

Kalapani Issue

The Kalapani issue is a proverbial thorn in the otherwise rosy India-Nepal relations. It is a territorial dispute between the two that has acquired many political dimensions over the years.

In May 2020, Nepal released a new political map that not only claimed Kalapani in its entirety but also Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh areas of Uttarakhand as well. This incident caused much diplomatic outrage in India.

This article will further discuss the Kalapani issue within the context of the Civil Services Examination.

Overview of the Kalapani Dispute

The origins of the Kalapani dispute can be traced back to 1816, when the Treaty of Sagauli was ratified following the end of the Anglo-Nepal war. The name Kalapani is derived from the river Kali that flows in the region. The Kali river marked the boundary of the Kingdom of Nepal and that of British India.

Article 5 of the treaty stated that the King of Nepal would give up territorial claims towards the west of river Kali that originates in the upper Himalayas and flows into the Indian plains. While the British recognized Nepal's suzerainty over territories that fell towards the east of the river.

Now this is the core of the Kalapani issue:

- Nepal claims that the Kalapani begins at the source which in this case is the mountains near Limpiyadhura, at a higher altitude east of the Kali river.
- Nepal claims that a land mass, high in the mountains that falls to the east of the entire stretch starting from Limpiadhura downwards, is theirs
- The Indian government is of the opinion that the border begins at Kalapani which India says is where the river begins.

To sum it up, the main cause of the dispute is in the diverging interpretations of the origins of the Kali river. While Nepal's claim of the territory east of Kali is based on the Limpiyadhura origin, India says the river actually takes the name Kali near Kalapani.

Importance of Lipulekh Pass

Apart from the Kali river, the Lipulekh Pass also is a point of issue. Forming the top of the Kalapani valley, it forms the Indian route to Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route.

Of the any passes in the Himalayas, the Lipulekh Pass is the one that is strategically important as its access offers the direct to the nearest Indian state or the National Capital Region itself. In the event of a war with China, this pass can be a cause for concern.

The importance of the Himalayan passes was highlighted during the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 (Began on October 20, 1962) when weakly guarded passes resulted in a military defeat for India.

Defence analysts are of the opinion that King Mahendra was concerned that the Indian military would take the Kalapani region in order to secure the mountain passes. As such he preemptively handed over the region to India. About 18 military outposts along Nepal's northern frontiers were set up but following bilateral negotiations in 1969, all the posts were removed barring Kalapani.

Present Scenario of the Kalapani Issue

Throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s despite several bilateral talks, the Kalapani issue remained unresolved.

In May 2020, India inaugurated a new link road to the Kailash-Mansarovar. Nepal objected to the exercise and said that it was violative of the prior understanding that boundary issues would be resolved through negotiation.

India reaffirmed its commitment to negotiation but stated that the road follows the pre-existing route.

Following this Nepal released a new political map showing the parts of Uttarakhand and Bihar along with all of Kalapani valley as part of Nepal. No motive for these new claims were given.

India has reacted to this development stating that this unilateral act is not based on historical facts and evidence. It is contrary to the bilateral understanding to resolve the outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue and such artificial enlargement of territorial claims will not be accepted by India.

On February 9 2021, Prime Minister of Nepal KP Sharma Oli asserted that any border dispute between Indian and Nepal would be resolved through peaceful dialogue.

Conclusion

The Indo-Nepal relations are quite important, based on cultural and historical ties as such it is important to settle any disputes amicably. And in addition growing Chinese presence on Nepal's borders can also be countered

- Since the free movement of people is permitted across the border, Nepal enjoys immense strategic relevance from India's national security point of view, as terrorists often use Nepal to enter India.
- The existing bilateral treaties between India and Nepal have not taken the shifting of Himalayan rivers into consideration. A primary reason for this is the lack of an approach where ecological concerns and needs of rivers are often discussed.

Thus the Indian government can take practical steps to resolve this dispute in a way beneficial to both the parties involved.