

AIR Spotlight - INDO-NEPAL RELATIONS OVER THE YEAR

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, Indo-Nepal relations over the year are discussed.

- **Participants –**

1. **Atul Aneja International Affairs Expert**
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- **Context:** Recently, Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba arrived in India for his three-day visit.

India Nepal Relations:

- India and Nepal have unique friendship and cooperation ties characterized by an open border and deep-rooted kinship and cultural contacts.
- There has long been a tradition of unrestricted cross-border movement. Nepal shares a border with five Indian states: Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, which spans over 1850 kilometers.
- The 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship is the cornerstone of India's special relationship with Nepal.
- In accordance with the Treaty, Nepalese citizens have access to the same facilities and opportunities as Indian citizens.
- Know more about the [India- Nepal Relations](#)

Nepal–India relations in post-COVID-19 period

- The spread of COVID-19 in both countries exacerbated the hardening of relations between them, as the open border was closed for more than a year and a half.
- However, after Sher Bahadur Deuba became Prime Minister of Nepal in July 2021, the situation on the ground is slowly returning to normal in the post-COVID-19 period.
- The border has now been reopened, and cross-border movement of people has resumed, with the exception of vehicles, which had been disrupted for so long.
- Another significant milestone in Nepal-India relations is the Indian government's handover of the Janakpur-Jaynagar railway segment to the Nepalese government.
- Significant progress has been made between Nepal and India in the post-COVID-19 period in terms of commerce, trade, and economic relations.
- Nepal began exporting surplus electricity to India for the first time because of the Indian government's liberal attitude.

India Nepal Boundary Issue

- The territorial dispute between Nepal and India over Lipulekh resurfaced in May 2015, when India and China agreed to expand transit and trade through the region. Nepal then protested the

agreement by sending diplomatic notes to India and China, alleging violations of Nepal's territorial integrity.

- In 2020, Kathmandu published a new political map that included the three Indian territories of Limpiyadhura, Kalapani, and Lipulekh as part of Nepal, causing tensions between the two countries.
- India reacted sharply, describing it as a "unilateral act" and warning Kathmandu that such "artificial enlargement" of territorial claims would not be tolerated.

Know more about [Kalapani Issue: Origins of Indo-Nepal Border Dispute](#)

India-Nepal Cooperation:

- **Defense Cooperation**

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- In the defense sector, India and Nepal have extensive cooperation. India has been supplying equipment and training to the Nepal Army (NA) in order to help them modernize.
- Other aspects of India's defense cooperation with Nepal include disaster relief, joint military exercises, adventure activities, and bilateral visits.
- SURYA KIRAN, an Indo-Nepal Battalion-level Joint Military Exercise, is held alternately in India and Nepal.

- **Connectivity And Development Partnership**

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- The Government of India's development assistance to Nepal is a broad-based programme in which various projects in infrastructure, health, water resources, education, and rural and community development have been implemented.
- In recent years, India has helped Nepal improve border infrastructure by upgrading ten roads in the Terai region, developing cross-border rail links at Jogbani-Biratnagar and Jaynagar-Bardibas, and establishing Integrated Check Posts at Birgunj, Biratnagar, Bhairahawa, and Nepalgunj.

- **New Partnership in Agriculture**

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- The 'India-Nepal New Partnership in Agriculture,' which focuses on collaborative projects in agricultural research, development, and education, was launched in 2018.
- This is an important and timely initiative because agriculture and related activities provide a significant portion of the income in both countries.

- **Energy Cooperation**

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- In 2014, India and Nepal signed an agreement on "Electric Power Trade, Cross-Border Transmission Interconnection, and Grid Connectivity."
- In 2016, the first high-capacity 400 kV cross-border power transmission line between Muzaffarpur (India) and Dhalkebar (Nepal) was completed for improved electricity transmission.

- The Joint Working Group (JWG) and Joint Steering Committee (JSC), which the Agreement envisages, have been established.
 - A Joint Technical Team (JTT) was established to prepare a long-term integrated transmission plan that would cover projects through 2035.
- **Multilateral Cooperation**
 - Both Nepal and India have been heavily involved in the regional and sub-regional frameworks of SAARC, BIMSTEC, and BBIN in order to improve cooperation and economic integration by combining the region's potentials and complementarities.

Challenges facing India-Nepal ties

- **Increasing Chinese Influence:**
 - One of India's major concerns is the growing Chinese presence in Nepal.
 - India is wary of Nepal's support for China's "One Belt, One Region" (OBOR) initiative, as well as China's decision to extend the rail link to its border with Nepal.
- **Geopolitics playing out in Nepal:**
 - The Nepalese Parliament recently ratified a grant assistance agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) worth \$500 million. Following this move, there were street protests and social media campaigns ostensibly supported by China.
 - India is wary of other powers intervening in Nepal, such as the United States and China.
- **Territorial disputes:**
 - The relationship between India and Nepal was strained after the Indian Defense Ministry opened a strategically important road connecting the Lipulekh pass and Dharchula in Uttarakhand.
 - Nepal later published a new political map that included the three Indian territories of Limpiyadhura, Kalapani, and Lipulekh.
- **Border blockade:**
 - Nepal adopted a new constitution in 2015. The Madhesis, Janajatis, and Tharus protested the new Constitution, organizing a border blockade between India and Nepal, resulting in an economic and humanitarian crisis in Nepal.
 - Madhesis and Indians have extensive cross-border ethnic and linguistic ties.
 - India has been accused by the Nepalese government of assisting and supporting the blockade. Nepal's relationship with India had deteriorated as a result of this.

- **Open border:**

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- The open border between India and Nepal is causing issues such as illegal migration, counterfeit currency entry, and drug and human trafficking, all of which have serious security implications for India.

Conclusion:

To increase India's reliance on Nepal, it is necessary to prioritise the expansion of trade and economic activities. It is all the more important to balance such relations because Nepal's dependence on India is greater than India's dependence on Nepal. Interdependence between Nepal and India is the key to resetting the two countries' relations.

