

Indian Foreign Secretary's visit to Nepal

December 17, 2020

India and Nepal are historical neighbors. But the recent geopolitical moves have brought a strain in their relationship. However, both the nations are in favour of resolving problems through dialogue with a view to take the friendly relations to new heights. It is important to respect each other's sensitivities and focus on the positives of the wide-ranging relationship.

In news: Foreign Secretary Harshavardhan Shringla recently visited Nepal.

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign relations

Static dimensions

1. Brief history of Indo- Nepal relations
2. What needs to be done for a strong relationship?

Current dimensions

1. In news
2. Background of the visit

Content:

In news:

- Foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla held talks with his Nepalese counterpart Bharat Raj Paudyal and other top leaders and discussed wide ranging areas of bilateral cooperation.
- He visited Nepal at the invitation of its foreign secretary, amid a strain in bilateral ties following a **bitter border row between the two countries.**
- Discussions took place on specific measures that could

be taken to finalise key projects such as **Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project**, as well as launch of new economic initiatives.

- The need to resume people to people contacts, including commencement of an air travel bubble between India and Nepal was discussed.
- Shringla conveyed India's interest in **expanding the development partnership and strengthening people-to-people contacts**, particularly among the youth.
- He invited Nepal to take advantage of India's market and economic growth.
- Shringla **handed over 2,000 vials of anti-virus drug Remdesivir** to Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali as part of India's continuing assistance to Nepal to help it contain the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Both sides shared their perspectives on boundary matters and discussed ways to take it forward under the appropriate bilateral mechanisms.
- They discussed specific meetings that could be scheduled to maintain high level engagement and address issues of mutual interest.

Background of the visit:

- The ties between the two countries came under strain after Indian defence minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated an **80-km-long strategically crucial road connecting the Lipulekh pass with Dharchula in Uttarakhand** on May 8, 2020.
- Nepal protested the inauguration of the road claiming that it passed through its territory.
- Later **Nepal came out with the new map showing Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura as its territories.**



- India reacted sharply by calling it a “unilateral act” and cautioned Kathmandu that such “artificial enlargement” of territorial claims will not be acceptable to it.
- It said that Nepal’s action violates an understanding reached between the two countries to resolve the boundary issues through talks.
- Earlier in November, Indian Army chief Gen. M M Naravane travelled to Nepal and the visit was largely aimed at resetting bilateral ties that came under severe strain following the bitter border row.

Brief history of Indo- Nepal relations:

- The **India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950** forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal.
- Under the provisions of this Treaty, the Nepalese citizens have enjoyed unparalleled advantages in India, availing facilities and opportunities at par with the Indian citizens.
- India welcomed the roadmap laid down by the historic **Comprehensive Peace Agreement of November 2006** towards political stabilization in Nepal through peaceful reconciliation and inclusive democratic processes.
- When the **Interim Election Government (IEG)** in cooperation with the political parties and the Election

Commission, conducted the **2nd Constituent Assembly cum Parliament Elections** in Nepal in 2013, India provided 764 vehicles and other logistical support besides providing two helicopters on loan basis, for election purposes.

- India has also welcomed the **Constitution of Nepal, 2015** which is the present governing document of Nepal's political affairs.

What needs to be done for a strong relationship?

India still enjoys great leverage with Nepal. It is **Nepal's largest trading partner** and the two countries are **culturally intertwined**. In the past, India has played a considerable role in **maintaining stability and development in Nepal**.

India has often spoken of the "neighbourhood first" policy. But the reality is that India has ignored the changing political narrative in Nepal for far too long. India has displayed **quiet diplomacy** even when Nepali leaders publicly adopted anti-Indian postures with more importance given to the China factor.

Since the free movement of people is permitted across the border, **Nepal enjoys immense strategic relevance from India's national security point of view**. Therefore, stable and friendly relations with Nepal is one of prerequisites which India can't afford to overlook.

It is imperative today to **resolve the boundary issue by peaceful negotiations which will be a win-win situation for both the countries**. A normal relationship where India can be a generous partner will be a better foundation for "neighbourhood first" in the 21st century.

Mould your thought:

1. Though India and Nepal are historic partners, the recent geo-political changes have strained their relationship.

What needs to be done to bring this relation in the correct trajectory?

Approach to the answer:

- Brief about Indo-Nepal history
- Write the reason for recent visit of India's foreign secretary to Nepal.
- Brief about discussions done
- Conclude with what needs to be done by stating grey areas (boundary dispute, Relation with China)