



March 2018

Policy Brief

Pakistan-Nepal Budding Relations

By

Sadaf Sultana



An Institute of International and Cultural Affairs

Policy Brief

PAKISTAN HOUSE

Pakistan-Nepal Budding Relations

By: Sadaf Sultana

Prime Minister Pakistan, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, reached Nepal on 5 March, 2018 for two days official visit where he met Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. Khaqan Abbasi is the first high level foreign leader to visit Nepal after the inauguration of new government under the leadership of Sharma Oli, who has been sworn in as the 41st Prime minister of Nepal on 15 February 2018. This visit was a part of pre-emptive and out-reach endeavor by Pakistan in order to engage with regional and neighboring countries. The visit bestowed a prodigious chance for Pakistan to strengthen bilateral ties with Nepal in all areas of mutual interest and diverse fields such as defence, education, trade and tourism.



Pakistan and Nepal established their relationship in 1960. Despite geopolitical obligations and influence of India, both states initiated their diplomatic relations in 1962. They also signed number of agreements to reciprocate the “Most Favored Nation” status to reinforce cooperation and assistance. Since then the bond of friendship and cordiality between Pakistan and Nepal, boosted by understanding and cooperation, have strengthened. Nepal has always remained an important regional South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) partner of Pakistan and always counter any hegemonic design against Pakistan.



In this visit, the two leaders dwelt on the agenda of bilateral relations and to improve regional trade, which will not only trigger the pace of development in the whole SAARC region but also help promoting further bilateral economic relations between Pakistan and Nepal. Both leaders conferred the SAARC as a significant forum to explore cooperation among regional countries for the benefit of their peoples. According to Pakistan foreign office statement, Nepal is an important regional country and close friend

of Pakistan. Pakistan ties with Nepal are categorized by cordiality, mutual respect and commonality of interests. Their support to each other, at bilateral and multilateral forum, has remained obligatory.

For India, this visit was unusual. Pakistani Prime Minister visit to Nepal has left India with an almost “paranoid policy approach”. The reason is that Nepal’s Prime Minister generally makes his first visit to India and KP Oli is still anticipated to do so. But after winning the election from nationalist platform, where he has assured to diversify Nepal’s relations beyond India and expand connections with other states, especially China, KP Oli is doing all he can do to prove his independent credentials. Therefore, in the political dictionary of Nepal, independence and nationalism have come to be tantamount with resisting India, and Pakistan’s Prime Minister visit is a clear sign of signaling independence.



KP Sharma Oli is seen as friend with China. He is not known to be in good relations with India because he has viewed India as a major actor in his government’s fall in August 2016. The major differences arose between the two countries over Nepal’s new constitution that was notified in 2015. For India, the new constitution discriminated politically almost 51% of the Nepalese people that will definitely resulted

into protest and it was not in their favor. Therefore, India resisted and argued that it has unstable borders with Pakistan and China and it did not want demonstrations over lack of political rights spilling into India as both share open borders. India decided to impose economic blockade to Nepal and in response Oli reached out to China, signed some key agreements, cancelled Nepal's President visit to India and recalled the Nepalese ambassador to the country.

Former foreign secretary of India, Kanwal Sibal, said that there is a danger of Nepal joining the China-Pakistan effort against India. In January 2018, China ended internet service monopoly of India in Nepal. Also, to end the landlocked Nepal's dependence on India for land route for trade, China is talking with Nepal to construct railway lines all the way to Nepal border. This shows that Oli is clear that he would broaden his options by strengthening ties with China to get more influence in his dealings with India. Furthermore, PM Abbasi visit strengthened the position on KP Oli and encouraged him to show that he has friends in the region to repulse any pressure that India may bear on him. Nepal strengthening relations with China and Pakistan in the region is showing a way to discourage India against any intervention.



PM Abbasi official visit was highly successful and inclusive, and it would bring bilateral relationship to the new heights of friendship in coming days. He clearly emphasized on regional and international issues and highlighted the massive investment opportunities available in diversified fields due to CPEC through which Nepal can also take the advantage. Moreover, to take the bilateral relationship to a new height, Nepal can help Pakistan to host SAARC summit in Islamabad which was postponed earlier due to India. Because at all meetings of SAARC, Pakistan had advanced its belief that a secure and peaceful environment in South Asia was crucial for the advancement of region's development and prosperity. As the host of next SAARC summit, Pakistan is looking forward to convening the summit at an early date and assured that the country would play a positive role in further strengthening regional cooperation.