
India's policy towards Nepal during Janata government

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Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight India's policy towards Nepal covering all historical, political and economical aspects. The paper also focuses on visit of different political leader to Nepal, which reaches its heights place during this period.

Introduction

In the major turn of events, the ruling congress lost control of India for the first time since independence in general election of the sixth Lok Sabha in 1977. The Janata alliance of parties won 345 seats was opposed to the ruling congress party. In this election the congress lost nearly 200 seats. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her powerful son Sanjay Gandhi both lost their seats. In March 24, 1977, Janata Government came into power in India, headed by Morarji Desai. He became India's first non congress prime minister. Nepali King Birendra accompanies with queen and the foreign minister Aryal was the first foreign dignities to visit India he reached India on 30 March to inaugurate a world conference on religion, philosophy and culture. The king returned Delhi in April for a day's stopover. The purpose over was not to take up any special issues but to mutual understanding of each other's problems and policies. The king wanted to know about the attitudes and policies of the new Janata government which they adopt towards Nepal. Morarji Desai's statement affirming India's faith in 'genuine non-alignment and policy of friendship with all countries, especially neighbouring countries on the basis of equality

and reciprocity had been generally welcomed in Nepal but the king was eager to have firsthand knowledge of how it was going to be implemented during his one day visit. He had a detailed discussion with Prime Minister Morarji Desai, Vajpayee and Jagjivan Ram on the strengthening of the cordial relations existing between the India and Nepal. After returning from Delhi the general impression of the Nepali government was that the change in government of India would not make any difference for Nepal. It was change in the government and not in the political system itself. The leaders of the both countries were agreed on the need to resume discussion at the earliest on the renewal of 1971 treaty of trade and transit.

Both prime minister and foreign minister (Atal Behari Vajpayee) agreed to give a new strength and shape to India's policy towards immediate neighbours was described 'the top priority' by the new government. Atal Behari Vajpayee said that India's policy with immediate neighbours is policy of 'first priority' or what he described as "Turning swords into ploughshares" was made in Ministers of external Affairs first major foreign policy speech in the lok Sabha on 29 June 1977: "We have recognized that our first priority must be to

promote a relationship of cooperation and trust with our immediate neighbour ... We shall be vigilant about our territorial integrity but pose no threat to their national personalities. We believe it is in our separate and common interest to forge, on the basis of geography, the sinews of economic cooperation in the subcontinent. If we succeed we could ease the burden for all the people, so that some of the swords can be turned into ploughshares and the entire region can be tackled better the common enemy poverty and inherited degradation.

On April 11, 1977 J.P Narayan publically urged king Birendra to release B.P koirala from the jail and initiate the process of democratic in Nepal. Nepal sharply reacted to what they thought India was meddling in their internal affairs. King Birendra himself asked India to desist from sermonizing to Nepal on matters of purely democratic concerns of Nepal. On May 24 Tulsu Giri launched a blistering attack on India, what he called "a full speed hate- Nepal campaign in responsible circle in India" showing "undue concern for the political system of this country." Later India's denied the allegation, on May 25 as imaginary. On June, 15 1977 king Birendra hopped for "deep friendship" with India.

Objective of the study

1. To analysis the Janata government policy towards Nepal
2. To highlight political and economic relation between India and Nepal.
3. To assess the visit of Indian political leaders to Nepal

Methodology

The methodology undertaken in this research paper includes historical and analytical methods. The historical records and official document were examined: primary as well as secondary sources that are available on the

subject have been used. A primary source includes policy documents, reports, official statements and interview of policy makers. In the secondary sources, the major works of different distinguished authors in the field have also been included and analysed.

3.2 Atal Behari Vajpayee visit

The Janata Government tried to improve cultural ties between India and Nepal. Atal Behari Vajpayee reached Kathmandu on 14 July on a three day official visit. Being a senior minister of his party, who visited Himalayan kingdom. His visit gives first hand assessment of each other view points on several important issues and mutual interest between India and Nepal. He tried to assure the king that new Janata government would not interfere in the internal affairs of the kingdom, regardless of the views held or expressed by the relatively small section of the ruling party about the system of government working there. Vajpayee was reported to have conveyed India's regrets to the king over the statement made by the Nepalese Tulsu Giri in which he said that there was a hate Nepal campaign in India. Vajpayee told the king that king India was a democratic country with the Fourth Estate having full freedom and the people have freedom of speech. He assured the king that no statement against Nepal had been given at the government level and as such Giri's statements was unwarranted. King and Vajpayee agreed that contacts at the highest level must be maintained so that differences. If any, could be sorted out by mutual discussion rather than airing them through the media The view on foreign policy and on Nepal did not change with the change of government. Atal Behari Vajpayee highlighted the close cultural relations between India and Nepal, he stated that: "There is no other country in the entire gamut of our international relationship with which India has such ancient and deeply intertwined relations as with Nepal. Indeed there

are probably no other two countries in the world whose destinies are so interlinked as ours.” On July 26, 1977 the then minister of external affairs Atal Behari Vajpayee in response to a calling attention notice in the Lok Shaba, stated that, Hon,ble members are aware of my recent visit to Nepal between July 14th to 16th 1977 at the invitation of his Excellency Krishna Raj Aryal. I am very happy that Nepal was first country that I visited, in the bilateral context. This fact reflects unique relations which are found in history, culture, tradition, religion, social and economic ties. The primary motive of this visit was the promotion of good relations between the two countries, to continue the practice of dialogue with our new government at highest levels. While in Kathmandu we had an exchange of ideas ranging over a wide variety of bilateral subjects. He also met Nepali Prime Minister Dr. Tulsī Giri, while Vajpayee reiterated his commitment to the democratic way of India, at the same time, he also highlighted that the India would not interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal or any other country. He also talked with foreign minister of Nepal in the friendly and cordial atmosphere in order to cover all matters of bilateral issues. Indian external affair minister (Vajpayee) was confident in cementing the friendship and cooperation to mutual benefit; both the countries have had a common interest in the stability of all the countries of the south Asia. Both the countries discussed the Nepalese ideas about the zone of peace, and he said that it is the desire of his government to see the entire sub-continent an area of peace, steps are being taken by new government to improve the relations with all the countries especially with neighbouring countries. He also said that Nepali government can give suggestions to Indian government with open mind and reaffirmed that the treaty of peace and friendship between India and Nepal, was accepted by both countries

would live perpetual peace. During Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Nepal, both the countries discussed the possibility of expediting three joint projects –Karnali, Pancheswar and Rapti.

3.3 Prime Minister Morarji Desai’s visit to Nepal

On 9th December Morarji Desai, on his first official visit to Nepal in the hope that it would contribute its mite in promoting better understanding between India and Nepal in the larger interest of stability in the south Asia. His visit opened new path for finding solution of the pending problems. Two trade agreements were concluded at the end of the visit. The visit followed by a weeklong Colombo plan conference in Kathmandu during which king Nepali king Birendra had given a call to the countries of the region to evolve joint projects to optimise benefits of utilizing river waters for the benefit of the people of the south Asia. It was an interesting coincidence that, ten years ago in October 1967 Morarji Desai and Kirti Nidhi Bista had met in Nepal as deputy Prime Ministers respectively India and Nepal. On 9th December 1977 they met again in Kathmandu as prime minister. This was the kind of link with the past, but there was another kind of link, less welcome one. The problems which were in the agenda of the two deputy Prime Ministers ten years ago were also present there at that time. This was some evidence of the slow progress discussions of the problems had made between India and Nepal. Therefore, it was with some reservations that the two influential leaders offered to tackle the bilateral problems for mutual benefits. During the discussion, the most important issue which took much time was the concept of zone of peace. This proposal was first time introduced by king Birendra in 1973 at non-alignment summit in Algeria.

During the talk, the two sides did not agree on this issue. Desai did not see any relevance of this concept. He was not opposed to the idea in

principle but he would rather like to convert the entire south Asia into a peace zone whereas Nepal wanted a part of it making India a co-guarantor of peace along with china. India thought on Nepal's proposal was more identical with the former's attitude towards Pak's plea for getting the south Asia region recognised as a nuclear weapon free zone. Emphasizing that, the entire sub- continent should be converted into a peace zone. Desai felt that his propose would be better served if the countries concerned opted to live in peace.

After his visits, Prime Minister Desai while speaking in parliament in 12th December, "My visit, the discussions which I had, and the general atmosphere of warmth, cordiality leads me to believe that apprehension and misgivings about India's attitude have been removed. The relations have to be resorted to one of trustful friendship, as is appropriate between countries whose abiding compulsion must link them in peace progress." The talk cleared the way for implementations the Indian Aided projects such as Karnali, Pancheswar, Devi projects etc, in Nepal. Both the countries agreed to enhance cooperation in harnessing sharing river water for mutual benefits such as, irrigation soil conservation, power production and navigation purposes. However, his visit repeated the view that in the presence of the treaty of peace and friendship between India and Nepal, there was little substance in the proposal for consulting Nepal into a zone of peace.

3.4 India's policy towards Nepal during 1978- 1980

In March 17, 1978 India agreed to separate trade and transit treaties, satisfying long – term Nepalese demand. These treaties helped the restoration of confidence in Indo- Nepal ties. The treaty of trade provides assistance in the industrialization process of Nepal. Indian government had agreed to enlarge the scope of preferences for Nepalese manufactured products

in Indian markets. Both India and Nepal had also agreed to include necessary arrangements to maintain supplies of essential goods needed each other, and India also to provided Rs. 12.45 cores (Rs.18.05 cores Nepalese currency) for the renovation and extension of the Chandra canal system, construction of a pumped canal from western Kosi canal for lifted irrigation, and construction and distribution system from western kosi canal in Nepal. In 1978 India agreed to provide Rs.320 million aid for the construction of Davi-Ghat hydro-electric project in Nepal. From 26th to 30th July, 1978 a high powered multi-disciplinary Indian delegation of industrial experts visited Nepal and held discussion with Nepal officials. After the completion of discussion, a memorandum of understanding on industrial and economic cooperation was signed and it was agreed to develop trade and industrial cooperation for reducing the trade deficit between the two countries. India and Nepal agreed that the use of Udaipur cement plant, development, and paper and pulp industries. India also agreed to share industrial and technological expertise with Nepal. These developments gave further strength in their cooperation.

India was very keen to see that the projects aided by it were duly carried out. The minister of state for works and housing, Ram Kinkar, paid four visited to Himalayan kingdom beginning from 17 February, 1978 to visit some India aided projects in the Nepal. He was keen the central sector of Mahendra Raj Marg which runs nearly 300 km through the Terai region. By the time the projects would be completed in 1981, the expenditure on it was likely to go up to Rs 45 crores against the original estimate of Rs. 25 crores because of rise in the cost of construction material. The whole amount was offered by India.

When Nepal signed the Memorandum of Understanding and Economic Cooperation with

India in 1978, Indo-Nepalese economic relations entered a new phase of economic growth through cooperation. Under the new agreement, India and Nepal decided to cooperate in a number of large, medium, small, and cottage industries to be set up in Nepal. As a result a cement plant at Udaipur, a paper and pulp industry, and other projects were being established in Nepal. The investment in these areas will amount to 210 million according to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of India; these projects are expected to bring a total turnover of Rs 870 million and provide direct employment to 10,000 people. (However, in any development projects carried out by India in Nepal the bulk of the work force is usually Indian.)

Smuggling has been a big problem between India and Nepal. India had agreed to keep issues related to smuggling across the border under constant review. As extensive wireless network covering at least 1500 miles of the border was to be set up in a bid to prevent the smuggling and also the numbers of checkposts had to be increased from 78 to 90 in addition to 22 land stations on 1978. The Government of India, decided to give ten percent of the seized goods to local Panchayat on the border which might give some help to the authorities in their efforts. Nepal which had imported nearly Rs. 12.5 crores worth of sensitive items had been advised to obtain only to supplies essentially items to meet its domestic requirement. At present much of those commodities found their way to India and was being sold at a higher cost. Against Rs. 4.5 crores of goods in 1975 and Rs.6 crores in 1976, the goods seized in 1977 amounted to only Rs 2.7 crores. This shows the effectiveness of the new – anti smuggling drive started by the Janata Government. During first ten month of the financial year, exports to India dropped by 51 percent to Rs. 33 crores while imports from India went up by 18 percent to Rs. 128 crores,

thus cause the trade deficit of Rs. 95 crores. Due to regular trade deficit, India agreed to make cement and coal available to Nepal at near domestic prices. This was substantial gain to Nepal.

In February 1978, Tula Meherji Shreshtha a close follower of Gandhi in Nepal was given 1978 Nehru Award for international understanding. Due his illness he could not go to Delhi to receive the Award. The government of India appointed P.C Chunder, the union education minister to go Nepal and present the award personally to the renowned recipient. On his one day visit to Kathmandu he met Nepal prime minister and foreign minister, Kirtinidhi Bista and Raj Aryal respectively. Kirtinidhi Bista in his talk emphasised the need for closer cooperation in the field of education especially technical and medical education between the two countries. The Nepalese prime minister, Kirtinidhi Bista paid an official visit to India on 15 April for 11 days. He stressed Nepal's policy of self reliance in economic development. On July 30 both India and Nepal governments broke new grounds of bilateral cooperation by agreements joint industrial ventures in cement, paper and metal industries. On September 26, 1978 George Fernandez, Minister for Industries visited Nepal and announced a package grant- in-aid assistance of Rs, 9 crores.

On 20, October 1978, Indian External Affairs Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee paid a two days official visit to Nepal. It was his third visit during last 18 months; he said, signified the importance the Indian government attached to the relations with Nepal. The primary objective of his visit was to discuss with Nepalese leaders prospects of joint measure to control floods in the Himalayan Rivers which had caused unprecedented damage in Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar and West Bengal. The two sides agreed to set up commission for flood forecasting, for this

purpose experts of the two countries will meet in the first week of December in 1978.

Vajpayee met with his Nepalese counterpart Aryal, They discussed on bilateral and international issues. Aryal admitted that there were no major problems between the two countries, but some minor difference would always remain between neighbours which be solved by mutual discussion and understanding. He also said that the issue sharing of river water could not be included in the category of minor differences. Vajpayee also met Nepal's home minister, K.B Singh with whom the problem of Indian girls marrying with Nepalese's men was discussed.

The External Affairs Minister, Vajpayee's visit was considerable significance. Apart from having serious discussion on bilateral issues he had also assess the Nepal's view of how china was trying to improve Sino- Indian relations. Though he had two meetings with his china counterpart in New York during the UN session but he was more interested in utilizing this opportunity to ascertain the latest china's mood from Nepali leaders. The Nepalese prime minister had returned only last week from china and Vajpayee was scheduled to visit china on 30th October. During Nepalese premier Bista's talk in Peking the Chinese leaders did discussed on the proposed visit of Vajpayee to their country. He merely told Vajpayee that the Chinese leaders were looking forward to his visit to Peking to sort out some of the outstanding Sino- Indian problems including the border issue. The statements of Nepal's prime minister might be interpreted to indicate his impressions that the political atmosphere in the Chinese capital was now favourable for a meaningful Sino- Indian dialogue. Bista reported to have observed that the china leaders appreciated the Janata Government's efforts to improve India's relations with the south Asian countries. On the return from Nepal, Vajpayee

expressed satisfaction with Nepal visit and free and truthful talks with king, prime minister and foreign minister of Nepal. He said that Nepal and Bangladesh would work together in river projects. He further said that Nepal assured him, not do anything behind the back of India which would hamper or harm the growing cooperation between India and Nepal which had acquired a new depth and dimension. Nepalese leaders also assured him that while they develop bilateral relations with other neighbouring countries nothing would be done to harm India's interest.

A two day periodic review of the India and Nepal relations and bilateral cooperation began in New Delhi on 23 February 1979 at the foreign secretary level. The differences between India and Nepal in their respective attitudes to the china attack on Vietnam were obvious as reflected in the exchange of views between two neighbouring countries. India had criticized the Chinese attack on Vietnam, expressed its solidarity with her and demanded immediate withdrawal of Chinese soldiers from the Vietnamese territory, while the government of Nepal had expressed its genuine concern over the fate of Kampuchea and accused Vietnam of interference in the internal affairs of the country. India had criticized china but made only key references to Vietnam Vis-a- Vis Kampuchea. Nepal had ignored the Chinese action but denounced Vietnam in the context of Kampuchea.

In the bilateral relations, both the countries were satisfied with the progress of various ongoing schemes or project of Indian assistance to Nepal in the fields of soil conservation, power generation and industrial development.

In April, 1979, the students in Kathmandu organized a massive demonstration, against the system, which was brutally suppressed by the police. That spark-off unrest in the country. Faced with growing pressure from both inside and outside the system, King Birendra

announced a national referendum to choose either a reformed Panchayat system or return to multi-party system.

Indo – Nepalese relation was again reviewed at the highest level when king Birendra accompanied by the Queen and the Foreign Minister, K.B Sahi visited New Delhi on his 6 days official tour 19 September, 1979. King Birendra's visit took place when both India and Nepal had been preparing for a democratic expansion of popular will-the people of Nepal to participate in the referendum ordered by the king to choose between the Panchayat and multi- party system. India has elected the parliamentary representative to form a new government at the centre. Despite their preoccupation with these both India and Nepal shared more than passing interest in the king's visit. He visited Lucknow on 21st and on next day he was in Varanasi to meet Uttar Pradesh (UP) chief minister, where Indo-Nepalese multipurpose projects were discussed. During talks the delay in the construction of the schemes for flood control, irrigation and power generation on the Ghagra, Rapti and Sharda were figured.

The economic cooperation got an impetus during Birendra visit. The sides reached an agreement, included undertaking survey of three major projects within the time schedule to be drawn up shortly, of them the Karnali project on the Ghagra River generated 3000 to 400 MW of power was as much importance to India as to Nepal. An amount of Rs. 14.60 crores was embarked for meeting on expenditure on schemes in hand during current year. Two major project, central sector of Mahendra Marg and Devghat hydro- electric project were being executed on a turn key basis by India. The aerial survey of another road was completed during this year, for a hospital a sum of Rs. 17.65 lakh was given and an agreement was signed to supply iodised salt to Nepal.

Improvement of the industrial estates in Palpa and feasibility reports on a cement plants and three projects to be set up by HMT were completed during this year under review.

The Janta Party leader, Chandra Shekhar, had even urged the King to negotiate with B.P. Koirala. Clarifying why India was interested in political developments of Nepal, he stated, "As a neighbour, we have a vital interest in what happens in Nepal. We cannot forget that B.P. Koirala had fought the British imperialism and suffered imprisonment for our independence. It is natural therefore that the sympathies of Indian people are with B.P. Koirala and with the people of Nepal now fighting for the restoration of their democratic rights and civil liberties"

What endures from the brief period of Janata Party rule is not a policy but the rise to prominence of its president Chandra Shekhar as a "friend of Nepal and the Nepali people". For many in Kathmandu, including its powerful political circles, Chandra Shekhar remains the pre-eminent Indian leader, whatever the swings in his career at home.

During the Janata regime, Kathmandu found it easier to do business with New Delhi because of the high importance and high uncritical acceptance that erstwhile Indian leadership gave concept of "good neighbourliness". The peace was set by the then India's prime ministers Morarji Desai's affirmation in the Kathmandu on 10th December, 1977 that "India seeks to resolve problems through negotiations and, if needed be, by sacrifices and compromises so that the entire region is devoid of fear and tensions". The Janata leaders were unusually moderate towards all small neighbours. Without taking any advantages in return from them, now when Indira Gandhi returns in power in 1980 there was general feeling that Kathmandu could no longer take a satisfied view of such matters. The new government assured to continue to adopt a liberal policy towards the kingdom.

Conclusion

In short during Janata party period, in beginning there was lack of understanding of each other's viewpoints was successfully eliminate and reinstates by good progress in various spheres of Indo-Nepal cooperation. India was successful in maintaining the peaceful relation with Nepal. The Janata government on the whole was quite successful in securing the progress of Indo-Nepal friendship and cooperation on the of "Beneficial Bilateralism"

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