

LOWER THE TEMPERATURE, DEFUSE THE ISSUE

The border trouble between India and Nepal is a matter best handled bilaterally, through quiet diplomacy

The inauguration of a road from Dharchula to Lipu Lekh (China border) by India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (an event over videoconferencing on May 8) has now been followed by Nepal's charge claiming that the stretch passes through Nepalese territory.

This road follows the traditional pilgrim route for the Kailash-Mansarovar yatra. This is an arduous walk, which I did in 1981, the year the yatra re-started after about 25 years, when India and China agreed to reopen the pilgrim route via Lipu Lekh. The conversion of the trekking route to a metalled road is a boon to both pilgrims and traders.

Explaining Nepal's stand

The controversy has given Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli an opportunity to hide his government's incompetence and failure to meet the basic needs of the people, and to divert attention away from the rising tide of opposition from within his own party. His intemperate remarks in the Nepalese Parliament are best ignored in the interest of preserving India-Nepal ties.

Nepal deployed its armed police at Chharung, close to Kalapani, in its Sudoor Paschim. While there is nothing untoward in deploying the armed police, whose mandate is to man the borders of Nepal, it is the manner and timing of the deployment that raised eyebrows in New Delhi. The Nepalese contingent was dropped to the location by helicopters, very visibly.

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police is also located in Kalapani since it is close to the India-China border. Indian forces are not there because of Nepal.

The Nepalese government has raised the stakes further and has made a negotiated settlement more complex by authorising a new map extending its territory across an area sensitive for India's defence.

The Sugauli Treaty

The boundary delineation has a long history. Before the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli, the Nepalese kingdom stretched from the Sutlej river in the west to the Teesta river in the East. Nepal lost the Anglo-Nepalese War and the resulting Treaty limited Nepal to its present territories.

The Sugauli Treaty stated that "[t]he Rajah of Nipal [Nepal] hereby cedes to the Honourable [the] East India Company in perpetuity all the under-mentioned territories", including "the whole of the lowlands between the Rivers Kali and Rapti." It elaborated further that "[t]he Rajah of Nipal [Nepal] renounces for himself, his heirs, and successors, all claim to or connection with the countries lying to the west of the River Kali and engages never to have any concern with those countries or the inhabitants there of."

The present controversy has arisen since the Nepalese contest that the tributary that joins the Mahakali river at Kalapani is not the Kali river. Nepal now contends that the Kali river lies further west to the Lipu Lekh pass.

The British used the Lipu Lekh pass for trade with Tibet and China. The Survey of India maps since the 1870s showed the area of Lipu Lekh down to Kalapani as part of British India. Both the Rana rulers of Nepal and the Nepalese Kings accepted the boundary and did not raise any objection with the government of India after India's Independence.

As a reward for the military help rendered by Jung Bahadur Rana in quelling the 1857 uprising, the areas of Nepalgunj and Kapilvastu were restituted to Nepal soon thereafter. The British did not return any part of Garhwal or Kumaon, including the Kalapani area, to Nepal.

India did not exist in 1816 when the Treaty of Sugauli was concluded. And India's present borders, not just with Nepal, but with many of its other neighbours, were drawn by the erstwhile British regime. India inherited the boundaries of British India. It cannot now unravel the historic past.

On the way to resolution

The Nepal-India Technical Level Joint Boundary Working Group was set up in 1981 to resolve boundary issues, to demarcate the international border, and to manage boundary pillars. By 2007, the group completed the preparation of 182 strip maps, signed by the surveyors of the two sides, covering almost 98% of the boundary, all except the two disputed areas of Kalapani and Susta. It also ascertained the position of 8,533 boundary pillars.

The remaining issues concerning the boundary are not difficult to resolve unless they are caught up in domestic or international concerns. The next steps are the approval of the strip maps by the respective governments (that of the Nepalese Government is still awaited), the resolution of the differences of opinion over Kalapani and Susta, and speeding up the erection of damaged or missing border pillars.

India has successfully resolved far more intractable border issues with Bangladesh not so long ago, covering both the land and maritime boundaries. The land boundary settlement required an exchange of territories in adverse possession of the two countries, including the transfer of population, and a constitutional amendment (Number 100 of May 15, 2015) to give effect to the 1974 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement.

The maritime boundary issue was even more difficult. India agreed to go to the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration, knowing well that if the Court applied the principle of equity, India would lose up to four-fifths of the disputed area, as India had established its claim on a baseline that took into account the curved nature of the India-Bangladesh shoreline, thus boxing Bangladesh's maritime claims to within Indian and Myanmar waters. The Court ruling accepted much of Bangladesh's claim. Despite the Indian member of the tribunal giving an adverse entry, the government of India accepted the ruling.

Compared to what was accomplished between India and Bangladesh, the India-Nepal border issues appear more easily solvable, so long as there is political goodwill and statecraft exercised on both sides. The way to move forward is to formally approve the strip maps, resolve the two remaining disputes, demarcate the entire India-Nepal boundary, and speedily execute the work of boundary maintenance.

Ties are unique

India's leadership and the Indian people have been conscious of the self-respect and pride of the Nepalese people. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India* as also in *Glimpses of World History* that Nepal has been the only truly independent country of South Asia.

Nepal, in turn, has in the past responded to India's needs as a friendly neighbour. Its political leaders contributed to India's struggle for freedom. The only time since Independence that foreign troops were deployed on Indian soil was when, in 1948-49, Nepalese soldiers under the command of General Sharda Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana came to India's northern cantonments, depleted by deployments in Jammu and Kashmir and Hyderabad.

The people-to-people relationship between India and Nepal is unmatched. In the far corners of India, sometimes locals turn against those from other Indian States, but seldom against the Nepalese. It is the government-to-government relationship that generally lags. There is nobody in India that wishes ill for Nepal.

For India's Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Mukund Naravane, to charge at an interaction at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, that Nepal, at someone else's behest, has objected to India laying a road connecting the Lipu Lekh pass, was ill-advised. It widens the door for that someone else to foment more trouble. This is a matter best handled bilaterally, through quiet diplomacy.

The Official Spokesperson of India's Ministry of External Affairs, Anurag Srivastava, has said recently that India and Nepal have an established mechanism to deal with all boundary matters. He has affirmed that India is committed to resolving outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue, in the spirit of India's close and friendly bilateral relations with Nepal. The best is to activate the existing mechanisms as soon as possible, before any further damage is done.

The more the trouble festers, those who stand to gain by deteriorating India-Nepal relations will benefit. There is need for the two countries to lower the temperature and defuse the issue. They must invest time and effort to find a solution. Raking up public controversy can only be counterproductive to the relationship.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **temperature** (noun) – the extent/magnitude/ scale/range of tension in a conflict.
- ❖ **defuse** (verb) – reduce, lessen/diminish, ease/ mitigate.
- ❖ **bilaterally** (adverb) – between two countries involved.
- ❖ **quiet diplomacy** (noun) – it is a way of conduct of international relations (through the interaction of official representatives of governments or groups) to create conditions in which parties feel comfortable to act, in particular allowing parties calmly to evaluate positions and interests, to weigh options and consider independent and impartial advice.
- ❖ **inauguration** (noun) – introduction, launch, beginning (of something).
- ❖ **stretch** (noun) – area (length of road).
- ❖ **arduous** (adjective) – difficult, taxing, demanding, exhausting.
- ❖ **trek** (noun) – a form of walking, undertaken with the specific purpose of exploring and enjoying the scenery; a long journey on foot, walk.
- ❖ **metalled** (adjective) – made with road metal (crushed rock, broken stone, etc).
- ❖ **boon** (noun) – benefit, advantage, gain.
- ❖ **stand** (noun) – stance, viewpoint, standpoint.
- ❖ **incompetence** (noun) – inability, incapability, ineptitude, lack of skill/ability.
- ❖ **tide** (noun) – trend, tendency.
- ❖ **intemperate** (adverb) – immoderate, inordinate, unreasonable/unjustifiable.
- ❖ **interest** (noun) – concern, matter.
- ❖ **preserve** (verb) – maintain/keep, protect, safeguard.
- ❖ **tie** (noun) – bond, association, relationship.
- ❖ **deploy** (verb) – move (military troops) into position for military action.
- ❖ **man** (verb) – (of personnel) serve, operate, work at a place.
- ❖ **deployment** (noun) – the movement of workforce/personnel to a place for an effective action.
- ❖ **raise eyebrows** (phrase) – show surprise.
- ❖ **contingent** (noun) – unit, squad, troop.
- ❖ **raise the stakes** (noun) – increase the risk involved in a particular situation.
- ❖ **authorise** (verb) – approve, endorse, permit/ allow.
- ❖ **delineation** (noun) – the act of outlining exact position of a boundary/limit/border.
- ❖ **stretch** (verb) – extend, spread.
- ❖ **cede** (verb) – give up, concede, surrender, relinquish (territory).
- ❖ **in perpetuity** (phrase) – forever, for always, for all time.
- ❖ **renounce** (verb) – give up, relinquish, abandon/reject.
- ❖ **successor** (noun) – heir, next-in-line, descendant.
- ❖ **lie** (verb) – be situated, be located, be placed, be positioned.
- ❖ **inhabitant** (noun) – native community, local people, (permanent) resident/dweller.
- ❖ **there of** (phrase) – of that (things just mentioned).
- ❖ **contest** (verb) – debate, argue about, dispute.
- ❖ **tributary** (noun) – branch river, headwater, side stream.
- ❖ **contend** (verb) – claim, argue, allege/insist.
- ❖ **pass** (noun) – a navigable (passable) route (road/passage) through a mountain range.
- ❖ **render** (verb) – give, provide, supply, furnish.
- ❖ **quell** (verb) – crush, stifle, suppress, end.
- ❖ **uprising** (noun) – insurgency, revolution, rebellion.
- ❖ **restitute** (verb) – to return, to hand back.
- ❖ **thereafter** (adverb) – after that, subsequently.
- ❖ **erstwhile** (adjective) – old, previous, former, then.

- ❖ **inherit** (verb) – assume, take over, receive (from a former user of something).
- ❖ **unravel** (verb) – solve, resolve, clear up, clarify, sort out (something complex).
- ❖ **set up** (phrasal verb) – establish, start, begin.
- ❖ **demarcate** (verb) – define, delimit, mark off (boundary).
- ❖ **strip map** (noun) – strip map is a map showing only defined geographic area (immediate territory). It is a set of map pages that follow a route, such as a river, road, or pipeline.
- ❖ **ascertain** (verb) – find out, decide/verify, come to know.
- ❖ **(be) caught up in** (phrasal verb) – become involved in (something unintended).
- ❖ **speed up** (phrasal verb) – accelerate, advance, forward.
- ❖ **far more** (phrase) – a lot more, much more.
- ❖ **intractable** (adjective) – unmanageable, uncontrollable, ungovernable.
- ❖ **not so long ago** (phrase) – recently, at a recent time, a short time ago.
- ❖ **maritime** (adjective) – of or related to the sea.
- ❖ **adverse possession** (noun) – a legal principle/doctrine that allows a person to claim a property right in land owned by another (for an extended period of time).
- ❖ **arbitration** (noun) – conciliation, mediation, intervention/negotiation.
- ❖ **baseline** (noun) – standard, criterion, basis (of comparison for something).
- ❖ **take into account** (phrase) – consider, respect, take account of.
- ❖ **curved** (adjective) – bent.
- ❖ **shoreline** (noun) – seashore, seaside, beach.
- ❖ **box** (verb) – fight, spar.
- ❖ **tribunal** (noun) – panel, committee (set up to resolve some disputes particularly).
- ❖ **so long as** (phrase) – given that, provided that.
- ❖ **goodwill** (noun) – friendliness, cooperation, understanding.
- ❖ **statecraft** (noun) – statesmanship, negotiations/discussions; the skilful management of a country's public affairs.
- ❖ **exercise** (verb) – use, employ, make use of, utilize.
- ❖ **untoward** (adjective) – unexpected, unanticipated, inappropriate, inconvenient.
- ❖ **move forward** (phrasal verb) – progress, make progress, advance, develop.
- ❖ **speedily** (adverb) – rapidly, swiftly, quickly, fast.
- ❖ **conscious** (adjective) – deliberate, intentional, purposeful, considered.
- ❖ **self-respect** (noun) – self-regard, morale, self-esteem.
- ❖ **in turn** (phrase) – in succession, successively, sequentially.
- ❖ **cantonment** (noun) – a military base/camp, command post.
- ❖ **deplete** (verb) – reduce, decrease, diminish (in quantity/number).
- ❖ **unmatched** (adjective) – unequalled, incomparable, unparalleled, second to none.
- ❖ **far** (adjective) – afar, far off, faraway, distant.
- ❖ **turn against** (phrasal verb) – set against, cause to dislike, become hostile to.
- ❖ **seldom** (adverb) – hardly, rarely, almost never.
- ❖ **lag** (verb) – fall behind, trail behind, linger, move slowly, not keep pace (in development).
- ❖ **ill** (noun) – problems, troubles, difficulties.
- ❖ **behest** (noun) – instruction, requirement, demand, wish/desire.
- ❖ **ill-advised** (adjective) – ill-considered, misguided, injudicious.
- ❖ **foment** (verb) – instigate, incite, provoke/stir up.
- ❖ **mechanism** (noun) – procedure, process, method/ technique.
- ❖ **outstanding** (adjective) – unfinished, incomplete, unsettled.
- ❖ **spirit** (noun) – real/true meaning, true intention, essence.
- ❖ **fester** (verb) – cause bitterness/resentment/vexation/annoyance; brew, smoulder (of negative thinking).
- ❖ **deteriorate** (verb) – decline, degenerate, degrade.
- ❖ **invest** (verb) – devote, spend, expend.
- ❖ **rake up** (phrasal verb) – recollect, remember, revive/remind the memory of.
- ❖ **counterproductive** (adjective) – harmful, damaging, dangerous/destructive.