

**FOLLOWING IS THE FULL TEXT OF INTERVIEW OF THE  
PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE TO  
KANTIPUR & THE KATHMANDU POST**

**Q 1: An India President is visiting Nepal after nearly three decades, how did it come about and what we expect from your visit?**

**Answer:** The last visit of President of India was in 1998 when Late Shri K.R. Narayanan paid a State visit to Nepal. It would, therefore, be after 18 years that a Presidential visit will take place from India to Nepal. I agree with you that this gap is far too long. I am happy that I would be visiting Nepal at the invitation of President of Nepal, Rt. Hon'ble Bidya Devi Bhandari from 2 to 4 November 2016. I am looking forward to meeting the political leaders and friends in Nepal, and exchange views with them on a range of issues of mutual interests. My visit is a mission of friendship and to advance our close and multi-faceted partnership further with Nepal. I also look forward to the visit of the President of Nepal to India at the earliest convenient time.

**Q 2: How would you describe the current state of Nepal-India relationship?**

**Answer:** Our shared cultural traditions, geography and civilizational linkages define our unique bilateral ties. We

share a common vision of economic prosperity and sustainable development for our two peoples and the region. Ours is a people's centric partnership, and a multi-faceted one. There is some sort of inevitability about relations between the people of our two countries. As it happens in any relationship of this depth and intensity, there are times when we may have differing perceptions on certain aspects. But we do manage any such differences with sensitivity, goodwill and utmost understanding of each other's vital interests. This has been the case throughout the history of India-Nepal relations. In my view, the current state of India-Nepal relations is excellent and both the Governments are determined to work hard to meet the ever growing aspirations of our people for higher standards of living.

**Q 3: You have known in Nepal among a handful of Indian leaders who is well versed on issues related to Nepal-India ties, including the peace process, which started in 2006. How would you characterize Nepal's ongoing political process?**

**Answer:** I am encouraged by the developments in Nepal since the commencement of peace process in 2006. I applaud the efforts and achievements of the people of Nepal to consolidate multi-party democracy and to strive for peace,

progress and economic prosperity. As a close friend, India wishes the people and government of Nepal every success in pursuit of these objectives.

**Q 4: Now let's move on to more contemporary times. When Mr. Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, there was much excitement in the neighbourhood. He invited all SAARC member states to his swearing-in-ceremony, he strongly espoused 'neighbour-first' policy and he generated a huge goodwill in Nepal with two visits within a year and addressed Nepal's parliament too. Two years later, the early excitement is now not only tempered with caution but also a certain degree of mistrust, how did we get here?**

**Answer:** If I see developments in the last two years, I see several reasons for optimism on the growth of relations between India and Nepal. We have had intensive high-level political exchanges. At the same time, our bilateral mechanisms are meeting regularly to advance our functional cooperation across diverse sectors. We have signed Power Trade Agreement, and India has begun exporting electricity to Nepal through a new transmission line. Bilateral trade has maintained a stable trajectory, as our development cooperation. We are in the process of implementing an oil

pipeline project between India and Nepal, which will be the first cross-border pipeline to be built in South Asia. We have signed Project Development Agreements for two hydropower projects. We have also set up the Pancheshwar Development Authority, which has been meeting regularly to pursue cooperation on this important project. However, there is no room for complacency. I believe we have tremendous untapped potential for further expanding cooperation in all these sectors. An essential dimension of '*neighbourhood-first*' policy is enhancing connectivity in the region – physical connectivity, digital connectivity, trade and transit facilitation, and exchange of ideas. Indeed, across all sectors of our national endeavours, we have made progress during the last two years or so. And we are determined to build on this progress. My sense is that at the popular level this forward movement will shape our perception of each other.

**Q5: How do we get into a win-win situation?**

**Answer:** I think all the initiatives in diverse sectors that have been undertaken by our two countries have contributed towards socio-economic development of our two peoples. This is what you call a win-win situation. With economic transformation underway in India, new opportunities are opening up for cooperation between India and Nepal in

particular, given our open border and national treatment accorded to each other's citizens. In fact, our people have been quick to seize these opportunities as is evidenced by millions of Nepali citizens living and working across the whole length and breadth of India. As governments, we need to further facilitate this process so that we continue our win-win partnership.

**Q 6: What's the Indian position on Nepal's new constitution?**

**Answer:** As a close neighbour, we are interested in peace, stability and progress of Nepal. We have learnt from our own experience that sustainable socio-economic development can only be achieved in an environment of peace, stability and a participatory democracy, and where every section of the society is an equal stakeholder in political processes and the outcomes. These lessons could be of benefit to Nepal as it embarks on its own path of building democracy.

**Q 7: There's been criticism, in Nepal and elsewhere, about India going far in expressing its displeasure over the new constitution, mainly in imposing over a four-and-a-half months-long undeclared border blockade?**

**Answer:** Given our shared border, developments within Nepal can impact on the flows across it. But let us not forget that ours is a unique partnership, which is driven by extensive contacts between our two peoples. India has an abiding interest in peace, stability and development of Nepal. As close friends, we, therefore, welcome all efforts that lead to enduring peace and stability in Nepal. Our support and good wishes will always be there as Nepal moves forward towards a federal democratic republic.

**Q 8: To many, the undeclared blockade only polarized the Nepali society further and escalated anti-India sentiments. India does enjoy a lot of leverage on Nepal and coercive measures like these only alienate the Nepali population. As the head of Indian state, how do you respond to this criticism.**

**Answer:** Let me underscore that the central tenet of India's 'neighborhood first' policy is close contacts and shared prosperity. Our engagement with Nepal will always be guided by the long term interests of both nations. Going forward, I firmly believe that India and Nepal need to do more to work together for our common goal of development, peace, economic prosperity and well being of our two peoples.

**Q 9: Another major irritant in Nepal-India ties is the huge, and increasing, trade surplus in favour of India, our major trading partner, in our bilateral trade. Can something tangible be done to counter the trade imbalance?**

**Answer:** I have always held the view that India and Nepal linked as they are by geography and civilizational contacts need to adopt policies that promote mutual investments, create jobs and contribute to national growth. While we have maintained steady growth in bilateral trade and investments, we can certainly do much more to facilitate business linkages. Our private sector should be encouraged to expand linkages in manufacturing and services sector, engage in regional supply chains and benefit from India's growth story. It is equally important that we address market entry barriers and continue to take measures to facilitate trade and mutual investments. Further, we believe that expeditious implementation of hydropower projects and promotion of investments between India and Nepal would not only contribute in reducing the trade gap but also contribute in considerable measures to create jobs within Nepal.

**Q10: Nepal still relies on heavily congested Calcutta / Haldia port for its trade, though there has lately been talk**

**of also using Visakhapatnam? What can Nepal expect from New Delhi to facilitate its trade and transit?**

**Answer:** The facilities at Visakhapatnam Port have already been made available to movement of goods to Nepal. We have also taken new measures to facilitate movement of goods between Nepal and Bangladesh through India. I am sure that Nepalese businesses will fully utilize the facilities extended through Visakhapatnam port. The two countries are also creating new integrated check-posts and railway links along India-Nepal border. We hope that the land acquisition and other associated matters for the development of hydro-power projects, integrated check posts and cross border railway lines would be addressed early for these projects to be completed expeditiously for the benefit of our two peoples.

**Q 11: There's a strong perception in Nepal that India views us primarily through the prism of its security concerns and that has hindered our development in trade, connectivity, and so on. Do you see that change in the near future?**

**Answer:** While India naturally has its interests, what guides us equally is the belief that these are in consonance with those of Nepal. It is a multi-dimensional perspective.



While peace and stability in Nepal is important for India, Nepal's socio-economic development is no less important. If you see India's contribution to infrastructure development in Nepal since 1950s, you will come to self-evident conclusion that India is not only the largest investor in Nepal and Nepal's trade partner but also the largest partner to Nepal's infrastructure development. India is committed to moving ahead with Nepal, as per its priorities, on development, economic and connectivity projects, which will benefit growth of trade, investments and facilitates movement of people.

**Q 12: Successive Nepal governments have stressed the value of trilateral relationship involving trade, transit and investments that pull in both our giant neighbours, India and China, to work closely for our development. While Chinese leadership has come out in favour of the idea, New Delhi seems to have certain reservations about it. What is India's position on this and if you do have reservations, what are they?**

**Answer:** India has age old, multi-faceted and time-tested partnership with Nepal. Our ties with Nepal have their own natural logic. The open border is its most unique characteristic. We remain open to any ideas, which will be

mutually advantageous and enable economic development and well-being of the people of Nepal.

**Q 13: Kathmandu is home to SAARC headquarters and both Nepal and India have been strong proponents of SAARC over the years. Increasingly, India now seems to be giving a greater priority to alternative regional forums, such as BIMSTEC, BBIN. Where does this leave SAARC?**

**Answer:** India continues to attach importance to cooperation within the framework of SAARC. However, no cooperation can take place in an environment of terror. Also, we do not see any competition between cooperation under the rubric of different regional and sub-regional organizations. We need to move forward for our accelerated socio-economic growth under the framework of any regional or sub-regional organization that is most suitable. Our interests lie in fast growth and development. We do not want to get bogged down by the processes or formats.

**Q 14: Any important messages that you would like to convey to our readers about the visit and the larger aspect of Nepal and India relationship marked by shared history and culture?**

**Answer:** I am very happy to visit Nepal in this festive season of Tihar and Chhath. India attaches the highest priority to its relations with Nepal. Our two countries have vital stakes in each other's progress and wellbeing. India is committed to strengthening its partnership with Nepal and to extend all possible support for all round development of our excellent bilateral relations. As two sovereign nations, we wish to take forward our relationship on the basis of mutual trust and mutual benefit. Also, India will remain a welcoming land for the people of Nepal.

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