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## Nepal: Indian PM's Visit: Update No. 299

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By Dr. S.Chandrasekharan

It was understandable that PM Modi during his short visit could connect with the people of Nepal. The enthusiasm shown by the people of the streets in Kathmandu was genuine and spontaneous.

The government of the Nepali Congress- UML combine did its best to make the visit a great success. The euphoria noticed in the Nepalese media was a pleasant surprise as one is normally used to subtle and even open anti Indian propaganda!

I only wish the PM had visited the Terai also even if was for a few hours at least to the Janakpur temple which compared to Pasupathinath Temple in Kathmandu is in a neglected condition both in the upkeep of the temple and the infrastructure leading to it.

His address to the Parliament in Hindi understood by all the members was a great success and he dispelled many misgivings about Indian policy spread by a few individuals. While not detailing the full itinerary and the promises he made, a few points that are relevant to the Indo Nepal friendship and its future course can be discussed.

\* First is the line of credit of one billion dollars given to Nepal for developmental purposes. I only wish the Indian bureaucrats do not stipulate conditions in using the funds as it happened in Bangladesh where there was an insistence to procure where available, Indian-made goods and equipment.

\* Second is the clear declaration of non interference in the internal affairs. I recall one able journalist whom I respect, mentioned in one of the Indian papers that since 2005 India has been interfering in the internal affairs of Nepal. Coming as it is from the PM, at least the people

of Nepal should understand that India has nothing to gain by interfering.

\* Third, again is the firm declaration from the Prime Minister himself of India's support to democracy and its further development in Nepal. This gives a lie to some of the JNU types in India as also some of those on the left who were spreading the word that the new government is out to restore monarchy in Nepal.

\* Same goes to the rumour that the new government in India would support those elements in Nepal who want Nepal to return to being a "Hindu State." To me it looks that it hardly matters whether Nepal is declared a Hindu or a Secular State. One has to only witness the huge crowds that assemble in the posh area of New Road at the Ganesthal in Kathmandu, or the crowds that assemble even in winter in the early hours at the Pasupathi temple for bhajans or the long trek undertaken by people to Mukthinath and to Mankamna ( there is a rope way now). Hinduism cannot be taken away from the people no matter how the country is now declared to be.

\* Fifth is the declaration made by the Indian Prime Minister that transmission lines will be laid soon for Nepal to get power from India for the next ten years. Nepal hardly produces one percent of its potential and those regular visitors to Nepal would know that the city has blackouts for extended hours of ten or even more. The Indian PM said that ten years hence, may be India could get power from Nepal. I am not sure whether Nepal will be in a position to look after its own needs even after ten years and the question of power purchase from Nepal appears to be very unlikely. It is understood that an Indian draft on power purchase was criticised by the Nepalese officials as being too stiff and that no respect is being given to Nepal as the upper riparian! This mind set will continue in any initiative taken by India and it is best left to Nepal to decide what it wants to do with its surplus power as and when it does have one.

\* Sixth is the amendment to certain provisions to the Pancheswar agreement. It is almost two decades ago that the Pancheswar agreement was signed and even the DPR is not ready. While not going into the details, it looks that the Pancheswar project is unlikely to be completed in near future. It is in the interest of India that in its projection and meeting its requirements, power from Nepal is not taken into consideration at all.

\* Finally, there is a strong reiteration on the revision of the 1950 treaty in keeping with the modern times. The 1950 treaty is outdated and no sovereign country would accept the humiliation of some the clauses found in the treaty. Nepal should be free to decide what type of relationship it wants and what would suit them to continue the close cultural, economic and security relations between the two countries. Every government in power in Nepal has sought a revision without specifying what type of relationship they would need in future. If Nepal is serious, it should come out with specifics so that the full implication of the revision can be discussed and settled.

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