
NEPALI VICE PRESIDENT VISITS CHINA TO STRENGTHEN TIES

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Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun left for China on Tuesday on a week-long trip that aims to consolidate ties between the two countries.

Pun, a former Maoist commander, is leading an 11-member delegation to attend Chinas 23rd Lanzhou Investment and Trade Fair, a gathering of business leaders and foreign delegates in Lanzhou, the capital of northwest Gansu province.

On Wednesday, he is scheduled to address a forum on the New Silk Road and will also address members of the business community. Along with Malaysia, Nepal will be a guest of honor at the event also known as the Lanzhou Fair.

Nepal is reportedly working on a protocol of its transit and transport agreement with China, which was signed a year ago during a visit by Nepali Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli.

Once signed, the protocol will eventually help Nepal reduce its dependence on India, its neighbor in the south, which has traditionally exercised clout over the landlocked country.

Ties between the two countries grew strong after Oli visited China in March last year and signed a raft of agreements in Beijing.

Many in Kathmandu think Nepal was being pushed northward following an unofficial five-month blockade by India in 2015, which halted supplies and choked the mountainous country.

The Indian move followed promulgation of Nepals long-awaited post-war constitution, which triggered protests from ethnic groups in the country's southern plains.

The diplomatic standoff and the ensuing overtures led to distance between Nepal and India, casting doubt whether India would have a grip over its strategically-important backyard.

China wants more deals

Last week, China handed over a national academy on the outskirts of capital Kathmandu to Nepali police force, which guards the countrys northern border.

On May 12, Nepal joined South Asian nations, including Pakistan and Bangladesh in signing an agreement to become part of the China megaproject -- the One Belt One Road (OBOR) -- that is estimated to cost around \$5 trillion for building roads, bridges, ports and railways spanning over 60 countries across Asia, Africa, Middle East and Europe.

Last month, a five-member Chinese delegation led by Chinese Assistant Minister Kong Xuanyou held foreign secretary-level talks in Kathmandu. The two sides discussed bilateral agreements including the OBOR and other Chinese-funded projects in Nepal.

But with the change of guard in Kathmandu last month -- Sher Bahadur Deuba of the pro-Indian Nepali Congress party became prime minister -- analysts say Beijing worries whether Nepal would follow through last years agreements.

Purna Basnet, editor of Nepali language digital newspaper Nepal Khabar, told Anadolu Agency the Chinese want assurance from Kathmandu over its commitment to past agreements.

I think bilateral visits between the two countries will continue in the next few years because China wants Nepal to sign more agreements and implement it on time, Basnet said.

Apart from the signing of a framework agreement on OBOR, they have lobbied with the government to sign another MoU [Memorandum of Understanding] so that Nepal is firmly part of their [OBOR) campaign.

The editor said all of Chinas foreign and economic policies were now geared towards realizing the megaproject known as the New Silk Road.

Pun, who visited a similar trade fair in Kunming last year, will return on Tuesday after visiting Xian and Yanan, two historic cities in Shaanxi province. The former marks the eastern end of Silk Road and the latter lies near the endpoint of Chinese leader Maos long march as part of his communist insurgency.

Kaynak/Source: