

Title: Regarding recent goodwill visit to Nepal.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform hon. Members that I made a goodwill visit to Nepal from August 17 to 19.

The purpose of my visit was to personally convey to His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev the deepest condolences of the President, the Prime Minister, the Government, and the people of India at the grievous tragedy that had struck Nepal in June. I also conveyed to His Majesty the good wishes of the President and the Prime Minister.

This visit was undertaken to also convey to the newly elected Prime Minister of Nepal, His Excellency Shri Sher Bahadur Deuba, reaffirmation of India's commitment to building further on the existing friendship and cooperation between India and Nepal.

I took the opportunity of the visit to meet with the President of the Nepali Congress, Shri Girija Prasad Koirala, Leader of the Opposition, Shri Madhav Kumar Nepal, the President of the Nepal Sadbhavna Party, Shri Gajendra Narayan Singh, the President of the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, Shri Surya Bahadur Thapa as also senior statesman, Shri Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

While my visit was essentially for the purpose of conveying goodwill, and for reaffirming India's commitment to our traditional ties of friendship and cooperation, issues of interest to the two countries were also discussed. Some apprehensions had been voiced, in the media in Nepal, about the renewal of the existing Trade Treaty between our two countries. I conveyed that India remains fully committed to the growth of industry, in Nepal, enhancing trade between the two countries and growth of employment in Nepal. There were, however, certain issues that had emerged during the implementation of the Treaty over the past five years, which now need to be addressed, then discussed between the two countries, and necessary adjustments made. I expressed confidence that in the forthcoming discussions between the technical delegations of the two sides, this would be resolved to mutual satisfaction. There had also been concerns expressed in Nepal about the possibility of adverse consequences, of a minor flood control embankment being constructed in district Siddhartha Nagar, of Uttar Pradesh. I conveyed that though technical provision had been made in this embankment for water to flow through 12 Regulators, and that there was unlikely to be any adverse impact, yet construction was promptly halted after the concerns of His Majesty's Government were received by us. Since then, technical officials have met at site and will meet again. About apprehensions that this embankment might cause damage to Lumbini, I affirmed that these were totally unfounded. Lumbini is as sacred to India as it is to Nepal.

I reiterated our willingness to jointly develop the water resources of Nepal so that Nepal becomes an energy exporting country. The leadership of Nepal assured me of their desire also to make progress in this field.

I conveyed the Government of India's appreciation of the movement towards dialogue on the Maoist question and hoped that this would reach a successful conclusion.

Our continuing concerns with regard to the clandestine use of Nepal's territory for anti-Indian activities by the Pakistan ISI were also conveyed. I received a firm assurance from His Majesty's Government that any such activity against India would not be tolerated and that necessary steps would be taken.

My exchange of views with political leaders in Nepal was most fruitful, constructive and forward looking. I found unanimity that the ties of friendship and co-operation between our two countries should continuously be strengthened, in a spirit of friendship, for the benefit of the peoples of Nepal and India.

I am happy to report that relationship between India and Nepal continues to be that of mutual trust and friendship. I am confident that these ties will continue to remain extremely friendly and cordial.
