











## India-Nepal-Bangladesh power diplomacy is a big step for regional cooperation in South Asia

By Mehjabin Bhunu

"In recent years India has been prioritising regional integration among South Asian countries, excepting Pakistan. As per the joint vision statement between Nepal and India in April last year, the two countries agreed to expand sub-regional cooperation in the power sector among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN).

India's efforts in recent years to establish greater energy connectivity with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka have been quite successful. India, Nepal and Bangladesh have finalized the draft of a Trilateral Power Trade Agreement. It is New Delhi's efforts to create more energy connectivity with some neighboring countries." "The agreement, the first of its kind, has been agreed upon by the three countries and is expected to be signed in the coming months. The agreement is said to fulfill the long-standing demand of Nepal and Bangladesh." "When Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited Delhi in early June, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled India's plans to export hydro-power from Nepal to Bangladesh. It is reported that 50 megawatts of electricity will be the initial generation, with the potential to increase thereafter." "The deal is in line with India's efforts in recent years to establish greater energy connectivity with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka through power transmission networks and petroleum pipelines." "It also has an unstated objective of reducing its neighbors' dependence on China. In the past India has shown more interest in power trade with neighboring countries under bilateral agreements." "The new guidelines for cross-border trade in electricity in recent years have served as building blocks for new arrangements. The project guidelines, developed after consultation with all stakeholders, also allow neighboring countries to participate in these power exchanges." "It enables a country like

Nepal to transmit electricity from one South Asian country to another through India.

The scheme has been drafted in a way that power from any Chinese-funded power plant cannot be traded through the Indian link. "In addition to building electricity transmission infrastructure in Nepal and



Bangladesh, India has also helped build cross-border pipelines with both countries. "South Asia's first cross-border petroleum pipeline connects Moithan in Bihar, India to Amlekunj in Nepal. It was built at a cost of 324 crore (3.24 billion) rupees. Launched in 2019, the project has provided 2.8 million metric tonnes of diesel to Nepal." "Both sides have also approved the construction of the second phase of the pipeline. Based on this, a second pipeline connecting India to Jhapa district in Nepal is to be constructed." "In March this year, India and Bangladesh launched a Rs 377-crore cross-border petroleum pipeline project. It is expected to supply one million metric tonnes of diesel annually from Assam's Numaligar refinery to the northern parts of Bangladesh. The length of this pipeline is 132 km and 127 km in Bangladesh." "During the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, part of India's support worth \$4 billion was seen as a project to help meet Colombo's fuel and gas needs." "When petrol stations in Sri Lanka went down in June last year, India supplied fuel through Indian petrol stations. Sri Lanka and India have agreed to jointly develop oil-bearing farms amid growing concerns about China's influence in Trincomalee." "India's enabling role" "Energy cooperation between Nepal and Bangladesh is one of the most promising areas of cooperation. Plans to make power an exportable commodity are outlined in Nepal's 15th Five-Year Development Plan (2019-2024). Nepal plans to grow its 1,250 MW of electricity production to more than 5,000 MW within the next five years, making it an energy-surplus country." "The goal of Bangladesh is to invest, produce, and import surplus energy from Nepal. The fact that Bangladesh and India use more electricity during the summer months, which is their busiest time of year, must be emphasized." "A trilateral energy sales and purchase agreement between Bangladesh, Nepal, and India are required for any Dhaka-Kathmandu power transaction to be implemented because Bangladesh and Nepal do not have a direct land link. Both parties have acknowledged that the trilateral agreement's strategic component is vital; otherwise, electricity exports to Bangladesh would be only on paper." "Being a landlocked country, Nepal's plan to export its electricity other than to India requires India's close cooperation and partnership. According to the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) of India, the Indian authority is allowed to do cross-border trade where India is involved. There is a specific provision of a tripartite agreement that allows the Indian authority to sign the framework of bilateral agreements between the government of India and the governments of the respective neighbouring countries. In other words, Bangladesh and Nepal had to sign bilateral agreements for cross-border electricity trade with India." "If India finally enables the power corridor to Bangladesh to import electricity from

Nepal, it will usher a new era of bilateral energy cooperation. Not only that, through Bangladesh, it can achieve its untapped opportunities of hydropower from India's northeastern region. So, both Bangladesh and India should come forward to enhance their energy security based on reciprocity and enhance South Asian regional cooperation." "If the plan materialises, it will be Nepal's first export of power to a third country other than India. Since November 2021, Nepal has been selling its excess power to the Indian market after the southern neighbour gave regulatory clearance." "Sub-regional cooperation" "In recent years India has been prioritising regional integration among South Asian countries, excepting Pakistan. As per the joint vision statement between Nepal and India in April last year, the two countries agreed to expand sub-regional cooperation in the power sector among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN).

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and Bangladesh also agreed to make joint efforts to create a high level trilateral administrative mechanism between Nepal, Bangladesh and India to forge partnership in the areas of power trade, building cross-border transmission infrastructure and overall cooperation in the power sector." "The Joint Steering Committee meeting also instructed the Joint Technical Team (Transmission) under high level mechanism, to explore options of cross border transmission lines to enable trading of power between Nepal and India and submit a report within six months." "The Joint Technical Team had earlier identified two routes—Anarmari (Nepal)-Panchagarh (Bangladesh), and Anarmari (Nepal) to Thakurgaon (Bangladesh) for dedicated transmission lines." "The total length of the first route is 49km, of which a 24km section falls within the Indian territory. The second route has an 83km length, of which a 33km section falls in Indian territory." "Bhetuwal, who was also a delegation member of Nepal, said that two sides now would explore three options of transmission infrastructure to enable trading of power between the two countries in the short, medium and long run." "They include: using existing India-Bangladesh cross border link; enhancing the capacity of existing Baharampur-Bheramara link between India and Bangladesh; and developing Duhabi (Nepal)-Purnia (India) and Barapukuria (Bangladesh) transmission link." "During the meeting, the Bangladeshi side also notified Nepal that the Bangladesh Power Development Board would soon sign power sale agreement with GMR, India to sell 500MW of electricity from 900MW Upper Karnali Hydropower Project based in Nepal, according to Nepal's energy ministry." "The Indian company is working to generate resources to develop a Nepal-based hydropower project and securing power sale agreement would be important for the company to conclude financial closure." "In early May, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court had paved the way for the Indian company to work towards financial closure of the project enabling it to sign power sale agreement with Bangladesh entity after the court vacated earlier interim order against the Indian company." "The two countries also decided that the NEA and BPDB would sign a joint venture agreement within the next six months to develop the 683 MW Sunkoshi 3 hydropower project at the border of Ramachhap and Karvapalanchowk districts of central Nepal, according to the energy ministry of Nepal." "Earlier, the two countries had agreed to develop this project jointly but entities responsible for developing the project could not be determined."

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## Smash And Grab

By Sunanda Datta Ray

Contd... CHAPTER 7

It would be another couple of days before the Losong festival ushered in the year of the Hog. Based on the Kali Chakra, which Tibet imported from India, the Sikkimese calendar runs into a cycle of 12 years, each named after an animal: rat, bull, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, bird, dog, and hog. There is a shorter governing cycle called after the five elements, (earth, water, fire, tree and iron) and each of these lasts for two years, though the animal year changes roughly every 12 months. The year of the Iron Dog was, therefore, followed by, the year of the Iron Hog, to be succeeded in time by the Earth Rat year and then the Earth Bull year. But the lunar chart which determines the Kali Chakra does not always exactly synchronize with Western calendar dates, and there was an interregnum of a few days between the end of the Dog year and the beginning of that of the Hog. It was symbolic of the suspense in which Sikkim was poised, for the Denzong kingdom hovered between a discarded past and an unrevealed future.

T.N. Kaul blamed the Gyaimo for this uncertainty. He believed that the Chogyal's "American marriage, perhaps/made him believe that through extraneous influence he could ensure American and Canadian support for his claims to independence." Her advent certainly added a new dimension to the perspectives. Hope aroused awareness of the world in Sikkim and made the world conscious of her husband's tucked away kingdom. The first entry in the palace guest-house visitors' book, read Hope Cooke, Scale Harbor, Maine, USA. It was a significant opening. For though guests and the guest-house, even perhaps a register to record arrivals and departures, may have existed before, Hope replaced casua usage with method and a sense of purpose. She tried to choreograph Sikkim's cultural heritage for presentation on an international stage. The Kagyet dances turned into a national pageant under her direction.

What Rustomji attempted in architecture, the Gyaimo accomplished in interior decor, dress design, and studies. The palace's heavy-Victorian furniture was sent into storage and replaced with low cushioned divans, carved and gilded choksetys, and wondrously woven warps. A series of textbooks was planned to inspire national pride. Promising young men and women were helped to study abroad, especially in the US where Hope's contacts enabled them to gain college admission. The Palden Thondup Cottage Industries Institute started imaginative new lines of production. Even her own personality altered. Gone was the casual young girl in a scanty dress who had romped gaily in Darjeeling. There blossomed instead a willowy woman with a string of pearls-twisted in her high coiffure, and eyes shadowed to darken her fairness. Hope wore khos in ceremonial occasions, but otherwise favoured the Nepalese saree drawn tightly under her arms, or a length of fabric wrapped about her in Lepcha style. Her movements became slower, her smile more distant, and her voice dropped till it was barely audible. She wisped along barely seeming to touch the ground, an ethereal being who ignored Sikkim's flesh and blood to go into ecstasies over the country's spirit.

In their different ways, the Gyaimo, Kazini, and Princess Coo Coo la were spurred by similar ambition. Each wanted recognition in a more important Sikkim. But each wanted it for herself. There were operational differences too. Hope may have believed that her connections abroad would exert themselves on her behalf, but Coo Coo la had powerful friends in New Delhi and expected them to yield to her persuasion. Kazini hoped that her important contacts would benefit her husband, though it was never certain whether the public personalities she spoke of so glibly really were close friends and whether her influence extended beyond newspaper publicity. The Chogyal could not have found it easy coping with three domineering females, though happily, he was spared Kazini's proximity and, therefore, direct experience of her tantrums.

Policitians and civil servants shared the king's faith and approvingly read Kaiser Bahadur Thapa's fulminations in Sikkim. "If you keep a servant you have to pay his wages," was Netuk Tsering's curt dismissal of Indian aid. Four senior officers—Jigdal Densapa, Rasaily, Kunzang Sherab, and Dorji Dahdul had formed an external affairs committee to advise on relations with India and future ties with other countries. The initiative gave oblique warning of Gangtok's intention one day to manage its own foreign policy. Two of its members always accompanied the Chogyal to New Delhi, and the committee was unlikely to take any step without clearance.

Gangtok's study forum was another such move. Its 150 members were also drawn from the upper reaches of the civil service. Densapa and Rasaily were again the leading figures, but the group "included Chandra Das Rai, who had returned to administration after his unrewarding political venture, and Keshav Chandra Pradhan, the chief conservator of forests. About 30 or 40 of these rather staid bureaucrats met at irregular intervals over tea or drinks to discuss administrative reform and future strategy in a somewhat casual fashion. No resolutions were ever adopted, politics was strictly avoided, and the Chogyal did not consult the forum. None of the members was in the first flush of youth; many were of noble birth, all were men of substance and all held responsible jobs; but ludicrously enough, they were viewed in India as dangerous revolutionaries. B.K. Daschowdhury, a Lok Sabha member, warned the Indian Parliament that there existed in Gangtok a "young study group on the very lines of the Red Guards in China with the help and aid of Chinese funds and that this organization has started very strong anti-Indian propaganda in Sikkim and neighbouring border areas creating great trouble throughout north Bengal and thereby threatening the security of India".

However laughable such alarms, it is true that, taking their lead from the ruler, some articulate young Sikkimese complained they had to live under stifling restrictions. Independence did not occur to them at this stage, but they were anxious to express themselves and to project Sikkim's identity. The demand for a radio station, which had dragged on since 1957, was a case in point. Nehru had agreed to a transmitter, and his consent was reported in Indian newspapers. But the PO convinced the external affairs ministry that Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, and China would see, the acquisition as proof of Sikkim's sovereignty. It was impossible to officially retract the prime minister's public commitment, but even if the civil service could not cancel a political decision it could obstruct execution. Unaware of these machinations, Dr B.V. Keskar told Parliament on 20 April 1960 that preliminary investigations had been completed and installation would depend on the conclusion of All India Radio's technical discussions with the durbar. The minister added that the station would entail an initial investment of Rs 184,000 and a recurring annual charge of Rs 250,000. Though India would provide most of the money, Sikkim would also make a small contribution. contd..



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