

Citizens' Appeal Against Signing Problematic Agreements with India

Kathmandu, 4 January 2024

In the context of Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar's two-day visit to Kathmandu starting today, we protest the apparent willingness of the Government of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to sign agreements in the areas set out below, which is bound to weaken Nepal's independent and sovereign agency on bilateral matters. We also protest the Dahal Government's reaching agreements with New Delhi in a secretive manner without adequate information provided to the polity and the general public.

1. Allowing the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu to directly give grants of up to NPR 20 crore outside the Nepal Government's budgetary processes will gravely impact the country's political sphere. The Nepali public cannot accept a situation where local government representatives from all over have to line up before a foreign embassy for development assistance. We strongly demand that the Government pull back from agreeing to something that goes against the Constitution as well as the federal government's policy guidelines regarding foreign assistance.
2. There is an attempt to make the new 'Agnipath' recruitment scheme of India's armed forces applicable to recruits from Nepal. While the system for Nepali citizens to join the British and Indian armies was put in place through the Tripartite Agreement of 1947, the 'Agnipath' scheme is sought to be applied to Nepal without discussions with the Kathmandu Government, as if New Delhi is free to take unilateral decisions when it comes to Nepal. We recommend that the starting point for any attempt to amend or review the recruitment of Nepali citizens into the Indian military should be the 1947 Tripartite Agreement itself. The attempt to formalise changes on such a vital issue through inter-ministerial agreement is unacceptable.
3. We find the decision to guarantee 10,000 MW of Nepal's hydroelectricity for the Indian market problematic, as this also affects Nepal's flexibility in relation to stored water as a natural resource. Because hydropower is not just a tradeable commodity but also intrinsically linked to use of water as a resource, we demand that decisions be reached only through wide national discussion and parliamentary oversight.

The Nepali public cannot accept agreements that are discussed secretly between the two governments and foisted upon society as a whole. By being part of such non-transparent dealings, the Dahal Government has once again shown how its own short-term interests are allowed to eclipse the national good. This is happening even as the Dahal Government is reluctant to raise long-pending issues such as the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty, the border disputes of Limpiyadhura-Lipulek-Kalapani and Susta, and the unpublished report of the Eminent Persons' Group set up by the Prime Ministers of the two countries.

The Dahal Government is evidently unwilling to place these and other matters of vital national interest on the agenda of bilateral meetings, while on the other hand, it seems happy to include any and all agenda items proposed by the Indian side. All of this only exposes the Dahal Government's tendency to swim against the national interest in favour of immediate personalised goals.

We take Nepal to be an inseparable friend of India, and the Nepali public has always stood for mutual respect and friendship between the two countries. We signatories of this appeal are convinced that agreements that go against Nepal's constitutional provisions and impact the country's sovereign rights and sense of dignity cannot do justice to this historical friendship. With this in mind, we strongly appeal to the Nepal Government not to sign agreements that compromise the national interest.

Signatories:

1. Suryanath Upadhyay;
2. Dr. Renu Adhikari;
3. Hira Bishwokarma;
4. Kanak Mani Dixit;
5. Sushil Pyakurel.