



CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)

CLAWS-NICE SECOND ANNUAL DIALOGUE

ON

**SOFT POWER DIMENSION: INDIA-NEPAL
RELATIONS**

Thursday, 17 December 2020, 0930h-1300h

The **Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)**, New Delhi organised Second Annual Dialogue with The **Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE)**, Kathmandu, Nepal. The theme of the webinar is “**Soft Power Dimension: India-Nepal Relations**”. A Joint **CLAWS-NIICE Monograph on “Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Issues in South Asia”**, was also released during the event on 17 December 2020 by General Bipin Rawat, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, YSM, SM, VSM, ADC the Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces (CDS). The basic objective of this webinar was to a) Recollect the historical and civilisational aspects of the relationship and how the centrality of these aspects are being affected by economic and political factors prevalent in these countries and the region at large (b) To appraise the role played by military diplomacy in the broader bilateral relations (c) Exploring future opportunities for cooperation on matters of climate change and disaster management and (d) Exploring religious tourism to further bolster the ties between India and Nepal.



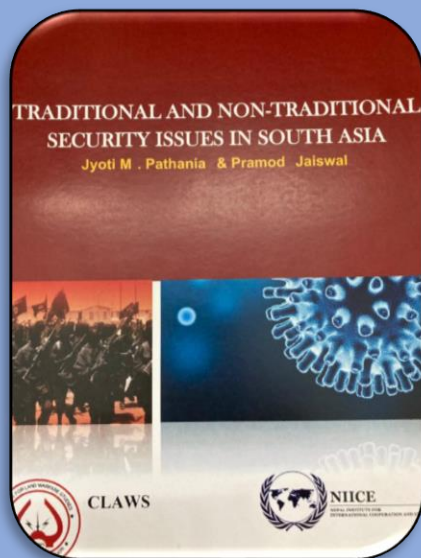
Dr Jyoti M. Pathania, Chairperson, Outreach Committee and Senior Fellow, CLAWS welcomed General Bipin Rawat, the Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces (CDS) and NIICE and all the participants on behalf of CLAWS.



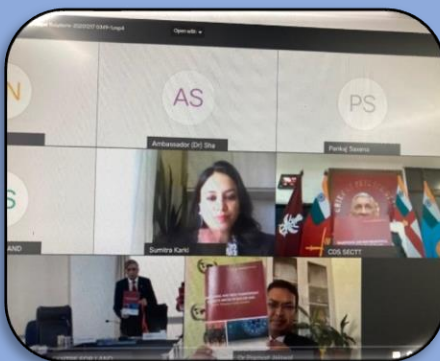
Lt Gen (Dr) V K Ahluwalia, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, VSM (Retd), Director, CLAWS** in his opening remarks mentioned that the India-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 is the bedrock of relationship with Nepal and this has paved the way for the several diplomatic exchanges. Lt Gen Ahluwalia quoted Harsh Vardhan Shringhla, the Foreign Secretary's speech where he mentioned "the ties between India and Nepal are based on civilisational reasons and are further based on four pillars of developmental cooperation, stronger connectivity, expanded infrastructure and economic projects". Lt Gen Ahluwalia opined that the economic projects have paved the way for greater trade and commerce relations and the water sharing resources between India and Nepal are also vital points of cooperation. He also emphasised on the importance of Soft power in the relations between India and Nepal and highlighted that historical and civilisational ties, economic connectivity and interdependence, defence diplomacy, medical diplomacy, value system of governance, travel and tourism, education, climate change, terrorism, multilateral organisations, exchanges between think tanks like CLAWS and NIICE and people-to-people were all a part of Soft power which was the binding forces between India and Nepal.



General Bipin Rawat, , PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, YSM, SM, VSM, ADC the Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces (CDS) gave the keynote address where he highlighted that India and Nepal share a unique relationship of friendship and



cooperation since 1950 which is characterised by the open borders and deep-rooted people-to-people contact of art and culture, customs, connectivity through road and railways, business and management, education, health, electricity and power, tourism and defence amongst the others and these highlighted the socio-economic aspects of continuity between the two countries. General Rawat also mentioned India's proactive medical and vaccine diplomacy with regard to the coronavirus and assured India's help to Nepal. The CDS highlighted the Defence cooperation which takes place between the two countries through joint training and exercises like of Officers and Jawan's, like the



SURYA KIRAN Joint Exercise, supplying military equipment to the Nepalese Army and supporting them in training within India and also, accepting Nepalese citizens in the Indian Army as Officers and Jawan's and this further embraces the rigour and zest that India aims towards the strengthening of relations with Nepal. General Rawat also highlighted the characteristics of honesty, loyalty and bravery among the Nepalese Officers and Jawan's and also mentioned that over 36,000 Nepalese citizens are a part of 6 Battalions in the Indian Armed forces. The CDS also emphasised that Nepal in the present times as part of its Foreign Policy is opening up to other countries like China and Nepal must be vigilant in some cases like Sri Lanka and other nations which have also signed agreements with other countries in the region. He further opined that it is necessary to work on the peace and prosperity between both

India and Nepal and due to their extensive bilateral relations both the countries are inseparable in all ways. Thereby, India and Nepal have a wide canvas of cooperation and collaborations. General Rawat concluded by saying that “the relations between India and Nepal are as tall as the Himalayas and as deep as the Indian Ocean”.



Dr Pramod Jaiswal, Research Director, NIICE, gave the special address where he highlighted the reasons for a unique relationship between India and Nepal and opined that the open borders, familial

relations between royal families, people-to-people relations especially in trade, commerce, cultural exchanges through artists, musicians and students, Hindi cinema, religious tourism and affiliations, yoga, languages, defence relations and Gorkha soldiers and space diplomacy are all instruments of Soft Power which have strengthened the ever-growing relations between India and Nepal. Dr Jaiswal highlighted the importance of political prism and how greater emphasis must be stressed upon in the realm of culture as it paves the greater way forward for Soft power which is the crux of the relationship between India and Nepal.



Dr Jyoti M Pathania, Chairperson, Outreach Committee and Senior Fellow, CLAWS was the Chair of the Technical Session of the Webinar. Dr Pathania opined that India and Nepal share an organic

relationship of friendship and cooperation characterised by civilisational

ties and rooted in history, culture, tradition and religious connect and along with this, the relationship is based on open border and deep-rooted people-to-people contact across the border is the testament to the strength of soft power dimension. Further, she focused upon Joseph Nye's Soft Power where Nye highlighted three pillars of Soft Power namely: culture, political value and foreign policy. Dr Pathania highlighted the cultural part of Soft Power which has strengthened the relations between India and Nepal in the recent times and supported her argument with examples of cultural agreements and MoUs, like the proposed MoU between Nepal Academy of fine Arts and Lalit Kala Academy; another one between Nepal Academy of Music & Drama and Sangeet Natak Academy, the conservation of the Pashupatinath temple etc, which would help highlight and take the relations between the two countries to greater heights.

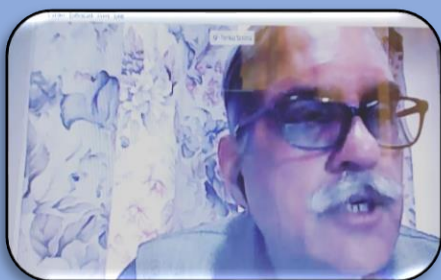


The first Speaker was **Former Ambassador Dr Shambhu Ram Simkhada, Chairman, Academic Sub-Committee of National Defence University, Nepal** spoke about “Historical

and Civilisational Bonds: Can They Withstand the Geo-economic and Geo-strategic Pressures of Modern Regional Politics”. Former Ambassador Simkhada spoke about four areas of cooperation people-to-people, business-to-business, military-to-military and government-to-government have a very strong cultural basis for India and Nepal. People-to-people relationship is a magical relationship due to the open border along with religious bonding's and this paves the way for excellent economic relations which helps in the growth in both the countries

especially the businesses and all this results in interdependence between India and Nepal.

Dr Simkhada questioned as to why there are so much hick ups in this beautiful relationship between India and Nepal. He opined that the shift from the 1950's Friendship Treaty took place as Nepal's search for a greater international identity and Nepal's independent identity began and this was accompanied by India's security preoccupations and these two critical issues have contributed to a need for a new paradigm of relationship. Further, Ambassador Simkhada said that the deep-rooted and widespread relationship like India and Nepal's must be placed on strategic bonding but the strategic bonding is partly based on a relationship of trust and confidence. He also argued that if there isn't this trust and confidence then, it can lead to a potential of disruption and misuse of the open border which would be detrimental to both the sides and this would lead to the issue of paradox of proximity. This proximity could be positive or complex and that complexity demands greater attention and greater sensitivity and that is where the real problem lies as it creates a crisis of comprehension which is due to the different nature of our relationship. Ambassador Simkhada emphasised that India and Nepal are both governed by their own national interest and must work towards permanent friendship and also requires permanent peace.



Maj Gen Pankaj Saxena, VSM (Retd), Senior Fellow (Veteran), CLAWS spoke about “India-Nepal Military Diplomacy: An Anchor for the Bilateral Relations”. According to Maj Gen Saxena, military diplomacy can be defined as the peaceful use of military in diplomacy to

support foreign policy of a nation. It is mainly conducted by people in uniform, it is peaceful and not coercive and lastly, it is a subset of overall diplomacy so as to follow the national security policy of a nation. Maj Gen Saxena defined Nepal's Military Diplomacy to be conceptually and practically far ahead as historically speaking, Nepal uses military as a diplomatic tool in international affairs. Indian Ministry of Defence defines Defence Diplomacy as exchange of high-level defence related visits, dialogues on security challenges and port calls and defence cooperation as those activities covered by training exchanges combined exercises and sourcing development production and marketing of defence. Military Diplomacy between India and Nepal started in 1947. Maj Gen Saxena explained the openness that the Indian Armed forces has for the Nepalese soldiers and nowhere else in the world is there such bonhomie between the soldiers of the two countries. He also opined that the military diplomacy between India and Nepal has resulted in a wide range of activities like training officers in India and Nepal, military aid and modernisation of Nepal Army by the Indian Army, reorganisation and equipping the Nepal Army by the Indian Army, supported the Nepal Army with lethal and non-lethal equipment and Nepal Army has purchased some equipment and some equipment has been given to Nepal Army by the Indian Army.

Maj Gen Saxena opined that the relationship between India and Nepal must be made more visible and made more often. He suggested some policy recommendations in military diplomacy where he said that one contingent of the Nepal Army could be a part of Republic Day Parade and vis-a-versa. Second, NCC cadets may visit India and Indian NCC cadets must visit Nepal as well. Third, Militaries of both the countries must sponsor school visits in each other's country so that relations continue to

blossom. Fourth, the think tanks in both the countries to create positive public opinion. Fifth, Defence deals and equipment are going on, but India today is taking determined steps in defence production and Nepal could give their qualitative requirements to India and buy what is needed for them. Sixth, he proposed a liaison office in both the countries maybe headed by a Brigadier or a General or a veteran to be establish and maintain regular interaction for all matter's military. Lastly, national interest and security of any country is important and it is upon Nepal to be careful of China and must watch out of Chinese activities.



The third speaker was **Dr Manjari Singh, Associate Fellow, CLAWS** spoke about “Climate Change and Disaster Management: The Future of Indo-Nepal Cooperation” where she highlighted that climate change and disaster management issues are the most pressing issues and are hardly discussed between India and Nepal and this transnational issue isn't mentioned in both the countries foreign affairs ministry documents on bilateral relations. She also mentioned that the cooperation of water resources is limited, and this clearly indicates that the two countries haven't exploited this topic to its full potential. Dr Singh spoke about the challenges that the two countries face are both natural and anthropogenic factors and these issues are earthquakes, flash floods, landslides and droughts and these issues are further aggravated due to miscommunication gaps and frequent disputes regarding flood control add to the problems and are a major block to the cooperation effort made by India and Nepal. The other issue that Dr Singh mentioned was that of the Flash floods to be a frequent issue for India and Nepal and this is one

of the most crucial issue as there is a loss of land, water, crop, animal and human lives and this vast spread of frequent flooding needs to be dealt with in a more effective and progressive manner.

Dr Singh opined that India and Nepal have made efforts but are very limited and so far, the two countries have worked on adopting flood control measures which largely comprise of river training works and construction of embankments, dams and reservoirs and this approach is problematic as soil erosion and landslides in the upper catchment areas have heavy silt and this paves the way for the rise in the river beds and is unsustainable as rivers change their course of flow and in the longer run it will create more environmental hazards. She also mentioned that both the governments have set up three tier joint committees at Ministerial, Technical and Resource level and also a joint committee on inundation has been set up and it deals with the issues of inundation, embankments and flood forecasting but the actions at the ground level are very limited. Dr Singh concludes her paper by suggesting some areas of future cooperation. First, they are disaster prevention measures need to be prioritised. Second, there is a need to reduce tension over flood control, the two countries should aim for bilateral engagements and cooperation benefitting both the countries should be put in place. Third, the houses and areas of flooding must be raised and this can be done through retro fittings but this is an expensive investment and the presenter expressed her reservations about the same. Fourth, local governance needs to step up their game to deal with the target population and keep them safe from disasters. Fifth, both the countries need to work on bilateral, trilateral and regional level of the Paris Treaty.



Sumitra Karki, Research Associate, NIICE spoke about “Religious Tourism as Soft Power: Strengthening India-Nepal Ties”. Religious tourism is one of the dimensions of soft power as it facilitates economic growth and can

bring socio-economic development for the country. It can also empower the local community which would also pave the way for entrepreneur development. According to Sumitra Karki, religious tourism can also strengthen foreign policy especially for India as India has hosted several world leaders in religious places. The India-Nepal Religious relations must be highlighted specially the Ayodhya and Janakpur linkup among the other temples. There are several religious circuits between India and Nepal like the Ramayana Circuit and the Transnational Buddhist Tourism Circuit and these two religious circuits aim at better information amongst each other, more inclusive policy making and generating more investments for these circuits. Sumitra Karki mentioned about the efforts that India and Nepal have made in order to run these circuits where the Indian Railways announced the Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train and this was followed by Japan being a co-organiser for the 6th International Buddhist Conclave and in the recent times, India has approved the Kushinagar Airport in Uttar Pradesh and finally, on 6 December 2020, Developing the Buddhist Pilgrimage (Circuit) conference was held. She suggested that these Religious Circuits could be stretched from South Asia to Southeast Asia then it would be possible that it could cover BIMSTEC but for that proper connectivity is required and that can only happen if there are conferences, meetings and joint programs and this would be successful as countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Burma could also be interested in the Ramayana circuit due to its great popularity.



Lt Gen (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM, PhD (Retd), Distinguished Fellow, CLAWS gave the valedictory address where he spoke about the overriding importance of reciprocity, tradition, culture and religion between India and Nepal. He

also mentioned about the three T's-trust, trade and transit and with the passage of time, there is a change in nature of new nature of relationships and the new nature of statecraft that has developed in the past decades. The societies have changed and that has led to the formation of an aspiration and growth-based environment along with nationalism in both the countries. Lt Gen Sharma emphasised on four changes that have taken place. First, the strategic geography has changed between India, Nepal and of course China and it has been changing in the past. Second, there is a pervasive change in the society in India and Nepal. Third, the issue of the proliferation of the communication of technology is also significant. Fourth, the altering national threats like terrorism, energy supply, security. climate change and transnational crimes are coming up in larger force. India and Nepal relationship are of a robust one and it will continue to do so.



Lt Gen (Dr) V K Ahluwalia, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, VSM (Retd), Director, CLAWS** gave the concluding remarks and suggested certain policy recommendations. He opined that there are rapid changes in the geopolitical economic and strategic landscape and each country works

towards its national interest and so, one shouldn't be sensitive to the changes taking place. India and Nepal have deep-rooted bonding, affiliations and linkage which needs to be kept in mind. Lt Gen Ahluwalia emphasised that the open border with Nepal goes to show that the full and free movement that takes place across the border along with the people to people contact as economic integration at the national as well as the local level take place. Connectivity brings in all the aspects of soft power as it covers health, education, economic activities, employment and defence movement and so, connectivity is of primary importance as it also covers the newer domains like digital connectivity. Connectivity with time bound implementation is the need of the hour and connectivity needs to be supported with capital for the smooth flow of infrastructural projects which would help strengthen this relationship.

