











# Nepal faces enormous challenge, BRI at the crossroads of geopolitics

Sharachchandra Bhandary

"The 2024 Media Cooperation Forum on Belt and Road" was recently held in Chengdu, southwest China's Sichuan Province, by People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee. The event took place as the massive infrastructure project known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping, enters the golden era of its implementation.

The event, which brought together officials, academics, businesspeople, and over 200 delegates from media organizations in almost 80 countries, had the dual goals of strengthening media cooperation and fostering common development.

China came up with the massive infrastructure project known as the Belt and Road Initiative in an effort to improve connectivity and trade throughout Asia, Europe, and Africa. Many financial and physical development projects have been undertaken over the years, ranging from satellite networks to the building of railroads. It is still one of the biggest infrastructure projects ever launched by a single nation.

China has signed more than 200 cooperation agreements with more than 150 countries and more than 30 international organizations, including Nepal, as of June 2023, according to the BRI white paper that China released. In May 2017, a BRI agreement was reached between China and Nepal. Since then, the BRI has generated debate and has not been put into practice. Nepal claims that China has not made it apparent what terms will apply to the loan or grant implementation of this project. But Nepal wants grants to be used to manage the BRI project. However, China prefers to use a loan rather than a grant to carry out the project. China has been stating that it has adopted the same BRI policies as it has with other nations; the Chinese government has also made it plain that it will not adopt any different policies for Nepal. Some people interpret it as China's plan to increase its power.

Due to the influence of foreign actors and geopolitics, Nepal has not been able to carry out the excellent megaproject of win-win cooperation. International relations experts assert that until China and India's relations improve, it will be challenging to execute the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Nepal. They also assert that issues will arise until India accepts the BRI. The Western powers have also viewed it warily. Westerners doubt China's ability to use the Belt and Road Initiative to expand its network throughout the world. All of their attention is on how to make it fail.

Experts claim that Nepal is also feeling the effects of the BRI. Several nations are putting pressure on Nepal's government and political parties regarding the BRI. They think that Nepal can make significant strides in the area of physical infrastructure if the Belt and Road Initiative is put into action. Maintaining a balance in its relations with its two neighbors is currently Nepal's biggest challenge. They believe that while it is very difficult to maintain people-



to-people contacts because of language and geography, China is necessary for investment and cooperation. Nepal's economic development will be more challenging without China's assistance.

Some academics have drawn a connection between Nepal's potential for geopolitical unrest and the BRI's implementation. However, this risk has been further amplified by postponing the BRI's implementation and demanding the implementation of a different agreement that was started in opposition to it. It has sparked concerns about the government's approach to fostering equality among friendly nations.

Political leaders cannot afford to act rashly and later regret their choices. Even for common people, taking responsibility for their agreements and understandings is a matter of conscience. In this sense, political leadership needs to be more responsible and sensitive. It is crucial to be aware of attempts to use politics of confusion regarding the Belt and Road Initiative to further entangle the nation in geopolitics. Preventing the muddy splash of animosity between the powerful countries will be beneficial to the nation. However, the attempt to isolate the opposing side in response to external pressure will intensify the geopolitical conflict.

Given the challenges China faces on the US-led strategic front, it makes sense for it to take into account its geopolitical and strategic advantages in Nepal as well. It makes sense for China to want to increase the number of its allies while decreasing the number of its adversaries. In order to achieve this, it has been extending relationships on a "win-win" basis throughout the globe. Countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have felt more at ease with China's policy because they are up against the dominance of strong Western nations over all of their resources, which is assisting China's rise to global dominance even more.

During an eleven-day visit to China, four journalists from Nepal spoke with local Chinese leaders and journalists who expressed their hope for the growth of Nepal's tourism industry and the aspirations of their citizens for the country's overall development. The Chinese leadership is in favor of forging friendly ties with other political parties in addition to keeping China's relationship with Nepal restricted to communist parties. China believes that by developing the agricultural sector and exporting agricultural products, Nepal can make enormous strides in its economic development. According to a Chinese study, Nepal's extensive connectivity will enable it to fully utilize its enormous potential in the

tourism and hydropower sectors.

Citing China's achievements, they said that the country's economic, technological, and educational sectors have all seen previously unheard-of growth as a result of the open policy. Every Chinese person thinks that the current president's BRI will lead to unprecedented levels of development and prosperity. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides a strong basis for global and Chinese sustainable development. The foundation for China's modernization is its open policy, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is what will position China as a global power and the world's largest economy.

Furthermore, they asked that the false statements made by the West about China's progress and the Belt and Road Initiative be refuted and that Western media journalists go to China to see the situation firsthand rather than spreading misinformation. They have asked to spread the word that China is progressing alongside everyone. They made these demands in response to claims made by some so-called Western experts that China's loans under the Belt and Road Initiative are trapping impoverished and developing nations in debt. China has repeatedly said in the open that those accusations are unfounded. The forces that opposed overall growth in developing nations created the "debt trap."

Li Shulei, a member of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's Political Bureau and the head of the CPC Central Committee's Publicity Department, addressed the forum in the meantime and stressed the significance of the 2024 Media Cooperation Forum on Belt and Road, pointing out that it provides an important forum for communication and exchange among media professionals from different nations.

People's Daily President Tuo Zhen said that the forum offers a great chance for media organizations all over the world to share ideas and experiences. He emphasized that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has created new opportunities for global communication and collaboration, pointing out that Chinese President Xi Jinping has given media cooperation a lot of consideration within the initiative's framework. He stated that the BRI aims to promote growth and reciprocity, in line with worldwide patterns of harmony and collaboration.

Hu Guo, Vice President of People's Daily, stated that "BRI accumulates advanced economic, industrial, and scientific potential of countries, capital, technologies, competencies, and talents for the benefit of universal global development."

Other speakers emphasized the need to genuinely implement BRI and raise the standard of living

for their respective peoples. They declared, "The goals of a military alliance do not drive the BRI project. In terms of development, this project is dependable for connecting to the outside world. BRI is not a strategic military initiative. It envisions collaboration solely on infrastructure and economic development. It carries with it the understanding of reciprocal advantages in the social and economic domains. It will mark a significant step toward creating a just world.

Participants in the forum voiced the opinion that media outlets ought to do a better job of reporting on the practices and contributions made by partners in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as narrating tales of win-win cooperation in those nations. The guests urged media organizations to advance information connectivity, intensify efforts to be enabled by digital and smart technologies, and strengthen cooperation to highlight the wonders of various civilizations, pointing out that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has flourished since its founding.

The forum also adopted the "Belt and Road Media Cooperation: Chengdu Initiative," demonstrating the media community's dedication to promoting reciprocal engagement. According to the document, "Participating countries have prioritized connectivity since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), leading to enhanced policy coordination, infrastructure development, seamless trade, financial integration, and stronger people-to-people connections." Global economic growth has been stimulated, international economic cooperation has been facilitated, and global connectivity has been reinforced by these efforts.

The Chengdu Initiative highlights the ongoing significance of media collaboration in fostering cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding, acknowledging that the Belt and Road Initiative is entering a new phase. The text goes on to say, "Media outlets in participating nations should uphold the values of the Silk Road, which are harmony, collaboration, inclusivity, transparency, and mutual gain. In order to foster stronger ties between all parties involved, they should adhere to the concepts of cooperative consultation, cooperative construction, and shared gains. They should also spread impartial, unbiased, and accurate information and abstain from bias, fake news, and misinformation."

It suggested using the media's combined influence to effectively tell BRI stories about shared prosperity and development, strengthening regional cooperation and enhancing global governance, and promoting cross-cultural learning and increased people-to-people interactions. To avoid misunderstandings, it has been emphasized that fake news publications should be held more accountable.

*Bhandary works for the National News Agency (RSS) as an executive editor. His recent visit to Chinese City Chengdu served as the basis for this reporting.*



## Nepal should learn from Africa about China's sensibilities

Prem Sagar Poudel

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Beijing conveyed the message that Africa is China's priority. America is trying to expand investment and relations to make Africa in its favor. In this situation, China has made it clear that it has reinforced its contact with Africans. What Nepal will learn from this forum has not been discussed in Nepal. China is not a priority in Nepal due to the expanding of relations with America. China's investment is also not significant in terms of returns. Therefore, China's collaboration with Africans is like a ripe bael for crow for Nepal. However, there are some topics that Nepal can learn from this forum.

In terms of investment, Nepal can be an attractive place for China. As the cost of laborer in China increases, Chinese companies can come to Nepal because of cheap labor in Nepal. However, Nepal is not interested in this matter. It seems that China is always ready to collaborate for the all-round modernization and development of Africa. Nepal should find the reason why China's interest in Nepal is decreasing.

The US and its G7 partners are pushing ahead with plans to build infrastructure in African countries. When Africans keep their relationship with China, misrepresentations are used, including the debt trap. This commentary is also in Nepal. However, Nepal is carrying this wrong commentary of the West. This problem comes until the issue of Nepal's national interest is clear. From this conference, it seems that Nepal should make China clear about its national interests.

At the conference, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that all assistance to Africa is welcome. But he also warned that dominant behavior should not be shown in this process. Why can't not only China but also America use this commentary in Nepal? Nepal should be clear on this matter. On the other hand, China presented the highest example of hospitality by honoring the African delegates, with a red carpet welcome and presentation of cultural tableaux. Nepal should also find the reason why Nepal does not get the same respect as the African representatives from China.

In his speech, President Xi proposed upgrading bilateral relations with all African countries to a strategic level. He also emphasized on building the China-Africa community. This conference has created a basis for China and Africa to work in the fields of fairness and rationality, openness and win-win cooperation, people-centeredness, diversity and inclusiveness, ecological-friendly work, and peace and security. Why Nepal has not been able to build such a base with China so far.

At the conference, Chinese and African representatives raised the issue of cooperation in the Global South. In his speech, President Xi announced that China, together with African countries, will bring a wave of modernization to the entire South. In this way, China seems to be trying to establish itself as a partiality of the entire South and a reliable alternative to America. The leaders of Nepal link China's efforts in Nepal with self-interest. This is the difficult path seen in the Nepal-China relationship.

China's egalitarian thought is a major reason why Africans trust China instead of the West. China respects the sovereignty of African countries. Never interferes in their internal affairs. Now the West is trying to impose ideologies like homosexuality, individualism, and materialism in Africa. The West has implemented in behavior what it wants to do in Africa. Nepal should learn from Africans in this matter.

In 2021, China released a white paper entitled 'China Africa Cooperation in the New Era'. It mentions the principles of cooperation between China and Africa. It emphasized sincere friendship and equal treatment, a blending of justice and national concerns, people's development and openness, inclusiveness and coordination. In addition, China insisted on not placing any human rights or political conditions on the aid and not seeking

## Smash And Grab

By Sunanda Datta Ray

CHAPTER 14 Against the Law

Elsewhere, protectorates are graduating to independence and colonies are marching to freedom. In Sikkim, a protectorate is moving to "freedom within India" by annexation through constitutional legerdemain. The Hindustan Times, 30 August 1974.

Sikkim is not a part of India, and the Indian constitution cannot be twisted to give its people representation in our parliament. Shyam Nandan Mishra, Lok Sabha, 2 September 1974. Armed with an Indian permit to reside, permanently within the inner line, Kazini bustled into Gangtok in late July, chucking that there had never been a dull moment in Kalimpong for 20 years, and telling everyone how much she had enjoyed "midnight cooking assignments for the dear old Kazi's people". cont...

With Hope gone, she was looking forward to being the sole purveyor of Western wisdom in a rustic world. The two women had barely ever met, but the Gyalmo's higher rank had always rankled with Kazini and fuelled her enmity. Her dislike of Coo Coo la was even more the jealous product of distance; but the Chogyal's sister had withdrawn into a private shell, and the chief minister's wife did not any longer need to fear being upstaged. In fact, she was determined to assert her position as the first lady of Sikkim. The PO and the chief executive both had wives, but they were Indians whereas Kazini, blissfully disregarding her own British passport, saw herself as foremost in Bhutiya-Lepcha society.

She was soon to be disillusioned. Gangtok boasted none of Kalimpong's raffish cosmopolitanism. There were no sprigs of foreign royalty, no mysterious European travellers, or swashbuckling Tibetan aristocrats to animate her salon. Society was homely beyond endurance. Such activity as once existed had revolved round the palace; there was no substitute for that focus even if the unpolished Sikkimese were looking for a replacement. No one was; and Kazini was viewed with mingled fear and mistrust, a strange apparition from another world whose meddling was to be avoided. The dak bungalow with its unimaginative departmental furniture, that had been allotted to her husband, was humble compared to the palace, India House, or even Mintokang. To add to her chagrin, K. M. Lal was housed in an identical bungalow next door, able to keep an eye on every little flutter in her modest domain.

It was a disappointing home-coming. Worse was the discovery of the narrow field of her husband's operations fenced in as it was by the chief executive's overriding powers. Even within his own enclosure, Kazi dared not take a single step without clearance from India House or Mintokang. The chief minister cut a sorry figure as he waited on Bajpai and Das for orders. Kazini was excluded from their confabulations, and was convinced that the Indian security men posted day and night outside her doors were really spying on Kazi and her. cont...



