

'China proposed 2+1 format for India talks'

The spirit of the Wuhan informal summit echoed strongly last week during the visit of Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Oli to Beijing, with China proposing a new dialogue mechanism that would also involve India.

An official source told *The Hindu* that the Chinese side proposed to Mr. Oli a "two plus one" format for dialogue. "This is different from a trilateral mechanism. Under the Chinese proposal, China and India can jointly conduct a dialogue with a third regional country," the source said.

The Chinese initiative is not Nepal-specific. "My impression is that the two-plus one formulation is flexible and can be applied to any other country in South Asia," the source said.

Meet with Xi

During Mr. Oli's visit, the Chinese side made its intent clear to engage deeply with Nepal, and develop special ties with its Himalayan neighbour. The hosts broke protocol by initiating Mr. Oli's meeting with President Xi Jinping, ahead of the customary delegation level talks with Prime Minister Li Keqiang.

Yet, Beijing also made it plain that China-Nepal ties would be docked with India's shared interests as well. The Chinese leadership, in fact, made direct reference to the April Wuhan informal summit, which has begun to have a cascading impact on the region. "The Chinese made it clear that they were not interested in pursuing a zero-sum approach with Nepal. In fact, the hosts spoke about the Wuhan informal summit between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, including the discussion between the two leaders on achieving greater regional cooperation, which covered connectivity," the source said.

During Mr. Oli's visit, it had become evident that China was inclined to fulfill its ambitious agenda with Nepal gradually, after ensuring that such steps were in sync with India's interests.

Analysts say, that the Nepali side has understood the "big picture", appreciating that China is keen to build bridges with India, as Beijing's friction with the U.S. under the Trump administration begins to mount.

"Besides, bringing India on board is essential for enhanced regional connectivity, including a trans-Himalayan corridor through Nepal, if President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative is to achieve its full potential," the source observed.

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