

NO LONGER SPECIAL: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA-NEPAL TIES

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After months of brinkmanship, India and Nepal have brought their relations to the edge of a precipice. The Oli government's decision to pass the constitutional amendment [ratifying a change in its maps](#) that include Lipulekh, [Kalapani](#) and Limpiyadhura, territories that India controls, marks a decidedly new phase in ties. While the issue is an old one, it resurfaced in 2019 when [New Delhi published new political maps](#) to reflect the changes following the decision on August 5 to reorganise the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and [Nepal objected](#) to the depiction of disputed territory. In 2000 and 2014, India and Nepal agreed to hold talks about Kalapani and Susta, without much success. Matters snowballed when India's [Defence Minister inaugurated a surfaced road](#) over the territory; when Nepal protested, Indian Army Chief, [General Naravane, suggested](#) it was at the "behest" of China. At the base of the rift is the lack of diplomatic manoeuvring to allow a step back from the brink. While New Delhi contends that it was willing to discuss matters "at a mutually convenient date", Kathmandu says the MEA has rejected two dates suggested by the Nepal MoFA, and has routinely dismissed requests from the Nepal Ambassador for a meet with the Foreign Secretary. That the MEA said Kalapani talks could wait until both countries had dealt with the coronavirus pandemic first, further enraged the Oli government, which has pointed out India's participation by videoconference in bilateral and multilateral meetings. Meanwhile, Mr. Oli's purposeful manner in pursuing the amendment at exactly the same time as the India-China border stand-off bolsters the belief among some in New Delhi that he is speaking with confidence borne from Beijing's backing.

Regardless of the truth of those accusations, or who is more responsible for the downslide in ties, the speed with which the constitutional amendment was passed has left little space for diplomacy now. That the vote was unanimous should also inform New Delhi of the futility of casting Mr. Oli alone as the 'villain' of the piece. It is necessary the two nations resolve their issues through dialogue lest they face more serious consequences. The Modi government has in the past not flinched from taking tough measures, including the 2015 blockade that severely affected India's land-locked neighbour. The Oli government, which seeks to build its legacy by overturning what it calls "unequal" agreements made by the monarchy, could also cause a security nightmare for India if it opens up other parts of their long boundary, and reverses old commitments on open and unsecured border posts. Both sides moved quickly this week to manage the fallout of border firing by Nepali police on a group of Indians that left one dead. The same alacrity is needed to manage the fallout of Saturday's amendment vote, on the once celebrated "special" relationship between the two countries.

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