

## INDIAN ARMY CHIEF NARAVANE CONFERRED HONORARY RANK OF 'GENERAL OF NEPALI ARMY'

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NEW DELHI: Indian Army chief Manoj Mukund Naravane on Thursday was conferred honorary rank of "General of Nepali Army", by Nepal's president Bidya Devi Bhandari.

The function at the presidential palace was attended by Nepalese prime minister KP Sharma Oli and key functionaries of government, a statement from the Indian embassy in Kathmandu said.

"The practice follows a seven decade old tradition of conferring Army Chiefs of each other's country with the honorary title. Commander-in-Chief General KM Cariappa was the first Indian Army Chief to be decorated with the title in 1950. In January last year, Chief of Nepali Army, General Purna Chandra Thapa, was also made the honorary General of the Indian Army by President Ram Nath Kovind at a ceremony in New Delhi," the Indian embassy statement said.

Naravane is on a three-day visit to the Himalayan country aimed at putting bilateral ties back on track after Nepal published a new map showing sections of Indian territory as lying within its borders.

Earlier in the day, Naravane presented some medical equipment to the Nepalese Army including X-Ray machines, computed radiography systems, ICU ventilators, video endoscopy units, anesthesia machines, laboratory equipment and ambulances, the Indian Embassy said. The gifting of medical equipment follows an earlier army-to-army provision of ventilators in July this year," the statement said. "Additional ventilators were also gifted to assist Nepali Army in its fight against Covid-19 pandemic," the statement added.

On Thursday, Naravane also laid a wreath and paid homage at Bir Smarak (Martyr's Memorial) at the Army Pavilion in Tundikhel, Kathmandu. He was later accorded a ceremonial Guard of Honour at the Nepali Army Headquarters after which he went in for talks with his counterpart General Purna Chandra Thapa. Both sides discussed enhancing bilateral defence cooperation, the Indian embassy statement said.

The army chief is expected to interact with Indian Army pensioners in Nepal during the visit. There are 136,000 pensioners in that country and form part of the strong people to people links between the two countries.

The army chief's visit follows ties between India and Nepal coming under strain after defence minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated a key border road to Lipulekh region, which is claimed by Nepal. Kathmandu then issued a new map that showed three Indian areas -- Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura -- as part of Nepalese territory. In August, however, Nepal's prime minister KP Sharma Oli called Prime Minister Narendra Modi in what was seen as an effort to reach out to India.

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