

NEPAL, CHINA TO DISCUSS RAIL CONNECTIVITY DURING XI VISIT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Nepal-China train connectivity is expected to get priority during the visit of President Xi Jinping, Nepal's Defence Minister Ishwor Pokhrel said on Wednesday. Senior Chinese officials described the October 12-13 visit to Kathmandu as a "plus" to India-China ties.

"Rail connectivity with China is a burning issue before the Nepali citizens. It's a topic that both sides are expected to discuss when President Xi arrives here on October 12. The project has several aspects that require detailed top-level negotiations," Mr. Pokhrel told *The Hindu* over telephone regarding the Kathmandu-Kyirong rail connectivity that would open Nepal to Chinese trains across the Himalayas.

The connectivity between Kathmandu and Kyirong in Tibet has acquired greater significance since the 2015-16 blockade that froze the movement of goods from India to Nepal and strengthened demand for an alternative connectivity option for Kathmandu.

The trans-Himalayan project is estimated at \$2.75 billion and is considered to be one of the most ambitious infrastructure plans ever undertaken by the Chinese government. Discussions during the visit are expected to focus on the crucial issue of financing of the massive project.

The Minister said the visit was an honour for the people of Nepal as this was the first official journey by a Chinese President in nearly two-and-a-half decades. President Xi will arrive in Kathmandu for an overnight visit on October 12, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal announced on Wednesday morning. The visit will commence after completion of Mr. Xi's India visit.

China's Vice Minister Luo Zhaohui also drew attention to the "new railway connectivity initiative" with Nepal and said, "We hope that China-India plus cooperation will be expanded to Nepal. We also hope that the cooperation will be expanded to Bhutan."

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