

OLI MOVE ON NEPAL MAP HINTS AT SOFTER STAND

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K.P. Sharma Oli

After months of simmering dispute with India over the Kalapani issue, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli indicated a softer line on Friday when he used an old map of Nepal to greet everyone on the festival of Vijaya Dashami. The old map does not show the region of Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura, which is part of India's Pithoragarh district.

The triangular piece of land is, however, shown as part of Nepalese sovereign territory in the new map, which was unveiled on May 20, and made part of the insignia of the Nepalese state by an amendment on June 13.

Prime Minister Oli's use of the national insignia of Nepal carrying the old map has drawn strong reactions from the political class of Kathmandu, with leaders expressing surprise about the use of the old map during Dasara, which is the biggest festival in the Himalayan country.

'Wrong move'

"Prime Minister Oli at his individual level can use any map of Nepal that he wishes but as the Prime Minister of Nepal, he should have used the national map of Nepal that was passed by Parliament and dedicated to the Nepalese people," said Bishwaprakash Sharma, spokesperson of the Opposition Nepali Congress, speaking to *The Hindu* over phone.

Mr. Sharma said Mr. Oli has undermined Parliament by not using the new map.

Use of the old map also drew sharp reactions on social media, with Nepalese users connecting the move with Thursday's discussion between Mr. Oli and Samant Kumar Goel, chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), the external intelligence wing of India.

Nepalese publication *Myrepublica* reported that Mr. Goel led a nine-member delegation. The visit drew attention as it came a fortnight before the scheduled visit to Nepal of General Manoj Mukund Naravane, chief of the Indian Army.

Since the unveiling of the new map and the amendment in Parliament that gave it a legal status, Nepal has not gone back on its demands on the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura.

Mr. Oli has spoken on the phone with Prime Minister Modi but no meeting of the border mechanism has so far been held to discuss the issue.

Mr. Oli has, meanwhile, firmed up his hold over the government of Nepal and resisted challenges from rivals in the Standing Committee of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

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