

'India's border infrastructure with Nepal inadequate'

There is a need to dramatically improve the quality of the border infrastructure with Nepal, especially in the context of increased Chinese political penetration in that country, a former official in charge of internal security said here.

Satish Chandra, an Indian Foreign Service official who had served as India's Deputy National Security Adviser, said that the issue of border infrastructure was significant and the roads that had been planned in 2000-1 have yet to be built.

'We always get messages from the Indian embassy that the border checkpoints are not adequate. A task force was set up and they found after visiting the border that the situation was worse than reported,' he said at a seminar on 'Emerging situation in Nepal: and policy options for India', organised by the New Delhi-based think tank Observer Research Foundation.

The roads and checkpoints on the Nepali side were routinely found to be superior to those on the Indian side of the border. 'If we are going to handle good relations, why shouldn't we have good border management?' he asked.

Former ambassador of India to Nepal Deb Mukharji said China is likely to become more active in Nepal - not to undermine the Indian presence there, but chiefly as a bulwark against increased American activity, which could have an impact on the situation in Tibet.

He also pointed out that China has not been in sync with international opinion on the situation in Nepal.

'Remember, while the entire world had stopped arms supply to the royal army after the coup (by King Gyanendra), China was still sending arms to them,' Mukharji said.

Vikram Sood, former head of India's external intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), said he had one concern. 'I have a doubt that Nepal could become a playground for big powers, which could turn the country into a royal mess,' he said.

The Communist Party of India's national secretary D. Raja said he was confident that the next step in the democratic process - the making of a new constitution - would go smoothly.

Raja felt that state-to-state relations between two democratically elected sovereign governments could improve. 'I don't think there would be any worsening of the situation. Earlier, the Nepalese political class played manipulative games with the king. State-to-state, transparent relations can improve the relations much better,' he said.

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