

HIMALAYAN CATASTROPHE

On the morning of August 26, a slab of glacier broke off a mountainside on the Nepal-Tibet border, crashed into a valley and blocked the Lhende River. The lake it formed burst almost instantly, sending ice, rock and water down the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli rivers into Nepal's Rasuwa and Nuwakot districts, and across into Tibet's Gyirong County. Nepal's police have confirmed over 160 dead and hundreds missing, among them more than a hundred Indians, many on the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage, and foreign nationals from half a dozen other countries. Bridges, highways and roughly an eighth of Nepal's hydropower capacity were knocked out within minutes.

The immediate trigger was natural, violent enough that seismographs first mistook it for an earthquake. But natural is not the same as normal. Nepal's glaciers are retreating up to 15 metres a year, and glacial-origin floods across the Hindu Kush Himalaya, once expected roughly once a decade, numbered three in just two months last year, according to ICIMOD, the region's mountain-research body. What has shifted is temperature, not geology.

Layered on top is a man-made factor: hydropower stations, roads and settlements pushed into unstable valleys with almost no early-warning cover, in a country that emits less than a tenth of one per cent of the world's carbon. Cutting the toll of the next flood, and there will be one, means treating glacial lakes as the infrastructure risk they are: systematic mapping of the region's most dangerous lakes, sensor-based warning systems extended from a handful of pilot valleys to every settlement below a glacier, zoning that keeps construction off riverbanks, and hydropower design built for catastrophic failure, not average monsoon rainfall.

Rebuilding India's Gorkha bridge with Nepal

Bhopinder Singh

The Gorkha soldier once served as one of the strongest human bridges between India and Nepal. Today, that bridge is narrower. Delhi's challenge is to forge a new generation of substantive ties with Nepal — strong enough to withstand and absorb the shocks of future political upheavals, border disputes or diplomatic disagreements.

India-Nepal relations have never been merely a matter of treaties, trade figures or diplomatic communiqués. Geography made the two countries neighbours; history, culture and religion made them close, but for generations, one institution gave that relationship its most powerful human expression, ie, the Gorkha soldier in the Indian Army.

From Nepal's monarchy through successive phases of Nepali Congress governments, Left parties of varying hues, the Gorkha soldier remained an extraordinary living link between Kathmandu and New Delhi. Young men from Nepal's hills enlisted in the Indian Army, served with distinction, retired to their villages and carried home not merely pensions and memories, but a personal familiarity with India. This was soft power in its most organic form. It was also a relationship built on sacrifice, loyalty and shared military traditions. The Gorkha Regiments became one of the most visible manifestations of the India-Nepal relationship, while Indian Army recruitment gave the bilateral relationship a constituency that no embassy or foreign ministry could manufacture. That bridge, however, has been badly weakened.

The introduction of the Agniveer recruitment system has fundamentally altered the attractiveness of military service. Its implications for Nepal's Gorkha recruitment cannot be brushed aside. This also coincided with a reduction in recruitment from Nepal. The consequence is more serious than a decline in numbers. A decades-old social ecosystem is being disrupted.



The danger for New Delhi is that it may underestimate what this means politically. The Gorkha connection was never simply about manpower for the Indian Army. It was an instrument of familiarity and trust between societies. It gave India an enduring human presence in Nepal, and Nepal an enduring stake in India's military institutions. If that channel becomes marginal, India loses something that cannot easily be recreated through conventional diplomacy.

The recent exchange of honorary Generalships between the chiefs of the Indian and Nepali armies was therefore welcome and heartening. Such gestures matter. Military institutions possess a special vocabulary of camaraderie, and public recognition by one army of the other can reassure both establishments that the foundational relationship remains intact. But symbolism has limits. Indiatriavel guide

This question has become more urgent as Kathmandu's political landscape evolves. Nepal has moved through monarchy, democratic parties, Maoist insurgency, republican transformation, coalition governments and competing Left formations. New political movements are now reshaping the country's political vocabulary and its relationships. India cannot

assume that the emotional capital accumulated over decades will automatically transfer to a new generation.

Nor should New Delhi imagine that geography alone guarantees strategic primacy. Nepal sits between India and China, and Kathmandu has considerable room to diversify its external relationships. China's growing economic, infrastructure and political engagement has given Nepal alternatives that did not exist to the same extent earlier.

This is where India's response to crises such as the recent floods assumes importance. When Nepal faces a natural disaster, India's instinct to help is necessary and commendable. Cross-border humanitarian assistance is precisely what a close neighbour should provide. But aid during a crisis, however generous, cannot substitute for the patient construction of strategic trust during normal times. India therefore needs a broader Nepal strategy, one that moves beyond episodic crisis management and symbolic diplomacy.

The Gorkha relationship should be revisited imaginatively. If the Agniveer framework is to remain India's model for recruitment, New Delhi and Kathmandu must explore mechanisms that preserve the attractiveness of service for Nepali cit-

izens while respecting India's new military requirements. The young Nepali who has little personal connection with an Indian Army veteran must nevertheless have compelling reasons to see India as a partner in his or her future.

India must recognise that Nepal's strategic choices are increasingly shaped by a younger, more assertive and digitally connected generation. Shared history and cultural affinity remain important, but they cannot be the sole foundation of a modern bilateral relationship. Connectivity, economic opportunity, technology, education and mobility increasingly determine how young Nepalis perceive India. Indiatriavel guide

This is why India should view the Gorkha relationship not simply as a relic of the past, but as a template for the future. The lesson of the Gorkha soldier is that durable influence is created when ordinary people have a personal stake in the relationship. India needs to recreate that principle across multiple sectors.

The relationship with Nepal has survived monarchies, republics, ideological transformations and political upheavals. It will survive the present phase too. But survival should not be confused with strength.

The Gorkha soldier once served as one of the strongest human bridges between India and Nepal. That bridge is now narrower. Honorary Generalships can remind us of its importance; humanitarian assistance can demonstrate goodwill; but neither can rebuild it on its own. Delhi's challenge is therefore larger than repairing an old military arrangement. It is to create a new generation of substantive bonds with Nepal, strong enough that when the next political upheaval, border dispute or diplomatic disagreement arrives, the relationship has sufficient depth to absorb the shock.

That will require less symbolism, more substance, and above all, recognition that the most enduring foreign policy is ultimately built not between governments, but between people, like the gallant, loyal and trustworthy Gorkha soldier.

THE JOURNEY FROM FAITH TO SELF-REALISATION

Rajyogi Brahma Kumar Nikunj Ji

Over the last several decades, the topic of spirituality has come to the forefront of public and professional consciousness. With the dawn of a new century, spirituality has received increased coverage in the media and more discussion in the workplace, in politics and in education. To many, spirituality represents a necessary essence of life that energises both thoughts and actions.

To others, spirituality is a belief in a power operating in the universe greater than oneself. Still others define it as a sense of interconnectedness with all living creatures, and an awareness of the purpose and meaning of life. However, the lack of a universally accepted theory or definition of spirituality has created a lot of confusion as well as misunderstanding in society. Many people confuse spirituality with religion and so bring pre-existing beliefs about the impact of religion to discussions about spirituality.

Though all religions emphasise spirituality as being an important part of faith, what really needs to be answered is whether it is possible to be 'spiritual' without necessarily being a part of an organised religious community?

Recognising the difference between spir-



ity and religion can be a great way to begin to understand what spirituality actually means.

Those people who profess their faith in Almighty and higher beings, in living life virtuously or in following the rituals pertaining to their faith are known as religious-minded. However, there is a difference between being religious and being spiritual. Even though books and information on spirituality have flooded the world, there is still a lot of vagueness and contra-

dition about knowledge of the soul, its original nature, abode and role in world drama.

The first step towards being spiritual is to be soul-conscious and be free from all limitations and bondages of the physical world.

A spiritual being is aware of his/her real identity - of being a soul and a child of the Supreme Soul - and is also aware of one's true nature of being peaceful, pure, blissful and loveful. When we play our worldly

roles with this awareness, we live a truly spiritual life. We also begin to see everyone as souls and, instead of creating karmic bondages in relationships, we begin to empower each other and remain detached and loving.

Self-realization is the goal of many spiritual schools of thought, but most people go beyond satiating their curiosity to learn something new, and once they learn it or experience it, their excitement fades and they start searching for other sources of intellectual stimulation.

A spiritual person always remains content with the self and devotes his time not to material pursuits but tends to remain in the company of the divine, thereby experiencing true love, peace and happiness, which are more lasting than material attainments. Such a person will see everyone as souls; be loveful to every person in this world regardless of one's religion, country, gender and other physical traits.

When we would understand the above definition of a real spiritual being, we would be spiritually awakened and enlightened and get directly connected to the Supreme Being, who would lead us to the path of self-transformation, which would further lead to world transformation. So, let's embark on this journey of becoming a 'Spiritual Being' through self-realisation and introspection.

SCO Summit: India's Eurasian balancing act

Parul Chandra

The upcoming annual leaders' summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) at Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, which PM Narendra Modi will attend, comes amid ongoing geopolitical shifts and strategic realignments that continue to trigger severe global economic consequences.

The motto of the summit on August 31-September 1 - '25 years of the SCO: Together Towards Sustainable Peace, Development and Prosperity' - serves both as an ambitious goal and a test of regional cooperation.

The summit takes place against a backdrop of global turmoil driven by Russia's long-drawn war with Ukraine and the unabating US-Israel-Iran conflict. Both Russia and Iran are SCO members. These conflicts have had a major impact on the global economy and the SCO motto, therefore, assumes even greater significance.

Over its 25-year history, the SCO has expanded considerably. It now includes 10 member states, two observer states and 15 dialogue partners that encompass a vast geographical area, diverse cultures and people. For India, SCO membership provides a

crucial platform to pursue its strategic interests in the vast Eurasia region.

India transitioned from an observer state in 2005 to full membership in 2017 alongside Pakistan, whose inclusion was backed by its all-weather ally, China. The other full members include the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Its two newest members are Iran, which joined the grouping in 2023, and Belarus in 2024. Afghanistan and Mongolia serve as observer states.

Additionally, the SCO's 15 dialogue partners reflect the growing interest in the grouping. They are Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

With the 10 member states encompassing a huge geographical spread of around 36 million sq km and over 3.4 billion people, India recognises the geopolitical value of remaining deeply engaged in the SCO at both multilateral and bilateral levels. PM Modi, for instance, will be meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin, among others, on the margins of the summit. Indiatriavel guide

India's SCO membership also underlines its strategic autonomy in



participating in a non-Western-aligned forum alongside major powers like Russia and China. Membership ensures India a seat at the table, while keeping a close eye on China's regional ambitions and the China-Pakistan nexus. As an economic powerhouse, China often seeks to dominate the SCO, which has its secretariat in Beijing. India consistently uses the platform to counter these dynamics.

At the SCO summit at Tianjin in China last year, India reiterated its opposition to Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with PM Modi emphasising that connectivity efforts "must uphold the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity".

In a strong message to China, which has often used "salami slicing" tactics to encroach on territory India claims as its own, PM Modi also noted: "Connectivity that bypasses sovereignty ultimately loses both trust and meaning." India remains the sole SCO member state that does not endorse the BRI.

For India, SCO membership is both a strategic and economic imperative. PM Modi spelt out the three pillars upon which India's policy towards the SCO is predicated at the Tianjin summit last year: Security, Connectivity and Opportunity.

India's membership of the SCO is also critical for its connectivity strat-

egy across Eurasia. With Pakistan blocking India's direct overland access to Afghanistan and beyond to Central Asia, New Delhi must explore alternative transit routes to these regions. Building robust ties with the 'stans' of Central Asia, which India views as part of its extended neighbourhood, is crucial to balance China's heavy influence in the region. The SCO serves as a useful platform to find common ground with them on various issues, including connectivity, energy, security, trade, critical minerals and counter-terrorism. It's noteworthy that en route to Bishkek, PM Modi will also be travelling to Uzbekistan, with which it has robust defence cooperation, to build on its strategic partnership.

The 'stans' are particularly important for New Delhi's efforts at connectivity with Central Asia and even beyond to Europe. There is convergence of interests in this regard, with these landlocked nations exploring alternative routes for connectivity.

India has been banking on the INSTC (International North South Transport Corridor) as a vital connectivity link to Central Asia. The ambitious project, however, is a long way away from fruition. Indiatriavel guide India's plans to access these na-

tions and Afghanistan via the Iranian port of Chabahar, too, have been in the doldrums owing to US sanctions and the current heightened tensions in West Asia. On the security front, the SCO provides India with a vital platform to draw attention to terror, especially emanating from Pakistan. Last year, for instance, India highlighted the terror strikes carried out at Pahalgam in Kashmir by Pak-backed attackers. India acknowledges that the SCO-RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure), headquartered at Tashkent in Uzbekistan, has played a significant role in the fight against terrorism.

At the Bishkek summit, India will undoubtedly press ahead with its focus on counter-terrorism and regional connectivity. Additionally, as member states discuss establishing an SCO Development Bank to fund infrastructure, India will likely seek more clarity on its structure to ensure it aligns with territorial sovereignty principles. Ultimately, India's participation in the Bishkek summit is not merely a diplomatic routine. It's driven by a pragmatic focus on strategic autonomy, counter-terrorism, and Eurasian access. India should do its utmost to leverage the SCO to safeguard its own strategic interests and monitor regional dynamics.