New road to Kailash Mansarovar runs into diplomatic trouble—India-Nepal Spat

Part of: GS-II—India and Nepal (PT-MAINS-PERSONALITY TEST)

Nepal says India has breached a 2014 agreement India’s plans to shorten the travel time for pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar ran into a diplomatic trouble as Nepal strongly objected to the new link road from India to China which was inaugurated by Defence Minister.

In a strongly worded statement, Nepal’s Foreign Ministry said the decision to build the road through territory at the Lipulekh pass that it claims as its territory is a breach of an agreement reached between the two countries to discuss the matter. “The Government of Nepal has learnt with regret about the ‘inauguration’ by India of ‘Link Road’ connecting to Lipulekh, which passes through Nepali territory.”

“This unilateral act runs against the understanding reached between the two countries including at the level of Prime Ministers that a solution to boundary issues would be sought through negotiation,” the statement said, referring to the agreement between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and (then) Nepal PM Sushil Koirala in 2014 for Foreign Secretaries to work out the “outstanding boundary issues” on Kalapani (where Lipulekh lies) and Susta.

MEA response

The Ministry of External Affairs said the road going through Uttarakhand’s Pithoragarh district “lies completely within the territory of India”. The road that starts from Dharchula in Uttarakhand and runs 80 km to the Lipulekh pass was built by the Border Roads Organisation to help shorten the travel time to reach Kailash Mansarovar in Tibet by about three days each way. Nepal’s latest objection comes months after another protest in November 2019 by Mr. Oli’s government against the publication of Indian maps that included the Kalapani area. At the time, the Ministry of External Affairs had rejected Nepal’s contention, asserting that the map “accurately depicts the sovereign territory of India”.

Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

- The BRO develops and maintains road networks in India’s border areas and friendly neighboring countries and functions under the Ministry of Defence.
- It is entrusted for construction of Roads, Bridges, Tunnels, Causeways, Helipads and Airfields along the borders.
- Officers from the Border Roads Engineering Service (BRES) and personnel from the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) form the parent cadre of the Border Roads Organisation.
- It is also staffed by officers and troops drawn from the Indian Army’s Corps of Engineers on extra regimental employment.
- The BRO operates and maintains over 32,885 kilometers of roads and about 12,200 meters of permanent bridges in the country.
Darchula – Lipulekh road

- The road is an extension of Pithoragarh-Tawaghat-Ghatiabagarh road. In this 80 Km road, the altitude rises from 6000 feet to 17,060 feet.
- It originates from Ghatiabagarh in Uttarakhand and terminates at Lipulekh Pass, the gateway to Kailash Mansarovar.
- With the completion of this project, the arduous trek through treacherous high-altitude terrain can now be avoided by the Pilgrims of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and the period of journey will be reduced by many days.

(Note: The Lipulekh Pass links Uttarakhand with China’s Tibetan Autonomous Region.)

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