



Dear Hon'ble Prime Minister,

Two weeks ago, I happened to visit Nepal for a vacation with my family. My son had his Durga Puja vacations and he wanted to go to the mountains. We were cautioned by many to avoid going to Nepal since there were reports that the transport system had come to a standstill. But after a cursory search online, we decided that it would not be a problem. I was also curious to see the situation on the ground. What I experienced on that trip is forcing me to write this letter to you.

You have yourself visited Nepal not long ago and must have gotten a sense of our shared history. At the moment, I am saddened to say that our long-standing good relations with the country are in peril. If you are getting reports from MEA officials that project a peaceful and happy situation there, I must tell you that it is not so. I have a strong suspicion that officials seem to have their own biases and interests in mind. I judge the situation based on what I have seen and after interacting with the most local of people.

For instance, the waiter at the hotel in Pokhara where I was staying told me, "I don't feel like serving Indians anymore. People from India come and misbehave all the time. They treat us like slaves and order us around. I would be happier if Nepal cut off all ties with India and our relations with China are strengthened. Their government and people are more considerate and friendly."

I would never underestimate the astute observations of the people on the ground. They probably understand foreign policy more than our officials.

I am also of the firm opinion that this "unofficial" act of India of clamping an embargo on petroleum products, medicines and food items, amongst others, is clearly an infringement of basic human rights. Nepal, a nation emerging from a devastating earthquake, deserved kid glove handling by India. Instead, we have, for reasons completely unknown, beaten them black and blue, whereby the populace today has turned totally anti Indian. The plight of the average Nepal citizen is comprehensible to anyone who has seen the unending queues for gasoline, the collapse of public transport, unavailability of medicines, closures of medical infrastructure and other such vital implications which have successfully enraged the people. Since Nepal is a land-locked country, it does not mean we will behave like big brother and choke supply of essential goods to get our way.

And what is 'our way'? Responsible and senior officials in your government, when I asked them about Nepal, expressed dismay and displeasure as to why that country dared to change fundamentals of their Constitution without discussing with India. I wonder if our MEA pundits can dare to speak in similar fashion, say, about Bangladesh or Burma. Not to speak of Pakistan or Sri Lanka. Should we be perceived as a bully by another, till yesterday friendly, sovereign nation is a question you have to ponder over.

India has been primarily responsible for dishing out a horrible *Dasain* to Nepal in 2015. We have virtually forced a dark and obnoxious Deepawali on our Nepali sisters and brothers. At the behest of some unconcerned and arrogant MEA advisors/officials, India's relations with Nepal have become bitter for no rhyme or reason.

The excuse of Madhesis opposing something that is exclusively and obviously internal for a free nation should not guide our short term policy that will damage India in the long term. We have to realize that, as with every Constitution in the world, it will be amended and changed over a period of time as and when the people will it. The Madhesis also have a say in the Nepal administration and they should be the ones to push for their rights, while India should be seen and felt as staying away and respecting the handling of the internal affairs of this sovereign nation and its democracy.

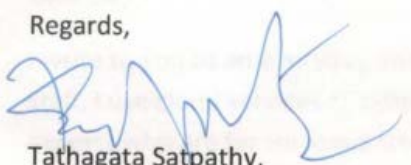
China has made the expected move of signing a MoU for short-term oil deal with Nepal. At the moment, Nepalese imports from India account for 60% of their total trade while those from China account for 13%. The Chinese are looking for an opportunity to tap this market and increase their share. The present animosity between Nepal and India will only bolster their attempts further.

If you are under the impression that the Himalayas will prevent the Chinese from establishing a trade route to Nepal, think again. They are capable of building multi lane highways in a matter of a few months in the most difficult of terrains. One such example of their determination and advanced techniques can be seen at the Sikkim border where they are extending their railway network while we struggle to maintain our rickety high altitude single lane roads.

My sincere suggestion to you would be to consider the situation in Nepal and tell our MEA to be patient and re-asses ground realities immediately. We need to give our neighbor time to evolve and mature, to sort out its issues democratically. India, which has been seen throughout history as being non-aligned and non-aggressive, should not take steps which would make the world think otherwise. We cannot, and should not, ruin our relationship with our neighbor by having a knee-jerk reaction to the social crisis unfolding there. Instead, we should offer support in the form of ensuring uninterrupted supply of essential goods and helping their economy come back on track. Urgency in this is of great importance. If we delay matters, the moment for India would be lost forever.

I hope you make history merely by ensuring that India stops interfering with Nepal's internal affairs.

Regards,



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Member of Parliament,
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