Concerns with Indo-Nepal relationship

What is the issue?

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Despite several attempts at a reset, ties between India and Nepal continue to be a cause of concern.

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What are the recent issues between the two?

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- The Nepalese Army withdrew its contingent for BIMSTEC Military exercises and instead sent only an observer mission at the last hour.
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- The reason behind was India's "unilateral" announcement of the multilateral exercises without having formally proposed it to the hosts.
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- It was also visible with Thailand's non-participation in the counter-terror exercises because of lack of adequate notice.
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How does this benefit China?

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- Nepal decided to join China for a 12-day Mt Everest Friendship Exercise in Sichuan province.
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- It drives the wedge further with India, since it also focussed on anti-terrorism drills, as what BIMSTEC proposed in MILEX-18.
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- New Delhi signalled its discomfiture with the volume of Chinese investment in hydropower, infrastructure and transport projects in Nepal.
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- Yet, Nepal recently finalised an ambitious connectivity proposal that will eventually link Kathmandu to Shigatse by rail.

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- This will give Nepali goods **access to Chinese sea-ports** at Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang and Zhanjiang and land ports in Lanzhou, Lhasa and Shigatse.
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What are its other concerns against India?

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- India is still blamed for the 2015 economic blockade against Nepal.
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- It is also held responsible for attempts to destabilise Mr. Oli's previous tenure as Prime Minister during 2015-2016.
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- General Bipin Rawat recently stated on BIMSTEC, that "geography" will ensure that countries like Bhutan and Nepal "cannot delink themselves" from India.
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- This could unnerve India's smaller neighbours and with the credibility to become a responsible regional power, such statements could be misleading.
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- Thus, New Delhi cannot turn a blind eye to the rebuffs, and must address them.
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What could be done?

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- Along with an open border, both countries have shared the deepest military links with traditionally awarding each other's Army chiefs the honorary rank of General.
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- Such unique ties must not be undermined due to lack of communication.
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- Modern technology and connectivity projects, as with china, could well take away geography's role as a guarantor of good relations.
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- Thus, New Delhi and Kathmandu must put an end to the unseemly controversy by renewing diplomatic efforts over the issue.
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Source: The Hindu

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