

India-Nepal - Kalapani Territorial Issue

Why in news?

There is renewed tension between India and Nepal over the Kalapani territorial issue.

What is the Kalapani territorial issue?

- Kalapani lies on the easternmost corner of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district, between Nepal and India.
- Both India and Nepal lay claim to Kalapani.
- The dispute was revived in November 2019 when India published a revised political map showing the newly created UTs of J&K and Ladakh.
- The map showed Kalapani as part of Pithoragarh district.
- Nepal protested immediately and drew attention to the issue.
- Very recently, India inaugurated the Darchula-Lipulekh pass link road, cutting across the disputed Kalapani area.
- The road is used by Indian pilgrims to Kailash Mansarovar.
- Nepal hit back by summoning the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Vinay Mohan Kwatra, to convey a formal protest.

What are Nepal's claims based on?

- The Kalapani region derives its name from the river Kali. Nepal's claims to the region are based on this river.
- The River became the marker of the boundary of the kingdom of Nepal following the Treaty of Sugauli.
- This was signed between the Gurkha rulers of Kathmandu and the East India Company after the Gurkha War/Anglo-Nepal War (1814-16).
- According to the treaty, Nepal lost the regions of Kumaon-Garhwal in the west and Sikkim in the east.
- The King of Nepal gave up his claims over the region west of the river Kali which originates in the High Himalayas and flows into the great plains of the Indian subcontinent.
- According to the treaty, the British rulers recognised Nepal's right to the region that fell to the east of the river Kali.
- Here lies the historic origin of the dispute.
- According to Nepal's experts, the east of the Kali river should begin at the

source of the river.

- The source according to them is in the mountains near Limpiyadhura, which is higher in altitude than the rest of the river's flow.
- Nepal claims that a land mass, high in the mountains that falls to the east of the entire stretch starting from Limpiyadhura downwards, is theirs.
- India on the other hand says the border begins at Kalapani which India says is where the river begins.
- The dispute is mainly because of the varying interpretation of the origin of the river and its various tributaries that slice through the mountains.



Is the road new?

- For India, the Lipulekh pass has always been part of the road to Tibet.
- Since 1981, when China re-opened the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route for Indians, they have also used the pass to walk into Tibet.
- It was mentioned as one of the border passes for trade in a 1954 agreement with China.
- India's part was also reaffirmed in another trade agreement in 2015.
- The road built now follows the same alignment, and would essentially cut down their travel time by 3 days each way.
- [But India and China were in clear violation of Nepal's concerns during the 2015 Lipulekh agreement that renewed India's Mansarovar pilgrimage connection.
- Neither side consulted Nepal or sought its opinion before that agreement that boosted pilgrimage and trade to Tibet.]

What is the tussle now?

- Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli took New Delhi by surprise with an aggressive posture on the Kalapani territorial issue.
- India has been even angered by Nepal's strong protests, followed by fiery speeches by Mr. Oli and Nepal's Foreign Minister.
- The Nepali cabinet also decided to adopt a new political map.
- That reportedly claims not only Lipulekh but also other areas that are in Indian territory that have been claimed by Nepal.
- Nepal claims this by invoking the 1816 Sugauli treaty with the British.
- The move was described by India's MEA as "artificial", "unilateral" and "unacceptable".
- But, the struggle within the ruling Nepal Communist Party has probably spurred Mr. Oli's more combative posture.

How is it being dealt with?

- Boundary disputes are common ground for countries that have an ancient history and shared borders.
- The Kalapani issue is one such dispute that India and Nepal have resolved to sort out.
- Unfortunately, the respective Foreign Secretaries, tasked by the PMs in 2014 to discuss the matter, have failed to find an acceptable date for a meeting since then.
- Sadly, India was delaying in responding to this.
- Even recently, when tensions prevailed in Kathmandu, the MEA said that it would convene the meeting after the pandemic had been dealt with.
- This was unnecessarily dismissive of an issue important to Kathmandu.
- Mr. Oli's government had raised it in November 2019 as well; its offer to send a political envoy to New Delhi was refused.

What is the way forward?

- Given the importance of ties with Nepal, India must not delay dealing with the matter.
- Amidst a pandemic situation as well as a faceoff with China in Ladakh and Sikkim, India must do all to put off the tensions with Nepal.
- The crisis appears to threaten the very basis of the two countries' special relationship which has notably nurtured open borders and free movement of people.
- India and Nepal must not let their differences grow into a full-blown diplomatic crisis.

Source: The Hindu