India's Policy towards Nepal during non-congress Regime

Zafar Hussain

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science,
Bhabha University, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

This paper tries to highlight India relation towards Nepal covering all aspect of social cultural and political. This paper also focuses on various visits of different political leaders to Nepal which reach its heights place during this regime. This paper also examine Gujral doctrine is expression of the foreign policy initiated by Inder Kumar Gujral, the Foreign Minister in Deve Gowda Government which assumed office in June 1996. Gujral himself later became Prime Minister. The Gujral Doctrine is a set of five principles to guide the conduct of foreign relations with India's immediate neighbours as spelt out by I.K. Gujral, first as India's External Affairs Minister and later as the Prime Minister.

Keywords: Gujral Doctrine. Foreign policy, Indo Nepal relation, Janta government

Introduction

In the major turn of events, the ruling congress lost control of India for the first time since independence in general election of the sixth Lok Sabha in 1977. The Janata alliance of parties won 345 seats was opposed to the ruling congress party. In this election the congress lost nearly 200 seats. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her powerful son Sanjay Gandhi both lost their seats.¹ In March 24, 1977, Janata Government came into power in India, headed by Morarji Desai. He became India's first non-congress prime minister.² Nepali King Birendra accompanies with queen and the foreign minister Aryal was the first foreign dignities to visit India he reached India on 30 March to inaugurate a world conference on religion, philosophy and culture. The king returned Delhi in April for a day's stopover. The purpose over was not to take up any special issues but to mutual understanding of each other's problems and policies. The king wanted to know about the attitudes and policies of the new Janata government which they adopt towards Nepal.³ Morarji Desai's statement affirming India's faith in 'genuine non-alignment and policy of

friendship with all countries, especially neighbouring countries on the basis of equality and reciprocity had been generally welcomed in Nepal but the king was eager to have firsthand knowledge of how it was going to be implemented during his one day visit. He had a detailed discussion with Prime Minister Morarji Desai, Vajpayee and Jagjivan Ram on the strengthening of the cordial relations existing between the India and Nepal. After returning from Delhi the general impression of the Nepali government was that the change in government of India would not make any difference for Nepal. It was change in the government and not in the political system itself. The leaders of the both countries were agreed on the need to resume discussion at the earliest on the renewal of 1971 treaty of trade and transit.⁴

Both prime minister and foreign minister (Atal Behari Vajpayee) agreed to give a new strength and shape to India's policy towards immediate neighbours was described 'the top priority' by the new government. Atal Behari Vajpayee said that India's policy with immediate neighbours is policy of 'first priority' or what he described as "Turning swords into ploughshares" was made in

Ministers of external Affairs first major foreign policy speech in the Lok Sabha on 29 June 1977: “We have recognized that our first priority must be to promote a relationship of cooperation and trust with our immediate neighbour ... We shall be vigilant about our territorial integrity but pose no threat to their national personalities. We believe it is in our separate and common interest to forge, on the basis of geography, the sinews of economic cooperation in the subcontinent. If we succeed we could ease the burden for all the people, so that some of the swords can be turned into ploughshares and the entire region can better tackle the common enemy poverty and inherited degradation.”⁵

On April 11, 1977 J.P. Narayan publically urged King Birendra to release B.P. Koirala from the jail and initiate the process of democracy in Nepal. Nepal sharply reacted to what they thought India was meddling in their internal affairs. King Birendra himself asked India to desist from sermonizing to Nepal on matters of purely democratic concerns of Nepal. On May 24 Tulsi Giri launched a blistering attack on India, what he called “a full speed hate- Nepal campaign in responsible circle in India” showing “undue concern for the political system of this country.” Later India’s denied the allegation, on May 25 as imaginary. On June, 15 1977 King Birendra hoped for “deep friendship” with India.⁶

Objectives of study

1. To highlight political and economic relations between India and Nepal.
2. To assess the visit of Indian political leaders to Nepal

Methodology

The methodology undertaken in this research work includes historical and analytical methods. The historical records and official documents were examined: primary as well as secondary sources that are available on the subject have been used. A primary source includes policy documents, reports, official statements and interview of policy

makers. In the secondary sources, the major works of different distinguished authors in the field have also been included and analysed.

Discussion

In June 1996, a thirteen party coalition government, known as the United Front Government with support outside from the Congress and CPM came to power with H.D. Deve Gowda as the Prime Minister and I.K. Gujral as the Minister for External Affairs. India tried to follow a policy of good neighborly relations on a long term basis soon after the installation of the United Front Government in 1996. Despite being a weak government it took certain concrete steps towards resolving contentious bilateral issues with the neighbouring countries. India’s then foreign minister and later on Prime Minister I.K. Gujral emphatically believed that there was a need to adopt liberal attitude towards the problems of the neighbouring countries, even without looking for reciprocity from them. In the form of what was called Gujral doctrines, India tried to formulate a sort of a perspective on its relations with the neighbouring countries. In an interview with the frontline, Gujral very firmly acknowledged the regional component in the policy of globalization. He stressed that every worthwhile foreign policy has to focus on regionalism. India took steps to improve relations with all South Asian States.⁷

This doctrine is expression of the foreign policy initiated by Inder Kumar Gujral, the Foreign Minister in Deve Gowda Government which assumed office in June 1996. Gujral himself later became Prime Minister. The Gujral Doctrine is a set of five principles to guide the conduct of foreign relations with India’s immediate neighbours as spelt out by I.K. Gujral, first as India’s External Affairs Minister and later as the Prime Minister.

These principles are:

1. With neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, India does

not ask for reciprocity, but gives and accommodates what it can in good faith and trust.

2. No South Asian country should allow its territory to be used against the interest of another country of the region. (Second Principle of Panchsheel- Mutual non-aggression)
3. No country should interfere in the internal affairs of another. (Third Principle of Panchsheel- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs)
4. All South Asian countries must respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. (First Principle of Panchsheel- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty)
5. They should settle all their disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations. (Fourth and Fifth Principles of Panchsheel- Equality and mutual benefit & Peaceful co-existence)⁸

The essence of Gujral Doctrine is that being the largest country in South Asia, India decided on 'extension of unilateral concessions to neighbours in the sub-continent'. Among other factors, these five principles arise from the belief that India's stature and strength cannot be divorced from the quality of its relations with its neighbours.

Positive Application:

- Sharing of Ganga Water with Bangladesh: It is in pursuance of this policy that late in 1996 India concluded an agreement with Bangladesh on sharing of Ganga Waters. This agreement enabled Bangladesh to draw in lean season slightly more water than even the 1977 Agreement had provided.
- Freezing of Border Dispute with PRC: The confidence building measures agreed upon by India and China in November 1996 were also a part of efforts made by the two countries to improve bilateral relations, and freeze, for the time being, the border dispute.
- Increasing People to People Contact with Pakistan: Gujral advocated people to people contacts, particularly between India and Pakistan, to create an atmosphere that

would enable the countries concerned to sort out their differences amicably. India unilaterally announced in 1997 several concessions to Pakistan tourists, particularly the elder citizens and cultural groups, in regard to visa fees and police reporting.

- “Confidence Building Measures” Talks with Pakistan: The Gujral Doctrine assumed significance when at Foreign Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan in June 1997, the two countries identified eight areas for negotiation so as to build confidence and seek friendly resolution of all disputes.

Positive Significance of the Doctrine:

It thus, recognizes the supreme importance of friendly, cordial relations with neighbours.

- According to Gujral, these five principles, scrupulously adhered to, would achieve a fundamental recasting of South Asia's regional relationships, including the difficult relationship between India and Pakistan.
- Further, the implementation of these principles would generate a climate of close and mutually benign cooperation in the region, where the weight and size of India is regarded positively and as an asset by these countries.
- The Gujral Doctrine was generally welcomed and appreciated not only within the country, but also by most of the neighbours and major powers.
- In the context of changed international environment in post-cold war world Gujral Doctrine become a new and important principle of India's foreign policy.
- It can be implemented by different regional powers like USA, Russia, People Republic of China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Germany etc
- It had a heuristic impact.⁹

The Prime Minister I.K Gujral visited Nepal in June 1997. During his visit, India agreed to provide alternative trade routes to Nepal (Bangladesh via Phulbari in West Bengal) so that India can diversify its trade line overseas. More over the Memorandum of understanding on the

civil aviation was also signed between two countries, in which they agreed that their airlines would fly additional point and increased the air seat capacity of 400 to 600 per week. India also agreed to initiate discussions on the issue of revision of 1950 Treaty. It was indeed a truly good neighbourhood policy Vis-a-Vis Nepal.¹⁰

During Gujral's visit to Nepal in June 1997, a power agreement was signed to encourage private and semi-government investment in Nepal. After the Mahakali Agreement this was a significant development because the countries could meet any shortage in power from Pancheswar. Also, both the countries had freedom to enter into an agreement with a third party to generate resources for exploiting power. India is aware that the excess power can be utilized by its power deficient areas. Letters were exchanged on developing the Raxaul- Sirsiya rail link and supply of medical equipment to a hospital in Kathmandu from India. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on civil aviation which allows private airlines to operate between the two countries in the light of growing business and tourism; Bangalore and Lucknow airports are open for the flights arriving from Nepal. .¹¹

Conclusion

There has been an element of "mutual benefit" and "non-reciprocity" in India's relations with Nepal as envisaged in the Mahakali Treaty. India and Nepal relations hitherto defined in terms of geo-politics had to accord primacy to economic cooperation in the light of the changing global economic environment. The main thrust of the economic cooperation has been on four areas: trade and transit relations, sharing of water resources, Indian aided projects and joint ventures. In fact, the countries have moved ahead from bilateralism and are looking towards multilateralism. In December 1996, Nepal submitted an approach paper on sub-regional cooperation within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) parameters which suggests creation of growth polygons between Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India in

the fields of transit, multimodal transport, irrigation, energy, environment, tourism, trade and investment.

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