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The open Border Dilemma: Assessing Nepal's Security

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Abstract

This article examines the realities and solutions surrounding the Nepal-India open border issue, focusing on its implications for Nepal's security. Using a qualitative approach, the study draws on secondary literature, case studies, interviews, and focus group discussions. It highlights the challenges posed by Nepal's landlocked geography and historical context. King Prithvi Narayan Shah's "Yam between two stones" approach exemplifies Nepal's diplomatic balancing act between India and China. The open border with India spans 1,880 kilometers, while the Himalayas form a natural barrier along the 1,414-kilometer northern frontier with China. Nepal's small size, population, and limited economic resources, including restricted access to sea routes, exacerbate its vulnerabilities. However, its strategic location offers opportunities for regional cooperation. Strengthening ties with both India and China, while positioning Nepal as a gateway to South Asia, can promote peace, stability, and development, transforming geographical challenges into prospects for progress.

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Introduction

The national security of a state is best understood within the context of its historical evolution. Security studies have not yielded a universally applicable theory, as security concerns are shaped by the unique internal and external environments of each nation. Every country faces security challenges, which can be broadly categorized into domestic and international dimensions. These challenges are often perceived as potential threats to security.

Nepal's geopolitical situation is profoundly influenced by its close historical ties with its neighbors, China and India, whose proximity is unchangeable due to geography. The Himalayas serve as a natural barrier between Nepal and China, with the border comprising diverse terrains such as plains, high hills, rivers, forests, and gorges. Nepal's security dynamics, like those of all nations, are inherently fluid and shaped by geographical and historical factors. As Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founding father of Nepal, aptly remarked, the country is like a "yam between two rocks," highlighting its strategic position.

Nepal and India share a historically close relationship, rooted in geographical proximity and shared ethnic, linguistic, and cultural ties—connections that are rare globally. Their open border allows citizens to cross freely without passports or visas, except for air travel. Following India's independence in 1947 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Nepal found itself navigating significant geopolitical changes. Over the subsequent two decades, Nepal often found itself at odds with the policies of those aiming to replace British influence in the region. While geopolitical dynamics shifted from the south to the north, Nepal's economic dependence on India deepened. Paradoxically, China's presence in Tibet not only restored a geopolitical balance but also ended much of the trans-Himalayan trade, altering Nepal's northern economy.

These contradictions between India's geopolitical objectives and Nepal's realities, as well as between Nepal's political and economic trajectories, have significantly shaped Nepal-India relations. The enduring metaphors used by Prithvi Narayan Shah and British imperialist Curzon, describing Nepal as a "yam between two rocks" and a "buffer zone" for British India respectively, continue to reflect Nepal's strategic balancing act between the competing influences of its northern and southern neighbors.

Methods

This study employs an interpretive and qualitative methodology, utilizing a diverse range of secondary data sources such as government documents, academic literature, research articles, and reports from international organizations. By thoroughly analyzing these materials, the study aims to offer detailed insights into the current geopolitical issues and challenges characterizing the Nepal-India bilateral relationship. This approach facilitates a nuanced exploration of the intricate political dynamics and the factors shaping the tensions and collaboration between the two countries, with particular emphasis on regional security, border disputes, and diplomatic engagements.

Objectives

This document aims to analyze the Nepal-India open border issues and their geopolitical implications, focusing on the themes of statehood, nationalism, sovereignty, and national security. The primary objective is to examine how the open border shapes Nepal's national identity and state-building efforts, particularly in light of the deep ethnic, linguistic, and cultural connections between the two countries. It will evaluate how these ties influence Nepal's nationalism and its relationship with India.

Additionally, the study will address the implications of sovereignty and national security for Nepal, highlighting the impact of unrestricted movement of people and goods on the security concerns of both nations. It will critically assess the challenges posed by the open border, such as the risks of illegal activities and potential security vulnerabilities.

Finally, the document will consider the role of globalization in Nepal's national security, particularly in relation to external influences, trade, and cross-border dynamics. It will analyze how global political trends, economic interdependence, and security partnerships shape Nepal's security strategies and its capacity to uphold sovereignty while navigating complex relations with India.

Discussion and Results

Nepal and Geo-politics

Nepal's landlocked geography presents numerous challenges, including formidable natural barriers like the towering Himalayas in the north, historically emphasized as a natural defense (Bhasin, 1970) [2]. King Prithvi Narayan Shah, who unified Nepal in the 18th century, underscored the strategic significance of geography in Nepal's foreign policy. He advocated for cultivating strong relations with both the Chinese emperor to the north and the British emperor to the south, while also cautioning against the cunning nature of the latter and advocating defensive strategies during conflicts (Yogi & Acharya, 1953) [15]. This approach, often described as being "Yam between two boulders," has guided Nepal's diplomatic stance since then.

Understanding Nepal's geographical constraints is pivotal for assessing its strengths and vulnerabilities. Nepal shares an open border of 1880 kilometers with India to the south, east, and west, while its northern border with China, spanning 1414 kilometers, is defined by the Himalayan range. Despite its strategic location between two large nations, Nepal is significantly smaller in both size-being 23 and 68 times smaller than India and China, respectively-and population, with just 29 million people. As a landlocked and developing nation, Nepal confronts the critical challenge of limited access to sea routes, with its nearest seaport located 1,127 kilometers away in India.

Nepal's foreign policy places significant emphasis on fostering strong relations with its neighboring countries

(Koirala, 2014) [6]. Its ties with India and China are deeply shaped by religious, cultural, and ethnic connections. Sharing borders with four politically sensitive Indian states and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, Nepal occupies a strategic position crucial to both nations. Ethnic linkages across these borders contribute to regional peace, stability, and development. Far from being a limitation, Nepal's location offers opportunities-it can serve as a gateway to South Asia for China while enhancing the quality of life for its people.

Geographically, Nepal spans from the lowlands in the south to the peaks of the Himalayas in the north, including Mount Everest at 8,848.86 meters, with elevations starting as low as 62 meters (The Kathmandu Post, 2020). The country is endowed with abundant natural resources, including water capable of generating 83,000 megawatts of hydropower, of which more than 40,000 megawatts are commercially viable. Additionally, Nepal has rich deposits of minerals and valuable plants, though systematic exploration remains limited. Despite these resources, the country faces scarcity, with over 6 million Nepali youths seeking employment abroad due to insufficient job opportunities at home.

Nepal is a culturally diverse nation, home to more than 125 ethnic group and an equal number of languages. This rich pluralism fosters social cohesion through tolerance, harmony, and mutual respect. However, recent attempts to undermine this unity and sow division present significant challenges. Strengthening this diversity through universal democratic values and the rule of law remains a vital task. Situated between two global powers, Nepal holds a unique geopolitical position as the region's heartland. While its landlocked status poses vulnerabilities and geographic challenges, these were recognized as early as the 18th century by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, Nepal's unifier. He described Nepal as a "yam between two boulders," advocating for balanced alliances with both the Chinese emperor and the British ruler of the southern seas, while cautioning against the latter's influence in the Indian subcontinent (Yogi & Acharya, 1953) [15]. This enduring geo-strategy continues to shape Nepal's approach to diplomacy and foreign relations.

Understanding Nepal's geographical constraints is essential for assessing its strengths and vulnerabilities. The towering Himalayas in the north have historically served as a formidable natural barrier, a point emphasized by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (Bhasin, 1970) [2]. This northern frontier holds strategic significance, as any compromise in Nepal's defense could directly affect India's security interests.

Nepal's cultural, religious, and ethnic ties with India and China further underscore the importance of maintaining strong relations with its neighbors. The country shares borders with four politically sensitive Indian states and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, which is of critical importance to the Chinese government. Ethnic linkages across these borders highlight Nepal's strategic role in fostering regional peace, stability, and development. Positioned between two global powers, Nepal's location offers immense strategic and economic potential. It can serve as a gateway for China to South Asia and as a bridge to enhance the quality of life for its population.

Rich in natural resources, Nepal has the capacity to generate 83,000 megawatts of hydropower, with more than 40,000 megawatts commercially viable. The country also has untapped deposits of minerals and valuable plants, which, if properly utilized, could contribute to economic growth. However, despite these resources, Nepal faces significant developmental challenges. The lack of job opportunities has

driven over 6 million Nepali youths to seek employment abroad, primarily in Gulf countries (Koirala, 2014)^[6]. Nepal's cultural diversity is one of its greatest assets, featuring a rich blend of ethnic groups, languages, religions, and traditions. This vibrant multicultural heritage has shaped the nation's identity and attracts tourists from around the globe, making tourism a key economic sector. However, Nepal continues to grapple with social and economic issues. Poverty remains widespread, with many citizens living below the poverty line, especially in rural areas. Access to basic services like education, healthcare, and sanitation is limited, and income inequality persists between urban and rural populations and among social groups.

Political instability has been another persistent challenge. Nepal endured a decade-long Maoist insurgency that concluded in 2006 with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Since then, the country has transitioned from a monarchy to a federal democratic republic, a process marked by the complexities of drafting and implementing a new constitution. Political parties have faced difficulties in effectively addressing the diverse needs and aspirations of the population, further complicating governance and development efforts.

In recent years, Nepal has made significant strides in several areas. The economy has experienced steady growth, accompanied by initiatives to enhance infrastructure, particularly in the transportation and energy sectors. Moreover, the government has taken steps to advance social inclusion, gender equality, and human rights. Despite these achievements, considerable efforts are still needed to address deep-rooted structural challenges and improve the overall quality of life for its citizens. Nepal's foreign policy continues to focus on fostering amicable relations with its neighbors, India and China, while actively engaging with the global community. Recent efforts have emphasized strengthening economic collaboration with China, notably through the Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to boost connectivity and trade across Asia and beyond. Simultaneously, India remains a vital partner in areas such as trade, investment, and cultural exchange.

Nepal's strategic location between India and China provides both significant opportunities and notable challenges. Its unique geographic position, cultural richness, and plentiful natural resources hold tremendous potential for economic growth and regional cooperation. However, persistent issues such as poverty, political instability, and social inequality must be addressed. Effectively managing these challenges while leveraging the country's strengths is essential for achieving sustainable development, peace, and prosperity. The South Asian region is a mosaic of diverse nations with deeply interconnected histories, cultures, and economies. In this context, the concept of open borders has drawn considerable attention for its role in fostering cross-border interactions and regional integration. Open borders enable the free movement of people, goods, and ideas, facilitating exchanges across social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. A prominent example within South Asia is the Nepal-India open border, known for its long-standing history and distinct features. Examining the implications of such practices is essential for policymakers, scholars, and the broader community.

Proponents of open borders emphasize their potential economic advantages for both host nations and migrants. Enhanced labor mobility can help mitigate workforce shortages, boost economic growth, and drive innovation and entrepreneurship. Migrants, in turn, benefit from better employment opportunities and improved wages. Additionally,

open borders contribute to social and cultural enrichment by allowing the exchange of ideas, traditions, and experiences. This cultural diversity fosters societal tolerance and promotes cross-cultural understanding. Open borders are also framed as a humanitarian and ethical necessity, offering refuge and protection to individuals escaping persecution, conflict, or natural disasters. Advocates argue that denying entry to those in need contradicts the core values of human rights.

Open borders are often associated with economic concerns, as critics argue that unrestricted migration can put pressure on labor markets, reduce wages for local workers, and increase income inequality. Furthermore, hosting a large number of migrants may strain social services and infrastructure, creating additional challenges for host countries. Detractors also contend that relaxed immigration policies could undermine national security and sovereignty, potentially allowing entry to criminals, terrorists, or individuals with harmful intentions. To address these risks, they advocate for stricter border controls to protect the safety and welfare of the host nation's citizens.

Cultural and social issues are also a point of contention. Critics suggest that large-scale immigration could weaken social cohesion, as it may lead to the formation of isolated communities and hinder the integration of migrants into the broader society. They also express concerns that significant demographic changes might threaten the preservation of national identity and cultural values. Striking a balance in open border policies requires tackling economic inequalities and minimizing potential labor market disruptions. Understanding the labor needs of host countries is essential to create migration policies that align with both domestic workforce requirements and the interests of local workers. Facilitating the successful integration of migrants is equally important, which can be achieved by offering language education, employment assistance, and access to social services. Allocating sufficient resources to these efforts is vital to ensure that migrants are effectively integrated while maintaining social harmony in the host society.

Ensuring political stability and safeguarding national identity are critical considerations when shaping open border policies. Policymakers must engage in meaningful dialogue with the public to address concerns and protect the values and interests of the host country. Insights can be gained by examining examples like the Schengen Area in Europe, where open border policies reveal both challenges and advantages. Lessons learned from these experiences can help inform strategies for managing migration flows and fostering the integration of diverse populations.

Conversely, studying countries with stricter immigration policies, such as Australia and Canada, provides a comparative perspective on alternative approaches. These nations prioritize selective migration based on specific criteria, striking a balance between economic requirements and social and cultural factors. By analyzing these case studies, policymakers can identify effective practices and apply them to create open border policies that maximize benefits while minimizing potential challenges. International collaboration and information sharing are essential for building comprehensive and evidence-based migration frameworks. Policy initiatives should address economic disparities both domestically and internationally. This can involve programs to enhance education, improve skill development, stimulate economic growth, and create jobs in underdeveloped regions. Establishing partnerships between origin and destination countries can also ensure a migration process that benefits all parties.

To address security concerns, robust border control systems

are essential. This includes improving intelligence sharing, implementing thorough screening processes, and creating reliable systems to identify and apprehend individuals with malicious intent. Additionally, promoting the integration of migrants into host societies is vital. Providing language training, cultural orientation programs, and fostering community engagement can help migrants integrate effectively. Adequate resources should be allocated to support these efforts, ensuring the development of inclusive and cohesive communities.

Lingual, Cultural and Social Connectivity with India

The open border between Nepal and India, along with close personal ties and frequent population movements, particularly in Nepal's Tarai region, has contributed to shared religious practices, cultures, languages, traditions, social norms, and lifestyles on both sides. Over the years, a continuous migration of Nepalis to India's plains, facilitated by the open border, has resulted in a socio-cultural integration that makes it challenging to distinguish between the people of the two countries. This interconnectedness has motivated both governments to maintain the open border, which has become more of a political and legal concept in the Tarai region than a strict division. Intermarriages and deep-rooted socio-cultural ties have further reinforced the need to keep the border open, symbolizing the continuity of shared cultural and social heritage (Upreti, 2009, p.127) ^[14].

The cultural relationship between Nepal and India is multifaceted, with religion playing a central role. Pilgrimage is a key expression of this bond, as thousands of Nepalis visit sacred Indian sites annually, such as those on the char dham yatra—Badrinath, Kedarnath, Jagannath, Rameshwaram, and Dwarka—along with other significant destinations like Haridwar, Rishikesh, Varanasi, Gaya, and Vaishnodevi. Similarly, Indian pilgrims frequently visit Nepal's holy sites, including Pashupatinath, Lumbini, the Ram-Janaki Temple, and Muktinath. These shared religious beliefs, deities, and practices have created a robust and enduring cultural connection. Entertainment is another critical aspect of Nepal-India cultural relations. Indian cinema and music are immensely popular in Nepal, while Nepali films and music have a significant audience in India, particularly in areas with large Nepali-origin populations. Language further strengthens this bond, as both nations share several common languages, including Nepali, Hindi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Avadhi. Many of these languages are rooted in Sanskrit and written in the Devanagari script, which is also used for religious texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. This strong cultural connection has fostered mutual understanding, strengthened bilateral ties, and preserved friendly relations between the two countries (Muni, 1973, p.40) ^[8].

Nepal's social and cultural identity reflects its geographical divisions. The northern hill regions, inhabited predominantly by populations of Mongoloid descent, contrast with the Indo-Aryan communities in the southern Tarai. A rich linguistic diversity marks these areas, with Tibeto-Burmese languages like Limbu, Gurung, and Tamang spoken in the hills, and Indo-Astroloid languages such as Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Tharu prevalent in the Tarai. These languages are closely tied to adjacent Indian states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The social structures, including caste systems and traditional values, also mirror the characteristics of neighboring regions. Hinduism dominates Nepal's Tarai, while Buddhism gains prominence in the northern areas. Nepal embodies a fusion of cultural influences from India and the Himalayan region, most evident in the Kathmandu Valley. Historically, Hindu

rulers coexisted with Buddhist Newars, fostering mutual cultural and religious exchanges, such as the Newars adopting the Hindu caste system. This coexistence exemplifies Nepal's pluralistic society.

Nepal's cultural diversity has also been shaped by its rugged geography and the interaction of distinct cultural groups. However, southern cultural influences have been particularly dominant, evident in the popularity of festivals like Vijaya Dashami, Diwali, and Holi, as well as the use of Devanagari script for the national language, Nepali. Despite this dominance, recent waves of Nepali nationalism emphasize the unique elements of Nepali culture, highlighting the country's distinct identity amidst shared traditions (Muni, 1973, p.40) ^[8].

Economic Transactions for Trade and Commerce

Development is an inclusive process that integrates multiple dimensions of a country's existence, such as societal, cultural, political, economic, and religious aspects. While enhancing income levels and living standards is pivotal, it is equally important that these improvements foster positive transformations in attitudes, values, beliefs, and institutional frameworks. Unfortunately, many less-developed and developing nations, including Nepal, focus on economic growth without adequately addressing the need for reforms in their social and political systems (Khadka, 1992, p. 134) ^[5]. Globally, nearly one-fifth of the population resides in 28 landlocked nations without direct access to the sea. For these countries, the right to unimpeded sea access for trade and commerce hinges on transit arrangements, as the movement of goods and people depends on neighboring states. Consequently, landlocked nations face unique trading challenges that span economic, social, and political spheres. In the 20th century, where seamless, reliable, and cost-effective international trade is a cornerstone of economic development, transit freedom becomes a vital necessity for landlocked states. For such nations, transit is not merely a convenience but a lifeline for survival.

Since emerging from isolation in 1951, Nepal has adopted pragmatic measures to expand trade and economic ties with various countries. The Foreign Investment and Technology Act of 1981, later revised in 1992, outlines regulations governing foreign investments. India has supported Nepal's economic and technical development for decades, with collaborative projects in areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, water supply, health, and industrial development (Sharma, 1995, p. 209) ^[11]. Despite these efforts, most projects focus on infrastructure rather than sustainable economic growth. Sarup discusses the 1950 Treaty of Trade and Commerce, wherein India recognized Nepal's right to unrestricted transit for goods across Indian Territory. This treaty was replaced by the 1960 Trade and Transit Treaty, which aimed to enhance bilateral economic cooperation. Articles VII-XI of the treaty specifically addressed transit provisions, ensuring exemptions from customs duties and fees, barring reasonable service charges. While the treaty marked progress, issues like procedural inefficiencies and restrictions have persisted, prompting Nepal to advocate for unimpeded transit facilities.

Geography and terrain exacerbate Nepal's transit challenges. Rugged landscapes, inadequate infrastructure, and logistical inefficiencies hinder efficient trade. Despite these obstacles, Nepal's foreign trade has expanded since 1951, primarily involving agricultural exports to India and limited local exchanges with China. However, reliance on Indian ports and transportation systems has led to additional challenges, including lengthy procedures, congestion, and periodic trade

restrictions by India on essential commodities. These restrictions have adversely affected Nepal's economy, reducing exports and creating trade deficits.

The diversification of Nepal's trade policy is essential to reduce its economic dependence on India and increase exports. Investment in sectors like hydropower, tourism, and cross-border trade can help bridge the trade deficit. Furthermore, integrating with global value chains could enhance economic opportunities. While cultural and historical ties with India remain strong, pragmatic approaches to bilateral relations are necessary to address recurring issues and safeguard Nepal's sovereignty. The 1950 Treaty provisions, along with landlocked geography and open-border challenges, underscore the complexities of national security concerns for Nepal.

Open borders in South Asia, particularly between Nepal and India, have facilitated social, cultural, and economic exchanges. Advocates highlight the benefits of labor mobility, multiculturalism, and humanitarian principles. However, critics emphasize economic, security, and social challenges, including labor market strains, national security threats, and difficulties in cultural integration. Addressing these concerns requires balanced policies that ensure economic development, social cohesion, and political stability. Case studies of countries with open and restrictive border policies, such as the Schengen Area and Australia, provide valuable insights into managing migration. Policymakers must adopt evidence-based approaches to promote integration, address economic disparities, and enhance border security mechanisms. Collaborative frameworks can ensure that open-border practices are both beneficial and sustainable.

In the context of national interests, Nepal's priorities encompass political, economic, security, and cultural dimensions. Protecting national sovereignty, fostering economic development, and preserving cultural values are integral to Nepal's strategy. Despite its challenges as a landlocked nation, Nepal must develop a robust security framework to address geopolitical realities while maintaining independence and promoting inclusive growth.

Pros and cons on Nepal-India Open Border

Nepal and India have maintained a long-standing and significant relationship, deeply rooted in cultural, social, and economic connections. These ties are indispensable for both nations and play a crucial role in shaping their interactions. Currently, Nepal is advocating for a revision of the 1950 Nepal-India Friendship Treaty, which was signed during the Shah dynasty. Nepal views certain provisions of the treaty as unequal and believes that revising it would help safeguard the mutual interests of both countries while fostering a balanced and constructive partnership. Collaboration on mutual security concerns, particularly concerning the open border, remains a central aspect of Nepal-India relations. Nepal has repeatedly assured India that its territory will not be used for activities detrimental to Indian interests and anticipates a similar commitment from India.

To address shared security challenges, bilateral mechanisms have been established to combat cross-border crimes and enhance communication between bordering districts, facilitating better information exchange. India, for its part, has emphasized the importance of strengthening legal frameworks to more effectively manage shared cross-border security issues. While the open border system offers various benefits, it also presents challenges, which can be understood through its positive and negative impacts as outlined below.

Positive Impacts

Drawing from an extensive review of relevant literature,

several positive outcomes associated with the open border have been identified. These benefits highlight the socio-economic and cultural advantages facilitated by the open border, fostering cross-border cooperation and strengthening connections between communities on both sides:

- Convenient Movement:** The open border system enables easy and unrestricted movement of people between the two countries.
- Strengthened Relationships:** Free movement across the border has bolstered interpersonal relationships between communities on both sides.
- Effective Rescue Operations:** During disasters and calamities, timely assistance and rescue services are readily provided from either side of the border.
- Improved Health Services:** In the event of epidemics, health services can be shared and coordinated across the border.
- Instant Labor Supply:** Labor shortages in one area can be quickly addressed by utilizing the workforce from the other side of the border.
- Competitive Markets:** Cross-border trade fosters healthy competition among businesses in frontier towns, benefiting consumers.
- Uninterrupted Food and Goods Supply:** The unrestricted border ensures the swift supply of food grains and essential goods in areas experiencing shortages.
- Economic Gains through Markets:** The open border supports economic activities, such as the trade of livestock, vegetables, and daily essentials in *Hat Bazaars* (open markets) held regularly on both sides, benefiting the local population.

Negative Impacts

These challenges underscore the complexities associated with managing an open border, such as security vulnerabilities, illegal activities, and socio-economic disparities. The findings highlight the potential drawbacks of the open border alongside its benefits:

- Border Encroachment:** The open border system has led to boundary encroachments and destruction of boundary markers, as unrestricted movement allows individuals to cross freely without monitoring.
- Cross-border Terrorism:** The open border has been exploited as a transit route for terrorists. Allegations have been made regarding infiltration of Pakistani ISI agents via Nepal, and Maoist insurgents have used Indian Territory as a refuge, complicating security management.
- Human Trafficking:** Thousands of Nepali girls are trafficked annually to Indian brothels. As of 2023, 86 cross-border rescues were conducted by Maiti Nepal to combat human trafficking.
- Illegal Arms Trade:** The unrestricted border has facilitated the illegal transport of firearms and ammunition, which are often used in conflicts, particularly by Maoist insurgents.
- Goods Smuggling:** Market goods, materials, and machinery are frequently smuggled through unmonitored border points, evading customs and impacting legitimate trade.
- Cross-border Crime:** Incidents of crimes such as murder, theft, and rape have risen along the frontier due to the lack of stringent border control.
- Kidnapping:** The open border has facilitated cases of kidnapping, targeting businesspersons and affluent families.

8. **Aircraft Hijacking:** The open border has had implications for air security, as seen in the 2000 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight from Nepal, prompting stricter passport controls for air travelers.
9. **Theft and Robbery:** Crimes such as robberies have been reported, with perpetrators using the open border to evade authorities.
10. **Refugee Infiltration:** The open border facilitated the infiltration of approximately 100,000 Bhutanese refugees into Nepal decades ago, creating long-term challenges.
11. **Environmental Exploitation:** Unmonitored border access has led to deforestation and illegal exploitation of medicinal plants and herbs from Nepali forests.
12. **Peace and Security Concerns:** Free movement across the border has made it difficult to maintain national security and public order, with third-country nationals exploiting the lack of identification requirements

Resolution to Border Security

Addressing these issues necessitates trust-building, enhanced border security, equitable economic cooperation, and mutual respect for sovereignty. The following strategies could aid in resolving border disputes and strengthening bilateral relations:

1. **Joint Border Commission:** Establish a commission to oversee fair and transparent border demarcation, fostering mutual trust.
2. **Hotline between Security Forces:** Create a direct communication channel between border security forces to prevent misunderstandings and improve coordination.
3. **People-to-People Exchanges:** Increase cultural and social interactions to foster trust and shared interests between the two nations.
4. **Fixed Entry and Exit Points:** Develop controlled entry and exit points to address issues such as unauthorized movement, smuggling, and human trafficking while maintaining efficient cross-border activities.
5. **ID card System:** Introduce a balanced ID verification system to regulate cross-border movement while preserving the open border's essence.
6. **Eminent Persons Group (EPG) Recommendations:** Promptly and sincerely implement the EPG report to modernize the 1950 treaty, enhance border management, and address trade and security concerns.
7. **Respect for Sovereignty:** Build a balanced partnership where decisions are made through equal dialogue, ensuring Nepal's sovereignty and concerns are respected.
8. **Brotherly Relationship:** Foster a relationship of equality, avoiding perceptions of dominance while encouraging collaboration based on shared interests.
9. **Economic Cooperation:** Promote economic ties to create mutual stakes in peace, stability, and border dispute resolution.

Conclusion

Nepal's strategic location between India and China presents both opportunities and challenges. While leveraging its position through initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative, Nepal continues to maintain critical economic, trade, and cultural ties with India. Strengthening economic cooperation with India is essential to fostering peace, stability, and mutual interests, particularly in resolving border disputes and promoting harmonious relations.

Despite its rich cultural heritage and resilient population, Nepal faces significant obstacles such as its landlocked geography, widespread poverty, political instability, and security vulnerabilities. These challenges are exacerbated by border-related issues like land encroachment, trafficking, and smuggling, which threaten human rights and national security. Nevertheless, Nepal has achieved notable progress in economic growth, infrastructure development, and human rights. To unlock its full potential, the nation must tackle governance issues, enhance law enforcement, and foster better coordination among stakeholders. By prioritizing investments in human capital and infrastructure, Nepal can overcome its socio-economic challenges and pave the way for a stable and prosperous future.

The open border with India is viewed as a double-edged sword from Nepal's perspective. On one hand, it has strengthened people-to-people connections and cultural ties across border regions. On the other, it has heightened concerns about Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national identity, particularly given the disparity in size, economic power, population, and military strength between the two nations. With strategic policies and investments, Nepal can navigate these complexities and emerge as a resilient and thriving nation.

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