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Old Ties, New Kathmandu: What India Now Needs to Negotiate With Nepal

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Old Ties, New Kathmandu: What India Now Needs to Negotiate With Nepal

 **The Indian Express** 5 June 2026 **GS2**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Nepal has floated third-party involvement in the boundary dispute, which India rejects. How should India keep the dispute bilateral while addressing Nepal's sense of grievance?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Nepal's Foreign Minister is in India on the first ministerial outreach from a new government in Kathmandu, against the backdrop of a live boundary dispute that Nepal has periodically tried to internationalise. For an aspirant, this is a core GS2 "Neighbourhood First" case: it tests whether you can hold together **deep civilisational ties** and a **hard territorial dispute** in one coherent policy, the exact balancing act the examiner and interview board look for on India's neighbours.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

India and Nepal share kinship, an open border and intertwined economies, but the **Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiadhura** dispute strains ties, with Nepal floating **third-party involvement** that India rejects. The territory is **Indian**, and the dispute is **bilateral**. The fix is not concession but a **credible bilateral mechanism** with a timeline, paired with visible **connectivity and energy** deliverables that prove the bilateral track works.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	SIGNIFICANCE
Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura	Tri-junction area near Uttarakhand	The core boundary dispute; India holds it as Indian territory
Third-party involvement	Nepal's bid to internationalise the dispute	India rejects it; insists on bilateral resolution
1950 Treaty	Treaty of Peace and Friendship	Kathmandu seeks revision; an enduring irritant
Open border	Free movement of people and goods	The relationship's deepest bond, and a vulnerability

THE ANALYSIS: THE BALLAST AND THE IRRITANT

- 1 The ballast is strong.** Connectivity, **hydropower** cooperation, trade and the open border are productive areas for early, confidence-building wins.
- 2 The irritant is the boundary.** Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura, periodically inflamed, including by Nepal's 2020 revised political map.
- 3 The signal beneath the dispute.** Nepal's reach for third-party involvement reflects a perception that **bilateral channels have stalled**, not merely a territorial claim.
- 4 The China factor.** Kathmandu's room to play external balancers grows when India's bilateral track looks dormant.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura are Indian territory; *the boundary is to be resolved through established bilateral diplomatic mechanisms, and India rejects third-party involvement.* **Treaties and bodies:** Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950; *the India-Nepal Eminent Persons Group (EPG), whose report awaits formal reception.* **Geography:** Nepal is **landlocked**, dependent on Indian ports (e.g. transit via Kolkata and Visakhapatnam); *the open border is unique in the region.* **Cooperation:** *hydropower trade, the Motihari-Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline, and cross-border rail and road links.* **Framework:** *part of India's Neighbourhood First policy and the Gujral Doctrine legacy of non-reciprocity with smaller neighbours.*

THE DEBATE

Argument to hold firm: India should not reward Nepal's internationalisation gambit with concessions, lest other neighbours learn to externalise bilateral disputes.

Argument to actively engage: A dormant bilateral channel is what *drives* Nepal toward third parties; India must make the bilateral track visibly work.

The balanced verdict: Concede nothing on the **principle** (Indian territory, bilateral resolution), but invest heavily in the **process**: convene the mechanism, set a timeline, and stack early wins on connectivity and energy.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

On disputes, the strong answer holds the principle firm while making the process generous and credible. "We will not internationalise, but we will make bilateral talks real, time-bound and productive" is a stronger posture than either rigidity or concession. The same template fits India's approach to other boundary and water disputes: firm on sovereignty, flexible and energetic on mechanism.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Dormant bilateral channel -> Nepal perceives stalemate -> reaches for third-party involvement -> friction. The reset: Credible, time-bound bilateral mechanism + connectivity/energy deliverables -> restored trust -> dispute stays bilateral.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Reinvigorate the bilateral boundary mechanism** with a clear timeline.
- ② **Deliver visible wins** on connectivity, hydropower and trade quickly.
- ③ **Address the trust deficit** through consistent, high-level engagement.
- ④ **Hold the line quietly** on keeping the dispute bilateral and the territory Indian.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

“India’s Nepal policy must combine the warmth of civilisational ties with the hard-headedness of boundary negotiation.” Examine. (250 words)

“With Nepal, India must be unyielding on the principle and inexhaustible on the process; a dormant bilateral channel is the surest invitation to third parties.”

Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura (Indian territory, GoI stand) · Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950 · India-Nepal EPG · Nepal landlocked, transit via Indian ports · Motihari-Amlekhgunj pipeline.

How does India keep the boundary dispute bilateral while genuinely addressing Nepal’s sense of grievance and asymmetry?

Connects to GS2 PYQs on India’s neighbourhood and the “Neighbourhood First” policy; probable forward question is the ties-versus-boundary framing above.

today’s Myanmar editorial (neighbourhood recalibration); static GS2 on India-Nepal relations, Gujral Doctrine, and Neighbourhood First.

Sources: *Indian Express, MEA, The Hindu*

Source: Old Ties, New Kathmandu: What India Now Needs to Negotiate With Nepal — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

A new political dispensation in Kathmandu and a live boundary dispute, where Nepal has floated third-party involvement, require India to update its negotiating playbook, addressing connectivity, the trust deficit, and the boundary question through bilateral mechanisms rather than relying on civilisational goodwill alone.

✓ SUPPORTING

- The visit of Nepal’s Foreign Minister, the first ministerial outreach from the new government, is an opening to reset a relationship strained by the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura boundary dispute.
- Nepal’s interest in third-party involvement reflects a perception that bilateral mechanisms have stalled; India’s challenge is to make those mechanisms credible and active rather

than dormant.

- Connectivity, energy cooperation, and trade remain the ballast of the relationship and the most productive areas for early, confidence-building progress.

COUNTER

Some argue India should hold firm on the boundary and not reward Nepal's internationalisation gambit with concessions, lest it set a precedent for other neighbours to externalise bilateral disputes.

WAY FORWARD

Reinvigorate bilateral boundary mechanisms with a clear timeline, deliver visible gains on connectivity and energy, address the trust deficit through consistent high-level engagement, and firmly but quietly keep the dispute bilateral.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"India's Nepal policy must combine the warmth of civilisational ties with the hard-headedness of boundary negotiation." Examine India's challenges with a new dispensation in Kathmandu. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India and Nepal share a relationship unlike any other, with open borders, kinship, and deep economic ties. Yet that very closeness makes friction, when it comes, especially raw.

A new government in Kathmandu offers a chance to reset.

BODY

The first ministerial visit from Nepal's new government is an opening India should use well. The relationship's ballast, including connectivity, hydropower cooperation, trade, and an open border, remains strong, and these are the areas where early, visible progress can rebuild momentum.

But the irritant is the boundary: the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura dispute, which Nepal has at times sought to internationalise by floating third-party involvement. India's consistent position is that the matter is bilateral and must be resolved through established diplomatic mechanisms, and that Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura is Indian territory.

The deeper challenge is that Nepal's reach for third-party involvement signals a perception that bilateral channels have stalled. The remedy is not to concede the principle but to make the bilateral mechanism credible: convene it, give it a timeline, and pair it with tangible deliverables on connectivity and energy that demonstrate the value of the bilateral track.

The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, long sought to be revised by Kathmandu, and the recommendations of the India-Nepal Eminent Persons Group also await resolution. Civilisational goodwill is an asset, but it is not a substitute for active, structured diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

India should meet the new Kathmandu with both warmth and a working agenda, delivering on connectivity and energy while keeping the boundary dispute firmly, and productively, bilateral.

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