

Experts suggest govt to have clear agenda before PM's China visit

Experts have urged the government to have a clear agenda that serves the national interest in regard to Nepal-China cooperation instead of acting upon the agenda set by others.

They made such remarks during an interaction programme on 'Nepal-China relations and Contours for Economic Cooperation' organized by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), on Friday, June 15.

While deepening cooperation with China, Nepal should have substantial freedom of choice by ensuring that it does not become overly dependent, pointed out Gyan Chandra Acharya, former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, during the interaction program.

In his presentation, he cautioned that greater Nepal-China relations should not however mean shifting dependency from India to China.

In the name of connectivity, if Nepal only builds infrastructure without corresponding improvement in productive capacity, then the roads and railways would become like white elephant, he warned.

"Although Nepal currently has comfortable debt level, caution should be taken to avoid debt trap," he added.

Rajan Bhattarai, member of Nepal-India Eminent Persons Group, also pointed out that Nepal needs to lay foundation for developing mass-transit system referring to rail connectivity.

He also informed that the current government's emphasis appears to be on grant modality, rather than loans, for the construction of prospective railway projects.

Former foreign affairs secretary Madhu Raman Acharya, however, opined that road to national prosperity cannot be on grant alone and thus alternative modalities of funding projects like concessional loans can be utilized provided that the projects offer substantial benefits to Nepal.

He asserted that Nepal should also contemplate upon factors that have been preventing implementation of the existing agreements between the two countries.

Dr Posh Raj Pandey, chairman of SAWTEE, emphasized that strategic independence must be ensured during the negotiations while reiterating that Nepal should be careful not to shift dependency between neighbours.

Gyanendra Lal Pradhan of FNCCI pointed out the need for balancing relationship between India and China, for which Nepal could emulate Bangladesh as an example.

Given the expertise of Chinese in railway engineering, transport infrastructure expert Dr Surya Raj Acharya pointed out that Trans-Himalayan railway is technically feasible but the government's lack of experts in the area has been a major obstacle.

Experts suggest govt to have clear agenda before PM's China visit

Referring to PM KP Oli's visit to China, Dr Jagadish Chandra Pokharel, former vice chairperson of National Planning Commission, insisted that national consensus should be reflected in agreements that the two nations pursue.

The participants present in the discussion program had a consensus view that Nepal should have a clear agenda for its national interests and also echoed the view that agreements reached with the neighbours have to be followed through with effective and timely implementation. The round table brought together a cross-section of stakeholders, including policy makers, diplomats, scholars, and private-sector to identify priorities for Nepal in upcoming negotiations with China.

Source: NewBusinessAge, 17th June 2018