

Indian President's Nepal Visit Siddhi B Ranjitkar

Indian Ceremonial and even Honorable President Pranab Mukherjee visited Nepal from November 2 to 4, 2016. He has swept the three major superb towns of Nepal, and earned probably profound merits from making special offerings to Lord Pashupati in Kathmandu, and deity Sita in Janakpur. He also earned the honorary degree from the Kathmandu University, and civic felicitation letters from the Kathmandu Metropolitan city and the Janakpur Sub-Metropolis. He met with the Gurkha veterans in Pokhara, and told them their pensions would be doubled up. Pranab has earned a lot of demerits too, as people in those three towns where he visited have suffered from the traffic gridlock, and people are even denied to walk on the sidewalk. The Nepalese social media has been the full of heart-breaking news of how India imposed the blockade on Nepal, some people even demanded apology from President Pranab Mukherjee betraying the Nepalese value of the people always welcoming any guest as the heaven sent deity.

Pranab Mukherjee would have been not only a great Indian President but also would have been a great human, had he regretted for the blockade his government had imposed on Nepal for almost six months causing tremendous sufferings to 30 million Nepalese and a few million Indians running the business in the towns bordering Nepal. It would have healed the fresh wound of suffering the blockade has caused. However, it remained even after the visit of the dignitary; so, naturally, they did not welcomed Pranab from the bottom of the heart.

President Pranab Mukherjee congratulated President Bidhya Bhandari on the promulgation of the Nepalese Constitution but he has been shy to welcome the Constitution rather he has reiterated the position of his government on making the Constitution inclusive and acceptable to all the people.

Some Nepalese intellectuals and politicians take it as the unwanted Indian interference in the Nepalese business. However, the world has accepted the interference in one another's matters. Even the presidential candidate Donald Trump of the mightiest country such as America has invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to hack the emails of his rival and help him in the presidential bid. President Putin called Donald Trump as the 'poleznie durak' (in Russian) means useful fool, and helped him as much as possible going into the server of the rival of Donald Trump and releasing some emails. (Source: Washingtonpost.com)

Some Nepalese politicians did and probably do even today as Donald Trump did in America. I still remember that once an Indian diplomat in Kathmandu bitterly complained about the Nepalese politicians came over him for advice and then the Nepalese took it as interference. If the political leaders were to stand on their own as they did at the time of the promulgation of the new Constitution then nobody could interfere us. So, bashing the foreign interference in the Nepalese politics is nothing but immature political analysis.

The streets of Kathmandu have been uniquely clean as never have been before. I don't know how much money the Kathmandu metropolitan city administration has spent on sweeping the streets and cleaning up all the dirty buildings and electric and telephone poles. The city administration must have put every possible effort on cleaning up the streets, and must have spent the major budget on the cleanup.

The traffic police have been very smart to inform the commuters which part of the town would remain closed for the public and private vehicles and even for the pedestrians for the comfort of the VVIP guest. Surely, the air pollution has drastically come down as the streets came to be dead for some time. The traffic police would have been even smarter if the police had kept an ambulance standby for taking an emergency patient to a hospital or

taking anybody that needed an emergency transport. I am sure that the traffic police headquarters would consider it seriously for the future.

The army helicopter patrolled the Hyatt Hotel circling over it before president came over to reside. The security has been tight in the area for the safety of the VVIP guest. Certain areas have been almost under curfew.

Such security is essential in view of the message of the unwillingness to welcome the VVIP guest passed on in the social media. Some Nepalese have not forgotten the sufferings they have undergone during the unofficial Indian blockade for about a half-year. However, President Pranab Mukherjee has nothing to do with the blockade Prime Minister Narendra Modi has imposed, the Nepalese folks needed to understand it. Unfortunately, some of us forgot our diplomatic and humane etiquette, and spewed out venoms spreading the message of unwelcome to the VVIP visitor: the ceremonial president.

The Central Intelligence Bureau (CIB) has smartly taken two reporters in custody allegedly for planning to demonstrate with black flags to the unwelcome Indian President. The reporters' community has been belligerent to the police actions and demanded immediate release of the colleagues but to little avail. It is certainly violence of fundamental human rights but for the CIB it is business as usual.

When I was a small kid, my maternal uncle piggybacked me to watch Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at Taumadhi Square in Bhaktapur in mid 1950s. Riding on the back of my maternal uncle I watched how Pandit Nehru climbed the stone stairs to the five-storey temple, and his daughter Indira Gandhi followed him. Suddenly, a group of people started off scrambling to unfold black flags. People started running in all directions in confusion. I was terribly scared of the situation.

The government has been so generous to announce the public holiday on the second day of the Pranab's visit making the people stay home for the comfort of the VVIP visitor. However, it has provoked the strong reactions from the so-called social media network players, even some politicians and intellectuals. It won't cost much for the government to declare a national holiday but the common folks pay for it for the government making sure the VVIP guest is safe. Certainly, the country loses the business of NPR 2 billion per day of closure if we believe the data of the business community.

Nepalese have already squandered a few billions NPR lavishly spending three days on celebrating the wonderful festival called 'tihar' making offering to animals and goddess of wealth; so, spending another few billions on the visit of Pranab does not matter for the country; ministers of which go on begging with a golden bowl quote Minister Jeevan Bahadur Shahi. The news on 'gorkhapatra' of November 4, 2016 stated that the Birgunj Custom office has recorded the import of fruits worth NPR 2 billion for the 'tihar' festival. Another news has stated that marigold garland worth NPR 20 million imported from India. The total money spent on 'tihar' comes to NPR 5 billion that surely stimulated the economy.

Janakpur and Pokhara Sub-Metropolis also have cleaned up their streets for making them dirt free for the visit of VVIP Pranab. They also have built up welcome arches. Price of a single welcome arch varies from NPR 30,000 to NPR 100,000 depending on what materials they use. So, they must be using up their annual budget for the pleasure of the most important ceremonial visitor. Janakpur Sub-Metropolis alone built 91 welcome arches, the local media stated.

On November 2, 2016, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee landed at the international airport at 4:00 PM in Kathmandu. President of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal Bidhya

Devi Bhandari well dressed in the silky orange sari welcomed President Pranab equally splendidly dressed in a silky suit tailored in the Indian style at the airport. Pranab approached Bidhya with his hands clasped at his chest as the gesture of greetings but Bidhya extended her right hand.

The Nepal army provided Indian President Pranab Mukherjee with a twenty-one-gun salute as a formal ceremonial sign of respect. Then, the Nepal Army played the national anthem. President Bidhya Bhandari standing next to President Pranab Mukherjee clasped her hands at the end of her belly indicating she has been ignorant of how to stand properly at the time of playing the national anthem.

Both the presidents drove on a single presidential vehicle to the 'sital-newas:' official residence of the president and they spent 45 minutes in exchanging pleasantries, as both are ceremonial presidents and they do everything on the command of the respective executive officer.

Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bharat Raj Poudyal said, "The President of India congratulated President Bhandari, the Nepali people and the Constituent Assembly on the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal."

Then, Pranab went to the Indian embassy to attend the reception held on his honor. He met with the Nepalese political dignitaries except for the former Prime Ministers KP Oli and Jhala Nath Khanal who skipped it. Vice-President Nanda Bahadur Pun, former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, national poet Madhav Prasad Ghimire made available at the reception for President Pranab Mukherjee to meet.

Finally, Pranab went to the hotel Hyatt at Boudha obviously for rest but he did not get it. Prime Minister Prachanda with his Foreign Minister Dr Prakash Sharan Mahat went to see him. Prachanda briefed Pranab on the political development in Nepal starting from the peace process; the Nepalese media said that Dr Mahat quoted Prachanda as saying.

Before the day's activities ended, President Pranab Mukherjee needed to attend the State banquet President Bidhya Bhandari held at the Soaltee Hotel in his honor. Prime Minister Prachanda, deputy prime ministers, former prime ministers, and others attended the banquet. Former Prime Ministers KP Oli and Jhala Nath Khanal skipped all the ceremonies and banquet, too on the first day of the Pranab's visit.

On November 3: the second day of the State visit, Pranab made preparation for making offerings to Lord Pashupati for earning some merits. The security has worked from the early morning for the safety of the VVIP guest. The security has guarded all the temples and the public buildings around the temple to Lord Pashupati, and closed the temple for the common folks until the VVIP guest completed his offerings.

The three circles of security have kept President Pranab safe wherever he went in Nepal. The first outer circle of security is of the Nepal Army, the second inner circle of the Armed Police Force of Nepal, and finally the inner circle of the Nepal Police.

President Pranab Mukherjee rode on a bulletproof black limousine from Hyatt to the Pashupati area. Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Jeevan Bahadur Shahi, Secretary to the ministry Shankar Prasad Adhikari, Pashupati Area Development Trust member secretary Govinda Tondon and other PADT officials were at the western entrance of the temple to receive President Pranab Mukherjee. One hundred and eight Hindu boys chanted the auspicious mantras calling in all deities for blessing the President.

Pranab entered the temple through the western gate where the Pashupati Area Development Trust built a welcome arch reflecting the Nepalese culture. Pranab as a real Hindu believer went around the temple making and praying all the different deities such as Ganesh, Basuki (serpent deity), the Surya (sun) God, Narayana, Bhairab, and other deities on the premises of the temple before actually seeing Lord Pashupati first from the eastern entrance to the inner sanctum of the temple, and then from other entrances. He made offerings of 125,000 burning wick-soaked-in-oil lamps to Lord Pashupati, and performed the special 'rudri' means offerings of five different items such as honey, milk, yogurt, ghee (homemade butter), and sugar syrup to the phallus.

The next event, Pranab attended was the civic reception, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City administration held at the City Hall. At the civic reception, the chief executive of Kathmandu Metropolitan City Rudra Singh Tamang presented a letter of felicitation to President Pranab Mukherjee. The felicitation letter said, "We believe that the closeness and the mutual benefits the two neighboring friendly nations have enjoyed will help in enhancing, smoothing and providing a new dynamism to the historical friendly relationship Nepal and India have*."

President Pranab in turn appreciated the contribution of the Nepalese politicians to the Indian independent movement that freed India from the British Raj in 1947. Probably, the then Nepalese prime minister Jung Bahadur directly and personally intervening in the Indian uprisings against the British East India Company government in 1857 pushed the possible independence of India from the British Company rule for almost a century.

The third event President Pranab Mukherjee attended was the convocation the Kathmandu University held at the Nepal Army Headquarters in Kathmandu. Prime Minister Prachanda in the capacity of the chancellor of the university conferred the honorary doctorate on literature on President Pranab Mukherjee. Presenting the award, Prachanda said that the State visit of the Indian president has further strengthened the bilateral ties between the two countries.

Finally, President Pranab attended the banquet Prime Minister Prachanda held at the Dwarika Hotel in honor of the visiting president. This time, former Prime Ministers KP Oli and Jhalanath Khanal joined the dinner party. The foods served are entirely from the Nepalese cuisine. It is something like Indians serving 'sim-khada': typical Indian fast food served to the Nepalese dignitaries visiting India.

On November 4, 2016, Indian President Mukherjee flew to Janakpur on the chartered aircraft of Buddha Airlines and detoured a bit to watch the majestic Himalayan view including the Mount Everest: the tallest mountain in the world. Probably, airports in Janakpur and Pokhara too, don't have the appropriate facilities for Indian air-force plane to land making the need for the concerned agency to charter a private plane of the Buddha Airlines.

Deputy Prime Minister Bimalendra Nidhi was at the airport of the historic city called Janakpur to receive the president. They drove straight to the Janaki-mandir where the attendants to the deity and the mandir have been curiously waiting for the VVIP guest.

President Pranab Mukherjee has been the third Indian president after former Indian presidents such as Neelam Sanjiva Reddy and Giani Zail Singh to visit the Janaki-mandir to offer prayers to the deity Sita, the State-run news agency RSS stated. Following the Vedic rituals, Pranab made offerings to the golden idols of Sita and Ram at the inner sanctum of

the temple. Also following the Vedic and Maithil culture, chief priest called Mahanta Ram Tapeshwar welcomed the president.

Sita is the daughter of Nepal wedded to Prince Ram of Ayodhya: one of the cities of Uttar Pradesh currently India. Every year, folks from Ayodhya come with a large wedding procession to Janakpur to perform a wedding ceremony to the idols of Sita and Ram. Thus, Nepal and India has a matrimonial relationship since the pre-historic time. Today, both Nepal and India might have thousands if not hundreds of thousands of couples of Sita and Ram on both sides of the border. (See Annex to know more about Sita)

After the religious ceremony at the Janaki mandir, President Pranab drove to Tirhutiya Gachi in Janakpur to attend the civic reception the Janakpur Sub-Metropolis held. Only a selected about 1,500 people attended the civic reception, the RSS news stated. Deputy Prime Minister Bimalendra Nidhi presented a letter of felicitation to President Pranab Mukherjee written in three languages such as Nepali, English, and Mithila.

Then, President Pranab Mukherjee with his entourage flew on the Buddha Air plane to Pokhara: the world famous scenic city. President Pranab then drove to the Gurkha Veterans' Pension Camp. He has said that currently, 32,000 Gurkhas are in service, and 126,000 Gurkhas are in pension. He told the veterans that their pension would be doubled up. He also appreciated their contribution to defending the Indian frontiers. Gurkhas have shed a lot of blood fighting a number of wars for India. Nepalese serving in the Indian and British Army are called Gurkhas.

President Pranab flew back to Kathmandu from Pokhara only to fly in to India. President Bidhya Bhandari, Vice-President Nanda Bahadur Pun, Prime Minister Prachanda, deputy prime ministers, ministers and other high officials were at the airport to give an affectionate send off to the high-profile guest President Pranab Mukherjee. The Nepal Army presented a twenty-one-gun salute to President Pranab Mukherjee. Thus, ended the State visit of the ceremonial President Pranab Mukherjee on November 4, 2016.

November 6, 2016

* Translated from the Nepalese text published in 'gorkhapatra' on November 4, 2016

Annex

Sita is the daughter of Nepal. Mythically, Sita was born of the blood ascetic men called Rishis collected from among themselves and sealed in an earthen pot with a label written "Anybody opening this pot will meet with misfortune", and sent it to King Ravan of Sri Lanka as the tax payment the king imposed on even the ascetic folks.

Reading the label on the pot, Ravan got scared of it very much as the then folks trusted the holy men. He ordered his attendants to take the pot to the north as far as possible and buried it there. So, the attendants took it to the foothills of the Himalaya.

When King Janak of the Mithila kingdom was leveling the ground with his golden plow for performing unique fire worship, the plow brought a child up. The gorgeous girl child fascinated King Janak so much that he took her to his queen immediately, and they adopted her as their daughter, and named her as Sita means the tip of a plow.

One day, King Janak saw Sita sweeping the floor of the room holding the Shiva-dhanu with her left hand. Seeing Sita holding the Shiva-dhanu with so much of ease, Janak decided that he would give Sita in marriage to the man who could break down the Shiva dhanu. Janak had received it from Lord Shiva.

When Sita came of age, King Janak announced that anybody willing to wed Sita had to meet the condition of breaking up the Shiva-dhanu, and sent this message to all kings, and princes and so on to attend the ceremony. The exceptional beauty of Sita had spread across the continent.

All the kings and princes in the royal uniforms and wearing rare jewelry came to attend the wedding ceremony. Everybody was willing to try his luck for winning the hands of Sita. However, none could succeed even to lift the Shiva-dhanu not to mention breaking it down.

At that time, prince Ram and his brother prince Laksman were the pupils of Balmiki Rishi. They went with the Rishi to watch the wedding ceremony. Seeing none of the kings and princes could do anything with the Shiva-dhanu, Balmiki said to Ram, "Go and try it." Thanking the Rishi and greeting the audience of the royalties, Ram moved on to the platform on which the Shiva-dhanu was. Ram lowered his head to pray and then he held the Shiva-dhanu by his left hand, and rise it up, and bent it with his right hand breaking it into three pieces, and sending one piece to heaven, another to earth and the third to the underworld.

Holding the garland of magnificent flowers, and aided by an attendant, Sita approached Ram to put the garland around the neck of Ram as the gesture of the acceptance of wedding. Thus, Ram received the Sita's acceptance as a prize for breaking down the mightiest bow Lord Shiva bestowed on King Janak.

Then Dashrath: the king of Ayodhya, and the father of Ram and Laksman came with a wedding procession to Janakpur to perform the wedding ceremony to Sita and Ram following the Vedic rituals. Thus, the daughter of Nepal wedded to the prince of India. Every year people from Ayodhya come with a large wedding procession to Janakpur to perform the wedding ceremony to the idols of Sita and Ram. So, Nepal and India has a matrimonial relationship since the pre-historic time.

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