

# Call for clear agenda for talks with China

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**Jun 16, 2018-Nepal should have clear agenda that serves the national interest in regard to Nepal-China cooperation instead of acting upon the agenda set by others, experts said on Friday, on the eve of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's visit to China.**

**While deepening cooperation with China, Nepal should have substantial freedom of choice by ensuring that it does not become overly dependent, said Gyan Chandra Acharya, former under-**

secretary-general of the United Nations, during an interaction programme on 'Nepal-China relations and contours for economic cooperation', organised by South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (Sawtee).

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

If Nepal only builds infrastructure for the sake of connectivity without corresponding improvement in productive capacity, then the roads and railways would be a white elephant, he added.

“Although Nepal currently has a comfortable debt level, caution should be taken to avoid a debt trap.”

Rajan Bhattarai, member of Nepal-India Eminent Persons Group, also pointed out that Nepal needs to lay a 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 Secretary Madhu Raman Acharya said that road to national prosperity cannot be achieved on grants alone and that alternative modalities of funding projects like concessional loans be utilised provided that the projects offer substantial benefits to Nepal.

He said that Nepal should also look at factors that have been preventing implementation of existing agreements between the two countries.

Posh Raj Pandey, chairman of Sawtee, emphasized that strategic independence must be ensured during the negotiations. “We should be careful not to shift dependency between neighbours.”

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

Referring to PM Oli’s visit to China, 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 programme had a consensus view that Nepal should have a clear agenda for its national interest and also echoed the view that agreements reached 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.

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