



THE
AIDIA
DISTINGUISHED
LECTURE

AIDIA DISTINGUISHED LECTURE

By

H.E. MR. HARSH VARDHAN SHRINGLA
Foreign Secretary of India

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Kathmandu, Nepal

WELCOME REMARKS



Mr. Sunil KC

Founder

Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA)

Namaste and Good Morning!

H.E. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary of India

Members of Parliament,

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Vanay Mohan Kwatra,

Senior Diplomats,

Political Leaders,

Distinguished members from business community and civil society

Friends from media and other dignitaries

We are delighted to host this distinguished lecture by His Excellency Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary of India. So, on the behalf of AIDIA, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Excellency Shringla for accepting our invitation and extend a very warm welcome for your gracious presence here today.

We would also like to warmly welcome to Former Foreign Secretary of Nepal, Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai, His Excellency Ambassador of India to Nepal Shri. Vinay Mohan Kwatra along with very noted participants from think-tanks, policy circles, government agencies, diplomatic missions, academia, business, media who are here with us today.

I would like to inform you all that this distinguished lecture is a part of AIDIA's aim to promote track 1.5 diplomacy. AIDIA has been continuously creating a debate forum for policymakers, shapers, and practitioners to have meaningful discourse on the many common areas between Nepal and India. For instance, in 2018 AIDIA in collaboration with Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML) hosted the Nepal-India Think Tank Summit, where more than 35 renowned speakers from Nepal and India addressed the forum. Similarly, very recently we hosted virtual events in collaboration with Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses and Vivekananda International Foundation on Nepal-India relations. And, we think these continuous series of exchanges of ideas has some ways contributed to promoting Nepal-India cooperation. Undoubtedly, I believe that today's lecture by the Foreign Secretary of India will be of a high imperative to better understand the key issues, emerging trends and changing dynamics of the

multi-faceted Nepal-India bilateral relations. And, to shape the right public discourse that can ultimately contribute to deepening the bilateral ties between our two countries.

We know that, cultural and historical inter-linkages, economic interdependence, cross-border migration, mutual security concerns are some of the primary features of our relations and where we need to work closely for achieving our shared interests.

The geographical proximity between our countries has contributed in many commonalities we share. But, at the same time, we have been also dealing with some complex issues such as long-standing border disputes. I think regular dialogues and the open exchange of opinions is a key to resolve such sensitive issues amicably.

We are expecting that, today's distinguished lecture by the Secretary Shrignla will offer some fresh perspectives to shape the many issues related to Nepal- India discourse on right track and to advance the bilateral cooperation.

Now, without further due, I would like thanks Former Foreign Secretary of Nepal, Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai for being with us today and kindly request him to take the program further.

Thank You!

OPENING REMARKS



Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattari

Former Foreign Secretary of Nepal

**Distinguished Chair of the Program,
Your Excellency the Foreign Secretary of India,
Your Excellency the Ambassador of India,
Dignitaries and Friends,
Dear Journalists,
Ladies and Gentlemen
Good Morning and Namaskar,**

Let me, first of all, extend sincere thanks to the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) and His Excellency Ambassador Vinay Mohan Kwatra for kindly inviting me to attend the AIDIA Distinguished Lecture being delivered by His Excellency Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary of India who is now in Nepal on an official visit.

I am privileged to have the unique opportunity of formally introducing our close friend, Foreign Secretary Shringla, who actually does not need any introduction here. With a background of working in private and public sectors prior to his formal enrolment in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) in 1984, he is a well-known figure in Nepal both for his family linkage and for his efficient discharge of responsibility as Director of Northern Division more than two decades ago. As an interested outsider spending nearly three-fourth of almost four-decade long diplomatic career being posted in or looking after the region, I found the study of IFS a fascinating exercise as it evolved from the nucleus of the Indian Political Service that one stalwart once criticized as neither Indian, nor political, nor service.

As an established expert on neighbourhood, Mr. Shringla is one of the most visible foreign secretaries as exemplified by his active status in terms of social sites, lectures and regular contributions of articles. Let me remind the august audience that he has recently authored a lead article entitled, India is a constructive, dependable actor globally, eloquently indicating how his country has handled the COVID-19 crisis fairly well in the context of the global pandemic.

During his thirty-six years of epoch-making service in the IFS, he has served in different capacities at headquarters and Indian missions abroad including major political divisions in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and ambassadorship to three important countries, Thailand, Bangladesh and the United States with the distinction of being India's youngest top diplomatic

representative to Washington DC. His reputation as a successful diplomat culminated in his ultimate appointment as the numero uno of IFS ten months ago. It was a matter of coincidence as he rightly said on assumption of his duty that he joined the IFS during the period of Cold War and has now been destined to preside over one of the most efficient foreign services when global warming has become a major issue of far-reaching regional and international repercussions.

Mr. Shringla is a product of two elite institutions, Mayo College and St. Stephen's College. As a Stephanian, his appointment as thirty-third Foreign Secretary marked a hat-trick as two of his predecessors had the same academic orientation. An avid reader and sports fan, he has taken keen interest in adventure tourism including his participation in the trek to Sagarmatha base camp and Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra. In terms of family, he is married to Madam Hemal Shringla and they are blessed with a son.

Before I request the distinguished Foreign Secretary to kindly deliver his much anticipated lecture, I feel extremely honoured to note that Mr. Shringla is the 29th Indian Foreign Secretary that I have had the honour to interact with and be enlightened since my first visit to India in March 1974 as an ICCR Fellow. The Indian foreign secretaries I met represent a big and wide range of diplomats. Some of these luminaries include the first incumbent, KPS Menon senior, topper of the ICS examination of 1921. Subimal Dutt and Shashank had the longest and shortest tenures respectively. Mani Dixit happened to be one of my D.Litt. examiners and also served as National Security Adviser (NSA). Two distinguished professionals were special recruits to the IFS, Ramachandra D. Sathe and Jagat S. Mehta. Another Stephanian, Shivshankar Menon, also became NSA after retirement. Last but not least, Maharajkrishna Rasgotra who was posted in Nepal twice, is currently the longest surviving Foreign Secretary.

To conclude, the audience is aware of plethora of writings and opinions on current state of our bilateral relations when two strong Prime Ministers enjoying overwhelming majority are in power. We don't have dearth of analysts, experts, pessimists and even cynics including so-called practitioners like us on both sides. As optimist to the core, my observation if I may make, is simple, straight and clear. The only alternative to the present state of Nepal-India relations is a more robust, mutually advantageous and more transparent ties of friendship and cooperation that truly cater to the reality of the rising aspirations of the people and take into account the enhancement of the quality of life through optimum utilization of our resources with a view to taking our ties to a state of mutual interdependence.

With these words, I wish to welcome His Excellency Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Nepal. I am sure his visit will be a success in further consolidating mutually beneficial ties of friendship and cooperation that have marked our relations since times immemorial. Last but not least, I wish the distinguished Foreign Secretary a fruitful tenure.

Thank you very much for your kind patience.

DISTINGUISHED LECTURE



H. E. Mr. Harsh Vardhan Sringla
Foreign Secretary of India

H.E. Ambassador Dr. Madan Bhattarai,
H.E. Ambassador of India Shri Vinay Kwatra and my colleagues in the Indian Embassy,
Founder AIDIA Shri Sunil KC
Former Ambassador of Nepal to India
Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen
Namaste and Good morning,

1. तपाईंहरू सबैको साथ साथै virtually जोडिनुभएका नेपाली मित्रहरूलाई सम्बोधन गर्न पाउनु मेरो लागि सम्मान र सौभाग्यको कुरो हो । म यो अवसरको लागि Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) and its founder Shri. Sunil KC प्रति आभारी छु ।
2. म नेपालका पूर्व विदेश सचिव Ambassador Dr. Madan Bhattarai लाई पनि राम्रा शब्दहरूका लागि धन्यवाद दिन चाहन्छु । म उहाँलाई लामो समयदेखि चिन्छु र व्यक्तिगत रूपमा उनलाई भेट्दा मलाई खुशी लाग्यो । Dr. Bhattarai you're a Diplomat, scholar, academic, intellectual. You combine all these rare qualities, we have great respect and regard for you.
3. मैले तपाईंको यो सुन्दर शहरको धेरै चोटि भ्रमण गरिसकेको छु तर विदेश सचिवको रूपमा यो मेरो पहिलो भ्रमण हो । मलाई पहिले नै आउन मन थियो तर COVID 19 ले गर्दा ढिलाइ भयो ।
4. For my opening remarks I'll switch to English. I want to say that I have been to this wonderful city of Kathmandu after a gap of a decade or so. People who ask me , "Does it feel different this time?" The answer is both "yes" and "no". "Yes", because I have never previously visited Nepal wearing a mask; and "no" because the buzz and vibrancy of Kathmandu are undiminished, rather they have been enhanced. The transformation of the city is apparent. Economic and social upgrade, a construction push, the energy of youth and enterprise – it is all extremely impressive. And it is apparent even in these restrictive pandemic conditions. The hearts and smiles of friends and interlocutors I have met remain unchanged. These hearts and smiles, and such sentiments, are unreservedly reciprocated by us in India.
5. The Nepal-India relationship is intricate and exists in various paradigms. We share the same geography, civilisational heritage, culture and customs. There are affinities in religious and spiritual traditions, even food habits. The people-to-people linkages are so strong and so powerful that quite frankly we in government only complement these. As Prime Minister

Narendra Modi put it during when he visited Nepal two years ago, "India's relations with Nepal are familial and friendly, which stand on the strong foundations of mutual and deep relationships between its people, which are much above the relationship between the two governments."

6. Recent years have given the relationship a new momentum. For India, Nepal is fundamental to our "Neighbourhood First" approach. India's development and modernisation are incomplete and intrinsically and symbiotically linked to the development and modernisation of neighbouring countries such as Nepal. That is why leaders from our neighbouring countries were invited to Prime Minister Modi's swearing-in ceremony in 2014 and in 2019. We are deeply appreciative of the Nepalese leadership's gesture in travelling to New Delhi for these cherished occasions. They celebrated our mutual commitment to inclusive democracy and governance, dedicated that to the welfare of all citizens and all sections of society.

7. Our Prime Minister's visit to Nepal in August 2014 was the first at that level in 17 years. It injected a fresh energy into the relationship and created a steady stream of two-way travel and developmental initiatives. Over the past six years, Prime Minister Modi has visited Nepal four times and the Prime Minister of Nepal has been welcomed in India seven times. At the level of head of state or head of government, our leaders have met 16 times. At the level of Foreign Minister, our Joint Commission has convened three times, and there have been innumerable other official engagements. Our bilateral calendar has never been busier.

8. Our people – Nepal's people and India's people – are our strength, and our endeavours are meant to assist and enable them. Our aspiration of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" and your goal of "Samriddh Nepal, Sukhi Nepali" are entirely compatible. In my meetings here in Kathmandu, with the President and the Prime Minister of Nepal, the Foreign Minister, and my counterpart, the Foreign Secretary, and other dignitaries and officials, I have been left with no doubt that our countries are on the same page and share the same vision. I must acknowledge here that the welcome that my delegation and I have received. It has been moving and memorable.

Friends,

9. Aside from our common civilisational inheritance, India's relationship with Nepal rests on four pillars – development cooperation; stronger connectivity; expanded infrastructure and economic projects; easier and enhanced access to educational opportunities in India for the young people of Nepal. Underlying all of these is a steadfast principle: we will work to Nepal's priorities. The structure that the pillars hold up is also well-defined and unchanging – mutually beneficial people-to-people contacts. And in all this technology, particularly digital technology, is to my mind a force multiplier.

10. India sees itself as Nepal's foremost friend and development partner. Developmental experiences that we share with you are developmental experiences that have proved successful

and beneficial in our own country. Given our similarities in environmental conditions and socio-economic challenges, there is so much we can learn from each other. Let me illustrate with an example of my own career. As a younger officer, I have vivid memories of an iodised salt programme that India supported in the hilly remote districts of Nepal. It helped address the chronic ailment of goitre, and mirrored India's own battle against this pressing health problem. As someone from the hills myself I personally experienced the incidence of Goitre in many of our hill districts in India.

11. One programmatic mechanism that we have used to good effect is that of High Impact Community Development Projects, implemented in Nepal with India's support. These projects are tailored to the needs of the local community, create community assets, and promote socio-economic welfare at the grassroots level. We are mindful in designing sustainable programmes that contribute to the community and don't in any manner encumber it.

12. Such development projects have been implemented in all 77 of Nepal's districts and over a hundred of them have been completed since 2014 when our Prime Minister visited Nepal for the first time when he took over. They cover diverse sectors such as education, health, irrigation, drinking water, preservation of culture, skill development, youth training, and agriculture. These are projects that have immediate and positive impact on the lives of people, touching everybody in society.

13. Enhancing cross-border connectivity and infrastructure projects are also critical. They unlock potential of millions and in millions. Connectivity projects come in various forms. Physical connectivity projects such as highways, rail and air links and inland waterways enhance movement of goods and people. Energy connectivity – whether power transmission lines or petroleum pipelines – contribute to the well-being of each other's citizens, and build mutual trust and partnerships. Digital connectivity through optical fibre networks is our route to the future, particularly, and as we find in India, with remote access to education, healthcare and other services through the digital medium. Finally, trade facilitation through upgraded border infrastructure makes for easier transit and seamless commerce.

14. Several examples can be provided in each of the categories. I will mention only a few:

- The Motihari–Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline was the first of its kind in the region. It has created capacity to carry two million metric tonnes of petroleum products into Nepal, and has already led to savings of over Nepali Rupees 800 million for the people of this country
- Brisk implementation of the 900 MW Arun III hydropower project is underway, and cross-border power transmission lines have been upgraded
- The Jayanagar–Kurtha cross-border rail line should be operational shortly. It will make Janakpur so much quicker to visit from India. Tourism from India would be an important area of

employment, commerce and opportunity. We want to promote it to the extent that we can.

- The modern integrated check-posts at Birgunj and Biratnagar have transformed cross-border movement of people and goods, and work on the integrated check-posts at Nepalgunj has commenced

15. The spectrum of our bilateral cooperation is all-encompassing. It traverses centuries, quite literally. An element of our cooperation that is often missed is the restoration and conservation of the cultural heritage of Nepal. Some years ago, at your request, we shared proposals for the conservation of monuments in the revered Pashupati temple complex. After the earthquake of 2015, India cooperated with Nepal in the restoration of 30 heritage locations, including the iconic Seto Machindranath temple in Kathmandu, the Hiranyavarna Mahavihar at Patan, and the Jangam Matha at Bhaktapur. Our best domain specialists are at the service of the living history of Nepal.

16. Yet, our endeavours are meant to not only preserve and celebrate the past but also build and nurture the future. Given the young population – both in India and Nepal – education is a crucial bridge. Seventy schools and 150 health facilities are coming up in 12 districts of Nepal with Indian support. I know that our Ambassador Vinay Kwatra and his colleagues have been working ceaselessly to ensure that many of these commitments that are being made at the level of our leadership are implemented in a timely manner. And I think going over, taking stock of the implementation projects, I find that we have done extraordinarily well despite Covid in this context. Few projects are as satisfying as those that promote learning and the health for the well-being of our citizens.

17. As a neighbour and friend, India sees itself as Nepal's natural and instinctive responder in times of crisis. The devastating earthquake of 2015 was a test for the people and government of Nepal. The courage and resilience of the citizens of Nepal, the grit and determination in rebuilding lives and livelihoods, was an inspiration for us in India and across the world. On our part, we were happy to contribute to this process, as first responders and then towards long-term reconstruction.

18. The outlay of Indian earthquake-related assistance is US\$ 1 billion but its true value is not in monetary terms. It lies in how it has helped communities on the ground. To cite an instance, 46,000 houses have been built in Gorkha and Nuwakot. They incorporate earthquake-resilient technologies in line with your motto of "Build Back Better", and they epitomise humanity's ability to triumph over adversity.

19. The year 2020 has brought with it an additional challenge in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has been the most globally disruptive event since World War II. Its devastating impact on society and on the economy is still being tabulated. Recovery, resilience and rebuilding will require both perseverance and planning. Through this period, Nepal and India

have been together. We have suffered together and we have fought back together.

20. It has not been easy. When the pandemic struck, India found itself short of critical health supplies. We did not manufacture personal protective equipment (PPEs) or ventilators. Only two companies in India made N95 masks and we were woefully lacking testing kits. In a short span of time, with a whole-of-government and I would say whole-of-society resolve, led by the Prime Minister, our people rose to the occasion. National capacities were built, by the state, by civil society and by the private sector.

21. We created 15,466 dedicated Covid-19 facilities with 1.5 million isolation beds. Today there are over a hundred PPE manufacturers in India, making 150,000 PPE kits a day. At last count, there were 48 companies making ventilators. And our Prime Minister mentioned that when we started with the Covid crisis there were 16,000 ventilators in hospitals all over India. Today, we plan to have 500,000 ventilators. Testing kits production has gone up considerably and we are conducting about a million tests a day. We are supplying masks, PPEs, diagnostic test kits and ventilators to other countries. Our pharmaceutical companies ramped up production of drugs, especially HCQ and paracetamol. We shipped these to 150 countries even in lockdown conditions. Whatever we had and whatever we could, we shared with our friends – including here in Nepal.

22. We were only too glad to extend assistance to Nepal in dealing with the Covid-19 outbreak, be it in equipment and supplies, or ensuring uninterrupted flow of goods across the border. We also assisted in repatriating Nepalese citizens from various countries along with our own citizens. Yesterday, I had the privilege of handing over 2000 vials of Remdesivir injections to the Hon'ble Foreign Minister. I would like to emphasise our continued and uninterrupted commitment to Nepal.

23. We are on the cusp of the availability of a vaccine for the novel coronavirus. As the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines, India is at the forefront of this effort. We have at least five promising vaccine candidates at advanced stages of trials. Dozens of sites across India are conducting vaccine trials on all ages and social groups. I would like to assure the people of Nepal that, once a vaccine is rolled out, meeting Nepal's requirements would be a priority for us. Given our genetic profiles, what works for India is likely to work for Nepal as well. Together we will recover from the pandemic and together we will protect our people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

24. The year 2020 has been a defining experience for all of us. In India it has reinforced our determination to build a stronger national economy, with robust industrial capacities and deft use of technology. Technology is a cross-cutting instrument, whether in factories or farms, in software or social transformation. We have learnt this over the past few years in India as digital banking and biometric identities have made our financial system more inclusive and accessible

to underprivileged sections; as renewable energy and water conservation and recharge have sought to redress ecological and environmental imbalances; and as IT and biotech have emerged as cutting-edge tools for economic opportunity and societal transformation.

25. We are dreaming of a new India, a new India as envisioned by our Prime Minister, an India with modern amenities for all our people, an India that is a middle income society. And we are dreaming with our eyes wide open – we are persisting with efforts to realise these dreams. We would like our friends in Nepal to share our dreams and be a part of this journey. We cannot do it alone, just as you cannot fulfil your dreams alone. In our region, our South Asia, we are symbiotically linked. We need each other.

26. India's market is available to Nepal – to your companies, your start-ups, and your teeming talent pool. Nepal's hydropower potential can be a major source of clean energy for the subcontinent, and an economic game changer for your country. Together we can find solutions to climate change and environmental concerns that trouble us. Together Nepal's youth and India's young people can explore the exciting age of technology and innovation. India's education institutions, research and skilling centres, and start-up ecosystem are primed to forge partnerships with Nepal.

27. India's rise, India's economic growth and India's modernisation are inextricably linked to our region and our geography. The Indian Premier League is embellished by Nepalese cricketers and the Indian Soccer League by Nepal's talented young footballers. The arena of sport is sending us a message, whether here in Kathmandu or in New Delhi.

28. यसलाई ध्यान दिएर सुनौं अनि निर्णायक रूपमा अघि बढौं। हामी नेपालका र भारत का भावी पुस्ता हरू प्रति जवाफदेही छौं। घनिष्ठ मित्र र छिमेकी को रूपमा हामी सँगै काम गर्न आवश्यक छ। हामीले हाम्रो युवाहरूको आकांक्षा लाई पूरा गर्न आवश्यक छ। शसक्त सहकार्यमुखी भारत-नेपाल सम्बन्ध दुई देशका जनताहरूको हितमा छ।

धन्यवाद।

Thank You.