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Azerbaijan-Nepal Relations: New Opportunities on the Horizon

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Abstract

This study offers a comprehensive academic and policy-oriented analysis of bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Nepal, tracing the evolution of their ties across political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Although historically limited in interaction due to geographic distance and differing regional priorities, the relationship has notably intensified since 2023. Political relations have matured through high-level visits, the establishment of parliamentary friendship groups, and the first-ever foreign ministry consultation meeting, culminating in plans to formalize cooperation through a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding. Economically, trade remains minimal, but both sides have identified alternative areas of engagement, including investment in hydropower, digital governance collaboration, and tourism promotion. Azerbaijan's e-governance expertise and Nepal's renewable energy potential offer mutual benefits for technical cooperation. Culturally, the relationship is growing through educational scholarships, tourism, and symbolic exchanges, with rising people-to-people contact and shared engagement in multilateral forums such as the Non-Aligned Movement and COP29. The study concludes that the period between 2023 and 2025 marks a pivotal phase in the Azerbaijan-Nepal relationship, shifting from symbolic friendship to structured cooperation. It illustrates how two geographically distant, developing nations can forge meaningful partnerships rooted in mutual respect, multilateral engagement, and complementary development goals.



Introduction

Azerbaijan and Nepal, two geographically distant and culturally distinct countries, have quietly sustained diplomatic relations for three decades. Initially characterized by modest and largely symbolic interactions, their bilateral engagement remained peripheral for much of the post-Cold War era. With no resident embassies and limited direct trade or investment, ties between the two nations were largely maintained through multilateral platforms such as the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Both countries, as members of the Global South, found common ground in advocating for sovereignty, development rights, and the principles of non-alignment, yet these shared values did not initially translate into robust bilateral cooperation.

In recent years, however, Azerbaijan-Nepal relations have entered a new and dynamic phase. Since 2023, diplomatic momentum has accelerated through high-level visits, expanded political consultations, and mutual expressions of interest in deeper collaboration. Landmark developments such as the first-ever foreign ministry consultations in 2025, reciprocal visits by heads of state and high-ranking officials, and plans for the signing of a foundational Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signal a deliberate effort by both countries to move from symbolic friendship to structured partnership. The leadership in both Baku and Kathmandu has increasingly emphasized not only political goodwill but also tangible cooperation across economic, educational, and cultural spheres.

This work provides a comprehensive and policy-oriented overview of the evolving bilateral relationship. It draws on official statements, diplomatic records, trade data, and multilateral engagements to assess how Azerbaijan and Nepal are redefining the partnership. The analysis unfolds across three main dimensions: political-diplomatic ties, economic and developmental cooperation, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges. It highlights the role of shared platforms, especially the NAM and global climate summits, in fostering bilateral dialogue, while also examining how new drivers such as digital governance, renewable energy, and educational exchange are reshaping the bilateral agenda.

As Azerbaijan and Nepal commemorate the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025, the timing is particularly apt to take stock of the progress made and the potential for future cooperation. By tracing the journey from early multilateral encounters to structured bilateral mechanisms, this study not only documents the deepening of ties but also explores how two landlocked, developing countries, despite vast differences in geography and geostrategic focus, can find common cause in diplomacy, development, and global engagement. The case of Azerbaijan–Nepal relations offers a compelling example



of South–South cooperation in an increasingly multipolar world, where smaller and mid-sized states are playing more assertive roles in shaping inclusive international partnerships.

Historical Overview of Azerbaijan-Nepal Relations

Nepal formally established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan on 28 February, 1995.ⁱ Nepal's recognition and engagement came a few years into Azerbaijan's independence, setting the foundation for a friendly relationship based on mutual trust and respect. Since then, official ties have remained cordial and friendly. Both nations, as developing countries and members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), found common ground in international principles such as sovereignty and territorial integrity. Given the physical distance and relatively limited volume of bilateral dealings, neither country has opened a resident embassy in the other. Instead, they manage relations through concurrent accreditations. Nepal's Ambassador in Moscow is concurrently accredited to Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan's Ambassador in New Delhi is concurrently accredited to Nepal. This arrangement underscores the practical approach both governments have taken to maintain diplomatic links without an extensive on-the-ground presence.

In the first two decades after 1995, direct bilateral exchanges were infrequent. Neither country was a priority focus for the other, as Nepal was preoccupied with internal political changes (including a decade-long civil conflict and subsequent democratic transitions) and Azerbaijan was focused on post-Soviet state-building and regional issues in the South Caucasus. Nonetheless, multilateral forums provided opportunities for contact. Both countries cooperated at the United Nations and became active participants in the Non-Aligned Movement, with Nepal being a founding NAM memberⁱⁱ and Azerbaijan joining NAM in 2011.ⁱⁱⁱ These platforms allowed Azerbaijani and Nepali delegations to support each other on broader principles and forge a sense of partnership in the Global South.^{iv} Despite limited engagement, Azerbaijan demonstrated goodwill toward Nepal at times of need. Notably, after Nepal's devastating 2015 earthquake, Azerbaijan promptly sent humanitarian aid to assist with relief efforts.^v This act of solidarity during Nepal's crisis was well received in Kathmandu and remembered as a sign of genuine friendship. Additionally, the Azerbaijani government offers scholarship programs to the citizens of member states of the Non-Aligned Movement.^{vi} Through these government-funded grants, Nepali students have been able to pursue higher education at Azerbaijani universities, helping to foster meaningful people-to-people connections. Although modest in scale, such



initiatives have laid the foundation for strengthening bilateral ties beyond official diplomacy.

Furthermore, the relationship between Nepal and Azerbaijan began with diplomatic engagement through multilateral platforms. In 2018, Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, traveled to Baku for the 18th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Mid-Term Ministerial Conference, marking the first visit by a high-ranking Nepali official to Azerbaijan.^{vii} This signaled the nascent stage of diplomatic interactions between the two countries. Building on this momentum, in 2019, Nepali Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli visited Baku for the 18th NAM Summit of Heads of State and Government, a milestone as the first visit by a Nepali head of government, albeit for a multilateral event.^{viii} These early engagements, primarily within the context of NAM activities or international conferences hosted by Azerbaijan, laid the groundwork for more direct and focused bilateral developments from 2023 to 2025.

Political Relations and Diplomatic Engagement

Politically, the relationship between Nepal and Azerbaijan has been consistently amicable. Neither country has pressing bilateral political disputes or conflicts of interest, which has allowed diplomacy to center on cooperation and mutual support. High-level officials often describe the ties as based on friendship and goodwill. For instance, during a meeting in mid-2023, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev noted that relations with Nepal were "good" and that there were opportunities to expand ties further.^{ix} Similarly, Nepal's President has lauded the "friendly relations" between the two countries in international forums.^x This positive tone at the leadership level has provided impetus for broadening the scope of engagement in recent years.

With diplomatic missions non-resident, day-to-day political contact is maintained through embassies in third countries (Moscow and New Delhi). Nonetheless, both sides have made efforts to keep channels open. An *Azerbaijan–Nepal inter-parliamentary relations working group* exists in Azerbaijan's Milli Majlis (Parliament) to liaise with Nepali counterparts, chaired by a member of the Azerbaijani parliament.^{xi xii} In Nepal's Federal Parliament, a Nepal-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Friendship Group was established in December 2024, with Hon. Dr. Anjan Shakya (of the CPN-UML party) as the convener.^{xiii} These parliamentary groups aim to bolster inter-legislative dialogue and symbolize growing political interest in the relationship. They may facilitate exchanges of



lawmakers or friendship visits in the future, further solidifying political ties at multiple levels of government.

Political relations between Azerbaijan and Nepal have increasingly been shaped by high-level bilateral engagements, particularly since 2018. A key milestone was the visit of Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali to Baku in April 2018, where he led the Nepali delegation to the 18th Mid-Term Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).^{xiv} While the event was multilateral in nature, Gyawali's participation and bilateral meetings with Azerbaijani officials, including a courtesy call on President Ilham Aliyev, laid important groundwork for enhanced diplomatic ties and reinforced mutual political goodwill. This momentum continued in October 2019, when Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli attended the 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the NAM in Baku. Although the summit was a multilateral forum, the visit elevated Nepal's visibility in Azerbaijan and provided a platform for sideline meetings between Nepali and Azerbaijani officials.^{xv} These interactions served as a catalyst for further strengthening bilateral relations, allowing both countries to explore areas of cooperation and enhance diplomatic understanding. These diplomatic exchanges, both at the ministerial and head-of-government levels, have marked a gradual but meaningful expansion of Azerbaijan–Nepal political relations. They reflect a shared commitment to deepening engagement not only within multilateral frameworks like NAM but also through the cultivation of direct bilateral dialogue. Such interactions have played a pivotal role in building mutual trust, exploring common interests, and laying the foundation for cooperation across various sectors including education, tourism, climate diplomacy, and sustainable development.

Azerbaijan's tenure as chair of the Non-Aligned Movement significantly intersected with Nepal's.^{xvi xvii} Azerbaijan hosted numerous NAM events and actively engaged members.^{xviii xix} Nepali officials participated regularly, culminating in July 2023 when Nepal's Foreign Minister Narayan Prakash Saud visited Baku for the NAM Coordinating Bureau Ministerial Meeting (3–6 July 2023).^{xx} During that trip, Foreign Minister Saud had a one-on-one meeting with President Aliyev. In that meeting, Saud praised Azerbaijan's development achievements and leadership, calling Azerbaijan "an example for developing countries" and congratulating Aliyev on his successful NAM chairmanship.^{xxi} He also thanked Azerbaijan for providing scholarships to Nepali students. President Aliyev, on his part, thanked Nepal for supporting Azerbaijan's initiatives as NAM Chair and noted the "fruitful cooperation" between the two countries in international organizations.^{xxii} Both sides discussed prospects for expanding business, economic, and trade relations and agreed on exchanging delegations to explore these opportunities. This meeting underscored how the NAM platform was leveraged to advance bilateral discussions on political and economic cooperation.



Bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Nepal have witnessed notable momentum in April 2025, marked by two significant diplomatic engagements in Kathmandu, both underscoring the expanding scope of political, humanitarian, and economic cooperation between the two countries. On April 27, Vice-President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Leyla Aliyeva, paid a visit to Nepal and met with President Ramchandra Paudel.^{xxiii} During the meeting, she conveyed greetings from the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and reaffirmed Azerbaijan's commitment to fostering friendly and cooperative relations with Nepal. Leyla Aliyeva also highlighted the Heydar Aliyev Foundation's intention to launch several projects in Nepal, particularly in the social and healthcare sectors. During her visit, she toured a rehabilitation center for children with special needs and a municipal hospital in Kathmandu. Both sides acknowledged the importance of expanding cooperation in areas such as humanitarian support, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development. President Paudel expressed appreciation for the Foundation's initiatives and the overall enhancement of Azerbaijan-Nepal relations. President Paudel, recalling his own visit to Baku during the COP29 Summit, emphasized the historic significance of his meeting with President Aliyev and expressed optimism that this high-level dialogue would serve as a catalyst for deepening bilateral cooperation.^{xxiv} Further institutionalizing the political dialogue, the first-ever bilateral Foreign Ministry consultation meeting between Nepal and Azerbaijan was held in Kathmandu on April 30.^{xxv} The meeting was led by Nepal's Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai, and Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov. This milestone session reviewed the full spectrum of bilateral ties and reaffirmed both countries' commitment to enhancing collaboration across bilateral, regional, and multilateral platforms. A key outcome of the consultations was the agreement to establish a formal mechanism for regular diplomatic dialogue, ensuring periodic consultations moving forward. Deputy Minister Mammadov's visit also included courtesy calls on Nepal's top leadership, including President Ramchandra Paudel and Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, reflecting the high level of importance Nepal placed on the Azerbaijani delegation. In addition, Mammadov engaged with economic stakeholders through a roundtable discussion with Investment Board Nepal and delivered a lecture on Azerbaijan's foreign policy, organized by Asian Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs (AIDIA)^{xxvi}, signaling an expanded agenda that incorporates economic outreach and public diplomacy alongside political engagement.

In May, COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev^{xxvii} taking part as a keynote speaker in the Sagarmatha Sambaad, in Kathmandu emphasized the urgent need for collective action to address climate threats to mountain ecosystems and vulnerable communities at the opening. Sagarmatha Sambaad (Sagarmatha Dialogue) is a multi-stakeholder dialogue forum committed to deliberate on the most prominent issues of global, regional and



national significance, which has been held in Kathmandu on May 16-18. In the sidelines of Sagarmatha Sambaad, Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) met with COP29 President and Representative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on climate issues, Mukhtar Babayev, and also requested him to invest in hydropower in Nepal.^{xxviii}

Likewise, in November 2024, Nepal's President Ramchandra Paudel visited Baku to attend the 29th Conference of Parties (COP-29) to the UN Climate Change Convention, which Azerbaijan was hosting.^{xxix} This visit, at the invitation of President Aliyev, was the highest-level Nepali visit to Azerbaijan to date. President Paudel delivered Nepal's national statement at the World Leaders Climate Summit on November 12, highlighting Nepal's climate vulnerabilities and needs.^{xxx} On November 14, 2024, President Paudel held a bilateral meeting with President Aliyev, the first-ever meeting between the Presidents of Nepal and Azerbaijan.^{xxxi} Paudel expressed gratitude for Azerbaijan's warm hospitality and praised the excellent organization of the COP summit. He noted that he was pleased to experience Azerbaijani culture during his stay.^{xxxii} Importantly, President Paudel reaffirmed the friendly relations and cooperation in international forums, including on climate change and sustainable development. He also conveyed that Nepal, after years of political transition, was entering a phase of sustainable development and is eager to attract foreign investors, especially in the tourism and hydropower sectors.^{xxxiii} In this context, Paudel invited Azerbaijani investment into Nepal and even extended an invitation to President Aliyev for an official visit to Nepal. President Aliyev welcomed the invitation and hailed the meeting as historic, expressing hope that it would "give a boost" to bilateral relations. He emphasized the need to enhance economic and trade ties and suggested both countries increase cooperation and mutual support at the UN and other international organizations. The two leaders also touched on the ongoing foreign ministry consultations and agreed on the importance of collaboration on climate issues during Azerbaijan's COP presidency. This encounter at COP29 not only reinforced political goodwill but also linked their bilateral agenda with a global issue of common concern. President Paudel's participation in climate events including leading discussions on mountain issues on the sidelines of COP29 and his bilateral meeting added a new dimension to the relationship, as noted by Azerbaijani officials.

In their political dialogue, Nepal and Azerbaijan often underline shared values and support in multilateral settings. Both countries advocate for the interests of developing and least-developed countries on the world stage. For example, at COP29, President Paudel urged consideration of developing nations' interests and sought fulfillment of climate finance commitments by developed countries^{xxxiv}, a stance President Aliyev, as host, could empathize with. In the United Nations, the two have generally supported each other's

candidacies and resolutions whenever aligned with mutual principles. Cooperation in peacekeeping (Nepal is a major UN peacekeeper contributor, and Azerbaijan has engaged in UN peacekeeping discussions) and development issues has been positive, though not highly publicized.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains a cornerstone of their multilateral engagement. Azerbaijan's active NAM chairmanship (2019–2023) saw initiatives like the NAM Parliamentary Network and NAM Youth Network, which President Aliyev launched to revitalize the movement. Nepal, as a committed NAM member, supported these initiatives, a fact for which Aliyev explicitly thanked Nepal. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Azerbaijan (as NAM Chair) created a NAM COVID-19 Response Fund and convened special sessions. Nepal participated and benefited from the collective support mechanisms, illustrating solidarity.^{xxxv}

Another emerging area of multilateral cooperation is climate and sustainable mountain development. Both countries are members of the Group of 77 (G-77) coalition of developing nations at the UN, and share concerns on climate justice. Nepal, a mountainous country, and Azerbaijan, which includes mountain and lowland areas, found common ground at COP29.^{xxxvi} Nepal's President even chaired a high-level dialogue on "Advancing the Mountain Agenda" on the sidelines of COP29, an event where Azerbaijan's support as host was critical.^{xxxvii} Such collaboration in global conferences enhances mutual understanding and allows each to voice issues important to the other (e.g., Nepal highlighting mountain ecosystem challenges, Azerbaijan highlighting energy transition and resilience).

Perhaps the most telling sign of deepening political relations is the intent to formalize agreements. In an extraordinary revelation, Deputy Foreign Minister Mammadov noted in May 2025 that no bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or agreement had been signed between Nepal and Azerbaijan in the first 30 years of ties, a reflection of how informal and low-key the relationship had been.^{xxxviii} However, he announced that both sides are now working towards signing their first-ever MoU in the near future. This planned MoU (content yet to be disclosed as of mid-2025) would mark a significant milestone in formalizing cooperation. The areas likely covered could be regular political consultations, cultural exchange, or economic collaboration, given these have been focal points in recent talks. The move to sign an MoU indicates a mutual desire to institutionalize the partnership and ensure continuity and concrete projects, moving beyond ad-hoc interactions.



In political conversations, both countries have started identifying specific fields for collaboration. During the 2025 Foreign Ministry consultations in Kathmandu, both sides discussed ways to enhance cooperation in a range of sectors, “trade and investment, tourism and culture, education, climate change and clean energy, among others”.^{xxxix} These broad areas, agreed at the diplomatic level, highlight that the political will exists to expand the relationship horizontally. The fact that climate change and clean energy featured in the talks shows alignment with global priorities and Azerbaijan’s interest (as an energy producer) to engage Nepal on renewable energy or related policy.^{xl} Tourism and culture indicate recognition of people-to-people linkages as a tool to bring the countries closer together. Trade and investment were highlighted, acknowledging the need to boost economic ties (discussed in the next section). Also notable is education, which likely builds on the existing scholarship programs and could expand to academic exchanges or research collaboration.

Currently, defense ties between Nepal and Azerbaijan are minimal to non-existent. Nepal’s military engagements abroad are largely through UN peacekeeping, and Azerbaijan’s defense partnerships focus on its region. However, a tangential security issue has emerged related to irregular migration (discussed under the Cultural/people section below), which requires consular coordination. Aside from that, law enforcement cooperation has seen a small example. In October 2024, Nepal’s Attorney General Ramesh Badal visited Baku for the 29th Annual Conference of the International Association of Prosecutors and met Azerbaijan’s Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev. They noted progress in bilateral relations and a favorable atmosphere for cooperation between their offices.^{xli} During this visit, Nepal’s Attorney General, Ramesh Badal, and his delegation also toured the “ASAN Xidmet” center.^{xlii} Ulvi Mehdiyev, who heads Azerbaijan’s State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations, explained how the ASAN centers operate and shared information about the Agency’s current social innovation initiatives. Chairman Mehdiyev pointed out that these centers use advanced technology to offer quick, clear, and easy-to-use public and private services to various individuals and organizations in Azerbaijan. Besides the ASAN Xidmet center, the Nepali delegation also learned about the “INNOLAND” Incubation and Acceleration Center, the “Mobile ASAN Xidmet,” and “ABAD.” This gave them a broader understanding of Azerbaijan’s work in innovation, public service, and community development. Attorney General Badal expressed his strong admiration for the ASAN Xidmet approach and stated his intention to discuss it with relevant authorities in Nepal. The meeting also explored possible areas for collaboration between the two nations in the future.

While this was a niche interaction, it suggests openness to cooperation in legal affairs, sharing best practices in the rule of law, etc., at least symbolically. The political

dimension of Nepal–Azerbaijan relations has transformed from a relatively quiet friendship into an active engagement characterized by high-level visits, structured dialogues, and cooperation on global issues. By 2025, the two nations have not only celebrated 30 years of ties but are clearly looking ahead to broaden this partnership. The groundwork laid in political understanding and goodwill is now feeding directly into efforts to boost economic and cultural ties.

Trade, Investment, and Development Cooperation

Economic engagement between Nepal and Azerbaijan has historically been minimal, a fact acknowledged by both sides. The geographic distance (over 4,000 km apart) and the reality that both are landlocked countries (Nepal between India and China; Azerbaijan enclosed by land and the Caspian Sea) have posed logistical challenges to direct trade. Neither country is a major trading partner to the other, and there have been no significant joint economic projects until now. However, recent diplomatic talks suggest a desire to identify niches for trade and investment cooperation.

Official trade statistics show that the bilateral trade turnover is extremely low. Nepal’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes the scale of trade, investment, and tourism interactions as “nominal at the moment”.^{xliii} For example, Nepal’s exports to Azerbaijan consist of a few specialty items: handmade carpets and other textile floor coverings, clothing accessories, works of art and handicrafts, etc. These reflect Nepal’s traditional export strengths (carpets being a notable Nepali product) finding a small niche in the Azerbaijani market. On the other hand, Nepal’s imports from Azerbaijan have included plastics, electrical machinery and equipment, according to Nepali records. This implies that some Azerbaijani-made plastic goods or electrical components (perhaps re-exported via a third country) made their way to Nepal in small quantities.

To put numbers in perspective, the trade data from Nepal’s side (Trade and Export Promotion Centre) shows fluctuating but generally tiny values. In one recent year, 2020, Nepal recorded an anomalously high export figure of roughly \$2.5 million to Azerbaijan against \$1.7 million in imports, resulting in a positive trade balance of about \$0.83 million for Nepal. This spike was unusual, possibly a one-off shipment of carpets or handicrafts in bulk. In the subsequent years, trade collapsed: Nepal’s exports were only \$10,000 in 2021 and \$7,000 in 2022, with virtually zero imports from Azerbaijan in those years. From Azerbaijan’s perspective, official data likewise indicate very low trade. Azerbaijan’s State Statistics Committee recorded total trade turnover with Nepal of around \$55–57 thousand per year in 2021–2022.^{xliv} (The discrepancies in the 2020 figure between Nepali and

Azerbaijani data highlight possible differences in accounting or classification, but regardless, the volumes are minor.) Even as late as Jan-Sept 2023, Azerbaijan reported trade with Nepal at only \$540 (likely just a few hundred dollars).

Sadly, as of now, there are no publicly available official trade statistics specifically detailing the bilateral trade figures between Azerbaijan and Nepal for the year 2024. According to the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, the country's total foreign trade turnover for the first seven months of 2024 amounted to approximately \$26.24 billion USD.^{xliv} However, this data does not specify trade volumes with individual countries like Nepal. Nepal's trade data for 2024 is available through its Department of Customs, but detailed bilateral trade figures with Azerbaijan are not separately listed.^{xlvi} This omission suggests that trade volumes between the two nations are minimal and not significant enough to be highlighted individually in official reports.

Merchandise trade is virtually non-existent. Neither country features in the other's list of significant trading partners. Geography and transit are the primary obstacles, with no direct air, land or sea link, goods must transit via third countries (through India, Iran, or Türkiye and then by sea or airfreight). The cost of shipping small volumes is high relative to the value of goods. Additionally, the two economies have limited complementarity. Azerbaijan's main exports (oil, gas, petrochemicals) do not currently find a market in Nepal (which imports fuel primarily from India as India is the sole exporter of petroleum products to Nepal), and Nepal's traditional exports (agricultural products, textiles) have easier markets nearer home or in the Western countries.

Recognizing these challenges, both governments have signaled interest in improving trade. During the 2025 bilateral consultations, trade was a central topic. Both sides discussed “ways and means of further enhancing trade and investment”.^{xlvi} President Aliyev also emphasized to President Paudel that economic and trade ties should be enhanced.^{xlvi} One idea is to identify niche products or new sectors for trade. For instance, Nepal could potentially export tea, coffee, herbal products or pashmina to Azerbaijan if awareness increases. Conversely, Azerbaijan could export chemical products or fertilizers to Nepal (Azerbaijan produces some petrochemical derivatives) if a route via a third country is viable.

An interesting domain for potential cooperation is energy. Azerbaijan is a major oil and gas producer, while Nepal is an energy importer (petroleum products) and also has huge untapped hydropower potential. Although it is not straightforward for Azerbaijan to physically supply oil to Nepal (due to distance and Nepal's reliance on Indian transit routes), there could be cooperation in energy investment or know-how. Nepal's President

specifically pitched Nepal's hydropower sector as ripe for foreign investment to Azerbaijan in 2024.^{xlix} This suggests Nepal might welcome Azeri investment in hydropower plants or infrastructure. Such investment, if it materialized, would not be direct "trade" but would impact economic relations significantly.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) between Nepal and Azerbaijan is likewise very limited, but not zero. As of the latest data in mid-2022, Azerbaijan's total FDI stock in Nepal was about NPR 5.2 million (Nepalese Rupees)^l, roughly equivalent to only \$40,000. This placed Azerbaijan as a low-ranking source of FDI (ranked 45th, accounting for a mere 0.002% of Nepal's FDI stock). However, Nepal's Department of Industry reports that there have been 5 registered projects with Azerbaijani investment up to the fiscal year 2022/23, bringing in a total pledged investment of NPR 46 million (around \$350,000) and promising 208 jobs in Nepal. These projects are small-scale but indicate some entrepreneurial interest. They might include ventures like restaurants, trading companies, or tourism-related businesses set up by individual Azerbaijani investors in Nepal. The creation of over 200 jobs from \$350k investment suggests labor-intensive sectors, possibly hospitality or services.

One known instance of business interaction is Azerbaijan's experience in infrastructure development. Ambassador Ashraf Shikhaliyev noted that Azerbaijan has companies with vast experience in building large projects (for example, international airports) and expressed that such companies "can come to Nepal for the development of infrastructure", as Azerbaijan is keen to contribute in that area^{li}. This was mentioned during his 2022 visit to a Nepal Infrastructure Summit. While no concrete project has yet resulted, areas like airport construction, road or tunnel building, or energy infrastructure could be opportunities where Azerbaijani firms (some of which work internationally) might bid in Nepal, if facilitated by government agreements.

To catalyze economic ties, high-level visits have included business components. When Deputy FM Mammadov visited Kathmandu in 2025, a roundtable was organized by Investment Board Nepal (a government agency that facilitates large investments of over NPR 10 billion) with the Azerbaijani delegation^{lii}. This suggests Nepal showcased potential projects or sectors to the visiting officials, signaling openness to Azerbaijani investors. Likewise, discussions during official meetings touched on enhancing the business-to-business links and exchange of delegations to explore trade opportunities^{liii}. There is talk of possibly establishing a Nepal-Azerbaijan business council or chamber in the future, though none exists yet, as a platform for information exchange among entrepreneurs.

Given the physical trade barriers, both countries have astutely identified digital cooperation as a promising avenue. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and e-governance are sectors where “borders do not matter” and distance is irrelevant, as Ambassador Shikhaliyev observed. Azerbaijan has internationally recognized success in e-governance through its ASAN Service – a one-stop public service delivery platform that won the UN Public Service Award in 2015. During an official visit to Nepal in October 2023, Ambassador Shikhaliyev extensively briefed Nepali officials, including the Prime Minister, on the ASAN model. He explained that ASAN centers provide over 400 services under one roof, dramatically improving citizen satisfaction (with a reported 99% approval rating). Considering Nepal’s own governance challenges and mountainous terrain, the mobile ASAN service units (which bring services to remote areas) were highlighted as particularly relevant for Nepal. He offered that Azerbaijan is “ready to share its positive experience with friendly Nepal” in this domain. Nepali officials showed interest; indeed, the concept of leveraging e-governance aligns with Nepal’s digital Nepal framework. Collaboration could involve Azerbaijan helping Nepal develop similar service centers or digital platforms, training Nepali IT personnel, or sharing software solutions. In the 2025 consultations, e-governance and digital public service likely featured under the broader cooperation areas, given prior discussions. This sort of knowledge transfer is a cost-effective way to deepen economic ties and yields mutual benefit. Nepal improves governance, and Azerbaijan gains an international partner that validates its model.

Tourism is another economic area with potential. The exchange of tourists between Nepal and Azerbaijan is currently quite small but growing incrementally. In 2023, about 116 Azerbaijani tourists visited Nepal, according to Nepal’s Department of Immigration. This number, while modest, shows that a trickle of Azerbaijanis are interested in Nepal, likely for its famous trekking, mountains (the Himalayas), and cultural heritage. Conversely, the number of Nepalis visiting Azerbaijan is not well documented but is presumed to be very low. Nepalis generally require a visa and there had been no direct promotion of Azerbaijan as a destination until recently. Azerbaijan, however, has started pitching itself as a tourist destination to Asian countries. It offers an e-visa (ASAN Visa) system that simplifies visa issuance for most nationalities, including Nepalis. In the Kathmandu meetings of 2023, the Azerbaijani side made a presentation on the benefits of the ASAN Visa model to promote tourist flow, noting how it could facilitate more visitors from Nepal.^{liv} With improved awareness and easier visa processes, more Nepali travelers might consider Azerbaijan, for instance, pilgrimage to Baku’s historical sites like Fire Temple, or business tourism en route to Europe. Additionally, both nations have scenic attractions (the Caucasus mountains and Caspian coast in Azerbaijan; the Himalayas in Nepal) that could be jointly packaged for third-country tourists.

A limiting factor for tourism and trade is the lack of direct air connectivity. There are currently no direct flights between Nepal and Azerbaijan. Travelers must transit via hubs like Dubai, Doha, or Istanbul. Azerbaijan Airlines does not fly to South Asia, and Nepal's airlines do not fly to the Caucasus. However, with Azerbaijan's expanding profile as a transit hub (Baku lies on the air route between South Asia and Europe), future connectivity improvements are possible. For example, Azerbaijan could consider code-share agreements that make Kathmandu reachable with one stop. Improved connectivity would undoubtedly boost tourism figures in both directions and lower costs for businesses. Both countries are involved in some multilateral economic initiatives where their interests intersect. Azerbaijan's recent accession as a full member of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation in 2024^{lv} doesn't directly involve Nepal, but Azerbaijan's participation in broader South-South economic forums could create indirect opportunities that Nepal can tap into via other partners. Meanwhile, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) serves as a shared framework for both Azerbaijan and Nepal, which formally joined the initiative in 2015^{lvi} and 2017,^{lvii} respectively. The BRI holds the potential to conceptually bridge South Asia and the South Caucasus more closely in the future. Should trans-Himalayan infrastructure in Nepal and trans-Caspian transport routes in Azerbaijan continue to develop, a long-term prospect of overland trade linking the two regions through a chain of countries may emerge. While such connectivity remains a distant goal, it presents a strategic dimension worth considering from an academic perspective.\

Direct development aid between Nepal and Azerbaijan is minimal. Azerbaijan, while an upper-middle-income country with energy wealth, is not a traditional donor to Nepal (Nepal relies on aid from countries like India, China, Japan, the USA, etc.). Azerbaijan does channel some international development assistance through institutions like AIDA (Azerbaijan International Development Agency), often to NAM countries in need. Beyond the humanitarian aid in 2015, there haven't been major aid grants to Nepal. However, Azerbaijan's role in global funds (for example, contributions to UN funds or the NAM's COVID fund) indirectly benefits countries like Nepal. One noteworthy form of "aid" is the scholarship program offered by Azerbaijan to citizens of member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Non-Aligned Movement, Small Island Developing States, and countries with which Azerbaijan shares cultural, ethnic, or historical ties.^{lviii}

In conclusion, while the economic relationship between Nepal and Azerbaijan remains the weakest aspect of their bilateral ties, it is also a key area both sides are actively seeking to strengthen. Recognizing the geographic constraints that limit traditional trade, the two countries are pragmatically shifting focus toward alternative avenues: investments in niche sectors, technology transfer, e-governance cooperation, tourism development, and



multilateral economic engagement. Encouragingly, discussions around economic collaboration have become more frequent and concrete, with officials exploring opportunities in hydropower investment, digital cooperation, and a potential Memorandum of Understanding to formalize economic ties. These developments signal growing momentum and shared interest in broadening the scope of bilateral engagement. If even a few pilot initiatives, such as the entry of an Azerbaijani IT firm into Nepal or a joint tourism promotion campaign, come to fruition, they could serve as catalysts for deeper economic interdependence. Such progress, built on a foundation of strong political goodwill, would mark a meaningful step forward in transforming diplomatic dialogue into tangible outcomes.

Cultural and People-to-People Relations

The cultural dimension of Azerbaijan-Nepal relations is less formalized but provides a meaningful underpinning to the bilateral friendship. “Cultural” ties here encompass educational exchanges, cultural diplomacy, tourism, and general people-to-people contacts. Given the lack of a long historical connection, the two countries are just beginning to learn about each other’s rich heritages. Nonetheless, there have been some notable cultural interactions and programs fostering mutual understanding.

Education has been a bright spot in bilateral cooperation. As part of its outreach to NAM member states, the Government of Azerbaijan offers scholarships (such as, Heydar Aliyev International Education Grant Program) for international students, and Nepali students have been among the beneficiaries. Established by a decree of President Ilham Aliyev on July 8, 2023, the Heydar Aliyev International Education Grant Program enables Nepali students to pursue preparatory courses as well as undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and medical residency programs at leading Azerbaijani universities. These include ADA University, Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University, Khazar University, Azerbaijan State University of Economics, Baku Engineering University, Baku Higher Oil School, Baku State University, Karabakh University, Nakhchivan State University, and the National Aviation Academy. Fields of study under the full scholarship program include engineering, agriculture, medicine, etc.^{lix} Nepal’s Foreign Minister in 2023 acknowledged this, expressing gratitude that “Nepalese students were educated as part of the scholarship programs provided by Azerbaijan”.^{lx} Studying in Azerbaijan gives Nepali youth exposure to Azerbaijani language, culture, and society, creating long-term goodwill ambassadors for Azerbaijan in Nepal. While the exact number of Nepali scholarship recipients is not published, the scale is relatively small (perhaps a handful each year), but growing.



In 2024, as part of the AIDA (Azerbaijan International Development Agency) program jointly implemented by Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Baku-based Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), experts from Nepal—along with participants from Albania, Brazil, Pakistan, the Netherlands, Serbia, Belgium, Australia, Hungary, Morocco, Georgia, and China—took part in a fellowship program hosted by the AIR Center.^{lxi} This engagement marked one of the few instances of Nepali experts participation in Azerbaijani policy-oriented initiatives and think-tank platforms. Conversely, opportunities for Azerbaijani nationals to study or conduct academic research in Nepal remain limited, primarily because Nepal is not yet a common destination for international students outside of South Asia. Nonetheless, the AIDA fellowship and similar exchanges point to the untapped potential for expanding academic and policy collaboration. While institutional ties between universities or research centers have not yet been formally established, such partnerships could be pursued in the future. Academic conferences and think-tank dialogues between the two countries have been virtually non-existent until now, but the groundwork for a more structured and policy-oriented engagement is beginning to take shape. The lecture delivered by Deputy FM Mammadov in Kathmandu on Azerbaijan’s foreign policy in 2025 organized by Asian Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs (AIDIA) can itself be seen as a knowledge exchange initiative, sparking interest among Nepal’s academic and diplomatic community about Azerbaijan.^{lxii}

Neither country has a resident cultural center in the other (e.g., no Nepali cultural center in Baku or Azerbaijani cultural center in Kathmandu). However, cultural diplomacy has taken place through diplomatic events and international fairs. For example, Azerbaijan’s Embassy in India (accredited to Nepal) sometimes participates in multicultural events in New Delhi. In this regard, one report noted Azerbaijan being showcased at a diplomatic charity fair in Delhi, events where Nepali diplomats could also be present, allowing informal cultural exchange.^{lxiii} At high-level visits, cultural elements are included: during President Paudel’s visit to Baku, he noted his pleasure at being exposed to Azerbaijani culture.^{lxiv} This likely refers to cultural performances (music, dance) arranged for COP29 guests and possibly visits to cultural sites like the Old City of Baku or the Heydar Aliyev Center. Such experiences left an impression. Paudel even presented a Nepalese keepsake (a token of Nepali culture, perhaps a handicraft or artwork) to President Aliyev during their meeting, symbolizing cultural goodwill.

Tourism acts as a cultural bridge by enabling people-to-people contact. While current tourist flows are small, they are culturally significant. Azerbaijani travelers who venture to Nepal often do so to experience its unique culture (temples of Kathmandu, wildlife, etc.) and nature (trekking in the Himalayas, possibly even an Everest base camp

visit). As noted, 116 Azerbaijanis visited Nepal in 2023, each of those visits would involve interaction with Nepali guides, hotels, and communities, spreading awareness of Nepal in Azerbaijan via word-of-mouth upon return. Likewise, a few Nepalis have traveled to Azerbaijan. Some Nepali travel entrepreneurs took interest in Azerbaijan after the NAM summit exposure. There have been Nepali tour groups visiting Baku's modern attractions and the ancient fire temple at Ateshgah. Increasing tourism is mutually beneficial culturally, it dispels stereotypes and unfamiliarity.

A special mention within tourism is mountaineering and adventure sports, which tie the two countries in an inspirational way. Nepal, home to Mount Everest and other eight-thousanders, has attracted climbers from around the world, including Azerbaijan. In 2007, Mr. Murad Ashurly became the first Azerbaijani to summit Mount Everest, planting Azerbaijan's flag on the world's highest peak. Another renowned Azerbaijani climber, Israfil Ashurly, also scaled Mount Everest and other Himalayan peaks.^{lxv} These achievements have been celebrated in Azerbaijan (covered in their media) and create a point of pride and connection: the Himalayas become part of Azerbaijan's adventuring narrative. In turn, such stories bring a slice of Nepali geography and culture (Sherpa climbing culture, etc.) into the Azerbaijani public consciousness. Similarly, Nepali mountaineering guides and Sherpas have worked with Azerbaijani climbers, forging personal friendships. This is a niche but potent form of cultural exchange, centered on a shared love of mountains.

With the formal creation of parliamentary friendship groups and the intention to sign MoUs, one likely area for formal agreement, could be culture and education. A cultural cooperation MoU could facilitate exchange of cultural troupes, translation of literary works, or organization of art exhibitions. For example, Nepal could host an exhibition of Azerbaijani carpets and paintings, while Azerbaijan could host a photo exhibition about the Himalayas or Nepali handicrafts. Similarly, academic exchange agreements could allow professors or students to spend a semester in each other's country, enriching cross-cultural understanding. One domain that intersects culture and economics is film shooting and media production. Nepal's mountains and Azerbaijan's landscapes have both attracted foreign film crews. Perhaps in the future, a joint documentary could be made, for instance, focusing on mountain communities in the Caucasus and Himalaya, highlighting traditional knowledge and climate change impacts. Both are members of UNESCO and could collaborate on preserving cultural heritage as well.

In essence, cultural and people-to-people relations between Azerbaijan and Nepal, though currently modest, are steadily evolving. Education and tourism serve as the vanguards of this process, with scholarship opportunities and adventurous travel planting



the seeds of mutual appreciation and understanding. Both countries appear to recognize the value of cultural engagement. Nepal, notably, has explicitly identified culture as a priority area in its recent bilateral agenda with Azerbaijan. By investing in these soft links, Azerbaijan and Nepal are laying a foundation of trust and goodwill that will reinforce the political and economic pillars of their relationship, ensuring a more resilient and multifaceted partnership in the years to come.

Conclusion

As Nepal and Azerbaijan commemorate 30 years of diplomatic relations in 2025, their bilateral relationship stands at an encouraging juncture. Historically distant and low-key, the partnership has been reinvigorated through recent high-level engagements and a broadened agenda. Politically, the countries have moved from general amicability to proactive cooperation, holding their first diplomatic consultations, supporting each other in international fora, and exchanging visits up to the presidential level. There is a clear intention on both sides to institutionalize ties (evidenced by plans for the first MoU and established parliamentary friendship groups), which will anchor the relationship beyond the tenures of individual leaders. Economically, while trade and investment remain minor, a realistic appraisal of challenges has led to creative approaches: focusing on ICT, governance, and niche investments, and leveraging multilateral linkages for development. Both nations are looking to turn political goodwill into tangible economic results, whether through increased trade in specialty goods, Azerbaijani investment in Nepali infrastructure, or collaborative efforts in energy and climate action. Culturally, educational exchanges and tourism have opened small windows into each other's worlds, with the promise of wider vistas as official cultural cooperation grows. The human connections – students, climbers, tourists – add depth to the state-to-state interaction and foster mutual empathy.

In analyzing the recent developments, a few themes emerge. First, multilateral platforms have been catalysts for bilateral progress. The NAM chairmanship of Azerbaijan and the climate summit in Baku and Sagarmatha Sambaad in Kathmandu provided the settings for Nepali and Azerbaijani leaders to meet and understand each other's priorities, effectively jump-starting deeper bilateral dialogue. Second, the relationship is largely complementary and free of conflicts, which gives it room to grow positively. Nepal, as a peaceful non-aligned nation, and Azerbaijan, as an emerging regional player, have found common language in development and South–South cooperation. Neither poses strategic concerns to the other, which means the focus can remain on cooperation. Third, size asymmetry has not hindered engagement: despite Azerbaijan's larger economy and Nepal's larger population, they approach each other as equal partners in the international



community. This respect was evident when President Aliyev called the meeting with Nepal's President historically significant and when Nepal's side actively courted Azerbaijani expertise and investment without reservations.

Looking ahead, one can expect the momentum to continue. Signing foundational agreements (on political consultations, cultural exchange, or economic cooperation) will likely happen soon, providing frameworks for regular interaction. We may see Azerbaijan playing a supportive role in Nepal's pursuit of digital governance and infrastructure upgrades, aligning with Ambassador Shikhaliyev's remark that Azerbaijan is ready to collaborate with Nepal in e-governance. Conversely, Nepal can be a steady supporter of Azerbaijan in broader Asian and global initiatives, be it at the UN (where both may back each other's candidatures) or in advocating for common issues like the rights of landlocked developing countries. There is also scope for both to learn from each other. Nepal from Azerbaijan's post-conflict reconstruction and rapid modernization, and Azerbaijan from Nepal's experience in peacebuilding. Notably, Nepal went through a decade-long civil conflict (1996–2006) and emerged with a successful peace process, transitioning into a federal democratic republic. Azerbaijan, having regained control over previously occupied territories, is now focused on reintegrating these regions and their communities. Nepal's experience in fostering national reconciliation, promoting political inclusion, and managing post-conflict development could provide valuable insights as Azerbaijan navigates its own complex reintegration process.

In conclusion, the bilateral relationship between Azerbaijan and Nepal serves as a textbook example of how two geographically distant countries, with limited historical interaction, can cultivate a cordial and multi-faceted partnership when guided by strong political will and supported by multilateral engagement. The years 2023-2025 have been pivotal in transforming this relationship from a quiet chapter into an active narrative. As they continue on this path, both countries stand to gain, politically through a reliable friend in a different part of Asia, economically through new opportunities and knowledge-sharing, and culturally through the enrichment that comes from connecting diverse peoples. In a world where international cooperation is often dominated by big powers, the Azerbaijan-Nepal story is a heartening reminder of the value of engagement between smaller states, driven by mutual respect and common aspirations for peace and development. It is a relationship still in its adolescence, but one maturing steadily with each exchange of courtesy and each act of collaboration.



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