

India stands for a united, rich, strong Nepal: PM Modi

Offers support to his counterpart's vision of a land-and-water-linked nation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KATHMANDU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said India supported a “united, prosperous and strong” Nepal as he strongly backed his Nepalese counterpart K.P. Sharma Oli’s vision to transform the land-locked Himalayan nation into a land-and-water-linked country.

Mr. Modi made the remarks at a joint press conference after a one-on-one meeting with Mr. Oli, followed by marathon delegation-level talks during which the two sides had extensive discussions on all aspects of the bilateral relationship.

Mr. Modi’s expression of support came after Mr. Oli, in his remarks, said that Ne-



Bound by faith: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart K.P. Sharma Oli at Janakpur. ■PTI

pal’s desire is to create a strong relationship underpinned by mutual trust so that it is not affected by any “occasional or intermittent

differences that are natural between neighbours.”

Mr. Oli was apparently referring to the strain in bilateral ties after the adoption of

a new Constitution by Nepal in 2015 that divided Nepal into seven provincial units and marginalised Madhesis, who are largely of Indian-origin and inhabitants of the Terai.

The move triggered a six-month-long agitation – from September 2015 to February 2016 – during Mr. Oli’s first tenure, in which more than 50 people were killed. The protests also crippled the land-locked country’s economy as supplies from India were blocked.

Mr. Oli said the two sides had agreed to address “all matters” by September 19, Nepal’s Constitution Day.

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'RAMAYAN CIRCUIT' GETS A NEW BUS SERVICE ▶ PAGE 9

'India backs a united, rich, strong Nepal'



School students wait to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Kathmandu on Friday. ■ AP

“Prime Minister Modi and I have just concluded bilateral talks on the entire gamut of our relationship in an atmosphere of warmth and cordiality that characterises the deep friendship and understanding between our two countries,” Mr. Oli said.

“We reiterated our firm commitment to take our relations forward on the basis of equality, mutual trust, respect and benefit. Relations between neighbours are different from that of others. Neighbourhood constitutes top priority in our foreign policy,” he said.

Prime Minister Modi responded by saying that this was his third visit to Nepal since assuming office in 2014 and it shows his government’s “deep commitment” to further strengthen ties with Nepal.

Noting that Nepal’s people have chosen the Oli-led government for economic and social prosperity and for nation-building, Mr. Modi said: “We are committed

to supporting Prime Minister Oli’s vision that Nepal should not be a land-locked country but a land-and-water-linked nation,” he said.

“In today’s talks, we discussed the initiatives started between the two countries in agriculture, inland waterways, and railways. These will enhance the mutual connectivity between the people and trade of the two countries. In inland waterways, our cooperation is very important,” Mr. Modi said.

The Prime Minister said the agricultural ministers of the two sides will soon meet and start work on a road map for agricultural development.

Earlier Mr. Modi, with Mr. Oli, laid the foundation stone of the 900-megawatt Arun III Hydroelectric Power Plant in Tumlingtar area in eastern Nepal through a remote system. He said India would invest ₹6,000-cr. in the project, which would generate jobs.