

Nepal PM to visit India for six days this month

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Kathmandu: Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli will embark on a six-day official visit to India, beginning from February 19, making his first foreign visit since assuming office last October.

A cabinet meeting on Thursday night approved the dates for the prime minister's India visit and assigned the task to prepare agenda and other necessary ground work to the ministry of foreign affairs, Minister for Information and Communication Sher Dhan Rai, who is also Spokesperson of the Nepal government, said.

It is goodwill visit and maintaining good relations with India is the key, Bishnu Rimal, chief political adviser to Prime Minister Oli, told IANS.

He added that the visit will be focused in restoring bilateral ties.

Oli will leave for New Delhi after participating in celebrations of the National Democracy Day the day Nepali people were freed from clutches of autocratic Rana regime some 66 years back.

At a time when Nepal-India relations reached an all-time low due to protests in southern plain in Nepal and India's displeasure over the new constitution promulgated in last September, the visit is being viewed with great interest.

The agenda for the visit is yet to be finalised. However, the prime minister himself is holding a series of meetings with former prime ministers, former foreign ministers, diplomats, business community and leaders from various political parties.

The very nature of the visit is expected to be political, seeking Indian acceptance on Nepal's newly promulgated constitution, economic and technical cooperation, signing accord on utilisation of India's \$1 billion aid and loan for various reconstruction projects in Nepal, implementation of past memoranda of understanding and finding a new framework of cooperation, said officials.

During the visit, the two sides are preparing to sign an agreement for utilisation of \$1 billion Indian aid and loan pledged during the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction in June by India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

Out of the pledged amount, \$250 million comes as aid and rest \$750 million will be a soft loan. The two sides have yet to agree on the modalities of the soft loan, interest rate and project to be financed by Indian loan and aid.

To lay ground for the visit, Nepal's Finance Minister Bishnu Prasad Poudel and Foreign Secretary Shanker Das Bairagi travelled to Indian capital early this week, met India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and discussed a wide range of bilateral issues.

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