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Boundary Working Group: India-Nepal

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Why in News

Recently, it has been reported that **Nepal has proposed a meeting of the Boundary Working Group (BWG)** in August end or early September 2020.

- The meeting was proposed during **a telephonic conversation between the Prime Ministers of the Countries on 15th August 2020 (India's 74th Independence Day)**.
- This high level contact came **after nearly nine months of tension** and war of words **after India** (in November 2019) **asserted control over the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiadhura** region of **Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand)** which is claimed by Nepal.

Key Points

- **Boundary Working Group (BWG):**

- The BWG is a joint agency constituted by the governments of India and Nepal in **2014** to carry out works in the fields of construction, restoration and repair of boundary pillars including clearance of ‘no-man’s land’ and other technical tasks.
- **Led by the Surveyor General of India, the BWG is different from the foreign secretaries meeting that is being sought to discuss the Kalapani border dispute, but it is an important mechanism to review the boundary work.**

Survey of India is the **National Mapping Agency** under the **Department of Science & Technology.**

- The group so far has held **six meetings**. The **last meeting** was on 28th August 2019 in Dehradun (Uttarakhand).
- In **2017**, the two sides had finalised the comprehensive plan and modalities for execution and completion of boundary work in the next five years.
- The **BWG’s inputs are critical** as they are given to the governments on the basis of **field-level survey**.
- The 15th August phone call between the Prime Ministers, followed by the **17th August meeting** between senior officials on Indian government-assisted projects in Nepal, have smoothed the way for further dialogue. The two sides can now use modern technology, including satellite imagery and drone survey, to review the work done at the BWG.

- **Recent Tension Between the Two Countries:**

- The border dispute between India and Nepal had come to the fore in **November 2019** when **India published its new map** following the **bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir** into two Union Territories and the end of its special status under Article 370. The map showed Kalapani as a part of Uttarakhand State.

Susta area in Bihar is another **disputed area between the countries.**

- Nepal had proposed talks to discuss the boundary issue. It was tentatively scheduled for March 2020, but had to be put off due to the **Covid-19 outbreak.** Nepal suggested a videoconference, and then claimed that India stalled the proposal.
- **India's inauguration of a new road from Dharchula to Lipulekh on the Mansarovar Yatra** route in May 2020 **provoked the government of Nepal which came out with a new map of Nepal**, depicting Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura region as part of territory.
- Further, **a Constitution Amendment Bill was passed by Nepal's Parliament to legitimize the alteration or addition of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura** to the country's new map. The passage of the Bill and the new map led to the **breakdown of communication between the two countries.**

- **Issues Involved:**

- **India perceives Nepal to be tilting towards China** under the leadership of Prime Minister K P Oli and his Nepal Communist Party.
- From **Nepal's perspective, Indian diplomacy seems increasingly unresponsive under the centralised control of the Prime Minister's Office.**

Nepal has thrice approached India officially for boundary dialogue since November 2019, however India has maintained that Nepal has to first create the right conditions for it.

Way Forward

- De-escalation must happen before the social, cultural and economic flows across the open border suffer long-term damage.
- The ice was broken on 15th August when the Prime Minister of Nepal called the Prime Minister of India, but that is just the beginning. Talks must be held, for which the video conference facility that has existed between the two Foreign Secretaries must be re- activated.

Source: IE