

Nepal and China agree to expedite BRI infra projects

KATHMANDU

NEPAL and China have reached an agreement to accelerate the completion of pending projects previously announced by the Chinese government in 2018 and 2019 under the controversial Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to boost infrastructure in the landlocked Himalayan nation, a media report said on Tuesday.

The agreement was reached during a meeting between the vice chairman of Nepal's National Planning Commission (NPC), Dr Min Bahadur Shrestha, and Chong Liang, the vice chairman of the Chinese government's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), which oversees the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' is expected to visit China in September. During the meeting, both parties discussed the progress in implementing various programmes and projects announced by the Chinese government and stressed the need for expeditious completion of preparatory work on both sides to accelerate major connectivity projects in line with the previously agreed-upon commitments, My Republica reported.

In Beijing, the two sides discussed outstanding work to be carried out. China has been actively investing in Nepal in many infrastructure projects to boost closer cooperation.

Nepal and China signed a memorandum of understanding on One Belt One Road. PTI

In win-win deal, Turkey finally lets Sweden enter NATO grouping

Russia blames war against Ukraine on organisation's expansion

VILNIUS

UNITED States President Joe Biden on Tuesday hailed an agreement for Sweden to join NATO as more work remained to determine a path forward for Ukraine's future with the alliance.

On Monday evening, the night before the summit opened, Turkey withdrew its objections to Sweden joining the alliance, a step toward the unity that Western leaders have been eager to demonstrate in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The deal was reached after days of intensive meetings, and it's poised to expand the alliance's strength in Northern Europe. "Rumors of the death of

NATO's unity were greatly exaggerated," Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, told reporters triumphantly on Tuesday.

According to a joint statement issued when the deal was announced, Erdogan will ask Turkey's parliament to approve Sweden joining NATO. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, another holdout, is expected to take a similar step.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that NATO's expansion is one of the reasons that led to the current situation. "It looks like the Europeans don't understand their mistake," Peskov said. He warned against putting Ukraine on a fast track for NATO membership.

"Potentially it's very dangerous for the European security, it carries very big risks," Peskov said.

The outcome is a victory for Biden as well, who has touted NATO's expansion as an example of how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has backfired on Moscow. Finland has already become the 31st member of the alliance, and Sweden is on deck to become the 32nd. Both Nordic countries were historically nonaligned until the war increased fears of Russian aggression.

Because of the deal on Sweden's membership, "this summit is already historic before it has started," Stoltenberg said. NATO members are now focused on Ukraine's desire to join NATO. AP

Ukraine's wait to be its member gets longer

VILNIUS

NATO leaders on Tuesday dashed Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hopes for a clear timeline to join the alliance, saying they would offer an invite to become a member only when "conditions are met."

At a summit in Vilnius of the 31 NATO nations, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg insisted the alliance had never used "stronger language" to back Ukraine in its bitter fight to defeat the Russian invasion.

NATO leaders pledged that "Ukraine's future is in NATO" and shortened the eventual process Kyiv would have to go through to enter the alliance. "We will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the alliance when allies agree and conditions are met," a statement said.

Zelenskyy on Tuesday had blasted as "absurd" the absence of a timetable for his country's membership in NATO. Later, he pushed for Ukraine to join NATO in a speech in Vilnius. "NATO will give Ukraine security, Ukraine will make NATO stronger," he said. AFP

HOW THE DEAL WAS CLINCHED

- 1 Turkey on Monday demanded its entry into the EU as quid pro quo for letting Sweden into NATO
2 Yet, 24 hours later, it green lighted Sweden's NATO entry without the EU door opening. What happened in the interregnum?
3 Turkey's major problem with Sweden has been its soft corner for Kurdish militants
4 Sweden claims it worked very hard to address Turkey's concerns on terror. The Nordic country last month introduced tough anti-terror laws, making it illegal to give financial or logistical help to terrorist groups
5 Last week, the law came into play for the first time as a Swedish court jailed a Kurdish man for terror finance
6 Sweden also resumed arms export to Turkey
7 With Turkey withdrawing its objections to Sweden's entry into NATO, another door opened for it - negotiations with the US for F-16 fighter jets
8 For its part, Sweden agreed to push Turkey's case for EU entry, so it was a win-win situation for President Erdogan

I spoke to Erdogan and he still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted a deal with Sweden. So let's get that done

Joe Biden, US President

When you pave the way for Turkey, we'll pave the way for Sweden as we did for Finland

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey President



SCALP is the air-launched long range, conventionally armed weapon that has been put into operations with Royal Air Force and French Air Force in 2003

France announces delivery of SCALP missiles to Ukraine

France's announcement on Tuesday that it would send SCALP long-range missiles to Ukraine comes months after Britain began delivering its identical Storm Shadow

Range of 250 km

Developed jointly by the two NATO allies, Storm Shadow/SCALP is a 1,300-kilogramme missile armed with conventional explosives, usually launched from aircraft such as the Royal Air Force's Eurofighter Typhoon or French Rafale

FEATURES OF SCALP

Manufacturer MBDA says that the SCALP is designed to meet the demanding requirements of pre-planned attacks against high-value fixed or stationary targets such as hardened bunkers and key infrastructure

It has been used in previous conflicts including in Iraq, Libya and Syria

The missile uses inertial navigation, GPS and terrain referencing to chart a low-altitude course to its target to avoid detection

It uses an infrared camera to match images of the target to a stored picture "to ensure a precision strike and minimal collateral damage," MBDA says

The warhead can be programmed to detonate above the target on impact

5 Mexicans, Nepali pilot die in helicopter crash near Mt Everest

KATHMANDU

A private commercial helicopter carrying Mexican tourists crashed on Tuesday near Mount Everest in eastern Nepal, killing all six persons on board, including five members of a family, in the latest aviation accident in the Himalayan nation.

The Manang Air helicopter 9N-AMV took off from Surke Airport in Solukhumbu district at 10.04 am for Kathmandu and suddenly lost contact at an altitude above 12,000 feet at 10.13 am, said Gyanendra Bhul, Manager at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA).

The helicopter crashed in the Lamjura area of Likhupike Rural Municipality in the remote mountainous Solukhumbu district. TIA spokesperson Tkeknath Sitaula said all six bodies were found at the crash site during a search operation.

They were returning to Kathmandu from Surke after enjoying a mountain flight. The flight was conducted from Lukla, the gateway to Mount Everest, Sitaula said. According to the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), all five tourists were Mexican nationals and the pilot was Nepalese Captain Chet Bahadur Gurung. The Mexican victims have been identified as Sifuentes G. Fernando (95) and Rincon Ismael (98), both males, along with three females—Sifuentes Gonzalez Abric (72), Gonzalez Olacio Luz (65) and Sifuentes G. Maria Jese (52). PTI

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