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Herr Botschafter,

An die Politische Direktion des
Eidg. Politischen Departementes

3003 B e r n

Anlässlich der entsprechenden Feierlichkeiten hat König Birendra von Nepal bekanntlich den Vorschlag gemacht, Nepal zu einer Friedenszone zu erklären. In der Presse wurde dies allgemein als Wunsch zu einer "Schweiz des Ostens" mit entsprechender Neutralität zu werden, gedeutet. Im Falle Nepals geht es natürlich vor allem um die Absicherung dieses Landes gegenüber seinen Riesennachbarn Indien und China.

Der königliche Vorschlag hat zu einer Reihe von Kommentaren geführt. In der Beilage sende ich Ihnen den wie mir scheint interessantesten Artikel, welcher in der "Hindustan Times" erschienen ist: Peace zone idea born out of Nepal's fears. Der Verfasser führt darin interessante Vergleiche zwischen der Neutralität der Schweiz und einer etwaigen Nepals an. Besonders hervorzuheben ist das Verständnis des Verfassers für die schweizerische Neutralität. Dabei hebt er hervor, dass Nepal, gleich wie die Schweiz, über wirtschaftliche Unabhängigkeit verfügen müsste - dem eben im Falle Nepals nicht so ist - und auch u.a. davon absehen müsste, die nepalesischen Staatsangehörigen in den Militärdienst Indiens eintreten zu lassen. Ich verweise im übrigen auf den lesenswerten Artikel, der allerdings mit dem hier so oft überheblichen Ton endet, wonach das "tiny" Königreich sich eine grosse Aufgabe gestellt habe.

Ich versichere Sie, Herr Botschafter, meiner vorzüglichen Hochachtung.

Der Schweizerische Geschäftsträger a.i.:

Kopie m. Beilage an:
- Information und Presse
- Völkerrechtsdirektion
Beilage erw.

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(R. Bär)

Dodis



Peace zone idea born out of Nepal's fears

From Ashok Vyas Hindustan Times Correspondent

KATHMANDU, March 7 — The proposal to declare Nepal a "zone of peace" seems to be born out of a long-cherished desire here to make this Himalayan Kingdom a "Switzerland of the East"

Like Switzerland, Nepal too is a mountainous, land-locked country. But the similarity ends here, since over the centuries Kathmandu's cultural and economic links have been dominated by India.

This geopolitical reality of Indian preponderance has often acted as an eyesore to some of the fiercely nationalist elite here who have often tried to delink the Himalayan Kingdom from the influence of the Indian subcontinent.

In the '50s, these elites, in their attempt to project Nepal's separate socio-economic identity, came forward with the idea of a Himalayan federation comprising Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

With the emergence of a strong Chinese presence in the north, the emphasis shifted to keeping equidistant between China and India in the '60s. In the '70s it has become more pronounced.

In 1973 an attempt was made to give Nepal a separate geographic entity with the argument that Nepal was outside the geographical limits of the subcontinent and was really that part of Asia which touched both India and China.

This was soon followed up with King Birendra's speech at the Algiers non-aligned summit in 1973 that Nepal should be declared a zone of peace.

King's speech

In the speech which virtually got lost in the host of other speeches, King Birendra had said "twelve years ago in Belgrade we pledged ourselves against military alliances—whether they be multi-lateral, bilateral or regional. It was a far-sighted policy based on prudence, sanity and peace. From the womb of this far-reaching decision, we hope, will emerge the radiance of world peace. In this wholesome spirit, my country, Nepal, situated between two of the most populous countries in the world, wishes within her frontiers, to be declared a zone of peace."

While lending his support to declare the Indian Ocean a zone of peace in particular and advocating the idea of peace zones in general, King Birendra had said: "In the absence of clearly demarcated peace zones accepted as such by every country in the world, countries with smaller size and population are bound to feel insecure."

The King felt the non-aligned countries required "safeguards against outside interference and aggression in the world still dominated by power politics."

In the light of this, his speech at the farewell reception on Feb. 25 this year before the representatives of some 65 countries was only a further clarification of his earlier concept of Nepal being declared a zone of peace.

What was the idea behind making such a proposal? Was it the fear of "outside interference and aggression as hinted during his Algiers summit speech?"

Though during the coronation farewell speech the King had said that the proposal for a zone of peace was not prompted by fear or threat from any country or quarter, it was clear there was

some concern for maintaining his country's independence.

He said: "As heirs to a country that has always lived in independence, we wish to see that our freedom and independence shall not be thwarted by the changing flux of time when understanding is replaced by misunderstanding, when conciliation is replaced by belligerency and war."

It seems that the basic, old urge of Nepal playing a balancing role between India and China coupled with fears of the Nepali Congress and the threat of Maoist subversion could be one of the motivations behind the proposal.

Swiss-type neutrality

In simple terms, the proposal means asking India and China to keep their hands off Nepal.

So long as Kathmandu adopts a strictly balanced posture vis-a-vis India and China, New Delhi can have no objection. But so far Nepal's neutrality, specially in the political field, has more or less leaned towards the Chinese side.

The deep and extensive contacts between India and Nepal have more often than not proved as a source of irritant. The presence of Nepali Congress leaders in India is yet another factor.

On the other hand, Peking is in a very happy position as even the Maoists who are opposed to the system, have taken asylum in the south and not in the north which provides an advantage to China.

Another possible motivating factor could be the achievement of a Swiss type neutrality. But this presupposes many things including full economic independence, complete restraint on making any comment on any political developments in the world and stopping its people from joining other countries' armies.

On these counts Nepal will have to take some vital, basic decisions one of which could be stopping its Gorkhas from joining the Indian army. India, with its massive manpower, can possibly do without Gorkhas recruitment and may well get rid of a colonial dispensation. But can Nepal afford this? It is well known that Gorkha recruitment provides a much needed prop to Nepalese economy by providing employment to thousands of people and earning the much needed Indian rupee.

India, which has accepted Nepal's sovereignty and independence, has had no ill designs against the kingdom. New Delhi's support to Nepal in getting it admitted to the United Nations and the help it rendered in opening up from the centuries old isolation were definitely not directed against Nepal's sovereignty.

In the latest proposal one thing which comes out in rather sharp focus is that despite tremendous economic dependence on India, Nepal does not want to have anything more to do with India than with China.

As such, India will have to define its approach keeping in view its own national interests which include the old Nehru concept of the southern slopes of the Himalayas being areas of special interest to India. As things stand today, India has nothing to lose and should be in no hurry to elucidate its posture.

It will be interesting to watch how this tiny Himalayan kingdom goes about its difficult diplomatic task.