

India supporting blockade, can get supplies through China: Nepal deputy PM

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Kathmandu: Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Bamdev Gautam has accused India of supporting the "blockade" by Madhesi parties protesting against the country's new constitution and said his government can make alternative arrangements for supplies via land from China as also by air and sea routes.

In an interview at his home here, Gautam said three major parties have suggested to Prime Minister Sushil Koirala that he send a special envoy to meet Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convey the problems Nepal is facing due to the blockade.

Gautam said the blockade will also affect India as its exports to Nepal will be impacted. Hoping that the issue will be sorted out, he said Nepal can make several alternative arrangements to get its supplies.

"However much it is difficult, we will make contacts with the world through the air route. We will use land routes to reach China and through China we will contact the world (for supplies)," Gautam told IANS.

Gautam, who is also the country's home minister and leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), said that the road from China has been damaged due to the devastating earthquake in April this year in which over 8,500 people were killed.

Asked if getting supplies through land route from China would be easy, he said there is no alternative if there is a compulsion.

"Even if it is difficult, what else to do in a compulsion. The earthquake has damaged the road but we will build it because we should contact the outside world and we will do it."

The Madhesi parties from the Terai region have been protesting at the border entry points with India to build pressure on the Nepalese government to meet their demands for amending the new constitution.

They maintain that the Terai-based people and ethnic groups fail to find adequate representation in the country's new constitution that was promulgated on September 20.

India is keen that the Nepalese leadership accommodates the aspirations of the people living in the plains, including Madhesis and janjatis, through affirmative action.

Asked about the solution to the present impasse, Gautam said that Nepal was a landlocked country and had the right to the sea under international conventions.

"We are a landlocked country. On three sides is India and on one is China. We do not have a sea boundary. Such countries have to be given the right to the sea. This right is there since the United Nations was formed. This is our right. Allow us to go to sea. We may get supplies from India or any other country. Do not restrict this right. This is solution to the problem," he said,

He said if the blockade continues, "it will affect India more."

"Seventy percent of Nepal's trade is with India and if India imposes a blockade like this, people whose products are

not exported will rise in protest against the (Indian) government. It happened earlier also and then government had to lift the blockade.â€•

Gautam said the whole world had welcomed the new constitution but India had not done this so far.

â€œWhy they did not do it, they would know. But this is wrong conclusion of Indian government. When India did not welcome (the constitution), some Madhesi morcha parties - who were protesting earlier - announced that they will enforce a blockade on the border. And in this the Indian government has provided full cooperation. This has been done to support the Madhesi parties,â€• he said.

He said Nepal had faced an blockade when Rajiv Gandhi was prime minister but â€œit did not bow down".

â€œThe blockade has happened again. The Indian government representatives say it is not their policy (but the) security officers (from the Indian side) have said that they have instructions from the central government not to allow vehicles into Nepal,â€• Gautam said.

He said it has also been said that Indian transporters do not want to come into Nepal due to the threat of violence.

â€œWho gave the threat when Nepal government is saying there is no insecurity (threat) to drivers, trucks and transport companies and they will be provided security.â€•

He said vehicles from Nepal, which were to bring diesel and petrol were also not being allowed to go through the check points.

â€œWe feel no declaration has been made (about the blockade). But we are seeing the behaviour of the Indian government. It is happening to a plan. The government of India must have done it so that the Madhesi parties achieve success in their agitation. This is the work of the Indian government.â€•

He said Modi during his visit to Nepal had won the hearts of the people but â€œwe are facing a blockadeâ€• during his tenure.

He said Modi should direct the removal of the blockade.

Gautam said Nepal's relations with India go back deep in time and problems that cropped up in the past were solved.

â€œThere is a problem and it will be solved,â€• Gautam said.

He said the demands of the Madhesi parties had been met in the new constitution

Asked why these parties did not sign the new constitution, he replied â€œI do not know.â€•

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