

Nepal's Long Transition to Democracy

What is the issue?

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- The upcoming elections in Nepal will be the first under its new 2015 constitution and will complete its democratic transition.

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- India must play an enabling role in this tumultuous transition from a 240-year-old monarchy to a multi-party polity.

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How did democracy evolve in Nepal?

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- **Abolishing Monarchy** - A Maoist insurgency erupted in the mid-1990s which claimed nearly 15,000 casualties.

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- In 2005, after a peace accord, the Maoist joined the political mainstream and subsequently contested elections.

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- Monarchy was overthrown in 2006 and a 601-member Constituent Assembly (CA) was elected in 2008 with a two-year mandate to draft a new constitution.

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- **Constitution** - CA failed in its mandate after multiple extensions and finally lapsed in 2012 after the Supreme Court's intervention.

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- Despite the lack of consensus for a constitution, this period, notably, saw the rehabilitation of former maoist militants.

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- A new CA was finally elected in November 2013, with eventually concluded the long delayed constitutional draft.

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- **Terai Dissent** - New Constitution enjoyed considerable support, but wasn't liked by 'Madhesi & Janjatis' of plains bordering India.
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- While India sought to address the Madhesi cause, the Katmandu establishment saw this as interventionist.
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- Nepal even started talk of enhancing co-operation with China through Tibetan plateau to off-set India.
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- **Local Body Elections** - Eventually, there was a regime change and a new coalition under Mr. Prachandra came to power.
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- Notably, the elections to the 753 local bodies in Nepal was held earlier this year after a 20-year gap under the Prachandra regime.
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- **Future** - Nepal will elect seven provincial assemblies along with its parliament as per the 2015 constitution.
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- Parliament and the provincial assemblies will in turn elect a new president and vice president.
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What is the future of Indo-Nepal ties?

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- One of the important challenges for the new government will be to address Madhesi grievances through constitutional amendments.
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- India seems to have recognised that its overt support to the Madhesi cause had hurt diplomatic relations with Nepal.
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- It has hence currently been urging the Madhesi leadership to work from within the system rather than through agitation or boycott.
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- An increased Chinese presence through infrastructure projects under the 'Belt & Road Initiative' is a real risk.
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- Hence, an early move by Delhi, to build positive equations with whatever regime takes shape in Katmandu is necessary.
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Source: The Hindu

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