



## Policy Brief

# Border Lines & Broken Trust: The Kalapani Dispute and Indian Territorial Expansionism

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## **Executive Summary**

### **“Border Lines & Broken Trust: The Kalapani Dispute and Indian Territorial Expansionism”**

#### **Overview**

In 2019, India unveiled a new map that contained the border region districts of Kalapani, Lipu Lekh, and Limphuyadhara of Nepal in its territory. This sparked outrage in the Nepalese community, which in turn added the eastern region of the Kalapani River. The dispute is based on India's increased ambition of expansionism, leading to military deployment in the region, while building infrastructure to slowly encroach. Although there exists a bilateral mechanism between Nepal and India, there has been little to no progress made in the resolution of the dispute. The Nepalese government has tried to approach India, but they have been met with silence. India has similar border disputes with other neighboring countries as well, and in an attempt to form a regional hegemony, it has created distrust and regional conflicts. Pakistan is aware of India's expansionism and has taken necessary measures to keep its border safer and more secure. By developing policies based on studying Indian imperialist movements in Nepal, Pakistan can prevent any misadventure of India to bring about geographical changes along the border or the line of control.

#### **Recommendations**

- Pakistan needs to counter India's cartographic propaganda through engaging with cartographic diplomacy. There is a need to highlight the UN-approved map that showcases Jammu and Kashmir as a disputed territory. Pakistan must stick to the official map, highlighting it internationally, preventing Indian expansionism. The Survey of Pakistan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) must take this action to create a credible map-based narrative for Pakistan.
- Pakistan further needs to strengthen diplomatic ties with smaller South Asian states such as Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, etc. Engage these nations through sustained diplomatic dialogues, expanding trade and cultural exchanges, and offering technical and educational cooperation. Pakistan should also explore

bilateral or multilateral forums with these countries to promote shared interests, particularly in resisting unilateral actions that undermine regional stability, limit Indian hegemony and expansionism, while also strengthening its regional partnerships.

- There is a need to utilize international legal instruments to counter India's expansionism. The Ministry of Law and Justice, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should lead efforts to develop a strong lawfare-based narrative. This includes preparing legal dossiers, highlighting treaty violations, and presenting documented evidence of India's actions at international forums such as the UN, and OIC. Such a coordinated approach will strengthen Pakistan's case globally and challenge India's unilateral claims.
- Pakistan has to develop a proactive policy discourse. This should include research and training for academics on border disputes and regional strategy. It can be made possible by funding think tanks and researchers to come up with adequate long-term strategic policies, for MofA's consideration. The task requires the National Security Council to work in tandem with the Higher Education Commission to fund academic training.
- In this politics of narrative, there is a need to utilize the power of global media platforms to showcase India's expansionism. Pakistan must present a strong counter-narrative to Indian policies, particularly highlighting India's breaches of trust and violations of sovereignty at the global level. A dedicated mechanism must be developed for effective narrative building in international forums such as the UN, OIC, and global think tank platforms. This would include all relevant stakeholders, such as the MoFA, academia, think tanks, diaspora communities, and civil society, tasked with designing and implementing a comprehensive narrative strategy

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### **Issue**

To analyze the India-Nepal border dispute in the Kalapani region which exemplifies India's territorial expansionist policies by disregarding historical claims, violating border sovereignty, and draw relevant lessons for Pakistan highlighting India's expansionism.

### **Historical Background**

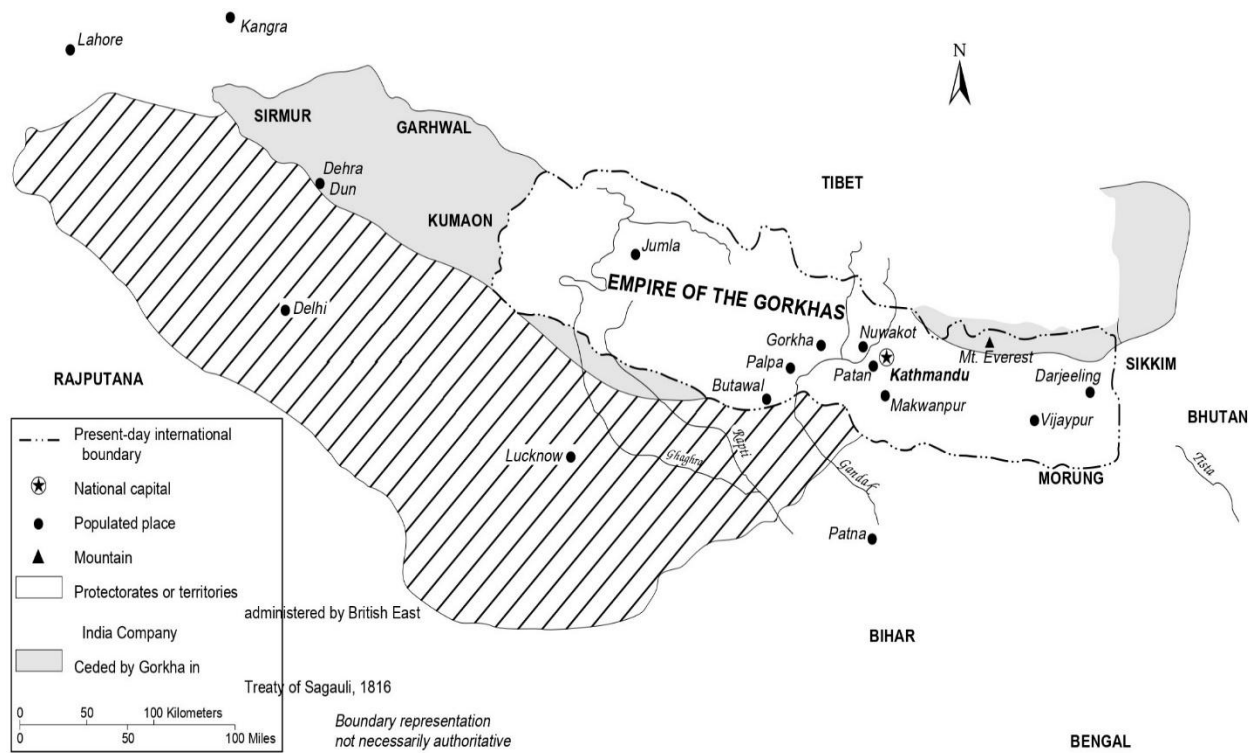
The Kalapani region is located at the tri-junction of India, Nepal, and China. The dispute itself stems from the varied interpretation of the Sugauli Treaty, which was signed after the 1814-1816 Anglo-Nepalese war. The treaty annexed the regions of Darjeeling and Terai of Nepal to the East India Company, which became part of modern-day India post-independence.<sup>1</sup> The Mahakali River runs as the natural boundary between India and Nepal. In accordance with the treaty, particularly article 5, the border of Nepal extended

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<sup>1</sup> Bhairavi Pradhan, "The Treaty of Sugauli Sandhi, 1816: Its Impact on the Indian Gorkhas," Policy Watcher, June 3, 2023, accessed July 30, 2025, <https://policywatcher.com/2023/06/the-treaty-of-sugauli-sandhi-1816-its-impact-on-the-indian-gorkhas/>.

till the western side of the river, and anything beyond the western border was to be ceded to the East India Company as shown in Map - 1.<sup>2</sup>

Map – 1 Map Before the Sugauli Treaty



Source: "Nepal Map Before Sugauli Treaty," October 20, 2011, accessed August 27, 2025, <https://completenepal.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/nepal-map-before-sugauli-treaty/>.

However, the lack of clarity regarding the river's precise origin has led to conflicting overlapping territorial claims. Nepal argues that the river originates at Limpiyadhura, northwest of Kalapani, and therefore claims Kalapani, Limpiyadhura, and Lipulekh as part of its territory. India, on the other hand, contends that the river's source is near Kalapani itself, asserting its jurisdiction over the region. The absence of detailed surveys during the treaty's formulation has fueled a longstanding border dispute that continues to strain Indo-Nepalese relations. It must be taken into account that the territories that lie in India predominantly speak Nepalese and follow Nepali traditions.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Priyanka Kumari, Dr. Ramanek Kushwaha, "Sugauli Treaty 1816," *International Journal of History*, vol. 1, no.1 (2019): 42-47, <https://doi.org/10.22271/27069109.2019.v1.i1a.42>.

The India-China war of 1962 led to the Nepalese government under King Mahendra allowing India to form defensive posts inside Nepalese territory.<sup>3</sup> India later retreated from those posts, except those in Kalapani. India has kept a military might in the Kalapani region. Although Nepal has complained about Indian encroachment into border areas, India has maintained and strengthened its presence.<sup>4</sup>

### **Brief History of Dispute Resolution**

There have been several attempts made to solve the Kalapani dispute; however, it has yet to be resolved. The process of resolution hit a halt post the revocation of Article 370. The following are the attempts to resolve the issue:

- In the early 1970s, Nepali State Minister for Forest Bahadur Singh Etwal, from Darchula, had publicly raised the Kalapani dispute issue for the first time.
- On July 16, 1973, the Nagendra Prasad Rijal cabinet formed a panel with representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to report on the encroachment from the ground. The report mentioned that India had created an artificial Kali river to demarcate the border.
- In 1981, the Nepal-India Technical Level Joint Boundary Group was formed to demarcate the borders and maintain the dilapidated and disappeared boundary pillars.
- In 1981, Dwarika Nath Dhungel, then chief district officer of Darchula, prepared a ground report suggesting Nepal should demarcate the Nepal-India border and deploy security forces.
- On June 29, 1998, nine Nepali political parties wrote to then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan about the Kalapani dispute caused by the Indian encroachment. In response, the UN asked Nepal to submit a proposal in the name of the Nepali government.
- During the 1998 SAARC Summit, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala reminded his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the unresolved Kalapani dispute.

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<sup>3</sup> "Kalapani Dispute: Past, Present and Future of the Nepal-India Row Explained," OnlineKhabar, August 6, 2022, <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/kalapani-dispute-past-present-future.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Alok Kumar Gupta, "Kalapani: A Bone of Contention Between India and Nepal," IPCS, October 17, 2000, accessed August 4, 2025, [https://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=422](https://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=422).

- On July 17, 1998, Kalapani was again discussed in the fifth meeting of the Joint Working Group between the two countries.
- On August 10, 1998, CPN-UML leader KP Sharma Oli registered a motion in parliament demanding the withdrawal of Indian forces from Kalapani.
- In 1999, Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh said his side was willing to resolve the Kalapani dispute with negotiations during his Nepal and China visits. It did not bear results.
- In 2016, the Maoist-aligned All Nepal Independent Student Union (Revolutionary) submitted a complaint to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon over the India-China trade agreement.

## **Analysis**

In 2019, after the revocation of Article 370, India introduced a new political map. The map had added Kalapani, Lipu Lekh, and Limphuyadhara regions of Nepal into its boundary as showcased in Map – 2.<sup>5</sup> This sparked outrage within Nepal, which contested these regions as theirs. In response, Nepal released its map as well, which included these aforementioned territories within its borders as highlighted in Map – 3.<sup>6</sup> India has been focused on fighting a cartographic war after unveiling the RSS ideology of Akhand Bharat, adding disputed boundaries to its region. It has created a pattern of border disputes in an attempt to establish its hegemony. Furthermore, India constructed a road through the disputed territory to the Lipulekh pass in 2020, showcasing its expansionist tendencies. The pass has been used by India to carry out trade activities with China.

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<sup>5</sup> Anil Giri, "India's New Political Map Places Disputed Territory of Kalapani inside Its Own Borders," Khatmandu Post, November 4, 2019, accessed August 7, 2025, <https://kathmandupost.com/national-security/2019/11/04/india-s-new-political-map-places-disputed-territory-of-kalapani-inside-its-own-borders>.

<sup>6</sup> "Government Unveils New Political Map Including Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura inside Nepal Borders," Kathmandu Post, May 20, 2020, accessed August 7, 2025, <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/05/20/government-unveils-new-political-map-including-kalapani-lipulekh-and-limpiyadhura-inside-nepal-borders>.



Map – 2



Source: “Kalapani Territorial Dispute: Origin, history, significance, territory map, Nepal's objection,” November 7, 2019, accessed August 27, 2025, <https://www.jagranjosh.com/current-affairs/kalapani-territory-all-you-need-to-know-why-nepal-objects-its-inclusion-in-new-indian-map-1573112411-1>

Map – 3



Source: “India’s new political map places disputed territory of Kalapani inside its own borders,” November 5, 2019, accessed August 27, 2025, <https://kathmandupost.com/national-security/2019/11/04/india-s-new-political-map-places-disputed-territory-of-kalapani-inside-its-own-borders>.



Although a bilateral mechanism does exist between India and Nepal, the resolution of Kalapani requires India to take a step back from its border incursions. However, India attempts to showcase its might through such tactics. In 2022, the Nepali PM Sher Bahadur Deuba, in a meeting with PM Modi, discussed the potential resolution of the dispute, but it was sidelined by other agendas.<sup>7</sup>

Essentially, India has breached sovereignty, developed illegal infrastructure on disputed territory, and aimed at administrative control along the Kalapani region. India has, in multiple cases, breached bilateral mechanisms to assert its hegemony, systematically swallowing up other territories of neighboring nations.

### **Lessons for Pakistan**

Pakistan is fully aware of India's expansionist tendencies, where historically agreed-upon treaties have been disregarded, as seen in Kashmir with repeated violations of the Line of Control. To counter this, Pakistan should not only revisit its own treaties for potential discrepancies to strengthen its lawfare strategy but also extend legal and diplomatic support to smaller neighboring nations like Nepal and Bhutan, which face similar challenges. By helping these states build legal cases and diplomatic narratives in international forums, Pakistan can foster collective resistance against India's unilateralism, creating a stronger, rules-based framework to safeguard regional sovereignty.

In Nepal's Kalapani region, India's 2019 map (shown in Map – 4) and road construction disregarded historical treaties, while in Bhutan's Doklam, its military intervention entrenched Indian influence. With China, India has hardened its position in Ladakh through infrastructure and troop build-up, and in Arunachal Pradesh by deepening governance and logistics. Against Pakistan, the revocation of Article 370 consolidated control over Kashmir, while military occupation of Siachen and assertive claims in Sir Creek further highlight its expansionist posture. By strong-arming smaller neighbors and

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<sup>7</sup> Sachin Parashar, "Nepalese PM Raises Border Issue with Modi, Agrees Not to Politicise It: MEA," *The Times of India*, April 3, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/nepalese-pm-raises-border-issue-with-modi-agrees-not-to-politicise-it-mea/articleshow/90616440.cms>.

altering facts on the ground, India has sown regional distrust and complicated prospects for peaceful resolution.

Map – 4



Source: "Kalapani: Border Issue between India and Nepal," January 30, 2021, accessed August 27, 2025, <https://niice.org.np/archives/6755>.

Nepal's predicament in the Kalapani dispute, along with India's attempts to exert influence over Bhutan, highlights an opportunity for Pakistan to strengthen solidarity with smaller South Asian nations. By supporting these states diplomatically and technically, Pakistan can help counter India's regional dominance while fostering stronger regional partnerships. Such cooperation would not only weaken India's unilateral hold but also enhance Pakistan's international standing and open avenues for collective action on broader global challenges such as terrorism, climate change, and sustainable development.

Pakistan needs to consistently and categorically issue maps of the region, which must be internationally accepted and recognized for the sake of credibility. This must include disputed territory, which India has included in its maps.

Despite multiple attempts by Nepal to resolve the dispute, India has kept a firm military presence in Kalapani and has avoided any formal discussions. Nepal has addressed the issue in international media and, hence, is leveraging India to actively participate in diplomatic talks about a bilateral issue. Thus, Pakistan should similarly promote narratives in the international media to shed light on the Kashmir issue and the Indus Water Treaty. They may be considered bilateral disputes by India, but international pressure can play an important role in addressing the issues on merit.

India has expanded in the disputed regions by building infrastructure and stationing military forces, thereby challenging sovereignty. To counter this, Pakistan should prioritize enhancing connectivity and infrastructure in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, focusing on roads, communications, and essential services. By creating opportunities for local communities—through education, healthcare, and economic development—Pakistan can strengthen trust and secure grassroots support. Such an approach would establish a durable presence rooted in mutual understanding and shared prosperity, contrasting India's reliance on militarization.

### **Recommendations**

- Pakistan needs to counter India's cartographic propaganda through engaging with cartographic diplomacy. There is a need to highlight the UN-approved map that showcases Jammu and Kashmir as a disputed territory. Pakistan must stick to the official map, highlighting it internationally, preventing Indian expansionism. The Survey of Pakistan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) must take this action to create a credible map-based narrative for Pakistan.
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