



24.07.26

WEBINAR PROGRAMME

INDIA–NEPAL RELATIONS: REIMAGINING THE PARTNERSHIP

A Joint Webinar

*Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University,
Bengaluru*

&

*Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE Nepal),
Kathmandu*

DATE	TIME	MODE
06 August 2026	1400–1800 hrs IST	Hybrid

Programme

The webinar comprises five sessions — an inaugural session, three thematic panels, and a concluding session.

PROGRAMME	
14:00–14:15 IST (15 min)	<i>Welcome & Opening Remarks</i> Setting the Frame Welcome by hosts from both institutions. Brief framing of the webinar’s purpose: an honest, forward-looking assessment of the India–Nepal relationship at a moment of change — in Nepal’s domestic politics, in India’s regional engagement, and in the broader geopolitical environment. Opening remarks on the shared interests that underpin the partnership and the work required to fulfil its potential.



	Remarks by Chair Ashok K. Kantha — <i>Chair Professor, SCB Chair of IR, Chanakya University (India)</i> Remarks by Co-Chair Dr. Pramod Jaiswal — <i>Research Director, NIICE Nepal</i> [7 min each]
14:15–14:50 IST (35 min)	<i>Session I — Keynote Address</i> Neighbourhood First 2.0: The Framework and Its Implications for Nepal The keynote offers a substantive scene-setter presenting the Neighbourhood First 2.0 analytical framework — the case for moving beyond gesture-based diplomacy toward reimagined economic partnership, resilient connectivity, and institutionalised delivery. Nepal-specific implications are drawn out: unblocking the hydropower potential, making trade and transit arrangements genuinely reciprocal, and restoring strategic trust after a period of political turbulence. The keynote addresses why India's delivery credibility, not declarations, is the decisive variable — and invites questions and open discussion featuring Nepalese participants on how this framework is perceived in Kathmandu. Keynote Address by Shri. Ashok K. Kantha — <i>Chair Professor, SCB Chair of IR</i> [20 min keynote] [15 min for questions and open discussion]
14:50–15:50 IST (60 min)	<i>Session II — Panel Discussion</i> Economic Partnership and Connectivity: From Potential to Delivery The economic relationship between India and Nepal holds considerable promise but has long fallen short of its potential. This session examines the principal areas of opportunity and the obstacles that have impeded



progress: trade and transit arrangements, including land ports; hydropower cooperation; Indian private investment in Nepal's manufacturing and services sectors; and connectivity, including cross-border rail links and digital infrastructure. Speakers will address the concerns that have shaped Nepalese perceptions of the economic relationship — including the persistent trade deficit and non-tariff barriers — and consider what a more balanced and mutually beneficial partnership would require from both sides.

CHAIR

Prof (Dr.) Chetan Singai — Dean, SLGPP & Member-Secretary, SCB Chair Advisory Council

India

Speaker 1 Dr. Prabir De — Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi

Speaker 2 Saurabh Kaushik — Research Fellow, SCB Chair of IR

Nepal

Speaker 1 Dr Govind Pokharel — Former Vice Chairperson of National Planning Commission, Nepal

Speaker 2 Achal Raj Pandey — Faculty, Central Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

[10 min each; 20 min open discussion]

15:50–16:00 | Break — 10 minutes

16:00–17:00

IST

Session III — Panel Discussion



(40 min)

Nepal's Political Transition, The China Variable, and India's Strategic Space

Nepal has experienced significant political flux in recent years, with coalition governments in Kathmandu navigating complex domestic pressures alongside an increasingly active external environment. This session examines how Nepal's changed political landscape with a stable government bears on its foreign policy choices, and how India and Nepal can sustain a productive bilateral relationship in a more competitive regional setting. It will also address the growing engagement of external powers in South Asia and the implications for the India–Nepal partnership. The discussion will draw on perspectives from both sides, with the aim of identifying shared interests and practical areas for deeper cooperation.

CHAIR

Shri. Ashok K. Kantha — *Chair Professor, SCB Chair of IR India*

Speaker 1 **Shri Ranjit Rae** — *Former Ambassador of India to Nepal, Vietnam, and Hungary*

Speaker 2 **Dr. Nihar Nayak** — *Research Fellow, South Asia Centre, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*

Nepal

Speaker 1 **Dr. Pramod Jaiswal** — *Research Director, NIICE Nepal*

Speaker 2 **Amb. Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai** — *Foreign Affairs Advisor to the former Prime Minister of Nepal Sushil Koirala; Nepal's Permanent Representative to the United Nations*

[10 min each; 20 min open discussion]



17:00–18:00
IST
(40 min)

Session IV — Panel Discussion

People-to-People Ties, Youth Engagement, Development Cooperation, and Soft Power

People-to-people ties have historically been one of the strongest foundations of the India–Nepal relationship, yet this dimension has received less sustained attention than the economic and political tracks. This session examines the full range of human linkages between the two countries: the ITEC programme, scholarships, and cultural diplomacy; youth engagement and academic exchange, including university linkages, student mobility, and the role of young professionals and social media communities in shaping bilateral perceptions among the next generation; the large Nepali diaspora in India and Indian community in Nepal and their contributions; and the question of how India’s development cooperation record is perceived in Nepal, and what steps might help close the gap between delivery and public recognition of that delivery.

CHAIR

Shri Ranjit Rae — *Former Ambassador of India to Nepal, Vietnam, and Hungary*

India

Speaker 1 Prof (Dr.) Chetan Singai — *Dean, SLGPP & Member-Secretary, SCB Chair Advisory Council*

Speaker 2 Ms. Puspa Kumari — *Research Assistant, Vivekananda International Foundation*

Nepal

Speaker 1 Bibek Dhoj Thapa — *Research Associate and Program Coordinator, NIICE Nepal*

Speaker 2 Tanuja Pandey — *Gen Z Activist*



	[10 min each; 20 min open discussion]
18:00–18:10 IST (10 min)	Closing Session Key Takeaways and the Road Ahead Each co-chair draws out two or three concrete propositions from the day's discussions — actionable recommendations rather than summaries. Brief remarks on possible follow-up: joint publication of a policy brief, scope for a continuing bilateral track-2 dialogue, and the next institutional engagement. Remarks by Chair Ashok K. Kantha — Chair Professor, SCB Chair of IR, Chanakya University (India) Remarks by Co-Chair Dr. Pramod Jaiswal — Research Director, NIICE Nepal [5 min each]

About the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University, Bengaluru

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations was created to study global affairs from an Indian vantage point. Rooted in the country's strategic culture, its purpose is to inform India's growing international profile and constructive role through original thinking and careful inquiry. The Chair works to advance interdisciplinary scholarship, to deepen the expertise of advanced students and researchers across the core fields of international relations, to articulate an Indian conceptual vocabulary for the discipline, and to cultivate partnerships and a wider community of scholars committed to sound analysis and considered policy. Established within the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy at Chanakya University, the Chair has a primary focus on Asia, with particular attention to India's neighbourhood.

Ashok K. Kantha is the inaugural Chair holding the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professorship of International Relations since December 2025. A career diplomat for more than thirty-eight years, he served as Secretary (East) in the



Ministry of External Affairs and as Ambassador and High Commissioner to China, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Over the past decade, he has been closely involved with think-tanks as Honorary Fellow and former Director (2017-22) of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Distinguished Fellow with Vivekananda International Foundation and Distinguished Fellow with Council for Defence and Strategic Research.

Chanakya University was founded in 2022 and has grown quickly as a notable multidisciplinary institution. Supported by major technology companies, the University already runs six Schools, eight Centres of Excellence, and two Chairs, and has established itself as a serious centre for teaching, research, and engagement with public policy. Dr. S. Somanath, former Chairman of ISRO, is its Chancellor.

About NIICE, Kathmandu

Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) is an independent, apolitical and non-partisan think tank based in Nepal, which believes in freedom, democracy and a world free from conflict. We envision a world, where sources of insecurity are identified and understood, conflicts are prevented or resolved, and peace is advocated. It was registered under the Companies Act 2006 of Nepal in February 2016.