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Q8(c)

Discuss the potential role India can play in initiating a possible phase of trilateral economic engagement among India, China and Nepal

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · India's Contribution to the Non-Alignment Movement

India's Contribution to the Non-Alignment Movement: Different phases; current role.

Core demand of the question

- State the theoretical appeal of India-China-Nepal trilateral economics (Himalayan ecology, hydropower, trade, tourism)
- **Be honest about the trust deficit:** LAC, Galwan, **BRI in Nepal**, Kalapani/Lipulekh, Nepal's omni-enmeshment
- Discuss potential that is issue-based and limited, not a concert

Revision summary

Map-logic supports India-China-Nepal talks on hydropower, trade, tourism and Himalayan disasters.

- **The trust deficit is structural:** LAC after Galwan, **BRI in Nepal**, and Kalapani-Lipulekh map fights.

Nepal will omni-enmesh; Delhi cannot veto that without pushing Kathmandu further toward Beijing.

India's realistic role is initiator of thin technical engagement, not chair of a Himalayan concert.

Grade potential as moderate and politically capped - the same honesty used for Latin American regionalism.

Introduction

A **trilateral economic** conversation among **India, China and Nepal looks, on a map, like common sense: a landlocked Himalayan state, two giant neighbours, shared rivers, tourism, and a need for roads that do not stop at ideology. In politics it is one of the hardest triangles in Asia. Potential exists. It is narrow and conditional.** An honest answer must say so.

Body

The potential

Nepal needs hydropower markets, posts, and investment without a single-patron trap. India needs a stable Himalaya, fewer Chinese-only corridors on its flank, and electricity that is not only domestic coal. China wants western-province outlets and BRI completion. **Issue-based trilateralism could mean: disaster-warning on earthquakes and floods; limited power**

trade protocols; tourism circuits; and customs data on a few crossing points. Track-II already whispers this. A full political triangle would be a Himalayan **functional regime**, in the APT spirit of Q4(b): money and meetings where force is too hard.

The trust deficit

Galwan 2020 and a live **LAC** mean India will not underwrite Chinese economic depth in the central Himalaya as if it were ASEAN. **BRI** projects in Nepal - airports, roads, debt talk - are read in Delhi as strategic. Nepal's maps on **Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura** collide with India's. Lipulekh trade with China, when announced without Kathmandu's comfort, inflames Nepali nationalism that then leans Beijing. India-Nepal is a civilisational intimacy that turns toxic fast; China-Nepal is a cheque intimacy that turns strategic fast. Trilateral **institutions** cannot outrun that.

What India can still do

India can **offer** trilateral functional talks on ecology and power while keeping BRI connectivity that is dual-use off the table. It can improve its own delivery - roads, petroleum, a less heavy political hand - so that Nepal does not need a triangle to escape Delhi. It can accept that Kathmandu will practise **omni-enmeshment**, as Dhaka now does. Pretending a concert of Himalayan harmony is a seminar luxury. The potential role is as **initiator of thin, technical engagement**, not as chair of a new UNASUR of the mountains.

If the LAC calms and BRI is ring-fenced, the triangle could thicken. Until then, the honest grade is the Latin American one: **moderate potential, political ceiling**.

Flow diagram

Trilateral potential -> Hydropower tourism disaster
 Trust deficit -> LAC / Galwan / Galwan
 Trust deficit -> BRI in Nepal in Nepal
 Trust deficit -> Kalapani Lipulekh
 Trilateral potential -.capped by. -> Trust deficit

Conclusion

India can initiate thin trilateral economics with China and Nepal on water, power and disaster. It cannot, while the LAC and BRI cut the same mountains, lead a trust-based Himalayan community. Potential is real. Romance is not.

Facts & figures

Galwan 2020

Deadly LAC clash that froze the political climate for any deep India-China economic triangle.

Kalapani-Lipulekh

Tri-junction cartographic dispute that turns any India-China trade announcement into a Nepal domestic crisis.

BRI in Nepal

Chinese projects that Delhi reads as strategic depth on the Himalayan flank, limiting trilateral comfort.

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