

India Likely to Supply 50 Phased-Out Tanks to Nepal

KATHMANDU, Dec 16 [2009]: India, which has decided to resume military aid to Nepal, is likely to supply 50 phased-out tanks at discounted rates.

India's The Telegraph newspaper reported the deal, quoting an unnamed senior Defense Ministry official in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The report said Nepal has specifically asked whether it can acquire 50 tanks from the Indian Army at discounted rates. These are Ajeya T-72 tanks that are being replaced with the Bhisma T-90 in the armored regiments.

Besides the tanks, officer cadets from Nepal will get more seats in the Indian Military Academy and the recruitment of Nepalese Gorkhas in the Indian Army would be increased.

The decisions followed talks, Nepal's visiting army chief, General Chhatraman Singh Gurung, held with Indian security officials in the Indian capital.

On recruitment of more Nepali nationals to the Indian Army, the southern neighbor has proposed to raise an additional battalion that will increase the recruitment from Nepal from the current level of about 1,600 soldiers a year.

There are seven Gorkha Rifles regiments in the Indian Army, each with five or six battalions of about 900 soldiers. Gorkhas from Nepal and India are recruited not only in these battalions but also in other regiments such as the special forces (parachute battalions), the newspaper said.

Nepal Army has also enquired whether India can raise the supply of military hardware to the level prevalent nine years back. In 2005, India scaled down its military aid, following the February 1 coup by the then king Gyanendra. But the actual reduction in military assistance had begun in 2001, with the Maoist insurgency intensifying in Nepal.

General Gurung, an alumnus of the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehra Dun who attended the passing-out parade of officer cadets on Saturday, also held talks with the Indian Army's director-general of military training. He said it was his wish to set up an institution like the IMA in Nepal.

At the academy, Gurung visited the room where he had stayed as a cadet. He also spent time in its archives searching for a photograph of himself with the late Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, whom he described as his hero.

Gurung was honored with the rank of General in the Indian Army by the President on Monday. He is slated to meet the external affairs minister, the foreign secretary and national security adviser on Wednesday.

Gurung's visit comes close on the heels of an India-Nepal defence cooperation committee meeting in Kathmandu last week.

The Indian Army, the paper said, looks at the demand of the Maoists for "integration" of their PLA troops in the Nepal Army ranks — under the country's peace accord — with "suspicion".

The delegations of the two armies have exchanged notes on security, with the Nepalese team of the view that the Maoists can present a military challenge yet again.

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