THE diplomatic relations established between Nepal and China on August 1 set a land-mark in the foreign policy of Nepal by renewing the age-old cultural, social and economic ties between the two countries in a manner appropriate to modern conditions. It provides an occasion for reviewing the past relations between Nepal and Tibet and examining the possible repercussions of the step taken on Nepal in future. Ever since the overthrow of Rana rule, particularly during the past two years, it had been widely known that at an opportune moment, Nepal's normal diplomatic relations with China would be re-established. In this age of internationalism when science and technology have contracted the world into a more or less single unit, a small country like Nepal has to establish proper and cordial relationship with the rest of the world and more so with China, her next door neighbour.

Foreign relations, however, are conditioned by various factors like geographical and strategic conditions, political obligations, economic necessities and historical ties (of race, region and culture). Sandwiched between Tibet and India, Nepal is situated at a distance of 500 miles from the nearest port, The Himalayas present a great physical and climatic barrier in the north despite which cultural contact and trade between Nepal and Tibet have taken place across the Himalayas through several passes. Only a small volume of purely local trade can pass through these passes; so economic relations between Nepal and Tibet cannot be said to be very intimate. However, historical bonds have been always there as the Nepal-Tibet border has been crossed in the past by Buddhist and Christian missionaries, and Chinese armies have also crossed the Himalayas to settle in the beautiful valleys enclosed in the great barrier of the Himalayas. Even today people of diverse races and castes live in Nepal, and migration from Tibet appears to have been unrestricted in the past. Indeed, Nepal has been a meeting ground of the cultural streams from the North and the South where Shihmanism and Buddhism have been happily blended, resulting in a distinct culture which finds expression in temples and chaityas, homes and palaces, social ceremonies, religious festivals and fairs, customs and manners, and dancing and singing.

Nepal has been influenced in the past, apart from India, by Chinese and Tibetan traditions. Historical changes and developments in India and China have left their mark on this country. Through her long and chequered history as an independent nation of the Himalayas, Nepal has many a time repulsed invasions from both the South and the North and has thus proved herself, in various respects, worthy of her national freedom and independent existence. True, being a small country, at times Nepal had to bow down in the past to a large and superior military force, but never has she allowed any country to plant its foot-hold permanently on her soil. Among the famous travelers who came from China to Nepal, Fahien (406 AD) and Huentsang (635 AD) highly praised Nepalese art and culture of their times. Thus in spite of temporary defeats on the battle fields, for example at the hands of China in 1792 and British in 1816, Nepal has never allowed foreigners or outsiders to interfere with her way of life and her internal affairs.

It is in the light of her past history that Nepal's relations with China should be viewed. Some maintain that from ancient times, Nepal had no relations with China, and that hostilities between the two countries dated from the 55th year of the Chienlung reign, i.e. 1790, when Nepal invaded Tibet. Though on the governmental level, relations may not have been established before this, they both were known to each other through travellers, exchanges of art and culture and social and even matrimonial relations from very ancient times.

To trace the relationship on the governmental level, one has to go back to the end of the eighteenth century (Sept. 1792) when Nepal's ambition for expansion of territories towards the North involved her in a war with China for the first time, which brought the Chinese army under Pu-Kang-Aun within the marches of the capital. Nepalis under Damodar Pandeny put up a fierce and stubborn resistance against the marching hordes and peace was concluded with honour. The Chinese were content with a formal submission from the Gurkas. The treaty of 1792 which governed the relations between the two countries until recently; provided, among other things, for compensation of all the losses incurred by the Bhotias in Lhasa, freedom of trade and commerce for the citizens of both the countries in each other's territories, help by China to Nepal in case of foreign invasion, and exchange of valuable presents after every five years. After 1910, taking advantage of the disturbed and uncertain conditions in China, Nepal discontinued the practice of sending presents to Peking. Nepal's relations with Tibet were determined till last year by the treaty of 1856, which obliged Tibet to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 10,000 (which has now been stopped) and also to grant certain extra-territorial rights and concessions to Nepal.

History shows that conflict between Nepal and British India had cropped up from time to time over the control of trade routes to Tibet, Moreover, before the opening of the new trade route via Kalimpong in the wake of the Youngusband Mission in 1904, there used to be brisk trade between Nepal and Tibet. Kuti and Kerang were famous centres of trade where the products of Tibet were exchanged with the goods and merchandise of Nepal. Though the volume and value of trade with Nepal has dwindled in recent times, nevertheless Nepali merchants still have some hold on the Tibetan trade. The defective system of transport is a hindrance to the development of this trade.

What Led to the Present Pact?

Why is it that diplomatic relations were established only now and not years ago? Firstly, under the Rana regime, Nepal left her foreign policy from the time of Jung Bahadur, the first Rana Prime Minister, to the British and almost all the outstanding issues were settled by a reference to the British in India. The Ranas always had this one motive viz., that the country should be kept in isolation and that all foreign influences should be kept.
out. It is only after the overthrow of the Kana Rule and the growth of the democratic atmosphere in the country that Nepal could think of establishing diplomatic relations with countries other than Britain. The independence of India also helped in this process. Secondly, the increasing importance of People's China after 1950 both internally (with the development of her national economy) and externally (relations with the Asian countries) made it necessary for almost every Asian country to establish friendly relations with New China. India's role is also quite important, for, the immediate circumstances leading up to the Nepal-China diplomatic relations have got to be examined against the background of India's diplomatic relations with China. India has been the first country in Asia to establish diplomatic relations with People's China and has ever since done her utmost to secure China's good-will and friendship. The Agreement on Tibet in April 1954, besides laying down the procedure for trade and cultural exchange between Tibet and India, was the first to enunciate the famous five principles, known as the Panch Shila. India has always stood for China's admission into the UN and has also recognised China's claims on Formosa as morally valid and she did her best to secure peace in Korea and Indo-China. Finally what paved the way for the Pact may be the joint declaration by Pandit Nehru and Mr Bulganin of the basis of the Indo-Soviet ties. The Bandung Conference of 29 countries also might have expedited matters. Apart from Mr Chou En-lai's assurance at the political committee meeting of the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung that China would never use force in settling border questions with the adjoining countries, the leader of the Nepali delegation at Bandung, had a personal interview with the Chinese premier with regard to various problems.

Terms and Conditions

The Pact, which is based on the Nehru-Bulganin statement envisages the promotion and strengthening of Nepal-China relations in the economic and cultural fields. The exchange of envoys will be at ambassadorial level. The Chinese Ambassador in New Delhi will be concurrently accredited to Nepal and the Nepalese Ambassador in India will similarly be accredited to China.

The text of the joint communique on the talks conducted at Kathmandu from July 27 onwards as broadcast by Peking Radio and monitored in Tokyo runs as follows:-

The Governments, desirous of establishing friendly relations between the two countries, have agreed to establish normal diplomatic relations and to exchange Ambassadors between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Nepal.

The two Governments have further agreed that the following five principles, namely:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial Integrity and sovereignty,
2. Non-aggression,
3. Non-interference in each other's internal affairs for any reasons of an economic, political or ideological character,
4. Equality and mutual benefit, and
5. Peaceful co-existence should form the basic principles to guide the relations between the two governments.

The Governments believe that the establishment of diplomatic relations will also promote further development in the cultural and economic co-operation between the two countries.

Future Prospects

This agreement does not refer to relations with Tibet and the problems connected with her will be settled separately. Tibet has stopped her annual tribute of Rs. 1000 which she had been paying to Nepal by the treaty of 1856. Nor does it provide for the careful handling and amicable settlement of the border incidents with Tibet. As Nepal's boundaries on the North are ill-defined, since the Himalayas do not run straight, this is a matter of some importance. The people living on the border often run into disputes. Border incidents used to be very frequent in the past and have been the cause of wars between Nepal and Tibet. Moreover, all the good wishes of both Governments notwithstanding, trade and commerce between the two countries cannot be properly developed, unless transport facilities are improved. Any improvement appears to be difficult in the near future, but it may be possible in the years ahead.

The present agreement, however, is just a beginning and it may be hoped that most of the issues will be carefully examined and amicably settled when separate talks are held with Tibet. Some months ago, the Chinese national Assembly had put forward the suggestion that China should have normal relations with Nepal and other small countries on the side of the Himalayas. Nepal has already seized this opportunity. It is necessary for us to develop friendship with a Power which is growing in Asia. Culturally and socially, there are very many similarities, which will be developed and encouraged by the greater contacts (which are quite possible now) of the peoples of the two countries.