

India's Foreign Policy towards its neighbour

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No nations can live alone in international society. In recent times increasing globalization and interdependence between nations all over the globe has enhanced the need for healthy diplomatic relations among all countries. For that reason, it is necessary to have a sound and strategic foreign policy. It is crucial for having a voice in international platforms, for effective trade, investments, and for achieving nations own self-interest. India has successfully developed its own foreign policy since independence. After independence, India's foreign policy mainly revolved around fostering new relationships with different nations to maintain peace and cooperation in the sphere of international disputes such as the Cold War. At that time India's conflicts with neighbours like China and Pakistan compel India to led necessary changes in its foreign policy. Relation with USA and Soviet Union were in constant flux due to the allegiances formed during both the Sino-Indian and the Indo-Pakistani wars. At this moment India felt the need of powerful military. India focused on greater military preparedness and development of more agenda-driven foreign policies. In 1991 India took more liberal industrial policy and transform its economy more open and thus led its economy and trade policies with the outside world open. This greatly created opportunities for employment and manufacturing in the country, and also created a new avenue for cooperation and interaction with several countries of the world.

Development in India's Foreign Policy

The present government has been trying to make active efforts to expand India's diplomatic footprint, foster strong international relations, and use these global relationships for mutual advantage and progress. This method is known as 'fast track diplomacy' which is brought by Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) government. It involves a much more concentrated and proactive approach to building close ties than was witnessed in earlier times. This is achieved through an increased number of personal visits by the Hon'ble Prime Minister to neighbouring and other countries, as well as increased participation in regional and international conferences and summits.

This dynamic approach has some specific goals that have been set for the nation. These objectives are –

Developed a good relation with neighbouring countries- India has a very large boundary and shares its boundaries with Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, Maldives, Myanmar,

Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The present Central Government has emphasized the need to prioritize ties with its immediate neighbours. This prioritisation is being implemented through two core approaches. That is 'Neighbourhood First Policy' and 'Act East Policy'. 'Neighbourhood First' Policy aims to improve interactions with its immediate neighbours and the Indian Ocean Island states. India's policy towards immediate neighbourhood is based on efforts to build peace and cooperation in South Asia. Vaccine diplomacy and development assistance based on mutual respect and equal partnership are two the most important pillars to catapult India's Neighbourhood First Policy. It achieves various goals through a holistic approach to regional foreign policy. India entering into Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for cooperation in areas of trade, infrastructure, commercial linkages and transit facilities. Resource support by India to its neighbours is another vital component of this approach in terms of financial aid, equipment, human resource training and diplomatic alliances. For example, India provided immense assistance, in the form of economic adjustment programme to Sri Lanka. India has extended assistance of about \$2.5 billion including credit facilities for fuel and food to crises ridden Sri Lanka. Regional Institutions mechanism help India to emerge as a regional leader in South Asia. In furtherance of this, India has actively participated and invested in SAARC as a vehicle for development in the region. However, it has also begun to initiate issue specific groups that can achieve faster and more effective progress, without being held back due to lack of consensus. One such example is the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) group. The official of this group tries to formulate, implement and review quadrilateral agreements such as water resource management, connectivity of power, transport and infrastructure.

Institution Building In the present Foreign Policy one important aim for India is to participate and take the lead in several international governance platforms. The government is trying to increase India's influence in the existing associations. India is already a member of the G20, the East Asia Summit, SAARC and the BRICS coalition, and aims to increase its authority at these platforms. The government has played an active and influential role in various international organisation like IMF, G8+5 and IBSA dialogue forum. India is also a member of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Sanghai Cooperation Organisation. The government also claim for permanent membership on the UN Security Council.

'Act East' Policy in 1992 the then PM Narasimha Rao government launched a 'Look East' Policy. The Act East Policy was announced in November 2014. It is the upgradation version of Look East' Policy. Act East Policy is a diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic and cultural with Asia specific region at different levels. In addition of this, the Prime Minister attends the annual ASEAN Summits, and engages in high-level exchanges with member nations. India is also a member of BIMSTEC. It is an important platform for India to consolidate regional cooperation to its neighbourhood. It has three primary objectives. Mainly 3C - Connectivity (Infrastructure investments, Improved access to gateway ports, Technology transfer), Culture (Promotion of tourism in famous cultural and religious sites, Preservation of ancient manuscripts, heritage sites and artifacts) and Commerce (Strong Production Networks, Regional Value Chains, Bilateral Trade Agreements).

Under the Act East Policy (AEP), the India Japan strategic partnership has been lifted to an entirely new level. India has upgraded its relations to strategic partnership with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, Singapore and tries with all countries in the Asia Specific Region. In furtherance of this India has been also actively engaged with Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC), and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Through such strategic partnerships, India can develop new global value chains – a crucial requirement in light of manufacturing campaigns such as ‘Make in India’.

Current Relations with its Neighbour Countries

In order to play a vital role in the emerging multi-polar world politics, India has been trying to develop enduring linkages between its domestic priorities and its foreign policy objectives. The current government has taken initiatives to strengthen relations with its neighbourhood. The recent progress in relations with the neighbouring nations highlights the growing efforts of the government to build and strengthen its relationships with these nations.

India and Bhutan: the basis for bilateral relations between India and Bhutan was formed by Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Peace and Friendship in the year 1949. Article 2 of the treaty was granted India a role in guiding Bhutan’s foreign policy. In 2007 the revised Indo-Bhutan Friendship treaty was passed and India encouraged Bhutan’s sovereignty. The guiding role of making foreign policy was abolished. During his first foreign visit to Bhutan in 2014, the Hon’ble Prime Minister declared the expansion of bilateral ties and termed the relationship between the two countries as “Bharat to Bhutan” (B2B) relations. In November 2016 by Indo-Bhutan Trade and Transit Agreement a free trade regime between the two countries opened and also provides for duty free transit of Bhutanese exports to third countries. India has agreed to assist Bhutan in establishing Hydro Power project and also constructed three Hydroelectric projects. In addition to this, the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreements (BBIN MVA) initiated through as part of India’s “eastern strategy”, which would help build stronger links with northern states and countries like Bhutan and Bangladesh, was passed in the lower house of Bhutan’s National Assembly with certain amendments including regulated cross border movement of vehicles.

India and Nepal: Nepal is also a friendly neighbour country of India. The India Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 forms the basis of the special relations that exist between these countries. India has been a key development partner of Nepal. Indian cooperation started in 1952 with the construction of an air strip at Gaucharan and continues its assistance to Nepal. It has been assisting primarily on infrastructure development and capacity development of Human resources. India is Nepal’s largest trading partner. India has provided transit facility to Nepal for the third country trade. Both Public and private sector of India have invested in Nepal. Alongside, the current government recently took up the work of starting the 5,600 MW Pancheshwar project, which had remained stalled for 18 years after the agreement. Deliberations and discussions are presently being carried out to agree upon the major issues such as the sharing of water and its benefits between Nepal and India and putting a value to the benefits in the project’s Detailed Project Report (DPR). Energy from the project that is to be developed jointly by India and Nepal will be divided equally as per bilateral treaties. However, sharing of the benefits and water from the reservoir — like irrigation and flood

control — are yet to be agreed upon, in terms of price and quantity. Govt. of India's support and aid after the Nepal earthquake has significantly strengthen the relations. Recently India Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 was renewed. India and Nepal now plan to construct Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) on their respective sides at ports of entry in Birgunj, Biratnagar, Bhairahwa and Nepalgunj. Assistance is also provided to several India Nepal Friendship Organisations working to promote Indian culture and India Nepal bilateral relations.

India and Bangladesh: India was the first nation to acknowledge Bangladesh as a separate and independent state in December 1971. India and Bangladesh are engaged in regional cooperation through multilateral forum such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORARC etc. in pursuance of directions of the Prime Ministers of these both countries are trying to implement sub regional cooperation initiatives along with Nepal and Bhutan. There are more than 50 bilateral institutional mechanisms between India and Bangladesh in the areas of security, trade & commerce, power & energy, transport & connectivity, science and technology, defence, rivers & maritime affairs etc. To promote bilateral cultural exchanges, the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) of Indian Council for Cultural Relations was inaugurated at Dhaka on March 11, 2010. Both countries jointly celebrated year-long celebrations of the 150th birth Anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore and the 90th Anniversary of the publication of the poem 'Bidrohi' by Kazi Nazrul Islam in 2011-12. Presently both countries are celebrating Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahaman 102th birth anniversary. However, leaders of both nations have failed to come to a consensus with Teesta River Water Sharing Agreement. At present, there is only one treaty between India and Bangladesh on the sharing of water from River Ganges. With the political pressure from both the nations, the leaders are unable to bring the Teesta Treaty into agreement.

India and Sri Lanka: India is Sri Lanka's closest neighbour. The relationship between the two countries is more than 2,500 years old and both sides have built upon a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic interaction. In recent years, the relationship has been marked by close contacts at the highest political level, growing trade and investment, cooperation in the fields of development, education, culture and defence, as well as a broad understanding on major issues of international interest. In recent economic and political turmoil in Sri Lanka seems to have given India's foreign policy a fresh lease of life in the island nation. Recently the country has been rocked by protests as people seethe with anger over soaring prices and shortages of food and fuel. (BBC News, BBC HINDI, Colombo, 19 May). Though previously Sri Lanka had opted for loan about 10bn yuan from China to tackle its foreign exchange shortage, but recently India is slowly emerging as one of the biggest providers of aid to Sri Lanka. Recently Sri Lanka has finalised an agreement to share ownership of the British built Trincomalee oil tank farm with the Indian Oil Corporation. India has sought such a deal for decades.

India and China: official diplomatic relations between India and China were established on 1st April 1950. In 1988, the nations entered the phase of improving the bilateral relations, and in 1993 leaders of the nations signed an Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the India-China Border Areas. Since then,

trade and economic relations with China have witnessed immense progress. India- China bilateral trade, which was as low as US\$ 2.92 billion in 2000 reached US\$ 70.4 billion by 2015. India's exports to China touched US\$ 8.86 billion whereas China's exports were US\$ 61.54 billion. But still there are irritants in relations between the two countries. The border dispute between these countries still unresolved. China has a long-term wish to build dams on Brahmaputra or seek access to Indian ocean through Pakistan and Myanmar. String of pearls still a concern for India. In addition to that often China flex political and military muscles to India.

India and Pakistan: India and Pakistan share linguistic, cultural, geographic and economic links, yet their relation has been mired in complexity due to a number of historical and political events. Since Independence in 1947, relations between India and Pakistan have been tense. The nations have fought wars in 1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999. However, these tensions did not deter the nations from working towards initiating peaceful, friendly and cooperative relations. To build confidence within the business community of both nations, three agreements- Customs Cooperation Agreement, Mutual Recognition Agreement and Redressal of Trade Grievances Agreement were signed during the Commerce Secretaries' talks in September 2012. After the attacks on Uri army base by Pakistan-backed terrorist, a retaliatory "surgical strike" by India dissolved possibilities of any discussion between the nations. In 2019 Indian government moved to revoke art 370 of the Indian constitution and created Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union territory of Ladakh. This incident further deescalates the relation. And diplomatic ties between the two countries were suspended. Pakistan downgraded its diplomatic relation with India.

India and Afghanistan: India and Afghanistan have a deep relation based on historical and cultural links. According to MEA the friendly relations can be traced back in 1950 when five-year treaty of friendship was signed between them. India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan. The Taliban returned to power (2021) after twenty years of insurgency. Still now USA or other western countries have not yet recognised the Taliban as Afghanistan government. Recently India and Taliban official have made their relationship more official. On June 2, 2022 a high-level delegation of Indian officials met with Taliban acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Kabul. The Taliban regime is desperate to have economic and humanitarian aid which India can and has provided in the past. A stronger relation with India will also provide the regime with greater leverage in its relations with Pakistan.

India's border disputes with China have led to the first real threat of full-scale war in the recent past. This conflict has led to China not only threatening military action, but also hinting support to Pakistan with regards the Kashmir issue. Various incidents has turned China into an 'open adversary' to India. Such a policy can puts India at risk of becoming isolated, not only in South Asia, but also the world. A balanced foreign policy approach towards US, Russia and China would be the best option before India. At the same time India should actively participate with ASEAN, BRICS and other multi-lateral organisation to fulfil its interest.

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