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## **India's Foreign Policy- An Introduction**

India's international influence varied over the years after independence. Indian prestige and moral authority were high in the 1950s and facilitated the acquisition of developmental assistance from both East and West. Although the prestige stemmed from India's nonaligned stance, the nation was unable to prevent Cold War politics from becoming intertwined with interstate relations in South Asia. On the intensely debated Kashmir issue with Pakistan, India lost credibility by rejecting United Nations calls for a plebiscite in the disputed area.

In the 1960s and 1970s India's international position among developed and developing countries faded in the course of wars with China and Pakistan, disputes with other countries in South Asia, and India's attempt to match Pakistan's support from the United States and China by signing the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971. Although India obtained substantial Soviet military and economic aid, which helped to strengthen the nation, India's influence was undercut regionally and internationally by the perception that its friendship with the Soviet Union prevented a more forthright condemnation of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. In the late 1980s, India improved relations with the United States, other developed countries, and China while continuing close ties with the Soviet Union. Relations with its South Asian neighbours, especially Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, occupied much of the energies of the Ministry of External Affairs.

The end of the Cold War significantly affected India's foreign policy, as it did for much of the world. The country now seeks to strengthen its diplomatic and economic ties with the United States, the European Union trading bloc, Japan, Israel, Mexico, and Brazil. India has also forged close ties with the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the African Union, the Arab League and Iran.

Though India continues to have a military relationship with Russia, Israel has emerged as India's second largest military partner while India has built a strong strategic partnership with the United States. The foreign policy of Narendra Modi indicated a shift towards focusing on the Asian region and, more broadly, trade deals.

## **Act East Policy**

In the post Cold War era, a significant aspect of India's foreign policy is the Look East Policy. During the cold war, India's relations with its South East Asian neighbours was not very strong. After the end of the cold war, the government of India particularly realised the importance of redressing this imbalance in India's foreign policy. Consequently, the Narsimha Rao government in the early nineties of the last century unveiled the look east policy. Initially it focused on renewing political and economic contacts with the countries of East and South-East Asia.

At present, under the Look East Policy, the Government of India is giving special emphasis on the economic development of backward north eastern region of India taking advantage of huge market of ASEAN as well as of the energy resources available in some of the member countries of ASEAN like Burma. Look-east policy was launched in 1991 just after the end of the cold war, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After the start of liberalisation, it was a very strategic policy decision taken by the government in the foreign policy. To quote Prime Minister Manmohan Singh "it was also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy".

The policy was given an initial thrust with the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visiting China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore and India becoming an important dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992. Since the beginning of this century, India has given a

big push to this policy by becoming a summit level partner of ASEAN (2002) and getting involved in some regional initiatives such as the BIMSTEC and the Ganga–Mekong Cooperation and now becoming a member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in December 2005.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India has forged a closer partnership with Western powers. In the 1990s, India's economic problems and the demise of the bipolar world political system forced India to reassess its foreign policy and adjust its foreign relations. Previous policies proved inadequate to cope with the serious domestic and international problems facing India. The end of the Cold War gutted the core meaning of nonalignment and left Indian foreign policy without significant direction. The hard, pragmatic considerations of the early 1990s were still viewed within the nonaligned framework of the past, but the disintegration of the Soviet Union removed much of India's international leverage, for which relations with Russia and the other post-Soviet states could not compensate. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India improved its relations with the United States, Canada, France, Japan and Germany. In 1992, India established formal diplomatic relations with Israel and this relationship grew during the tenures of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government and the subsequent UPA (United Progressive Alliance) governments.

In the mid-1990s, India attracted the world attention towards the Pakistan-backed terrorism in Kashmir. The Kargil War resulted in a major diplomatic victory for India. The United States and European Union recognised the fact that Pakistani military had illegally infiltrated into Indian territory and pressured Pakistan to withdraw from Kargil. Several anti-India militant groups based in Pakistan were labelled as terrorist groups by the United States and European Union.

India has often represented the interests of developing countries at various international platforms. Shown here are Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, Dilma Rousseff, Xi Jinping and Jacob Zuma, 2014.

In 1998, India tested nuclear weapons for the second time (see Pokhran-II) which resulted in several US, Japanese and European sanctions on India. India's then-defence minister, George Fernandes, said that India's nuclear programme was necessary as it provided a deterrence to potential Chinese nuclear threat. Most of the sanctions imposed on India were removed by 2001.

After September 11 attacks in 2001, Indian intelligence agencies provided the US with significant information on Al-Qaeda and related groups' activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. India's extensive contribution to the War on Terror, coupled with a surge in its economy, has helped India's diplomatic relations with several countries. Over the past three years, India has held numerous joint military exercises with US and European nations that have resulted in a strengthened US-India and EU-India bilateral relationship. India's bilateral trade with Europe and United States had more than doubled in the five years since 2003.

India has been pushing for reforms in the UN and WTO with mixed results. India's candidature for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council is currently backed by several countries including France, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Brazil, Australia and UAE. In 2004, the United States signed a nuclear co-operation agreement with India even though the latter is not a part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The US argued that India's strong nuclear non-proliferation record made it an exception, however this has not persuaded other Nuclear Suppliers Group members to sign similar deals with India. During a state visit to India in November 2010, US president Barack Obama announced US support for India's bid for permanent membership to UN Security Council as well as India's entry to Nuclear Suppliers Group, Wassenaar Arrangement, Australia Group and Missile Technology Control Regime. As of January 2018, India has become member of Wassenaar Arrangement, Australia Group and Missile Technology Control Regime.

## **Strategic partners**

India's growing economy, strategic location, mix of friendly and diplomatic foreign policy and large and vibrant diaspora has won it more allies than enemies. India has friendly relations with several countries in the developing world. Though India is not a part of any major military alliance, it has close strategic and military relationship with most of the fellow major powers.

Countries considered India's closest include the Russian Federation, Israel, Afghanistan, France, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and the United States. Russia is the largest supplier of military equipment to India, followed by Israel and France. According to some analysts, Israel is set to overtake Russia as India's largest military and strategic partner. The two countries also collaborate extensively in the sphere of counter-terrorism and space technology. India also enjoys strong military relations with several other countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, Singapore, Brazil, South Africa and Italy. In addition, India operates an airbase in Tajikistan, signed a landmark defence accord with Qatar in 2008, and has leased out Assumption Island from Seychelles to build a naval base in 2015.

India has also forged relationships with developing countries, especially South Africa, Brazil, and Mexico. These countries often represent the interests of the developing countries through economic forums such as the G8+5, IBSA and WTO. India was seen as one of the standard bearers of the developing world and claimed to speak for a collection of more than 30 other developing nations at the Doha Development Round. Indian Look East policy has helped it develop greater economic and strategic partnership with Southeast Asian countries, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. India also enjoys friendly relations with the Persian Gulf countries and most members of the African Union.



# **India and its neighbourhoods' regional relations**

## **1. Bangladesh**

India was the second country to recognize Bangladesh as a separate and independent state, doing so on 6 December 1971. India fought alongside the Bangladeshis to liberate Bangladesh from West Pakistan in 1971. Bangladesh's relationship with India has been difficult in terms of irrigation and land border disputes post 1976. However, India has enjoyed favorable relationship with Bangladesh during governments formed by the Awami League in 1972 and 1996. The recent solutions of land and maritime disputes have taken out irritants in ties.

At the outset India's relations with Bangladesh could not have been stronger because of India's unalloyed support for independence and opposition against Pakistan in 1971. During the independence war, many refugees fled to India. When the struggle of resistance matured in November 1971, India also intervened militarily and may have helped bring international attention to the issue through Indira Gandhi's visit to Washington, D.C. Afterwards India furnished relief and reconstruction aid. India extended recognition to Bangladesh prior to the end of the war in 1971 (the second country to do so after Bhutan) and subsequently lobbied others to follow suit. India also withdrew its military from the land of Bangladesh when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman requested Indira Gandhi to do so during the latter's visit to Dhaka in 1972.

Indo-Bangladesh relations have been somewhat less friendly since the fall of Mujib government in August 1975. Over the years over issues such as South Talpatti Island, the Tin Bigha Corridor and access to Nepal, the Farakka Barrage and water sharing, border conflicts near Tripura and the construction of a fence along most of the border which India explains as security provision against migrants, insurgents and terrorists. Many Bangladeshis feel India likes to play "big brother" to smaller neighbors, including Bangladesh. Bilateral relations warmed in 1996, due to a softer Indian foreign policy and the new Awami League Government. A 30-year water-sharing agreement for the Ganges River was signed in December 1996, after an earlier bilateral water-sharing agreement for the Ganges River lapsed in 1988. Both nations also have cooperated on the issue of flood warning and preparedness. The Bangladesh Government and tribal insurgents signed a peace accord in December 1997, which allowed for the return of tribal refugees who had fled into India, beginning in 1986, to escape violence caused by an insurgency in their homeland in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Bangladesh Army maintains a very strong presence in the area to this day. The army is increasingly concerned about a growing problem of cultivation of illegal drugs.

There are also small pieces of land along the border region that Bangladesh is diplomatically trying to reclaim. Padua, part of Sylhet Division before 1971, has been under Indian control since the war in 1971. This small strip of land was re-occupied by the BDR in 2001, but later given back to India after Bangladesh government decided to solve the problem through diplomatic negotiations. The Indian New Moore island no longer exists, but Bangladesh repeatedly claims it to be part of the Satkhira district of Bangladesh.

In recent years India has increasingly complained that Bangladesh does not secure its border properly. It fears an increasing flow of poor Bangladeshis and it accuses Bangladesh of harbouring Indian separatist groups like ULFA and alleged terrorist groups.

The Bangladesh government has refused to accept these allegations. India estimates that over 20 million Bangladeshis are living illegally in India. One Bangladeshi official responded that "there is not a single Bangladeshi migrant in India". Since 2002, India has been constructing an India – Bangladesh Fence along much of the 2500 mile border. The failure to resolve migration disputes bears a human cost for illegal migrants, such as imprisonment and health risks (namely HIV/AIDS).

India's prime minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina have completed a landmark deal redrawing their messy shared border and there by solving disputes between India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh has also given India transit route to travel through Bangladesh to its North East states. India and Bangladesh also have free trade agreement on 7 June 2015.

Both countries solved its border dispute on 6 June 2015.

To connect Kolkata with Tripura via Bangladesh through railway, the Union Government on 10 February 2016 sanctioned about 580 crore rupees. The project that is expected to be completed by 2017 will pass through Bangladesh.

The Agartala-Akhaura rail-link between Indian Railway and Bangladesh Railway will reduce the current 1700 km road distance between Kolkata to Agartala via Siliguri to just 350-kilometer by railway.

The project ranks high on Prime Minister's 'Act East' Policy, and is expected to increase connectivity and boost trade between India and Bangladesh.

## **2. Bhutan**

Historically, there have been close ties with India. Both countries signed a friendship treaty in 1949, where India would assist Bhutan in foreign relations. On 8 February 2007, the Indo-Bhutan Friendship Treaty was substantially revised under the Bhutanese King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Whereas in the Treaty of 1949 Article 2 read as "The Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations."

In the revised treaty it now reads as, "In keeping with the abiding ties of close friendship and cooperation between Bhutan and India, the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of the Republic of India shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests. Neither government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other". The revised treaty also includes in it the preamble "Reaffirming their respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity", an element that was absent in the earlier version. The Indo-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 2007 strengthens Bhutan's status as an independent and sovereign nation.

India continues to be the largest trade and development partner of Bhutan. Planned development efforts in Bhutan began in the early 1960s. The First Five Year Plan (FYP) of Bhutan was launched in 1961. Since then, India has been extending financial assistance to Bhutan's FYPs. The 10th FYP ended in June 2013. India's overall assistance to the 10th FYP was a little over Rs. 5000 crores, excluding grants for hydropower projects. India has

committed Rs. 4500 crores for Bhutan's 11th FYP along with Rs. 500 crores as an Economic Stimulus Package

The hydropower sector is one of the main pillars of bilateral co-operation, exemplifying mutually beneficial synergy by providing clean energy to India and exports revenue to Bhutan (power contributes 14% to the Bhutanese GDP, comprising about 35% of Bhutan's total exports). Three hydroelectric projects (HEPs) totalling 1416 MW, (336 MW Chukha HEP, the 60 MW Kurichu HEP, and the 1020 MW Tala HEP), are already exporting electricity to India. In 2008 the two governments identified ten more projects for development with a total generation capacity of 10,000 MW. Of these, three projects totalling 2940 MW (1200 MW Punatsangchu-I, 1020 MW Punatsangchu-II and 720 MW Mangdechu HEPs) are under construction and are scheduled to be commissioned in the last quarter of 2017–2018. Out of the remaining 7 HEPs, 4 projects totalling 2120 MW (600 MW Kholongchhu, 180 MW Bunakha, 570 MW Wangchu and 770 MW Chamkarchu) will be constructed under Joint Venture model, for which a Framework Inter-Governmental Agreement was signed between both governments in 2014. Of these 4 JV-model projects, pre-construction activities for Kholongchhu HEP have commenced.

### **3. Nepal**

Relations between India and Nepal are close yet fraught with difficulties stemming from border disputes, geography, economics, the problems inherent in big power-small power relations, and common ethnic and linguistic identities that overlap the two countries' borders. In 1950 New Delhi and Kathmandu initiated their intertwined relationship with the Treaty of Peace and Friendship and accompanying secret letters that defined security relations between the two countries, and an agreement governing both bilateral trade and trade transiting Indian soil. The 1950 treaty and letters stated that "neither government shall tolerate any threat to the security of the other by a foreign aggressor" and obligated both sides "to inform each other of any serious friction or misunderstanding with any neighboring state likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations subsisting between the two governments", and also granted the Indian and Nepali citizens right to get involved in any economic activity such as work and business related activity in each other's territory. These accords cemented a "special relationship" between India and Nepal that granted Nepalese in India the same economic and educational opportunities as Indian citizens.

Relations between India and Nepal reached its lowest during 1989 when India imposed a 13-month-long economic blockade of Nepal. Indian PM Narendra Modi visited Nepal in 2014, the first by an Indian PM in nearly 17 years.

In 2015, a blockade of the India-Nepal border has effected relations. The blockade is led by ethnic communities angered by Nepal's recently promulgated new constitution. However, the Nepalese government accuses India of deliberately worsening the embargo, but India denies this.

## **4. Pakistan**

Despite historical, cultural and ethnic links between them, relations between India and Pakistan have been plagued by years of mistrust and suspicion ever since the partition of India in 1947. The principal source of contention between India and its western neighbor has been the Kashmir conflict. After an invasion by Pashtun tribesmen and Pakistani paramilitary forces, the Hindu Maharaja of the Dogra Kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, and its Muslim Prime Minister, Sheikh Abdullah, signed an Instrument of Accession with New Delhi. The First Kashmir War started after the Indian Army entered Srinagar, the capital of the state, to secure the area from the invading forces. The war ended in December 1948 with the Line of Control dividing the erstwhile princely state into territories administered by Pakistan (northern and western areas) and India (southern, central and northeastern areas). Pakistan contested the legality of the Instrument of Accession since the Dogra Kingdom has signed a standstill agreement with it. The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 started following the failure of Pakistan's Operation Gibraltar, which was designed to infiltrate forces into Jammu and Kashmir to precipitate an insurgency against rule by India. The five-week war caused thousands of casualties on both sides. It ended in a United Nations (UN) mandated ceasefire and the subsequent issuance of the Tashkent Declaration. India and Pakistan went to war again in 1971, this time the conflict being over East Pakistan. The large-scale atrocities committed there by the Pakistan army led to millions of Bengali refugees pouring over into India. India, along with the Mukti Bahini, defeated Pakistan and the Pakistani forces surrendered on the eastern front. The war resulted in the creation of Bangladesh.

In 1998, India carried out the Pokhran-II nuclear tests which was followed by Pakistan's Chagai-I tests. Following the Lahore Declaration in February 1999, relations briefly improved. A few months later, however, Pakistani paramilitary forces and Pakistan Army, infiltrated in large numbers into the Kargil district of Indian Kashmir. This initiated the Kargil War after India moved in thousands of troops to successfully flush out the infiltrators. Although the conflict did not result in a full-scale war between India and Pakistan, relations between the two reached all-time low which worsened even further following the involvement of Pakistan-based terrorists in the hijacking of the Indian Airlines Flight 814 in December 1999. Attempts to normalise relations, such as the Agra summit held in July 2001, failed. An attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, which was blamed on Pakistan, which had condemned the attack caused a military standoff between the two countries which lasted for nearly a year raising fears of a nuclear warfare. However, a peace process, initiated in 2003, led to improved relations in the following years.

Since the initiation of the peace process, several confidence-building-measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan have taken shape. The Samjhauta Express and Delhi–Lahore Bus service are two of these successful measures which have played a crucial role in expanding people-to-people contact between the two countries. The initiation of Srinagar–Muzaffarabad Bus service in 2005 and opening of a historic trade route across the Line of Control in 2008 further reflects increasing eagerness between the two sides to improve relations. Although bilateral trade between India and Pakistan was a modest US\$1.7 billion in March 2007, it is expected to cross US\$10 billion by 2010. After the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, India sent aid to affected areas in Pakistani Kashmir and Punjab as well as Indian Kashmir.

The 2008 Mumbai attacks seriously undermined the relations between the two countries. India alleged Pakistan of harbouring militants on their soil, while Pakistan vehemently denies such claims.

A new chapter started in India Pakistan relation when a new NDA government took charge in Delhi after victory in 2014 election and invited SAARC members' leaders in oath taking ceremony. Subsequently visit of Indian Prime Minister on 25 December informally to wish Pakistani Prime minister Nawaj Sharif on his Birth Day and participate in his daughter's wedding. It was hoped that the relation between the neighbor will improve but attack on Indian army camp by Pakistani infiltrators on 18 September 2016 and subsequent surgical strike by India aggravated the already strained relation between the nations.

A SAARC summit scheduled in Islamabad was called off because of after boycott by India and other SAARC member's subsequently.

The relation further took a deep after another attack on Indian Army post in Pulwama in Kashmir. India blamed Pakistan which was denied by the Pakistani establishment but the Indian establishment made another preemptive attack on Terrorist Camp on 26th Feb 2019.

A new government at both Delhi and Pakistan has created a new hope for better relation between the two nations.

## **5. Sri Lanka**

Bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and India have been generally friendly, but were affected by the Sri Lankan Civil War and by the failure of Indian intervention during the civil war as well as India's support for Tamil Tiger militants. India is Sri Lanka's only neighbour, separated by the Palk Strait; both nations occupy a strategic position in South Asia and have sought to build a common security umbrella in the Indian Ocean.

India-Sri Lanka relations have undergone a qualitative and quantitative transformation in the recent past. Political relations are close, trade and investments have increased dramatically, infrastructural linkages are constantly being augmented, defence collaboration has increased and there is a general, broad-based improvement across all sectors of bilateral co-operation. India was the first country to respond to Sri Lanka's request for assistance after the tsunami in December 2004. In July 2006, India evacuated 430 Sri Lankan nationals from Lebanon, first to Cyprus by Indian Navy ships and then to Delhi and Colombo by special Air India flights.

There exists a broad consensus within the Sri Lankan polity on the primacy of India in Sri Lanka's external relations matrix. Both the major political parties in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United Nationalist Party have contributed to the rapid development of bilateral relations in the last ten years. Sri Lanka has supported India's candidature to the permanent membership of the UN Security Council.