



# PSIR BULLETIN

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POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



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## ASSESSING THE ANTI-INDIA SENTIMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

A.G. Shivamurthy

**Focus:**

The editorial focuses on how the history and identity formation of India and its internal and external interests promotes anti-Indian sentiments in South Asia

**PSIR syllabus: India and south Asia (Paper 2B)****Context:**

The revival of the 'India Out' campaign in the Maldives in early January 2022

- The recent 'India Out' campaign in the Maldives is against the opposition to the **Uthuru Thila Falhu** (UTF) harbor development deal with India in February 2021, which is being seen as a way of allowing Indian military presence on native soil.

**More about news:**

- The 'India Out' campaign is widely spreading across social media platforms.
- Reports are being published in Maldives media alleging that the present incumbent government is allowing India to establish a military base in the island by signing secret agreements, in exchange for financial assistance or other material benefits.
- This allegation is made against the government because the leader of the current ruling party Mohamed Nasheed urged India to intervene militarily to restore peace and democracy in 2018.
- Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) of former President Abdulla Yameen and its coalition partner People's National Congress (PNC) are trying to mobilize people against the current government by spreading misleading propaganda against India.

**Concerns:**

- **Skepticism against India:** Bhutan and Afghanistan have retained a positive perception of India due to their differences with China and Pakistan, the same isn't true for other south Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Many sections of people and politicians from these countries continue to perceive and portray India with animosity, lack of trust, and skepticism.

## REASONS THAT CAN BE DRAWN FOR ANTI-INDIA SENTIMENTS

- **History and identity formation:** History continues to shape South Asia's present inter-state behavior and attitudes. Independent India has shaped its identity and nation by mainly drawing from its civilisational history and ethnic and regional diversity.
- **Seeds of skepticism:** The memories of Hindu Zamindars and the partitions of 1905 and 1947 continue to sow seeds of skepticism against India.

- **Sri Lanka** and the **Maldives** still remember India from its days of the Chola invasion. Sri Lanka, perceives India as a Hindu state pushing back against Buddhism.
- **Religion:** Religion has also played a vital role in this differentiation. **For example**, Sections of the Maldives, Pakistan, and Bangladesh view independent India as a Hindu state, where Muslims are looked down on as secondary citizens.

These factors of history and identity formation have thus sown the initial seeds of skepticism against the Indian state. And this phenomenon has prevailed since India's independence.

- **Ethnic and religious spillover:** Throughout its historic and civilizational interactions, India has had its ethnic and religious spillover with its modern-day neighbors, such as the Madhesis in Nepal, Tamils in Sri Lanka, and Hindus in Bangladesh. But, these ethnic or religious spillovers have not always been perceived positively by others. The Tamils, the Madhesis, and the Hindus are seen as others and outsiders by sections of elites and extremist elements in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh. India has protested, raised concerns, or even intervened in these countries when its fellow-ethics and religious groups are threatened.
- **Examples:**
  - In the 1980s, India's military interference to end the **Tamil-Sinhala conflict** and still continue to raise the issues of the 13th amendment and reconciliation of the Tamils with Sri Lanka.
  - In Nepal, India insisted on promoting an inclusive democratic framework for the Madhesis.
  - In Bangladesh too, India has continued to raise concerns over majoritarian attacks against Hindu minorities.
- **Geopolitics and strategic rivalry:** Traditionally, India has viewed its neighbors with a security centric lense and has treated South Asia and the Indian Ocean as its sphere of influence and the first line of defense. Although this had mitigated the threats from Pakistan and China and helped India maintain its status quo, it had created a perception of India dictating its smaller neighbors' domestic and foreign policies.
  - **For Example:** With China's rise, South Asian countries are hoping to reap economic benefits from China through its Belt Road Initiative (BRI). While India has attempted to maintain its status quo by countering these projects, it has also persuaded its neighbors to respect its sensitivities and security. This has created a perception amongst some segments that India continues to involve too much while offering too little.
- **Unresolved issues:** These unresolved issues have created a perception that India lacks interest in the region and is incapable of looking beyond its national interests.
- **For Example,**
  - 1) **Bangladesh:** water-sharing issues continue to shape a negative perception of India in Bangladesh.
  - 2) **Sri Lanka:** India has failed to address the fisherman issue.
  - 3) **Nepal:** Water sharing remains a major irritant. The treaties of Koshi, Gandaki, and Mahakali have been perceived as unfair and exploitative by the Nepalis.
- **Economic expectations and relations:** India's economic and geographic size has often created some expectations of benignity from its smaller neighbors. It is thus expected to promote connectivity, free trade, and also reduce trade restrictions. But, despite some recent success with economic integration and connectivity, inter-regional trade remains low.
- **Low trade:** India's trade with South Asia is worth a **mere 36 billion dollars** despite all the bilateral and regional trade agreements. This has thus shaped a perception of India being a petty trader.

**New Delhi's response:**

- **New Delhi's recognition:** Anti-Indian sentiments and emotions have continued to challenge the efficiency of India's neighborhood strategy and policy. But, there is a recognition of the challenges that India is facing in the neighborhood and recalibration is in the offing. India's push for greater connectivity with its neighbors and a sustained substantive political outreach has shaped India's neighborhood policy in recent years.
  - **Assistance during Covid:** New Delhi's support to its neighbors during the COVID-19 crisis has further underscored the indispensable role India plays in South Asia.

**Conclusion:**

Structural challenges will ensure that anti-India sentiment in the region is not going to disappear anytime soon. But if Indian policymakers recognise the roots of this sentiment, they will be better able to shape their policy response.

## BUILDING UP CONNECTIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA

**H.V. Pant & Ayjaz Wani**

**Context:**

The first virtual engagement between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and presidents of the five Central Asian countries on January 27 2022.

**(PSIR Paper 2B: 'Recent developments in Indian foreign policy')**

**More about the news**

- Two days after China held a virtual summit with Central Asian countries, India too stepped in and Prime Minister Narendra Modi pitched for "an integrated approach for regional connectivity and cooperation for the next 30 years".
- The virtual summit saw the participation of the five presidents — Kazakhstan's Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Uzbekistan's Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan's Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow and Sadyr Japarov of Kyrgyz Republic.
- This was the first engagement of its kind between India and the Central Asian countries at the level of leaders.

**Significance of meeting:**

- Meeting comes at a time of widening security fault lines in Eurasia and common geostrategic and geo economic challenges from a volatile Afghanistan for both India and Central Asia.

### HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF RELATIONSHIP:

- **Slow progress:** Since 1991, New Delhi's ties with the Central Asian countries have developed slowly despite a shared culture and trade links via the ancient Silk Road. The emergence of the nation-states with differing

ideologies and the partition of the Indian sub-continent during the 20th century posed challenges to New Delhi in connecting directly with the region.

- **Greater impetus in recent times:** India gave greater emphasis to the region in recent years, called “**the global chessboard**”, through its extended neighborhood policy.
- **Narasimha Rao’s efforts:** Then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao moved quickly to establish diplomatic presence in the region and visited Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 1993, followed by Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1995. New Delhi signed the Strategic Partnership Agreements with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to stimulate defense cooperation and deepen trade relations.
- **Connect Central Asia policy:** New Delhi unveiled the **Connect Central Asia policy in 2012** to further strengthen its geopolitical, geo-economical and geo cultural relationship with the region. However, Pakistan stonewalled New Delhi’s approach and disallowed India passage through its territory.
- **Permission for Chabahar Port:** India continued to work to find a solution to its connectivity conundrum. New Delhi signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran in 2015 to develop the Chabahar port in the Sistan-Baluchistan province that was in the doldrums from 2003. Most of the Central Asian nations view India’s Chabahar port as an opportunity to diversify their export markets and to control China’s ambitions.
- **Boost in Modi’s era:** In 2015 PM Modi visited all the Central Asian countries. The visit marked India’s diplomatic shift for the first time to look at the region as a composite geographical unit. Reciprocal high-level state visits by the presidents of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan after 2015 set the tone for strengthened India-Central Asia dynamics through bilateral and trilateral arrangements. Both sides sought cooperation in defense and military technologies, money laundering and also established a joint counter-terrorism working group.
- **Sushma Swaraj’s remarks:** In 2019, at the India-Central Asia dialogue, India’s then external affairs minister **Sushma Swaraj** remarked, *“We (India-Central Asia) are bound together through a shared history, cultural linkages and common habits and traditions.”*
- **The third India-Central Asia Dialogue:** The third India-Central Asia Dialogue was recently held that coincided with the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Countries hosted by Pakistan. The foreign ministers opting to visit New Delhi instead of Islamabad reflected the increased convergence between Central Asia and India.

#### **How New-Delhi's shift in foreign policy is helping itself:**

- With a view to counterbalance the influence of an ever more assertive China, the Central Asian Region has admitted New Delhi into the **Ashgabat Agreement**, allowing India access to connectivity networks to facilitate increased trade and commercial interactions.

#### **Conclusion:**

Central Asia has remained pivotal to political transformations and the India-Central Asia summit will help both New Delhi and CARs to galvanize efforts for regional peace and stability. New Delhi’s sustained efforts can lay the foundation of a robust bilateral engagement with a pivotal geography at a time when the two need to work more closely than ever.

## HARNESSING NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN A WORLD OF DECLINING MULTILATERALISM: WHAT INDIA CAN DO FOR ITSELF AND OTHERS

### Context:

World is witnessing the decline of the multilateral system of international politics. In the article the writer tries to justify how India can tackle the situation and how it can turn this into an opportunity.

### (PSIR Paper 2A “Changing international political order”)

“Multilateralism is the coordinated diplomatic interaction between three or more stakeholders in international politics, but can be interpreted differently by different stakeholders. Sometimes it is understood as not only a diplomatic approach, but one that is committed to certain principles and set of values”- **Hanns Maull**

### CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM:

- **Weaponized interdependence:** Today, multilateralism faces a crisis of unprecedented proportions. Phenomena like “Weaponized interdependence” (the ability of some powerful states to exploit the control that they exercise over hubs of production networks in a world of closely integrated global value chains).
- **Pandemic effect:** The long-standing vulnerabilities of the multilateral system have been laid bare by the pandemic. The mishandling of Covid19 by WHO and now the World Trade Organization stands by helplessly as members continue to bicker over the TRIPS waiver, and potential capacity for vaccine and medicine production in the Global South cannot be put to its much-needed use.
- Hence, the system is in dire crisis, at a time when the world needs it most; collapse of the system would hurt all parties, including India. Yet, amidst all the handwringing, it is often forgotten that the crisis of multilateralism could offer new opportunities that India should harness.

### THREEFOLD OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA:

- **Reforms in multilateral order:** First, while India itself had, for decades, pushed for reforms in the multilateral order (e.g., for greater inclusiveness in international organizations), the crisis of the system seems to have finally created a more widespread recognition for the necessity of reform.
- **Search for new allies:** Second, key players in the west, especially in Europe, have begun to recognise that they need new allies and friends. This is especially so given that the US seems to be turning away from the very system that it had led in creating, and then served as a guarantor for.
- **Sustainable globalization:** Third, a recognition seems to be finally growing that sometimes helter-skelter globalization in a world where production chains can be weaponized is no longer acceptable. Alternative and more sustainable forms of globalization need to be developed, which meet goals of both prosperity and security.
- Therefore, the moment is ripe for sharing new ideas. India has always had much to offer to the world, maybe today is the right time for the world to appreciate it.



## STRATEGIES NEW-DELHI CAN ADOPT:

- **Coalitions with likeminded:** Coalitions with like-minded actors will be key. Here, India could work closely with the 'Alliance for Multilateralism', an initiative launched by Germany and France to shape both the alliance itself and the overall reform agenda. Working together with a group of both developed and developing countries could further amplify India's voice.
- **Improve relations in neighborhood:** While keeping an eye on the global picture, India needs to pay attention to its own immediate region. India risks finding itself in a precarious geo-economic position, surrounded by the so-called "string of pearls" and potentially weak in a world where interdependence can be weaponized. By hedging and balancing, and working in coalitions with other countries also facing such dilemmas India could carve out an important niche for itself as a shaper of the multilateralism that upholds the liberal order.
- **More stress on core values:** While India today seems to be laying emphasis on pragmatism rather than ideology, it would do well to tap into some of the core values that it stands for: Democracy, pluralism, rule of law, and freedom of speech. Values matter because multilateralism is little more than an instrument per se; it cannot be seen as a goal in itself.
- **Improve domestic structure:** None of the above strategies will work if India fails to get its act together domestically. Here, the most important sector is the economy. Its own people will not support its growing role internationally, if the government fails to deliver with jobs and better living standards.

**Conclusion:**

- Between aggressive globalization and market closure, India will have to find its "**Suvarna madhyam**" (**golden mean**) that will be based on strategic economic diversification within a small group of like-minded countries.
- Internationally, too, an India rising on sustainable economic growth in cooperation with others who share its values of democracy, pluralism, liberalism and more will have more bargaining clout and persuasive power than an inward-looking India caught up in domestic political upheavals and slowing growth rates. After all, a strengthened and reformed multilateralism will need to have strong roots in the domestic politics of the countries that seek to uphold it.

## RISING INDIA 2021: A NOTE FROM A TROPICAL BRICS MEMBER

**Context:**

With changing global politics India sees itself as the upcoming global power. Writer discusses in this article the problems that are lying ahead of New-Delhi.

**(PSIR Paper 2A "Changing international political order")****Introduction:**

- Indian civilization and culture may be the only ones in Asia and likely in the whole world that can balance the equally ancient and powerful Chinese traditions. With its massive size in many socio-economic dimensions, India is essential to the world geopolitical scenario. Equally important is its identity as a diverse and pluralistic, functioning democracy, qualities that place it at the forefront of game-changing nations.

**Issues need to be resolve:**

- **High population growth:** India is experiencing annual growth of population of least five percent for nearly 40 years bringing new domestic demands and tough challenges to the country's human capital.
- **Low infrastructure:** There is much to be done in building basic infrastructure, improving social indicators and bridging inequality, especially for India's increasingly young population.
- **Ruptured health and trade facilities:** At the same time, India must rethink its health and trade policies. The fragile structure of its rural population, with complex relations with the agricultural sector and certain industrial practices, already makes both endeavors a difficult task. The geographical imbalances and the contrasting and competing Chinese exporting machine further exacerbate the problems.
- **Need to change protectionist attitude:** India refused to participate in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), involving ASEAN itself, Japan, South Korea, China, Australia and New Zealand. While India's motives are understandable, it must shed its protectionist views and adopt a wiser trade strategy.
- **Need to improve relations with neighborhood:** A great India must also find stable solutions to the challenges brought about by its relationships with neighbors such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. This "neighborhood deficit," adding clay feet to the subcontinent giant, must cease; more diplomatic skills and stronger political will, combined with large doses of patience are required for sure.

**CHARTING A FUTURE FOR INDIA-US RELATIONS IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER****Context:**

- India's role is emerging in the international system. Also its contribution is also increasing to the vitality and stability of the global world order.
- The editorial talks about, what issues and challenges confront India's growing international profile, and what opportunities might it exploit as it continues to evolve as a significant global player. The strategic state of relations between India and the United States (US) provides a useful lens for considering these questions.

**(PSIR Paper 2B: "New world order")****The Contours of the India-US Relationship**

- **Tough start of relations:** Despite India's undeniable regional and global importance to American interests, for decades, the US was unwilling to consider key areas for deepening bilateral and regional cooperation, largely due to India's possession of nuclear weapons. In the early 2000s, however, Washington began to view an active and constructive relationship with India as essential to making progress in a range of issues.
- **For example:** The US' global war on terror, aligned with India's efforts to combat its own organized terrorism threats. It gave both countries a practical platform for increased cooperation in intelligence, law enforcement and military relations.
- **Recent developments in cybersecurity:** In recent years, cybersecurity cooperation has steadily increased between the two nations. Moreover, the US has realized that enhanced cooperation with India is essential to counter a rising China, which is already well-underway in exercising its considerable economic and political clout regionally and beyond.

**Progress in relationship:**

- Over the past two decades, the India–US relationship has expanded in almost every conceivable dimension like political, diplomatic, economic and military albeit not as allies but as fellow travelers on parallel journeys. One might fairly say the India–US relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been characterized by a pragmatic realism that recognises the major points of divergence and, at times, open friction that remain ever-present.
- In 2020, two major factors have accounted for the current heightened cooperation between India and the US: i) the global COVID-19 pandemic, and ii) China’s moves, both its domestic actions on the COVID-19 pandemic and in Hong Kong and what appears to be increasingly provocative regional behavior.

**India’s Role in the International System**

- **Domestic Positives:** Observers of India have long anticipated the country’s growing importance on the world stage. The country is rightly touted as the world’s largest democracy: Massively populous, immensely resource-rich, fiercely proud, and unquestionably successful in continuing to advance the circumstances of its more than 1.3 billion citizens.
- **Independent stand:** Its tradition of independence on global issues has served it well over the decades since the Cold War. India occupies a prominent place in the vital issues facing the world community today: Climate change; sustainable development; closing inequality gaps; and the challenges to a robust global economy to support, educate, employ, and elevate the growing global population.
- **Mark at international level:** Internationally, India has served as a perennial force in the United Nations and in other international fora. It has skillfully navigated the often-fraught waters of the US–Russia relationship, negotiated countless developing world challenges, and emerged as a major voice wrestling with the paradoxical promise and peril of the cyber age. All this, even as it continues to deal with its preoccupations with Pakistan and China on issues closer to home.

**Conclusion:**

To move forward, India must confront its approach to international leadership, which has traditionally been more passive than assertive, more reactive than active. Here, India’s greatest resource is its people. In today’s world where, statistically, people are healthier, wealthier, more educated, more mobile, and more politically active than at any point in human history, India stands on an equal footing with any country that aspires to leadership.

**INDIA’S ROLE IN THE EMERGING DYNAMICS OF THE INDO-PACIFIC****Context:**

Rising importance of Indo-pacific region, changing geopolitics, and opportunities for India.

**(PSIR Paper 2B “Regionalization of world politics”)****Introduction:**

- The growing importance of the Indian and Pacific oceans have given new momentum to the “Indo-Pacific” as a geostrategic construct. The Indo-Pacific region will shape the trajectory of global politics for most of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- This is the region where Great Power competition (primarily between the United States (US) and China) is playing out. The region is also home to some of the world's largest economies. The Indo-Pacific will very much be the fulcrum around which countries will reorient and re-align their policies.

#### India and Indo-Pacific region:

- **Call free and open Indo-Pacific:** India has been active in championing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The US, Australia and the members of the ASEAN have all expressed a common view that India should play a greater role in the region.
- **Attract big geographic area:** For India, the geography of the Indo-Pacific stretches from the eastern coast of Africa to Oceania (from the shores of Africa to those of the Americas), which also includes the Pacific Island countries.
- **Participation in various international forums:** India has been an active participant in mechanisms such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus, ASEAN Regional Forum, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and Mekong Ganga Economic Corridor, in addition to convening the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. Through the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC), India is moving towards engaging with the Pacific Island countries.
- **Rising trade:** India's trade in this region is growing rapidly, with overseas investments being directed towards the East, e.g., the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, and the Free Trade Agreements with ASEAN and Thailand. India's approach to the region is exemplified by its evolving "**Act East Policy**," comprising economic engagement with Southeast Asia and strategic cooperation beyond that to East Asia (Japan, Republic of Korea), Australia, New Zealand, as well as the Pacific Island countries.
- **India's liberal view for Indo-Pacific region:** India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Security in the region must be maintained through dialogue, a common rules-based order, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.
- **Support for Rule based order:** India supports a rules-based, balanced and stable trade environment in the Indo-Pacific region. Sustainable connectivity initiatives promoting mutual benefit should be continually fostered. In this regard, India has been an important stakeholder in the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

#### Countering China in Indo-Pacific region:

- **Issue based partnership:** Engaging with its partners in the Indo-Pacific region has become a necessity for India, given the difficult phase in Sino-India relationship, especially after the 2020 **Galwan Valley clash**. India now believes in issue-based partnerships- this explains India's embracing of the several minilateral platforms like India-Australia-Japan, India-US-Japan, India-Australia-Indonesia among others which have mushroomed in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Rise of QUAD:** India, along with its Quad partners, is upping its game in the Indo-Pacific. After the September 2019 Foreign Ministers meeting, the Quad has taken off in a significant way. It is no longer merely a talking shop or just another popular plurilateral platform.
- **Joint naval drills:** In July 2020, the Indian Navy conducted joint naval drills with the US Navy in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, sending out a clear message to China.

- **Mutual logistics agreements:**

1. India and Australia have signed the Mutual Logistics Sharing Agreement in June 2020.
  2. With Japan too India signed the Mutual Logistics Sharing Agreement in September 2020.
  3. India and the United States finalized the long-pending Basic Exchange Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in October 2020.
  4. India, Australia and Japan have unveiled a supply chain resilience initiative in April 2021 with an aim to counter China's dominance and with a view to eventually attaining a strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the Indo-Pacific.
- Moreover, given the challenges that the world is grappling with for the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is only logical for India to work with the countries of the Indo-Pacific to build alternate supply chains to reduce its economic dependence on China, to boost its own health infrastructure and R&D, to draw lessons from their response.

**Way forward:**

While India has consistently emphasized “**inclusiveness**” in the Indo-Pacific framework, it will be challenging to strike a balance between the interests of all stakeholders. While the primary proponents of the Indo-Pacific agree on the values that should be upheld in this region, the approach and policies (Indo-Pacific visions or strategies) vary. For instance, India's vision is starkly different from the US'.

**Conclusion:**

In recent years, India seems to have shed its past caution of standing up to China. However, as geopolitical tensions rise between China and the US, India needs to carefully design its Indo-Pacific architecture while keeping its long-term strategic and economic interests in mind.

## A CLOSER LOOK INTO FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN INDIA

**What is feminist foreign policy in the Indian context?**

- **Feminist foreign policy is subjective context:** A closer reading of the concept of 'Feminist foreign policy (FFP)' reveals one very interesting aspect of it. Its definition and understanding are always influenced by the context in which it is discussed. Hence, the idea of FFP needs to be tailored to each country's specific political needs and backgrounds, making it all the more important for India to derive its own definition of the concept.
- An ideal definition of FFP in the Indian context would, thus, involve dissecting the term into 'Feminist' and 'Foreign Policy', and explore their place in India's political attitudes and opinions. In the Indian context, a 'Feminist Foreign Policy' would, thus, imply the deconstruction of power structures that thrive on all kinds of inequalities.

**Gender in India's foreign policy**

- On paper, India's commitments towards gender equality seem highly impressive. However, there is more than what meets the eye. A deeper inquiry into India's dynamic with the discourse on feminist foreign policy

and commitments towards gender equality reveals how India's efforts tend to address the cause on a superficial level. There are several examples that elucidate this point better.

- **Firstly**, India managed to appoint their first female Minister of External Affairs only in 2014, when Sushma Swaraj completed her full term of five years.

**Secondly**, India's performance in Liberia was also critiqued on being gender essentialist in nature since the women peacekeeping contingent was mostly involved in providing care and support.

**Lastly**, high numbers of women in the total workforce of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) does not translate into women being posted at high governance positions.

#### Why do gaps still exist?

- Existence of gaps between commitments on paper and the reality with respect to India adopting a FFP and bringing gender parity in its foreign policy structure can be attributed to two main reasons,

**More stress on rhetoric:** The first involves how India's actions are determined more by its political considerations than fulfilling its commitments.

**Misconceptions about women:** Secondly, the traditional misconceptions about women not being capable diplomats and foreign service agents stemming from patriarchal and misogynistic thought processes also hinders India's implementation of gender equality commitments.

#### Conclusion

The on-going pandemic has shown the glaring need for India to adopt a human security approach in its conduct of foreign policy. One can say that half the battle is won since India does show its willingness to adopt the necessary measures to incorporate FFP in its international relations. In addition to showing how India is capable of dealing with a variety of issues at hand, adopting a FFP could also prove instrumental in reforming India's domestic policy landscape and its treatment of women. While there is no doubt that India has to walk several miles to achieve this goal, it is crucial that it realizes that now would be a perfect time to start that journey.

## INDIA-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS: GROWING CONVERGENCE BRINGS RELATIONS TO STRATEGIC HEIGHTS

Debasis Bhattacharya

#### Introduction:

- India and Central Asia have had long standing historical, cultural, political, and economic relations that have over the time metamorphosed into a stable, mature, and transformational partnership.
- India's proximity and growing convergence on issues of mutual concern with the five Central Asian countries comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have been reflected in heightened cooperation in addressing emerging geostrategic challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing world order.

#### Points of cooperation:

- The two sides have enhanced deliberations and cooperation on areas such as trade and connectivity, economic development, development partnership, energy security, regional issues of mutual interests as well as the mutual geopolitical concerns of each side on Emerging situations in Afghanistan.

- During the “Third India-Central Asia summit” held on 19 December 2021, the two sides further reiterated commitment towards building robust cooperation in addressing emerging global concerns while emphasizing the ardent need to promote security, stability, and long-term shared economic prosperity in the India-Central Asia geopolitical architecture.
- **Remarkable visit of Indian PM:** PM Modi’s visit to central Asia in July 2015, to all five Central Asian countries marking the first time an Indian PM has gone to all five countries in a single visit since their independence in the early 1990s was a turning point in reinvigorating the socio-politico-economic tie between the two sides.

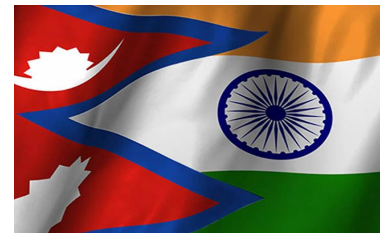
#### **Key highlights of “Third India-Central Asia summit”**

- **Areas of strategic engagement:** The Dialogue identified key areas of strategic engagement towards enhancing defense and security ties, economic and connectivity initiatives, and energy cooperation, particularly in the context of frank and cordial deliberations on issues related to India’s US \$1 billion Line of Credit for projects in Central Asia.
- **Logistics:** The two sides agreeing to continue developing the transit and transport potential in conjunction with improving the logistics network of the region was another milestone development.
- **Enhance connectivity:** Summit formerly touched upon the optimum use of INSTC in conjunction with the Ashgabat Agreement on International Transport and Transit Corridor (ITTC) to enhance connectivity between India and the Central Asian countries.
- **Geographical proximity:** Regarding the security paradigm, the two sides fully recognized the strategic imperatives for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan especially in the context of the nation’s close geographical proximity not only to India but also the fact that it shares land borders with three Central Asian countries—Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
- **Spill-over effect of terrorism:** Keeping in perspective the potential danger and consequences of the spill-over effect of terrorism into the extended neighborhood, summit stressed upon: The formation of a truly representative and inclusive government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking, central role of the UN, providing immediate humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people and preserving the rights of women, children and other national ethnic groups.
- **Dealing with COVID-19,** while the Central Asian countries appreciated India’s assistance in supply of COVID-19 vaccines and essential medicines during their early stage of the pandemic, New Delhi reciprocated by expressing gratitude for the medical supplies received from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and the offer of assistance made by Turkmenistan during the second wave of COVID-19 in India in April-May 2021.
- **Expansion of trade and economic engagement** delineates strong solidarity to achieve full trade potential in critical sectors like pharmaceuticals, information technology, agriculture, energy, textiles, gems and jewelry, among others.

#### **Conclusion:**

Overall, in recent years, the contours of the India-Central Asia relationship have been witnessing metamorphosis in an unprecedented manner whereby growing convergence has the potential to bring about a paradigm shift in the geostrategic dynamics of the extended neighborhood. The very fact that the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian nations visited New Delhi in December 2021 to attend the third India-Central Asia Dialogue despite the threat of the Omicron variant while side-tracking the overlapping meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation bears testimony to the importance they accord to relations with India.

## NEPAL-INDIA RELATIONS IN POST-COVID-19 PERIOD



Hari Bansh Jha

**Introduction:**

No two countries of the world are as closely interdependent as India and Nepal, be it socially, culturally, economically or even politically. This is so because the relations between the two countries are fundamentally based on people-to-people relations rather than government-to-government relations.

**Relations before and after Covid-19**

- **The lowest ebb around 2014-15:** The relations between Nepal and India touched their lowest ebb in 2015, when Nepal was making its new constitution.
- Further in 2020, on the boundary issue in Nepal's North-western region deteriorated the relations. The spread of COVID-19 in the two countries further created a hardening of relations between the two countries as the open border was closed for over one-and-half years, beginning in March 2020.
- **Positivity after Covid-19:** In the post-COVID-19 period, the situation on the ground is slowly returning to normal. The border is now reopened and cross-border movement of people apart from vehicles, that remained disrupted for so long has resumed. Even cross-border marriages have become a normal phenomenon. Recognition of COVID-19 test reports of one country by concerned authorities of the other country further facilitated the cross-border movement of people and vehicles.
- **Janakpur-Jaynagar Railway link opened:** Another landmark achievement in relations between Nepal and India is that the Indian government has handed over the **Janakpur-Jaynagar** sector of the railway to the Government of Nepal. The entire cost of the railway project, that amounts to INR 8.8 billion is being borne by the Indian government.
- **Increase in trade between India and Nepal:** Significantly, there has also been an improvement on the front of commerce, trade, and economic affairs between Nepal and India in the post-COVID-19 period. Nepal for the first time started to export surplus electricity to India. Earlier, Nepal used to import power from India.
- **Nepali citizens started coming to India again:** Many of those Nepalese who could not return to India due to the closure of the Nepal-India border during the COVID-19 period were allowed to enter India thereafter.
- **Construction of highway:** Furthermore, India alone constructed nearly three-fourth of the East-West Highway of Nepal that connects the eastern part of the country to the western part. Indian support in the construction of **Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu**, apart from several airports in different locations of the country, was crucial.
- **Construction at other sites and support:** No less important was India's role in the construction of different buildings of **Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu**. For a long time, India also provided technical support for the smooth functioning of the University. There is hardly any important sector in which India did not extend support to Nepal, be it education, health, culture, roads, hydropower, agricultural, forestry, transport, or communication.



**Conclusion:**

It is a matter of great satisfaction that Nepal–India relations have gradually been improving, especially in the COVID-19 period. For this, the credit largely goes to the people and also to the governments of the two countries for their realization that there is a need to improve the relations and work for it. Because of the improvement in relations, both Nepal and India are in a win-win situation.

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