



## India's Position in South Asia : An Assessment of India's Neighbourhood First Policy



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While no country enjoys absolute hegemony in any given region, there are few that categorically dominate the economic, strategic and political spheres in their respective regions. India is one such state and has had a long history of exercising strong influence in South Asia given its geographic centrality in the region and power asymmetry vis-à-vis its South Asian neighbours. Since its independence, India has in a way assumed and carried forward the protectorate role once played by the British. This is particularly the case in the importance attributed to these states by India in its strategic considerations.

The main reason for that influence was India's power asymmetry with respect to its neighbours. Most external powers like the US and UK were sensitive to Indian concerns about them engaging with a state like Bhutan which was an important security buffer for India against China. Bhutan still

### Key Points

- India's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy was introduced in 2014 to revitalise India's relations with its South Asian neighbours.
- Post introduction of the policy, on different occasions, India was supported by its neighbours after major terror incidents sponsored by the Pakistani state.
- No significant improvements were made post the introduction of the Neighbourhood First policy, as is clear from the trade data, in fostering deeper economic integration that would suggest a quantum leap from the existing trends in trade and other areas like aid and grants provision by India.
- Many contentious issues with almost all neighbours persist which still has not invited any pragmatic solutions from the Indian side.
- India must find a remedy to the problems that plague the implementation of various developmental projects it announces with its neighbours, reorient its diplomatic conduct towards its neighbours based on mutual respect and sovereignty and work towards resolving current disputes than seeking comfort in status quo.

does not have official diplomatic relations with any of the five permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members and bilateral relations with these states are conducted via their respective embassies in India.<sup>1</sup>

However, introduction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Neighbourhood First Policy' against the backdrop of evolving regional dynamics and China's increased financial and political engagement with India's neighbours, especially under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), calls for analysing India's position post the introduction of its new policy towards its neighbourhood. What also needs to be examined is whether there has been a change in India's political position in South Asia as well as the level of financial engagement with these states compared to the government in Delhi prior to 2014. The paper also aims to highlight some of the troubles facing India's relations with its neighbours (minus Pakistan) and some structural constraints that continue to affect these relations.

### **India's Neighbourhood First Policy**

When Prime Minister Modi took over the office in May 2014, his first decision was to invite the head of states of all South Asian countries to his swearing in ceremony emphasising on the importance of India's immediate neighbours. This was followed by his Neighbourhood First Policy<sup>2</sup> to stress upon India's commitment to South Asia. The aim was to increase India's engagement levels with its immediate neighbours and fostering deeper economic, security and cultural integration.

In that context, significant changes in terms of political decisions and relations and economic aspects between India and its neighbours need to be analysed in detail.

### ***The Political Tangent***

The shift in India's political position in South Asia during 2014 onwards in contrast to previous government's stance can be analysed through three significant developments, namely, statements of support post major terror attacks, support for India at South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), hedging behaviour of India's immediate neighbours and support for India after the controversy surrounding the abrogation of Article 370.

While analysing the official statements issued by the neighbouring countries post major terror attacks during 2009-14 and 2014-19 respectively, 2008 Mumbai attacks and 2019 Pulwama attack holds significance. Both incidents saw significant casualties with both exhibiting clear Pakistani state's active involvement. All Indian neighbouring countries strongly condemned the Mumbai terror attacks. While no country actively hinted at Pakistan

to mend its ways, this was consistent with the prevalent diplomatic norms. Similarly, the 2019 Pulwama attack, which saw a death toll of 46, invited equally strong condemnation of the terror incident from India's South Asian neighbours with all the six states except Pakistan using the term "strongly condemn" in their respective statements.<sup>3</sup> This was an encouraging sign of South Asian states consistently standing firmly with India against the threat of terrorism.

At SAARC level, following the Uri Attack in 2016, India moved to boycott the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit planned to be held in Pakistan in November 2016. India was followed by five states including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives, who also pulled out of the summit.<sup>4</sup> Nepal, it should be noted, was the only state to opt for a middle path, urging member states "that a conducive environment be created soon to ensure the participation of all member states in the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit" while also calling on states for not allowing their territory to be used for terrorism.<sup>5</sup> This was a huge show of support for India's attempts to isolate Pakistan.

Similarly, the abrogation of Article 370<sup>6</sup> leading to the reorganisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir saw support from several Indian neighbours including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives with all of them terming it as India's internal matter.<sup>7</sup> This was despite Pakistan's attempt to prop up this issue at a regional level. While no corresponding event exists during the 2009-14 period to contrast this with, based on the evidence in other instances like that of terrorism, it can be safely said that India's immediate neighbours have stood with India on matters of India's strategic interests.

Most of these instances of support for India as discussed above, however, were vis-a-vis India's relations with Pakistan. The dynamics change quickly when one brings China in the picture. In this regard, unfortunately for India, its neighbours have shown great consistency in their hedging behaviour, mainly in the economic context, against India by standing with China.

One of the most important neighbours showing such tendency is Nepal. In recent years it has seen the greatest shift as far as its policies towards India and China are concerned. One major incident that can be attributed to this change is the Nepal Blockade of 2015. This was believed to be primarily a result of Nepal's growing proximity to China and a perceived affront to India when the new constitution was promulgated without informing New Delhi. Unlike previous incidents where consequences for non-conformation to Delhi's preferred policy choices was limited to governments in power, the blockade of 2015 had direct impact on the day to day lives of the common people. Thus, it was a public humiliation of the Nepalese people at a global stage.<sup>8</sup> This time, however, there was visible pushback from

Nepal. Not only did Nepal stand its ground on the contentious constitutional issue but also took concrete steps to reduce its over-dependence on India for vital resources such as its imports like petroleum and medicines. For this, Nepal turned to China to build cross-border rail, upgrade the nine road links between Nepal and Tibet and a dry port at Timure to facilitate trade from third countries. Not only this, in 2018,<sup>9</sup> Nepal and China held their first joint military exercise and in the same year, Nepal decided to skip the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral and Technical Cooperation (BIMSTEC) military drill that was to be held in India.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, while India have received consistent support from its neighbours on the global stage on issues of terrorism and its sovereignty, there have been instances of disruptions in India’s political ties with some of its neighbours be it with Nepal on disagreement over their constitution and the subsequent economic blockade or with Bangladesh on the matter of illegal immigrants and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

**The Economic Front**

The economic aspect of global relations is important for all states, especially for the small developing economies like most of India’s neighbours. Development cooperation and bilateral trade was supposed to be at the centre of India’s Neighbourhood First Policy. Therefore, it must be studied to examine what actual changes have occurred in India’s financial and developmental engagements with respect to its neighbouring countries post 2014.

**Table 1: Bilateral Trade between India and South Asian states (minus Pakistan) \*\* (Figures in USD million)**

Countries	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bangladesh	2415	3382	4347	5613	6264	7137	6378	6423	7831	9725	9364
Bhutan	245	345	426	411	446	462	661	649	613	910	943
Nepal	1844	2412	3224	3625	3943	5007	3815	5021	5941	7747	7750
Sri Lanka	2060	3833	5525	4833	4900	7025	6380	4542	5034	5981	5220
Maldives	110	132	136	129	113	144	174	188	220	241	232
Afghanistan	589	537	621	629	684	685	848	755	1005	1148	1381
South Asia (minus Pakistan)	7263	10641	14279	15240	16350	20460	18256	17578	20644	25752	24890
World	422837	573686	772077	787602	783027	778219	658390	618181	739193	832256	804757
Trade with South Asia as a percentage of India’s total trade.	1.72%	1.85%	1.85%	1.83%	2.09%	2.63%	2.77%	2.84%	2.80%	3.09%	3.09%

Source: Adapted from International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>11</sup>, 2009-2019

**Graph 1: India's Trade with South Asia (minus Pakistan) \*\* as a percentage of Total Trade (2009-19)**



Source: Adapted from IMF, 2009-2013

**Graph 2: India's Trade with South Asia as a Percentage of its Global Trade (2014-19)**



Source: Adapted from IMF, 2014-19

**Note\*:** India's trade data from 2004-08 showed similar trajectories as that from 2009-13 and therefore to minimise deviances caused due to currency valuation fluctuations a period of 5 years from 2009-13 is taken to compare to similar duration from 2014-19.

*\*\* Pakistan has been left out of the assessment of economic due to insufficient data on the real trade conducted and persistent political hurdles for economic cooperation.*

Looking at the above data in Table 1 and trends in Graph 1 and 2, it can be argued that India's Neighbourhood First Policy has not fared well and has actually to some extent failed in terms of improving economic interdependence between India and its neighbours via the trade route. India's trade with South Asia (minus Pakistan) as a percentage of its total trade has marginally increased by 0.37 percentage points from 1.72 percent in 2009 to 2.09 percent in 2013 and by a marginally improved by 0.46 percentage points from 2.63 percent in 2014 to 3.09 per cent in 2019. This is not a significant increase by any measure. In absolute terms, India's trade with South Asia saw a growth of 125 percent from 2009-13 while it grew by just 21.65 percent in the 2014-19 period.

**Table 2: Bilateral Trade between China and South Asian states (minus Pakistan) (Figures in USD million)**

Countries	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bangladesh	12253	14707	15552	16112	18766	18366
Bhutan	11.18	10.13	5.24	6.41	12.84	10.85
Nepal	2329	851	895	992	1103	1517
Sri Lanka	4043	4567	4657	4419	4625	4485
Maldives	104	172	342	301	406	376
Afghanistan	410	376	440	544	695	630
South Asia (*minus India & Pakistan)	19450	20683	21891	22375	25607	25383

Source: Adapted from IMF<sup>12</sup>, 2014-19

One of the key reasons behind India's renewed emphasis on its neighbourhood was to counter China's increasing presence in South Asia. Contrasting the growth in India's trade with South Asia from 2014-19, one can see from Table 2, that despite lacking the advantages available to India in terms of geographical proximity, China managed to record a growth of 30.5 percent in its trade with South Asia\*, a much better performance than India's 21.65 percent.

*\* Pakistan has been left out of the assessment of economic due to insufficient data on the real trade conducted and persistent political hurdles for economic cooperation.*

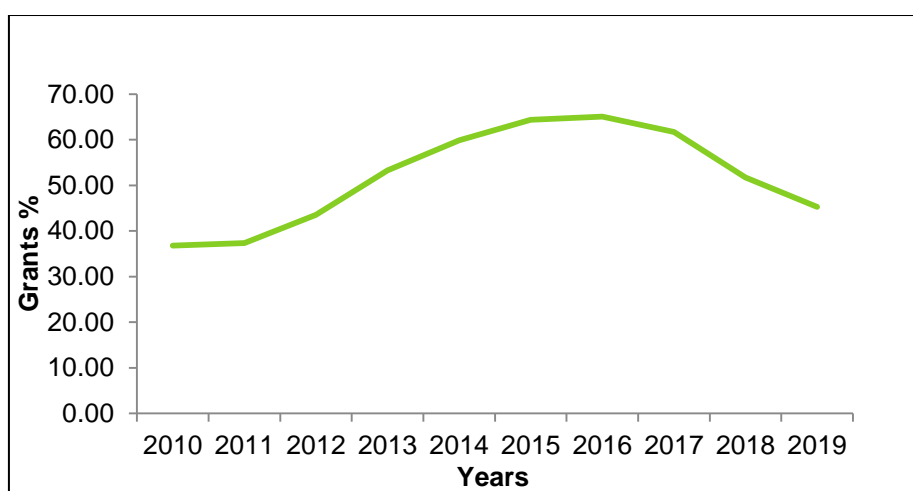
**Table 3: India’s Grants and Aid to South Asian States (Figures in INR Crores)**

Countries	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019
South Asia (minus Pakistan)	2314	2383	3091	5148	7018	9478	9735	9050	7659	6793
MEA Budget	6293	6375	7106	9661	11719	14730	14966	14663	14798	15011
Grant and aid to South Asia as a percent of total MEA budget	36.77%	37.38%	43.50%	53.29%	59.89%	64.34%	65.05%	61.72%	51.76%	45.25%

Source: Adapted from Indian Union Budgets<sup>13</sup>, 2010-2019

On the grants and aid end, analysing data available from Indian union budgets given in Table 3, one finds some commonality between the periods 2009-13 and 2014-19. Both periods show erratic pattern of grants and aid provided by India to its immediate neighbours. This only highlights India’s consistently limited fiscal space available and the importance given by successive governments to giving grants to the South Asian states. The grants and aid provided to South Asian states as a percentage of the total Ministry of External Affairs budget shows that fluctuating trend. In fact, studying the figures below highlights that while during the FY 2010-14 grants to South Asia continued to see a steady increase as a percentage of total grants, during the FY 2015-19 period that trend is reversing, as clear in Graph 3, with lesser financial grants and aid being given to India’s neighbours in FY 2018 and FY 2019.

**Graph 3: Grants to South Asia as a % of Total MEA Budget**



Source: Adapted from Indian Union Budgets, 2010-2019



## Troubles in India's Bilateral Relations with its South Asian Neighbours

Being the largest and most powerful state in South Asia which occupies a central position, India's bilateral relations with its immediate neighbours have, understandably, some problems and disputes that continue to remain unresolved. Below is a look at the five bilateral relations with the most persisting issues.

**Pakistan.** Pakistan remains India's biggest irritant in the world. The Islamic Republic has persisted with its policy of using terrorism as an instrument of foreign and security policy. Pakistan's Prime Minister too was invited to Prime Minister Modi's swearing in ceremony which was hoped to pave the way for the beginning of a normalisation process. Unfortunately, several terror attacks like Gurdaspur, Pathankot and Uri<sup>14</sup>, sponsored by the Pakistani state, played spoiler for any possibility of normalisation in the bilateral ties. The tussle between the security establishment and civilian political leadership continues to this day, and more recently the differences between the two have only been seen to be growing.<sup>15</sup> The vested interest of the security establishment, in terms of holding onto power within Pakistan, is too powerful a motivator to let any peace process with India to succeed. Since India has maintained that terror and talks cannot happen together, bilateral issues have remained unattended while the escalated tensions at the Line of Control continue.<sup>16</sup>

**Bangladesh.** In the last decade, India's partnership with Bangladesh has grown significantly in the most productive manner. However, previous to 2009, the relations had remained fraught between 2001 and 2008 due to the Khaleda Zia and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led government's cold approach towards India. The uptick in the relations happened after Sheikh Hasina became the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 2009. India's relations with Bangladesh have improved even further after the declaration of India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. The two countries signed the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015<sup>17</sup> resolving several decades old land enclaves issue. Apart from this, security cooperation along the counter-terrorism lines has increased considerably with both countries working actively to eliminate terrorism. However, not everything is perfect for the two countries.

Increasing economic and military cooperation between Bangladesh and China is a matter of concern for India, as deeper economic and military integration can create over dependency of Bangladesh on China which can have both economic and strategic implications for India. China is Bangladesh's largest trading partner despite being sharing a land border with India on three sides.



Similarly, issues like the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) 2019, perceived by Bangladesh as demeaning for it was named with countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan on issues of religious intolerance towards their minorities, have had some impact on the bilateral relations with several high level visits being cancelled in the beginning of 2020 including that of Bangladesh's Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister.<sup>18</sup> This matter will continue to pose a potential threat to India's relations with Bangladesh in the short to medium term depending on how the CAA is pursued and the rhetoric around it in India and Bangladesh and its real or perceived impact on Bangladesh's image at the world stage.

Another very contentious issue between the two neighbours is the Teesta water sharing dispute. Bangladesh has been seeking an equitable water sharing treaty along the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty. Nothing has materialised due to the Indian state of West Bengal being a key stakeholder in the matter. Around a dozen districts of northern West Bengal are dependent on the river for livelihood, and have proved to be a difficult party to bring on board for the treaty. The West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, opposed a proposed agreement in 2011<sup>19</sup> that would have given India 42.5 per cent and Bangladesh 37.5 per cent of the total water. Apart from the farmers and industries, the water from the river is redirected towards the Kolkata port in the lean season to keep the port functional. One key expert who played a crucial role in the 1996 Ganga Treaty is Ainun Nishat who advised that large reservoirs can be made on the Indian side to store monsoon rains and to be used for agriculture, industry, people and Kolkata port during the lean season which would address the reservations of the West Bengal Chief Minister about a possible treaty for Teesta river.<sup>20</sup> However, the recommendations made do not seem to interest the West Bengal Chief Minister.

**Nepal.** Nepal remains a sensitive issue. Perhaps the biggest highlight of India-Nepal relations in the recent years has been the Nepal Blockade of 2015. Possibly, it was due to the differences between the two countries over Nepal's constitution, which Nepal believed was informally placed by India as a measure to force the Himalayan nation to address the issue of Madhesi political representation and rights in its new constitution.<sup>21</sup> The blockade had a significantly adverse impact on India's image in Nepal and South Asia at large. The blockade period which lasted months saw several large scale protests in Nepal against India as the masses were impacted by critical shortages of medicines, fuel and other necessities.<sup>22</sup> In 2016, Nepal signed an agreement with China securing transit rights for importing goods.<sup>23</sup> In 2019, Nepal and China signed the Protocol on Implementing Agreement on Transit and Transport and six other agreements.<sup>24</sup>

India's Neighbourhood First Policy focused on furthering cooperation. Prime Minister Modi visited Nepal in 2014 making it the first such bilateral visit since 1997. India played a crucial role in aftermath of Nepal Earthquake of 2015 in performing rescue and relief operations as well as reconstruction activities. India also provided Nepal access to Visakhapatnam port in 2016<sup>25</sup>. However, in Nepal's case, India's approach to resolving older contentious issues was not proactive. One such issue cropped up recently in May 2020 as India's Defence Minister inaugurated a new road up to the Lipulekh Pass. Nepal protested the move and "accused India of changing the status quo without diplomatic consultations".<sup>26</sup> That was followed by escalatory measures taken from Nepal including deploying border police near the contested areas and issuing a new political map showing those areas as its own territory.<sup>27</sup> Since India has held Lipulekh and Kalapani for decades now, and has been conducting infrastructure building for years, the unprecedented reactions to the road inauguration point to possible dissatisfaction with India in Nepal. Although, the Indian Army chief's visit to Nepal<sup>28</sup> saw the Himalayan state adopting a more reconciliatory approach<sup>29</sup> which can mean that the recent stresses in the ties around the border issue was driven by Nepal's internal politics primarily. Even if that is the case, raking up a sensitive issue with India for domestic political gains by Nepal deserves more attention from the Government of India.

**Sri Lanka.** India's relations with majority of its neighbours are personality driven i.e. the individuals in power in the other country. For Sri Lanka, this is a trend that is taking strong roots. This is especially true for economic engagement in case of Sri Lanka. The return of the Rajapaksas is most certainly going to be a stressing factor for India due to the inconspicuous proximity of the Rajapaksas to China. While Sri Lanka insists on an India First Policy<sup>30</sup>, it is expected to be limited to not endangering India's core security interests. However, long-term strategic impact of economic projects will continue to be a source of worry for India. The Hambantota Port which was initially financed by China by way of debt was later leased out to it by Sri Lanka for a period of 99 years.<sup>31</sup> Talks are ongoing for a total USD 1.5 billion equivalent Yuan currency swap with China to manage Sri Lanka's liquidity crunch. This figure dwarfs the deal Sri Lanka struck with India for a USD 400 million swap.<sup>32</sup>

There are some persisting issues which continue to hinder better relations, especially when it comes to sentiments among people, primary of these being the fisheries dispute and the Tamil minority issue. India could do better in managing the fishing issue by better delivery of navigations systems to larger number of fishermen to avoid crossing into Sri Lankan waters.<sup>33</sup> This could be supplemented by better policies which allows only small fishermen

and not big fisheries companies to fish in certain areas to prevent Indian fishermen from crossing into our neighbour's waters for better catching prospects.

The Tamil issue which continues to hold back the relations to some extent needs to be put on the back burner. Successive Indian governments have been unable to politically nudge Sri Lanka in the desired direction on the Tamil issue. India's insistence on better reintegration of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, while admirable, may not be the most important tenet of the bilateral relation to focus on in today's geo-political scenario in the region. Thus, the internal political dynamics of India should not guide its policies towards a strategically important neighbour, especially at a time when India looks to counter China's advance in South Asia.

**Maldives.** India's relations with Maldives too are plagued with the same inconsistency in terms of Maldives' conduct towards India and vice-versa. Under President Abdulla Yameen, Maldives was visibly tilting towards China as was evident in not only its economic engagement with China but also the friction in its ties with India. Be it the arbitrary manner in which the Male airport projects was given to China, Maldives returning one of the two helicopters gifted by India, or the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China which completely stumped India,<sup>34</sup> the bilateral relations had been on a downward trend for a few years even after the launch of India's Neighbourhood First Policy. This was considered by many, among other reasons, a response from Maldives to India's cold attitude towards Maldives under President Yameen. While it was often cited that the reason behind this was Maldives' increasingly autocratic conduct domestically, the former president of Maldives, President Mohamed Nasheed had often shown similar conduct with instances like arrest of his political rivals, including President Yameen, and criminal court chief judge Abdulla Mohamad.<sup>35</sup>

Situation only improved after the election of Ibrahim Mohamed Solih as the president of Maldives in November 2018. Since then, the bilateral ties have been witnessing a sharp upturn with Maldives emphasising its 'India First' policy. India, for its part, has played a positive role in reviving the partnership, offering a line of credit worth USD 800 million in 2018. In August 2020, India announced a USD 500 million package including a grant of USD 100 million and in September 2020, India announced a USD 250 million financial support to battle the economic fallout of COVID-19.<sup>36</sup> India had also helped evacuate Maldivian citizens from Wuhan during the start of the pandemic.<sup>37</sup> In addition to this, India extended its health diplomacy to Maldives and was one of the first respondents to aid Maldives and sent shipments of medical and food supplies along with medical assistance teams in March and May this year. More recently, India reiterated its support to Maldives' foreign minister's

candidature for the United Nations General Assembly presidency, symbolising the turnaround in the bilateral ties between the two countries.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

India's neighbours have shown consistency in their support for India on matters of latter's security interests. While some may point out to the growing defence cooperation between many of the South Asian states and China, one must remember that global politics is about achieving the right balance in a state's conduct at the world stage to maximise national interests. Thus, for most states and especially smaller states with limited national resources and lack of distinct national security threats, even if the economic benefits come with increased dependence on a particular country in other spheres like defence, they are welcomed nonetheless in the absence of better alternatives.

Some factors have made it easier for China to establish deeper economic and political roots in most South Asian states. India's past record of direct or indirect intervention in domestic politics of its neighbours, its central position in South Asia with shared borders and historical disputes with its neighbours, the power asymmetry between India and all of its neighbours are only some of the examples.

By analysing data available in Tables 1, 2 and 3, it would be safe to conclude that India has not been able to bring about any big leaps in fostering economic interdependency with its neighbours. Graph 3 suggests the asymmetry between stated policy of neighbourhood first and the decreasing aid and grants being provided by India to its South Asian neighbours. On the political front, however, support for India on matters of terrorism has only grown in terms of statements issued by its neighbours and support gestures like boycotting SAARC summits.

India's limited financial resource makes it difficult for it to match China dollar for dollar. Economic hedging practices by South Asian states vis-a-vis India and China will continue in the region. India can hope to countervail China's economic might by continuing its recent approach of investing in high impact community development projects in the neighbourhood, is the right way forward. Apart from that, the common issue that plagues India's development cooperation efforts is that of implementation which is often bogged down with bureaucratic delays. Setting up of a single nodal ministry or department, with human resources from various concerned ministries or departments, for releasing funds, issuing clearances and ensuring timely implementation of projects using harmonised processed under a single roof

can help break the lethargic approach seen in implementation of development related projects and agreements with foreign countries.

With China aggressively pursuing political engagement with South Asian states, India cannot afford to continue practices of the olden days that involved India's active, direct or indirect, involvement in its neighbours' domestic and international affairs. A more refined diplomatic approach should be followed to secure national interests without appearing a 'big brother' as is usually said about India's conduct in South Asia. The same refinement must trickle down to Indian media as well which has often been outright disrespectful and insensitive in its reporting of India's neighbours and this is important due to the reach and impact Indian media has in South Asia and their attitude towards India's neighbours might be wrongly appropriated to the Indian state and people.

Regional dynamics are changing fast. India will have to move faster than in the past, improve its delivery mechanisms when it comes to development cooperation, remove trade barriers, boost Indian investments in its neighbours' economies and create deeper interdependence and target economic grants and aid better. This is important to maintain its position in its strategic backyard as India will be increasingly compared against the benchmarks set by China and not its past self.

## End Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Rakesh Sood (2018), "Reviving Neighbourhood First", *The Hindu*, 09 May, Available at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/reviving-neighbourhood-first/article23816290.ece>, accessed on 26 November 2020.

<sup>3</sup> "48 countries condemn Pulwama attack, extend support to India", *The Times of India*, 16 February 2019, Available on <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/world-condemns-pulwama-terror-attack-who-said-what/articleshow/68019116.cms>, accessed on 13 November 2020.

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<sup>7</sup> Sidhant Sibal (2019), "Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives back India's stance on Article 370", *DNA India*, 21 August, Available on <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-bangladesh-bhutan-maldives-back-india-s-stance-on-article-370-2783666>, accessed on 13 November 2020.

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