Before Mrs. Indira Gandhi's coming to power, the Indian Ocean policy of the Government of India was vague or rather weak. Though it had been opposing Super Power politics of dominating the weak countries, which was a legacy of the colonial age, yet sometimes its opposition was vague, sometimes there was facilitation silence and sometimes its attitude was permissive as shall be explained. Actually speaking only after 1968, India started having a policy towards the Indian Ocean. Prior to the Sino-Indian clash, India's main concern was Pakistan. But after 1962, India reviewed its policy on a wider scale. In 1965 there were some activities in the Arabian Sea but in 1971 India resorted to blockade of East Pakistan (now Bangla Desh) from the Bay of Bengal side as well. With the threat of the U.S. intervention (Enterprise fleet), Super Power rivalry was at the door of India but soon the U.S.A. reconciled with the broken Pakistan and free and sovereign Bangla Desh.

For a long time the importance of the Indian Ocean for the security and commerce of India was not
adequately recognized and most of the Indian historians in the past remained preoccupied with the Himalayas and the land mass beyond the Hindukush on the north-west. This "northern bias" of Indian historians was somewhat natural, as till the advent of the British, all foreign invaders had come from the north-west direction through the mountain passes. Even during the period of British Rule, the Central Asian tradition still continued to dominate the Anglo-Indian School of history because of the bogey of Russian advance towards India which the British authorities raised in order to cover up their own aggressive designs in Central Asia.

It was only much later, towards the end of the Second World War, that Indian historians and writers began to realize the importance of the Indian Ocean in the wake of the penetration of the Japanese following the fall of Singapore. K.M. Panikkar highlighted the great significance of the Indian Ocean for the trade and security of India in his works published in 1944-45.

Panikkar regretted the "unfortunate tendency to overlook the sea in the discussion of India's defence problems" and remarked: "India never lost her independence till she lost the command of the sea in the first decade of the 16th century".  

But as was natural, Panikkar, reacting strongly as he was to the neglect of the Indian Ocean as a factor in Indian history by the previous historians, rather overemphasized the role of India there without taking into account the actual power potential of the India to play such a hegemonistic role in the foreseeable future, let alone the desirability of it. Advocating that the "Indian Ocean must remain truly Indian", Panikkar suggested the Albuquerque-style security of India by firmly holding distant bases like Singapore, Mauritius, Aden and Socotra. He also favoured a broadening of the political organization of the Indian empire "so as to include Ceylon and Burma for defence purposes". However, credit must be given to Panikkar for having foreseen the possibility of the Indian Ocean becoming a fulcrum of

3. Ibid, Page 82
4. Ibid, Page 90
power struggle in the post-war period. He wrote: "...the possibility has to be visualized of America entering the Indian Ocean as a major naval power," and commented about the possibility of "a Russian entry" as well which must be "kept in mind". Cautioning against the Chinese thrust, he wrote that the "movement towards the south may, and in all probability, will be reflected in the naval policy of resurgent China."  

Panikkar's views received strong support from another Indian writer, K.B. Vaidya, who wrote: "Even if we do not rule the waves of all the five oceans of the world, we must at least rule the waves of the Indian Ocean". This writer gave a call to convert the Indian Ocean into an "Indian lake" which according to him meant that "India must be the supreme and undisputed power over the waters of the Indian Ocean". Vaidya pleaded for the creation of three self-sufficient and full-fledged fleets to be stationed at the Andamans in the Bay of Bengal, in Ceylon at Trincomalee, and at Mauritius guarding the

5. Ibid, Page 87
6. Ibid, Page 86
western approaches. The same is the view of N.G. Goray also. 8

A later study by a team of the Indian Council of World Affairs 9 made in the early years of the 1950s at the suggestion of the New York Institute of Pacific Relations, covered many aspects of the problem of defence and security in the Indian Ocean such as the geographical situation, economic and human factors, specific problems of the countries in the region, and interests of outside powers. While many of the conclusions of this study have become irrelevant owing to political changes both at the regional as well as global levels, it remains significant as the first important work which advanced the theory of a "naval vacuum" in the Indian Ocean. 10 It said:

"With the withdrawal of British naval forces, there exists a vacuum in naval power similar to that which existed off the Chinese mainland before the United States stationed its 7th Fleet there". 11

8. N.G.Goray, India should rule the Indian Ocean Article in Motherland dated May 15, 1971
10. Ibid Page 183
11. Ibid Page 29-30
But this "vacuum", according to it, could not be filled by any "single nation individually". The reference to the U.S. 7th fleet was obviously a subtle hint for the creation of a multilateral naval force under the aegis of the U.S. lead military alliances to step into Britain's shoes in the Indian Ocean.

The stand taken by the Government of India on the problem of security in the Indian Ocean had been by and large, in conformity with both the traditions of the anticolonial struggle and the country's own enlightened self-interest. Having attained her national freedom after a long struggle against foreign colonial rule, it should be naturally and morally repugnant for India to think of dominating her neighbours in the name of safeguarding her security. India's approach had, therefore, got to be one of trying to realize security largely through peaceful regional cooperation. An essential pre-requisite for successful regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean area is keeping it free from big power competition and rivalry. Hence India

12. Ibid, Pages 183
had been insisting that the Indian Ocean should be left alone by the great powers as a sea of peace a demand endorsed by nearly 60 nations at the Lusaka Conference of non-aligned nations in September 1970.

India had categorically rejected the "vacuum" theory under whose cover the United States desired to establish herself firmly in the Indian Ocean with the help of her allies and some other credulous Asian nations. The Indian Government's stand on the so-called "vacuum" in the Indian Ocean was elaborated by Swaran Singh as the Defence Minister in the Lok Sabha on 10 April, 1968. Swaran Singh's statement deserves to be quoted at some length. He said:

"Government do not accept the validity of the propaganda that a vacuum will be created in the Indian Ocean on the British decision to withdraw from the areas east of Suez.... It is not our intention firstly to accept the validity of this concept that any vacuum can be created. If any foreign power leaves any particular area, then it is for that area and for that territory to
take adequate steps to safeguard their own safety and their own country. If they ask any other country for help, that could be considered, but when even a country like the U.K. is withdrawing from overseas commitments, for a country like India, which has never believed in that concept, to think in these terms, is absolutely inconsistent with our approach to this problem.\textsuperscript{13}

To the Jan Sangh leader Balraj Madhok's query "whether the British built up their naval power in the Indian Ocean because they had their own interests, whether India has no interests in Indian Ocean beyond its coast", Swaran Singh replied:

"...the build up of the British Navy for colonial purposes is well-known subject matter of history and even lay men should know that much history that by building a strong navy they were able to dominate a good part of the world and created colonies, and we also became slaves at that time."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. XV Cols 3192-3202 dated April 10, 1968.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid Cols. 3196-97.
Again, speaking on a call-attention motion in the Rajya Sabha on 8 May 1969 on a statement by a Naval Study Group at the Defence Services Staff college, Swaran Singh decried the talk about a "vacuum". He did not agree with the view that the British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean would affect India in any way. Swaran Singh told the Rajya Sabha that "the British presence was not in our interest".

Similarly, on 19 March 1969, the External Affairs Minister, Dinesh Singh, strongly rebuffed the advocates of the "vacuum" theory. He said:

"I have not been able to understand one point. Much has been said about the withdrawal of the British Navy. Apparently, according to them, if the British Navy is there, everything is alright."

On another occasion in his speech in the Lok Sabha on 8 April 1970, Dinesh Singh called the British Navy "a symbol of domination in Asia". He said he was "surprised and in many ways humiliated when my

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15. A paper incorporating the views of a naval study group at the Defence services staff College was published in 'Hamla' Magazine of the Indian Navy under the title 'Power Vacuum in the Indian Ocean.'


countrymen say 'what will happen if the British go away'. The Indian reaction to the British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean had thus been one of welcoming it as a process of decolonization and having complete faith in the capacity of the new Asian countries "to meet the challenges that come with a measure of self-respect, dignity and self-reliance without looking to Washington or Moscow".

India has been opposed to the extension of the big power naval competition in the Indian Ocean and the establishment of foreign bases there. Yet at times this policy was allowed to be diluted, perhaps on account of the fear of China. Nehru, though he denied that India was consulted by the U.S. Government about sending their fleet, stated in his Lok Sabha statement of 19 December, 1963, that "if the U.S. Government decides to do this, all that we need say, today, is that outside the territorial waters of India, the Ocean is, naturally, open to them".18

He tried to underplay the fears expressed in many progressive circles about an increase in tension in the region as a result of the linking up of SEATO and NATO through the 7th Fleet cruise, and said in reply to a supplementary question by Vasudevan Nair of the CPI that he did not think "any particular concern need be caused to the countries here" as "most of the countries in South East Asia are more or less allied to the U.S. Government." 19 Nehru went to the extent of calling it "Sight-seeing, seeing the waters, etc." 20.

General Taylor's visit to India, his meeting with Nehru just two days before the entry of the 7th Fleet, and the U.S. proposal for an "air umbrella" for India's defence lead to various speculations about India's tacit support to the U.S. move in the Indian Ocean. Nehru's statement in the Rajya Sabha on 21 December 1963 - "It would be quite wrong to suggest that a cruise by a few U.S. naval vessels in the Indian Ocean either threatens

19. Ibid. Col. 5772.

20. Ibid Col. 5770
our freedom, or imperils our policy of non-alignment" - further added to misgivings about India's position. Despite the solemn assurance given by Nehru in the same statement that no foreign ships, troops, or aircrafts would participate in the country's "actual defence", a misunderstanding about India having a hand in the extension of the operation of the U.S. Seventh Fleet to the Indian Ocean persisted for quite some time.

On the question of the establishment of bases in the Indian Ocean, too, India's stand, though one of opposition in general, was at times liable to be misunderstood, and left many things rather vague. Thus, when in July 1965, the Maldives gained independence, the retention of the Gan base by the British evoked no protest from India whatsoever, and later the same year when Britain and the United States began their preparations for setting up bases on the British Indian Ocean Territory, there was no strong reaction in New Delhi beyond a statement by the then Deputy Minister for External Affairs, Dinesh Singh, in the Rajya Sabha on a call attention motion by I.K. Gujral, which said that
"Government of India's policy in regard to bases in the Indian Ocean has been one of strong opposition". When members insisted on knowing about the specific steps taken to register our protest in the international forum and to call a meeting of the affected countries, the Government only referred to the unanimous resolution passed at the Cairo Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries condemning the setting up of bases in the Indian Ocean. When Gujral had earlier raised the issue of bases, the Foreign Minister had made a statement saying that they were only to be communication bases. Later Dinesh Singh put a different gloss on it by stating that the Government had not intended to condone those bases and was only sharing the information available to them. He declared: "We do not welcome the setting up of communication bases and we have not welcomed it".

Yet the ambiguity about the Indian Government's stand on Indian Ocean bases could not be fully dispelled. The matter again came up for discussion in the Lok Sabha in 1967. Foreign Minister M.C. Chagla,

22. Ibid.
while monotonously repeating the Government's earlier statement that they were against any foreign military bases in the Indian Ocean, showed his readiness to accept the Anglo-American version that they were not establishing military bases. On 6 April 1967, Chagla said: "All that we can do, for the time being, is to accept their statements that they do not propose to use these islands as military bases." This was in fact going back upon the stand earlier taken by Dinesh Singh of opposition to all bases including the communication bases, and what Chagla said simply echoed the British version. The Minister was even reluctant to straight away use the word "protest" for the Government's communications to the British Government on the subject.

When George Fernandes asked him if they had made protests, Chagla replied that "apart from making inquiries we have made representations which amount to protests". On 5 June 1967, Chagla offered the usual British apologia to Nambiar's charge that the Government was ignoring the country's defence interests by allowing

a great power to establish bases so near to its shores, and asked him "to realize that the U.K. has a defence agreement with Australia, Malaysia and Hongkong, and these islands were necessary for her transit and staging facilities and so they are carrying out arrangements for that purpose"²⁴.

Chagla's assurance "that the Government would try to mobilize public opinion of like-minded countries to see that these islands do not in any way prejudice the security of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean", came to nothing. Apart from agreeing, under the pressure of the Afro-Asian group, to be one of the sponsors of a resolution in the U.N. Trusteeship Council condemning the British plan as being contrary to the U.N. Charter, no other effective steps were taken by India in this direction, and instead of India mobilizing other countries, we on occasions watched the spectacle of others mobilizing us against the foreign bases in the region.

²⁴. Ibid.
But these ambiguities were soon removed and vacillations overcome in time. Before long the Indian policy resumed its old initiative and drive. If there were some illusions about the Western military presence in the Indian Ocean serving the containment of China, they were as speedily dissipated as they had arisen and the danger to the security of the region as a result of its becoming a scene of bigpower naval competition was clearly realized. Rival fleets and military bases in these hitherto placid waters could one day impinge on Indian security as dangerously as the U.S. military aid to Pakistan. Hence the old accent on keeping the Indian Ocean region free from rival military alliances was again revived.

Launching the frigate 'Nilgiri' in October 1968, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi expressed the hope that the Ocean would always remain "an area of peace and a bridge of understanding" between the littoral nations.25 Addressing the Indian Journalists' Association in London

in January 1969, the Prime Minister declared that India wanted the Indian Ocean to remain an Ocean of peace and hoped that any country that entered it "will keep that in mind". On 19th March 1969, Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh told the Lok Sabha that India had made it known to all countries including the Soviet Union that "it wants the Indian Ocean area to be free from conflict and free from any nuclear weapons". This demand was reiterated in the joint communiqué issued after the visit of the then Prime Minister of Mauritius, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam to India in December 1969, and also included in the joint communiqué issued after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Mauritius in June 1970. It was also endorsed by 60 non-aligned nations at the Lusaka Conference in September 1970.

At the Singapore Conference of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers in January, 1971, India took a line of strong opposition to the British sale of arms to South Africa and highlighted the danger posed to the interest

of the littoral states by the transformation of the Indian Ocean into an arena of great power rivalry. Foreign Minister Swaran Singh who represented India at the Conference, expressed "concern" at the arrival of "the power game" in the Indian Ocean, until now a peaceful ocean. Describing the Soviet threat as "hypothetical", the Indian Foreign Minister said that the littoral states were "far more concerned over the growth of South African Military power". He also opposed the construction of an Anglo-American base at Diego Garcia which, he warned, would only bring in other big-powers. At a press conference in Singapore on 21 January 1971, Swaran Singh denied the existence of a Soviet threat. "All that had happened," he said, "was that Soviet ships had begun patrolling the area, thus breaking the British monopoly in this regard". He also added that "India would like all Big Powers, including the Soviet Union, United states, France and Britain, to leave the area alone."

India's policy in the Indian Ocean had for its long-term objective the creation of a regional security system without big-power interference and primarily through non-military means by mutually beneficial economic cooperation between the nations of the area. Experience proved that the involvement of the Asian nations in the military alliances only increased tensions in the area and added to their insecurity.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's proposal of March 1967 for a convention among the nations of Asia ensuring respect for independence and sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries of the region and neutrality of such countries as wish to remain neutral, was typical of the Indian approach to security in the Indian Ocean. The proposed Convention could be signed by not only all the countries of the region, but also by great powers, and thus incorporate, besides the five principles of peaceful coexistence, the concept of economic, cultural, scientific and technical cooperation."29.

29. Dinesh Singh as Foreign Minister described in his speech in the Indian Parliament on April 8, 1970 the Brezhnev plan for Asian Security as the same in many ways as the Prime Minister had said three years earlier. Lok Sabha Debates Vol. 39, 1970 Cols 239-260.
There was a good deal in common between the Indian and Soviet approach to regional security. Both had nothing to do with military blocs directed against definite states or groups of states and aim at embracing all the states of a given geographical region. India believed that security could only be ensured by collective efforts through commitments undertaken by all countries, or on a regional basis, and insisted that far from replacing the U.N. Charter, the regional security systems must complement it. The Indo-Soviet approach had a further similarity in the great importance they attached to the development of regional economic cooperation for creating a climate conducive to security. The Indo - Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was born out of the above common approach of the two countries to the problems of security and economic development and was not directed against any state or group of states.

India has pursued a consistent policy of steadily increasing her naval capability and opposing any extra-regional naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Although India had by 1971 transformed her navy from a small
coastal force to a balance force consisting of one aircraft carrier, two cruisers, 17 destroyers, six minesweepers and one ocean-going tanker, and had augmented shore-based naval aviation,\textsuperscript{30} her strategic perception of the Indian Ocean was still limited. It was only during India's December 1971 war with Pakistan and after the creation of Bangladesh that India's strategic perceptions of the Indian Ocean and her future security role in South Asia underwent a radical change. The successful Indian blockade of the Bay of Bengal totally severed Pakistani supply-lines which contributed substantially to the rapid surrender of the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan. The cumulative Indian experience in total sea control has had a powerful impact on her naval expansion programme, which was undertaken in the changing strategic environment in South Asia. The Indians greatly aided by the Soviets, had launched a massive programme of rapid deployment and modernisation of their naval fleet. India has by now built the largest naval force in the Indian Ocean next to the naval deployments of the superpowers. The Indian Defence Minister told

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the Rajya Sabha in December 1983 that India might go in for a nuclear-powered submarine.\textsuperscript{31} The strengthening of the Indian Navy was part of a massive armament programme aimed at making India the largest military power in Asia*. This had been motivated by India's aspirations to play a dominant role in the region. The Soviet Union's strategic interest in beefing up the Indian military complex, which was a part of the Soviet China policy and which enabled her to buy Indian consumer goods for her own market had generated fears of Indian domination among her small neighbours.

Despite the historic significance of the Indian Ocean to India's security and economic growth, India's past and present defence policies had largely remained land-oriented because of her threat from Pakistan. India's border conflict with China in 1962, and the absence of a credible threat from the sea, lead to a considerable emphasis on land forces.

\textsuperscript{31} R.Venketraman's Statement in Hindu dated Dec.6,1984.

* India had borrowed Soviet nuclear powered submarine 'Chakra' which has been returned to them as we are to have such ones in near future.
Infact, the initial Indian response to the creation of BIOT and to the establishment of the US communication station on Diego Garcia was mild and low-key. However, Sino-American rapprochement and India's growing identity of strategic and security interests with the Soviet Union substantially changed her Indian Ocean policy. Since the Lusaka Conference of Non-aligned Countries in 1970, India had actively supported all proposals declaring the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. Indian criticism has been specifically directed against the US naval facilities in the area. The Indians have argued that it was the US that triggered a competitive race as far back as the mid-1960s when they commissioned the North-West Cape Very Low Frequency (VLF) Communication Station in Australia as a prelude to the deployment of nuclear submarines in the Indian Ocean. Thus, it was often asserted by the Indians that the Soviet naval presence was reactive' and 'defensive' and did not present any strategic threat to the US or Western interests.

India's assertive opposition to the naval presence of the superpowers is indicative of her anxieties and ambitions to emerge as a major power in the region. India has gradually succeeded in developing herself into the largest military power among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. India now maintains the third largest standing army in the world and the fifth largest airforce. Her navy is the eighth largest in the world which is rapidly undergoing further expansion and modernisation. India's advocacy of the demilitarisation of the Indian Ocean by the superpowers is an essential element of her goal to establish naval supremacy in the region.

Although the United States had accepted the post-Bangladesh realities in South Asia, she refused to abandon the area because of Western economic and security interests in the Persian Gulf. Also, India's advocacy of the peace zone proposal and for the demilitarisation of the Indian Ocean were regarded with some suspicion by some of the regional powers, largely due to her power ambitions in the region. The Indian
leadership seems determined to acquire a potent military capacity and a strong industrial base in order to act as a regional superpower. This added to the fears of small states such as Sri Lanka that superpowers might be replaced by regional powers. Despite much suspicions and criticism even by the U.S.A., India has "blue water" navy in the South Asia now and is the most important factor in the region.

Thus besides Pakistan, India had/has no competitor in the Indian Ocean politics. Till recently there were strains and tensions with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. So far Bangladesh is concerned, the following two issues marked good neighbourly relations between the two countries:

(A) **TIN BIGHA ISSUE:**

There were some hurdles in the transfer of Tin Bigha corridor to Bangladesh. The Muslim League there tried to exploit the situation to its advantage. Leaders of Bangladesh Muslim League in a statement called upon the government to take
immediate and effective steps to take possession of Tin Bigha Corridor\textsuperscript{33}. The main legal hurdle was over when the Supreme Court of India had decided that the Government of India could transfer the corridor to Bangladesh. Under the agreements of 1974 and 1982 the same was agreed upon so that the Bangladesh mainland could be linked with its enclaves Dahagram and Angarpota\textsuperscript{34}. Ultimately the said transfer was made recently by the Narsimha Rao Government according to an understanding between the Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia and her Indian counterpart at the time of the earlier's visit to India. Under it though transit facilities are given to Bangladesh, the sovereignty of India is to remain over the corridor land\textsuperscript{35}. Thus the two countries attained another milestone in the way of good and cordial neighbourly relations.

\textsuperscript{34} Bangladesh Times dated Nov. 25, 1991.
\textsuperscript{35} Hindustan Times dated 1992.
CHAKMA ISSUE:

The Chakmas are Hindu tribals and they inhabit Chittagong Hill region of Bangladesh. They have not merged with the Bangladeshi mainstream culturally as the two have two different religious systems. Hence when the chakmas were persecuted by the Bangladesh Government, they resisted and fled to India in large number creating burden on the Indian Government. In December, 1991, Chakmas urged the U.N.O. to intervene. About 70,000 Bangladeshi Chakma refugees had urged the U.N.O. to inquire into "human rights violation" in the Chattagong hill tracts and to pressurize the Bangladesh Government for a permanent and peaceful solution to their problems.36

Chakmas organised 'Shanti Vahini' to give armed resistance to Bangla atrocities. When pro-democratic movement gathered momentum, Chakmas expressed their support to it37. To camouflage

37. "Statement of Upendralal Chakma, who was former M.P. and Advisor to President Ershad on tribal affairs. Telegraph dated Dec. 5, 1991."
the issue Bangladeshis started making allegations of Indian interference in their internal affairs. A daily 'Inquilab' in its lead story on January 4, 1991 made such allegations which were later picked up by Bangladesh Nationalist Party Chairperson Begum Khalida Zia and Jamat-E-Islami leader Abbas Ali Khan. During recent visit Bangla Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia has discussed the issue with the Indian Prime Minister. The talks were cordial but the issue is still unresolved.

Though the issue of Tin Bigha has been resolved, yet Chakma problem is still an irritant between the two countries.

Despite such problems, India has emerged the most powerful country in the Indian Ocean region. Its relations are cordial with Nepal, Bhutan, Mali, Myanmar (Burma) and others.

INDIA AND SRI LANKA

Miseries and suppression of Tamils of Sri Lanka became the sore-issue between India & Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka paid to heed to the Tamil

resentment, hence they took up arms and the problem of insurgency became acute in northern and eastern part of Sri Lanka. Their plight led to wide spread sympathy among the people of Tamil Nadu. Besides this, influx of Sri Lankan Tamils to India created problems for the Indian Government. Under these compulsions and strains, the latter helped them. Hence the LTTE movement little by little gained strength. But at no stage India wanted disintegration of Sri Lanka. The Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka N.N. Jha suggested the formation of an interim provincial council in the Tamil Majority North-Eastern part of Sri Lanka as a first step towards a solution to the vexed problem in the island state. But the government of Sri Lanka expressed its resentment to this suggestion. Ranjan Vijaratne said on February 21 that India had enough problems of its own and should not bother itself with what was happening in Sri Lanka. To improve relations between the two neighbours, the Government of India proposed India – Sri Lanka Friendship Treaty. “There will be lots of people

I who will tear it to bits when it is presented to Parliament", said Sri Lankan High Commissioner in India Standley Kalpage, who also termed it "unfair". Even after the withdrawal of I.P.K.F., martyrdom of Rajiv Gandhi, banning of LTTE and various initiatives taken by the Indian Government to improve relations between the two neighbours, the state of affairs is far from being satisfactory.