CHAPTER - 5

India’s Foreign Policy with its Neighbours
During 1991-2015
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This chapter discusses India’s bilateral relations with its neighbours in South Asia.

5.1 Afghanistan

5.1.1 Early Taliban Phase

After the end of the Cold War, India has moved away from the policy of ‘strategic restraint or limited cooperation’ to calculated cooperation. In relation with Afghanistan, India has developed an open and tolerant approach to accommodate the volatile circumstances. The then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao clearly understood India’s position in the evolving regional security complex, and acknowledged the growing influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan. Following Soviet intervention in Kabul, Rao attempted to engage Afghanistan and moderating existing differences between Delhi and Kabul. His calculated initiatives (Reset policy) was tumbled down because Taliban deposed the ruling communist regime in 1996. Despite the evidence that Taliban maintained a close connection with Pakistani military establishment and militant groups operating in Kashmir, India failed to act and prevent the Taliban from coming to power in Kabul. Though, the Taliban regime had an explicit control over Kabul administration but India did not recognize the Taliban and supported president Rabbani and his government as the legitimate one. Many Arab countries and Pakistan endorsed the Taliban regime and constantly supported and encouraged both financially and militarily. With their support, Taliban flourished and this led to enormous human rights violation and loss of many lives. Throughout the years, India’s Afghan policy experienced a complete break and meanwhile New Delhi extended support to the non-Pashtun Northern Alliance to safeguard its strategic interest.

After the fall of communist regime, first time, India directly established a contact with Taliban after hijacking IC-814 an Indian Airlines aircraft to Kandahar in December 1999. Negotiating with Taliban, India secured the safe release of passengers, crew and the aircraft in exchange for three terrorists, including a Pakistani national. This (hijacking) was an example of international terrorism at its worst. India strongly believed that it was engineered by Pakistan and fundamentalist groups that are
based in Pakistan. Immediately after Airlines Hijacking, India has maintained an active profile in addressing its security concerns and national interests which impacted the developments in Kabul. The issue was raised during the visit of US President Bill Clinton to India in March 2000 and the return visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee to the US in September 2000. India and USA agreed to institutionalize their bilateral discussions on Afghanistan. The discussion were also held with Russian president Vladimir Putin who visited India. India and Russia decided to coordinate their efforts on Afghanistan and formed a Joint Working Group on Afghanistan. The two meetings (Delhi and Moscow) were conducted in both the countries in 2000 and 2001 respectively. The two sides decided to continue a close cooperation at the bilateral level as well as multi-laterally to address the terrorist forces and extremist ideologies emanating from the Taliban held areas in Afghanistan. After 9/11 attack, USA wanted Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden but Taliban refused the American request. Afghanistan became a centre stage for geostrategic military intervention.

5.1.2 India’s Reconstruction Policy after ousting of Taliban regime

Following the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 Taliban was evicted from the power centre in Kabul. After fall of Taliban, New Delhi enthusiastically resumed diplomatic relations with Hamid Karzai’s new government, reopening its embassy in Kabul and established four additional consulates throughout the country and also initiated an ambitious new phase of commitment, intended to create an atmosphere conducive to Indian interests. These change of environment marks a return to India’s assistance and reconstruction policy, with broader and wider approach and an extensive policy options to engage Afghanistan. Immediately, the liaison office of the MEA became operational in Kabul. It was subsequently upgraded to an Embassy on 22 December 2001. Thenceforth, India proactively engaged in Afghan peace process as well as reconstruction policy. India actively participated in the various conference on Afghanistan in Bonn, New York, Islamabad, Tokyo and London conferences which were sponsored by UN, USA, Europe, and Japan. In all these conferences, India’s role and active engagement is widely appreciated by international community and government of Afghanistan.

The hallmark of India-Afghanistan bilateral relationship was marked with regular and frequent high level visit in both the direction. Since November 2001, steady
exchange of top level visits provided impetus to bilateral relations. The then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh led an Indian delegation to Kabul in December 2001 to attend the inauguration of the Interim Authority in Afghanistan. Thereafter, India has followed a policy of high-level engagement with Afghanistan through extensive and wider ranging humanitarian, financial, project assistance and participation in international efforts aimed at political reconciliation and economic rebuilding of Afghanistan. After assuming the charge of Afghanistan’s president, Hamid Karzai visited India in March 2003, during the visit, many agreements were signed and India agreed financial and project assistance for Afghanistan’s reconstruction. The main focus of India’s assistance includes rebuilding institutional capacity by imparting training in various fields (diplomats, government officials with different capacity, judicial officials, teachers, doctors, journalists, women entrepreneurs, military and police personnel), and providing multi-disciplinary project assistance in areas of public transport, electricity generation and transmit, information technology, civil aviation, education, health, agriculture, media, etc. Both sides also signed a Preferential Trade Agreement (2003) to improve trade and assured more investment especially private and public undertaking. India has also been in regular contact with the international community, including the United States, European Union, Russia, Iran, and other likeminded countries, with regard to reconstructing new Afghanistan.

After Afghanistan Parliamentary election (to fulfil the Bonn agreement) in 2005, India’s relations with Afghanistan reached a new higher level with more interaction. Hamid Karzai paid a visit to India in February 2005 and quickly after Manmohan Singh visited Afghanistan in August 2005. During the visit, India promised more developmental assistance. This visit also marked with new beginning of Afghanistan’s interest in the comity of SAARC nations, India helped and supported Afghanistan to seek membership of the SAARC. In 2007 SAARC summit (Delhi), Afghanistan was formally inducted into SAARC as an eighth member.

The attacks carried out on Indian projects, facilities, and personnel have increased in magnitude and frequency between 2002 and 2014. India’s deep engagement and physical presence in Afghanistan caused some uneasiness from different quarters especially Pakistan backed Taliban. It was witnessed in 2008 and 2009 bombing of its embassy and consulate and the murder of nine Indian civilians in an attack on a Kabul guesthouse in 2010. With all this set back, India reiterated its
commitment towards Afghanistan's reconstruction despite the huge loss of its personnel and materials.

The engagement between two countries became wider and deeper, it was further illuminated during the visit of the then PM Manmohan Singh in 2011. As a rare honour, Singh addressed the joint session of the Afghan parliament and announced an additional US$ 500 million thus raising the cumulative Indian commitment to US$ 2 billion. Over the years, with the assistance from India, numerous small, medium and large scale projects are completed and formally handed over to Afghanistan. This enabled India to become Afghanistan’s leading regional development partner which makes India the fifth largest bilateral donor. Since 2001, India’s reconstruction efforts were widely appreciated and recognised by the international community, Afghan government and above all the people of Afghanistan.

5.1.3 Wider engagement – India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement

The seventh visit of Hamid Karzai to India in October 2011, marked the new and renewed momentum in the bilateral relationship. The two leaders signed a historic agreement on Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between Afghanistan and India. This was the first such agreement signed by Afghanistan with any country. This agreement formalized and enabled a framework for complete cooperation in all areas between the two countries, that is, political and security cooperation; trade and economic cooperation; capacity development and education; and improved social, cultural, civil society and people-to-people relations. The signing of this agreement reiterated India’s strong signal of enduring commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. Thereafter, this agreement is a guiding force for bilateral relation between the both countries. Under this agreement, India promised to strengthen the capabilities of the Afghan security forces and enhance the security and military cooperation. Significantly, PM Singh conveyed his support for Afghan’s decision to commence an Afghan-led process of negotiation and reconciliation with the Taliban.3

Initially, India-Afghan strategic agreement was initiated to increase cooperation in the field of training and helping Afghan national security forces and make them to defend their country. In later years discussions are extended to military hardware and equipment supply which was initiated by Afghanistan. The Afghan President Hamid Karzai formally requested Indian government for sophisticated military hardware to
equip Afghanistan’s armed forces. Since US ended its combat role in Afghanistan in 2014, around ten thousand US soldiers are stationed in Afghanistan for non-combat operations. Thereafter, Taliban resurfaced in many places and even captured Kunduz and many other downs. However, the complete drawdown of international troops (which started since 2011), has not hastened India’s withdrawal. Fairly, it has encouraged India to recalibrate its approach. Responding to evolving circumstances and anticipating further changes, India is developing a flexible policy framework which allows India to safeguard some of its interests in Afghanistan. The stability of Afghanistan remains at stake but India has taken a restrained approach to Afghan stability. The personnel from Afghan army are being trained at various Indian military facility as part of capacity building measures.

Though, India followed restrained approach in military cooperation especially supply of military equipment, but during President Ghani’s visit, India has gifted Afghanistan three Cheetal helicopters. According to Daniel Norfolk, to fulfill India-Afghanistan bilateral defense cooperation, India entered into an agreement with Russia, this agreement enables supply of military equipment to Afghanistan, will be sourced from Russia and will be paid by New Delhi. Initial military supplies will include small arms and ammunition but could eventually lead to the transfer of heavy artillery, tanks and even combat helicopters.

5.1.4 India-Afghanistan-Pakistan Dilemma

Since 2001, India’s developmental engagement with Afghanistan caused some uneasiness in the Pakistan military establishment. Earlier Pakistan enjoyed a very close and friendly relation with Taliban regime. In recent years, Afghanistan has become very closer to India, and concluded strategic cooperation agreement, that has been created much irritation to Pakistan. It is evident that the growing security threat for India’s establishment in Afghanistan is mainly abetted and aided by Pakistan through their Taliban friend. Recently, “before three days of Modi’s swearing-in ceremony there was a failed terror attack by the LeT on the Indian consulate in Herat.” According to Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, “this would have had serious implications for regional security had it succeeded.” India-Afghan close cooperation in all fields, forced the Pakistani military establishment to recalibrate a strategic calculus which includes further expanding its
support for the Taliban and Haqqani Network as a counter measure against Indian influence in the region.\(^7\)

Why India needs Afghanistan? How Afghan sees India deeper engagement? These two questions are much relevant in India-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral relationship. First, strategic interest, New Delhi perceives its own influence in Afghanistan, would be a useful countermeasure to an antagonistic Pakistan. Both nations have had a history of competing for influence in Afghanistan. Subsequently, Delhi has commenced a programme of development assistance all over Afghanistan with a broader view to nurturing a stable and friendly government in Afghanistan and generate goodwill amongst the people. India’s influence and its strategic objectives are adding to Pakistani suspicions. Second, to secure free and open trade, India is rapidly growing as an energy-deficient country, and very keen to access oil and natural gas from the Central Asian countries via Afghanistan bypassing Pakistan. In addition, India wants to access Afghanistan’s extractable resources and useful transit facility for these commodities free from Pakistani influence. In short, India wanted to create a stable Afghanistan free from Pakistani influence and open to trade. To answer the second question, Afghanistan has seen India as non-interfering friend with shared commonalities of interest in regional stability and Afghan development.

Initially, President Ashraf Ghani, priority agenda was to outreach Pakistan because of its influence in Afghan Taliban “to solve the Taliban issue by negotiating peace talks and seeking ultimately to end its support to Taliban, thus providing stability to Afghanistan. This led to somewhat strained relations with India.”\(^8\) These development caused some worry in the Modi government and created some uneasiness over the re-emergence of dominant Pakistani influence in Afghanistan which will be a detriment to India’s interest in Afghanistan. However, Afghan disappointment with Pakistani is very clear because growing militant extremism has been increasing day by day after Ghani assuming charge as president. Pakistan is not willing to let ‘Afghan owned, Afghan led’ process of political reconciliation with Taliban without its interference. India is keenly watching these developments, without any hasty move against Ghani and not attempting to disrupt Ghani initiative. India is maintaining a policy of ‘waiting game’ in Afghanistan\(^9\). The recent minor worry in the India-Afghanistan bilateral relation is somewhat cooled off the Ghani’s first standalone foreign visit to India in April 2015 and followed by PM Modi visit in December 2015.
During the PM visit, India reiterated that the reconciliation processes in Afghanistan must be led, controlled, owned by Afghanistan with agreed red lines. According Rahul Chaudhary, “agreed red lines include elements of Afghan Taliban be part of the national reconciliation who quit Taliban/Al-Qaeda, renounce violence and agree to uphold the constitution of Afghanistan.”

5.2 Bangladesh

India has many commonalities with Bangladesh which includes geographical, historical, cultural, social and linguistic linkages and these are reflected in many ways India’s multi-dimensional and expanding relations in the bilateral cooperation. After liberalisation, India’s relation with Bangladesh, became many ebb and flow, exactly with change of government in Bangladesh. When Hasina government comes, there is mutual understanding and greater cooperation, on the other hand, if Mrs Khalida Zia occupies the administration of Bangladesh, there would not be much cordial relationship because there are two identities of Bangladesh in relation with India. Hasina upholds the identity of secularism and other side Zia gives more importance Muslimness identity. The real transformation began with Sheikh Hasina, when she assumed the office of Prime Minister in 1996, Bangladesh resolved water sharing problems and the insurgency. This was evident in signing of the bilateral Ganges Water Treaty (1996) and repatriation Chakmas (1997), removed the two main irritants that had plagued Indo-Bangladeshi relations for many years.

On the other hand, this momentum was lost, with the elected BNP four party alliance (mostly fringe Islamic party) government taking over in October 2001. Following reports of post-election attacks on members of the minority community especially Hindus and Buddhist in Bangladesh and regrettable border incidents of 2001. In Zia tenure, many violence and corresponding influx of refugees into India and overriding perception of security threats posed to India clouded the bilateral relations. Regular border incidents were an aberration which the relationship severely curtailed into further expansion. Bilateral ties reached to lowest ebb during this phase which ended in 2006.

With the beginning of Caretaker Government in 2006, a perceptible shift occurred in both the countries relationship. India and Bangladesh moved away from hostile posturing and tried to stabilize bilateral ties. The real beginning started only after
the formation of the Grand Alliance Government, led by PM Sheikh Hasina in January 2009. India continued to engage the Government of Bangladesh on all important bilateral issues, that transformed the bilateral ties to the new height and various contentious issues steadily melted down. She addressed India’s core security concerns immediately after assuming power, this positive signal, leading to greater cooperation and thereafter new momentum emerged in the bilateral relations. To reduce contentious issues, both countries agreed to build a comprehensive institutional framework to enable bilateral understanding in all areas. There are more than 50 bilateral institutional mechanisms between India and Bangladesh. Both sides agreed that the institutionalized bilateral mechanisms such as Joint Rivers Commission, Joint Economic Commission, Joint Boundary Working Groups and Home Secretary level talks would meet more frequently to ensure relationship in a positive direction and their routine outcome monitored by the political leadership on a continuous basis. These explores newer avenues for cooperation and reduced contentions and conflict issues at the bay.

The two countries have given utmost priority to trade, investment and development. In 2009, during the then Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee’s visit, two agreements were signed namely (i) Trade Agreement and (ii) Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA). Followed by a state visit of PM Sheikh Hasina to India in January 2010, India agreed to provide a Line of Credit of US$ 1 billion to support infrastructure projects in Bangladesh. Since Hasina took over, there were regular and close contacts between the two countries at various levels. During PM Singh visit in September 2011, so many agreements were signed among the most, India leased out Tin Bigha corridor, following the operationalisation of 24- hour unfettered access to Dahagram and Angarpola through Tin Bigha. This created enormous response from Bangladesh PM as well as the people of Bangladesh. Bangladesh honoured and conferred Indira Gandhi Bangladesh Freedom medal for her unique role and contribution to the liberation war and birth of Bangladesh. The honour was received by Sonia Gandhi Friends of Liberation War Honour on behalf of the Indian Armed Forces which was received by the then minister of state of defence Pallam Raju. After assuming the BJP government, External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj, made her first visit to Bangladesh immediately after assuming office in June 2014. Followed by Prime Minister visit to Bangladesh on 6-7 June 2015 at the invitation of the PM Sheikh Hasina. Twenty two agreements/MoUs were signed and exchanged. PM Modi
welcomed the decision of Bangladesh to allocate land for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for India. Mongla and Bheramara were identified as possible locations. Earlier this year (2016), Bangladesh has decided to prefer India over China for a sensitive port project.\textsuperscript{12} Both countries have worked to improve levels of trust and to strengthen relations. PM Shaikh Hasina needs to be complimented for the bold steps she has taken to strengthen relations with India. After PM Modi visit, India-Bangladesh relationship has become truly multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of areas including trade and transit, investment, security, connectivity, border management, water, power, coastal shipping, renewable energy, development cooperation, civil nuclear cooperation especially in training for technical person, art and culture, people to people exchanges, human resource development, amongst others.

5.2.1 All Critical Issues Settled Down or Nearer to Settled Down and Ever Widening Bilateral Cooperation

After 1990s, India’s relation with Bangladesh has been marked by many contentious issues especially border issues (like fencing, illegal migration and trade, land boundary demarcation), maritime dispute, river water sharing problem and security related issues especially insurgency are matters of deep concern between their relation. Over the period of close relationship, these issues became settle down and some extent neutralized. These helped to build a better bilateral cooperation and also extended into many different fields especially security and military cooperation, sub-regional cooperation and improved trade and transit arrangements. To sustain these arrangements and further enhance the bilateral cooperation, both the countries encouraged India-Bangladesh Friendship Dialogue which started in 2009, and concluded seven rounds, the last one held in Dhaka in March 2016.\textsuperscript{13}

5.2.2 Border, Land boundary demarcation and Fencing

India and Bangladesh shares 5\textsuperscript{th} longest international border in the world, most of which highly porous and unfenced. The porous Indo-Bangladesh border makes cross-border trafficking in persons, drugs, and fake currency seamless. Given the length and porosity of the India-Bangladesh boundary, problems can and do arise from time to time. In recognition of this fact, multi-tiered institutional mechanisms have been established for dialogue on border-related management. Despite the safeguard mechanism, frequent cross-border firings are common at regular basis. For example, in
April 2001 unprovoked and unwarranted intrusion by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on 15 April 2001 in Pyrdiwah in Meghalaya State, and tension spread into other neighbouring Indian states. To avoid such a grave incident, since 2003, Institutional dialogue on key issues relating to border management continued through the biannual Director General level talks between the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). This biannual talks agreed and continued a coordinated patrolling between the two sides in an effort to jointly tackle border crimes and the two forces are also discussing confidence-building measures to improve understanding between the forces such as offering training in Indian institutions and sports exchanges.

India shares - 4097 kilometres (km) out of which 1116.2 km is riverine border, of which 6.5 kilometres un-demarcated for several decades. This issue, along with the exchange of 62 enclaves and adversely possessed lands by the two countries has been resolved amicably. The signing of the Protocol (September 2011) addressed all outstanding issues related border demarcation. During May 2015, India unanimously passed One Hundredth Amendment Bill to implement the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, 1974 and its Protocol agreement, 2011 which paved the way for the ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh, a task that has remained pending for decades. Result of this agreement, the enclaves, strip maps of India and Bangladesh in each other’s countries were exchanged. The outstanding issues addressed include (i) undemarcated land boundary in three sectors viz. Daikhata-56 (West Bengal), Muhuri River-Belonia (Tripura) and Dumabari (Assam); (ii) enclaves; and (iii) adverse possessions. As it stands on the ground, India lost around 40 sq km/10,000 acres to Bangladesh. PM Sheik Hasina highly appreciated India’s unilateral gesture and goodwill prevailed at the both the side.14

5.2.3 Alleged Illegal Migration of Bangladesh to India and Fencing issues

Since end of 1980s, Bangladesh has opposed the idea of India erecting a fence along the border, which it considers to be a defensive structure. In contrast, from an Indian perspective, the main purpose of the fence is to prevent smuggling, illegal immigration and the use of the open border by insurgents and criminal elements. India constantly accuses Bangladesh of huge illegal migration from its borders to the adjoining states of India and adversely affecting the demographic pattern; Bangladesh, however, denies it. The Indian High Commissioner’s (in Bangladesh) concern about
illegal migration deserves attention: “We have to be circumspect in issuing visas particularly when we know that around 25,000 Bangladeshis do not return after entering India every year.”15 As of now, almost 80% of fencing has been completed by India neglecting a serious Bangladeshi’s concern

5.2.4 Maritime issue

Since 2008, maritime boundary demarcation issue (Dalpatti Island or New Moore Island) and also linked with dispute over the ownership of an island in the River Hariabhanga, become a lime light in Indo-Bangladesh relation. This issue that also involves Myanmar. Both India and Myanmar insist on resolving the issue based on the principle of equidistance but Bangladesh interested in only to resolve the issues based on the equity principle. 16 India initiated a technical level talks on maritime boundary held in Dhaka from 15-27 September 2008, after a gap of over 25 years but this talks became inconclusive because of the oil rich delta of the Bay of Bengal than the island itself. As such the island holds the potential to become the core contentious issue between the two nations.

India insisted on Bangladesh to solve the issue bilaterally and also met in January 2010 to discuss arbitration proceedings on the maritime boundary issues. Bangladesh has taken up the issue with the United Nations for arbitration. The Arbitration Tribunal for Delimitation of Maritime Boundary between Bangladesh and India, established under Annex VII of the UN Convention of Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), rendered its award in July 2014. “The settlement of the maritime boundary will further enhance mutual understanding and goodwill between India and Bangladesh by bringing to closure a long pending issue. This paves the way for the economic development of this part of the Bay of Bengal, which will be beneficial to both countries.”

5.2.5 Insurgency

Since long time, India’s north-eastern states are plagued by insurgency. It is believed that there are about 175 insurgent groups operating in the states surrounding Bangladesh. Land near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border town of Naikhangchari, which has become home to Indian insurgent outfits such as the United Liberation Front of Assam and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland. During the then PM Khalida Zia’s visit to India in 2006, India reiterated its concerns on the activities of Indian
Insurgent Groups (IIGs) operating from Bangladesh’s territory. It expressed its deep concern with regard to growing anti-India activities of the ISI from the Bangladesh soil. India pointed out incidents of terrorism in the Indian soils which revealed clear links with Bangladesh individuals/outfits like Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami (HUJI) and JMB. India underscored the need for sustained action by Bangladesh against elements indulging in cross-border terrorism. But after Hasina took over as PM of Bangladesh, both countries agreed to designate nodal points for continuous and regular sharing of real-time and actionable information in areas of mutual security concerns. With special direction from PM Hasina, Bangladesh apprehended and repatriated many insurgents to India who had been creating havoc in North East. The most recent instance of such support was the handing over of ULFA insurgent Anup Chetia and others. India also recently handed over Noor Hossain, wanted by the Bangladeshi Government on various criminal cases. This gesture from PM Hasina was highly appreciated by Indian government as well as the Chief Ministers of some of the North Eastern States.

5.2.6 River Water Sharing and Dam Construction Issue

Both India and Bangladesh, having share in common fifty four rivers. Obviously, sharing of river water is a major concern for both the nations. To solve this issue, the two countries have a bilateral Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) that was established in June 1972 to address various issues of contention and maintains liaison between the two countries to maximize benefits from common river systems and reduce misapprehension. Over the period, JRC extended to look at flood control works, advance flood warning, flood forecasting and cyclone warning, arsenic mitigation and disaster warning, study of flood control and irrigation projects. Since then, the JRC meeting provided an opportunity for both the sides to review bilateral cooperation in the water sector. Till now, 61 meeting of Technical Committee of JRC and 37 JRC conducted respectively and last one held in New Delhi on September 2015. Many significant events were concluded as the outcome of these meetings. For example, Ganga Waters Treaty signed in 1996 for sharing of water of river Ganga, continues to work satisfactorily.

Among the fifty four rivers, river Teesta and Feni has become predominant in the relationship between the two nations. During the then PM Singh’s visit to Bangladesh in 2011, agreement on Teesta river water sharing was not concluded mainly
because of the opposition by Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal. She was against giving Bangladesh 50,000 cusecs of water, as mentioned in the final draft of the interim treaty, instead of the 33,000 cusecs as in the initial draft. It created a heavy jolt in the relationship between the two nations. PM Modi accompanied with Mrs Banerjee to Bangladesh in 2015, though the treaty was not signed but broadly assured that “deliberations are underway involving all stakeholders with regard to conclusion of the Interim Agreements on sharing of waters of Teesta and Feni as soon as possible”. The underpinning issue of Teesta, an agreement already in place (agreed upon in 1983), allows India and Bangladesh to share 75% of its waters, giving the former the right to use 39% and the latter 36%. There is need for an agreement between India and Bangladesh as to how to divide the balance 25%. The remaining 25% sharing is matter of serious concern for more than three decades. During PM Modi visit to Bangladesh, he requested for an immediate conclusion of the Interim Agreement on sharing of Teesta waters.

Further PM Modi assured Bangladesh that “New Delhi would not take any step regarding their planned Tipaimukh Dam that might affect the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India”. This is, indeed, a positive development which would greatly dispel the apprehensions raised by the Bangladeshi side. This is likely to have a cooling effect on the recent heated political relations of the countries.

### 5.2.7 Increasing Security and Military Cooperation

After 2008, the ties between the two countries in the areas of security cooperation are improved slowly and steadily and has become an important aspect of the relationship. Bangladesh leadership at the highest level has guaranteed that its territory would not be allowed for use by anyone to harm India. The wide-ranging agreements required for security cooperation have been signed and ratified by both nations. A CBMP (Coordinated Border Management Plan) is in effect between both the countries since 2011. The CBMP aims to synergize the efforts of both the Border Guarding Forces for more effective control over cross border illegal activities and crimes and maintenance of peace and harmony along the India- Bangladesh border. Regular meetings of highest official on security related matters have been held continuously. Both the countries have mutually negotiated and concluded key security related agreements namely extradition, mutual legal assistance, combating circulation...
fake currency notes, transfer of sentenced prisoners, organized crime and illegal drug trafficking, prevention of human trafficking, and combating international terrorism. Both countries have been created a framework for regular and comprehensive interaction on all security related issues at the highest level including ministers meet, heads of border guarding forces, coast guards, border district DCs and DMs.

In addition, there are frequent high level visits at the defense ministerial level as well as between armed forces of both countries on a regular basis. Defence cooperation between India and Bangladesh surged ahead with India offering 123 courses to Bangladesh’s defence personnel and availing 14 courses offered by the Bangladesh side. National Defence College Study Tours were performed by both sides. Both countries Navy and Army are regularly conducting talks for security cooperation. The last, 3rd Navy to Navy Talks and 6th Army to Army Talks were held in New Delhi in 2015. India invited to the Bangladesh Air Force to participate in the International Aerospace, Defence & Civil Aviation Exposition held in 2015.

5.2.8 Sub-regional cooperation

In recent years, India’s relation with Bangladesh has seen as upward mobility which encourages the sub-regional cooperation especially with Bhutan and Nepal. To evolve such a paradigm, India and Bangladesh Joint Working Group on Water and Power – in pursuance of the directions of the PM’s of India and Bangladesh to commence sub-regional cooperation amongst India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. This has been constituted to enhance cooperation for sharing the waters of common rivers, explore possibilities of common basin management and harness the advantages of sub-regional initiative in the power sector. In the similar way, Joint Working Group on Transit and Connectivity on India-Bangladesh-Nepal-Bhutan focuses the implementation of the road and railway networks among the participating countries which will lead to enhanced connectivity, trade, movement of goods and services as well as people-to-people contacts. The third Joint Working Group (JWG) meetings on Sub-Regional Cooperation between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) was held in January 2016 at Dhaka. This meeting agreed to commence discussion on the possibility of having a BBIN Rail Agreement drawing on the draft on SAARC Regional Rail Agreement template. It was also decided that land ports/land customs stations crucial for sub-regional trade and transit would be given priority attention by all the
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four countries. To help such a move, India assured Bangladesh of its commitment and would continue to extend all cooperation to the process. It provides a substantive orientation to the development of the North Eastern region of India and links South Asia to South East Asia.

5.3 Bhutan

5.3.1 Bilateral smoothness and high level Contact

India and Bhutan continue to share uniquely a model neighbourhood policy, warm and cordial relations characterized by close consultations, maturity, complete trust, mutual understanding and respect for each other’s national interests. This relationship is continued, sustained and enhanced by the exchange of regular visits, including at the highest level. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan was honoured as the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations in 2005 and the only country in South Asia to be given this honour. This was also extended to his son current King Jigme Kheser Wangchuck in 2013. There are agreements in the broader field which includes culture, scholarships programme, people to people contact, trade and transit (road and railway linkages between bordering towns of India and Bhutan), power and hydroelectric project, agriculture and allied sectors and small development programme.

5.3.2 Insurgency and security Cooperation

Cooperation in insurgency is a hallmark of Indo-Bhutan relationship. Both countries have been accommodative in the issues related to insurgency. Until 2004, this cooperation was critical for India to control various Assamese militant group operating in Bhutan. The two Governments continued to be in close touch with each other on the issue of ULFA-Bodo militants in Southern Bhutan. Bhutan is seriously concerned with this problem. The 78th session of the National Assembly in July 2000 passed a resolution reiterating the decisions taken in the 77th session and authorized the Government to launch military operations against ULFA/Bodo. Bhutan reiterated that it would not allow its territory to be misused against the interests of India. Cadres of three Indian IIGs (Indian Insurgency Groups): United Liberation Front in Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front for Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) have established about 30 camps in this area from where they would enter India, carry out attacks on the Indian side and retreat beyond the reach of the Indian security forces into these camps in the Bhutanese jungles. In
June 2001, Bhutan reached an understanding with ULFA militants to close down four of their camps in Bhutan by the end of December 2001 but the promise was not fulfilled by Bodo and other militants.

At India’s request, Bhutan decided to tackle the problem and expel the IIGs from Bhutanese territory. When their attempts to peacefully achieve this objective failed, Bhutan Army launched a military operation of precision attacks on all the 30 camps in December 2003 which was led by Bhutanese King to flush out the insurgents. In about three weeks, Army was able to destroy all the 30 camps and observation posts of the IIGs and render their communication equipments inoperative. During this operation, India stood firmly behind the Bhutan, providing all logistical support requested by the latter till the completion of the operation.

Besides being the friendliest neighbour, Bhutan is of strategic importance to India. In the past, insurgent groups from Northeast India had taken sanctuary along Bhutan’s treacherous border with the Indian state of Assam and there have been reports about the Chinese army’s activities in north and northwest Bhutan. To maintain India’s strategic interest in Bhutan, after successful military operation during 2003-04, both countries have also strengthened cooperation in the field of security and border management. With the initiatives of both the countries, India-Bhutan Group on Border Security and Management was established in March 2004. This group has made several practical recommendations relating to training, exchange of information and better cross-border coordination between the security and administrative authorities of the two countries.

5.3.3 The revised treaty of Friendship in 2007

Since 2000, many from the government, academia as well as common people from the Bhutan, raised the concern of India-Bhutan friendship treaty on some specific issues which they felt restricted Thimphu broader interest. This was solidly evident during the King’s visit in 2005, he raised issue and wider discussions were held at the highest level in India to review and update the Treaty which was signed in Darjeeling in August 1949. Initially, this Treaty of Friendship emphasised non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, but on matters of foreign policy, Bhutan agreed to let India “guide” it. On the interest of Bhutan, India was agreed to revise the Treaty in 2005, and revised Treaty concluded in 2007 by signing of visiting Crown Prince Jigme Kheser
Wangchuck where the provision requiring Bhutan to seek New Delhi’s guidance in foreign policy was replaced with a broader sense of sovereignty. India responded positively on the request of Bhutan. As a result, either country’s shall not allow use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security or interest of the other. The new Treaty also provides that Bhutan is free to import arms and ammunition. Whereas earlier it could do so only with the assistance and approval from India. The updated Treaty of India-Bhutan Friendship is reflected the contemporary nature of their relationship and lay the foundation for their future development in the 21st century. This Treaty coincided with Bhutan’s transition to a democratic constitutional monarchy and reflected the desire of both governments to put in place the framework for the future growth of their relationship following the transfer of responsibilities.

5.3.4 Manmohan regime and election related capacity building

During PM Singh period, marked with high level and larger cooperation, he visited Bhutan in May 2008 as the first foreign dignitary to visit Bhutan after it became a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy in April 2008. He announced various measures including development of hydro power projects and set the target of new height of 10,000MW in 2020; new meritorious scholarship scheme; and inaugurated Thimphu medical college under Indian assistance. Followed by the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, paid a visit to India in December 2009. This was the first State Visit of the King of Bhutan to a foreign country since his formal coronation in November 2008. Twelve Agreements/MoUs were signed between the two countries during the visit which includes broader bilateral interaction encompasses the areas of hydro-power, transport, communications, infrastructure, health, education, IT, industry, medicine and agriculture and so on. From then onwards, the King and PM of Bhutan frequently visited India and improved bilateral mechanism with closer cooperation. During January 2014, the royal couple were the first foreign guests in two decades to have stayed at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. This was symbolic gesture by India which was widely appreciated by Bhutan.

The King himself took a major step and established Bhutan as constitutional monarchy, it diluted the powers of the King and strengthened the powers of parliament and encouraged multiparty democracy in Bhutan. India with all support and encouragement assisted Bhutan for this entire transformation from monarchy to multi-
party democracy. India helped the Bhutan first election with all logistical support and training to conduct a fair and free election in 2008 by providing four thousand Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). These machines were used successfully in the polls. Officials from India assigned by the Election Commission observed the elections in Bhutan and Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Navin Chawla visited Bhutan to supervise the election process in 2008. Bhutanese media personnel were in India to familiarize themselves on the election coverage. At the request of the Bhutan, India has facilitated holding of a workshop in Thimphu for senior bureaucrats of Bhutan on ‘Democratic Constitutional Monarchy’ with eminent civil servants from India acting as resource persons. Bhutan successfully held its second democratic elections in July 2013 and power transformed peacefully from Thinly to Topgay government. This time the CEC, S Y Quraishi observed the election progress. India extended various capacity building measures for a newly democratic country. For example a 14-member National Council delegation of Bhutan visited India to attend a nine days specialized training programme on Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST) from 24 July to 1 August 2013 at Lok Sabha Secretariat and met Speaker of Lok Sabha Meira Kumar; and another delegation comprised of 13-members of Bhutan’s National Assembly visited India during 13-16 January 2014 to observe the functioning of Parliament and various parliamentary procedures under the aegis of BPST.

5.3.5 Modi’s first ever foreign visit to Bhutan

After assuming office, PM Modi chose Bhutan as the destination for his first standalone foreign visit. He describes India’s relations with Bhutan, as all-weather friends, a model neighbours, special partners and stated that the relations with both the nation is endless. This unique relationship got a boost from PM Modi’s new mantra of B4B- Bharat for Bhutan and Bhutan for Bharat. PM Modi termed Bhutan a natural choice for his first visit abroad as the two countries shared a “special relationship”. His visit to Bhutan marked one of closest and friendliest South Asian neighbours which reflects the high priority accorded to India’s immediate neighbourhood. During the visit, Bhutan extended warmly greetings to Modi in the form of larger public gatherings all along the 50km route from Paro to Thimphu on arrival and departure. This visit reflects the high priority by Modi government in its relations with Bhutan and this shows India’s attitude towards good neighbourly relations in Indian subcontinent. His government encouraged Bhutan in consolidation of parliamentary democracy. In June
and August 2015, a team of legislative committee and parliamentary delegation from the Bhutan national assembly visited India to understand treaty ratification procedure.

5.3.6 Issues pertaining to minor irritant

Indo-Bhutan relationship is a model for ideal neighbourhood relationship. The relation between two nations is characterized by minor irritants which affects the bilateral relationship. Some section of the Bhutanese populace, lamented the fixed pricing in power purchasing from the three hydroelectric power production namely Thala, Kurichhu and Chukka. Opinion raised in favour of fair share in the form of variable pricing according to change of time. This power pricing was fixed a long time ago and not revised yet. Other concern related was the delay in the implementation of projects particularly in the hydroelectric sector.

With the anxieties about China’s intentions having become a factor in India’s relations with its neighbours, the issue also features in India-Bhutan relations. A surprise meeting held between PMs of Bhutan and China, Jigme Thinley and Wen Jiabao, on the sidelines of an international summit in Brazil (2012) had reportedly caused some unease in the security establishment in India.20 As of today, Bhutan does not have formal diplomatic relations with China, and there are outstanding border disputes that needs to be settled. Responding to questions about the possibility of China opening a consulate in Thimphu, Prime Minister Tobgay responded that “the resolution of border dispute is a pre-condition to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, and without that the question of opening a consulate did not arise”.21 On the whole, India, Bhutan relationship is an important one and where cooperation on a number of areas is of mutual benefit.

5.4 Maldives

5.4.1 Political Bilateral relation

Since 1990, the relationship between India-Maldives was close and friendly because at the end 1980s India promptly helped Maldives from the attempted coup by PLOTE, a fringe Tamil militant group to oust Gayoom regime. Afterwards, India maintained a very close and cordial relationship and bilateral relations became broader and wider which includes ever increasing trade, security and military, developmental assistance, culture and high level people-to-people and political contact. Since 1960s,
India has maintained a very high level political contact, it is evident that almost all the prime ministers of India visited Maldives (except PM Modi due to internal political turbulence). On the Maldivian side, former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and Mohamed Nasheed made a number of visits to India during their Presidencies. The current president Yameen has been visited India thrice after assuming charge, his last visit in April 2016, he has chosen India as his first foreign destination as a president. During the period 1990-2015, though India maintained better relations, the sixth term of Gayoom regime, marked with political unrest, relation between both the countries are somewhat are not so smooth.

When Gayoom assumed the charge the sixth term, India readily welcomed his presidency and extended support to his regime. L.K Advani (NDA government) represented India at the inaugural ceremony after Gayoom’s election in October 2003. He assured Gayoom all kinds of support and mutually engaged broader bilateral cooperation. Immediately, there was huge public protest against the government with participation from all the parties. During the protest, a young man was shot down by police which triggered and intensified the protest to a new level. This resulted in Gayoom imposing a state of national emergency in Male and other adjoining areas. With heavy hand, he crushed the democratic protest and lodged many political leaders across all parties and innocent civilians. India raised the serious concern about human rights violation and widespread anti-government protest and also urged the Maldivian government to lift the emergency as soon as possible. The President of Maldives deputed Ahmed Abdullah to India as his special envoy to brief India on the developments in the Maldives. Abdullah met all political leaders and handed over a personal letter from the then president Gayoom to then PM Singh. PM Singh urged the special envoy to lift the emergency, immediately the state of national emergency was lifted in October 2004.

Over the period of democratic movement, the internal political situation of Maldives reached its lowest ebb. Many political leaders were imprisoned for a long time, one of the prominent political leader Mohamad Naseed from the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) was imprisoned for nearly two years. This situation led to two kinds of security concern for India. First, India worried a growing Islamisation in that country because there was a solid evidence on the presence of fringe Islamic militant group especially Al-Qaida. Second, Gayoom was slightly moving away from India, he
inked a military pact with China which ended in 2009. The deteriorating security situation and the bomb attack in September 2007 which killed twelve foreigners and injured many, was an alarming situation for India. India offered all assistance in investigation as well as medical assistance to Maldives.

Gayoom visited India in February 2008 and signed many agreements and agreed to establish India-Maldives foundation to improve cultural relations. During his visit, India raised many concerns especially human rights violation and security concern and he agreed to accommodate the democratic aspirations of the people. He made an important stride in its history with the ratification of the new constitution of Maldives in August 2008 which paved the way of holding first multi-party presidential elections in Maldives. Mohamed Nasheed, the Presidential candidate of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), won the election.

India welcomed the result and represented the vice president India for his inaugural Ceremony in November 2008. On quickly assuming the office, Nasheed, paid an official visit to India in December 2008. He engaged in broader bilateral cooperation and requested PM Singh to invest more in Maldives. During the visit, two important agreements were signed namely standby credit facility of US$ 100 million to Maldives and an Air Services Agreement. Thenceforth India deeply engaged with Maldives which includes developmental assistance in the form of credit facility, wider economic, security and cultural cooperation. PM Singh invited Naseed as one of the special guests to attend the opening ceremony of the commonwealth games held in Delhi (2010). The year 2011-12 witnessed a series of high-level visits between the two countries. Manmohan Singh visited Maldives to attend the SAARC summit and also held bilateral meeting in November 2011.

During the PM Singh’s visit in 2011, six Agreements/MoUs were signed, which includes the framework agreement on cooperation for development, combating terrorism, drug trafficking, disaster management and coastal security, extradition treaty and agreed to extend another stand-by credit facility of US$ 100 million, for renovation of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH). Apart from that, with the growing oil shortage, India announced special oil arrangements for Maldives to solve the crisis. PM Singh also addressed the People’s Majlis (Parliament) of Maldives and became the first
foreign head of state to do so in the 78-year history of the People's Majlis. This was a special honour extended by Maldives to India as a goodwill gesture.22

With all enthusiasm, democratic regime led by Naseed, proactively engaged in politico-economic reform measures. Over the period, these reform measures drew severe dissent from political and business community and finally ended up with mass public protest against the governments reform measures. The strong resentment paved the way for ‘Coalition of 23rd December (2011)’ which comprised of Gayoom’s PPM, the conservative Islamic formations, the Adhaalath Party and Dhivehi Quamee Party (DQP) and Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP), along with other Islamist non-governmental organisations had joined hands to oust Nasheed. The immediate reason for his removal was the arrest of a judge of the Criminal Court, Abdulla Mohammad in January 2012 which became a trigger for the public criticism and protests against him that finally removed from the presidency.

The interim government was formed and its president Mohamed Waheed assumed the charge of the government. Instantaneously, India extended its support to the Waheed interim administration. According to S D Muni, “Indian officials were quoted as saying that Waheed was Nasheed’s running mate. He has strong administrative and political credentials. This is an internal issue and not a security issue for India. India even claimed that it had facilitated this transition.” Many analysts believed that this quickly accorded political recognition to the new government was a diplomatic dilemma with hasty measures. Muni says that “India seems to have misread the real dynamics of this internal power struggle despite its deep strategic and economic stakes in the Maldives.”23 India supported the new government believing that the interim government is supporting democracy and is facilitating a peaceful and stable environment. During the India visit of Waheed in May 2012, India asked Waheed to go for early election as soon as possible to maintain peace and democracy in the country.

After the sudden outing of Naseed, two things happened. First, the new government cancelled the Indian based GMR construction which was entrusted to build an airport in Hanimathaooo Island with an investment of US $ 500 million on the basis of Build and Run arrangements. The reason told by Maldivian government that this contract was against the norms and interest of the Maldives. Finally the tribunal gave judgement in favour of GMR. Second, issue was related to India’s involvement in the
internal affairs of the Maldives. India insisted that Maldives accommodate democratic forces especially in favour of former president Naseed. To avoid arrest by the government, Naseed took refuge in the Indian embassy in Male twice and this created misunderstanding and misapprehension by the government of Maldives.

After this dilemma, almost all political parties across party lines visited India in April-August 2012 to convey their assessment of the ongoing political turmoil in that country after the interim government assumed in Maldives. This included former president Nasheed, Gayoom, and Thasmeen Ali, Leader of the Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP). From the Indian side, the then foreign secretary Ranjan Mathai visited frequently to ensure early election in Maldives. This effort ensured election in the end of 2013, Abdulla Yameen became president of Maldives and paid a first foreign visit to India in January 2014. A Joint statement was issued highlighting the announcements made which comprises the release of US$ 25 million in standby credit facility for imports from India, and resumed the supply of stone aggregates and liberalized the visa regime. Further, bilateral cooperation became smoother and better, and India participated the 50th Anniversary of establishment of India-Maldives diplomatic relations in 2015 and it also was celebrated as India-Maldives Friendship day.

There is a regular exchange of high level ministerial visits on both sides. India’s External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj visited Maldives in November 2014 and October 2015. During these meetings, she renewed India-Maldives Joint Commission meeting, and co-chaired the same in its Fifth edition held after 15 years. The Joint Commission reviewed the entire gamut of the bilateral relationship and the framework agreement for cooperation, signed in November 2011, this enabled the Joint Commission to broaden its cross sectoral emphasise to include defence and security related issues. The Joint Commission discussions also endorsed enhancement of the trade and investment; proposed establishment of a Joint Business Forum; and increasing the Business-to-Business interface with more role to private players. Both the countries have stretched wider areas of cooperation in the field of tourism, fisheries, education, IT, infrastructure development, energy cooperation including renewable energy, and traditional medicine etc. From the Maldivian side, Male reiterated its interest in engaging with private investors from India for iHavan and Hulhulmale Youth City projects. In her visit, Sushma Swaraj emphasised on the India’s policy of
‘Neighbours First’ and Yameen willingly reiterated that Maldives’ policy of ‘India First’.

5.4.2 Military and Security Cooperation

The Joint Commission was set up under the 1986 Agreement, and it enabled the signing of a Framework Agreement on larger cooperation in November 2011. This mandated the Joint Commission to broaden its cross sectoral emphasize to include defence and security related issues. Bilateral defence and security co-operation broadened and deepened further into several areas including defence hardware and capacity building. Strategically, the Maldives occupies a critical position in the Indian Ocean Sea Lanes of Communication through which thousands of merchant and naval ships transit. India is interested in bilateral military and security cooperation, because third parties are interested in Indian Ocean especially China, US, UK, Pakistan etc. In 2001, during Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji’s visit to the Maldives, he proposed to establish a Chinese submarine base in Marao coral island located about 40 km south of the capital Male. Though such a submarine base has not been established. China signed a defence cooperation agreement with the Maldives, during the Gayoom regime that continued until 2009.

To avoid third party influence in Maldives, India readily extended various military related hardware to Maldives. During the then defence minister Pranab Mukherjee visit. He handed over INS Tillanchang, a fast attack craft, to Maldives in 2006. After 2008 Mumbai attack, added momentum in the military cooperation and also strong evidence in the presence of Lashkar-e-Toiba in Maldives. This has led India to conclude a close defence cooperation agreement with the Maldives. In August 2009, during the visit by Indian defence minister A.K. Antony, India agreed to set up 26 radar stations across 26 Atolls of the Maldives. These stations are linked to Indian Coastal Command. India would also establish an air force station for surveillance flights to monitor the ‘movement of pirates, terrorists, smugglers’ and such peace-threatening forces. This cooperation would ensure the security of the vast Indian and Maldivian extended economic zones in the Indian Ocean. During 2011, this cooperation further expanded and concluded a framework agreement on military cooperation. While addressing Maldives’ Parliament, Singh underlined the stakes that the two countries have in Indian Ocean security. These arrangements would counter the challenges like
extremism and religious fundamentalism, piracy, smuggling and drug trafficking and so on. In 2013, India offered the second Advance Light Helicopter to Maldives to strengthen the capacity of Maldivian forces. The Maldivian side acknowledged the usefulness of the Advanced Light Helicopter given by India to develop aviation capacities of Maldives. In the last few years, the healthy defence cooperation between two countries have widened to include joint EEZ surveillance, search and rescue operations, training and capacity building of MNDF and Maldives Coast Guard officers.

5.4.3 Joining Training and exercises

Since 1990, both the countries are engaged in bilateral defence and security cooperation. In recent years, this cooperation broadened and deepened further into several areas especially capacity building in the form training and exercise. The joint exercise codenamed DOSTI between the Indian Coast Guard and MNDF (Maldivian National Defence Force) was held for the first time in 1991, since then twelve editions of the exercise have been taken place. Sri Lanka joined the 11th edition of the exercise in 2012, thus turned into a trilateral exercise. DOSTI is aimed at strengthening defence cooperation between the two countries and to promote collaboration between coast guard officers of India and Maldives. Sri Lanka joined the exercise only in 2012 and thus making three coast guard officer’s interaction possible. Over the period of joint exercise, the focused area of cooperation broadened and widened because of the changing environment. During DOSTI-XII exercise, the focus areas included coast guard duties, maritime search and rescue, pollution control, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, marine pollution response, climate change and disaster management and anti-piracy operations. For the first time the exercise was viewed by representatives from maritime forces of Seychelles and Mauritius in 2015. During the twelfth edition (DOSTI-XII), two Indian ships, ICGS Samar and ICGS Rajdoot along with a Dornier aircraft, and one ship from Sri Lankan SLCG Samudura and two ships from MNDF MCGS Huravee and Shaheed Ali took part in the exercise. These ships participated and practiced in such a way to respond to actual emergencies of search and rescue, medical evacuation, pollution control and response at Sea.

The first Indo-Maldivian joint troop’s exercise “EKUVERIN” were conducted in October 2009 at the Rohideshwar Camp off Belgaum city, India. Till now seven joint
exercises were held in both the countries. The last “EKUVERIN” joint exercise was conducted in southern western coastal city of Trivandrum, India. During the last edition, 45 marines from MNDF forces and 45 soldiers from Indian Army participated and trained in such a way to deal with the emergency situation. In addition, two Table Top Exercise (TTEX) completed (started in 2014) which involves Indian Coast Guard, Indian Navy, MNDF, Sri Lankan Coast Guard and Sri Lankan Navy personnel. The exercise TTEX -15 held in Goa in October 2015 is an outcome of the Trilateral Maritime Security Dialogue between India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. At a regional level, India’s cooperation with Maldives and Sri Lanka is aimed to increase maritime domain awareness and surveillance, exchange of information, more training programmes and a cooperative security framework in the Indian Ocean region.

5.5 Sri Lanka

5.5.1 Sri Lanka relations until 2009

After Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination by the LTTE in 1990, India has maintained a Hands Off Policy with Sri Lanka and it has continued more than a decade. Over a decade, India was not interested in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka because it had learned a lesson from the 1991 tragedy. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka was highly inflicted with ethnic civil war and serious human rights violation in the hands of government and LTTE, a fringe Tamil militant group, fighting for separate nation for Tamil people, named Tamil Eelam. India has serious concerned over the plight of innocent Tamil people who were caught in the internecine war. Though, India kept away from internal civil war, it maintained a policy that ensured that South Asia is under the Indian sphere of influence. This policy followed by India curtailed the other power influence in Sri Lankan internal affairs, and advised Sri Lanka to adhere to the policy of negotiation to end the prolonged civil war in that country.

Throughout the years India maintained a high level contact and observed the situation very keenly. Both the president and PM of Sri Lanka, regularly appraised the then prevailing situation in the country. In 2001, there was a remarkable development in the Sri Lankan affairs, the then President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga visited India in February 2001. During the visit, she explained the Indian leadership of the recent developments regarding an attempt to establish peace process with third party mediators especially representatives from Norway and Japan. India readily agreed and
encouraged Sri Lanka to have arrangements to settle the Tamil ethnic problem. It was more intense when Ranil Wikremesinghe was sworn as the 17th prime minister of Sri Lanka in December 2001. He was really interested to settle the Tamil issues through peaceful manner. These development paved the way for signing of a Ceasefire Agreement with the LTTE in February 2002, which was facilitated by Erik Solheim (Norway) and Yasushi Akashi (Japan). They kept India regularly briefed on developments in the peace process. This has given some solace in the lasting civil war which intensified during 1990s and enabled a reviving of India-Sri Lanka bilateral relations, specifically on the economic front. Progress in the Sri Lankan peace process was far from smooth.

Despite six rounds of talks with LTTE and the government, LTTE, did not show any inclination to decommission its arms and also Sri Lankan army did not withdraw its army in the North and East. After six rounds of peace process, LTTE put off the participation in the peace talks, reason behind that LTTE dissatisfied with the slow progress in the commitments made by Sri Lankan authority. Sri Lanka offered three proposals regarding the devolution of administrative power to North-East province of Sri Lanka. These proposals were rejected by LTTE and they made counterproposals to Sri Lankan government in October 2003. The counterproposals were secessionist in nature and keeping key areas such as the signing of international treaties, external trade, resolution of disputes, control of maritime boundaries, under its control, and was completely rejected the by Sri Lankan authority. Counterproposals clearly indicated that there was no role for institutions of the Sri Lankan government in the affairs of North and Eastern province mainly dominated by ethnic Tamils. It created controversy and rift in the already delicate relationship between the President and Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. Bandaranaike believed that this peace dialogue would enable LTTE to consolidate its power and was concerned about the security threats to Sri Lanka. Citing the security reason, she dissolved Sri Lankan parliament in February 2003 and ordered for fresh elections, and it happened without the knowledge of PM when he was in America.26

India expressed a serious concern over the sudden political developments in Sri Lanka and requested both the parties to continue the peace process without affecting the political stability. At the end of 2003, Norway led peace committee met Indian officials and assessed the domestic political developments and temporarily suspended
its facilitation activities because of the recalcitrant attitude of both the parties. In both parliament (2004) and president election (2005), Rajapaksa won both the elections and became a prominent leader in Sri Lankan politics with hard-core Sinhalese support. As the PM and President of Sri Lanka, Rajapaksa visited India in 2004 and December 2005 respectively. After Rajapaksa assumed office, there was a clear change in the dimension of the prolonged ethnic civil war. As per the poll promise with JVP, BBS and other hard-line Sinhalese fringe group, he renounced peace process and strongly believed in military solution to end the lasting ethnic conflict. To attain this motive, he asked India for military help but India rejected his proposal and opposed to the resumption of violence that would hinder peace process. The 2002 cease fire agreement formally ended in 2006. This enabled Rajapaksa to go to war with LTTE.

In 2006, Rajapaksa made his visit to India and briefed the internal developments and growing security problem in the Northern region. During the visit, he met PM Singh, Sonia Gandhi, leader of the opposition, foreign minister and other senior political leaders and officials. He strongly demanded a military support and proposed a military cooperation with India. India agreed only to train the Sri Lankan armed personnel in the Indian military facility. Apart from India, he had visited Pakistan, China and many other nations to garner military support and achieved his objectives to some extent. India strongly opposed the move. To avoid external forces in Sri Lanka, India extended quasi-military support in the form of logistical training and provided radar to detect LTTE movements despite reservations from Tamil Nadu. The security situation in Sri Lanka was a major concern for India especially the plight of civilians and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the North which was the epicenter of battle between Sri Lankan armed forces and LTTE. In the last phase of war (January-May, 2009), India reiterated its concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation and emphasized the need for a pause to enable civilians to move to safety. With India’s request Sri Lanka stopped war for two days to ensure the safety and security of the civilians, and to minimise the effects of the conflict on civilians. The three decade prolonged armed conflict between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE ended in May 2009. During the course of the ethnic war, India reinforced its support to the right of the Sri Lanka to act against LTTE. At the same time, India conveyed its profound concern on the plight of innocent Tamil civilian population. After end of war, India reiterated a credible and genuine devolution package to Tamils in the Northern
and Eastern provinces and sincere implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution.

5.5.2 End of war and India’s rehabilitation and reconstruction policy

After the end of the war, India adopted a multi-pronged approach towards Sri Lanka. This policy has several leads and is continued and practiced since then. The following are the components of India’s approach i) India has recognized and abided its commitments of one Sri Lankan policy, that is united Sri Lanka. At the same, India urged Sri Lanka to give meaningful devolution of powers and its long pending issue of the implementation of the 13th AA in a time bound manner; ii) for Tamils, India reiterated its assurances to Sri Lankan Tamils that it would create every effort to guarantee that the 13th AA was not diluted and the future for the ethnic Tamils was marked by equality, justice and self-respect; iii) aid, assistance and investment into the reconstruction, rehabilitation, and resettlement of Northern Sri Lanka which was badly inflicted by prolonged civil war; iv) for India’s security concern, India was not interested in the outside powers and their influence in Sri Lanka, this would be inimical to the interest of India especially the Chinese overtures in Sri Lanka; v) wider and broader engagement in the fields of trade and investment, developmental assistance and military cooperation; vi) and seriously address the fishermen’s issue.

The above said objectives of India in Sri Lanka are keenly pursued since 2009 and India abided its commitments of united Sri Lanka, within the frame work of Sri Lanka unity and territorial integrity. India urged the Sri Lankans to emulate Indian model of federalism to solve the genuine and reasonable issues of Tamil minority community.27 If the Tamils problems (socio-politico-economic) are not solved, Sri Lanka could not progress in the economic and political front. Since the end of war, India constantly discussed the issue with Sri Lankan authority. During the Rajapaksa (second of term of presidency) visit in 2010, India raised the issue with him and he agreed and assured India that the issue would be settled soon. During his tenure, he visited India many times, and every time the issue was raised he was not interested in resolving them. Unfortunately, the Government led by Rajapaksa, despite assurances, did not deliver on its promises of devolution of power to Tamil minority community in Sri Lanka, meanwhile it also played the China card whenever it was required. The new president, Maithribala Sirisena, in his visit to New Delhi, assured that the issue will be
resolved soon. Sirisena-Ranil nexus have started some initiatives in this front. However, every political party is afraid to take bold step towards the implementation of 13th AA and devolution of power, because it will have impacts on their political future.

Soon after the war, India’s foreign secretary and foreign minister made many visits. During their visit, time line to settle all IDPs by the year of 2010 was agreed. India indicated its concerns over more than three lakhs IDPs and urged the Sri Lanka government to resettle them at the earliest to their native places of inhabitation. In this front, India helped and focused the issues related to relief, rehabilitation, resettlement and re-conciliation of IDPs in Northern Sri Lanka. India emphasized the reconciliation including permanent settlement in Sri Lanka. In order to assist in this process, India extended sufficient financial resources in the areas of housing, health, education, agriculture, etc., in northern Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka conveyed its intention to complete the settlement by the end of January 2010. Till now, it is not materialized and still many IDPs are yet to settle to their original habitation. Further, India has stressed that there is an opportunity to make a new beginning in the legitimate aspiration of Tamils. India’s (Foreign secretaries) travelled extensively travelled in Northern part of Sri Lanka especially the worst war hit areas of Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Trincomalee, and Jaffna to assess the progress made in resettlement of IDPs. India assisted numerous projects and many of them were handed over to Sri Lanka especially the housing projects to the affected Tamil people in Northern Sri Lanka.

5.5.3 Recent Bilateral Bonhomie

India-Sri Lanka relations have experienced a significant and qualitative shift in 2005. Bilateral relations reached a new high in 2015 with a number of high level visits. Sri Lankan PM Ranil Wickremesinghe paid an official visit to India in September 2015. This was his first foreign visit after the Parliamentary elections in August 2015. In Sri Lanka, there was a change for the better after Rajapakse was succeeded by President Sirisena. Sirisena-Ranil combination in Sri Lanka is giving boost for India and renewed directions in bilateral relation with Sri Lanka. Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister after Rajiv Gandhi to pay a purely-bilateral visit to Sri Lanka since July 1987. After PM Modi visit in 2015, bilateral engagement continued to expand in manifold particularly, defence, economic, education, agriculture, development partnership, culture and people to people exchanges etc. In addition, both the government signed an
agreement on cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy, science and technology and space programme. A new thrust has been added on augmenting trade and investment, ocean economy or blue economy and maritime security.

In the course of PM Modi visit, he also indirectly indicated the Indian model of cooperative federalism for the Tamils. While speaking in the parliament, he noted that he firmly believed in cooperative federalism and making various units of a country become formal partners in national decision making processes. At the same time, he envisioned that the future of Sri Lanka be defined by unity and territorial integrity, eternal peace and harmony. Nevertheless, some important issues in the bilateral relationship is still lingering and has created some frustrations in the ties. They are the devolution of powers to Sri Lankan Tamils; meaningful reconciliation in Sri Lanka; sensitivity to India’s security concerns and safety and security of fishermen.

5.5.4 India-Sri Lanka-China Nexus

The Chinese serious entry into Sri Lankan affairs after 2005 coincided with Rajapaksa’s visit to China and reached into the highest level of engagement during the presidency of Rajapaksa regime. This deeper engagement between both the countries are allowed the Chinese to build Hambantota port (it was initially offered to India). Though it was not economically unviable, but it gave Chinese to viable strategic asset in relation with India. There were frequent visits by Chinese naval ships to Hambantota port for refuelling and dockyard facility. It alarmed and raised serious concern for India’s security establishment over the use of Hambantota port facility by Chinese navy. It was during Rajapaksa’s tenure that Chinese presences became more visible and perceptible. Further, he gave assent to big projects such as 1.4 billion Colombo port city development. During 2015 elections, Wickremesinge had campaigned against the project. During NSA Ajit Joval’s visit, India raised the concern over the projects and its modality and asked to halt the project citing security concerns.28 To develop such a project, Chinese will get land ownership rights. This ownership of land will help the Chinese to develop clandestine activities against India. The new Sri Lankan government heeded the Indian concern over the project and suspended the project citing inappropriate and fraudulent measures involved in the project sanctioning. Chinese state run Global Times claimed that India was the main factor in derailing the Colombo Port City project. It alleged that “apart from Sri Lanka’s partisan politics, pressure from
India played a crucial role in suspending the project”. To enable this project, Wang Yi FM of China proposed China-Sri Lanka-India trilateral relations and Sino-Indian role in promoting Colombo’s development agenda. This even further added the suspicion of Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka and the growing doubt in some quarters of Indian authority.

Apart from the above developments, China has also proposed a ‘maritime silk road’ plan, under its One Road and One Belt initiative to revive a trade route running from China through Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to Europe. To counter these developments, PM Modi pronounced a shared responsibility of the countries in the Indian Ocean region to nurture and to shape its future in the 21st Century for the broader benefit of its people. This implied a clear exclusion of China from the Indian Ocean Rim. Simply put, China is no way related to the Indian Ocean Rim. To achieve this vision, “a clear roadmap was unveiled by the Modi government which recently launched ‘Project Mausam’, a transcontinental initiative to revive India’s ancient maritime routes and cultural linkages with countries in the region.”

India wants to build and expand its security links in the island nations to make sure its role as a ‘net security provider’ in the Indian Ocean. To achieve this objectives, India explored various initiatives to sustain its strategic interest in Sri Lanka. For example, “India scaled-up its operational presence at the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm, which opened up the possibility of India gaining strategic access to this eastern port city in such a way that could match Chinese presence in Sri Lanka.”

However, due to India’s strong reservation over the project, the present government stalled US$ 1.4 billion Colombo Port City project. After Rajapaksa regime, it has become a major irritant in the relationship between China-Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka approved the project and keenly looking more Chinese participation beyond infrastructure project such as logistics hub and investments in the real estate sector and thus pushing China-Sri Lanka strategic cooperative partnership to new heights. China also gives importance and centrality to Colombo to engage its maritime Silk Road initiative which covers Indian Ocean. This fully contradicts with Modi recent Parliament speech in Sri Lanka on the initiatives of Indian Ocean Rim, which critically says IOR is only for Indian Ocean and shouldn’t encourage external powers in this
region. Sri Lankan government’s positive policies towards China, may not sooth Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

Since 1990, India is facing a challenging task when it comes to its immediate neighbourhood. After 2005, a perceptible change occurred in style and substance of India’s foreign policy making, which accommodates neighbours interest and wishes without expecting anything from its neighbour (more tilt towards non-reciprocal altruism), this is achieved through the soft use of policies or attractive measures undertaken by India. However, to reduce deficit in the bilateral relationship, India has to walk a long path along with its neighbours’ widening interest. In recent years, there is a growing interest from India to enlarge the vision of better neighbourhood relations which is manifested in the ‘neighbourhood first’ policy initiatives by PM Modi government.

5.7 Notes and References


2. PM Singh visit in 2005, marked with high level cooperation between India and Afghanistan which includes cultural, social, economic, political etc. For the development of Afghanistan, India extended line of credit US$ 1billion.


4. After 2014 US led NATO forces are withdrawn from combat role. Since then, Afghan Talibans are actively engaging in various terrorist activities across the country and captured various towns including Kunduz and also targeting Indian establishment and its projects.

5. India has not interested to send troops into Afghanistan and very cautious of supplying military equipment to Kabul.


8. President Ghani deliberately announcing and publicizing the moratorium of its arms request from India.

9. n.7, p.3.

10. n.7, p.1-5.


13. India and Bangladesh friendship dialogue has mainly draw various personalities from the government of both countries to expose the so many fronts - restoration of connectivity, cooperation in power, telecom, energy, trade & investment, culture, S&T, development cooperation, sub-regional cooperation etc.


22. n.3, p. 9.


25. After death of Rajiv Gandhi, India has officially not involved in the internal affairs of the Sri Lanka and followed ‘Hands Off Policy’.


30. Sachin Parashar, “Narendra Modi’s ‘Mausam’ manoeuvre to check China’s maritime might”, Times of India, 16 September 2014.
