

Fragility In India's Neighborhood And Its Economic Impact.

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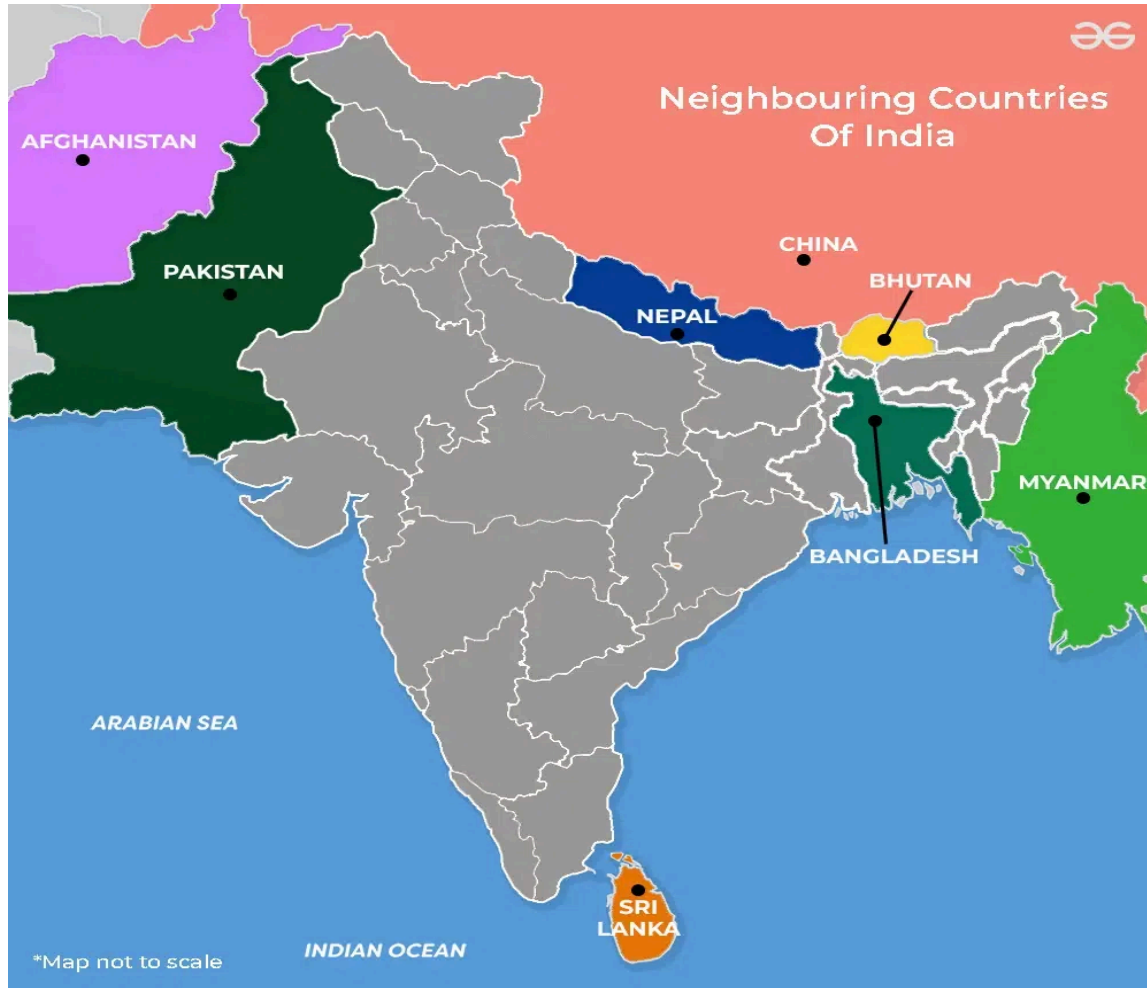
1. Abstract

Atal Bihari Vajpayee once stated that you can change your friends but not your neighbors. This holds strong ground for India having a land frontier of 15,106.7 km. The total length of the coastline of India is 7,516.6 km. The paper sheds light on how managing this huge boundary is a challenging task and how India has faced various border management issues in the past with nearly all its neighbors, be it stressed border tension or extra porous borders. The paper further highlights the aggressive fronts from China and Pakistan borders, drug smuggling issues from the Golden Triangle, and crescent and porous borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. The paper also talks about the neighborhood dynamics that have seen many ups and downs. These twists and turns forced India to mend its foreign policy over some time with many structural as well as ideological changes. The paper also highlights how neighboring countries have played an important role in the formulation of foreign policy along with the country's history, culture, political system, and other elements, like geography and natural borders. Some of them are constants, while others, like the domestic and external environment, change frequently which are also discussed in detail ahead.

2. Introduction

From ancient times India has maintained foreign relations with countries for economic and cultural links all over the world. India has a large and complex neighborhood. It shares borders and maritime boundaries with neighbors several thousand kilometers long. India's defense and security acquire preeminence, Relations are complex covering aspects of security, migration, trade, water sharing, and presence of outside great powers in the neighborhood. The dynamics of these relations change rapidly as issues move up and down the priority list depending upon the exigencies of time. With the rise of multipolar international politics, India must establish a long-term relationship between its domestic and foreign policy goals. Since its independence in 1947, India's principal challenges have included promoting internal cohesion and managing its often-troubled relations with its neighbors.

S.D. Muni (a fellow with the Institute for Defence Studies) notes that India's policy towards its immediate neighbors is likely to face severe challenges from internal turbulence in those countries and India itself, as has been the case with Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. India has been continuously facing Chinese intervention in both land area and maritime zone area since 1962. India's foreign policy seeks to protect political independence and external security.



Source: [Neighbouring Countries of India - Full List](#)

3.a. Change in Neighborhood policy over time: A historical perspective.

Indian foreign policy can be understood by dividing it into six broad phases:

1. **The first phase (1947-62): Optimistic Non-Alignment:** This period is marked by a setting of a bipolar world, with camps led by the United States and the USSR. India's objectives in this phase were to resist the dilution of its sovereignty, rebuild its economy, and consolidate its integrity. Thus, it was natural for India to lead Asia and Africa in a quest for a more equitable world order. In pursuit of this, India played a critical role in the establishment of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), which marked the peak of Third World solidarity. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was the leading architect of this policy. He focused on solving the

problems at home, like making the country more independent and getting the economy going again. India's loss to China in the Indo-Chinese border war of 1962 showed the unpleasant reality of world politics. After the Indo-Pakistan War in 1965, India's foreign policy was put to the test in a big way. This led to a shift toward adoption policies that put security as India's highest-ranked interest. "India's approach to its neighbors is shaped in part by the styles and personalities of its diplomats".

2. The second phase (1962-71): Decade of Realism and Recovery

After the 1962 war, India made pragmatic choices on security and political challenges. It looked beyond non-alignment in the interest of national security, concluding a now largely forgotten defense agreement with the US in 1964. However, India faced external pressures on Kashmir (Tashkent agreement 1965) from the US and UK. However, the agreement did not contain a no-war pact or any renunciation of Pakistan's aggression in Kashmir. Therefore, India now started tilting towards the USSR.

3. The third phase (1971-91): Greater Indian Regional Assertion

India showed remarkable use of hard power when it liberated Bangladesh in the India-Pakistan war in 1971. However, it was a particularly complex phase as the US-China-Pakistan axis that came into being at this time seriously threatened India's prospects, as a regional power. India also faced sanctions from the US and its allies after conducting a Peaceful nuclear explosion test in 1974 (Pokhran I). Further, the collapse of the USSR, India's close ally, and the economic crisis in 1991 compelled India to look again at the first principles of both domestic and foreign policy.

4. The fourth phase (1991-98): Safeguarding Strategic Autonomy

The emergence of a unipolar world (led by the USA), encouraged India to change its approach to world affairs. This quest for strategic autonomy was particularly focused on securing its nuclear weapon option (Pokhran II 1998). This is a period where India reached out to engage the US, Israel, and ASEAN countries more intensively.

5. This fifth phase (1998-2013): India, a Balancing Power

In this period, India gradually acquired the attributes of a balancing power (against the rise of China). It is reflected in the India-US nuclear deal (123 Agreement). At the same time, India could also make common cause with China on climate change and trade,

and consolidate further ties with Russia while helping to fashion BRICS into a major global forum.

6. The sixth phase (2013-until now): Energetic Engagement

In this phase of transitional geopolitics, India's policy of Non-Alignment has turned into multi-alignment. India is now more aware of its capabilities and the expectations that the world has of India. Power dynamics in the Asian nations have diversified, with a notable emphasis on India and China holding significant influence in the Indian Ocean Region.

The relevance of India's talent in creating and sustaining global technology is also likely to grow in time. India's willingness to shape key global negotiations (e.g. Paris Conference on climate change) is equally significant. India has been able to assert itself beyond South Asia, through its approach towards the Indian Ocean Region (SAGAR initiative) and the extended neighborhood (Act East policy and Think West policy).

3. b. Neighbourhood First Policy:

Introduced in 2014, India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy is a foreign affairs initiative designed to strengthen ties with its immediate neighbors. The guiding principles of this policy include prioritizing sovereignty and territorial integrity, fostering mutual respect, avoiding interference in internal affairs, promoting shared prosperity, prioritizing connectivity for regional integration, and encouraging people-to-people exchanges. The salient features of the 'Neighbourhood First' policy involve giving immediate priority to neighbors, and recognizing that peace and stability in South Asia are crucial for the overall development agenda. An early initiative in this direction was extending invitations to all heads of government of SAARC countries for the Prime Minister's oath-taking ceremony in 2014.

A significant aspect of the policy is the emphasis on resolving bilateral issues through mutual agreement. Connectivity is another focal point, with India entering into Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with SAARC members to facilitate the free flow of resources, energy, goods, labor, and information across borders.

Technical cooperation is a cornerstone of the policy, as evident in the development of a dedicated SAARC satellite. This satellite facilitates the sharing of technological advancements, such as telemedicine and e-learning, for the benefit of people across South Asia. In essence, India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy underscores a comprehensive approach to regional engagement,

emphasizing dialogue, dispute resolution, and technical cooperation for mutual growth and development.

3. c. Look East and Act East Policy:

The Look East Policy, initiated in 1991 by the Indian government led by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, aimed to enhance political, economic, and security collaboration with Southeast Asian countries. It sought to position India as a counterbalance to China in the region after the Cold War. The policy emphasized connectivity, trade, and cultural ties with East Asian nations and led to various multilateral agreements.

Key features of the Look East Policy include engagements with regional platforms like BCIM, BIMSTEC, SAFTA, ASEAN, EAS, and MGC. The first Trans Asian Car rally in 2004 symbolized India's commitment to the Look East Policy, covering several Southeast Asian nations.

In 2014, the policy was upgraded to the 'Act East Policy,' focusing on ASEAN countries, economic integration, East Asian nations, and security cooperation. The 4C's—Culture, Commerce, Connectivity, and Capacity building—were highlighted by the Prime Minister as essential elements.

The Act East Policy is a diplomatic initiative aimed at fostering economic, strategic, and cultural relations in the Asia-Pacific region. It involves comprehensive engagement with Southeast Asian countries at various levels, addressing connectivity, trade, culture, defense, and people-to-people contacts. Security considerations, particularly in response to Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, are integral to the Act East Policy.

3.d. Think West Policy:

India, having previously implemented a successful Look East policy, has now adopted a similar strategy toward West Asia. This 'pertinent look-West' policy involves an independent approach to the region, emphasizing omnidirectional engagement without taking sides in internal conflicts. Sustained diplomatic outreach, leveraging Islamic links, and recognizing the centrality of normalizing relations with Pakistan are key elements.

Additionally, there is a commitment to ensuring stability in Afghanistan, and efforts to accelerate economic integration with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Pakistan. This diplomatic approach underscores India's autonomous pursuit of interests in West Asia, acknowledging the region's complexities and prioritizing cooperative engagements.

4. India's Neighborhood Current Position and Impact:

A. China:

India and China, having a historical friendship spanning over a millennium, recognize the contemporary global significance of China as the world's second-largest economy. The rapid modernization of China's military underscores the mutual interest of both nations in maintaining tranquility and peace in the border region. In the past decade, India and China have engaged in numerous high-level visits and signed multiple agreements, reflecting the shared commitment to fostering positive diplomatic relations.

1. Border with China– Border Disputes with China – The delineation of the border has emerged as a significant point of contention between India and China. The current status is marked by a ceasefire line, and historical attempts at border demarcation include the establishment of the McMahon Line in 1914. The Aksai Chin region in northern India has been occupied by Chinese authorities, with a notable claim extending into a substantial portion of India's northeastern states, particularly Arunachal Pradesh. China consistently endeavors to exert strategic pressure on India from both Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. The border between India and China lacks clear demarcation throughout, and there is an absence of a mutually agreed Line of Actual Control along certain stretches, a delineation that took shape following the 1962 Indo-China war.



Source: [Voa News](#)

2. Shared Resources – Certain regions within India are significantly dependent on the four rivers originating in Tibet and flowing into Indian territory, namely the Languchen Khabab, Tackok Khabab, Ma Cha Khabab, and Senge Khabab. Concerns have arisen due to China's

construction of dams on these rivers and its plans to develop additional ones, resulting in the diversion of water, thereby impacting the natural flow of water in India.

3. Cultural Matters – India's stance on the presence of the exiled Dalai Lama, who currently resides in Dharamshala, has been a point of contention. The migration of around 100,000 Tibetan residents is a matter of concern for China, contending that the Dalai Lama is allegedly encouraging Tibetans to resist Chinese authority. Additionally, China consistently expresses disapproval of individuals in India whom they categorize as anti-social activists.
4. Safety and Security Concerns: CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) through POK– The passage of the CPEC network through disputed territory between Pakistan and India is also a source of contention between the two countries. China is deeply invested in its Silk Road revival project, of which CPEC is an offshoot. India is opposing the passage of this route through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
Apart from CPEC, China's BRI(Belt and Road Initiative) has also been a security concern for India as it follows a string of pearl strategies to counter India's presence in central Asia.
China's String of Pearl Strategy and Salami Slicing Strategy also pose safety concerns due to the extension of territorial claim and presence near Indian borders in the Indian Ocean region.

B. Pakistan:

The diplomatic relationship between India and Pakistan stands as one of the most intricate and challenging among India's neighboring nations. Historical influences from the colonial era have contributed to the persistent complexity of this relationship, with successive governments attempting negotiations to address outstanding issues, albeit with limited and temporary success.

1. Security Concerns: The security dynamics between India and Pakistan remain a primary source of tension, notably regarding the Kashmir region. Recent developments, such as India's revocation of Articles 370 and 35A of its Constitution, altering the status of Jammu and Kashmir, have exacerbated the longstanding disagreements. Pakistan strongly opposes this move, reflecting the ongoing desire to assert control over Kashmir.
Cross-border terrorism, originating from armed insurgents infiltrating India from Pakistan, has been a consistent challenge, significantly impacting India's national

security. The illicit drug trade through the Golden Crescent also poses a significant security concern.

2. **Economic Relations:** Bilateral trade between India and Pakistan remains limited, considering the size of their respective economies. Political tensions and a trust deficit have hindered trade relations, with Pakistan imposing non-tariff barriers restricting Indian exports. Following the Pulwama terror attack in 2019, India heightened customs duties on all imports from Pakistan to 200% and revoked Pakistan's Most Favored Nation status. Consequently, Pakistan suspended all bilateral trade with India.
3. **Cultural Connections:** Despite historical communal riots and debates over resource allocation contributing to strained social fabric, cultural ties persist. Visits to religious sites are regulated under a 1974 agreement, allowing limited pilgrimages between the two countries. The Kartarpur Corridor, connecting Sikh shrines in India and Pakistan, is a significant pilgrimage site for Indian Sikhs. While the idea was proposed in 1999, progress was impeded over the years due to tense India-Pakistan relations.

C. Bangladesh:

Bangladesh holds strategic significance for India's security, Northeastern development, and the successful implementation of its 'Look East Policy.' Despite a complex history, the imperative for both nations is to sustain the positive momentum in their bilateral relations. Key issues between India and Bangladesh include:

1. **Border Management:** The India-Bangladesh border, spanning 4,351 kilometers, constitutes the world's fifth-longest land border. Effective border management is crucial, with porous borders facilitating large-scale smuggling of food items, medicines, cattle, machinery, and narcotics. The Bay of Bengal, south of Bangladesh, presents a maritime frontier monitored by the Indian Navy. A maritime dispute between Bangladesh and India in the Bay of Bengal adds to the complexity.
2. **Safety and Security:** The movement of people from Bangladesh into India poses a persistent challenge, encompassing legal entrants who overstay visas and a significant issue of illegal migration. This has socio-political implications in Indian northeastern states, particularly Assam, where concerns about cultural preservation arise. Security concerns include the potential harboring of terrorism and insurgencies from India's

northeastern regions in Bangladesh, requiring collaborative efforts to eliminate safe havens. External forces seeking to undermine India's security add another layer of complexity.

3. **Trans-Border Rivers:** India and Bangladesh share 54 trans-border rivers, with ongoing disputes such as the Farakka Barrage construction affecting water-sharing agreements. The Ganga water-sharing agreement was finalized in 1996 after prolonged negotiations, but challenges persist over India's Farakka Barrage plans, aimed at enhancing water depth in the Bhagirathi-Hooghly branch during the lean season to benefit the Kolkata port.
4. **Economic Ties:** Bangladesh stands as India's largest trading partner in South Asia, fostering substantial economic interdependence. The garment industry, a major export for Bangladesh, relies on large imports of cotton yarn from India. Informal trade surpasses formal channels, and despite India extending three lines of credit totaling \$8 billion in the past nine years, utilization remains limited. India maintains a considerable trade surplus with Bangladesh, with exports reaching \$4.4 billion in 2016-17 and imports from Bangladesh standing at \$672 million.

D. Myanmar:

Myanmar has experienced prolonged periods of insurgency and international isolation, during which China's influence in the country has increased, while India's engagement has diminished.

1. **Border Dynamics:** In 1992, India adopted a pragmatic approach in reassessing its relations with Myanmar, opting to engage with the government in Naypyitaw. Given Myanmar's strategic location between India and China, its geopolitical significance is evident. Similar to the situation with Bangladesh, porous borders facilitate the movement of people, animals, insurgents, and goods – both legal and illegal.
2. **Economic Cooperation:** Myanmar plays a crucial role as the gateway for India's Act East policy. Overland connectivity between India and ASEAN countries necessitates Myanmar's involvement. India, Myanmar, and Thailand are collaborating on a 1,360km highway that may eventually connect India with Vietnam through Cambodia and Laos. These connectivity projects have gained prominence in India's Myanmar

policy, overshadowing interest in the China-proposed BCIM Economic Corridor, which China has incorporated into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

3. **Cultural Relations and Rohingya Crisis:** India has delicately navigated the Rohingya crisis, which emerged in September 2017, leading to a significant humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh due to the mass exodus of Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar's military operations. India's stance reflects a cautious approach to this complex issue.
4. **Chinese Influence:** Similar to the situations in Bangladesh and Bhutan, China's influence looms over Myanmar. China's military presence in the Rakhine coast and west of the Irrawaddy River has impacted India's strategic presence in the Bay of Bengal. China's de facto control over Kachin state, bordering Arunachal Pradesh, raises concerns for India. The potential for China to establish a substantial military and economic presence in Myanmar's regions bordering India, particularly Arunachal Pradesh, is a noteworthy consideration. China's strategic moves in Chittagong, Bangladesh, also pose challenges for India.

E. Nepal:

India's relationship with Nepal is characterized by a close yet intricate dynamic, marked by cooperation, interdependence, and concurrent strains of distrust and aspirations for autonomy in bilateral interactions. The intricate nature of India-Nepal relations holds significant domestic and foreign policy implications for India, particularly in light of Nepal's political and constitutional transformations since the 1990s.

1. **Political Changes and Constitutional Developments:** Nepal's ongoing political shifts and constitutional developments, initiated in the 1990s, carry implications for India's national security and interests. The issue of federalism and the devolution of power within Nepal's domestic politics is a source of contention and directly influences the bilateral ties between the two nations. India has expressed concerns about perceived discrimination against the Madhesis in Nepal's 2015 constitution, a community sharing ethnic ties with certain segments of the Indian population.
2. **Economic and Cultural Ties:** The nadir in India-Nepal relations occurred in 2015 during the Madhesis agitation and the subsequent trade blockade over specific provisions of Nepal's new constitution. Nepal has negotiated substantial concessions

from India, While India has offered more favorable trade and transit terms to maintain proximity under the 1950 treaty, practical shifts have been observed away from the stipulations of the said treaty.

3. **China's Influence:** The economic and military ascendancy of China has granted Nepal significant leverage to recalibrate its relations with India. By aligning itself with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Nepal has solidified its strategic partnership and cooperation with China. China stands as Nepal's leading investor and trading partner, committing to significant infrastructure investments, including road and rail links connecting Kathmandu and the Tibetan region of China.

Nepal remains a pivotal component of India's "neighborhood first" policy, as evidenced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three visits to Nepal in the last five years, with the latest occurring in May 2018. The Indian government is keen on redefining ties with Nepal in response to evolving geostrategic circumstances, emphasizing a diplomatic reset to foster strengthened relations in the current geopolitical landscape.

F. Bhutan:

Diplomatic Relations with Bhutan: India has maintained a robust and all-encompassing diplomatic rapport with Bhutan. However, at the domestic level, concerns regarding trade imbalances, potential drawbacks of excessive reliance on India, and perceived shortcomings in delivery mechanisms have become recurring topics of discussion in the media. Within the national assembly, there is a push from representatives to address border disputes with China and explore avenues for normalizing relations with the country.

1. **Security Considerations:** There is a potential risk of Indian insurgent groups utilizing Bhutanese territory for activities against India's interests. In light of these security concerns, Bhutan is presented with various policy options. It may choose to reinforce its ties with India, adopting a 'look south' policy to establish deeper connections with India, Bangladesh, and Southeast Asian nations.
2. **Border Issues:** In the realm of international relations, adaptation is intrinsic. Bilateral ties undergo transformation in response to evolving external dynamics and internal political and economic factors. Bhutan has raised concerns about perceived Indian dominance, contending that India's economic support primarily aims at accessing Bhutan's hydropower and natural resources.

3. **Hydropower Collaboration:** A pivotal aspect of the collaboration between India and Bhutan revolves around hydropower projects. These initiatives serve as a mutually beneficial mechanism, providing India, a notable contributor to global warming, with a dependable source of affordable and clean electricity. Simultaneously, they contribute to Bhutan's GDP and foster economic integration between the two nations.

G. Sri Lanka

With the defeat of the LTTE, Sri Lanka now has a unique opportunity to resolve the ethnic conflict and embark upon nation-building. It could potentially emerge as one of the major economies in the region. It is already registering impressive rates of growth.

1. **Security Concerns:** The maintenance of a stable Sri Lanka devoid of the influence of external powers is imperative for India's security interests. India is firmly opposed to the establishment of a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka, as it would not only be susceptible to external manipulations but could also fuel separatist sentiments in Tamil Nadu. The resultant impact on the living conditions of Tamils and their perceived second-class status is a matter of concern for India. Additionally, India is apprehensive about the increasing closeness between Colombo and China as well as Pakistan.
2. **Economic Relations:** As part of its foreign policy strategy toward neighboring nations, India has consistently extended trade concessions and economic incentives. Notably, Sri Lanka became the inaugural country to enter into a free trade agreement with India in 1998. Beyond trade, Indian tourists constitute a significant proportion, approximately 27 percent, of the total tourist influx into Sri Lanka.
3. **Shared Resources:** The issue of fishing in the Palk Strait, which spans 12 nautical miles and separates India from Sri Lanka, remains a point of contention. Instances of the Sri Lankan navy engaging Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait have been reported. The use of mechanized fishing trawlers by Indian fishermen has been a source of conflict, impacting the livelihoods of Sri Lankans, including Sri Lankan Tamil, fishermen. While Sri Lanka has advocated for a ban on mechanized boats, India advocates for a regulated usage of mechanized trawlers instead of an outright prohibition. To address these concerns, a Joint Working Group has been established to manage issues related to Indian fishermen straying into Sri Lankan waters, with a focus on

preventing the use of force, facilitating the release of confiscated boats, and addressing other relevant matters.

H. Maldives:

The Maldives is an archipelago located 370 miles southwest of India in the Indian Ocean. Because of its geostrategic location, it draws the attention of great powers. Under more peaceful circumstances, the island nation is crucial to check piracy and trafficking.

1. Security Partnership: Defense cooperation extends to the areas of Joint Exercises - “Ekuverin”, “Dosti”, “Ekata” and “Operation Shield” (begun in 2021).
2. Economic Relations: Tourism serves as the cornerstone of the Maldivian economy, with the nation evolving into a prominent tourist destination for certain segments of the Indian populace and a sought-after employment destination for others. In August 2021, Afcons, an Indian firm, inked a contract for the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP), the largest infrastructure initiative in Maldives. In 2021, India solidified its position as Maldives' third-largest trading partner. A Bilateral USD Currency Swap Agreement was established between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Maldives Monetary Authority on July 22, 2019.
3. Safety and Security Concerns: Maldives, akin to other nations in the Indian Ocean region, has received substantial Chinese investments in infrastructure. Embracing China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Maldives has witnessed significant Chinese financing and construction of crucial projects, including ports, airports, and bridges, under the "String of Pearls" initiative.
4. The 'India Out' Campaign: The pervasive 'India Out' campaign is gaining traction on various social media platforms. Reports in Maldivian media suggest that the current government is allegedly permitting India to establish a military base on the island through undisclosed agreements, purportedly in exchange for financial aid or other material benefits. These allegations are directed at the ruling party's leader.

India must exercise caution to prevent a situation analogous to that in Nepal, where perceived Indian interference in internal affairs has led to a negative sentiment among the Nepali populace. Maintaining a more subdued diplomatic presence appears to be the prudent approach in the context of Maldives.

5. Policy and Strategic Changes:

India over some time has witnessed dynamic changes in the neighborhood, which have significantly impacted India's foreign policy and foreign outlook, some of the significant strategic changes are:

1. **PANCHSHEEL or Five Virtues:** These were first formally enunciated in the Agreement on Trade between the Tibet region of China and India signed on April 29, 1954, and later evolved to act as the basis of conduct of international relations globally. These Five Principles are Mutual respect's territorial integrity and sovereignty, Mutual non-aggression, Mutual non-interference, Equality and mutual benefit, and Peaceful co-existence.
2. **VasudhaivaKutumbakam (The World is One Family):** Related to this is the concept of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas. In other words, the entire world community is a part of one single large global family and the Members of the family must live together in peace and harmony, work and grow together, and have trust in each other for mutual benefits.
3. **Interference vs Intervention:** India does not believe in interference in the internal affairs of other countries. However, innocent or deliberate - by any country has the potential of impinging upon India's national interests, India does not hesitate in quick and timely intervention.
4. **Constructive engagement over aggression:** India advocates the policy of constructive engagement over aggression. It believes that violent retaliation and confrontation can only complicate matters. War is no solution; after every war, the conflicting Parties ultimately come to the negotiating table by which time much damage has already been done. This applies in particular to Pakistan- the origin of State-sponsored terrorism targeted at India. The Surgical strike to target terrorist-launch pads in Pakistan-occupied Indian territory in September 2016 is one such example. Air Strike at terrorist camps in Balakote in February 2019 in retaliation to the Pulwama terrorist attack is yet another example.
5. **Strategic Autonomy and Partnership over Alliances:** Independence of decision-making and strategic autonomy are yet another significant feature of India's foreign policy. India thus believes in Partnerships and shuns Alliances, particularly military alliances.

6. India's Global Aspirations: India is a politically stable country and its economy is steady. India is building up its military muscles slowly but steadily. As a large market, India is an attractive destination for foreign investments, joint ventures, and commodity exports. India's stature in international affairs has arguably grown considerably in recent years. Arguably India's time has come. A certain degree of assertiveness in foreign affairs was visible even during the past five years when India appeared to punch according to its weight.

6. Recommendation:

1. As Dr. S Jaishankar pointed out many times, Bharat's foreign policy has been driven by ideologies since the 1950s which had caused ideological biases and left India unprepared for foreign threats like China. India needs a pragmatic foreign policy. India must diversify its foreign policy in diversified domains such as culture, education, etc, and capture a strategic sweet spot in the International domain, that will help India engage every power and extract whatever benefit India can.
2. India needs to let go of its "Panipat Mentality", This strategy fails to see threats coming and pays to stop them in time, eg India failed to see China's threat in the 1950s and let it defeated in the 1962 war, similarly India was caught by surprise when its main strategic ally Soviet Union collapsed in 1990's the bizarre world order of the future will have numerous risk and greater volatility than in the past. India can no longer afford to plead defense and wait for threats to materialize. As a rising power, India will have to go on the offensive to shape the world order rather than being shaped by it.
3. India's foreign policy needs to incorporate more risk. Aside from a defensive mindset India's foreign policy has also followed a low-risk low reward strategy. In 1962, India broke its policy of nonalignment to gain military support from the US after Chinese troops attacked India, however when the crisis ended India went back to nonalignment instead of building better foreign relations, a risk-averse foreign policy caused India to miss many opportunities to improve its strategic position. China has been more defensive by contrast during the 1950's China relied on the Soviet Union to fund its National Development before pivoting to the United States in the 1980s. This China's ability to take risks has brought in benefits on a global stage. India's diplomats had tried to stir India into a similar position for example India risked China's wrath by helping build the court that caused India to abandon non-alignment and build closer ties with Japan, America, and Australia.

4. India needs to control narratives and become more likable, as induced power grows it will lead to nurture a positive image and reassure existing power about its intention, India's effort to export vaccines to foreign countries during the Covid pandemic, India's position on the Ukraine Russia war and a defensive stance at global forums had reflected how India remains a key focus for other countries foreign in the coming years. Such a strong stance and hold is important to showcase the powerful ground India holds in today's global order.
5. India needs to get better at strategic deception. India had struggled with the policy of managing strategic deception. China has managed the USA over the last 40 years keeping their interest at top priority and still being able to establish great economic relations with the USA at the same time when Chinese military strength was threatening America in Asia and the Pacific region. India has in contrast struggled with this policy of managing contradiction. India needs to strengthen its game for strategic deception and learn how to differentiate economic and military power separately and master both at the same time.

7. Conclusion:

Given the wide-ranging changes in India's neighborhood, as has been suggested in the study, India will have to deal with a range of uncertainties over the next 20 years. The region can progress if the countries of the region create interdependencies and cooperate to tackle common challenges. India has a responsibility to promote cooperation as this will be in its national interest. The action that India takes today will have a profound impact on the developments in the next 20 years, not only within India but also in the neighborhood. India cannot control every development but, as a pre-eminent power in the region, its actions will have consequences. While new challenges will undoubtedly arise, a progressive foreign policy approach towards its neighbors—which emphasizes people-to-people ties, is likely to be more effective. India will have to harness both its soft and hard powers judiciously.

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