

Concept Note

An Appraisal of India's Neighbourhood Policy: Way forward

International Seminar

6-7 November, 2014

***Venue: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies,
Azad Bhavan,
IB-166, Sector III, Salt Lake
Kolkata***

India's emerging global economic strength has helped not only to redefine its self-image but also to adopt a new political role both internationally and within its immediate and extended neighbourhood. From a developing country with low visibility on the global political and economic front, India has emerged as a global power due to a multitude of factors. India's overall foreign policy objective of becoming a stable, developed and prosperous nation will be further expedited if India has a peaceful, politically stable and economically secure periphery. In pursuit of this key objective, it is believed that India should seek to create the required ambience that helps to focus on the essential tasks of stability, growth and development - a common challenge for the entire South Asian region.

A persistent paradox of South Asia is that it is a region with many cultural and other affinities but lacks meaningful integration and connectivity. It is striking how low the figure is for intra-South Asia trade, as compared with its global trade. South Asia languishes at around 6%, whereas for the EU this figure is around 67%, the highest, followed by NAFTA at 62% and ASEAN at 26%. Geographically, India sits in the middle of the SAARC region comprising 80% of land area, population, GDP and other indices. The next largest member is Pakistan, having only 10 to 11 % share of these indices is a distant second, the others states are even smaller. India shares land borders or maritime boundaries with all SAARC nations, (including Afghanistan, through Pak occupied Kashmir). Except Pakistan and Afghanistan, no other member country shares borders with one another, except India. India's military capabilities are greater and both India and Pakistan are nuclear-weapon powers. This asymmetry and historical burden brings with it sensitivities, fears and complexes for India's smaller neighbours. On the other hand, India confronts the most critical security challenge of territorial disputes in its neighbourhood.

As the largest country, India should be leading the South Asia project, establishing cross-border transport and communication links, opening up its markets and its own transport infrastructure to its neighbours and becoming the preferred source of capital and technology for their development. Instead of fearing Chinese inroads into the sub-continent, the only effective response could be to build a countervailing presence which is eminently possible given our geographical as well as cultural proximity to our neighbours. Our security preoccupations, including cross-border terrorism and activities of non-state actors, are likely to be addressed with greater seriousness if we

encourage our neighbours to build a stake in India's own prosperity and capabilities. In this context our extended neighbourhood which would include Iran, Central Asian States and Myanmar are important.

The benefits or logic of peace, conflict resolution and regional cooperation are obvious but it is also a fact that creating the structures for regional cooperation are also exceptionally challenging. India has taken several asymmetric steps in giving market access to its neighbours which helps regional integration in a mutually beneficial manner. India, therefore, supports suitable architectures for stability and resolution of conflicts in this region. On the security front, India seeks to work with its neighbours, as well as major powers in the world, to defeat terrorism and violent extremism. India has given a significant push to foster connectivity and promoted mutual confidence in multiple areas, including trade and investment. Leveraging India's economic growth into win-win arrangements with our neighbours has been a major plank of India's neighbourhood policy.

Indian specialists and specialists from the different South Asian countries and also the extended neighbourhood are expected to participate in this international seminar.

The international seminar proposes to discuss the following themes:

1. Political and socio-economic scenarios of the various countries in India's neighbourhood
2. Image of India in the region
3. Possibilities of security and economic integration
4. Issues in regional trade and connectivity
5. Confidence building measures
6. Other issues in developing bilateral relations and promoting regional cooperation

A Policy Brief would be prepared on the basis of the discussion held. For this purpose, a brief paper ranging from 2000-3000 words with references is to be submitted to MAKAIAS.