



Neighbourhood Views of India

South Asia Studies

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*Cover: Map of SAARC countries, without borders,
against a backdrop of the 2009 SAARC logo*

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Table of Contents

Foreword	1
– Neelam Deo	
Afghanistan:	
Getting closer to India.....	8
– Wazhma Frogh	
Bangladesh:	
A fine bilateral balance	16
– Mahfuz Anam	
Bhutan:	
A unique bond	32
– Karma Ura	
The Maldives:	
Big stakes for India	44
– Yameen Rasheed	
Nepal:	
Dignifying interdependence.....	58
– Yubaraj Ghimire	
Pakistan:	
Living with India	69
– Ayesha Siddiqi	
Sri Lanka:	
A cautious affinity	79
– Rohan Gunaratna	
Endnote	92
– Ronen Sen	

Foreword

Neelam Deo

Since the departure of the British, who divided the subcontinent in August 1947, India and much of the region – some countries carved out from its own territory, others connected by history and culture – have had a troubled coexistence. Efforts at coalescence, including through the 1979 creation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), have yet to bear fruit. The difficulties in the reconciliation process could have been predicted, but the emergence of the Cold War simultaneously with the end of colonisation became the principal element in the depth and persistence of differences between India and Pakistan, the two biggest countries in South Asia.

Along with the history of colonialism, which set religious and language groups against each other and hardened caste and class differences, another important contributor to this unfortunate reality is geography – one of the constants in human affairs.

The partition of India has left South Asia with a most peculiar political geography. Not only is India approximately 80% of the SAARC economy, it occupies three fifths of the land area of South Asia and shares a land border with each SAARC country except Sri Lanka, from which it is separated by only 31 kilometres of sea, and the Maldives further south. Afghanistan is the only SAARC country which does not border India, but has a very disturbed and

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disputed land border with Pakistan. None of the other countries border each other and can connect only through India, even if it is the short distance between Bhutan and Nepal or the breadth of India between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Additionally, the future of some states in India such as Assam or Tripura is linked to their SAARC neighbour Bangladesh, while the fate of every SAARC country is linked to the neighbouring state in India; for example, the impact of Tamil Nadu on Sri Lanka. At the macro level India's overall relations with a SAARC neighbour can be hugely distorted by the actions of the neighbouring state governments, as we saw when the West Bengal government's opposition to the Teesta water-sharing agreement cooled the warmth in Indo-Bangladesh relations.

The partition of the subcontinent also cut India off from its centuries-old neighbours in West Asia – the Arabs and Iran, whose influence on Indian culture and religious composition was so momentous. At the same time, it cut India off from Southeast Asia into which Hinduism, Buddhism and Indian culture had flowed peacefully for centuries. The occupation of Tibet by China in 1959 became a formidable barrier to the continuation of historical connections with the Central Asian states.

In the early years after Independence, India adopted autarchic economic policies and attained only sub-optimal growth rates of 3%, barely exceeding population growth rates of approximately 2 percent. Our energy and resource consumption was low and trade flowed mostly westward. The inward-looking import substitution industrial policies mirrored the enclosing geography.

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989 created a new global matrix, compelling India to diversify its external partnerships. After a brief unipolar moment of dominance by the United States, economic weight began to shift from the West towards the East, powered mostly by the growth of China, followed by that of India. That growth itself became possible by a radical liberalisation of the Indian economy that started in 1991, resembling in some ways the opening up of the Chinese economy a decade earlier.

The effective locking in of India into its current geography,

linked to its South Asian neighbours but denied land links to neighbouring regions in its periphery, began to really matter once the Indian economy moved into high gear, achieving over 8% rates of growth in the first decade of this century, which put India on a different growth trajectory from other SAARC countries.

Concurrently, India found its energy consumption growing at the rate of over 5% per year, and needing to import more and more of its requirements but unable to access gas from or through Bangladesh or Pakistan. Nor could India join the race to build pipelines in the West from the Gulf, Iran or Central Asia or Myanmar in Southeast Asia.

The optimism loosened by a high growth economy, and membership of groupings like BRICS and the G20, fed India's ambitions to have an even larger part in global decision-making bodies like the United Nations and the World Bank. The "look East" policy towards South Asia and efforts to draw closer to the Arab world through energy imports, trade and labour policy, paid dividends. But the constraints in the politics of South Asia are visible in Pakistan's opposition and the relative indifference of other South Asian countries to India's aspiration to permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

That relationships in SAARC would be complex was obvious at the moment of Independence, as the geography of the subcontinent was itself divided into India and the two wings of Pakistan. That complexity was aggravated and poisoned by the division premised on religion and the region quickly descended into a hellish bloodbath. The acrimony has continued over Jammu and Kashmir, with the two countries unable to transcend their colonially mid-wifed birth. Those unhealed wounds were reopened with the independence of Bangladesh as an independent country in an equally bloody spasm less than 25 years later. The economic fallout has been that even the rudimentary pre-Independence transport connectivities have eroded over time as economic exchanges shrank.

Early efforts at negotiating working arrangements between

India and Pakistan were wrecked by the allegiances demanded by the politics of the Cold War. Pakistan's early allegiance to U.S.-led security blocs such as SEATO and CENTO, and acting as a conduit for the U.S.-China rapprochement, earned Pakistan continuous western support on the Kashmir issue in the UN as well as weapons supplies. This encouraged it in its search for strategic parity with India and emboldened it into military adventurism against much-larger India. India's humiliating defeat in the 1962 war with China added to the complications, especially with the strengthening of the military and nuclear elements of the China-Pakistan engagement. Moreover, Pakistan's claim to be a homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent and physical contiguity gave it a position of privilege in Islamic capitals to our West.

Unsurprisingly, the narrative in Pakistan is of continuous grouching about inadequate western support in its efforts to enforce its claim to Jammu and Kashmir and to position itself as a victim rather than the epicentre of terrorist activities. Probably Pakistan also feels, with some justification, that it has had the short end of the stick in U.S. and NATO-led rivalry with first the Soviet Union and then Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. More recently while India's prestige in global capitals has been rising, Pakistan, still reeling from the 1980's retreat of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the chaos accompanying the takeover by the Taliban and the return of the West after 9/11, has sunk deeper into an economic and political morass.

Unfortunately, the promise of consistent close relations with Bangladesh has also been belied, as far as India is concerned. The assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and much of his family in 1975 followed by long bouts of military rule enabled pro-Pakistan elements to resume activities inimical to India, especially support to insurgent groups from Assam. There can be no clearer proof of this than the arrest and repatriation of many such leaders by the incumbent Awami League government.

The perception from the Bangladesh side is clouded by resentment over the Farakka barrage and the diversion of water to flush Calcutta port, and the absence of progress over water-sharing agreements of the other 53 common rivers. Misunderstandings are compounded when India wants to discuss illegal immigration from

Bangladesh and Bangladesh wants to discuss pending boundary demarcation and indiscriminate killings at the border by Border Security Force firing. When India wants to discuss transit to its northeastern states, Bangladesh wants to discuss the gaping trade deficit, with some justification on both sides.

The early support that the state of Tamil Nadu extended to the LTTE remains a factor in relations with Sri Lanka and not even the end of the civil war has resolved the status of the minority Tamil population of Sri Lanka. Despite a well-functioning Free Trade Agreement and shameful Indian acquiescence in the ugly endgame in the Sri Lankan war against the LTTE, the two countries have not transcended the suspicions engendered by the brief interlude of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in northern Sri Lanka. Partly because of the politics of Tamil Nadu, the two countries continue to have opposite narratives in the clashes with fishermen from Tamil Nadu, the rehabilitation of the Tamil victims of the civil war, the recently expanding Chinese presence in Sri Lanka and a host of other issues.

The animosity towards India in Nepalese elite attitudes is truly mystifying to Indians. The two countries have an open border, engage in free trade, people from Nepal can work anywhere in India and Nepalese recruits in the Indian army fight in its defence with distinction. No doubt the people of Nepal have vivid memories of the near blockade imposed by India in the late 1980s and the repeatedly botched hydro-power negotiations. They also have what seem to Indians to be highly exaggerated notions of Indian interference in their internal affairs while playing a dangerous game pulling the Chinese into refereeing competing political and strategic interests.

Relations with Afghanistan, the Maldives and Bhutan seem to have been freer of major misunderstandings, but may now be entering a more complex phase. Competition among neighbours and stakeholders following the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force from Afghanistan is throwing up new challenges, including a heightened sense of rivalry with India in a Pakistan reeling from U.S. criticism. The parallel democratisation and increasing religious fundamentalism in the Maldives at a time when the rising strategic significance of the Indian Ocean and the

problem of piracy has pulled in numerous navies, including that of China, has increased the stakes for India. Rising unrest in Tibet expressed in the increasing number of self immolations by monks, coupled with pressure from China to settle their border and host a diplomatic presence in Thimpu, has thrown up an entirely new set of issues confronting Bhutan and India. It is an open question how long Bhutan can remain in its idyllic happiness index and democratising monarchical state sheltered by a protective India.

At Gateway House we believe that for India to transcend its geography and take its rightful place in the world, it must work to minimise differences with its SAARC neighbours and increase their stake in taking the whole region forward. In order to map the way forward for a more cohesive SAARC, we felt that an indispensable starting point was to understand how bilateral relations and specifically India's policies are perceived by its neighbours. Therefore we requested a commentator from each SAARC country to assess bilateral relations and the genesis of attitudes towards India. They were also requested to identify actions by India which could ameliorate debilitating political and security differences, stimulate cooperation in development activities and expand commercial exchanges to trend towards a more harmonious region.

Their responses have been brought together in this important publication, which we hope will enhance understanding in and of India and be accessed by policy makers in the region and beyond.

This exercise is important not only for the rise of India but equally so for SAARC, because the importance of regions acting and progressing together is daily highlighted by the political upheavals in the Arab world and the economic turbulence in Europe. SAARC countries remain among the poorest in Asia and their social indices such as female literacy and child nutrition are worse than some poorer African countries. Intra-SAARC trade at 5%, as compared to 25% even in ASEAN, is the lowest of any regional bloc in the world. Despite four Indo-Pak wars, SAARC remains the least networked with institutions and agreements to minimise the dangers flowing from having two nuclear weapon

powers within and one on its border.

Finally, the significance of the success of India as a developing democracy able to achieve high rates of growth while attempting distributive justice as an alternative to the free market Washington Consensus or the authoritarian Beijing model should not be underestimated as other developing countries with a similar history of breaking out of colonisation to achieve higher rates of growth, hope to also become increasingly democratic. Although our SAARC neighbours may not acknowledge it, India is the gold standard for them as they genuinely endeavour to build and strengthen their own democratic institutions.

For India's geography to become an advantage, it is necessary for all the SAARC countries to grow together. Expanding intra-SAARC trade can be a major impetus if political differences can be resolved through compromise.

A virtuous cycle can begin – through the process of compromise, India will be able to access the energy resources it so badly needs to power its growth, while the energy flows can themselves link the economies.

Our cultural commonalities already bind the people. It remains for the governments to imagine a different future.

Afghanistan

Getting closer to India

Wazhma Frogh

Introduction

Bilateral relations between Afghanistan and India are usually analysed through a political lens. This essay is an attempt to record the views of ordinary Afghans about India and Indians. Afghanistan is on a journey of democratisation and people's views will increasingly influence regional and international policies in the years to come.

The transition is a challenge for Afghanistan. Its geopolitical position between Pakistan and Iran, and in the Chinese and Russian neighbourhood, has left the country vulnerable to infiltration and insurgency. The challenges are also economic in a democratising Afghanistan, which became a member of SAARC in 2009. The mutual interests of India and Afghanistan can be leveraged to address these growing challenges.

The Strategic Partnership signed between the Afghan and Indian governments in October 2011 details the bilateral relationship during the current transition and after 2014 – after the complete withdrawal of American and foreign forces from Afghanistan. The partnership agreement covers such areas as diplomatic relationships, economic ties, India's engagement in Afghanistan's

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social development issues, and political cooperation between the two countries.

For this essay, I surveyed 65 Afghans from the government and non-government sectors, civil society organisations and independent media outlets in different provinces of Afghanistan.^[1] The focus of my questions was India's socio-political engagement in Afghanistan after the September 2011 attacks in the U.S. This essay discusses what I gathered from the interviews.

Refocussing the bilateral lens

Afghanistan and India are tied by the destiny of geography. Afghanistan is strategically located at the heart of Asia, in close proximity to Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian states. At the same time, the mountainous landscape has isolated the country. Afghanistan's geographical location makes the country relevant and important for Indian security and foreign policy, particularly because Pakistan has played a politically active role in Afghanistan.

Before the 1980s, Afghanistan and India maintained mutually beneficial exchanges and ties. However, during the *mujahideen* war against the Soviet invasion (1979-1989), India adopted a non-aligned approach toward Afghanistan. It also remained silent on Afghanistan's struggle for survival during the civil war of 1990-1996. India's silence continued during the Taleban regime (1996-2001), which suppressed the Afghan nation to the depths of hopelessness. The Taleban was the first regime which abused Afghan Sikhs and Hindus, but India still maintained its strategy of non-interference.

Some Indian and Afghan scholars believe India's foreign policy in the past, although neutral, was not harmful to Afghanistan. [1] Other Afghan analysts critique the non-alignment policy, particularly when Pakistan played an active role in destabilising Afghanistan. India could have taken this issue to international fora such as the United Nations Security Council.

[1] At their request, I have not used the names and details of most of the people interviewed, and tried to paraphrase their responses to my primary questions: How do they see the Afghanistan-India relationship? What are their suggestions for improvements in India's engagement in Afghanistan?

Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies are routinely accused of supporting insurgency and instability in Afghanistan. Pakistan's engagement in Afghanistan during the *mujahideen* war, the Taleban regime and even after 9/11, has been a matter of concern for Indian foreign policy.^[ii] This was especially true with former President Pervez Musharraf's support for the re-emergence of the Taleban insurgency during 2006-2009.

India's policies towards Afghanistan have usually focused on our relationship with Pakistan. India has seen Afghanistan "in rivalry" to Pakistan, rather than considering Afghanistan as a regional neighbour in its own right. But the realities of the tri-lateral equation between Afghanistan, India and Pakistan must also be acknowledged. Afghanistan is caught between Pakistan's rivalry with India. The changing dynamics between India and Pakistan heavily impact the security, stability and future prospects of Afghanistan.

India's foreign policy should be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of Afghanistan as a neighbour of Pakistan, with which it shares extensive and porous borders. A member of the High Peace Council said during an interview with me that if India now engages in Afghanistan without focussing on how Pakistan engages with us, this will impact the on-going peace process.

The period after 9/11 began a new chapter for Afghanistan. After the bombing by the U.S.-led coalition forces in October 2001, Afghanistan's new administration welcomed international and regional attention, and India's non-alignment turned into post-war recovery and reconstruction. India is now the biggest regional donor and supporter of reconstruction in Afghanistan. According to the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, India has invested and contributed over \$2 billion to the Afghan economy over the last 10 years.^[iii]

Afghanistan signed its first Strategic Partnership agreement

[ii] From the interview done by the author with a Regional Cooperation Advisor at Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[iii] For more details, see 'India and Afghanistan: A Development Partnership', at: http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/176_india-and-afghanistan-a-development-partnership.pdf

with India in October 2011, even before it signed one with the U.S. The partnership is the first non-military alliance for Afghanistan in at least a decade. The partnership has changed Indian engagement in Afghanistan from humanitarian post-war aid to investment and equal partnership.

Indian companies have started bidding for extraction contracts in the Afghan mining sector and projects in several provinces are already underway. [2] For example, the mining project at Hajigak in Bamian province has been awarded to an Indian company, and Indian engineers and mining experts are already in Bamian, working on the project.

Afghanistan may still be important to India because of its concerns about Pakistan, but these concerns require India to strategise, for greater sustainability, its economic and political relationship with Afghanistan in the long term. Afghans expect India to more actively participate in the ongoing peace and reconciliation process, to support government reform, and help build infrastructure and services in a way that indirectly addresses the causes of insurgency – young men join insurgent groups because the government has failed to provide them with jobs and justice.^[iv] [3]

If India continues to invest in Afghanistan's mining, infrastructure, agricultural and other sectors, this will ensure that Afghan youth get jobs and opportunities. But India also has to use political advocacy and diplomacy with the Afghan government to insist that India's continued support will be conditional on the creation of job opportunities in those areas where insurgents actively recruit Afghan youth.^[v]

“India-Afghanistan relations are crucial for regional political stability and economic prosperity. Afghanistan can learn and benefit from the Indian model of growth, particularly in the mining sector, agricultural development, agro-business, rural economic development and energy production. These can reduce

[iv] Over 68% of the Afghan population is under the age of 24, according to the UN Human Development Report.

[v] From the interview with a member of High Peace Council, who is also a senior official in the Afghan government.

unemployment and eradicate poverty in our country, which are the roots of instability in Afghanistan,” Kabir Haqjo, Chief of Afghanistan’s Chamber of Commerce, said.^[vi]

The Afghans I spoke to also ask – what kind of regime will India continue to partner with in the future? If the Taliban return to power, how will India deal with the change, in the context of its long-term strategic partnership with Afghanistan?

Beyond the dictates of policy

Although the Indian engagement in Afghanistan may still be understood among policy-makers through the lens of its relations to Pakistan, ordinary Afghans believe India does not have a hidden agenda for their country.

During the years of non-alignment, personal relationships kept evolving and an intimate engagement between the people of the two countries flourished beyond the dictates of foreign policy. Thousands of Afghans sought refuge in India during the civil war, and Afghan exiles lived in New Delhi for years. Many Afghan officials are proud of the education they got in India, including President Hamid Karzai, who speaks about his days at Shimla University reading Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

After the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghans are again increasingly visiting India. According to Indian embassy officials in Kabul, in the past five years the embassy has been issuing 300 visit visas on average per day.

India has been a friend in need to many Afghans. They remember growing up to the tunes of old Indian songs being played in Kabul and in provincial theatres during the King’s rule some 50 years ago. Hindi songs are popular even today. “I am working on the road that is being reconstructed by support from the Indian government and listening to the old songs of Latajee,” a construction engineer on the Zaranj-Delaram road said.

As a result of India’s support for reconstruction in Afghanistan, India’s already positive image among ordinary Afghans has further

[vi] Direct quotations are from the author’s interviews with various Afghans.

improved over the last 10 years. This was evident in the opinions expressed by many of the people I interviewed. While young Afghans see suicide attackers from other neighbours blowing up Afghan markets and lives, they witness India contributing to the building of their Parliament house, they see Indian companies building roads in their country.

For many Afghans, India is a favourite neighbour, they appreciate the investment that India has made in the reconstruction, and they want more of this kind of “non-military counter insurgency” to sustain jobs and economic development so that potential recruits for insurgency have other options.

In fact, the expectations are now growing – as a regional economic power, Afghans want India to play a more active role in stabilising Afghanistan. Many of the Afghans I interviewed believe Afghanistan and India can forge stronger ties to build a regional economy. Afghanistan is increasingly becoming a job market for mining, agriculture, business, technology and energy industries, and especially for information technology (IT). Afghans would welcome Indian IT experts; they believe they can learn from these interactions.

“Strengthening our historic ties with the Indian people will not only assist in the stability in the region, it will also open a new chapter in the economic development of Afghanistan and India by building on Indian expertise to strengthen our human capacity. India can also invest in Afghanistan’s natural resources, agricultural and industrial development,” Abdullah Ahmadzai, Chief Executive Officer, Independent National Election Commission, said.

Learning to build a democracy

For 40 years, Afghans did not go to the polls to elect a government. Any faction took power at gun-point and contributed to the chaos. Afghans voted for their first elected president in 2004; this was followed by the first elected Parliament in 2005. Many Afghans now think that the Afghan government, with its newly-established governance structure, can learn a lot from the civil service in India. India’s sustainable civil service institutions can be a model for the Afghan government as it fights its way out of corruption (though

India has its own problems in this regard).

With more than 25 television channels, 100 radio networks, 500 newspapers and more than 2,000 male and female journalists, Afghanistan's media industry is growing. It works with a fair degree of independence and freedom of speech. A growing civil society that includes non-governmental organisations, associations, trade unions, and village-based community councils also spells hope for the future of Afghanistan.

All this has been achieved in just 10 years, but the progress is fragile. The civil society groups are mostly foreign-funded and supported by the international community. With the approaching 2014 deadline for the exit of foreign forces, Afghans working in and leading these organisations are worried about their security and future, and about whether funding and resources will continue to come from the West.

The Afghans I interviewed believe that increased exposure to Indian cinema through the Afghan media has also become a source of inspiration for civil rights movements in Afghanistan. Some of the films they see speak of mobilising people for a cause, about hunger strikes and public demonstrations. The governments of both countries should strengthen these and other cultural exchanges.^[vii]

More than 70% of the Afghans I interviewed understand Hindi, and over 40% can speak Urdu or Hindi. This linguistic bond can also help the non-governmental organisations to foster civil society exchanges. Indian civil society organisations, media houses and educational institutions can be critical partners in promoting democratic participation and democratic governance in Afghanistan. The Indian government should encourage Indian civil society organisations, media persons and academicians to travel to Afghanistan and establish links and platforms for dialogue.

Many civil society and human rights activists I interviewed said that the Indian government has not taken a stand on violations of

[vii] The Afghan Women's Network issued a Position Paper ahead of the 'International Conference on Afghanistan' in Germany in 2011, which called for the transformation of regional cooperation into a people-to-people dialogue.

human rights in Afghanistan. As a strategic partner, India needs to put pressure on the Afghan government to address such violations. Indian aid to Afghanistan should be conditional on addressing issues of human rights in Afghanistan, including women's rights to education, jobs and access to health services. As the youngest and largest democracies in the region, we can establish new parameters to address human rights violations in both countries.

Afghans understand that India's national security and regional stability heavily depend on the nature of Pakistan's presence within Afghanistan's ruling powers. But Afghans also expect India to now discard the Pakistan lens and regard Afghanistan as a strategic economic and regional partner, as a sovereign nation. Afghanistan and India must become equally important to each other, with or without Pakistan.

The Strategic Partnership signed between the Indian and Afghan governments in October 2011 is a landmark assurance that the Indian government will meet Afghan expectations. Perhaps Afghanistan and India can establish an independent commission to evaluate the practical implementation of the partnership agreement. In addition to officials of the foreign ministries and other government departments, the commission can include representatives from civil society organisations and the media from both sides. Including ordinary Indians and Afghans will mean that the warm and personal decades-old ties between the two nations are positively reflected in bilateral exchanges and foreign policy.

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Bangladesh

A fine bilateral balance

Mahfuz Anam

Introduction

I clearly remember how, as a freedom fighter, I felt strengthened, energised and elated with all the support India was giving to Bangladesh during our life and death struggle for independence in 1971. The warmth, generosity and openness with which Indian people received us – both the freedom fighters and the unfortunate refugees – were unprecedented in scale and time, as the host had to deal with millions of people within a few months.

I recall my trepidation when, one day, sitting with my fellow freedom fighters in a camp on the outskirts of Agartala, we read about Kissinger's sudden appearance in Beijing. While this was a positive development for global peace and international understanding, any rapprochement between these two giants was likely to make India's support for our war extremely challenging. What was spine-chilling was the fact that Kissinger flew from a secret air base in Peshawar in Pakistan, making for what I thought was a hostile triumvirate of the U.S., China and Pakistan – the last being our mortal enemy at the time.

Subsequently, I followed from various Mukti Bahini and training camps, Indira Gandhi's globe-trotting diplomatic forays, her

MAHFUZ ANAM, a journalist for 40 years, is Editor-Publisher, 'The Daily Star', the highest selling English newspaper for 19 years (1993–2012) of the paper's 21-year history. During his editorship the paper has gained unprecedented prestige and currently has 77% of the market share of English language dailies in Bangladesh. Anam regularly writes on politics, economics and international affairs and is a popular television commentator. He is also Founder-Publisher and currently Advisory Editor of 'Prothom Alo', the highest circulating Bangla daily in the country. From 1977 to 1990 he worked with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) as Communications Specialist in Paris, New York and Bangkok.

dexterous navigation in the treacherous waters of the international power game and her final bold but risky step of concluding a Friendship Treaty with the USSR, practically abandoning India's time-honoured non-aligned posture – all of which made me extremely aware and ever grateful for the role that India was playing for our freedom.

I make this personal introduction simply because I wanted to convince my Indian readers that my views on India's handling of relations with Bangladesh were not of one of those "India bashers" who see nothing good in India's actions. The very fact that I felt the need to make the above introduction is a statement in itself. For far too often I have seen my Indian friends – journalists, columnists, writers, intellectuals and academics – brush aside any critical comments from Bangladesh about India as unthinking and/or unreasonable. Some have even suggested we are "ungrateful."

A 'rebirth' with elusive dreams

I vividly recall that blessed December evening at the Murti training camp near Siliguri, in the Indian state of West Bengal, when I, along with nearly 70 other freedom fighters, all commissioned officer cadets for the Bangladesh Army, huddled around a one-band radio, straining our ears to hear the news of the surrender of the Pakistani army to the joint command, at what was then called the Racecourse Maidan, in independent Bangladesh.

As events unfolded at the faraway Maidan, as the surrender document was being signed, I sensed my own transformation into a free man equal to everyone, everywhere else in the world. I was being reborn.

I remember saying to myself: "Never again will I live under military rule or under dictatorship of any kind, nor live in fear of expressing my opinions and at no time will I have to see a citizen of my country being persecuted for his or her race, religion, ethnicity or personal belief."

It was a restless and euphoric night that we all passed in our camp, intermittently laughing, crying and hugging each other, fearful of falling asleep lest it all turned out to be a dream.

Next morning, as we talked about the future ‘Sonar Bangla’ in Murti camp, most of us felt convinced that Bangladesh and India will forge an exemplary bilateral relationship of mutual support and economic growth, which will show not only the region but also the world what neighbours can do for each other.

More than four decades down the line, as a freedom fighter whose dreams turned out to be illusive, I have to admit that I stand proved wrong on most counts. The economic fruits of independence have hardly reached the majority of our people. Military dictatorship returned with a vengeance, though we defeated it every time it raised its ugly head. Our cherished democracy and all forms of freedoms were trampled time and again. Freedom of opinion was never made as sacrosanct as I had dreamt, and minorities never got the security that the promise of our freedom struggle held out to them.

And with it all, the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and India also fell by the wayside.

On the cusp of a new equation

In spite of our many disappointments Bangladesh today is on the mend on several counts. Democracy, however flawed, occupies centre stage in our politics. Economic growth is not as elusive as it seemed for all these years. Human rights, however unsatisfactory, are a part of society’s active agenda. Press freedom, occasionally threatened, is strong in ways that it was never before. Secularism is now a fundamental part of our national ideology, and the rights of minorities are back on track as a principal goal.

In 2012, Bangladesh is a far more confident, capable and successful country than ever before. While the global economy is in a mess, we have continued to register a 6-plus% GDP growth. Our exports in 2011 amounted to \$23 billion; of this, readymade garments alone contributed \$18 billion. Earnings from expatriate labour brought in an additional \$13 billion last year. Yes, we still have enormous social and development challenges to surmount, but we do so with a better track record of performance than ever before.

It is this Bangladesh – self-assured in many ways, proud of

its ability to solve problems, keenly aware of both the enormity of the tasks ahead, but also of its capacity to address them, and extremely sensitive and proud of its own culture, independence and sovereignty – that is seeking a new relationship with its most important, powerful and, in many ways, highly successful neighbour.

Whether India will continue to look at us as a neighbour with problems, or as one with innovative and path-breaking prospects of an exemplary bilateral relation, is now the question. The way India chooses to answer it will determine how our relationship will evolve in the future.

I put the onus on India because Bangladesh has made its intentions and perspective clear. On reassuming power in January 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina undertook a historic initiative during her visit to India in January 2010 to improve bilateral relations and extended cooperation in every area of India's concern. The more than 50-paragraph joint communiqué signed on the occasion addressed all the fundamental concerns of India – border security, using Chittagong and Mongla ports, and transit to its northern states.

We have not only signed the communiqué, but also have acted on its contents. Sheikh Hasina's government has clamped down on local extremists and those involved in fomenting religious hatred as has never been done before. On cross-border insurgency, smuggling of weapons and severing of terrorist links, we have taken effective steps and the effort is continuing.

Agreements are being prepared on the use of our two ports. Regarding transit, some immediate steps led to the transport of huge equipment for power plants in the North East. Serious negotiations are in progress to allow transit to India's northeast through waterways, and by rail and road. On 4 July, the River Transit facility was renewed with newer and expanded provisions for coastal shipping and transshipment.

How has India responded? Progress in trade has been impressive, and a long-standing demand of Bangladesh for duty free access to Indian markets is being realised. This opens up tremendous prospects for our industrial growth and the challenge is now on our entrepreneurial class to take advantage of the opportunity.

A history of missed opportunities

The overall feeling about transit negotiations however is that India is making it a one-sided affair and Bangladesh's interests are not being maintained, especially in sharing with us the benefits in transportation cost likely to accrue to the Indian side.

In terms of water issues, we are still waiting for the agreement on Teesta and other common rivers. On our border demarcation agreement, the Indian Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) finally gave its nod in July 2012, after being stalled since September 2011. It still has a long way to go before implementation.

The killings at the border by the Border Security Force in the last four years, with 11 in the last year – in spite of then Home Minister P. C. Chidambaram's assurance that only rubber bullets will be used and that too on rare occasions – are continuing. This creates a highly negative emotional reaction among ordinary Bangladeshis. It is our view that Indian leaders and government officials are not fully grasping the importance of stopping the killing, and how it is unnecessarily embittering public sentiment.

The recent history of Bangladesh-India relations has been marked by anger in Bangladesh about Farakka (1974-1996) and suspicion on the Indian side about aid to insurgents (2001-2007). It is also a history of missed opportunities, especially in the early days of our independence. A question that has vexed my mind over the last several decades is this: Why didn't India build on her victory of 1971 and construct long-lasting bridges of mutual benefit between our two countries and peoples?

We got off to a very happy start with Indira Gandhi deciding to withdraw Indian troops from Bangladesh earlier than originally scheduled. Yet nothing of substance on the economic recovery of a war-devastated Bangladesh followed. Could there have been something of a South Asian 'Marshall Plan' with Bangladesh as the starting point, which would have had a significant impact on all the smaller neighbours of India?

One possible answer could be that India got caught in the euphoria of victory on the eastern front and forgot to build on its gains. Never before had India defeated its arch rival so

comprehensively and with such a devastating and demoralising impact on its enemy. Taking 92,000 Pakistani soldiers as prisoners made the victory that much more glorious, and the task of building on that success may have appeared unexciting and even mundane.

Otherwise, how can one explain the seriousness and earnestness in preparing for, and ultimately executing, the 1973 Simla Pact between India and Pakistan and the apparent apathy and neglect shown in implementing the 1972 Mujib-Indira Border Agreement? Bangladesh ratified the treaty within one year of its signing, whereas India has yet to ratify it, even after 42 years.

While we can understand India's eagerness to reach an understanding with Bhutto and make headway on the Kashmir issue, why this had to come at the expense of Bangladesh was something we never understood. Maybe Indira Gandhi would have turned her attention towards her eastern neighbour in time, but she never got the time.

Transitioning through tragic times

A tragedy of unfathomable proportions struck Bangladesh less than four years after our independence. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then President of Bangladesh, was murdered on 15 August 1975, along with all but two members of his immediate family and many others of his extended family. A few months later, four leaders of our wartime government, including its Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed and acting President Syed Nazrul Islam, who had been taken into custody after the assassination of Bangabandhu, and all of whom were known to Indian leaders and with whom they had close contact during the nine months of our war, were murdered in jail between 3-6 November 1975.

The period from August to November 1975 was a time of serious political instability, with more murders and changes of people in power. By the time things looked settled, a military takeover of our politics had taken place and generals had replaced civilians at the helm of affairs.

General Ziaur Rahman, the strongman of the day, was desperate to build a political base. He resurrected the religion-based parties and also aligned himself with people and leaders who had opposed

the very birth of the country. It was a sad sight to see a Liberation War hero abandoning what our freedom struggle stood for and bringing to the fore forces that were fundamentally opposed to the very foundation of the new state, and all this just to create a political base.

Perhaps the saddest development was to see a section of followers of Moulana Bhashani, known for his progressive and anti-imperialistic stance, and a person who supported the Liberation War, joining this potpourri of disparate political groups that would lead Bangladesh towards a non-secular and undemocratic path. And anti-India sentiment was the major political capital they would use, which had been given a patriotic and urgent hue by the water-sharing crisis created by the Farakka barrage issue (discussed below).

India obviously viewed all this with concern, suspicion and even anger, resulting in a far-reaching and costly “closing of the mind” to all of Bangladesh’s concerns and complaints.

The Farakka barrage issue

In 1974, Sheikh Mujib’s government agreed, purely on an experimental basis and for a limited period, to put into operation the newly-completed Farakka barrage on the Ganga – to flush the Calcutta port by augmenting the water flow of the Hoogly river. This temporary opening would evaluate both the operations and the impact of this water diversion project that we suspected would have a serious negative impact on the economy and the ecology. A final agreement was to follow after discussion by both sides. That never happened.

Mujib’s murder and the military takeover made India reluctant to cooperate with Bangladesh on anything. From 1974 to 1996, Farakka remained unresolved, with some interim agreements that did not satisfy anybody. For a significant part of these 22 years for Bangladesh, Farakka was the ugly face of India that we saw on a daily basis, a face that seemed determined to ensure our obedience by strangulating our economy, damaging our ecology and starving us of our due share of water rather than seeking our cooperation.

And all this while Bangladeshi public opinion hardened, became

hostile and transformed into a vote bank with the unfortunate consequence of making Bangladesh-India relations a domestic political issue.

I believe that it was the Farakka-triggered water crisis and the resultant impact on the country and on a large segment of our population, from 1974 to 1996, that gave anti-Indianism its popular base in Bangladesh, and helped the resurrection of the anti-liberation and communal forces in the country. Before Farakka, India-bashing was a fringe activity indulged in by diehard communalists and ultra-leftists. But during and after the Farakka years till 1996, it became a patriotic cause and the public perception of India as a “big brother bully” became widespread.

During her first term, Khaleda Zia (1991-1996) was mostly busy learning the job of running a government. She was open to advice and to divergent points of view and willing to listen. Many of the ministers were her seniors in politics, who enjoyed real authority and to whose advice she attached importance. Khaleda Zia was suspicious of, but not averse to, friendly relations with India. She would not take any initiative, but would not snub an overture from the other side.

In her view, SAARC, created by her husband, was stymied by non-cooperation from India. She firmly believed that the Awami League had a special sympathy for India and suspected some connection between the latter and Sheikh Hasina’s refusal to cooperate with her government. As the Awami League began the boycott of Parliament and indulged in frequent *hartals* (general strikes) and public demonstrations for a constitutional amendment and the institution of a caretaker government, her suspicions became stronger. As a result, good relations with India were never a priority in her mind.

During Sheikh Hasina’s first term (1996-2001), the all-important treaty on Ganga water was signed with India, which finally released us from the clutches of the despised Farakka barrage. The peace pact signed with our own insurgents in the Hill Tracts ended decades of insurgency in a part of our territory. Both these were significant achievements for the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, made possible only because of substantive cooperation from the Indian side.

India expected that in return Bangladesh would address some of its concerns, especially that of transit to its northeastern region. Having come to power after 21 years in political limbo, the ruling Awami League did not feel strong enough to challenge the power of the anti-India vote bank and thus did not address any issues of interest to India.

Changing the core pattern

The second time she was in power (2001-2006), Khaleda Zia was a far more determined and confident person, certain that it is only in an Islamic or Islam-anchored Bangladesh that we would reach our true potential. Making an electoral alliance with Jammat-e-Islami, and giving them Cabinet berths, signalled a quantum leap for religion-based parties entering our politics. It also signalled the coming to power, though as a minor player, of the party that had opposed the very birth of Bangladesh.

Khaleda Zia saw the signing of the water treaty with her arch-rival, Sheikh Hasina, as a clear sign of India favouring the Awami League. She saw no prospect of amicable relations between her party and the big neighbour. Two developments followed: Indian insurgents were sheltered within our border areas and religious extremists, including their armed cadres, were allowed to gradually occupy political spaces within the country with a view to using them to obliterate the secular forces, especially the Awami League.

India's suspicion and anger grew during this period, especially at the border sanctuary that Bangladesh was suspected of providing to the Indian insurgents and for the trafficking in arms. Bangladesh's denial, if ever taken seriously, lost all credibility when 10 trucks full of advanced military weapons were accidentally captured in the port city of Chittagong. Though never finally proven, the arms were widely suspected to have been meant for the insurgents operating in the Indian northeastern states.

It is this background that makes Sheikh Hasina's opening up with India in 2010 so very important. In my view, she showed tremendous courage and took a considerable political risk in changing the core pattern of Bangladesh's approach to relations with India.

In place of a confrontational position, she offered a partnership of common growth and a win-win future. She totally disregarded the possible impact of the anti-India vote bank in the next election and boldly went ahead with bringing about some fundamental transformations in our bilateral relations.

In an unprecedented gamble, she decided to positively respond to all of India's concerns without any immediate reciprocal move by India, and left it to India to respond in time and appropriately. There are only two things of significance that Bangladesh could give India – border security and transit, including the use of our two ports. Sheikh Hasina did both and practically gave up her “trump cards” in a show of trust unusual in inter-state relations. Many, including this writer, see it as a visionary gesture, while many others see it as her doing what India dictated.

But did India really grasp the significance of the development and give it the support and priority that were called for? If it did, it would have responded much faster to Bangladesh's concerns. It took Prime Minister Manmohan Singh around 18 months to pay a return visit to a neighbour whose government had made a historic opening for a significant improvement in the bilateral relationship.

And even that turned out to be a disaster on the substantial issue of the Teesta water-sharing treaty. It could not have been lost on India that Sheikh Hasina had to operate within an electoral cycle to convince her people of the wisdom of close cooperation with India and show tangible results, in economic terms. Her calling the bluff of the anti-India lobby with its vote bank needed to be countered by people-level benefits. That unfortunately was not forthcoming.

The debacle of the Teesta water-sharing treaty was a tremendous setback for the Bangladeshi prime minister. As much as the substance, what shocked us equally was the manner in which it was handled. It seemed that the government of India did not know what its component state, West Bengal, was thinking, and how fundamentally flawed the Indian government's assurance and our expectations were.

This greatly corroded the stature and credibility of our big neighbour's government. Most regrettably, it made Sheikh Hasina

look much too eager to respond to India's concerns without ensuring the rights of her own country – a most damaging image for a leader anywhere, anytime to have, especially in Bangladesh with regard to India.

So what course are we to follow for the future? Given the history of our chequered bilateral relations, the future lies in a mutually beneficial formula on the three 'Ts' – Teesta-Tipaimukh, trade and transit.

Teesta, Tipaimukh and water-sharing

An equitable deal on sharing the water of all common rivers will be a very serious test of our friendly relations. It is a complex issue, but it can be done. It will obviously involve technical teams working out the details. If done with goodwill on both sides, it should not be too difficult to achieve. But experience so far has been rather disappointing.

The failure to sign an agreement on sharing the water of the Teesta is a double failure, one of substance and another of form. When water-sharing has such a troubled history and when the bitter experiences of Farakka are less than two decades old, India should have shown far more sensitivity and understanding about the consequences of failure than it so far has displayed.

The failure on Teesta today signifies India's lack of interest and seriousness about Bangladesh's concerns. Not only has the Indian government failed to keep its commitment, it now seems to have left this issue totally in the hands of the West Bengal government, which has no incentive to solve the impasse. Will Mamata Banerjee's exit from the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition make a difference for the better?

On the issue of the Tipaimukh dam, India has not honoured the repeated commitment that nothing will be done without consulting Bangladesh. Worse, we learnt about the signing of the construction deal on the project's website, and not from any bilateral communication.

In addition to Teesta and Tipaimukh, Bangladesh is extremely concerned about the river-linking project suddenly coming to life

after a court verdict. Nobody knows what will happen under this project and how Bangladesh will be affected. President Pranab Mukherjee's assurance during his last visit to Bangladesh that India will not touch the Himalayan rivers that flow into Bangladesh, and we have nothing to worry about, has not convinced us, because similar assurances given on Teesta and Tipaimukh have proved to be far from the truth.

Now, with China planning a dam on its section of the Brahmaputra, India suddenly finds itself in the position of Bangladesh – a lower riparian country left at the “mercy” of what the upper riparian does. I think both Bangladesh and India should try and convince China to work together on the question of sharing Brahmaputra water, and perhaps set an example of equitable river water-sharing between three countries. Given India's growing good relations with China and the present excellent state of Bangladesh-India relations, this is an opportune moment.

Expanding trade and transit ties

After years of disappointment and arguments, Bangladesh finally has a trade situation with India that looks highly promising. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's declaration at the SAARC summit in Malé in November 2011 has opened up the prospect of duty-free access to virtually all relevant exports from Bangladesh. This is of tremendous significance to Bangladesh, because it provides us with a valuable opportunity to expand our export portfolio.

While the export of readymade garments (RMG) constitutes 80% of our global export, as of now 80% of our export to India comes from non-RMG sectors. The prospect of duty-free export to India gives us a huge opportunity to expand our market and diversify our export basket. This is a major positive development in our bilateral relations, and one that Bangladesh has been negotiating for a long time. How well Bangladesh is able to take advantage of this access to Indian markets is now a major challenge for us. However, some concerns about non-tariff barriers still remain, which we hope will be resolved very soon.

The sustainability of our friendly relations rests on handling

the transit issue, which includes the use of our two ports, in a truly win-win manner. This is an important statement that I am making consciously. Transit is the most important thing India needs and the only vital thing Bangladesh can give. We need an all-encompassing comprehensive treaty on transit so that both sides benefit. A piecemeal agreement will create advantages for one side and will not be sustainable.

If the impression is created that India was able to get her way, by browbeating us or with cunning, or with its superior negotiating skills, or with the connivance of a few overzealous bureaucrats eager to ingratiate themselves with India, then any agreement signed on transit will not last. If Bangladesh does not genuinely benefit from it, transit has the potential of becoming the central issue of conflict between our two countries in the future.

So far the entire negotiations on transit have been kept away from public scrutiny in Bangladesh. A section of decision-makers believes that public discussion may lead to too wide a divergence of views and it is better to present the public with a *fait accompli*.

In my view, this is a terrible mistake. For any deal on transit to be necessarily long-lasting, people must buy into it from the very beginning. For that, it is imperative to inform the public about the ongoing negotiations.

Transit is a greatly undersold idea in Bangladesh. It has been seen as a concession to India and not as an opportunity for building infrastructure within our country. We must take a totally new approach to this vital issue. First, we must take a comprehensive view of transit in its three dimensions – river, road and railways. The most used facility, in use since 1972, is of course river transit. Its use over 40 years is largely an unknown phenomenon and the volume of shipment of goods has remained very small. ^[1]

We must change all that. The volume of trade through river transit must not only grow, but the profit from it must be used to dredge our rivers. Some portion of the Indian credit of \$1 billion has been used for dredging, but the effort has remained

[1] For more on Bangladesh-India trade, see: <http://www.adbi.org/files/dp78.india.bangladesh.economic.cooperation.pdf>

rather limited because the funds were also used for other purposes. Today our rivers are clogged and polluted. Investment in river maintenance has been meagre if not absent. The greater use of water transit could be our means to save our rivers. The 1972 water protocol for water transport has been amended recently to apply it to both water and road transport.^[ii] This is very important.

However, for the protocol to be really effective, we need to construct a container trans-shipment terminal at Ashuganj and construct a 35-kilometre road to connect up to Akhaura in Bangladesh, which is adjacent to Agartala on the Indian side. This multi-modal transit can be the most effective option if the necessary infrastructure is put into place. No funds are available at the moment for either the terminal or the road.

Deciding the amount of transit fee is also important. So far, since the transit was only by river, there was almost no fee. That has to change for all routes, and especially in the case of the multi-modal option. A transit fee must lead to a substantial rise in earnings for Bangladesh. The proposal to leave it to market forces to determine the fee appears to be a sound route to follow.

The railways should be the second method of transit. Just as river transit can be used to dredge our rivers, it can also become our means to modernise our railways. Over the years, the railway service in Bangladesh has deteriorated greatly, resulting in a decrease in passengers and revenue. In my view, rail transit to India can become the biggest way to advance our railways sector.

With the greater use of our ports, both Chittagong and Mongla, we can think of electric trains crisscrossing the country. Keeping our population too in mind, we have to develop our railways. To achieve this we need a second bridge across the Jumuna, as the load-bearing capacity of the present one is limited and already

[ii] In July 2012, the Shipping Secretary of Bangladesh and his Indian counterpart signed an agreement for the renewal of the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade for the next two years. Bangladesh has proposed that coastal vessels may be used commercially for transporting cargo to and from India through Chittagong and Mongla ports. Dhaka's agenda at the meeting included the enhancement of charges for maintenance of routes and safety of navigation.

nearing capacity use.

Roads will be the final realisation of the full potential of the value of transit. This will help us build highways from the west to the east and link our ports and major export-processing zones. If planned well, this can trigger a revolution in highway construction that will greatly benefit our internal connectivity and production capacity.

The fundamental issue here is negotiating a truly win-win agreement. The transit deal with India does not fall into the usual category of transit as visualised under GATT and WTO. This is because instead of three countries being involved, here it is India that reaches its own outlying parts through a second country, Bangladesh. As India is not landlocked, it is not obliged to give transit. This point has been repeatedly argued by Bangladeshi experts. So our transit is based more on mutual benefit than on anything else. This mutual benefit must also include the sharing of benefits that accrue to the Indian side in terms of both cost and time savings.

Growing together

In conclusion, I would like to point out that we have lost valuable time mistrusting each other. Up to the mid-1990s, Farakka destroyed all chances of cooperation from our side. From the 1990s till the coming to power of Sheikh Hasina, border security, insurgency, arms trafficking and links with extremism destroyed the chances of cooperation from the Indian side. The Indian participation in these experiences has created a serious “trust deficit” in our bilateral relations that must urgently be addressed. There was a time when nothing we said was taken seriously in India and nothing India said was believed in Bangladesh. Thankfully, both sides have moved away from that position.

The time is appropriate for Bangladesh and India to regard their bilateral relations as a special case. The “special case” logic for both sides lies in geography. No other neighbour intrudes into the territory of India as Bangladesh does, and no other country encircles Bangladesh as India does. The unique nature of geography is sufficient to drive home the point, on both sides, that

even a normal approach to good neighbourly relations is far from adequate in our case.

India will have to understand and internalise that Bangladesh's economic growth is essential for India's own growth and stability, especially in the east and northeast. Bangladesh is a huge market for Indian goods; and our location, human resources, skills and entrepreneurship will give India an advantage in the East if we arrive at a mutually beneficial formula. The resources in the Bay of Bengal, if developed on an equitable and fair basis, can bring enormous benefit to both sides.

All this can happen if India seriously and sincerely addresses the "trust deficit" that, in my view, is the most serious impediment to our common prosperous future. India should not see our sensitivities merely as the myopia of an insecure neighbour, but as expressions of genuine concerns based on years of bad experience and letdowns. We need not be prisoners either of history or of our failures. We can grow together.

But for that to happen, India must respond immediately and comprehensively and take measures that help Bangladesh to prosper economically. The total elimination of non-tariff barriers, greater Indian investment in key industries, especially in energy and infrastructure, would be vital. Bangladesh must also consider the lessons of the free trade agreement between India and Sri Lanka for its own policy options.

Win-win relations between Bangladesh and India should ideally become a people's demand. In this lies the vision of South Asian prosperity. Any other vision is likely to be fragmented and unsustainable.

Bhutan

A unique bond

Karma Ura

Introduction

Like personal friendships, a relationship between two countries is also rooted in positive memories. I would like to frame Bhutan-India relations through some of my memories about India and Indians. Others of my generation share these memories, and how people in Bhutan view India can perhaps be gauged from this collective recall. A narrative rooted in memory might more accurately reflect people's views than a foreign policy perspective.

The memories are multi-tiered. Older Bhutanese people remember personal friendships with Indian soldiers who built roads in our country. Amongst countless memories animating my thoughts are those about the Dantak (the Indian military's road-building task force) soldiers who came to work in Bhutan in 1961 on behalf of the Indian government. In the early 1970s, the dirt road-highway that broke through my village of Ura in central Bhutan, where I grew up, was built by the Dantak soldiers. The soldiers burst onto the Bhutanese landscape with spades, picks, shovels, earthmoving machinery and explosives, to pave the way for motorised transport and trade with India.

With the exception of elders who had visited the borderlands of India and Bhutan, or the eight holy places in the Gangetic plains,

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nobody in my village had seen Indians in such numbers before. Our encounters with the Dantak workers during those days were one of the earliest experiences that shaped our thoughts about Indians and Indian institutions. The Bhutanese people consulted doctors at Dantak camps; travelled in Dantak trucks when that was the only motorised transport in Bhutan; bought household items from Dantak canteens; and made friends with the soldiers

In these soldiers, the people of Bhutan saw not the India of ancient Buddhist seers or the modern India of the bureaucratic elite of aid administration, but ordinary men who worked in very difficult conditions. In their struggle for livelihood, the soldiers reached out to ordinary Bhutanese engaged in similar struggles. The encounter was humanising for both sides. The forbearance with which the soldiers battled adverse weather, harsh working conditions and accidental deaths, far away from their homes and families, did not go unnoticed among the villagers. It impressed even the toughest folks.

These traits of endurance and resilience among the Dantak soldiers evoked a high regard for Indians in general, which persists to this day. This kind of regard may not count much in the foreign policy calculations of India or Bhutan, but these memories are what people hold in their hearts. Friendship with India would otherwise be an abstract idea for the ordinary Bhutanese.

Strategic and symbolic roads

The roads built by the soldiers were symbolic as well as strategic. Communications and transport linkages between countries are a reflection of their international relations, and the roads between Bhutan and India demonstrate our bilateral relationship. By laying the trunk roads of Bhutan in the 1960s and 70s, the Dantak sub-served the broader objectives of the bilateral relationship – to develop and modernise Bhutan and consolidate the sovereignty and security of Bhutan.

Over the last five decades Project Dantak of the Border Roads Organisation, has built 1,600 kilometres of roads in Bhutan. The other projects it has completed include airfields, helipads, the telecommunications network, a microwave link, a broadcasting station,

hydel sub-stations, river works, schools and colleges. [1]

The road linkages started in the 1960s against a backdrop of tension between India and China. Since then, Bhutan has been cautious not to undermine India's security interests in the region, while it has waited patiently for a more normal period to demarcate its border with China in places where it is contentious. The slow process of normalisation started in 1974 when a Chinese delegation attended the Coronation of the Fourth King of Bhutan at the invitation of Bhutan. Xinhua, China's official news agency, described the visit "as a new page in the friendly contacts between the two countries."

Discussions between Bhutan and China about the boundaries have been held numerous times since 1984. But the final agreement on border issues is yet to be signed. This may be due to the delay in arriving at a consensus on the demarcation of the so-called tri-junction near Chumbi valley, an area where Bhutanese, Indian and Chinese borders meet. The Indian media and security studies make clear Indian sensitivities on this issue.

In 1998, Bhutan and China signed an Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity in the Bhutan-China Border Areas. There is no formal trade along the Sino-Bhutan border, although there were many historic routes to the North. Bhutan imports Chinese goods via India. The web of roads and communications between the main economic centres in Bhutan and neighbouring Indian towns is now dense enough to facilitate the bilateral economic integration that has begun to take centre-stage.

The borders between Bhutan and India are porous and teeming with trade and people. The demographic pressure on the Indian side, in Assam and Bengal, pushes through at many points along the border. Bhutan is greener and emptier, and full of natural resources. Indians living close to the border can and do easily help themselves to fuel wood and timber, and at times the wildlife of Bhutan.

The routes between major towns in eastern and western Bhutan go through Assam. The volatile law and order situation in Assam often results in road closures as a form of protest. The flow of goods and people between eastern and western Bhutan

is frequently interrupted due to these strikes. The closures also severely affect the construction of large-scale projects. [2]

Compared to the bustling activities along the Bhutan-India border, the northern side of Bhutan, towards Tibet, is silent mountainous wilderness, with lonely footpaths trodden by a dwindling number of yak herds and herdsman, and occasionally by a small number of intrepid Bhutanese foot merchants plying between Bhutanese and Tibetan border towns, peddling a few backloads of Chinese thermos, china cups and rayon-imitation silks. These merchants have to assiduously dodge the border guards of the Royal Bhutan Army, because formal trade, even on horseback, is prohibited. Ordinary Bhutanese merchants wonder at this discouragement, for on the other side of the border there are cheaper goods. They wonder what harm such petty trade on horseback could do.

As all this would indicate, for Bhutan, access, trade and technological integration are “undivorcably” deep with India. This makes Bhutan more oriented towards South Asia and less towards China. Bhutanese and Indian foreign policies mutually support this orientation. Any other geopolitical orientation for Bhutan is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Spiritual journeys and connections

My second set of memories is of India as the holy Buddhist land. A family pilgrimage when I was in my teens became the reference point for me.

For many Bhutanese not concerned with commercial ties, India is venerated as the land of the eight *pithas*, with Bodh Gaya as the spiritual centre, and perhaps too idealistically, as “the centre of the world.” This concept of India might elude foreign policy thinkers in either country, particularly Indian foreign policy makers who are not yet fully conscious of the potential importance of the Buddhist heritage of India for its tourism and foreign policy.

But in the mind of the ordinary Bhutanese, India as a society where Buddhism originated, takes precedence over notions of India as a superpower known for many achievements such as its software industry, economic size, and the Agni missile. These things

matter more among the high-level official strategists of India.

In the high monastic circles of Bhutan, which are influential among ordinary Bhutanese, India is still regarded as the origin of Buddhist knowledge and literature, translated and transferred to Tibet and Bhutan. Indo-centric Buddhist practices including Kashmiri and Bengali *tantrism* continue in remote sites in Bhutan, while they have become relatively eclipsed in India. For the ordinary Bhutanese, whose world view is shaped by Buddhism, classical Indian Buddhist thinkers such as Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Dharmakirti, Chandrakirti, Asanga, and Shanti Deva, are still the apothees of intellect that adorn the world.

The geographical reorientation of Bhutan towards India was reinforced by our country's lost connections with the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China as the other holy land, as well as the main trading partner, before the 1950s. The routes and passes linking Bhutan and Tibet have been inactive since then. After the turmoil in Tibet resulting from its integration with the People's Republic of China, Bhutan withdrew its representative from Lhasa and formal cross border transactions came to a standstill.

Some of the Tibetan diaspora found homes in Bhutan, but the majority went to India. In India, the Tibetans founded Buddhist colleges in Dehradun in Uttarakhand, Bhir in Himachal Pradesh, Gangtok in Sikkim, and Bylakuppe in Karnataka. This vigorously renewed the status of India as the land of Buddhist learning in Tibetan languages. A large number of Bhutanese monks study privately in these monastic colleges, compensating for the loss of academic exchanges with Tibet.

In the mandatory once-in-a-lifetime spiritual itineraries of Bhutanese are pilgrimages to the holy sites of the Gangetic plains in India. Among other holy places, tens of thousands of Bhutanese visit Bodh Gaya every winter as part of their journey to the major holy sites in the life cycle of the Buddha.

In the reverse direction, nearly 33,000 Indian tourists, mostly from Bengal and Bihar, visited Bhutan in 2011, for the more mundane purposes of honeymoons and tourism. [3] It is during these journeys that some of them shed their vague preconceptions of the Bhutanese people as being the same as the tribes of northeast

India. They are surprised that Bhutan does not conform to their images of the country. They find the Bhutanese not to be the tribes they imagined, and the beautiful country not the budget destination they expected. The general Bhutanese standards of living in urban areas are comparable to the middle class in India, and food, hotels and taxis are more expensive than the tourists presume.

Tourists from mainland China also visit Bhutan, usually prompted by the idea of Bhutan as the “happiness-country.” Bhutan has become associated in the media abroad with the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), authored by the Fourth King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The dissemination of the GNH has rebounded positively, with an increase in tourism.

In 2011, 2896 tourists from the People’s Republic of China visited Bhutan according to the Tourism Council of Bhutan. [4] The high-end Chinese tourists stay in Indian joint-venture luxury hotels, where they rub shoulders with Indian luxury tourists and Indian hotel management. The government of Bhutan has officially promoted foreign direct investment (FDI) in hotels, while a muted section of modern Bhutanese doubt the wisdom of hosting foreign companies in a wide spectrum of our small economy.

Cultural and material streams

FDI from India, including in hydro-power projects, is not the only new face of the economic integration of Bhutan. The degree to which the Bhutanese have assimilated Hindi and Indian products into their lifestyle is possibly as reassuring for Indian tourists as it is for geopolitical strategists.

The Bhutanese pick up Hindi from Bollywood movies, which were extremely popular until the early 1990s. In the 1970s and 1980s, Bollywood movies were not only a significant leisure activity among the elite; they also influenced the attitudes and behaviour of Bhutanese youth and the early urban settlers who now form the middle class in Bhutan.

In the decades since then, movie tastes have stratified, with the urban middle class watching far less Bollywood, simultaneous with the rise of English as the medium of official discourse and

a reorientation of entertainment needs toward the Anglo-Saxon West.

Bollywood's influence aside, the presence of as many as 60,000 Indian workers in Bhutan at any given point of time, working mostly in the construction and hydro-power sectors, and in other industrial installation projects, forces a large number of Bhutanese to speak Hindi. Bhutan offers employment at higher daily wages, on average at Rs. 175 for an unskilled worker and Rs. 375 for a mason or carpenter. This is attractive for workers, especially from the neighbouring districts of Assam and north Bengal.

There is also a huge demand for Indian food, fuel (diesel, petrol, aviation fuel, kerosene), iron and steel, plastic and rubber products, base metal, manufactured goods and motor vehicles. Bhutan imported Rs. 30 billion worth of goods in 2011 from India. [5] This excludes the value of services, mostly related to hydro-installation and maintenance, imported from India. [6]

Over 90% of Bhutanese exports and imports are with India. Despite an emphasis on diversification, this is proving to be challenging for Bhutan – we are running out of rupee reserves to settle payments in rupees.

Bhutan has four main streams of earning the all-pervasive rupee: development grants from the government of India, earning from exports of electricity, exports of other merchandise, and credit (loans). These four factors determine the size of the rupee inflow from India. The year 2011 showed the highest annual amount of grant inflow, at Rs. 9 billion. The outflow of the rupee depends on imports, debt service payment, remittances of Indian workers, expenditure on education, healthcare, pilgrimages and tourism while in India.

Of late, the rupee reserve has been unable to catch up with the rupee outflow. This imbalance in the Bhutan-India economic flows could worsen. With the emerging imbalances, Bhutan is concerned that the annual grant component may decrease in real terms and the loan component may increase.

It is going to be a challenge to balance economic self-reliance and reliance on the Indian government.

Education and assimilation

My third set of memories is from my student life. Many Bhutanese have studied in schools and colleges in India, often with scholarships from the government of India. This is not the case now, with thousands of Bhutanese enrolled privately in Indian colleges, where discipline and academic standards are not so demanding and admissions are easier. Should not the governments of India and Bhutan channel these students into better institutions? The quality of education will reflect on their lives, and on their attitude to the nation where they studied.

India and Indians were part of the schooling and university experiences of a large number of Bhutanese, who today dominate the Bhutanese Parliament, the armed forces, the bureaucracy, the private sector and public sector enterprises. The fact that His Revered Majesty King Jigme Khesar attended a year-long course at the National Defence College in Delhi after his graduation from Oxford University, where he read politics and international relations, shows the importance attached to such experiences in Bhutan at the highest level.

The ease of interaction with Indians in general, and Indian bureaucrats in particular, with whom Bhutanese officials and businessmen later come into contact, comes from their long sojourns in India. The multicultural tolerance of Bhutanese professionals can also be attributed to their sub-conscious assimilation into India. This is of great importance in acquiring values for global citizenship.

On the other hand, their tolerance for inefficiency is also attributed, justly or unjustly, to the same assimilation process in India. In any case, the reputation of Bhutan in India and of India in Bhutan, is disproportionately important and both New Delhi and Thimphu are attentive to this importance.

My fourth set of memories consists of media reports about the relationship between India and Bhutan. Memories are enhanced by visual representations. The Bhutan-India friendship is memorialised by black and white photographs of Nehru and the revered Third King His Majesty Jigmi Dorji Wangchuck (reign: 1952–1972) exchanging *khadars* (white scarves symbolising goodwill) in 1958,

during Nehru's foot journey to Paro via the Nathula pass and Chumbi valley. In a significant mythic rendering of the event, the temple wall paintings of Dochula near Thimphu depict Nehru and the Third King horse-riding through a Himalayan meadow.

My childhood memories flash back to these photos, found pasted even on the smoky walls of rural houses. For the old generation of Bhutanese, the arduousness of Nehru's trek mattered as much as its political significance. Had he come by helicopter, it would be less remembered, and would have resonated less with the older Bhutanese. In the official and political circles of Bhutan the narrative that dominates is that of Nehru visiting Bhutan and the "friendship" between two men that began a national friendship.

In fact, the Bhutan-India relationship as a whole remains unchangingly represented by Nehru and the much-revered Third King of Bhutan. All the Indian leaders and national figures visiting Bhutan are subsumed in the image of Nehru. Simply put, the memory of Nehru's visit still frames the subsequent visits of Indian leaders in the minds of many Bhutanese. When Nehru's descendents such as Rajiv, Rahul, or Priyanka visited Bhutan, the framing got even more resonant, with a dynastic perception of India in the minds of Bhutanese.

Electricity and an incipient crisis

Although Tibet and Bhutan shared close and deep relations before the 1950s, how rapidly Bhutan adapted its policies southward towards India when that connection was lost in 1959, is a testimony to the main architects of Bhutan-India friendship – the Third and Fourth Kings of Bhutan along with successive Indian leaders such as Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Morarji Desai, Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh, to name a few.

The financing of the five-year development plans of Bhutan was also instrumental in the reorientation of Bhutan towards India. Although there are numerous other donors, India as the majority donor has become a reference point in the Bhutanese mind.

Hydro-power cooperation is growing in prominence – the government of India now provides 60% of the cost as loan at concessional interest rates and 40% as grant. The grant component

is mutually beneficial as it is aimed at electricity import (to India) tariff, based on the cost recovery model, which is affordable to Indian bulk customers.

Bhutan exports power to India at a negotiated rate of Rs. 1.98 to Rs. 2 per unit, depending on the agreement specific to a hydro project. India has significant stakes in the Bhutanese hydro-power sector. The energy export is two-way: Bhutan imports fossil fuel from India and, in monetary terms, the size of fossil fuel import from India is almost equal to the export of hydro-electricity.

A revision of electricity tariff is under consideration between the two governments, but fuel price increases are transmitted to Bhutan whenever they are revised in India. The same is true of the prices of all imports from India. This has led to a deterioration in the terms of trade in Bhutan over time. Bhutan's main export is electricity and if its price per unit does not rise reasonably in line with the inflationary impulse transmitted from India via imports of goods, a financial crisis can develop in Bhutan.

A crisis is already incipient, leading to a rupee deficit that was paid for by borrowing at commercial rates from the State Bank of India. This further adds to the rupee debt stockpile. I make this observation with affection for the deep relationship between the two countries. It is not meant as callous criticism of those who negotiate the price of electricity.

Gratitude and mutual respect

India's role has been progressive and dominant in every major review of the five-year plans. It has become reflexive to loudly proclaim gratitude to India in the Bhutanese Parliament hall from time to time, with Indian embassy officials sitting prominently in the gallery. Not many national parliaments pay such tribute to a neighbour. Rituals can be deeply meaningful or trite, and depend entirely on the deeper context. I believe this expression of gratitude remains mostly heartfelt and it should remain so, for it will lose all meaning if it becomes orchestrated among politicians.

The history of Bhutanese foreign policy shows that it has wisely not given in to geopolitical role-playing between India and China. Like any nation-state which is part of the unavoidable

process of globalisation, Bhutan will cautiously increase its network of international relationships. But stability and security are our priorities. For 50 years, India has been the primary source of development aid for Bhutan. The stable and mutually respectful partnership between Bhutan and India has helped the steady progress of Bhutan and this cannot – and should not – be replaced by any other relationship.

On the other hand, neighbours are not chosen. China is Bhutan's neighbour too and a good Sino-Bhutanese relationship is absolutely necessary for Bhutan's long term security. At the forefront of concerns at this moment are Sino-Bhutanese and Sino-Indian boundaries. Bilateral reconciliations of the boundary issues will help our relationships move on to higher planes of cooperation.

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The Maldives

Big stakes for India

Yameen Rasheed

Introduction

The Maldives and India have a shared cultural heritage that goes back several millennia. It is a relationship that extends beyond mutual economic, trade or security interests. The civilizational bonds between the two countries are unbreakable.

The Maldives gained independence from the British in 1965, and has since then developed a tourism-based economy. Due to its location in the Indian Ocean, in close proximity to India, and a lack of affordable high-end healthcare, an estimated 5,000 Maldivians are now permanently residing in India, primarily for education and medical purposes. Twice daily flights operate between Malé and the Indian cities of Bangalore and Thiruvananthapuram, ferrying hundreds of tourists, businessmen, labourers, teachers and students.

Around 20,000 registered Indian workers – doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants and labourers – live and work in the Maldives. [1] The state-run Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé, built with Indian assistance following Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1986 visit to the Maldives, is by far the largest healthcare centre in the Maldives, and it remains a symbol of bilateral cooperation between the two nations. [2]

India also has a strong cultural influence in the form of Hindi films and television soap operas that have for long been very popular among generations of Maldivians. In fact, most Maldivians now understand Hindi partly due to their prolonged exposure to Hindi cinema and television serials.

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India has had a resident High Commissioner in the Maldives since 1980. [3] The Maldives has enjoyed an especially comfortable relationship with India in recent years, especially after rapid Indian military intervention rescued the Maldivian government in November 1988 following a serious armed coup attempt by Tamil secessionist mercenaries hired from Sri Lanka by Maldivian businessman Abdulla Luthufi.^[i]

Under ‘Operation Cactus’, 1,600 Indian paramilitary troops were flown in to regain control of Malé and its only international airport, after an attack in a pre-dawn raid by around 80 PLOTE (People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam) mercenaries.^[ii] [4] The rebellion was crushed by the next day and the administration’s and then President Maumoon Gayoom’s gratitude towards India was permanently established. Diplomatic contact at the highest levels has been maintained between the two countries ever since; practically every Indian Prime Minister since Rajiv Gandhi has visited the Maldives.

The Maldives has often aligned itself with Indian interests on international forums, and has co-sponsored the G4 draft resolutions that would seek to grant India permanent membership of the UN Security Council. [5] In return, India has extended support to the Maldives’ candidature for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council in 2019.

India was among the first nations to respond with aid following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami that devastated entire islands of the Maldives, leaving them permanently uninhabitable. Indian navy ships and aircraft were deployed for emergency relief operations, while India also provided material and financial aid to help recover from the crisis. [6]

The close ties were further reinforced when President Mohamed Nasheed swept into power following the Maldives’ historic multi-party presidential elections in 2008. India was quick to extend

[i] The Tamil mercenaries were hired from Sri Lanka by Abdulla Luthufi. There is no Tamil secessionism in the Maldives. Luthufi is currently in Sri Lanka.

[ii] PLOTE was a separatist militant group formerly active in Sri Lanka. Luthufi claims close association with their then leader Uma Maheshwaram, a former LTTE leader, who was later assassinated.

support to the new democratic regime in the form of a \$100 million Standby Credit Facility, which would help the government invest in infrastructure projects in a troubled economy with a severe budget deficit.^[iii] Another \$100 million was pledged during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit in November 2011, on the sidelines of the 17th SAARC summit. [7]

A critical security partnership

The Maldives occupies a strategically important location due to its proximity to vital trade routes in the Indian Ocean. During World War II, the British Royal Air Force established a base at Gan, in the southernmost atoll of the country, which remained operational until 1976. After the British left, other powers, including the Soviets, were interested in taking over the base. The governments of President Ibrahim Nasir and President Gayoom resisted these attempts.^[iv] [8, 9]

The Maldives also lies within India's sphere of influence, and due to location and proximity to vital trade routes in the Indian Ocean, is of deep strategic importance to India's security establishment. President Nasheed had famously called the Indian Ocean "India's soft belly" with security vulnerabilities due to piracy off the eastern coast of Africa and the risk of terrorist activity. The geographically disparate islands create an ideal hub for international trans-shipment of drugs. There are fears that the Maldives, with its proximity to India, could become a hub to transport weapons and militants as well.

Coastal security became an especially high priority for India following the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. In the aftermath of the attacks, then President Nasheed called for a comprehensive framework for joint, coordinated patrolling between the two

[iii] The Maldives has traditionally depended on foreign aid and loans for most of its infrastructure and development projects. The country graduated from the LDC (Least Developed Countries) list in 2011, as a result of which it is no longer eligible for many of the funds that were formerly available. Credit facilities help bridge the deficit.

[iv] The U.S. has a major naval presence in Diego Garcia, a part of British territory in the Indian Ocean, south of the Maldives.

nations. In the past, Gayoom had resisted attempts at entering into bilateral security arrangements, but Nasheed decisively partnered with India on matters of national and maritime security.^[v]

As a result, the Indian navy and coast guard each stationed a helicopter in the Maldives for patrolling purposes, and the Maldives was to be plugged into India's security grid. An agreement was signed between the two countries in 2011 to install radars on all 26 atolls, which would then be integrated into India's coastal radar network project that was envisaged after the Mumbai attacks. [10]

A strong Maldives-India security partnership is certainly mutually beneficial. With nearly 70% of its economy dependent indirectly on tourism, the Maldives stands to gain from ensuring security in its waters. Indian naval aircraft would also carry out sorties over Maldivian territorial waters to defend against heightened piracy activities, and protect against any terrorist risks to the country's vital tourist resorts.

Meanwhile, having the Maldives within its security umbrella allows India to secure its maritime borders and gives it the strategic advantage of having "eyes and ears" in the Indian Ocean.

Economic investments

A part from partnering with India on security, Nasheed also actively sought investment from Indian companies. The \$511 million dollar investment in a project to upgrade the Malé International Airport (later renamed Ibrahim Nasir International Airport) by Indian infrastructure giant GMR Infrastructure Limited and its consortium partner Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad in 2010 remains the largest ever foreign private investment in the Maldives.

Other Indian companies like Suzlon and Bommidala have made large investments in the clean energy sector, with the former

[v] An officially-sanctioned biography by Royston Ellis suggests that Gayoom has previously sought to prevent the Maldives from becoming a playground for big powers, especially after other countries reportedly expressed an interest in building a naval base in the southernmost island of Gan. Gayoom's reluctance may have been driven by an interest in non-alignment with major powers.

signing an MoU in 2009 to conduct feasibility studies for a \$40 million wind-farm project on the Seenu Atoll in south Maldives. [11] Indian luxury hotel chain Taj Hotels has also made significant investments in the tourism sector. By the end of 2011, India had committed to invest upwards of \$900 million in various projects in the Maldives. [12]

In a related context, President Nasheed has been a high-profile campaigner against human-induced climate change at global platforms like the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009. He has emphasised that rising Indian Ocean levels are a threat to not just the Maldives but also to the livelihoods of millions of people living in coastal areas in India. Maldives has solicited Indian cooperation in the clean energy sector, and asked for India's assistance – with, for example, new technologies and data-gathering – to help Maldives achieve its carbon-neutral goal by 2020. [13]

In all areas, from cultural and diplomatic ties to bilateral trade, economic investments and financial aid, India has thus made an impact on the Maldives and is a clear regional power. Given the close bilateral ties, easy connectivity and people-to-people contact, it is inconceivable that any other regional power could occupy the same space in Maldivian minds that India occupies today.

However, while India is assured of the support and friendship of successive Maldivian governments, this does not imply that the internal political scene in the Maldives has no consequences for India. India has a big stake in ensuring a healthy democracy and stability in the Maldives, for reasons explored in the following sections.

India's stake in a stable Maldives

Early on the morning of 7 February 2012, the Maldives plunged into chaos following a police mutiny. By afternoon the first democratically elected president in Maldivian history, Mohamed Nasheed, resigned on national television, passing power on to his Vice President Mohamed Waheed. [14]

A confrontation between pro and anti-government protesters the previous night had escalated into violence after Nasheed

allegedly ordered the withdrawal of a police cordon separating the two groups, saying he “didn’t trust” the police. A team of police from the heavily-trained ‘Special Operations’ riot control force originally created by Gayoom then went on a rampage. By next morning, more police officers, opposition protesters and breakaway military units had joined in the rebellion, and the crisis escalated into a full blown confrontation between the police and military personnel still under Nasheed’s command.

The situation spiralled out of control, the protesters demanded the resignation of the President, Nasheed gave in, and resigned live on television. India was among the first to recognise the new government, with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh extending “warm felicitations” to the newly appointed President Waheed less than 24 hours after his swearing in, and even before the dust had settled down. [15] When President Nasheed claimed the next morning that he had been forced to resign under duress, the country fell back into political chaos.

Many have expressed shock at the speed at which India “abandoned” its friend and close partner Nasheed. Other governments like the U.S., the UK and Sri Lanka followed India’s lead in recognising the new government, which was primarily composed of prominent members of Gayoom’s family and his close associates. The Commissioner of Police and heads of military were replaced with senior Gayoom-era allies. India’s early recognition of the new regime was instrumental in granting legitimacy to the transfer of power.

Waheed’s rise to power signalled a return to Gayoom-era leadership. India’s stance was bewildering, especially considering that Waheed’s new government was composed of a coalition of parties that have been critical of Nasheed’s pro-India stance, and also been vocally opposed on nationalistic grounds to Indian company GMR’s investment in the Malé International airport.^[vi] [16]

India eventually flew in its Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai to

[vi] The official reason for opposing the GMR deal, as stated by the coalition of anti-Nasheed parties, is that it is a security risk to privatise the airport, and that the airport is a “national asset” that should not be “sold to the Indians.”

help resolve the internal political crisis, but failed to get any lasting assurances from the opposing parties on a way forward. It was a low point for Indian diplomacy when members of the ruling coalition publicly spoke out against Indian “interference” in the country’s matters. [17]

In a single startling episode of diplomatic blunder, India found itself humiliated by the ruling Maldivian coalition while simultaneously alienating the once staunchly pro-India Nasheed administration.

Members of the Waheed ruling coalition continue to vociferously demand the cancellation of the \$500-plus million airport investment by GMR, often using nationalistic, anti-India rhetoric. And India finds itself distanced from the Nasheed administration that originally signed and once vocally defended the Indian investment.

India no longer has the clout and undivided attention of Maldivian leaders (of both the ruling and opposition parties) that it enjoyed throughout the 30 years of Gayoom’s and three years of Nasheed’s regimes. The Maldivian Democratic Party (Nasheed’s party, the largest in the Maldives) has expressed dismay with the Indian government, whereas Waheed’s administration reassures India of protection for its investments, while simultaneously whipping up anti-India rhetoric.

Implications for India

India needs to also be concerned about other far reaching implications of the controversial transfer of power. First among them is the genuine threat of Islamic radicalism brewing in the Maldivian archipelago in India’s immediate neighbourhood.

Militant Pakistani organisations are believed to have used the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004 to travel to various islands and recruit young men for militancy, which has accelerated the radicalisation process in the Maldives. It was after the tsunami that religious conservatism became more visible and mainstream.

Due to the geographical isolation of the various islands and the

small size of the communities that live there, a phenomenon of rapid religious radicalisation is growing in Maldivian society. Small, isolated communities with limited access to external information and education resources are often the first to be targeted for conversion by visiting radical preachers.

Following the democratic reform movement since 2005 and the subsequent lifting of media restrictions, radical clerics were allowed to preach for the first time – and large sections of Maldivian society have gravitated towards the religious right. Traditional liberal Sufi-influenced belief systems are being replaced by rigid, imported Wahhabi customs.

The coalition of opposition parties that coalesced against Nasheed had adopted a decidedly religious platform, and used harsh religious rhetoric throughout their numerous protests, culminating in a large rally held on 23 December 2011 condemning Nasheed's "secular" policies. [18]

During the 17th SAARC summit held in 2011 in Addu in South Maldives, the coalition engineered a series of communal protests with heated xenophobic and religious rhetoric. Religious vandals attacked commemorative SAARC monuments, including Indian national emblems. The vandals were hailed as "national heroes" by some members of the present ruling coalition.

While Nasheed can rightly be criticised for having given orthodox Muslims a platform in the first place, he has also strongly resisted conservative demands, which often resulted in a confrontation between him and conservative sections of the public. [19] At the same time, Nasheed is also acknowledged as having been a willing partner in India's anti-terrorism efforts, gathering and sharing intelligence on radical Islamic clerics and militant groups. [20]

Nasheed's successor, Dr. Waheed, is also a liberal with moderate religious views. However, Waheed does not possess any significant political clout to resist fundamentalist forces. His fledgling political party has less than 3,000 members and has no elected members in either Parliament or local councils. The last election he contested independently was in the early 90s, for a seat in Parliament. He fled the country due too harassment from Gayoom, and did not return until just before the 2008 elections.

His cabinet includes worrisome figures such as Mohamed Jameel, leader of the Dhivehi Qaumei Party, who published a vitriolic, anti-Semitic pamphlet in 2011 in protest against Nasheed's normalisation of ties with Israel, as well as Sheikh Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed, who championed the draconian Religious Unity Regulations in 2010 that would have severely restricted freedom of conscience and press freedoms in the Maldives.^[vii] [21] (Nasheed intervened to revise and heavily water down the regulations)

Having come to power on the back of a coalition only held together by radical religious sloganeering, Waheed is now compelled to use fiery religious rhetoric himself – as he did in a speech delivered in February 2012, calling upon the “*mujahideen*” to back him. [22]

Another worrisome trend is the potential radicalisation of the Maldivian armed forces. Videos of the police and military mutiny show rogue officers marching down the roads of Malé chanting religious slogans when they went to attack leaders of Nasheed's party. [23]

The brewing of Islamic radicalism in the neighbourhood is a threat to India's security, and it is in India's best interests to find partners against radicalism in a society susceptible to rapid radicalisation. While Waheed is yet to be put to test on the issue of religious fundamentalism, India might already have lost a valuable partner in curbing extremism.

As the world's largest democracy, India is expected to support and stabilise democracy in the South Asian region. It would be unwise to ignore the weakness and failures of vital institutions in the nascent Maldivian democracy, such as the judiciary, the media and constitutionally-mandated bodies like the Judicial Services Commission and the Human Rights Commission – a failure that has contributed to the ongoing political instability.

[vii] The Religious Unity Regulations 2010, in original form, explicitly forbid citizens from holding a “personal opinion” on religion. This infringes on the freedom of conscience, as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which protects an individual's right to hold an independent opinion, thought or belief. The regulations would also have granted the government powers to censor media and television.

By failing to stand by the first democratically elected government in Maldivian history, India has inadvertently allowed the creation of a new power centre in the Maldives – the police and the armed forces. The new regime has been quick to placate the armed forces and the police with an unprecedented range of perks, payments and promotions. [24] The Waheed regime has also expressed its intent to not investigate or prosecute alleged excessive police brutality towards Nasheed's supporters in the aftermath of the power transfer, despite wide condemnation from international human rights groups. [25, 26] This might be the genesis of an army-controlled Maldives, with deep security implications for India.

Stabilising the future

India's global ambitions rest on its ability to ensure its regional security and stability. To meet this goal, India needs to redouble its efforts to engage with the SAARC region, and especially the Maldives. India must invest its best diplomats and foreign policy talent in its immediate neighbourhood.

In making hasty arrangements with existing regimes, India cannot afford to create another hostile power in the neighbourhood, nor earn the ill-will of neighbouring citizens. If India truly aspires to be a superpower, it should strive to once again take a principled initiative to lead the world into a non-aligned movement.

India has already been criticised for its ties with the Myanmar junta, for distancing the people of Nepal by supporting the monarchy, and for bungling in Sri Lanka – with the result that China has stepped in. Now India is engaged in a series of missteps in the Maldives that erode India's moral and political authority, as well as tarnishes its democratic credentials.

The democratic revolution in the Maldives precedes the Arab Spring by several years, and was fuelled by idealistic youth who imbibed the democratic ideals from their exposure to successful, functional democratic nations such as India. Today a large number of democrats and Maldivian youth feel disillusioned and betrayed by India's apparent reluctance to proactively defend the nascent Maldivian democracy and its institutions.

In a clear message that India supports the military, Indian

Defence Minister A. K. Antony inaugurated a military hospital with Indian assistance during a three-day official visit to Malé in September 2012, while announcing a slew of defence cooperation measures. Antony met with Gayoom's daughter and newly-appointed State Minister Dunya Maumoon, and New Delhi invited Gayoom for an audience with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

After the 7 February 2012 coup, India has been perceived as a stumbling block in the democratic struggle, rather than as a partner in democracy. As former Indian Ambassador to the Maldives A. K. Bannerjee said India "should bat for a friend" [27] and try to restore stability by engaging all parties to agree on early elections and restore full democracy, while simultaneously working with the Maldivians to build and strengthen its democratic institutions. Instead, India appears to have adopted a policy of offering its unconditional support to the ruling party of the day.

The Maldives has a long journey ahead before it can build a sustainable democracy. Should the Maldives revert to being an autocratic police state, India could lose a valuable regional democratic ally. Conservative Islamists have already begun to call the ongoing instability a failure of democracy, and the clamour for an Islamic theocracy is increasingly finding an audience.

For democracy to thrive, Maldivians need Indian aid and expertise to build and develop vital institutions such as the country's ailing judiciary, protect individual and media freedoms and implement overdue reforms in the police and other state agencies. The Maldives needs India's assistance and commitment to protect the fledgling democracy. Otherwise, as an exasperated President Nasheed told Indian media during a tour of India in April 2012, "What's the point in you being a great power?"

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Nepal

Dignifying interdependence

Yubaraj Ghimire

Introduction

“The overarching Himalayas, the monsoons and the southward flowing rivers gave the subcontinent its civilizational unity; we can prosper or self-destruct together” – Jagat S. Mehta, India’s former Foreign Secretary [1]

The relationship between Nepal and India is often described as unique. Geographical proximity, an open border, and cultural, civilizational, historical and social bonds have intimately brought together the two sides from ancient times to the present. Except during a few short-lived phases of “hostility,” the two countries have been able to overcome the pitfalls of the “familiarity breeds contempt” dictum.

At the same time, an objective look shows that the potential of this “unique” bilateral equation is hyped, not adequately explored and barely achieved.

Are the platitudes of “special relations” going to be enough to explore our common goals?

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The roots of the binary mindset

India's independence in 1947 may not have directly contributed to major political changes in the region. But a committed group of young social democrats from Nepal – most of them students – who were involved in India's freedom struggle, strongly felt that democracy should be the most preferred political system in a “decolonised” region.

Although Nepal was never directly under British rule, three years after India's freedom, 104 years of the Rana oligarchy came to an end in Nepal. The Nepali Congress Party, led by the same young social democrats, was at the forefront of this change.

It was expected that the end of the oligarchy would pave the way for the restoration of monarchy – the Ranas had appropriated all the powers of the King since 1846 – and create a situation where the Crown as a figurehead and the political parties would work together to form a parliamentary democracy. In that spirit, a tripartite deal was signed in New Delhi (where King Tribhuvan had taken asylum in 1950-51), between the King, the Nepali Congress and the Ranas. India's then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, mediated the deal.

Nepal's journey to democracy, and India's independence from colonial rule, were to have a tremendous impact on the bilateral relationship. Nepal, a land-locked and hitherto largely off-limits country, was in a hurry to be seen as a sovereign, independent and democratic member of the larger world. India's challenges were bigger: it had to retain its clout and its interests in the neighbourhood without being seen as hegemonic.

Nepal became a member of the United Nations in 1955, and was moving fast to establish diplomatic relationships – which other Himalayan kingdoms like Bhutan and Sikkim were not doing – with various countries, far and near. India, concerned about the region's and its own security, and pursuing a stronger role for itself in the region, was not comfortable about Nepal's international forays.

Nehru even advised against Nepal establishing relations with the Soviet Union and China. He wanted Nepal to interact with a third country only after “consultation with us.” [2] Nepal's leaders

had a personal rapport with Nehru, and they convinced him that Nepal would never establish relations with other countries at the cost of India's geopolitical interests.

India's aversion to Nepal making direct contact with other countries, an aversion that was especially manifest during the early years of the bilateral relationship taking shape in a changed geopolitical context, eventually created a negative perception about India in Nepal. This perception lingers till today.

"I chose to resign rather than sticking to power by appeasing the external [Indian] lords," Maoist leader Prachanda said a day after he quit as prime minister on 3 May 2009. Prachanda echoed Maoist ideologue and current Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, who too implied that India's ultimate design was to "Sikkimise" Nepal through a process of "Bhutanization"—that is, India planned to either annex Nepal like Sikkim or reduce it a protectorate status, like Bhutan. [3]

Three perceptions of India

Nepal was dependent on India because of geography and for various forms of assistance, including the modernisation of its bureaucracy. Indian administrators were sent to Nepal as advisors to the King, and its Ambassador enjoyed unparalleled access to Nepal's prime ministers. The Indian approach on issues such as Nepal's right to separate trade and transit treaties was often inconsistent. Some Indian diplomats believe India's policies sometimes took Nepal "for granted." [1b]

Despite Nepal's dependence on India for up to 70% of its trade and for various kinds of help, political parties and policy-makers in Nepal have three negative perceptions about India: one, that a weak Nepal is in India's interest; two, that India always tries to extract maximum concessions from a falling regime and ends up supporting the emerging ruler; and three, that it extends hospitality to rebel political personalities or organisations to use them as leverage with the Nepali regime of the day.

These perceptions are rooted in reality, but also influenced by Nepal's "small nation syndrome," which tends to exaggerate India's perceived "big brother" attitude.

The evidence for the first two perceptions comes from various sources: for example, India signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the fragile Rana regime (1950s), which most communist parties, including the Maoists, say amounted to surrendering sovereignty to India, but supported the democratic movement spearheaded by the Nepali Congress against the Ranas; in 1989-90, when King Birendra was facing a powerful pro-democracy movement in the country, India offered to help him provided he became more considerate towards India's security interests and recognised India's prior right over Nepal's rich water resources, estimated to generate 82,000-megawatt power.

The third perception – that India supports political rebels and organisations to use them as leverage against the Nepali regime – is rooted in the fact that from the late 1960s various powerful rebel Nepali political leaders and their groups were sheltered in India. Subarna Shumsher (1960-68) and B. P. Koirala (1968-76), both Nepali Congress leaders who at times threatened to change the regime in Nepal through armed revolts, found shelter in India. The pro-republic leader Ramraja Prasad Singh, who launched bomb attacks on Nepal's legislative building and a hotel in 1985, also got Indian support from 1978 to 1992.

The Maoist leadership guided most of its violent campaign in Nepal from 1996 to 2006 from safe places in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Mumbai and Delhi. The Maoists however tried to mislead New Delhi by assuring India's political leadership that "they were a genuine political movement and not a bunch of terrorists and that they recognized the need to sustain the close ties between India and Nepal necessary for Nepal to advance." [4]

India perhaps took the Maoists at face value and mediated yet another deal, generally referred to as the "12-point understanding" between the Maoists and Nepal's seven political parties. It was signed in New Delhi in November 2005. The signatories decided to collectively launch a movement in Nepal against the monarchy. The resulting 19-day agitation in April 2006 brought the nine-month-old royal rule to an end, and Nepal's triumphant new political leaders announced that the world's only Hindu kingdom will henceforth be a secular, federal republic.

But the Constituent Assembly, elected in May 2008, failed to

deliver the Constitution during its four-year tenure, until it was dissolved on 28 May 2012, nor did it institutionalise the radical changes it had promised. India, perceived as the dominant influence, is now linked with this failure, and with the resultant chaos, uncertainty and political instability in Nepal. Anti-India sentiments are palpably growing.

Prevailing uncertainty and likely consequences

Observers of Nepal-India relations say that the period from 1990 to 2005 was relatively less controversial. India's "economic blockade" of 1988-89, with New Delhi's reluctance to extend the transit treaty, had ended after the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990. Democracy demanded more transparency in governance, both in domestic and foreign affairs.

But a series of political setbacks in Nepal – the nascent multi-party democracy came under severe threat from the Maoist insurgents for a decade from 1996, there was political instability with 15 governments in as many years, the palace massacre that resulted in the killing of King Birendra and his entire family in June 2001, the succession by his brother Gyanendra and his takeover in February 2005 – have all impacted political stability in Nepal.

The Maoists used the instability to achieve their political goals. In June 2002 they established contact with Indian political leaders and top-level bureaucrats to convince them that they were the real representatives of the Nepali people. The election of the Constituent Assembly in 2008 legitimised the Maoist party as the biggest group without a majority. They refused to transform into a democratic party accountable to Parliament and implement the internal peace accord. Their insistence on federalism on ethnic lines with a right to self-determination also injected uncertainty about Nepal's status as an integrated state. The change in regime caused more political instability – five prime ministers in as many years. The hopes generated in 2006 fast evaporated and turned into frustration.

Nepal is now going through its most uncertain phase since 1950. The absence of a full-fledged Constitution, the fragmentation of politics and divisions among the signatories (the Maoists and

Nepal's seven political parties) to the 12-point understanding have contributed to this uncertainty. The political parties have not been able to agree on a model of federalism – should it be based on ethnicity or other factors – or on governance, the electoral system, and around 118 other issues that are related to drafting the Constitution.

At the same time, the Madhesi parties are pushing for recognition of their region as a single province, as a solution to being treated like “second class citizens” by the Nepali state for generations. The parties are based in the Madhesh plains, which share a border with India, and which represent the entire plains area comprising 18% of the total geography of Nepal with 48% of the population. Any such proposal related to restructuring and re-arrangement of power is always a difficult issue, but in Nepal, additionally, a sincere and non-partisan approach has been lacking.

Nepal's growing fragility and vulnerability are a matter of concern. [5] The absence of the monarchy without a credible alternative in place has created a huge political and constitutional vacuum. The state's authority has significantly eroded. Political parties and their top leaders in Nepal stand discredited as never before. All this has brought the influence of other external forces, including China, into Nepal. A failed, fragile or weak state will not only be a problem for Nepal, it will also have ramifications beyond its boundaries

The growing role of China in Nepal

India's role in Nepal is often strongly critiqued. India stood by the four big parties – the Nepali Congress, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists, Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist, and the United Democratic Madhesi Front – promising support for the timely delivery of the Constitution. On a visit to Nepal in April 2011, then External Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna offered all the support the people of Nepal and its leaders wanted, given the “special relations” shared by the two countries.

All the parties have worked in close proximity with India. And they all failed to deliver the Constitution and peace dividends to the

people. The weak and unstable governments and all major political parties in Nepal have failed to realise that drafting and finalising the Constitution has essentially to be a sovereign exercise – only drawing lessons from external sources.

In contrast to India's involvement, China took the position that Nepal is capable of formulating its own Constitution and focussed more on development assistance. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao reiterated his country's position during a visit to Nepal in January 2012: that it is entirely for the Nepalese people to prepare their Constitution without outside involvement.

But China's presence, role and visibility in Nepal is much greater in the post-2006 scenario in general, and after the exit of the monarchy in May 2008 in particular. In fact, with Nepal's growing tilt towards China, it is now becoming one of the competitive pieces of the chess game between India and China.

This is a change from China's previous stand of a deliberate lack of interest in Nepal's internal affairs except on matters related to Tibet. From the 1950s, and ever since the Dalai Lama left Tibet in 1959, China's has repeatedly requested Nepal to not to allow its territory to be used by free-Tibet elements. Of late though, the U.S. and the European Union's (EU) support to the Tibetan cause through Nepali territory seems to have irritated China. Xinhua, China's official news agency, has said that Nepal has "the highest degree of foreign interference in the world." [6]

When democracy was restored in Nepal, India and Nepal promised to embark on enhanced cooperation in the hydro-power sector – but so far this has not been substantial. Instead, China has now bagged the 760-mw West Seti hydro-power project, to be completed by 2019. Nepal also imported arms from China for its army after India stopped supplying arms in the aftermath of the royal takeover, at a time when King Gyanendra, in New Delhi's view, was seen as being less sensitive to India's interests. Other players such as China and the EU have stepped into the resultant void, with their own geopolitical calculations.

In 2011, Lumbini, the historical town in Nepal where the Buddha was born, received the promise of an investment of \$3 billion to build infrastructure, including an airport, a highway,

hotels, a convention centre and a Buddhist studies university. On paper the investor is a Hong Kong-based non-governmental organisation, but it reportedly has the backing of the Chinese government. If executed, this is a huge investment in a country whose 2010 GDP was \$35 billion. Chinese companies are expected to play a key role in developing the infrastructure

The proposed investment in Lumbini is in competition with India's prestigious but delayed investment in the revival of the ancient Nalanda university in Bihar. The proposal – which involves Singapore and other East Asian countries – has been on the cards since 2006. During a visit to Nepal on 8 November 2011, Karan Singh, a leader of the Indian Congress party, said that India was keen to develop Lumbini. But the Maoists are pinning their hopes on China. India's slow-moving plans on this project can be seen as another misstep in a long line of missed opportunities in building a counterweight to China.

During his January 2012 visit to Nepal, Wen Jiabao also offered a \$120 million aid package and assistance for building a rail link connecting Lhasa to Lumbini. Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai said that instead of Nepal being a “buffer state” between India and China, Nepal will now act as a “friendship bridge” between the two. India can seize the advantage by moving swiftly to develop infrastructure from the India side up to Lumbini on the Nepalese border. Once completed, India and China will have direct road and rail links; Lumbini can then be integrated with the remaining Buddhist sites in India, forming a Buddhist circuit.

Nepal no longer has leaders with direct access to their counterparts in India, unlike the leadership until the early 1990s – largely a product of Indian universities – who understood bilateral relations in a much wider context, and would not call India a “hegemonic” force even during times of major rifts, as the Maoists do (despite their tactical proximity with the Indian establishment for some time).

Education plays a significant role in building future leaders, in honing their quality and statecraft. Now most of Nepal's future leaders turn not only to India and the West, but also to the North, for higher education. Of 77,628 foreign students in Chinese universities in 2003, 80% were from South Asian countries, with

Nepal prominently in the list.^[1] [7] Many schools, colleges and at least one university in Nepal have introduced Mandarin and Chinese studies in their curriculum. There are now predictions that China's global rise will usher in a golden age of pan-Asian prosperity in which Chinese products, culture and values will set the standard for the world. [8]

Nepal's foreign policy – based on King Prithvi Narayan Shah's "between two boulders" theory – has to be sensitive to the vital interests of both big neighbours. That needs to be the core spirit of its neighbourhood foreign policy. Both India and China have vital interests and stakes in Nepal, and any imbalance in Nepal's relations with them may take "...a more difficult turn in the nuclear age," or could be made more complicated by politicians of "loose thinking and loose tongue." [9]

A humanitarian foreign policy

Bilateral foreign affairs and security interests need a great degree of confidentiality, but foreign policy and security issues will also always remain under the radar of researchers and critics. SAARC continues to fail as an effective forum to integrate the security and economic interests of the region, and the impression remains that the "intractable Indo-Pak divide over Kashmir" has exhausted the potential for regional cooperation. [10] As a result, regional diplomacy will largely continue to be a bilateral affair, and this calls for a greater understanding of each other's concerns between Nepal and India.

South Asia in general, and Nepal and India in particular, will attain a sense of integration if regional security, trade, food security and other issues come onto a common and more transparent agenda. Preserving biodiversity and the intricately linked ecosystem and agricultural patterns of our two countries, and jointly addressing natural disasters are challenges that can also be brought onto a common platform. For example, the Chure mountain range in Nepal protects Bihar and Uttar Pradesh from floods and drought. But rigid perceptions have come in the way of a more humanitarian vision of foreign policy.

[1] The Chinese Ministry of Education gives only the 2003 figures.

In Nepal, 36 of 75 districts, or 3.5 million people (one-eighth of the total population) are officially described as vulnerable to “food scarcity.” In post-conflict Nepal especially, agricultural production has been severely impacted. An exodus of agricultural workers continues to the Gulf countries, Malaysia, Singapore and other countries – at an average of 500,000 people a year, according to government figures – and many more go to India. Official figures indicate that at least 12,000 women were trafficked to India’s sex industries last year. An unspecified number are trafficked as “organ donors.” Managing migration and controlling human trafficking also require Nepal and India to work in close cooperation.

But the immediate challenge for Nepal is to overcome the current political mess and social discord, maintain the country’s integrity, and discourage caste and ethnic divisions. India and China as well as the EU could contribute by not patronising the forces that have failed Nepal’s people in the past six years. In the bilateral context, Nepal and India have to appreciate the challenges both countries face in terms of security, take a common position on terrorism and the criminal forces operating along the open border, and settle border disputes wherever they exist.

Security is intimately linked to development and internal stability, which require public participation in policy-making. Credible diplomacy also requires time-bound implementation of earlier agreements. Once bilateral relations focus more on development and security, other contentious issues can take a back seat. That will be a milestone in our bilateral relations.

What will be the best way to increase mutual understanding between the two sides? Nepal’s seasoned diplomat, Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, said: “While different problems will have different remedies, the best way to go about now is for Nepal to understand India’s real security concerns in the context of each other’s location. And India will earn much more respect in Nepal by leaving Nepal’s political process to the Nepalese.” [11] What will also count is whether the bilateral relationship is based on partnership, is more symbiotic and less parasitic. That will make the inter-dependence more dignified in the long run, more legitimate and more acceptable to Nepal.

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Pakistan

Living with India

Ayesha Siddiqi

Introduction

How Pakistan perceives India and how it wants the bigger neighbour to react may, at one level, be a simple question to answer if our bilateral relations can be viewed from the lens of a 65-year-old rivalry. But this is also a complex question, because Pakistan's perception of India also depends on how it views itself and the manner in which that view translates into formal policymaking.

This paper will analyse Pakistan-India relations from the standpoint of Islamabad's perceptions and expectations of a relationship. The key argument presented here is that from Pakistan's perspective the bilateral linkage is locked in a historical and ideological bind. It's not just the divergent perspectives of 1947, but also the manner in which the two states and societies have grown, that feed into perception-building and thereby in shaping expectations of the other.

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Islamabad's expectation from New Delhi has varied depending on how it views itself vis-à-vis India. Over the years, Pakistan's resolve to stand up to India has become stronger; this also has an impact on what is expected of its bigger neighbour. At this juncture, it will take either massive measures in one go, or incremental steps by India, to build Pakistan's confidence in a bilateral relationship. There are other sets of expectations as well that vary from group to group. All of these different perspectives will be presented in this paper.

What does Pakistan want?

At one level, India is more of a reality in Pakistan than in India itself. The popular social and political narratives in Pakistan have revolved around the perceived threat from the larger South Asian neighbour. Under these circumstances, what Pakistan expects from India is never simple, despite the fact that the demand may appear to be an uncomplicated wish.

Ask any Pakistani – ranging from a top government official to the common man – and the answer will not sound too complex. The general demand is for India and its state and society to accept Pakistan as a reality and not threaten it physically, accept its sovereignty, engage with it as an equal player in the region, and generally behave like a big brother. This means being more forgiving and less eager to punish the younger brother for any supposed acts of misdemeanour.

Nonetheless, this wish-list needs to be carefully deciphered, especially in the context of the history of Pakistan-India rivalry, which over the years has become etched in the minds of the establishments of the two neighbours, and through them onto the sensibilities of the common man.

One of the major issues pending between Pakistan and India is Kashmir, a territory without which Pakistan's establishment feels their country is incomplete. The Pakistani state has always challenged the accession of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) with India in 1947. In fact, according to the official narrative, India forcibly occupied a territory that was more naturally a part of Pakistan due to geographical contiguity and the

fact that the majority of the population in the Kashmir valley were Muslims. The official version of history does not own the attack on J&K in 1947 as propelled by the Pakistani army; in this version, India seems to have set the tone for enmity and confrontation.

In 1965, another military operation called ‘Gibraltar’ was launched to reverse the status of Kashmir and wrangle away the valley from Indian control. Although the eventual expansion of the war by India across the international boundary did not allow for the success of Pakistan’s military objective, the 1965 war is listed in Pakistani history books as an act of Indian aggression. Yet another effort was made in 1999 with a military operation in Kargil to secure what the Pakistani army considered as a favourable solution to the Kashmir issue.

From the perspective of Pakistan’s security community (which includes the military establishment, the foreign office and defence ministry bureaucracies, and an army of statist analysts and writers), Kashmir is fundamental to Pakistan’s survival. The denial of this right is considered as symbolising the denial of Pakistan as a reality. Historically, a popular perception persists that India has never accepted Pakistan as a reality and would not miss an opportunity to unravel Pakistan.

Over the years, Kashmir has become fundamental to the thinking of the security establishment, or as stated by the former army chief, General (retd.) Pervez Musharraf, “Kashmir flows in our veins.”^[i] In the past the Kashmir issue signified India’s non-recognition of Pakistan as a sovereign state for the Muslims of the subcontinent, especially those who had opted to live in Pakistan. The non-acceptance of the principle of the will of the majority determining the political future of a princely state was considered as an indicator of New Delhi not accepting Pakistan as a reality, and finding the means to damage Pakistan strategically.

This particular perception did not change even with the former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s visit to Lahore in 1999, where he made a speech stating that India did accept Pakistan as a reality. The Pakistani state, dominated by the security establishment, argues in terms of “capabilities” versus “intent” in evaluating the

[i] <http://presidentmusharraf.wordpress.com/2005/01/08/musharraf-kashmir-day/>

veracity of Vajpayee's claims.

More importantly, the Kashmir issue today has evolved from being just a question of territory to being the source of a major lifeline for any country: water. The popular strategic myth says that by continuing to hold on to Kashmir, India wants to control and manipulate water resources that it could block at any point in time. The construction of the Baglihar dam and other water projects like Kishanganga in J&K haunt the security establishment and increasingly the general public.

Though not very vocal, farmers from Punjab, and now even Sindh, have started to ask questions about India's intent behind building dams which may block water flow into Pakistan. Small businessmen and farmers in Punjab also seem unsure about the benefits from trade. They are made to believe, primarily due to Lashkar-e-Taiba/ Jamaat-ud-Dawwa advocacy in rural areas and the small towns of Punjab, that opening trade with India may eventually wipe them out financially.

Whether it is the issue of territory or a natural resource, the fear of India harming Pakistan because the latter does not accept the reality of the former is part of the popular geopolitical myth in Pakistan. This fear was further solidified by the memory of 1971. The dismemberment of East Pakistan, which in the minds of the security establishment was caused due to Indian intervention, and the 1971 Pakistan-India war, is considered as an example of India not accepting the reality of Pakistan. It is also believed that given a chance, India would not leave any opportunity to harm its smaller South Asian neighbour.

The new territorial threat

The echoes of the above-cited threat perception can be heard in Islamabad's fears regarding Balochistan, where it is believed India is involved in financing the Baloch insurgency. Intelligence sources talk about the presence of training camps for the Baloch in Afghanistan that are funded and operated with Afghan and Indian help. The military authorities also claim to have sufficient evidence linking some of the Baloch leaders like Brahmdag Bugti and others with Indian funding and support. To most in the security

establishment, Balochistan is a bitter reminder of 1971.

At present, this is a much bigger threat for Islamabad than its historic sense of the loss of Kashmir. Although the army considers itself to be in a better position in Balochistan in countering insurgency as compared to how it fared in the political-military crisis in East Pakistan during the end of the 1960s, the political unrest in Balochistan is a constant reminder of India's hegemonic designs and discomfort in accepting a safe and strong Pakistan. The Balochistan issue is critical in the framing of Islamabad's Afghan policy. It is believed that the continued Indian presence in Afghanistan will only work to Pakistan's disadvantage because New Delhi will not desist from fuelling insurgency in Balochistan and generally destabilising Pakistan by propping up an unfriendly regime in Kabul.

From a strategic perspective, Pakistan would like to have a secure neighbourhood where it does not have to suffer the constant insecurity of ever facing a two-front war situation. This is one of the reasons the country's defence establishment wants greater influence in Afghanistan, an objective increasingly being jeopardised by India's growing influence with the current regime in Kabul.

The changing strategic objectives

The insecurity regarding Balochistan or the Indian presence in Afghanistan must be seen from another dimension as well – one which pertains to the evolution of Pakistan's strategic ambitions. Essentially, there are two perspectives on Pakistan – an insecure state wanting to survive and/or a state that has acquired the ambition to expand its influence in the region.

Pakistan observers often fail to see the country as a mid-sized military power with nuclear weapons and geopolitical ambitions to extend itself beyond the South Asian region. This desire, which remains carefully camouflaged under the narrative of insecurity, also emerges from a historic sense of competition with the larger regional neighbour. The insecurity of Pakistan's establishment extends beyond just the issue of being attacked from outside or having its sovereignty challenged. One facet of this insecurity is

linked to the desire to be treated as an equal by India, and also by the international community as being equivalent to India. Thus, what Islamabad wants is not just that it should be treated by its neighbour as an equal power, but also that the world should treat the two neighbours equally. This particular dimension explains Pakistan's deep discomfort with the strategic relationship that New Delhi seems to be forging with the West, especially the U.S.

Historically, Islamabad developed a link with Washington to acquire quality weapons and as a counter-weight to New Delhi, particularly during a military-strategic crisis. Although an effort to establish a strategic linkage with the U.S. that could guarantee Washington's security umbrella against a threat to Pakistan from India always failed, policymakers in Islamabad never visualised the development of a strategic partnership between the U.S. and India. The civil nuclear deal between Washington and New Delhi is considered as a symbol of India's growing strength and America's willingness to use India as a strategic asset in the future. Pakistan's security establishment has therefore asked the U.S. for a similar arrangement in terms of a civil nuclear deal.

Pakistan's strategic community has evolved a new vision for the country as playing a more strategic role in the South Asian and Central Asian regions. Such ambitions are a result of its assessment of the state's military capacity – a by-product of the acquired military prowess and new set of alignments built in the past couple of decades or more, that seems to have given the state and its military establishment greater confidence about extending its role. This ambition is also one of the reasons that the security community is uncomfortable about India's expanding role in Afghanistan.

Since the 1980s, Pakistan appears to have developed a greater capability in the form of non-conventional military technology and improved sub-conventional means of warfare. Despite the fact that this methodology seems to have damaged Pakistan as well as caused the proliferation of violence inside the country, sub-conventional warfare is still considered by many as a comparatively dependable approach. In fact, many in the security establishment would silently consider this as a more reliable strategy than dependence on international players such as the U.S., which is

accused of repeatedly “letting down” Pakistan.

A slow distancing from the U.S. and developing its own teeth (including further strengthening of relations with China) have given the Pakistani state a certain confidence.

Will there be peace?

This greater confidence has to be seen in the larger context of what Pakistan expects from India and the impact of this new mood on bilateral relations. It is worth appreciating that in India-Pakistan relations, the set of expectations varies depending on whether the assessment is being made in Islamabad or Rawalpindi.

Over the years, the political leadership has learnt the lesson of improving ties with India. Although it is believed in certain circles in New Delhi that Pakistan’s politicians are equally to be blamed for popularising anti-Indianism in Pakistan, this belief is not nuanced. The political leadership after Zia-ul-Haq (1988 to date) is different in its understanding of relations with India as compared to the pre-Zia leadership, which included Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who gained popularity at home with his slogan of a “thousand years of war with India.”

Benazir Bhutto, in fact, was the first political leader to move away from this policy of her father. She broke the impasse in 1989 by inviting the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Pakistan, where both leaders signed an agreement of not attacking each other’s nuclear facilities.

Subsequently, even more pro-establishment and right wing leaders like Nawaz Sharif agreed to put the enmity aside and sign the Lahore Declaration with Prime Minister Vajpayee in 1999. More recently, Asif Zardari and his Pakistan People’s Party have shown a willingness to improve trade and overall relations with New Delhi.

For the political leadership post-1990s, improving relations with India is an existential issue, because peace in the region is the key to reducing the viability of the military at home in Pakistan. Even at a personal level, leaders like Nawaz Sharif, Pervez Elahi and others, who have business interests, see themselves benefiting

from trade with India.

Unfortunately, the position of the civilian leadership is in contrast to the objectives and plans of the military-dominated establishment of the country that wants appeasement with India to a certain level and not beyond. Thus, most of the objections raised and problems created for granting MFN (most favoured nation) status to New Delhi were allegedly posed by the GHQ (general headquarters), which is driven by a totally different view of the strategic realities of the region. It is indeed the military establishment, which, as mentioned earlier, has acquired the confidence to play a greater role and wants a larger recognition for itself and the country. For them, India's insistence on terrorism does not help in improving relations.

The divide between the civilian and military leadership was apparent in their respective views on the attacks on Mumbai on 26 November 2008. Although weak in comparison to the military, the political leadership represented by both the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the Pakistan People's Party was clear about helping India fight the menace. In a meeting held a week after 26/11, which I had a chance to attend, President Zardari was categorical in decrying the tragedy and assuring the Indian leadership that the attack was not perpetrated by the civilian government.

This was followed by another meeting called by Nawaz Sharif, who was also clear in his desire to reach out to New Delhi. Sharif had, in fact, backed the idea of sending the director general of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to India to investigate the issue. But the political leadership cannot resolve terrorism or the 26/11 issue on its own. However, it hopes that an improvement in trade ties will weaken the armed forces and eliminate a reason for terrorism.

The Pakistani military remains constantly suspicious of Indian military prowess and economic potential. The perception of India's power is a reminder to the GHQ of the tragedy of 1971, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh as a result of a civil war, which was followed by a war between Pakistan and India. The military does not acknowledge the role of the civil war in the dismemberment of Pakistan and holds New Delhi entirely responsible. The 1971 experience haunts the generals, who do not want the experience repeated on another front, especially not in Afghanistan.

Their demands therefore include that India withdraws from Afghanistan, stops supporting the insurgency in Balochistan and is more conciliatory in solving the water crisis. The icing on the cake, of course, would be a solution to the Kashmir issue. But for starters, the army GHQ expects symbolic gestures such as de-escalation from Siachen and a reduction of Indian forces in Indian-held Kashmir.

The security community's assessment of the strategic options in the region does not necessarily take into account the confidence that India seems to have acquired over the past couple of decades. In a way, India's and Pakistan's ambitions are counterpoised against each other, with little possibility at this juncture of narrowing the perception gap of their respective goals in the region.

A measure of patience

Does this mean that peace between India and Pakistan does not have a chance? If it does, it will require lot of patience by the two states and societies. At this point in time, Indian society as a whole might feel impatient with Pakistan, and Pakistanis may feel the same about India. This understandable frustration will remain the reality of the region for some time to come.

Any progress will have to be slow and incremental. A starting point would be for Pakistan observers in India to understand the evolving nature of Pakistan's politics and the state's strategic thinking.

To an observer of the Pakistan-India rivalry, the relationship seems to have grown from being a mere territorial issue to becoming an ideological problem. This means that there is no end game to the rivalry. In certain circles in Pakistan there is indeed a concern for the growing influence of the militant outfits that feed on, and in turn feed, the rivalry.

Outfits such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad are investing time and energy provoking ordinary people about India's designs to strangle Pakistan by blocking water or financing terrorism in critical areas like Balochistan.

The proponents of peace in Pakistan therefore get nervous

when negotiations on trade and people-to-people exchanges go into slow gear. They are also fearful that another Mumbai-type attack could interrupt the current cycle of peace again. If this happens, it would be lethal for the region.

It is necessary to break this vicious cycle of rivalry and make peace sustainable.

Sri Lanka

A cautious affinity

Rohan Gunaratna

Introduction

“We cannot describe the Indo-Lanka Accord as a Peace Accord, this is an accord for war. ...It is ridiculous that the Indians should claim that they fought with one hand tied behind their backs. If they could commit so many atrocities on our people with one hand tied, my heart shivers at the thought of what atrocities they would have committed with both their hands”

– Velupillai Prabhakaran, LTTE leader, commenting on India and the Indian Army [1]

More than any other country, India has shaped and influenced Sri Lankan culture and history. Sri Lankans speak Sinhalese and Tamil, languages that originated in the Indian subcontinent. The origins of Sri Lanka’s dominant religions – Buddhism and Hinduism – were in India. Although the island of Lanka has been independent from India for over 2,500 years, modern Sri Lanka’s history, religion, language, culture and society are an extension of the great Indian civilisation.

The harmonious relationship between Sri Lanka and India has been disrupted by three factors: one, regional geopolitics and India’s global geo-strategies; two, domestic politics in India, especially the Tamil Nadu factor in electoral politics; three, India’s

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record of arming, training, financing and providing a safe haven to groups inimical to Sri Lanka's interests.

A majority of Sinhalese and Muslim Sri Lankans blame India for aggravating the dispute between the Sinhalese and Tamils, which was created by Sinhala and Tamil politicians advancing their narrow political and party interests. Bilateral relations were seriously affected by India's support for Tamil militancy from 1983-1987. The Tamils too are of the view that India exploited the dispute in Sri Lanka to intervene.

After supporting Tamil militancy for half a decade, India advanced its interests by signing an Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987. Thereafter, New Delhi supported the Sri Lankan security forces in dismantling the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the years leading to the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009.

The deep sense of resentment, mistrust and anger against India generated in the minds of most Sri Lankans because of India's foreign policy since 1983, continues to this date. At an individual level Sri Lankans continue to have excellent friendships with Indians, but an overall "trust deficit" persists in Sri Lanka about India's foreign policy.

India must address this deficit, and Sri Lanka too must be sensitive to India's concerns about China's expanding role in the region. We must learn to better manage our relations with India, with both the central government in New Delhi and the state government of Tamil Nadu. The Sri Lankan government and citizens have to face the monumental challenge of striking a balance between the two.

The negative perception about India

The genesis of the current negative perception of India can be traced to 1977. That year, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, a close ally of the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was defeated in the elections by President J. R. Jayewardene. After Mrs. Bandaranaike's civic rights were removed, personal relations soured between Jayewardene, a contemporary of Jawaharlal Nehru, and a younger Mrs. Gandhi.

When Jayewardene, a visionary, started liberalising Sri Lanka's economy in 1977, the country's foreign policy shifted from being non-aligned to becoming pro-West. India then had a planned economy and, in contrast, Sri Lanka began to emerge as the economic power in South Asia.

The country prospered economically from 1977 to 1983, but the political and security situation deteriorated in the predominantly-Tamil northern region. Tamil political parties supported, covertly and overtly, ultra-Tamil nationalism and militancy. The LTTE was the most violent of the Tamil groups, a group that used terrorism and killed civilians. To disrupt government writ in the Tamil areas, the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) and its successor, the LTTE, in the first phase of terror (1974-1983), targeted Tamil mainstream politicians, administrators, and policemen.

The LTTE created a fear psychosis, which provoked Sri Lankan security forces to suspect ordinary Tamils, and disrupted the harmonious relations between the Tamil and Sinhala communities. In July 1983, an LTTE ambush on an army patrol triggered a riot, creating support for a wave of political violence against the Sri Lankan state that lasted until May 2009.

The Sri Lankan government, at the time overseeing the most vibrant market economy in the region, was confronted with a protracted terrorist campaign. After 1977 Colombo turned to its economic partners – the West – to build its military and police capabilities. From India's perspective, Sri Lanka had stepped out of the non-aligned orbit. India was within the Soviet sphere of influence, and New Delhi perceived Sri Lanka's growing relations with the U.S., Europe, Israel, South Africa, Pakistan and China as a threat to India's interests.

This was the Cold War era, and the relations between the pro-West Sri Lanka and the pro-Soviet India deteriorated. India was concerned about the deepening U.S. presence and influence on its southern flank. It was particularly concerned about the Voice of America's radio station in Sri Lanka, the lease of Trincomalee's oil tanks to a U.S. company, and an Israeli Interests Section in the U.S. Embassy in Colombo.

In the eyes of Indian leaders and policy-makers, Sri Lanka had

to be punished. To increase its strategic leverage, India started a programme to arm, train, finance and provide a safe haven to over 20,000 Sri Lankan Tamil militants from July 1983 to July 1987.

The LTTE already had training infrastructure in Tamil Nadu, but after July 1983 India provided training to the LTTE, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO). [2] Indian agencies taught the Tamil militants to operate against Sri Lanka in a way that was comparable to the CIA-ISI training the multinational anti-Soviet Afghan *mujahideen* forces launched from Pakistan.

India's policy of supporting the LTTE in Sri Lanka continued during Rajiv Gandhi's premiership. Empowered by training and emboldened with weapons, the LTTE struck the sacred city of Anuradhapura on 14 May 1985, killing 120 devotees, including children, and wounding others. While the other Tamil militant groups refrained from killing civilians, the LTTE targeted both civilians and security forces' personnel.

Referring to Tamil militancy, a desperate President Jayewardene remarked in 1985: "I think we can deal with them. But we need the sympathy of the world, we need the support of India, because there are training camps in India, they've been trained in India and they are operating from India, they move about freely in India and I don't think they should allow [them] to do that, to use violence against a friendly state." [3]

The LTTE gained leverage under the patronage of the central government in New Delhi and the state government in Tamil Nadu. The strategy of the LTTE was to prevent the Sri Lankan military from establishing government writ in the Jaffna peninsula and eliminating the LTTE. It was difficult for the military to dismantle the organisation because of the support from India for the LTTE.

In early 1987, the Sri Lankan military was about to capture the LTTE leadership when India intervened. On 3 June 1987, under the pretext of providing food to displaced civilians, India dispatched a flotilla of boats. When the Sri Lanka Navy turned back the flotilla, a humiliated New Delhi launched Operation Poomalai

(Eagle Mission 4), and India dropped food from aeroplanes the next day.

Through a series of letters exchanged between Jayewardene and Rajiv Gandhi, the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement was signed on 29 July 1987 “to establish peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka” from July 1987 to March 1990. But the agreement was aimed at advancing and preserving India’s geopolitical interests, rather than resolving the dispute between the Sinhalese and Tamils. The agreement referred to:

“...(i) An early understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel with a view to ensuring that such presence will not prejudice Indo-Sri Lanka relations; (ii) Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India’s interests; (iii) The work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm will be undertaken as a joint venture between India and Sri Lanka; (iv) Sri Lanka’s agreement with foreign broadcasting organizations will be reviewed to ensure that any facilities set up by them in Sri Lanka are used solely as public broadcasting facilities and not for any military or intelligence purpose.”

The LTTE was unwilling to give up its demand for a separate state; they resumed attacks, which prompted the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to respond. LTTE leader Prabhakaran remarked: “The Indo-Lanka accord is a military agreement between India and Sri Lanka. The goal of this accord is to completely destroy the Tamil movement for freedom and the LTTE that heads this struggle.” [4] The LTTE’s powerful propaganda machinery manipulated Tamils, who had hitherto loved India, into hating India.

The consequences of interference

The Indian involvement in the Tamil conflict eroded the traditional goodwill between Sri Lanka and India. The Indo-Lanka Agreement and the deployment of the Indian Army infuriated both Sinhala and Tamil nationalists. Reflecting the mood of the Sri Lankans, a 22-year-old sailor, Vijayamuni Vijitha

Rohana de Silva, struck Rajiv Gandhi with the butt of his unloaded rifle during a guard of honour parade at the President's House in Colombo on 30 July 1987. [5] Angered by the training given by India to the LTTE, de Silva believed the agreement would make Prabhakaran the leader of the northeast, and he would have to honour Prabhakaran in the same way he was ordered to honour the Indian prime minister.

The young sailor's family members were in the armed forces – a brother in the army and a sister in the air force – and he reflected the frustration and anger amongst the forces against India. Many Sri Lankans, including de Silva's mother, condemned his violent act, which could have led to war. "You were an honoured guest of our country, helping us achieve peace and harmony and you were so shamefully treated by a son of mine," she remarked. [6]

Sri Lankans in general remained tolerant of India's duplicitous role, but not Prime Minister Premadasa. As head of government, Premadasa boycotted the signing ceremonies in Colombo. As the next President of Sri Lanka, Premadasa unilaterally initiated talks with Prabhakaran. He secretly armed the LTTE, an act opposed by many, including his Minister of Foreign Affairs and the State Minister of Defence Ranjan Wijeratne. After demanding the withdrawal of the IPKF, Premadasa threatened to declare the IPKF an occupation force. Reflecting Premadasa's thinking on India, de Silva received a presidential pardon after only two-and-a-half years in prison.

In 1987, India earned the wrath of both the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP; People's Liberation Front, which espoused a Sinhala nationalist agenda) and the LTTE. The LTTE-IPKF confrontation killed 1555 Indians, injured over 3000, and indirectly caused the death and injury of several thousand civilians in Sri Lanka. "Indian army interference, and the spread of their ideology of domination and threats, have become impediments to peace and stability, and harm South Asia's weak states," Prabhakaran said. [7] "The day the Indian army took its step on our motherland I consider to be the darkest day of our struggle, the day the Indian army interfered in our struggle, I must say, is a dark chapter." [8]

On 2 March 1991, Prabhakaran masterminded the assassination of Sri Lanka's strongman, Ranjan Wijeratne, in order to weaken Sri

Lankan security forces. On 21 May 1991, to prevent Rajiv Gandhi from returning to office, the LTTE masterminded the assassination of the Congress leader. Prabhakaran correctly believed that Gandhi was the strongest leader in India, who was capable of intervening again in Sri Lanka.

Gandhi also assessed Prabhakaran correctly. Before his death, he remarked that Prabhakaran's ambitions were not limited to the north and east of Sri Lanka. In an attempt to influence Indian public opinion, LTTE supporters had infiltrated not only the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and other regional parties in south India, but also the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other national parties. After providing ideology, training and finance to a dozen Tamil nationalist groups, Prabhakaran had set his sights on Tamil Nadu.

Rajiv Gandhi's assassination was a major turning point in Sri Lanka-India relations. A section of Tamils in Tamil Nadu continued to support the LTTE, but New Delhi took decisive action. India became the first foreign country to proscribe the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. Indian police and intelligence agencies disrupted a huge LTTE operational and support network in Tamil Nadu. Plans to assassinate Prabhakaran nearly succeeded

Although blacklisted in 32 countries, LTTE offices and cells were operating through front and sympathetic groups, including groups on Indian and western soil. The LTTE harnessed its specialised training in India not only to fight the IPKF, but also Sri Lankan security forces.

The LTTE chopped the Tamil leadership tree, leaving behind the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a proxy determined to advance LTTE goals through politics. The Sri Lankan military succeeded in dismantling the LTTE in May 2009, but the TNA and remnants of the LTTE remain active in Tamil Nadu and in the West.

Reorienting alignments

The Sri Lanka-India relationship suffered and the conflict in Sri Lanka escalated because Sri Lanka had to rely on the West, China and Pakistan for arms to fight separatist terrorism.

Sri Lanka did not intend to jeopardise its relationship with India, but Colombo was insensitive to India's geopolitical and strategic considerations and the electoral calculations of Tamil Nadu for New Delhi.

As the region's superpower, India expects its neighbours to remain under its influence. Besides, India traditionally is intolerant of extra-regional powers forming good relationships with its neighbours. India's "Indira doctrine," modelled on the American Monroe doctrine, seeks to punish countries that step out of its sphere of influence.

India's security has depended largely on keeping neighbouring countries such as Nepal, the Maldives, Bhutan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh within its sphere of influence. Their choices were to either be sensitive to Indian perceptions or suffer its anger. Sri Lanka was no exception. Regimes and governments that did not follow the Indian line had to pay a heavy price.

The monarchy in Nepal was replaced. After Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh flirted with Pakistan, India armed, trained, financed and directed the Shanti Bahini movement against Bangladesh (1977-1997) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. India stopped supporting this movement only after a pro-New Delhi government formed by the Awami League returned to power in Bangladesh. India also supported insurgencies such as the Mukti Bahini, the Bangladesh Liberation Movement, and the Baloch separatist groups. After the China-India border conflict in 1962, India supported the independence movement in Tibet and after 1959, Tibetan refugees, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, have been living in India.

India is not an exception in its support for dissidents (including armed groups) in countries inimical to their interests. The United Liberation Front of Assam received sanctuary in Bangladesh; Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has supported separatist movements in Punjab, Kashmir and northeast India. There are other similar examples of South Asian countries supporting dissident groups to advance their foreign policy and strategic interests.

India expected its neighbours to reorient their geopolitics and strategy in keeping with India's alignments. When India was

within the Soviet sphere of influence, New Delhi expected its neighbours to follow the pro-Soviet line. Today, New Delhi expects its neighbours to be pro-U.S. and distance themselves from the influence of China. India is uneasy about China's weapon sales and military cooperation with Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Neither Sri Lanka nor India's other neighbours can be impervious to India's changing strategic alignments. If in the past Sri Lanka could not afford to be pro-West when India was pro-Soviet, today Sri Lanka cannot be pro-China when India is pro-U.S.

Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu

The relationship between Sri Lanka and India has been complex; even though Sri Lanka has suffered intermittently, the relationship has largely been harmonious. [9] But whenever there is a disruption, Sri Lankans revisit the dark chapters of their country's relationship with India. Of the 21 invasions Sri Lanka has endured in its 2500-year-old history, 17 were from India, mostly from south India. Sri Lankans especially recall with anguish the contemporary period (1983-1987) when India supported Tamil militancy.

Most informed Sri Lankans perceive the state of Tamil Nadu as inimical to the interests of Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu was a safe haven and operational base for the LTTE. Many Sri Lankans regard Tamil Nadu politicians as untrustworthy and corrupt, and believe that the state's political leaders played a pivotal role in arming, training and financing terrorism in Sri Lanka; one politician reportedly openly called for an Indian invasion of Sri Lanka and the creation of a separate state. [10] Even after the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka, the LTTE regrouped in Tamil Nadu. LTTE leaders and cadres worked with Tamil Nadu politicians supportive and sympathetic to the LTTE, with whom they built financial and business relationships.

The defeat of the LTTE by Sri Lanka's army stunned the Indian political and military leadership. India had been unable to achieve this feat despite its formidable military capabilities. Sri Lanka achieved victory with limited Indian help. According to Sri Lankan political and military leaders whom this author spoke to, the biggest gift they got from India was an absence of interference

during the final phase of the conflict.

India was among 24 countries which voted in support of the U.S.-sponsored resolution on Sri Lanka at the 47-member United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in March 2012. Eight countries abstained and 15 voted against; India was the only Asian country to vote against Sri Lanka. New Delhi clarified that India had added amendments to safeguard Sri Lanka from “the interferences of UN bodies,” but Sri Lankans feel they cannot rely on India for their country’s security. A Sri Lankan commentator remarked: “India was the only country in Asia that voted against Sri Lanka and expects us to believe that it is doing so for Sri Lanka’s benefit.” [11]

New Delhi does not usually vote on nation-specific resolutions, for fear of a resolution on the UN-disputed Kashmir. But the Indian government gave in to pressure from its Tamil Nadu coalition partners, notably the DMK. Under pressure from the remnants of the LTTE, the DMK threatened to pull out its ministers from the government at the Centre.

A counter-terrorism scholar in India has remarked: “New Delhi needs to remember, however, that the extraordinary rehabilitation and normalization processes in Sri Lanka’s North and East were the result, not of international or Indian pressure, but of Colombo’s own political intent and will.” He adds: “India would do well to remember, moreover, that nations that proclaim a true friendship – and not the diplomatic dodge of ‘friendly relations’ – best resolve their differences in private, and not through theatrical and empty posturing at international fora.” [12]

Sri Lanka’s disappointment about India’s role in the conflict has been compounded by other issues. For example, Sri Lankan Tamils resent the daily poaching by Indian fishermen in their country’s waters. In contrast to Sri Lankan fishermen, Indian fishermen are engaged in sea-bed mechanised trawling, a practice banned in Sri Lanka, India and in many other countries. The Indian fishermen operate in large numbers, and extensively damage coral reefs and the nets used by Sri Lankan fishermen, which affects their livelihood.

Crafting a durable relationship

Three years after terrorism was brought to an end in Sri Lanka, the most important task for New Delhi is to ensure that Tamil Nadu does not re-emerge as a safe haven for the LTTE to regroup. This is Sri Lanka's biggest concern. To prevent the LTTE from regrouping in Tamil Nadu, Indian and Sri Lankan law enforcement and intelligence services must now build a special relationship.

India should also stop trying to coerce Sri Lanka to follow the Indian model of political devolution. Every country is unique in its domestic challenges. Sri Lanka must have the time and space to develop its own methods to manage its internal affairs. This, in fact, is India's own stated policy on foreign affairs, so it should actually be followed.

The Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are all branches of one family, divided only by language and faith. They will resolve their differences best without outside interference. The problems in the north and the south of Sri Lanka are common challenges – Sinhalese youth rebelled against the state in 1971, the Tamils started to rebel in 1981. Any Indian interference now will only encourage ethnic and religious entrepreneurs to politicise ethnicity and religion. A wise India, familiar with recent history, will not dictate terms to, or impose its will on, Sri Lanka.

At the same time, every Sri Lankan must remain grateful to India for its non-partisan role in the final military operation against the LTTE in 2008-2009. Even though India is partially responsible for creating the LTTE, by not interfering in the final phase, India is also partially and indirectly responsible for defeating the LTTE.

Sri Lankans should also realise that India supported the LTTE and other dissident groups because New Delhi believed that Sri Lanka had stepped out of the non-aligned orbit and was aligning with the U.S., Israel, China, and Pakistan. Now the global dynamics have changed and India is on friendly terms with America and Israel. India's relations with China and Pakistan are improving, although a deep mistrust persists. Sri Lanka must maintain cordial relations with New Delhi and with Chennai, and not antagonise its mighty neighbour again.

In an attempt to control bilateral relations, New Delhi does not encourage Sri Lanka to build a strong relationship with Tamil Nadu's politicians. Colombo must invite the chief minister and top officials of Tamil Nadu to visit Sri Lanka's northeast to witness the unprecedented development work, and invite their participation. Exchanges such as this will help to correct the distortions and misunderstanding that recent history and propaganda have created in the minds of some influential Indians.

Indian intervention compounded the conflict in Sri Lanka. In the north and the south, Sri Lanka lost a generation of youth. By conservative estimates at least 100,000 Sri Lankans died in the northeast and a comparable number in the south. India too lost many lives. No amount of goodwill by either country can restore this loss.

The challenge for enlightened Indians and Sri Lankans today is to move beyond the sorrow and craft a stable and durable relationship between our ancient lands.

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Endnote

Ronen Sen

Gateway House has taken a most welcome and timely initiative in publishing this collection of contributions by independent analysts of SAARC countries. These essays give us useful insights about differing perceptions and expectations about India in these countries, which should be of interest to scholars and policy-makers.

Most bilateral problems arise from geographical contiguity. Sometimes, perceptions of these problems seem to be coloured by the difference in size of the countries concerned. Internal disturbances often have adverse socio-economic and security repercussions in the neighbouring country. India is the largest SAARC country. All SAARC countries are India's neighbours. None of them, however, adjoin the others, apart from Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Having been to all SAARC countries, including during critical transitional phases in our bilateral relations, I would like to set the record straight on some issues raised in the essays. I will not do this in a comprehensive way, but in an illustrative manner with the aim of dispelling some misperceptions.

RONENSEN is one of India's most seasoned diplomats. Ranendra "Ronen" Sen was India's ambassador to the U.S. from August 2004 to March 2009. His landmark contribution to the U.S.-India nuclear deal is considered of immense importance. He was an Ambassador in Moscow, Ambassador in Washington, High Commissioner in UK and Ambassador in Berlin, all at crucial times during India's relationship with the governments there. A career diplomat, Sen joined the Indian Foreign Service in July 1966. From 1968 to 1984, he served in Indian Missions/ Posts in Moscow, San Francisco, Dhaka, and the Ministry of External Affairs. From 1984 to 1985, Sen was Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. He was subsequently Joint Secretary to the Prime Minister of India from January 1986 to July 1991, responsible for Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Science and Technology. He was Ambassador to Mexico from 1991 to 1992; Ambassador to the Russian Federation from October 1992 to October 1998; Ambassador to Germany from October 1998 to May 2002; and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from May 2002 to April 2004.

India's most consistently close and cordial relations have been with our smallest neighbours – Bhutan and the Maldives. The complete trust and mutual respect instilled in the relationship by the former and present Kings of Bhutan facilitated the steady strengthening of our bilateral cooperation and the natural evolution of Bhutan's role in the international arena. We had promptly and decisively responded to the request for intervention to protect the former President of the Maldives from foreign insurgents in 1988. In the recent past, we appear to have, on the one hand, responded prematurely, and, on the other, reacted with great caution to unfortunate developments in that country.

The temporary trade and transit restrictions on Nepal in the late 1980s were measured manifestations of our concerns about palace intrigues affecting vital Indian national security interests. The Nepalese elite continue to be unable to reconcile conflicting desires for a “normal” relationship with India on a par with its relations with other countries, while at the same time preserving a special relationship which provides its citizens with unique rights in India that are not extended to any other country.

We should have done a better job in building on the tremendous popular goodwill in Bangladesh after our joint military intervention with the Mukti Bahini ended large-scale Pakistani-led genocide and liberated that country. We made significant progress in subsequent years in resolving bilateral differences, including the historic agreements finalised by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. It is heartening that the leader of the Opposition, Begum Khaleda Zia, recently extended full support to all these initiatives for strengthening our bilateral ties. In these circumstances, we should no longer delay honouring our commitments, including on Teesta water-sharing and the Land Boundary Agreement.

The long-festered ethnic problem in Sri Lanka also had serious adverse repercussions in India. President Premadasa's opposition to the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement of 1987 was widely known. What is not as widely known was that shortly after assuming office as President, he had clandestinely and consistently financed, armed and provided detailed intelligence inputs to the LTTE to fight the IPKF and eliminate other Tamil groups. He paid the price for this

deception. Apart from several of our armed forces personnel, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself became a martyr for the cause of the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. However, the inextricably linked reciprocal commitment of the Sri Lankan government, to India and its own people to meet the legitimate interests of its Tamil citizens, still remains to be honoured. The LTTE has been defeated. Yet, it would be naive to assume that there will be long-term peace in Sri Lanka without the implementation of the 13th Amendment to its Constitution and other measures to ensure ethnic harmony.

There have been major changes in the international situation and in individual member states since SAARC was established. We have witnessed the end of the Cold War, the gradual eastward shift in global economic growth, major transformations in our respective relations with the U.S. and closer collaboration with China and emerging economies. The inclusion of Afghanistan has enriched SAARC, given its ancient ties with the Indian subcontinent and its location as a link between South and Central Asia. In the run-up to the post-2014 transition phase in Afghanistan, there is significant scope for close collaboration between Pakistan, India and other countries.

Unlike some other regional groups, SAARC member states do not have uniform socio-political systems. Such diversity is no barrier to regional cooperation. However, what has no place whatsoever in any regional forum are country-specific restrictions on trade, transit, investments, etc. If we persist with such practices, intra-SAARC trade and economic cooperation will continue to remain among the lowest of any regional organisation in the world. Individual SAARC countries will continue to grow, as they have indeed in recent years, but outside the SAARC framework.

We all need to grow, and preferably to grow together. The slowdown in OECD markets has resulted in a lower demand for our exports and higher costs of imports. Some, like India, have decreased their vulnerability by diversifying their export markets as well as sources of imports, including for energy. If some SAARC countries view India, or for that matter China, as regional hegemony to be set off against each other, this will be a futile endeavour. They will be better served in seeing both countries as

among the fastest growing consumer markets in the world. One difference, however, is that the Indian private sector has a bigger relative role than in other BRICS countries, with corporate market capitalisation accounting for about 80% of India's GDP. Economic decisions in India will thus be increasingly taken in the boardrooms of companies and not in government offices.

Without effective trade facilitation measures and in the absence of adequate connectivity, the time and costs of trade within SAARC countries will remain among the highest in the world. Without better road, railways, river and power connectivity, regional cooperation within SAARC will continue to languish. Pipeline connectivity could, with the passage of years, become increasingly uncompetitive, given the relatively faster global growth of the trade in liquefied natural gas and potential large-scale exploitation of shale gas. *Quid pro quo* arrangements providing for transit trade or pipelines in lieu of other concessions will not be sustainable in the longer term.

There is a general sentiment that as the “big brother” in SAARC, India should be magnanimous in its dealings with its smaller neighbours. We have rightly extended duty-free access to our market for least developed countries (LDCs) in SAARC. We should also go more than halfway and not insist on strict reciprocity in dealings with SAARC countries. However, as in personal relationships, gratitude is not a sound basis for relations with any country. It was, in fact, a recurring refrain of resentment during my stay in Bangladesh in the 1970s. Unilateral gestures of goodwill are also not always advisable. During a private meeting with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in the late 1980s, I had sounded her out about a unilateral Indian initiative for visa-free travel of Pakistanis to India, in view of strong Pakistani reservations about a reciprocal bilateral agreement in this regard. She had wisely counselled against any such initiative which would be seen as patronising. Ultimately, we agreed through official channels to visa-free travel, under the framework of SAARC, with such restricted categories of eligibility that it had no public impact at all.

In this perspective, the most resilient relationships will be those based on mutual respect and mutual benefit with a tilt towards somewhat greater benefit to our smaller neighbours. GH

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