



## MODI'S VISIT TO SAARC COUNTRIES AND NEW DIMENSIONS IN THE INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on significant developments as new dimensions in the member countries of South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) due to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. With extending his invitation to the heads of SAARC countries for their presence in his swearing in ceremony as Prime Minister, he stated that it was the most important foreign policy initiative taken by the new government. Following to his statement, he began his foreign visits through Himalayan Kingdom Bhutan. In his visits to SAARC Countries he attempted to reset the bilateral relations and discussed the issues relating to strategic, security, science and technology, education, culture and some other areas. He emphasized the regional co-operation for the mutual development in South Asian region, which paves the way for new dimension in the Indian Foreign Policy.*

*The study examines the collective progress of neighbouring countries specially SAARC members with the mutual efforts of the nations based on democratic principles. The secondary data for study sources are collected through books, magazines, periodicals and newspapers.*

**Keywords:** Co-operation, bilateral, mutual understanding, development, dimension.

## **Introduction**

The Foreign Policy of a Country is determined by the major factors i.e., national interests, geo-political situations of the region, relations with the neighbours and international political environment. A valid and effective foreign policy serves two major goals, firstly national interests, secondly, enlightened global concerns like peace, co-existence of nations, world economic development, human rights and justice for everyone and for all the countries. Pandith Jawaharlal Nehru observed “the countries of Asia, however weak they might be do not propose to be ignored, do not propose to be by-passed and certainly do not propose to be sat upon”. These lines highlighted that no nation is spared in the world politics.

In the Indian Foreign Policy global and regional preferences are rooted significantly. The fundamental principles of the foreign policy is comprised world nations relations in general and neighbour countries relations in particular, while the regional peaceful co-existence leads to achieve progress. India and her neighbouring countries decides to solve their common problems mutually, as a result South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) came into exist on 1985. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said “As regional co-operation progresses, new tasks will untold themselves, bringing in new problems, let us not be daunted. Our very co-operation will increase our capacity to withstand pressures with unity we can hope to move ahead to a future of freedom, peace and property”.

SAARC’s stable workings shifts the focus from needless confrontations, arms race, mistrust and misperception to an attitude of accommodation, mutual help and fraternal ties of goodwill between the countries of South Asia. Like Europe, South Asia also moved towards prosperity with cooperation. The main aim of SAARC is to embark on a programme of comprehensive economic cooperation by buildings a dynamic South Asian Community endowed as it is with natural resources, skilled manpower and continental market.

With the same goal the Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the heads of the member countries of SAARC, when he was sworn in as 15<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of India, Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Nawaz Shariff, President of Srilanka Mr. Mahinda Rajepaksha, President of Afghanistan Dr. Hamid Karzai, Prime Minister of Bhutan Tshering Tobgay, Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Sushil Koirala, President of Maldieves Mr. Abdulla Yameen and Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament Shirin Chowdhari were present. Bangladesh Prime

Minister Sheik Hasina was conspicuous by her absence because she was on official visit to Japan at that time.

Modi expressed his concern to achieve significant regional cooperation and bilateral relationship with SAARC countries and rest of the world in his new Government agenda's priority.

## **Modi's visit to SAARC Countries**

### **Bhutan**

In his first visit to abroad Prime Minister Modi landed in Himalayan kingdom Bhutanese capital Thimphu on June 15, 2014. He called on King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck and held talks with premier Tshering Tobgay. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, National Security Advisor Ajith Dhoval and Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh were in his team. He assured Bhutan that India was committed to its happiness and progress. Referring to Bhutanese unique trait of laying thrust on the Gross National Happiness (GNH) rather than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), he said that one of the parameters for measuring this could be the consideration that it had a neighbor like India.

In his address at the joint session of the Bhutanese parliament, he underlined the special relationship of both nations based on age old cultural similarities. Also appreciated Bhutanese Democracy was showing signs of maturity within a short period of seven years and their role in controlling global warming. Inaugurating Bhutanese Supreme Court Complex in the capital he announced to doubling of scholarships for Bhutanese students in India. Digital library to provide access to two million books for young people. He declared the relation with Bhutan would be a key foreign policy priority of his Government and concluded his extremely successful first foreign visit to Bhutan with a message to neighbouring countries that a strong and prosperous India was in their interest.

As a SAARC member country Bhutan promised not to allow its territory to be used against India as assurance that comes against the back drop of militants from the northeast taking shelter there. In the joint statement both countries decided to scale up their ties that cover security interest and cooperation in a wide variety of fields.

## **Nepal**

Modi visited Nepal on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2014, in his two days visit he addressed the Nepalese constituent assembly. He described himself as a good friend of Nepal with highest priority.

He announced \$1 billion as concessional line of credit for the development of land baked country endowed with rich hydropower potential and various development purposes. He is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the country in 17 years. This visit was significant in many ways, emphasized the need of mutual cooperation in various fields. Many agreements signed by the both countries preferred the implementation of the pending projects. Modi advised Nepal Prime Minister Mr. Sushil Koiral to have constitution as early as possible. Nepalese Mao leader Prachanda described the visit as a major and significant step to give permanent solution to border dispute and other issues.

## **Srilanka**

During the three nations tour (Seychelles, Mauritius, Sri Lanka) of Prime Minister Modi on March 13 and 14, 2015, he visited Sri Lanka. His visit was the first stand alone Prime Ministerial visit to the island nation since 1987. He held talks with President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ronil Wickremasingha, on March 13, 2015, countries sign four pacts on visa customs, youth development and buildings Rabindranath Tagore memorial in Sri Lanka, both the leaders have discussed on bilateral ties and issues of regional importance. Prime Minister Modi expressed the India's readiness to help Trincomalee become a petroleum hub, by providing a fresh line of credit for the railway sector in Sri Lanka. Also Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka have agreed to enter into a currency swap agreement of \$1.5 billion to help keep the Sri Lankan rupee stable.

When he was addressing the Sri Lanka parliament he emphasises the India's stand to support Sri Lankan efforts to build a future that accommodates the aspirations of all sections of society including Sri Lankan Tamil Community for a life of equality, justice, peace and dignity in United Sri Lanka. He also pointed out the India's 50,000 houses reconstruction work in the Tamil dominated northern parts for war ravaged people.

Prime Minister Modi was handover the 27000 new houses to Tamils in war torn Jaffna, built with the assistance of India as part of India's efforts to help in the reconciliation process. He was also flagged off the train services at the north-western Sri Lankan town of

Talaimannar the closest point to India. He offered prayer to sacred Mahabodhi tree in Anuradhapura as part of his visit.

## **Bangladesh**

Prime Minister Modi was on a state visit to Bangladesh on June 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015. In his historic visit towards improving ties, India and Bangladesh exchanged the instruments of ratification of Land Boundary Agreement (LBA). On June 6, 2015, promising an end to the stateless existence of more than 50,000 in 162 enclaves on both sides of the border. The deal signed in 1974, entered the process of implementation after parliament ratified it in May 2015. Foreign Secretary S. Jayashankar and his Bangladesh Counter part M. Shashidul Heque signed the documents and exchanged the modalities for implementing the deal.

Both the countries signed 22 agreements and memorandum of understanding on economic cooperation, trade and investment, security, infrastructure development, education, science and technology and culture. Earlier Prime Minister Modi, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Mamatha Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal flogged off the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agarthala and the Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati bus services in a gesture of connecting lands, binding hearts of both nations. Both leaders expressed in a joint statement ‘people-to-people contact is the strongest of our links’ Prime Minister Hasina, in a statement “reflects our growing mutual confidence and shared commitment to expand our relationship”. They also agreed to set up Indian Special Economic Zones in Mongla and Blaramara .

During his visit Modi paid homage to countries founding father ‘Banga Bandhu’ Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehaman and called ‘an icon of democracy and a great friend of India’. He received the ‘Award of Liberation war Honour’ on behalf of the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Even the hard time Jamt-e-Islami of Bangladesh felt compelled to welcome Modi’s visit, its leader Maqbul Ahmed said it welcome the visit whole heartedly’, which symbolizes the Modi’s successful visit.

## **Afghanistan**

Prime Minister Modi visited Afghanistan on 25<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2015. He inaugurated new parliament complex of Afghanistan. In his speech to the Afghanistan parliament called for greater regional cooperation to help the war ravaged country get back on its feet. When Afghanistan becomes a heaven of peace and hub for the flow of ideas, commerce, energy and investment in the region, it will paves the way for all prosper together and hoped that Pakistan will become the bridge between South Asia and Afghanistan and beyond. He also

tried to allay fears that India was engaged in proxy war with Pakistan in Afghanistan. In his speech he said India was in Afghanistan to contribute not to compete.

Both the leaders, Prime Minister Modi and President Ashraf Ghani discussed on bilateral issues. They have also inaugurated 'Atal Block' in the parliament complex to mark the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's effort to its plan approval for construction, when he was in the power but foundation was laid by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

## **Conclusion**

With giving high priority to regional cooperation and bilateral relations with SAARC countries, Modi aimed at to reset the prosperity in the South Asian region. He began his foreign visit from Bhutan, inaugurated Supreme Court Complex, announced scholarships and appreciated the Bhutanese development parameter of GNH. In his Nepalese parliament address he declared himself as Nepal's good friend and addressed to have constitution as a democratic country as early as possible. At the end of three nations tour, he visited Sri Lanka, importantly he console the people of war-torn Jeffna by handover the houses built by India's assistance. When he was in Bangladesh exchanged the instruments of ratification of LBA, flogging of Bus services were historic. As a gesture of democratic principle he inaugurated parliament complex in Afghanistan. There are all enriches the ethos of Foreign Policy of India with new dimensions. During his return to India Modi gave surprise visit to Pakistan and wish his counterpart Prime Minister Nawaz Shariff on his birthday. The sudden diplomatic turn around by Modi on Pakistan has come as a pleasant surprise to foreign policy analysts. Formal visit to Pakistan and Maldives are ahead as part of his foreign policy initiatives.

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