

Unit 2. India's Bilateral Issues With SAARC Countries - A Quick Look



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation of SAARC leaders for his swearing ceremony and bilateral meetings with each of its leaders was unprecedented. The act not only highlighted the importance of SAARC for regional co-operation, but also portrayed India as the Big Brother in the group. Having said that, India is not devoid of bilateral issues with her neighbors. There are matters of conflict and mutual interest between neighbors, and it is essential to know the major areas in bilateral relations. Though the meetings on May 27, 2014 was more or less courtesy meetings after the swearing ceremony, we have certain takeaways from them. Let's have a quick look at the important areas discussed by our PM with the SAARC leaders.

About SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and geopolitical cooperation among eight member nations that are primarily located in South Asia continent. Eight member countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its secretariat is headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal.

India – Afghanistan : Highlights

- In his meeting with President Karzai of Afghanistan, PM thanked Afghanistan for the assistance provided by the Afghan National Security Forces in repelling the attack on our Consulate in Herat. He said that the attack only strengthened our resolve to work together with Afghanistan.
- He reiterated India's commitment to the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan and India's interest in seeing a prosperous, independent and sovereign Afghanistan where the reconciliation process would be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled.

India – Bhutan : Highlights

- In his meeting with Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay of Bhutan, PM conveyed his warm greetings and respects to His Majesty the King of Bhutan. He noted that

India and Bhutan share a unique and special relationship with longstanding historical and cultural linkages.

- He assured PM Tobgay of India's unflinching support for Bhutan's socioeconomic development.
- The two Prime Ministers agreed to commence four new joint venture hydroelectric projects with a generating capacity of 2120 MW in Bhutan.
- They affirmed their mutual security interests and agreed to closely coordinate and cooperate on issues relating to their national interest.

India – Maldives : Highlights

- Prime Minister conveyed to President Abdulla Yameen of Maldives the high importance attached by India to its relations with the Maldives, and pledged to work towards further enhancing bilateral cooperation.
- Prime Minister noted that the two countries had a shared recognition that the security interests of both countries were interlinked, and agreed that each side would continue to be sensitive to the concerns of the other on the issue, and that their respective territories would not be allowed to be used by any quarter for any activity inimical to the other.
- It was agreed to take measures to further strengthen investment and trade cooperation as well as cooperation in projects that would strengthen regional and sub-regional transport and connectivity to mutual advantage.
- Prime Minister expressed government's support to cooperation in the petroleum and natural gas sector particularly in oil exploration as well as in the tourism and educational sectors.

India – Nepal : Highlights

- In his meeting with Prime Minister Sushil Koirala of Nepal, PM noted that Nepal was an old and deeply valued friend with whom India shared history, geography and ancient civilisational ties, and it was his earnest desire to visit Nepal this year.
- Prime Minister expressed his appreciation for the political progress achieved in Nepal and conveyed his sincere hope that the Constitution would be adopted in the one-year timeframe that Nepal had set for itself.
- He expressed his determination to further strengthen connectivity and economic inter-linkages between India and Nepal, including through projects for rail and road connectivity. PM stressed the importance of expediting implementation of these projects and particularly projects in the hydropower and transmission sectors.
- He thanked Nepal for the ongoing security cooperation between law enforcement agencies on both sides which both sides are resolved to strengthen even further.



India – Sri Lanka : Highlights

- In his meeting with President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka, PM noted that India valued its relations with Sri Lanka.
- He requested the government of Sri Lanka to expedite the process of national reconciliation in a manner that meets the aspirations of the Tamil community for a life of equality, justice, peace and dignity in a united Sri Lanka. Early and full implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment and going beyond would contribute to this process.
- They also discussed the fishermen's issue, India's development assistance programme, and economic and commercial cooperation.
- In particular, PM expressed interest in early launch of the 500 MW Sampur Coal Power project and greater connectivity between the two countries.
- Both leaders reiterated their desire to further strengthen bilateral relations.

India – Pakistan : Highlights

- In the meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan, PM underlined our concerns relating to terrorism.
- It was conveyed that Pakistan must abide by its commitment to prevent its territory and territory under its control from being used for terrorism against India.
- We also expect that necessary steps will be taken in the Mumbai terror attack trial underway in Pakistan to ensure speedy progress of the case and the conviction of those responsible.
- The PMs agreed that the Foreign Secretaries will remain in touch and explore how to move forward.
- PM said that the two countries could move immediately towards full trade normalisation on the basis of the September 2012 roadmap.
- PM expressed his hope that India-Pakistan relations would progress in the economic, cultural and political fields in the same manner that India's relations with her other SAARC neighbours have progressed in recent years.

- He shared his vision of a SAARC region built on partnerships for development and mutual prosperity.

India – Bangladesh : Highlights

- Prime Minister requested Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to convey his warm greetings and best wishes to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, and said that he looked forward to receiving her in India at an early date.
- He recalled our strong relations rooted in shared struggle, history, culture and language.
- He noted that we have shared stakes in each other's progress and prosperity and Bangladesh was India's largest trading partner in SAARC.
- He appreciated the cooperation extended by Bangladesh to work together with India in all areas of mutual interest including security, power, border management, rail and road transport.
- He expressed the commitment of Government of India in maintaining and building upon the momentum that has characterised India-Bangladesh relations in recent years.

India – Mauritius : Highlights [Outside SAARC]

- Prime Minister has called the special and unique relationship between India and Mauritius in his meeting with Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam of Mauritius.
- He noted that the two countries are bound together by history, common ancestry and kinship of their people.
- Both leaders agreed to further strengthen the relationship, especially economic cooperation and interactions in the field of maritime security, renewable energy, and the blue-economy, including development of related infrastructure.
- They also agreed to work together with all other member countries in further strengthening the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Exercises left out for readers!

From the UPSC exam point of view, questions related to foreign affairs can be asked in Prelims, Mains or Interview, though the area is more important for the last 2 stages of the exam. In order to equip candidates to face the UPSC requirements, ClearIAS.com is leaving some questions open for discussion in the comment section. Our readers can post on those topics/questions as comments below.

1. Name India's largest trading partner in SAARC. (Prelims)
2. Explain Teesta Water Sharing Issue. (Mains)
3. Analyse the Thirteenth Amendment and significance of that in India-Sri Lanka relations. (Mains)
4. With which neighbouring country of India is Sampur Coal Power project is associated? (Prelims)
5. Non-Discriminatory (Non- Differentiated) Market Access (NDMA) vs Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status : An analysis based on India-Pak trade relations. (Mains)



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