



India's neighbourhood strategy

What is the issue?

\n\n

India needs to have a coherent and long-term vision for the neighbourhood to work towards South Asian integration.

\n\n

What are the prevailing concerns?

\n\n

\n

- India is one of the world's least regionally-integrated major powers with the absence of a coherent and well-planned regional policy.

\n

- India was accused of interfering with the Constitution-making process in Nepal in 2015 and also trying to influence recent electoral outcomes in Sri Lanka.

\n

- On the Rohingya refugees, India's approach goes against its traditional practice and it also suffer from lack of a refugee policy.

\n

- Also, the relationship with Pakistan continues to be testy and directionless.

\n

- India also has a long record of not following up on its promises to its neighbours.

\n

- India, thus, needs to have a coherent and consistent strategy to deal in its neighbourhood.

\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n

- South Asia is the least integrated region in the world because of the weak economic linkages among the countries of the region.

\n

- **Regional Trade** - India needs to frame better regional trading arrangements.

\n

- The long 'sensitive lists' maintained by South Asian countries are a major impediment in the implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

\n

- Each member country has a 'sensitive list' on goods that are exempt from tariff concessions (not eligible for lower import tariffs).

\n

- These sensitive lists remain long and hence India should persuade its neighbours to reduce the number of items on such lists.

\n

- **Soft power** - In the case of regional infrastructure projects, China is at a clear advantage than India.

\n

- Hence India must invest where China falls short, especially at the level of institution-building and in soft power promotion.

\n

- India could expand the scope and work of the South Asian University (SAU), including by providing a proper campus and ensuring that its students get research visas to India without much hassle.

\n

- If properly utilised, the SAU can become a point for regional integration.

\n

- **Focussing on Border states** - Several of India's border States have the capacity to engage in trading arrangements with neighbouring countries.

\n

- This should be made easier by the government by way of constructing border infrastructure and easing restrictions on such border trade.

\n

- **Multilateral engagements** - India prefers bilateral engagements in the region rather than deal with neighbours on multilateral forums.

\n

- However, there should be more attempts at forging multilateral arrangements, including by resurrecting the SAARC.

\n

- India should also look at other possible areas of convergence, including counter terrorism, regional trade and infrastructure development in the multilateral fora.

- \n
- This would help India to have a coherent and long-term vision for its neighbourhood.
- \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

\n



IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative