

Modi's Neighborhood First Policy: Security Implications for Bangladesh

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Abstract: The paper attempts to explore the security implications for Bangladesh with India's 'neighborhood first' policy which will be examined by following key questions like whether the euphoria which was created by Indian 15th Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflects any changes in India's South Asian foreign policy. How the new government of India will treat its immediate neighbors in general and Bangladesh in particular? What are the ramifications of this change of leadership in the South Asian political landscape in future? The dynamics of India's South Asian neighborhood policy along with policies under various regimes are discussed in the second section. Recent developments followed by the accession to the new government in India are outlined in the third section. The fourth section presents ramifications for Bangladesh. Section five is the conclusion of the paper. The analysis discloses that although the way new government deals with neighbors may indicate changes, the overall objective management of India's regional relations is unlikely to deviate much.

Key words: Neighborhood, India, Bangladesh, Security

1. Introduction

Accession to power of the 15th premier of India, Narendra Modi – a Hindu nationalist, is a remarkable event and it has critical importance for global politics in general and South Asia in particular. With his leadership Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) historic landslide victory in Indian national election of 2014 dumbfounded the world. The margin with which BJP has achieved the right to lead the Indian nation is colossal; earning the party a straight majority in parliament in course of thirty years of history.¹ Nearly after being elected as Prime Minister, inviting South Asian leaders to oath-taking ceremony at presidential palace, Modi has set an extra ordinary example in the political landscape of South Asia. It has been perceived as a new voyage in the dwindling discourse of South Asian politics which gave the new Indian government a privilege to create a congenial ambiance of faith targeted to go beyond the historic records of mistrust by offering an early nod of mutual dealings. South Asian leaders in the neighboring countries responded to this offering of new Indian government very genially which is obviously a good sign of zeal of the parties in the region towards teamwork in the area of persistent issues. Prime Minister Modi has chosen Bhutan and Nepal for his first foreign trips adding more enthusiasm to the euphoria which was created by Modi's early conducts during election campaign. 'Neighborhood first' approach of Indian new government amplify both anticipations and trepidations over how the new government is going to deal with its neighbors. The uneasiness, however, resulted from the fear of escalation in communal violence and the probability of adoption of a hawkish policy by the new government.

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Foregoing context raises the questions like; does this euphoria created by the early conducts reflect changes in the neighborhood policy of India? How the new government will treat its immediate neighbors particularly Bangladesh? And, what are the ramifications of this change of leadership in the South Asian political landscape in the coming days? This paper tries to analyze the early indications of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and finds out the new government's policy priorities in the neighborhood. Geographically, India's neighborhood comprises of the countries with which it shares borders: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. However, analysis in this paper limits its focus within India's South Asian neighbors in general and Bangladesh in particular and excludes analysis of India's policy towards China and Myanmar.

The paper is based predominantly on secondary sources and proceeds as follows. Dynamics of India's South Asian neighborhood along with policies under various regimes are discussed in the second section. Recent developments followed by the accession of the new government in India are outlined in the third section. The fourth section presents ramifications for Bangladesh. Section five is the conclusion of the paper.

2. Comprehending India's "Neighborhood" Policy

To gauge the India's compound neighborhood policy and understand the aims and objectives of new Indian leadership, it requires to know how the region has been perceived by India. Consequently, following discussion looks into the dynamics of India's South Asian neighborhood and the history of conduct and key elements of India's neighborhood first policy under different regimes.

2.1 What is Neighborhood Policy?

Like other country India also designed its foreign policy and neighborhood policy that traces its root to the notion of "a country cannot choose its neighbors"; therefore, what a country can do is to adjust and modify its policy revolving neighborhood and surrounding environment². Neighborhood is the foremost consideration of any foreign policy as it is the point where domestic affairs overlap external affairs directly³. Consequently, positive gesture in the policy for neighborhood has been appreciated in history of international relations of independent nations. Franklin D. Roosevelt has been pioneer in advocating 'Good Neighbor Policy' while attending in the Pan American Conference in 1936⁴. Attempt to build up an accommodating neighborhood has been observed in the European Union as well. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is hitherto a pioneer of its kind in the neighborhood policy discourse which aims to avoid dividing lines with its neighbors⁵.

Defining neighborhood is critical because it not only rests on geographical or political factors but it also has social and cultural underpinnings. As a term, 'neighbor', which is of West Germanic origin, combines two words, 'near' and 'dweller'⁶, i.e., someone who dwells nearby. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the term 'neighbor' is measured as a fellow, an associate or a beneficiary. This gives a positive connotation of the expression. However, in some other, like post-communist spaces where Slavic mores dominate,

'neighbor' is explained as a stranger of foreigner. The Russian word for 'neighbor' entails a person who enters another's private space without legitimate authority. Thereby, it has negative connotation of the same expression. There emerges the inherent ambiguity of 'neighbor' as put forward by Chattopadhyay, "the neighborhood is a space lodged in between the safe inside of friends and threatening outside of enemies"⁷. Thus, a neighborhood is not limited to territory only; it is also about 'numerous and diverse individuals' and their 'social constructions' who are neither well-known nor a total strangers⁸. This understanding of neighborhood is critical to figure out the dynamics of South Asian region.

2.2 Modi's "Neighborhood First policy" Approach

One of the major policy initiatives taken by Modi government is to focus back on its immediate neighbors in South Asia. Even before becoming the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi hinted that his foreign policy will actively focus on improving ties with India's immediate neighbors which is being termed as neighborhood first policy in the media⁹ and he started well by inviting all heads of state/heads of government of South Asian countries in his inauguration and on the second day on office he held bilateral talks with all of them individually which was dubbed as a mini SAARC summit by political analysts¹⁰. It asserted that "political stability, progress and peace in the region are essential for south Asia's growth and development" and promised that the government would "pursue friendly relations" in the neighborhood and "work towards strengthening Regional forums like SAARC".¹¹

Neighborhood is the focal point of Modi's foreign policy¹² which means that stronger relationship with neighbor than that of any previous government.¹³ He clarified his stance on "neighborhood first policy" saying that "Indian foreign policy has many facets, but I want to focus our relations with our neighbors" in his address to the nation on India's Independence Day, 2014¹⁴. Modi's "neighborhood first" approach, however, encompasses more than South Asia and follows a "proactive foreign policy" in the extended neighborhood. It aims not just to react to events unfolding in Asia but to shape them. Modi has developed personal relationships via high-level visits—24 of his 37 trips through 2015 were to Asian countries; for Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj the numbers were 21 of 28. Visits have been followed by proposals for cooperation in areas of mutual interest in the economic and strategic domains.¹⁵

He has made state visits to Bhutan and Nepal within the first one-hundred days of his government. Sushma Swaraj, too, kept, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal among top of her travel itineraries as foreign minister. Later during a launch event at ISRO he has asked Indian scientists to take the endeavor to develop a dedicated SAARC Satellite to share the fruits of the technology like telemedicine, e-learning etc. It was important for Narendra Modi to start off on a positive note with neighbors since he is seen somewhat of a hardliner on security and foreign policy issues and his rise, predicted much before the election results were out, had created apprehension if not outright insecurity in the neighborhood¹⁶.

2.3 India's South Asian 'Neighborhood': Determinant Factors

India's neighborhood policy –which is extension of Indian foreign policy – is inspired by Kautilyan Mandala theory (circle of the states) which argues that immediate neighbors are considered to be natural enemy and neighbor's neighbor is the ally¹⁷. Although India hopes to be surrounded by a group of friends; its foreign policy motivation indicates that neighbor of India is considered by her as enemy¹⁸. Yet not officially declared, the term 'Indian Neighborhood Policy' could be used to refer to various policy propositions and statement of different Indian regimes concerning India's immediate neighbors providing expression of neighborhood policy¹⁹. Reaffirming significance of India's South Asian neighborhood, many scholars and political leaders have expressed their concern. S. D. Muni, a former Indian ambassador, noted that "achieving the objective of becoming one of the principal powers of Asia will depend entirely on India's ability to manage its own immediate neighborhood"²⁰. C. Raja Mohan, a leading Indian scholar, observed that without enduring primacy in one's own neighborhood, no nation can become a credible power on the global stage²¹. Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee also acknowledged that friends can change but not neighbors who have to live together. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2010 noted that "we cannot realize our growth ambitions unless we ensure peace and stability in South Asia". Such statements substantiate the prominence of South Asian region in India's policy planning²².

Despite the facts that the region bears great significance for India, she cannot uphold relations up to expectation with her neighbors. Among other crucial issues, power disparity between India and her neighbors and geographical size add to mistrust and suspicion undermining affable neighborhood relations²³. In contrast, India's anxiety is if the smaller neighbors will take 'free ride' on its resources in the plea of collaboration and cooperation. Maintaining and deepening their relations with extra-regional powers these smaller neighbors counterbalance India's influence in the region; which further damage the relation more. This appears to India as attempts of smaller neighbors to gang up against the larger neighbor. Another factor which adds hurdles to this complex security landscape is fright of India's Akhand Bharat (united India) policy, where India will take the control of critical issues like security. For smaller countries, multilateralism is comfortable platform in settling the issues, where as India insists bilateral mechanism²⁴. Accordingly, India failed to achieve its envisaged regional leadership.

These complex dynamics undermines the neighborhood networks of South Asian region. For India, the crucial challenge is to get over the anti-Indian sentiment prevailing in its strategic neighborhood. For the neighbor countries, the challenge is to keep Indian 'hegemony' to a minimum. This dynamics of South Asia lies at the heart of the hearth of the complexity of the region²⁵.

3. New Government in the Office and Recent Developments

With a landslide victory in the general election of 2014, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by BJP has assumed the office in India. The government is headed by Narendra Modi who is both disputed for his alleged role in communal riots of Gujarat in 2002 and renowned for marvelous leadership as chief minister for economic

development²⁶. It's his leadership charisma which was the deriving factors leading Indians to choose BJP as ruling party²⁷. Unexpected overwhelming victory and his proved strategy with respect to economic development magically changed the mind of one million plus²⁸. Additionally, his earlier gesture revolving election campaign and oath-taking ceremony is fairly mesmeric for South Asian neighbors.

In election manifesto, BJP outlined its foreign policy marking economy in priority. It reads, "We will engage proactively on our own with countries in the neighborhood and beyond and create a web of allies to mutually further our interests"²⁹. The manifesto of BJP also made pledges to reinforce regional forum like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and insisted on regional cooperation and connectivity. This can be considered as a portent of the new government's reverence for neighboring countries' contemplations³⁰. In his Independence Day Speech on August 15, 2015, Modi reaffirmed his governmental pledges to work together for economic development with immediate neighbors. Responding positively to the invitation in the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi South Asian neighbors gave a cogent signal of what they expect from their larger neighbor.

The swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi was a crucial indication of the Indian government's intentions to bolster relations with countries of South Asian region. It was a signal that India is willing to look towards its immediate neighbors through a new lens in order to bring it back on track. By inviting leaders from all South Asian countries, the Prime Minister has given an ample clue to the global community of his priorities of neighborhood. On the other side, acceptance of invitation is another cogent signal of what the South Asian neighbors expect from India, i.e., a more responsible role and a break away from its hegemonic attitude. Narendra Modi had maintained the momentum of 'swearing-in diplomacy'³¹ by follow up visits that reconfirmed the determination of commitment. In June 2014, Indian External Affairs Minister had also chaired a meeting of India's top envoys from neighboring countries to maintain the momentum and strengthen bilateral ties³².

In his first foreign visit to Bhutan, stressing 'special relation' between the two neighbors, Modi called Bhutan as natural choice. The trip was highlighted by commitment of cooperation in hydropower, trade and commerce, scholarship for Bhutanese students and in extensive economic development³³.

Modi's second visit to Nepal was termed as a 'historic' one as he offered \$ 1 billion for infrastructure development, delivered speech in Nepali parliament and met opposition; where cooperation, connectivity, culture and constitution got the priority in discussion³⁴. He also performed a special *puja* (prayer) at the Pashupatinath temple that demonstrated his prudence to uphold the cultural bonds sharing both countries³⁵. It must also be noted that the new PM's celebration of the religio-cultural affinity between the two nations was a smart move aimed to win the hearts and minds of Nepali people³⁶.

The incumbent government properly choose to visit Dhaka as very strategic neighbor and time tested friend since independence of Bangladesh. Indian external affair minister, Sushama Swaraj as her maiden bilateral visit to Dhaka, met leaders from both government and opposition. Even though, it was a visit by a minister rather than Prime

Minister, it bears great meaning in terms of neighborhood dynamics as she talked to the people of Bangladesh about the vision of new government³⁷. Later, on June 6-7, 2015 Indian Premier Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh which opened a new chapter in India-Bangladesh relation. The visit concluded with signing 22 agreements and an announcement of a fresh line of credit of \$ 2 billion to the neighboring country including on cooperation in maritime safety and to curb human trafficking and fake Indian currency³⁸. The highlight of the Modi's visit to Dhaka was the exchange of document related to the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), which paves the way for exchanging territories to settle the 41- year-old border dispute which has been an irritant.

Visiting Kabul by Sushama Swaraj amidst the Taliban insurgency, political turmoil and 2014 election crisis, India proves that she would be side of her unstable strategic neighbor with given commitment³⁹. This visit at the crucial juncture implied that stability in Kabul would be in the priority list of Delhi. Two times visit (December 25, 2015 and June 4, 2016) to Afghanistan by Indian Prime minister implied the significance of Kabul for Delhi.

During his first visit, Modi inaugurated the Afghan new parliament building that was constructed by India at a cost of USD 90 million⁴⁰. In his address to the Parliament in Afghanistan, indicating new parliament building PM said "It will stand as an enduring symbol of the ties of emotions and values, of affection and aspirations that bind us in a special relationship"⁴¹. Calling India and Afghanistan's friendship antiquated and "bound by a thousand ties"⁴², Ghani acknowledged the India's cooperation for economic development in Afghanistan. Later, PM and President led delegation level talks titled "Deepening India-Afghan friendship" over breakfast at Dilkosha Palace⁴³. Prior to Modi's visit, India delivered three Mi 25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan, in what is seen as a shift in its strategy towards the strife-torn country⁴⁴. Again on June 4, 2016, Modi visited Kabul for second time, proving deep-rooted ties with Afghanistan. He termed the relations between both neighbors as 'timeless friendship'⁴⁵. He also inaugurated the Salma Dam – India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam - which will irrigate 75, 000 hectares of land and generate 42 MW power⁴⁶.

After his visit to Kabul, he has rightly chosen his next visit to Sri Lanka making its historic sign. Following the state visit to India by Sri Lankan president Maithripala Sirisena, Modi's visit to Sri Lanka is the first stand-alone bilateral tour by an Indian Prime Minister since 1987⁴⁷. During his visit Sri Lanka's appreciation on India's development assistance valued at US \$ 1.6 Billion including in areas of housing, transport infrastructure, health, was re-iterated by President Sirisena, Prime Minister Modi in turn expressed India's willingness to extend further cooperation on Sri Lanka's needs. The Indian Premier announced an additional credit line for the railway sector valued at US \$ 318 million. A currency swap worth US \$ 1.5 billion between the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and the Reserve Bank of India was also announced⁴⁸.

It's true that Modi did not have any state visit to Pakistan, but had surprise visit which is a significant sign the icy relationship between the two neighbors is thawing⁴⁹. It was a goodwill visit and the two sides decided to understand each other's reservations and restart the comprehensive dialogue in a positive manner⁵⁰. It was decided that as a part of

the comprehensive dialogue, the foreign secretaries of the two countries will meet in the mid of following January. Two sides consented to collectively work towards the common goal of fighting poverty and increase people to people contact in order to open new avenues for peace and mutual cooperation between the two neighboring countries. Tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbors were high in recent years but relations have begun to improve. Before that visit the pair met briefly in Paris last month on the sidelines of the COP21 climate change conference. Both sides are hopeful to hold comprehensive dialogue again. So it is evident that even though it was an unscheduled sudden visit but it helped melt ice of rigidity.

The incumbent government was very insightful selecting the two immediate Himalayan neighbors for maiden foreign trips. Long-time, the two countries were missing the visits of Indian Heads of State and Government⁵¹. Nevertheless, bilateral relations between the neighbors were smooth and charming. Thus, beginning the journey to woo neighbors with these two countries could not be more productive. Choosing any other neighbor could have added to already held apprehension by other smaller neighbors in the region. The visit to Bangladesh was essential to propel the sentiment that close rapport of Dhaka with the UPA government would not come in way of the new government's priority. Attending Kabul demonstrated that Delhi would not let stand alone its strategic partner Kabul during this transition period. All these developments are decisive to understand the willingness of the incumbent government to put flesh to the electoral promises and to fathom the implications of the new leadership in India for South Asian neighbors.

4. Security Implications for Bangladesh

Security has been a major driving force of India's neighborhood policy⁵². India's relations with Bangladesh have gone through several ups and downs over the past 40 years. Tensions have tended to recur periodically and have not allowed an atmosphere of mutual trust to prevail. At the root of threat to security lies a variety of forces that have become global in scope and more serious in their effects. There is no doubt that Bangladesh has faced immense security challenges with India dates back its independence. It confronted both conventional and non-conventional security challenges from internal as well as external sources. With respect to India, despite an enormous improvement of relations, there are certain issues that continue to keep the two countries wary of each other. The potential transnational threats from India are trans-border terrorism, drug trafficking, border killing, human trafficking, environmental degradation and water sharing crisis that threaten the security of the region in general and Bangladesh in particular.

Geography dictates that the destinies of India and Bangladesh are, and will always remain, inextricably intertwined⁵³. Bangladesh shares over 4,096 Kilometers (km) of a porous land boundary with India of which 6.5 km are yet to be demarcated⁵⁴. All these areas remain undemarcated because of differing technical positions taken by India-Bangladesh⁵⁵; which might exceedingly be prone to criminal activities. Additionally, the river borders pose a different kind of problems because the shifting river routes, soil erosion or frequent floods make it difficult to demarcate borders. The porous nature of the land and maritime border are congenial to extensive smuggling activities between the

two countries⁵⁶. Both Prime Ministers visits to each other country and signing a good number of agreements and MoUs are surely a milestone for bilateral relations but many security issues are yet to be addressed.

The killing of Bangladeshi nationals by Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) has become most irritant between the two countries. India-Bangladesh border is probably the most vulnerable and bloodiest border in the world⁵⁷. It has evoked strong public sentiments and acrimonies in Bangladeshi people. The violence is routine and arbitrary in the border line of India and Bangladesh. Indian officials – particularly BSF personnel - endorse shooting people who attempt to cross the border illegally, even if they are unarmed⁵⁸. BSF has carried out a shoot-to-kill policy– even on unarmed local villagers. The toll has been huge. Over the past 10 years Indian security forces have killed almost 1,000 people, mostly Bangladeshis, turning the border area into a south Asian killing fields⁵⁹. Apart from the killing innocent and unarmed Bangladeshi people, there are various kinds of atrocities – abduction, rape, missing, injury and looting – in the border line of the two neighbors (see table: 1). For last sixteen years, the border line has badly been marked and became headline in the media for killing of 112, injuring 1027, abducting 1329, missing 111, rape 15 people and 157 snatching/looting case⁶⁰.

Table-1: Atrocities by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) against Bangladeshi Citizens January 1, 2000 - February 2017⁶¹.

Years (s)	Killed	Injured	*Abducted	Missing	Rape	Snatching/ Looting
2017 (Jan-Feb)	4	12	6	0	0	0
2016	29	36	22	0	0	0
2015	44	60	27	1	0	0
2014	35	68	99	2	0	0
2013	29	79	127	0	1	77
2012	38	100	74	1	0	9
2011	31	62	23	0	0	0
2010	74	72	43	2	0	1
2009	98	77	25	13	1	1
2008	61	46	81	0	0	3
2007	118	82	92	9	3	5
2006	155	121	160	32	2	9
2005	88	53	78	14	3	4
2004	72	30	73	0	0	5
2003	27	41	120	7	2	8
2002	94	42	118	30	0	12
2001	84	29	55	0	1	10
2000	31	17	106	0	2	13
Grand Total	1112	1027	1329	111	15	157

Source: Odhikar - 2017

No one has been prosecuted for any of these killings, in spite of evidence in many cases that makes it clear the killings were in cold blood against unarmed and defenseless local residents. Rather in that case BSF claimed self-defense. Individuals were illegally entering Indian Territory, often at night, they were "not innocent" and therefore were a legitimate target. Bangladeshi border officials have also suggested that such killings are acceptable if the victim was engaged in smuggling⁶². Unlike officials of both country's security force, Bangladeshi people do not receive it so easy. The barbed wire fence and "shoot-to-kill" policy may not make good friend; rather it incurs revulsion and animosity amidst the Bangladeshi nationals⁶³.

Four Indian northeastern states of Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Assam share 1,880-km border with Bangladesh⁶⁴. The border area between India and Bangladesh is heavily populated and acutely poor. Illegal cross-border activities, such as cattle-rustling, illegal immigrants and trafficking in persons and narcotics, have flourished. The mountainous terrain, dense forests and other hindrances make the unfenced borders porous and vulnerable for cross border illegal activities without any hurdle. Statistics of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB)-2012 demonstrates that BGB seized different types of smuggled items valued BDT 5925933039; of them, the items of valued BDT 5603237789 was incoming, and outgoing was BDT 322695609⁶⁵. Some 27 674 cases was filed in connection with smuggling. 1849 smuggler were arrested. The statistics also shows that 405 women and children were rescued during trafficking in 2012. Of them 301 were women and 104 were children. 10 human trafficker have been detained during the incidents. In the same year, 605455 bottles of *phensedyl*, 126652 liters of wine, 76678 liters of *chulai mod*, 22634 bottles of bear, 9481 kg of Gaja (Hemp), 33 kg and 302 gram of heroin (see table: 2) have been seized⁶⁶.

Table-2: Smuggling statistics for the year of 2012

Item	Amount
Phensedyl (Cough Syrup)	605455 bottles
Wine	126652 liters
Chulai mod (local wine)	76678 liters
Bear	22634 bottles
Gaja (Hemp)	9481 kg
Heroin	33 kg and 302 gram

Source: Daily Prothom alo, Daily Inqilub, Daily Shongram

Trade deficit is another blemish in Bangladesh-India relations. It has swelled in recent years with import continuously rising while export hitting rock bottom for barriers created on the neighboring market. Currently, Bangladesh has trade deficit of US\$ 5.579 billion with India⁶⁷. It increased almost 4 times last ten years. In 2005-2006 fiscal years, the trade gap between two countries was 1.61 billion dollars. After ten years, however, it reached at 5.579 millions of dollars⁶⁸. Especially in the last five years, it reached its all-time high and reflecting a galloping economic imbalance between the two close neighboring countries⁶⁹. Last 2014-2015 fiscal years, Bangladesh imported 6.5 billion

dollars goods from India at the same time Bangladesh exported to India only 527 million dollars items⁷⁰.

India emerged as one of the largest sources of raw materials for Bangladeshi manufacturing industries, resulting in the import surge. At the same time, Bangladeshi exports hit various non-tariff barriers like products quality to enter the Indian market. Some economists think that India is big country, the trade gap is natural while entrepreneurs think it should be rational. India's market size is 250 billion dollars, but Bangladesh's export there only one percent of six hundred. India exports to Bangladesh more than 250 items. The country's export basket is mainly led by apparel industry while small income is coming from export of agricultural products, frozen fishes, jute and jute goods, leather and leather goods and light engineering items and RMG items. India gave duty free access for readymade garments but surprisingly, Bangladesh still has to face the state and other hidden taxes, and the state taxes are almost 12 percent. Moreover, the Indians buyer payment system is very poor according to industry insiders of RMG sector of Bangladesh⁷¹.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries signed for the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement to develop trade and economic co-operation in 6th January, 2004⁷². Following that agreement, process of removing duties started from 1st July 2006⁷³. But it failed on expectation. That time SAFTA countries made list of sensitive items. India listed 480 items as sensitive for least and non-least developed countries. India marked 868 sensitive items⁷⁴. They banned the sensitive items to import from other countries. India has cut short their sensitive items list for Bangladesh. They made 25 sensitive items on that time. Not only that, India declared 46 Bangladeshi items' duty free market access to India. Country's business leaders and exporters are continuously demanding that India remove non-tariff and para-tariff barriers to help Bangladesh increase its exports to the country to reduce the galloping trade gap between the two next-door neighbors. The lack of initiatives to negotiate different trade-related issues is hindering the export potentiality to India.

Another major challenge is, a bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and India would not be a viable solution because problems arise from outdated regulations in the trade policies, implementation of import policies in Bangladesh and Countervailing Duties (CVD) which is trade import duties imposed under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules to neutralize the negative effects of subsidies⁷⁵. However, there needs to be a level playing ground so that Bangladesh can increase its exports to India without facing tariff and non-tariff barriers. Bangladesh government sources maintain that the Bangladesh government has been trying to solve the concerning issues. Yet the business route is rarely smooth for Bangladeshi businessmen in Indian market of one billion plus population.

With the new Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a Hindu nationalist, renowned for his impressive management of Gujarat's economy as Chief Minister is now the leader of the one billion plus population. New developments, especially inviting all South Asian leaders in Indian Prime Minister's oath-taking ceremony and choosing South Asian Himalayan countries for opening foreign visits, have stirred up exhilaration regarding

possibilities of re-energizing the flagging discourse of South Asian neighborhood. Security and development of North-East India is directly linked with Bangladesh, so is the success of India's 'Look East' and connectivity policies. Bangladesh is a strategic country in the policy propositions of India. It is India's most important neighbor by all considerations -- security, cross-border migration, sharing of common resources⁷⁶.

Modi's visit in his neighboring Bangladesh has been seen as new chapter of India-Bangladesh relations⁷⁷. It was evident that Bangladesh figures prominently in the foreign policy agenda of the new government. During his visit 22 deals have been signed including greater regional connectivity, security and development, bilateral trade, foreign aid, blue economy and maritime cooperation⁷⁸. Definitely, the visit is glaringly marked by signing of Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) ending the contentious bilateral issue that has been lingering since 1974. Among the issues, of course, security is one of the major concerns of two neighbors. MoU on human trafficking, Bangladesh-India coast guards for maritime security and smuggling and circulation of fake currency note have been signed. Prime Minister Hasina's visit to Delhi was also marked by 7 agreements and 15 MoUs ranging from trade and commerce, education, judicial affairs, security to military affairs⁷⁹. Her visit to India was highly marked by defense deals between the two neighbors and drew a mass criticism from various quarters of Bangladesh especially for military agreement. Many security experts, diplomats and others in Bangladesh think the signed agreement would not benefit Bangladesh and could even go against the country's interests⁸⁰. However, bilateral visits of both Prime Ministers and signed deals during their visit create new hope for both nations. The signed agreements and deals will pave the way to work and cooperate each other. Still, the apprehension of Indian invasion in the name of cooperation and collaboration is revolving in the mind of Bangladeshi people. Hence, India has to play major role to create a congenial atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

In the initial days of PM Modi assuming power, there were apprehensions among Bangladeshi political community that relations with India may be strained due to the close rapport of the current administration of Dhaka with the immediate past administration in New Delhi. In addition, in his election speeches, Narendra Modi has been heating up debate on the issues of Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' calling for tighter border controls and denouncing Bangladeshi Muslim migrants⁸¹.

However, the positive approach regarding the bilateral issues including maritime boundary verdict, LBA, trade and commerce, civil and military relations bring Bangladeshi people to a position of relief. Very interestingly, Prime Minister Modi, who earlier opposed the LBA bill in parliament, headed the parliament to pass the bill⁸².

In this context, the incumbent government is anticipated to demonstrate inclination to deal with these issues importance to the regional and sub-regional role of Bangladesh. Since Bangladesh has been very forthcoming to address issues like extremism, terrorism and connectivity hand in hand with India, it is time that India come up to add to the confidence of this strategic neighbor. India's Border Security Force (BSF) is still regularly shooting Bangladeshi nationals, while Bangladeshi exports to India face a multitude of non-tariff barriers. Talks over Teesta Accord are still stalled, though

assurance has been provided to sign the water-sharing treaty soon. However, as evident in the land boundary agreement, bringing all the actors on board is the posture of the new leadership. But no discussion has taken place over this with the West Bengal unit. Therefore, relations between Bangladesh and India would maintain its momentum but implementation of mutual concerns might take a long time.

5. Conclusion

Post-independence India's foreign policy has been defined more by continuity than by change⁸³. Contemporary Indian foreign policy is focused largely on the promotion of economic interests, India's progression to the high table of international relations and enhancing its security within immediate neighborhood⁸⁴. For South Asia, Modi's foreign policy seems rare deviation from India's historic route of external affairs journey. Mr. Modi also emphasize people to people contacts to booster tie with neighbors. His government already shows fervor to retie the loosened connectivity at people's level to realize the shared prosperity. The sense of shared prosperity is also central to enhance the security and promote political reconciliation⁸⁵. The swearing in diplomacy was part of New Delhi's realization that further flexibility is required of India to accommodate neighbors. These short term tactical shifts to bring countries of South Asia in its radar with carrot of economic development and sweetness of 'equal partnership' might also unleash as 'sugar coated hegemony'⁸⁶.

As a close ally, Bangladesh expect more equal respect and honor, mutual trust and generosity from India. To foster the young tree of neighborhood, India has to sidestep route of mistrust, big boss attitude, violence and hegemonic shadow. Rightly maintaining the clause of Gangs treaty by India, fixing just amount of tax for naval and road transit, stop killing Bangladeshi nationals at border, Tista river treaty, reducing huge trade deficit are the pressing issues for Bangladesh. Taking advantages of the neighborhood policy and historic friendly relation between both nations, Bangladesh may resolve these above mentioned pending issues with her neighbor.

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