



Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Unresolved Issues in South-Asia

Introduction

- "Neighbourhood First" has been a cardinal component of India's foreign policy.
- Recurrent political or economic crises in neighbouring countries draw India back into the subcontinent and constrain its ability to deal with larger regional and global issues.
- Unless India manages its periphery well in the subcontinent, its pursuit of a more significant role in the Asian region will remain suboptimal.

Unresolved issues in South Asia

- **Bangladesh:**
 - The rhetoric in India about **illegal Bangladeshi migrants** and their alleged involvement in communal riots has had a negative resonance in the country.
- **Pakistan:**
 - With Pakistan too, India has historical adversity dating back to Independence and Partition and also the four wars.
 - Fuelling separatist tendencies in Kashmir and state sponsored terror attacks (Pulwama, Uri) have led to nonstarter of diplomatic relations.
 - Peace between India and Pakistan is not just good for the two states but for all the nations constituting the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
- **Nepal:**
 - **The Kalapani boundary dispute is a major issue.**

- In 2019, Nepal released a new political map claiming Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh of Uttarakhand and the area of Susta (in Bihar) as part of Nepal's territory.
- **Sri Lanka:**
 - Killing of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is a lingering issue between these two nations.
 - In 2019 and 2020, a total of 284 Indian fishermen were arrested and a total of 53 Indian boats were confiscated by the Sri Lankan authorities.
- The recent political **instability in Pakistan, the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, the 'India Out' campaign in Maldives and China's growing footprint in Nepal** are other major challenges for India.

Way Forward

- **A Revised Foreign & Security Policy:**
 - A strong Indian foreign and **security policy must ascertain that its neighbourhood remains peaceful and stable** and no hostile presence can threaten India's security.
 - The challenge for Indian foreign policy lies in creating effective and enduring incentives for our **neighbours to remain sensitive to India's security interests.**
- **Lesser Interventions:**
 - To deal with the increasing engagement of the smaller neighbours with external partners, India **should not articulate red lines with each country**, as it would invite charges of disrespect of the sovereignty of neighbours.
 - A better way would be to intervene less in the internal political affairs of its neighbours.
- **Taking Advantage of Political Shifts:**
 - The leadership change in Pakistan offers the prospect of **reviving the India-Pakistan engagement.**
 - It is in India's interest to promote regional economic integration, and SAARC is the one important available platform for that purpose.
 - BIMSTEC should not be looked upon as an alternative to SAARC but should pursue it on its own merits.
- **Cross-Border Connectivity:**
 - India requires efficient cross-border connectivity **both in terms of infrastructure and procedures** to allow the smooth and **seamless transit of goods and peoples.**
- **Transportation:**
 - **India should develop its role as the partner of choice** for trade and transportation.
 - We need a much deeper engagement beyond government, at the level of civil society, even at very localised levels between India and its neighbours.
 - Only then we will be able to act in ways that are meaningful to the peoples of the region as a whole.

Conclusion

- India's immediate neighbourhood directly impacts it geopolitically, geo-strategically and geo-economically because of its vicinity.
- Thus, working with them is important for India to rise as a superpower.
- Emphasis must be on sustainable and inclusive development. India's neighbourhood first policy, SAGAR initiative etc. are critical for this.