

# **Modi's South Asian Policy**

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Politics have turned to a incipient page with the advent of new leadership in India. Mr. Modi sweeps majority votes in the 2014 elections, thus establishing as the Prime Minister of India. With new leaders, comes a new policy and new methods to implement them. Mr. Modi's first step, inviting the SAARC nations for the swear in ceremony came as a surprise for the whole world. Ashish Nandy says, South Asian states are accidents of British colonialism. And, they have been unable to overcome the issue of artificially constructed borders. India has been involved in long standing disputes with its neighbours, regarding border and water sharing issues. South Asian regional integration has been stagnant and moribund while all these years due to these issues. Amidst this situation, Modi's invitation to SAARC nations, sends out the message that India will be reviving and leading the regional development of the South Asia as its primary concern. And, amongst all the invitations, an invitation to Pakistan implies Mr. Modi's pacific stance towards Pakistan, which was contrary to the expectation of the world. Various pundits predicted Modi taking a fundamentalist stance for Pakistan, on contrary Modi became the first one to initiate friendly relations. At the ceremony, Modi had brief exchanges with Sharif as also with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Nepal Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom.

But, Modi's South Asian policy doesn't end here, he moved further with space diplomacy. He has asked ISRO to plan and work on a SAARC satellite, which will be a gift from India to the neighbouring states. The enhanced cooperation in space technology will provide an additional dimension to the regional ties and pave the way for tackling the problems of natural calamities and poor connectivity. South Asia is a natural disaster prone area and this satellite seems the need of the hour to tackle these issues and move forward to the development path. Mr. Modi has a multi-dimensional policy for South Asia, not only including the political and economic aspects, but also the environmental issues.

Mr. Modi reinforces his stance on his South Asian Policy, by choosing Bhutan as his first foreign visit as Prime Minister. Bhutan has never been chosen by any of the Indian Prime Minister, as their first foreign destination. But, Modi altered the pattern and invigorate his focus on South Asia. He signed off on deals over a hydro electricity generation and food exports, and he inaugurated the new premises of Bhutan's Supreme Court, built with Indian help. Moreover, during the recent visit, speaking to a joint session of Bhutan Parliament, Modi said, "Terrorism Divides, Tourism Unites," flagging an initiative of combining the northeastern states of India and

Bhutan in a web of development and tourism linkages, also proposing a joint sports festival between India's northeastern states and Bhutan.

Mr. Modi's next destination was Nepal, which has not been visited by any Indian Prime Minister since 1997. His visit fixated on the 4 Cs - cooperation, connectivity, culture and constitution - to enhance bilateral ties. He stressed on the importance of the constitution writing to the Nepalese leadership, including President Ram Baran Yadav and Prime Minister Sushil Koirala. India had yesterday announced USD 1 billion line of credit (LoC) to Nepal. The two sides also agreed to conclude a Power Trade Agreement (PTA) - a framework pact for the commerce and power sector within 45 days.

100 days of Modi rule have made it clear that next five years will be focused on the revitalization of South Asian region. But, it raises one question why South Asia? South Asia is a region with so much potential, but remained divided due to the clashes between states. It is one of those regions where intra regional trade is much lower than the inter regional trade. And, to develop as a state, India must develop its neighbours first or else India will face spill over effects from the neighbouring states as an obstacle to its own development. Secondly, India needs to balance the power of China in the region, which can only be done by the vigorous consolidation of South Asian nation. And, that could be the reason why Mr. Modi chose Bhutan and Nepal as its first destinations. Both Nepal and Bhutan are highly influenced by China, and before it is too late, Modi took a quick step to give a hand to both states in the process their political and economic development. Even though the states are cooperating with Modi's initiative, even Mr. Sharif has reciprocate Modi's gestures for peace, but still state like Bangladesh has not shown much interest. And, this could be depicted by the absence of Bangladeshi Prime Minister from the swear-in Ceremony. Another aspect, which requires Mr. Modi attention to develop the region, is the strengthening of the SAARC secretariat and make it more operational than earlier. It would be intriguing to see what Mr. Modi has in South Asian policy kit for the SAARC Summit, this year.