



## INDIA AND THE NON-WESTERN SPACE: MAPPING INDIA'S POTENTIAL AND POSSIBILITIES IN SOUTH ASIA AND BEYOND

Tanwir Arshed<sup>1</sup>

*Presidency University. India.*

### **Abstract:**

With the dismantling of the Berlin Wall there was a subsequent vocalisation of the end of history thesis, which marked a turning-point in the study of world politics. However, with a gradual transition from a unipolar to an increasingly oligo-polar order, such transformation reconfigured the conventional west-centric conceptions of diplomacy and power balancing within politics amongst nations. Eventually, this generated an alternative discourse in world politics that not only challenges the Eurocentric epistemic within IR, but profoundly foregrounds ways for a normatively oriented, non-western frameworks. In South Asia, India, by virtue of its geostrategic location and enduring civilizational heritage, emerges as a vibrant actor that well aligns within this evolving framework. To substantiate this claim, the paper uses a case-study approach across three distinct non-western spaces, and make an attempt to evaluate three non-security lexicons (cultural & civilizational capital, postcolonial sub-regional engagements, and value-based humanitarian diplomacy) to demonstrate how India is positioned to substantiate its claim for the broader non-Western space.

**Keywords:** Oligopolar world order, global south, history, culture, custom, political heritage.

**Titulo en Español:** *India y el espacio no occidental: Análisis del potencial y las posibilidades de la India en el sur de Asia y más allá.*

### **Resumen:**

*Con la caída del Muro de Berlín se produjo una vocalización posterior de la tesis del fin de la historia, lo que marcó un punto de inflexión en el estudio de la política mundial. Sin embargo, con la transición gradual de un orden unipolar a uno cada vez más oligopolar, dicha transformación reconfiguró las concepciones convencionales centradas en Occidente de la diplomacia y el equilibrio de poder dentro de la política entre naciones. Finalmente, esto generó un discurso alternativo en la política mundial que no solo desafía la epistemología eurocéntrica dentro de las relaciones internacionales, sino que pone profundamente en primer plano las formas de marcos normativos no occidentales. En el sur de Asia, la India, en virtud de su ubicación geoestratégica y su duradero patrimonio civilizatorio, emerge como un actor dinámico que se alinea bien con este marco en evolución. Para fundamentar esta afirmación, el artículo utiliza un enfoque de estudio de caso en tres espacios no occidentales distintos e intenta evaluar tres léxicos no relacionados con la seguridad (capital cultural y civilizatorio, compromisos subregionales poscoloniales y diplomacia humanitaria basada en valores) para demostrar cómo la India está posicionada para fundamentar su reivindicación de un espacio no occidental más amplio.*

**Palabras Clave:** *Orden mundial oligopolar, sur global, historia, cultura, costumbres, herencia política.*

Copyright © UNISCI, 2026.

Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores, y no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI. *The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.*

<sup>1</sup> Tanwir Arshed is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Presidency University.India.

E-mail: <Tanwir.polsc@presiuniv.ac.in >

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31439/UNISCI-263>



## 1. Introduction

With the stroke of midnight, as the colonial forces prepared to depart from the subcontinent, India, awakened, not only as an independent and sovereign state but also as a promising actor aspiring to articulate the concerns of the voiceless non-western world. This approach of India was believed as an organic extension of its foundational principles of non-violence, peace, and anti-colonialism; the moral orientation, of which was shaped by its chief architect, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, who once asserted that *India have no quarrel with their neighbours and desire to live at peace with them.*<sup>2</sup> Nehru's foreign policy vision was unmistakably global in outlook, as he believed; *India*, would no longer remain a passive spectator of events; but *one world that free India will work*, would make a history; *in which there is the free cooperation of free people, and no class or group exploits another.*<sup>3</sup> This Nehruvian worldview enabled and embedded India to craft a foreign policy framework rooted in autonomy and independence in strategic decision-making, and simultaneously anchored in the principles of non-alignment, anti-colonialism & imperialism, and the pursuit of international peace, allowing it to maintain its sphere of influence despite shifting geopolitical winds. The successive Congress and even the non-congress leaders after Nehru unsurprisingly carried forward this legacy while articulating their India's foreign policy narratives. Although tone, emphasis, and rationales varied depending on time, context, and political priorities, the broader orientation of India's foreign policy continued to rest on its original normative and strategic premises; standing for a peaceful world order with due recognition and acknowledgment for the postcolonial / non-western sphere in spirit and principle.

This aspiration in India's Foreign Policy, became more pronounced especially after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, as India liberalised its economy and positioned it as a, trusted and accountable regional player, poised to emerge on the global stage and represent the global south. This paper examines this specific yet understudied dimension of India's foreign policy discourse, and tries map India's credible potentiality in global politics for the non-western world. The justification for revisiting India's positionality, in this context lies primarily due to two reasons; firstly as we witness a gradual transition of from uni-polarity to a more oligo-polarity (reshaping mechanisms of counter-balancing beyond traditional diplomatic practice), there has been rise of non-state actors, multilateral institutions, and non-traditional security concerns, those which has complicated and broadened the study of international politics, forcing its epistemology to move beyond the binary frames of security and territory. Secondly, adopting a pragmatically realist perspective, especially in recognition of India's limited capacity to directly contest China's economic and military narratives, its India's extensive civilizational, cultural, and political heritage, that positions India in a uniquely consequential role within the regional and global order, one which can substantially reshape the geopolitical and geospatial dynamics of Asia and beyond. In order to support justifications for positioning India as a pivotal actor in contemporary global politics, capable of articulating a significant agency of bargaining leverage in representing the interests of especially the Global South, (with special prominence on Central- South East and West Asian region) this paper use three specific edifices in India's foreign policy narrative; a) mapping its lost civilizational and cultural heritage, b) tracking the postcolonial patters of sub-regional engagements and connectivity initiatives, and, c) its unique non-western humanitarian and normative aid and assistive diplomacy to the non-Western world.

---

<sup>2</sup> Appadodai, Arjun: "India's Foreign Policy", *International Affairs*, Vol. 25, n°1 (1949), pp. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal: *India's Foreign Policy 1946-1961*, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, pp-2 at <https://archive.org/details/indiasforeignpol00nehr/page/n7/mode/2up?ref=ol>



## 2.The Glorious Civilization and Cultural Heritage

If one intends to assess and map India's potential credibility in the non-Western space, the starting point would undoubtedly lie in its enduring civilizational and cultural linkages, which transcend both time and history. These long-standing historical interactions, however, was dismantled and diminished with the consolidation of British rule under the praxis of hard-core real politics in play. Colonial policy reoriented India's external engagements to align with British geopolitical priorities in West, East and Central Asian states, particularly those tied to imperial trade routes and strategic interests. This process was complicated by the fragmented geopolitical landscape of West and East Asian region characterized by competing ethnic, sectarian, and ideological currents, and divergent political systems. However, when India's strategic dynamism is examined beyond the conventional frameworks of security and securitisation, drawing instead on a complex-interdependence analytical lens and a constructive interrogation of emerging facts and possibilities, particularly within the context of an evolving post-colonial world order, its sphere of influence may be more meaningfully deconstructed and rearticulated. A decisive shift in India's external outlook became fully apparent as it embraced a multi-vector approach, and a distinctly proactive mode of engagement. Infact it's also believed that the deliberate use of the name *Bharat* in place of *India* signals an intentional shift in emphasis toward the civilizational legacy of a thousand-year-old historical identity, rather than the post-1947 image of India as a newly independent and developing state. This is further observed as we try to delve at the past and attempt to map India's relations with West, East and Central Asian region.

### 2.1 South East Asia

Although the formal diplomatic articulation of India and Southeast Asia relations began after India's independence, their foundations rest on much older civilizational linkages that transcend modern borders. These connections was visible in shared religious traditions, cultural practices, architectural styles, and spiritual exchanges, those have long distinguished the relationship in the contemporary world order, deepen by cultural-spiritual affinities and extensive pre-colonial maritime trade networks stretching from West Asia to Indonesia. The movement of Hindu, Buddhist, and later Islamic monks, scholars, and traders across the Bay of Bengal facilitated the emergence of syncretic belief systems throughout Southeast Asia. The imprint of this process often termed 'Indianization' can be seen in symbols like Indonesia's Garuda, mythological depictions at Angkor Wat and Borobudur, the widespread adaptation of the *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, and the presence of Sanskrit inscriptions.<sup>4</sup> Festivals such as Thailand's Loy Krathong and Songkran further reflect this long history of cultural acculturation. Indian influence extended to scripts, administrative norms, architecture, and artistic forms, though contemporary Southeast Asian historiography often critiques earlier notions of 'Greater India.'<sup>5</sup> More recent interpretations, such as Wolters' ideas of 'localization' and 're-localization,' emphasize Southeast Asian agency in adapting Indic elements. Shifts in religious landscapes from the rise of Islam to the decline of Buddhist and Hindu political authority gradually transformed these connections.<sup>6</sup> These cultural syntheses were built on robust trade along the Silk Roads, with India acting as a crucial intermediary. The Bali Jatra

---

<sup>4</sup> Arshed, Tanwir: "India and South East Asia: Mapping the Changing Contours of Partnership in the Twenty-First Century", in Basu, Partha P. and Arshed, Tanwir (eds.) (2024): *75 Years of India's Foreign Policy, Bilateral, Conventional and Emerging Trends*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 181-183.

<sup>5</sup> Mishra, Prabhat Palit: "India's Historical Impact with Southeast Asia", *Education about Asia*, Vol. 26, n° 1 (2021), pp. 1-7.

<sup>6</sup> Wolters, Oliver William: "History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives", *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*, (1982), p.43



festival in Odisha, commemorating ancient maritime voyages to Bali, Java, and Sumatra, symbolizes this deep commercial heritage. Scholars such as Manguin and Coedès argue that these organic interactions forged a shared cultural sphere rooted in Indic ideas of kingship, religion, and Sanskritic traditions, enabling many Southeast Asian polities to see themselves as part of *Bharatavarsha* in a civilizational sense.<sup>7</sup> 2.2. *Central Asia*

The legacy of historical heritage between India and Central Asia were fundamentally shaped by the dynamics of transcontinental trade along the Silk Route, coupled by exchange of commodities in one hand and circulation of ideas, religious traditions, and cultural practices on other. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Indus Valley Civilization maintained commercial links with *Altyn Depe* in present-day Turkmenistan, suggesting the existence of early economic networks between the two regions, one which started on back of horses and stretched far beyond the lexicons of political, social, economic, and cultural implications.<sup>8</sup> Among India's most consequential cultural exports to Central Asia was Buddhism. The religious transmission followed a trajectory from India through Central Asia to China, with Kashmir serving as a critical intermediary. The Kashmiri scholar Vairochana is credited as one of the earliest Buddhist missionaries to Central Asia, while the Kushan Empire under King Kanishka played an especially transformative role in disseminating Buddhist doctrines across the region. The Fourth Buddhist Council, convened in Kashmir under Kanishka's patronage, marked a watershed moment that catalysed the differentiation of Buddhism into the Mahayana and Hinayana traditions.<sup>9</sup> The Gandhara School of Art, profoundly influenced by Buddhist iconography, shaped the visual and aesthetic sensibilities of the broader region. The monumental Buddha statues at Bamiyan (destroyed by the Taliban in 2000) and the remains of Buddhist sites across Pakistan's North West Frontier Province attest to this shared cultural legacy.<sup>10</sup> With the spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent, connectivity between the two got significantly facilitated, especially by Sufi saints originating from Central Asian centres such as Bukhara and Samarkand. One of the most prominent among them, Sayyid Ali Hamadani, migrated to Kashmir from Kulyab (in present-day Tajikistan) in the late fourteenth century accompanied by 500 disciples. This period produced a remarkable synthesis of Buddhist, Islamic, and indigenous cultural elements, many of which travelled back into Central Asia.<sup>11</sup> Trade along the Silk Route remained robust, with Chinese silk, Indian ivory, Syrian glass, and Roman metal ware circulating widely. Kashmiri shawls, along with Indian woollen and silk carpets, became highly prized commodities in Central Asian markets. This vibrancy of trade facilitated the formation of a sizeable Indian Diasporas in cities such as Bukhara, Andijon, Fergana, and Namangan.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the establishment of the Mughal Empire in India by Babur, a native of the Fergana Valley, brought the most significant political development, in the equation, reflection of which was seen in cultural and intellectual ties, attracting scholars, artisans, and craftsmen whose contributions greatly enriched Indian architecture, literature, and

<sup>7</sup> Manguin, Pierre-Yves and Wade, Geoff (eds.) (2011): *Early Interactions Between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-cultural Exchange*, ISEAS, p. 20. Also see, Vella, Walter F. (ed) (1968): *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press, p.202.

<sup>8</sup> Dani, Ahmad Hasan: "Buddhism to Islam: Cultural Links between Central Asia and South Asia", in Vohra, Narendra Nath (ed.) (1999): *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, Delhi, Shipra Publications, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Gafurov, Bobojon Ghafurovich (ed.) (1974): *Two volumes: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History, Archaeology and Culture of Central Asia in the Kushan Period*, Moscow, Nauka. (1974), p.196

<sup>10</sup> Khosla, Inder Pal: "An Overview", in Vohra, Narendra Nath (ed.) (1999): *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, Delhi, Shipra Publications, p. 401.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Raina, Radha: "Pioneering Pilgrims, Artisans and Merchants", in Vohra, Narendra Nath (ed.) (1999): *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, Delhi, Shipra Publications, p.76.



aesthetic traditions. The Taj Mahal stands as a notable testament to this architectural and artistic synthesis.<sup>13</sup> The decline of Muslim rule and the rise of European colonialism precipitated a structural reorientation in India–Central Asia relations.

## **2.2 West Asia**

With regard to West Asia, India’s relationship spans several millennia, one that was rooted in the rich cultural heritage and history. Classical sources such as the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* document extensive commercial interactions as early as the first millennium BCE, while archaeological findings most notably Harappan seals and artefacts recovered in Egypt, suggest even earlier exchanges between India’s western coastline and the Red Sea littoral.<sup>14</sup> Although evidence of large-scale migration or other forms of engagement in this period is limited, the rise of Islam significantly transformed the nature of India’s linkages with West Asia. The incorporation of Sind into the expanding Islamic world brought Arab military and administrative elites to the subcontinent, followed by merchant networks that facilitated the spread of Islam into peninsular India. Today, even though Hindus constitute the majority, India hosts the world’s third-largest Muslim population, with Islamic presence on the subcontinent dating back to the eighth century CE.<sup>15</sup> Over subsequent centuries, from the arrival of the Turko-Afghans in the thirteenth century to Nadir Shah’s invasion in 1738, India’s engagement with West Asia oscillated between conflict, alliance-building, and rich cultural exchange. Persian and Central Asian influences left a lasting imprint on Indian courtly culture, language, music, architecture, and literature, just as Indian scientific, medical, and artistic knowledge travelled westward into West Asia and onward to Europe. The Mughal era, marked by Humayun’s refuge in the Persian court and Akbar’s incorporation of Turkish and Persian elites, further exemplifies this multidirectional flow.

## **3. The Postcolonial Patters of Sub-Regional Engagements and Connectivity Initiatives**

The second factor that justifies India’s position as a leading advocate for the Global South’s vision of development and progress lies in its post-colonial approach to sincere sub-regional engagement and connectivity initiatives. From 1947 until the end of the Cold War, India navigated a deeply polarized international system by adopting non-alignment, thereby promoting the emergence of a non-military third bloc that helped contain the expansion of bipolar power politics. Since the post-Cold War oligo-polar order, India’s strategy of multi-engagement has emerged as a deliberate and adaptive policy response shaped significantly by leadership choices. Just as non-alignment once represented an innovative framework that resonated widely across the Third World, multi-engagement now offers a model that increasingly inspires states of the Global South confronting a similarly complex and asymmetrical international environment. Indian foreign policy has demonstrated a capacity for innovation and flexibility in managing interactions among unequal actors pursuing divergent national objectives. In this evolving context, both the quantitative expansion and qualitative enhancement of national capabilities have informed shifts in India’s foreign policy orientation.

---

<sup>13</sup>Abuseitova, Marziya Khusainovna: “Historical and Cultural Relations between Kazakhstan, Central Asia and India from Ancient Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century”, in Roy, Jitendra Nath and Kumar, Braja Bihari (eds.) (2007): *India and Central Asia: Classical to Contemporary Periods*, Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, p.50.

<sup>14</sup> Bhattacharya, Sanjukta Banerjee: “Revisiting India–West Asia Relations: An Analysis of Strategic Proximities”, in Basu, Partha P. and Arshed, Tanwir (eds.) (2024): *75 Years of India’s Foreign Policy, Bilateral, Conventional and Emerging Trends*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.156-158.

<sup>15</sup> “Countries with the Largest Muslim Population in 2022”, at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/374661/countries-with-the-largest-muslim-population/>



These changes, in turn, have produced discernible transformations in the substance, style, and underlying logic of policy decisions and their execution. By the early 1990s, profound structural changes in the international system compelled India to recalibrate its strategic orientation. Four developments during this period proved especially consequential for the subsequent trajectory of Indian foreign policy: (a) the liberalization of the economy under the Narasimha Rao administration; (b) the adoption of strategic partnerships under H. D. Deve Gowda (beginning with South Africa in 1997); (c) India's declaration of itself as a nuclear weapons state under A. B. Vajpayee; and (d) the deepening of ties with the United States, culminating in the Civil Nuclear Agreement under Manmohan Singh. Moreover, India's economic liberalization facilitated trade expansion, foreign investment, and high growth rates; the strategic partnership framework broadened India's diplomatic engagements with west as well as non-state actors creating new opportunities for participation in emerging coalitions and greater acceptance within mainstream global politics. Collectively, these developments transformed the substance of India's foreign policy, replacing previous patterns with new orientations and strategic behaviours, an analysis of which is protracted in the succeeding section.

### **3.1 Central Asia**

India's engagement with Central Asia began soon after 1991, when it established diplomatic relations with the newly independent republics and started exploring energy and trade links despite the lack of direct access. A key early proposal was the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline, conceived in the mid-1990s to bring Turkmen gas to South Asia.<sup>16</sup> An inaugural Turkmenistan–Pakistan pipeline agreement was signed in 1995, with India invited to join in the late 1990s, while in February 1999 Iran and India also signed a preliminary agreement on a proposed Iran–Pakistan–India (IPI) gas pipeline. Although India withdrew from IPI in 2009 amid pricing and security concerns, both TAPI and IPI already signalled an Indian push for trans-regional energy connectivity.<sup>17</sup> In the 2000s, this connectivity broadened beyond pipelines through the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC). In September 2000, India joined Iran and Russia in an inter-governmental agreement to establish this multi-modal corridor linking Indian Ocean ports to Iran, through the Caspian region, and onwards to Russia and Europe.<sup>18</sup> Central Asian states later joined the project. By integrating ship, rail and road routes, the 7,200-km INSTC connects Mumbai to Moscow via Iran and the Caspian, with branches into Central Asia. India's accession to the Ashgabat Agreement, a complementary transport-corridor pact, consolidated this framework: it deposited its accession in 2016 and formally joined in February 2018, gaining an arrangement that facilitates transit trade between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf and diversifies access beyond traditional chokepoints.<sup>19</sup>

Over the decade, India deepened security and development ties. It became an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2005 and a full member in 2017, signalling institutional engagement with Eurasian partners. To obtain a physical foothold, it invested in infrastructure in Afghanistan, viewed as a gateway to Central Asia. The Border Roads

<sup>16</sup> Mehdudia, Sujay: "TAPI Project Will Be the New Silk Route, Says Deora.", *The Hindu*, 4 December 2021, at <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/TAPI-project-will-be-the-new-Silk-Route-says-Deora/article15589321.ece>.

<sup>17</sup> Chaudhary, Shamila N.: "Iran to India Natural Gas Pipeline: Implications for Conflict Resolution & Regionalism in India, Iran, and Pakistan", November 2025, School of International Service, at <http://www.american.edu/TED/iranpipeline.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Avdalani, Emil: "The International North-South Transport Corridor", August 2025, Gulf Research Center, at <https://www.grc.net/single-commentary/302#:~:text=The%20INSTC%2C%20with%20a%20length,East%2C%20its%20expansion%20is%20progressing.>

<sup>19</sup> *India Joins the Ashgabat Agreement*, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29406/>.



Organisation built the Zaranj–Delaram Highway in southwest Afghanistan, completed and handed over in 2009, linking Afghanistan’s road network to the Iranian border and, via Iran’s Chabahar port, allowing Indian goods to reach Afghanistan and potentially Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan.<sup>20</sup> This illustrates India’s strategy of “connectivity through partners” in this case Iran and Afghanistan and to access Central Asian markets. These strands were gathered in June 2012, when India announced its “Connect Central Asia” policy at a meeting in Bishkek as a more proactive engagement with the five republics through “physical, air, people-to-people and digital connectivity.” Progress was initially slow because of geopolitical constraints and the absence of direct land access, but a breakthrough came with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s tour of all five states in July 2015, the first such visit by an Indian premier. Across this tour, India signed 22 agreements across sectors from energy to transport links and built on strategic partnerships with Kazakhstan (2009), Uzbekistan (2011) and Tajikistan (2012).<sup>21</sup>

From the mid-2010s, connectivity gained momentum through infrastructure and finance. India partnered with Iran to develop Chabahar Port in Sistan-Baluchistan as a maritime outlet toward Afghanistan and Central Asia, a project discussed since 2003 and concretised through a trilateral India–Iran–Afghanistan agreement in May 2016. By late 2017, the first phase of Chabahar’s Shahid Beheshti terminal was operational, and India had sent shipments of humanitarian wheat to Afghanistan through the port.<sup>22</sup> Together with the Zaranj–Delaram Road, Chabahar now forms part of the INSTC’s southern route, enabling freight movement from India into Central Asia via Iran. In October 2020, India extended a US\$1 billion line of credit for Central Asian projects in infrastructure, connectivity, energy and IT, which has supported road upgrades, agricultural modernisation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and power infrastructure. Soft connectivity has accompanied these efforts: a Digital Connectivity initiative was unveiled to share Indian expertise in digital public goods such as Aadhaar-style biometric ID and e-governance, and in June 2025 an India–Central Asia Digital Partnership forum was launched to collaborate on digital identity and data systems.<sup>23</sup>

Institutionally, India has also created platforms dedicated to this sub-region. An annual India–Central Asia Dialogue at foreign-minister level was instituted in 2019, with the first meeting held in Uzbekistan, and a first-ever India–Central Asia Summit at leadership level took place virtually in January 2022. At this summit, Prime Minister Modi and the five presidents agreed to deepen cooperation in trade, connectivity and security, describing it as “the first engagement of its kind” between India and Central Asian leaders and discussing joint working groups on Chabahar and regional connectivity. India’s stated vision is to restore Eurasian linkages akin to the Silk Road by acting as an “interconnected stakeholder,” for example through development-sharing initiatives such as “DAKSHIN” (Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative), which links Central Asian states with India’s Global South Centre of Excellence.<sup>24</sup> Over three decades, tentative diplomatic forays have thus evolved into a strategy of transport corridors, energy pipelines, security dialogue and cultural-economic partnerships

<sup>20</sup> “India and Afghanistan: Marching Ahead”, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/uploads/publicationdocs/176\\_india-and-afghanistan-a-development-partnership.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/uploads/publicationdocs/176_india-and-afghanistan-a-development-partnership.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Putz, Catherine: “A ‘New Chapter’ for India and Central Asia?”, *The Diplomat*, 8 September 2025, at <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/a-new-chapter-for-india-and-central-asia/>.

<sup>22</sup> Chakraborty, Subhayan: “Timeline: 21-year-long Effort by India to Set up Port in Chabahar”, *Business Standard*, 14 May 2024, at [https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/timeline-21-year-long-effort-by-india-to-set-up-port-in-chabahar-124051301100\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/timeline-21-year-long-effort-by-india-to-set-up-port-in-chabahar-124051301100_1.html).

<sup>23</sup> Kumar, Gitesh: “Reconnecting India and Central Asia in a Changing Geopolitical Environment”, *Special Eurasia*, 11 August 2025, at <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2025/08/11/india-central-asia/#:~:text=facilitating%20agri,initiatives>.

<sup>24</sup> “The First Meeting of the India-Central Asia Summit”, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34759/The+First+Meeting+of+the+IndiaCentral+Asia+Summit#:~:text=Prime%20Minister%20Shri%20Narendra%20Modi,at%20the%20level%20of%20leaders>.



designed to overcome geography and entrench India's presence in this vital part of the global South.

### **3.2 South East Asia**

On a similar tone India's engagement with East and Southeast Asia accelerated in the 1990s as a pillar of post-Cold War foreign policy. In 1992, India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN – its first formal linkage with Southeast Asia – and by 1996 it was upgraded to a full Dialogue Partner and joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), integrating into Asia-Pacific diplomatic and security dialogues. These developments formed part of the “Look East Policy” initiated by Rao's government in 1991–92 to enhance economic and strategic ties with East Asia.<sup>25</sup> The policy produced rapid gains: between 1993 and 2003, India–ASEAN trade expanded more than fourfold. In 2002, India's partnership reached summit level with the start of annual ASEAN–India Summits, and the same year it signed the ASEAN–India Framework Agreement on comprehensive economic cooperation, laying groundwork for a future free trade area.<sup>26</sup> Infrastructure connectivity deepened this diplomatic outreach. The India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway (1,360 km) connecting Northeast India to Thailand via Myanmar, was first proposed at an April 2002 trilateral ministerial meeting, building on India's earlier construction of the India–Myanmar Friendship Road (Moreh–Tamu–Kalewa) in 2001. India committed US\$100 million in 2012 to upgrade portions of the highway and Myanmar's bridges. Despite delays due to terrain and Myanmar's internal conflict, the highway remains under construction as of 2025 and is central to linking India with the ASEAN mainland.<sup>27</sup> India has also proposed extending this corridor to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam as an “East–West Economic Corridor,” and offered a US\$1 billion credit line in 2017 for ASEAN connectivity.<sup>28</sup> A second major project is the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, conceived in 2008 and launched by an India–Myanmar agreement. It links Kolkata to Myanmar's Sittwe port by sea, then moves inland via the Kaladan River, and onward by road to Mizoram. Sittwe Port was completed and inaugurated in 2016–2017; the river and road components are slated for completion by 2027. Offering an alternative to the vulnerable Siliguri corridor (“Chicken's Neck”), Kaladan will reduce distance and travel time and boost India–Myanmar–Southeast Asia trade.<sup>29</sup> Parallel efforts include the proposed trilateral Motor Vehicles Agreement with Myanmar and Thailand (under negotiation since 2015)<sup>30</sup> and integrated check-posts such as the Zokhawthar–Rih border post opened in 2018.<sup>31</sup> Beyond roads, Act East incorporates energy and

<sup>25</sup> Sinha, Dilip: “India's Look East Policy and the Northeast”, Distinguished Lectures Details, Uploaded by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 April 2016, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?505#:~:text=Date%3A%20April%2025%2C%202016>.

<sup>26</sup> Sajjanhar, Ashok: “The India–ASEAN Partnership at 25”, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (January 2018), at <https://www.idsa.in/publisher/comments/the-india-asean-partnership-at-25#:~:text=The%20India,ARF%29%20in%201996>.

<sup>27</sup> Basu, Pratinashree and Ghosh, Nilanjan: “Breathing New Life Into BIMSTEC: Challenges and Imperatives”, ORF Occasional Paper, April 2020, at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/breathing-new-life-into-bimstec-challenges-and-imperatives>

<sup>28</sup> Press Trust of India: “How Sushma Swaraj's Intervention Led to Evacuation of Kerala Nurses from Iraq”, *The Times of India*, 7 August 2019, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/how-sushma-swarajs-intervention-led-to-evacuation-of-kerala-nurses-from-iraq/articleshow/70578015.cms>.

<sup>29</sup> *Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project in Mizoram: Executive Summary*, at <https://mpcb.mizoram.gov.in/uploads/attachments/6b19cfb12b61c709d884a3305788d3fc/pages-234-executive-summary-english.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Press Trust of India: “Plea for Motor Vehicle Agreement between India and Myanmar”, *The Economic Times*, 16 February 2017, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/plea-for-motor-vehicle-agreement-between-india-and-myanmar/articleshow/57186840.cms>.

<sup>31</sup> Subramanian, Nirupama: “Simply Put: On Road to Mandalay, Beyond”, *The Indian Express*, 14 August 2018, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-myanmar-land-border-crossing-open-sushma-swaraj-imphal-mandalay-bus-service-5305229/>.



digital networks. India and Myanmar are collaborating on the Trilateral Optical Fiber Cable linking Northeast India to Southeast Asia, discussions on extending Indian power grids and oil pipelines into Myanmar, and hydropower cooperation such as India's assistance in building the Thanzinder (Tamanthi) project in the Chindwin basin (mid-2000s agreements). Indian companies (ONGC, GAIL) also hold stakes in Myanmar's offshore gas blocks. These initiatives provide developmental alternatives alongside China's Belt-and-Road investments.<sup>32</sup> Trade and institutional connectivity expanded in parallel. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement in goods (signed 2009, in force 2010) created a free trade area across India and ten ASEAN states, followed by a 2012 services and investment agreement (effective 2015). By 2017-18, India-ASEAN trade had reached US\$81 billion. India also concluded key bilateral agreements: CECA with Singapore (2005), CEPA with South Korea (2010), and CEPA with Japan (2011), strengthening trade, investment and technology partnerships.<sup>33</sup> Culturally, India expanded soft-power diplomacy. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), launched in 2000 in Vientiane, links India with Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in culture, education and tourism. India's Buddhist diplomacy is reflected in the revival of Nalanda University, endorsed by EAS states since 2007 and operational from 2014. Cultural centres in Thailand, Indonesia and Japan, along with cultural exchange agreements, promote yoga, Ayurveda and Bollywood.<sup>34</sup> Institutionally, India co-founded BIMSTEC in 1997 under the Bangkok Declaration, promoting connectivity and technical cooperation around the Bay of Bengal, and has recently revived it through initiatives such as the BIMSTEC electricity grid and economic corridor.<sup>35</sup> The BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement of June 2015 enables cross-border vehicular movement; although Bhutan has yet to ratify, India, Bangladesh and Nepal continue trial freight runs.<sup>36</sup>

Since 2014, India's this outlook towards the East Asian Economies adopted and evolved into a more assertive Act East policy, emphasising accelerated engagement, strategic partnerships (including defence cooperation with Vietnam, Indonesia and Japan), and time-bound connectivity projects. India also extended lines of credit for ASEAN infrastructure, such as the US\$1 billion offered in 2015.<sup>37</sup> India and Japan jointly launched the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) in 2017 to support infrastructure and digital projects linking Africa, India and Southeast Asia.<sup>38</sup> India has participated in the East Asia Summit (EAS) since 2005, promoting an open regional architecture, maritime security, an ASEAN-India Connectivity master plan, and disaster-response initiatives in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Sumi, Tolivi H.: "Connectivity Projects of North-East India Under Act East Policy", *Dimapur Government College Journal*, Vol.10, n° 1 (December 2024), pp.120-45.

<sup>33</sup>Khatri, Priyanka and Kim, Chanwahn: "Impact of India's Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN on Its Goods Exports: A Gravity Model Analysis", *Economies*, Vol. 11, No.1 (23 December 2022).

<sup>34</sup>Narayanan, Sripathi: "Mekong-Ganga Cooperation @25.", *Indian Council of World Affairs*, (December 2025), at [https://www.icwa.in/show\\_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls\\_id=14008&lid=8505](https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=14008&lid=8505).

<sup>35</sup>*History*, at <https://bimstec.org/history>.

<sup>36</sup>Kasturi, Charu Sudan: "Stalled at the Border", *Deccan Herald*, 28 June 2025, at <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/stalled-at-the-border-india-myanmar-thailand-highways-project-stalled-border-issues-manipur-3607344>.

<sup>37</sup>Roy-Chaudhury, Shantanu: "From 'Look East' to 'Act East': Mapping India's Southeast Asian Engagement", ORF Issue Brief, n° 800, May 2025, at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/from-look-east-to-act-east-mapping-india-s-southeast-asian-engagement>.

<sup>38</sup>Gupta, Prithvi: "Revitalising the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor", *ORF Expert Speak*, (2February 2025), at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/revitalising-the-asia-africa-growth-corridor>.

<sup>39</sup>*Joint Statement on Strengthening ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace, Stability and Prosperity in the Region in the Context of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) With the Support of India's Act East Policy (AEP)*, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38396/>.



### 3.3. West Asia

India's connectivity agenda in West Asia, encompassing the Gulf, Iran, and the wider Middle East, has been shaped since the 1990s by energy security, diaspora linkages, and geostrategic considerations. Following economic liberalisation, India improved ties with Gulf States and normalised relations with Israel in 1992, ending Cold War-era distance. Energy imports from the Gulf quickly became central, prompting exploration of overland gas routes. The most ambitious was the Iran–Pakistan–India (IPI) “Peace Pipeline,” conceived in the mid-1990s; India and Iran signed a preliminary agreement in 1995, and India joined Pakistan–Iran talks by 1999.<sup>40</sup> India pursued IPI for nearly a decade, but negotiations stalled over pricing and security, and New Delhi shelved the project in 2008–09 under U.S. pressure while prioritising civil nuclear cooperation.<sup>41</sup> In parallel, India engaged from 1997 with the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline consortium. After a U.S.-backed proposal in 2002, India formally joined TAPI in the mid-2000s; an inter-governmental agreement for the US\$10 billion pipeline was signed on 11 December 2010 in Ashgabat, with gas expected to reach Punjab by 2019, followed by a TAPI gas purchase agreement in 2012. However, conflict and financing constraints have repeatedly delayed implementation, and by 2024 only the Turkmen segment was complete.<sup>42</sup> Despite setbacks, both pipeline corridors reflect India's sustained pursuit of energy connectivity with West and Central Asia. A major breakthrough in westward connectivity came through Chabahar Port in Iran. India and Iran first agreed to develop Chabahar in 2003, envisioning a deep-sea port providing access to Afghanistan and Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan. Sanctions delayed progress, but momentum returned after 2014. During PM Modi's May 2016 visit to Tehran, India, Iran and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement to develop the port and associated road–rail links; India pledged US\$500 million for modernisation and secured a 10-year contract to equip and operate specific terminals. By October 2017, India dispatched 15,000 tons of wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar, demonstrating operational viability, and Iran inaugurated the port's first phase in December 2017. Despite renewed U.S. sanctions in 2018, Chabahar received a waiver, and India began commercial operations in December 2018; by early 2019, Afghan exports such as dried fruits transited the port.<sup>43</sup> Chabahar has since been integrated into the INSTC, with India in 2020 designating it a pivotal link complementing the Mumbai–Bandar Abbas route.<sup>44</sup>

India's investments extend to Iranian hinterland infrastructure. It supported construction of the Delaram–Zaranj highway in Afghanistan (completed 2009) and planned a Chabahar–Zahedan railway, although Iran opted to proceed independently in 2020; India nonetheless supplied track materials. These reflect India's aim to create a reliable West Asia–South/Central Asia transit corridor aligned with “Neighbourhood First” and “Extended Neighbourhood” strategies.<sup>45</sup> Diplomatically, India's “Link West” policy intensified in the 2010s. High-level visits after 2014 by PM Modi to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Qatar and Israel strengthened strategic ties. India and the UAE concluded a CEPA in February 2022, its first Gulf free trade

<sup>40</sup> Maleki, Abbas: “Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline: Is It a Peace Pipeline?”, *MIT Centre for International Studies*. (September 2007), at <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/iran-pakistan-india-pipeline-it-peace-pipeline>.

<sup>41</sup> Kazmi, Sahar Shah and Rasool, Sheikh Waleed: “Peace Pipeline or Strategic Gamble: Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project: Challenges, Opportunities and Foreign Policy Implications”, *Journal of Xi'an Shiyou University*, Vol. 20, n° 5 (May 2024), pp.756–62.

<sup>42</sup> Bhadrakumar, M. K. : “U.S. Brings Silk Road to India”, *The Hindu*, 23 December 2010, at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/U.S.-brings-Silk-Road-to-India/article15605598.ece>.

<sup>43</sup> Chakraborty, *op.cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Wani, Ayjaz: “INSTC Eastern Corridor: India's Gateway to Central Asia”, *ORF Expert Speak*, 27 November 2025, at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/inste-eastern-corridor-india-s-gateway-to-central-asia>.

<sup>45</sup> Haidar, Suhasini: “Chabahar and the Afghan Roundabout.”, *The Hindu*, 4 December 2021, at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/Chabahar-and-the-Afghan-roundabout/article62116361.ece>



pact, boosting trade and investment.<sup>46</sup> India and Iran maintained strategic dialogue following the 2003 Delhi Declaration, and India remained a major Iranian oil customer until 2019<sup>47</sup>. With Saudi Arabia and Israel, cooperation expanded into defence, technology and agriculture.<sup>48</sup> India also leveraged its 8-million-strong Gulf diaspora through labour agreements and cultural diplomacy, including International Yoga Day events and new cultural centres in Oman and Bahrain.<sup>49</sup> Security cooperation also broadened. India joined the multilateral I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, USA) in 2021, promoting technological and infrastructural collaboration. India's invitation as Guest of Honour at the 2019 OIC Summit marked increased acceptance in regional expanse. The Indian Navy's anti-piracy deployments in the Gulf of Aden since 2008 and maritime escorts have further secured sea lanes. India's 2015 Sagarmala programme to modernise ports strengthens maritime connectivity with Gulf partners.<sup>50</sup> The International Solar Alliance (ISA), launched in 2015, includes West Asian states such as UAE and Saudi Arabia, expanding sustainable connectivity.<sup>51</sup>

Connectivity ambitions culminated in the announcement of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the G20 Summit in New Delhi in September 2023. Jointly unveiled by India, the U.S., UAE, Saudi Arabia and EU partners, IMEC envisions integrated shipping, rail, energy and digital routes connecting India to Europe via West Asia, with an Eastern Corridor from India to the Gulf and a Northern Corridor linking the Gulf to Europe through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel. Framed as a transparent alternative to China's BRI, IMEC reflects India's strategic role as a bridge between Asia and Europe. Meanwhile, India revived negotiations for an India–GCC FTA in 2022.<sup>52</sup> Since the 1990s, India's West Asia engagement has evolved from energy dependence to a multidimensional connectivity strategy spanning pipelines, ports, roads, trade pacts, cultural diplomacy and institutional innovation (I2U2, ISA). Emphasising partnership, sovereignty and financial sustainability.<sup>53</sup> India is leveraging historical civilisational ties to embed West Asia within its broader westward connectivity vision.

#### **4. India's Unique Non-Western Value-Based Humanitarian and Normative Ventures**

The third and final pillar that undeniably reinforces India's credibility as a representative of the Global South is its normative, non-Western, and value-laden approach to humanitarian aid. As the world witnessed the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of a new global order

<sup>46</sup> Mohan, Chilamkuri Raja: "Modi and the Middle East: Towards a Link West Policy", *The Indian Express*, 5 October 2014, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/modi-and-the-middle-east-towards-a-link-west-policy/>.

<sup>47</sup> *Evacuation of Indian Nationals from Syria*, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38740/Evacuation\\_of\\_Indian\\_Nationals\\_from\\_Syri](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38740/Evacuation_of_Indian_Nationals_from_Syri).

<sup>48</sup> TOI Business Desk: "Agri Ties Boost: India, Israel Discuss Deeper Farm Cooperation; Focus on Tech, Innovation, Trade", *The Times of India*, 23 November 2025, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/agri-ties-boost-india-israel-discuss-deeper-farm-cooperation-focus-on-tech-innovation-trade/articleshow/125508701.cms>.

<sup>49</sup> Chinoy, Sujana, and Pradhan, Prasanta Kumar (eds.) (2024): *India's Approach to West Asia: Trends, Challenges and Possibilities*, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses and Pentagon Press, p.201

<sup>50</sup> Pulipaka, Sanjay, Singh, Antara Ghosal and Sircar, Saranya: "India and Connectivity Frameworks" in Krishan Singh, Hemant (ed.) (2017): *Delhi Policy Group*, Delhi Policy Group. p. 32, at [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/india-and-connectivity-frameworks-1074.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/india-and-connectivity-frameworks-1074.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> *India Shines Bright! A New Era in Solar Energy: Progress Driven by the International Solar Alliance*, at <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2071486&reg=3&lang=2>.

<sup>52</sup> Hussain, Afaq, and Shafer Nicholas: "The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: Connectivity in an Era of Geopolitical Uncertainty", *Atlantic Council* (August 2025), at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-connectivity-in-an-era-of-geopolitical-uncertainty/#:~:text=,and%20logistics%20hubs%20likely%20at>.

<sup>53</sup> Pulipaka, Singh, and Sircar *op cit*.



founded on the principles of neoliberal interconnectedness and interdependence, which aimed at fostering perpetual peace, India too underwent a significant normative shift in its approach to humanitarian aid. This shift, particularly evident since the mid-1990s following India's economic restructuring, marked a transformation in its foreign policy orientation, with an increasing emphasis on providing humanitarian assistance notably, to the Global South.<sup>54</sup> Entering the new millennium, India not only embraced the role of a humanitarian assistance provider but did so with a distinctive normative and value-based framework that was empirically and visibly different from the Western paradigm of aid.<sup>55</sup> If analysed one may find three specific rationales for understanding the construction of India's such distinctively non-Western approach to humanitarian aid. The first factor lies in India's deeply ingrained perception of its colonial history. In fact, the enduring legacy of this colonial worldview has not only shaped India's approach to its extended regional neighbours, but has also impeded its ability to view itself as an external intervener in the affairs of other nations or societies. Instead, India sees itself as a former recipient of aid and a site of significant human suffering, which informs its cautious, consent-based approach to providing assistance.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, one may also argue that the evolution of such a value based approach was a natural by-product of India's long-standing commitment to the principles of non-intervention, respect for territorial sovereignty, and the pursuit of strategic autonomy in its foreign policy, something which remains starkly opposite and contradictory to the Western model characterized by interventionist behaviour, the imposition of protection mandates, and a strict moral responsibility that transcends national borders. And, finally, when one seeks to map and critically engage with India's humanitarian aid diplomacy as a significant pillar of its non-Western stance, it is essential to recognize that, since its independence, India has consistently placed humanitarian norms at the core of its foreign policy. These norms are deeply rooted in a steadfast commitment to state sovereignty and non-intervention, underpinned by the values of Panchsheel and the principles of peaceful coexistence.

India has always asserted that humanitarian assistance must always respect the territorial integrity and political authority of the recipient state. As such, India typically provides aid only upon the request or explicit consent of the affected government, avoiding unilateral action or the imposition of externally driven humanitarian agenda.<sup>57</sup> India's skepticism toward humanitarian intervention further reinforces this normative stance. While India has engaged in United Nations debates on the concepts of humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), it remains cautious about the selective and politicized application of these doctrines. The experience of NATO-led intervention in Libya, in particular, reinforced Indian concerns that humanitarian justifications can be manipulated to pursue regime change or strategic objectives under the guise of moral action. As a result, India prefers a more restrained interpretation of humanitarian responsibility, one that separates relief and assistance from coercive political or military measures.<sup>58</sup> One distinctive feature of India's normative framework is its reluctance to draw rigid boundaries between humanitarian aid and development cooperation. Indian humanitarian assistance is often integrated into broader development partnerships and capacity-building initiatives. India places significant emphasis on strengthening local institutions, enhancing disaster preparedness, and fostering long-term

---

<sup>54</sup> Meier, Claudia, and Murthy, Chandra Sekhara Rao: "India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance", Berlin, GPPI, March, 2011, [https://www.gppi.net/media/meier-murthy\\_2011\\_india-growing-involvement-humanitarian-assistance\\_gppi.pdf](https://www.gppi.net/media/meier-murthy_2011_india-growing-involvement-humanitarian-assistance_gppi.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Choedon, Yeshi: "India on Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect: Shifting Nuances", *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.73, n° 4 (December 2017), pp.430-453.

<sup>56</sup> Meier and Murthy, *op.cit.* Also see Choedon, *op.cit.*, pp. 430-453.

<sup>57</sup> Choedon, *op.cit.*, pp. 430-445

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



resilience, rather than focusing solely on short-term relief efforts.<sup>59</sup> Institutionally, India's Ministry of External Affairs, through the Development Partnership Administration (DPA), is tasked with coordinating humanitarian aid in alignment with bilateral relations.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) plays an essential role, ensuring that humanitarian assistance is focused on risk reduction rather than political motives. The NDMA's publication of the "Guidelines on International Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)" in October 2024 formalized the norms that had previously guided India's humanitarian actions, underscoring principles of efficiency, coordination, neutrality, and respect for national sovereignty. This framing of India's aid diplomacy strongly resonates with regions of the world that are wary of Western-imposed humanitarian conditions, further reinforcing India's credibility as a non-Western humanitarian actor.<sup>61</sup> It presents India as a proactive yet cautious and coherent alternative within the global humanitarian assistance paradigm, offering a model that emphasizes respect for sovereignty, consent, and non-intervention. An attempt to map some of its significant contribution in the non-western spaces is presented in the following section.

#### **4.1 Central Asia**

India's humanitarian involvement in Central Asia has been primarily focused on Afghanistan. Throughout the 1990s, India provided vital humanitarian relief to Afghan civilians suffering from conflict and the oppressive Taliban regime.<sup>62</sup> This aid included medical missions, food supplies, and infrastructural support. Following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, India emerged as a key development partner for Afghanistan, contributing significantly to the country's reconstruction efforts. Notably, India established Afghanistan's first hospital for children, the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH), and also provided emergency food and medical supplies.<sup>63</sup> As noted by Meier and Murthy, India's aid bureaucracy tends to make little distinction between humanitarian and development assistance, preferring a composite approach grounded in partnership and capacity building.<sup>64</sup> India's humanitarian aid to Afghanistan expanded significantly during the 2010s. In addition to sending wheat shipments, medical teams, earthquake relief, and winterization supplies, India ensured that aid was channelled directly through Afghan institutions rather than relying on international intermediaries.

Even after the Taliban regained power in 2021, India continued its humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Official statements made in the Lok Sabha's unstarred 3879, answered on 25.03.2022 reveal that India supplied 75,000 metric tonnes of wheat in 2020, along with COVID-related medical supplies in June 2020 and 500,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in January 2021. Following the political crisis in August 2021, India dispatched additional consignments, including 10,000 metric tonnes of wheat, life-saving medicines, winter clothing, and further vaccine doses. These supplies were channelled through the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul, as well as UN agencies such as the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. In addition to humanitarian aid, India undertook Operation Devi Shakti, evacuating 669 individuals, including Indian nationals,

---

<sup>59</sup> Meier and Murthy, *op.cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Choedon, *op.cit.*, pp. 430-453

<sup>61</sup> Meier and Murthy, *op.cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Ganaie, Reyaz Ahmad and Ganaie, Muzaffar Ahmad: "India's Afghanistan Policy: A Quest for Strategic Space Post the US Withdrawal", *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, Vol.9, No. 462 (2022).

<sup>63</sup> Prabhu, Swati: "The Future of India's Development Cooperation in Afghanistan", *Observer Research Foundation* (May 2024), at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-future-of-indias-development-cooperation-in-afghanistan>.

<sup>64</sup> Meier and Murthy, *op.cit.*



Afghan minority community members, and foreign nationals. This operation successfully repatriated all Indian citizens who sought evacuation from Afghanistan.

#### **4.2 East Asia**

India's spectrum of humanitarian engagements has been much wider, especially with regard to the Indo-Pacific region that has been more operationally visible than in Central Asia. India has become a leading regional first responder to natural disasters and complex emergencies, often acting more swiftly and effectively than traditional Western donors. Some of the key instances are outlined below:

- **Humanitarian Response:** In the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, India mounted a significant humanitarian response. It dispatched a 46-member National Disaster Response Force team to Miyagi prefecture for search-and-rescue operations. India also donated 25,000 blankets, 13,000 bottles of drinking water, and 10 tons of high-calorie biscuits to the affected region.<sup>65</sup> These supplies were delivered rapidly in the freezing conditions post-tsunami, and were “truly appreciated” by Japanese evacuees.<sup>66</sup> Japan's government publicly thanked India, with Prime Minister Naoto Kan lauding the Indian relief team's efforts as a sign of “strong friendship”. The aid was given bilaterally, with India acting on its own initiative (alongside international donors) rather than through the UN. A similar kind of such assertiveness was also witnessed during the 2004 tsunami as despite its extensive damage, it simultaneously mounted large-scale relief operations for Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Moreover, the Indian government declined external military assistance, signalling self-reliance while projecting itself as a capable provider of aid.<sup>67</sup>
- **Food Aid:** India has been a major food aid provider to North Korea during its chronic food crises. In the early 2000s, as Western aid diminished over nuclear tensions, India stepped up with grain donations on humanitarian grounds. It supplied 2,000 metric tons of rice in 2002, 1,000 MT in 2004, and another 2,000 MT in 2006 to help alleviate severe famine-like conditions.<sup>68</sup> Responding to a UN World Food Programme appeal and a direct request from Pyongyang, India contributed \$1 million worth of pulses (about 1,300 tons) via WFP for North Korean civilians. This made India one of the few donors bridging a large food aid gap in North Korea where a quarter of North Korea's population was at risk of starvation. Indian officials emphasized that aid was given at North Korea's request and was “purely humanitarian”, separate from India's disapproval of Pyongyang's weapons program. This balancing act illustrates India's normative commitment to the principle of non-intervention and relief based on need, alongside its support for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
- **Infrastructure and Capacity Building:** India's humanitarian diplomacy in East Asia extends to long-term development aid for Mongolia, our spiritual neighbour. During a landmark 2015 visit by Prime Minister Modi, India announced a US\$1 billion Line of Credit for Mongolia. This credit is funding Mongolia's first-ever oil refinery, a strategic project to reduce Mongolia's dependence on imported fuel. Construction began in 2018 - 2019 with

<sup>65</sup> Kan, Naoto: “India's Disaster Relief after the Japan Earthquake and Tsunami”, *Government of Japan Press Statement*, 22 April 2011, at [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/kan/statement/201104/22kaiken\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/kan/statement/201104/22kaiken_e.html).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Chakradeo, Saneet: “Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Aid and Relief”, *Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)* (September 2020), at <https://csep.org/policy-brief/neighbourhood-first-responder-indias-humanitarian-assistance-and-disaster-relief/>.

<sup>68</sup> “Humanitarian Assistance to Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)”, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/12898/Humanitarian+Assistance+to+Democratic+People+s+Republic+of+Korea+North+Korea/>



Indian technical support; by 2023 India had extended an additional \$236 million, underscoring commitment to Mongolia's energy security. India acted unilaterally through its Export-Import Bank, rather than via multilateral banks, branding this as part of its "Development Partnership."<sup>69</sup>

- Refugee Crisis: The Rohingya refugee crisis presented India with a complex humanitarian challenge involving conflicting political sensitivities. India balanced its security and diplomatic concerns by providing humanitarian assistance through *Operation Insaniyat*, which delivered relief material, those including food, tents, and medical supplies—to Bangladesh while also supplying aid directly to Myanmar. According to Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), India's approach reflected both humanitarian obligation and political caution, showcasing its ability to navigate crises where Western-style pressure would have been unwelcomed.<sup>70</sup> India continued to provide humanitarian relief during subsequent crises, including Cyclone Mora (2017), and more recently Cyclone Mocha (2023). During Operation Karuna (2023), Indian naval ships delivered 40 tonnes of relief supplies to Myanmar within days of the disaster, demonstrating both logistical capability and regional commitment.<sup>71</sup>

### 4.3 West Asia

India's humanitarian contributions in West Asia differ fundamentally from its engagements elsewhere because West Asia has over nine million Indians residing for work and other reasons, making Diasporas protection an important function. As a result, India has shown commendable evacuation and crisis management capacities in West Asia, especially at and during conflict zones. Infact India's aid diplomacy, in West Asia goes beyond merely acting as a facilitator; it also positions itself as an active engager, as demonstrated during its operational support in crises involving individuals in conflict zones. This was clearly evident in Operation Kaveri (Sudan, 2023) and Operation Ajay (Israel-Hamas Conflict, 2023). The GOI evacuated approx 4,097 individuals (including 136 foreigners) from Sudan, including Indian nationals and foreigners. The mission utilised Indian Air Force flights and naval vessels positioned in the Red Sea, demonstrating sophisticated, multi-branch coordination. In response to renewed conflict in Israel and Gaza, India launched Operation Ajay, organising charter flights to repatriate Indian citizens.<sup>72</sup> In another significant operation, Operation Raahat during the Yemen Civil War, India evacuated approximately 5,600 civilians, including nationals from 48 countries.<sup>73</sup> Amid the ISIS insurgency, India also undertook emergency evacuations, such as in July 2014, when it successfully rescued and brought back 46 Indian nurses held captive in ISIS-controlled Tikrit. Additionally, over 4,900 Indian nationals were repatriated from Iraq, with around 3,900 stranded workers receiving air tickets.<sup>74</sup> India's commitment to humanitarian assistance and

<sup>69</sup> Jalali, Ujwal: "India-funded Mongol refinery to begin operations by 2028: MEA", *The Tribune*, 15 October 2025, at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/india-funded-mongol-refinery-to-begin-operations-by-2028-mea/>.

<sup>70</sup> Chakradeo, *op.cit.*

<sup>71</sup> "Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR)", Embassy of India, at <https://audit.embassyofindia.yangon.gov.in/pages/NTQx>.

<sup>72</sup> "Question no-2149 details about operation Kaveri, Operation Ganga and Operation Ajay", at <https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?Dtl/37469/QUESTION+NO2149+DETAILS+ABOUT+OPERATION+KAVERI+OPERATION+G+ANGA+AND+OPERATION+AJAY>.

<sup>73</sup> "Question no-186. Appreciation of India's Humanitarian Rescue Operation in Yemen", at [https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/26411/Q\\_NO186\\_APPRECIATION\\_OF\\_INDIA'S\\_HUMANITARIAN\\_RESCUE\\_OPERATION\\_IN\\_YEMEN](https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/26411/Q_NO186_APPRECIATION_OF_INDIA'S_HUMANITARIAN_RESCUE_OPERATION_IN_YEMEN).

<sup>74</sup> "Indian nurses freed in Iraq given rapturous home welcome", *BBC*, 5 July 2014, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-28173993>.



evacuation was also demonstrated during the Gulf War in August 1990, when, after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, India orchestrated the largest civilian evacuation in history, airlifting around 170,000 Indian nationals over 59 days.<sup>75</sup> These operations highlight India's active role in global humanitarian crises, reflecting a commitment to safeguarding its citizens and extending aid to those in need, even in the most challenging circumstances. In Iraq, following the 2003 invasion, India adhered to its commitment to state sovereignty and non-intervention, refusing to deploy troops without UN authorization, while contributing to the country's recovery through humanitarian assistance.<sup>76</sup> India's humanitarian response was also swift in Iran following the devastating 2003 Bam earthquake, where it was one of the first nations to offer aid, sending a team of medical professionals and supplies, and later establishing a field hospital in Bam.<sup>77</sup> In Syria, India consistently provided solicited humanitarian aid throughout the civil war, including 2,000 metric tonnes of rice in 2021 to address food insecurity, along with essential medicines and COVID-19 relief supplies. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), India strengthened its ties with Gulf partners by supplying essential medicines such as hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol, dispatching medical teams, and later launching the *Vaccine Maitri* initiative to provide vaccines globally.<sup>78</sup> Thus, when one seeks to identify a pattern, it is evident that each case reflects India's steadfast commitment to shaping its own narrative of aid and support, one that is qualitatively distinct from the traditional Western model. This approach emphasizes sovereignty, non-intervention, and partnership, setting India apart as a unique and principled actor in the global humanitarian landscape.

## **5. Concluding Observations**

However, when an attempt is made to map India's potential in and within the global south, one may find there exist some significant challenges that hinder its ability to fully realize its objectives and substantiate its claims. These challenges may be categorized as endogenous and exogenous factors affecting policy implementation, alongside a range of structural and institutional limitations. Some of the major issues could be delineated as the follows: First, India suffers from the absence of a clearly articulated long-term strategic vision within its foreign policy discourse. A close reading of India's foreign policy prerogatives suggests that its approach has often been reactive rather than guided by a publicly articulated grand strategy extending across decades. Second, within the emerging oligo-polar world order, India must focus on directing its policymaking toward a more substantive and innovative framework capable of addressing the evolving needs of the Global South. An excessive emphasis on rebranding and the frequent renaming or repackaging of initiatives has, at times, outpaced meaningful institutional reform and outcome-oriented diplomacy. Third, India needs to assertively reorient its approach to heritage diplomacy, which remains underutilized and overly symbolic. Although India frequently invokes its long-standing civilizational narrative, this discourse is seldom translated into concrete economic, technological, or security outcomes. The lack of substantive linkages between civilizational claims and material policy deliverables risks rendering India's self-projection as a "civilizational state" largely rhetorical rather than strategically meaningful. Fourth, the delayed execution and protracted completion of overseas infrastructure and connectivity projects have significantly undermined India's image and

---

<sup>75</sup> "The Great Indian Evacuation of 1990: How India Rescued Its Citizens From Kuwait During the Gulf War", *The Hindu*, 27 October 2025, at <https://www.thehindu.com/infographics/2025-10-27/the-great-evacuation-1990/index.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Meier and Murthy, *op. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> Pandey, Ayush: "India's Humanitarian Leadership Shines in 2023: A Year of Global Aid and Compassion", *The Times of India*, 31 December 2023, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indias-humanitarian-leadership-shines-in-2023-a-year-of-global-aid-and-compassion/articleshow/106425124.cms>.

<sup>78</sup> "Question no-3857 vaccine maitri", at [https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/36996/QUESTION\\_NO3857\\_VACCINE\\_MAITRI](https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/36996/QUESTION_NO3857_VACCINE_MAITRI).



acceptability within the Global South. Persistent bureaucratic and structural inefficiencies have frequently created implementation bottlenecks, thereby weakening India's credibility, particularly in its neighbourhood and broader Global South engagements. Fifth, India needs to more assertively and proactively recalibrate its regional sphere of influence. The absence of a consistent and forward-looking regional strategy has contributed to heightened strategic competition and an erosion of India's influence in South Asia. This phenomenon has exacerbated further by the growing presence of external powers, the domestic sensitivities of neighbouring states, and policy inconsistencies within and beyond the region. Sixth, India's overreliance on normative leadership claims within the Global South, in the absence of adequate material backing, risks projecting an image of largely aspirational leadership. Such claims are not always matched by India's financial, technological, or institutional capacities, particularly as it seeks to position itself as a credible alternative to Chinese investment and development financing. Seventh, India's weak institutional capacity and persistent internal constraints within its foreign policy establishment have long restricted effective policy execution. Limited diplomatic manpower, overstretched overseas missions, and coordination gaps across ministries continue to undermine policy delivery. India's protracted campaign for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, often framed as providing representation beyond China, further underscores these institutional lacunae. Moreover, India's limited influence and presence in global rule-making institutions, that sharply encumbers its role in shaping global norms on technology, climate, finance, and security. Eighth, India's longstanding commitment to strategic autonomy; while simultaneously deepening partnerships with major powers such as the United States, Russia, Europe, and China, has generated persistent contradictions and compelled New Delhi to engage in diplomatic tightrope walking. If India genuinely aspires to serve as a credible voice for the Global South, it must move beyond this strategic ambivalence and adopt a more coherent, principled, and forthright foreign policy posture. Ninth, India needs to recraft and broaden its avenues its economic diplomacy. This has always remained insufficiently integrated with its broader foreign policy objectives, particularly in areas such as trade, investment, supply chains, and technology cooperation. These domains are not always aligned with India's geopolitical priorities and therefore require strategic recalibration in light of the evolving dynamics of global politics. Finally, the "China factor" continues to pose a structural challenge to India's regional influence and foreign policy objectives. India's approach, characterized by a mix of deterrence, disengagement, and selective cooperation has most of the time produced enduring strategic ambiguities. Given China's declining population growth rates and its entrenched regional economic and technological base, India must pragmatically reconceptualise China less as an outright adversary and more as a form of strategic competition. This necessitates moving beyond conventional realist antagonism toward the construction of relational frameworks grounded in pragmatic engagement and context-specific cooperation.

However, despite valid critiques regarding the challenges India have faced in leveraging these pillars of confidence, both within the nation and among Global South countries; it is undeniable that India possesses the merit and potential to represent the voice of the Global South on the global stage. What is required is a perspective that transcends traditional security concerns and securitization frameworks. As and when, India aspires to embody the vision of being the "Vishwaguru," it must do so by strengthening its internal, regional and the subaltern forces through focusing on long-term strategic autonomy alongside the Indian spirit of non-western sense of binary games. India must ascertain to the fact that is high time to redefine, rebrand and reconfigure our sense of strategic autonomy banking on the normative pillars of our national power. Moreover, as India navigates the rapidly changing global dynamics and aspires to expand its sphere of influence, it needs to do so balancing in accordance with the evolving global order, alongside a fundamental reorientation of outlook and approach. Finally,



to conclude one may safely argue that India's rich historical legacy, sustained commitment to fostering global partnerships, and distinctive non-Western approach to humanitarian engagement collectively confer a level of global social acceptability that many major global and regional powers in the Global South continue to lack, underscoring the need for these actors to strategically reinvent and recalibrate their approaches.

### **Bibliography**

Abuseitova, Marziya Khusainovna: "Historical and Cultural Relations between Kazakhstan, Central Asia and India from Ancient Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", in Roy, Jitendra Nath and Kumar, Braja Bihari (eds.) (2007): *India and Central Asia: Classical to Contemporary Periods*, Delhi, Concept Publishing Company

Appadodai, Arjun: "India's Foreign Policy", *International Affairs*, Vol. 25, n°1 (1949)

Arshed, Tanwir: "India and South East Asia: Mapping the Changing Contours of Partnership in the Twenty-First Century", in Basu, Partha P. and Arshed, Tanwir (eds.) (2024): *75 Years of India's Foreign Policy, Bilateral, Conventional and Emerging Trends*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan

Avdaliani, Emil: "The International North-South Transport Corridor", August 2025, Gulf Research Center, at

<https://www.grc.net/single-commentary/302#:~:text=The%20INSTC%2C%20with%20a%20length,East%2C%20its%20expansion%20is%20progressing.>

Basu, Pratinashree and Ghosh, Nilanjan: "Breathing New Life Into BIMSTEC: Challenges and Imperatives", April 2020, ORF Occasional Paper, at

<https://www.orfonline.org/research/breathing-new-life-into-bimstec-challenges-and-imperatives>

Bhadrakumar, M. K. : "U.S. Brings Silk Road to India", *The Hindu*, 23 December 2010, at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/U.S.-brings-Silk-Road-to-India/article15605598.ece>.

Bhattacharya, Sanjukta Banerjee: "Revisiting India–West Asia Relations: An Analysis of Strategic Proximities", in Basu, Partha P. and Arshed, Tanwir (eds.) (2024): *75 Years of India's Foreign Policy, Bilateral, Conventional and Emerging Trends*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan

Chakraborty, Subhayan: "Timeline: 21-year-long Effort by India to Set up Port in Chabahar.", *Business Standard*, 14 May 2024, at [https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/timeline-21-year-long-effort-by-india-to-set-up-port-in-chabahar-124051301100\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/timeline-21-year-long-effort-by-india-to-set-up-port-in-chabahar-124051301100_1.html).

Chakradeo, Saneet: "Neighbourhood First Responder: India's Humanitarian Aid and Relief", *Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)* (September 2020), at <https://csep.org/policy-brief/neighbourhood-first-responder-indias-humanitarian-assistance-and-disaster-relief/>.

Chaudhary, Shamila N.: "Iran to India Natural Gas Pipeline: Implications for Conflict Resolution & Regionalism in India, Iran, and Pakistan", November 2025, School of International Service, at <http://www.american.edu/TED/iranpipeline.htm>.



Chinoy, Sujan, and Pradhan, Prasanta Kumar (eds.) (2024): *India's Approach to West Asia: Trends, Challenges and Possibilities*, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses and Pentagon Press, p.201

Choedon, Yeshi: "India on Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect: Shifting Nuances." *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.73 n° 4 (December 2017)

"Countries with the Largest Muslim Population in 2022", at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/374661/countries-with-the-largest-muslim-population/>

Dani, Ahmad Hasan: "Buddhism to Islam: Cultural Links between Central Asia and South Asia", in Vohra, Narendra Nath (ed.) (1999): *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, Delhi, Shipra Publications,

"Evacuation of Indian Nationals from Syria", at [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38740/Evacuation\\_of\\_Indian\\_Nationals\\_from\\_Syri](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38740/Evacuation_of_Indian_Nationals_from_Syri).

Gafurov, Bobojon Ghafurovich (ed.) (1974): *Two volumes: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History, Archaeology and Culture of Central Asia in the Kushan Period*, Moscow, Nauka.

Ganaie, Reyaz Ahmad and Ganaie, Muzaffar Ahmad: "India's Afghanistan Policy: A Quest for Strategic Space Post the US Withdrawal", *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, Vol.9, n° 462 (2022).

Gupta, Prithvi: "Revitalising the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor", 2 February 2025, ORF Expert Speak, at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/revitalising-the-asia-africa-growth-corridor>.

Haidar, Suhasini: "Chabahar and the Afghan Roundabout.", *The Hindu*, 4 December 2021, at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/Chabahar-and-the-Afghan-roundabout/article62116361.ece>

*History*, BIMSTEC, at <https://bimstec.org/history>.

"QUESTION NO-3857 VACCINE MAITRI", 11 August 2023, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Media Center, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/36996/QUESTION\\_NO3857\\_VACCINE\\_MAITRI](https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/36996/QUESTION_NO3857_VACCINE_MAITRI).

"QUESTION NO-2149 DETAILS ABOUT OPERATION KAVERI, OPERATION GANGA AND OPERATION AJAY", 21 December 2023, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Media Center, at

<https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?Dtl/37469/QUESTION+NO2149+DETAILS+ABOUT+OPERATION+KAVERI+OPERATION+GANGA+AND+OPERATION+AJAY>

Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR), Embassy of India at <https://audit.embassyofindia.angon.gov.in/pages/NTQx>.

Humanitarian Assistance to Democratic People s Republic of Korea (North Korea), at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/12898/Humanitarian+Assistance+to+Democratic+People+s+Republic+of+Korea+North+Korea/>

Hussain, Afaq, and Shafer Nicholas: "The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: Connectivity in an Era of Geopolitical Uncertainty", *Atlantic Council* (August 2025), at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-connectivity-in-an-era-of-geopolitical-uncertainty/#:~:text=,and%20logistics%20hubs%20likely%20at>.



“India and Afghanistan: Marching Ahead”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/uploads/publicationdocs/176\\_india-and-afghanistan-a-development-partnership.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/uploads/publicationdocs/176_india-and-afghanistan-a-development-partnership.pdf).

“India Joins the Ashgabat Agreement, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29406/>.

“India Shines Bright! A New Era in Solar Energy: Progress Driven by the International Solar Alliance”, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, at <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2071486&reg=3&lang=2>.

“Indian nurses freed in Iraq given rapturous home welcome”, *BBC*, 5 July 2014, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-28173993>.

Jalali, Ujwal: “India-funded Mongol refinery to begin operations by 2028: MEA”, *The Tribune*, 15 October 2025, at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/india-funded-mongol-refinery-to-begin-operations-by-2028-mea/>.

“Joint Statement on Strengthening ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace, Stability and Prosperity in the Region in the Context of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) With the Support of India’s Act East Policy (AEP)”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38396/>.

“Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project in Mizoram: Executive Summary”, at <https://mpcb.mizoram.gov.in/uploads/attachments/6b19cfb12b61c709d884a3305788d3fc/pages-234-executive-summary-english.pdf>.

Kan, Naoto: “India’s Disaster Relief after the Japan Earthquake and Tsunami”, *Government of Japan Press Statement*, 22 April 2011, at [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/kan/statement/201104/22kaiken\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/kan/statement/201104/22kaiken_e.html).

Kasturi, Charu Sudan: “Stalled at the Border”, *Deccan Herald*, 28 June 2025, at <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/stalled-at-the-border-india-myanmar-thailand-highways-project-stalled-border-issues-manipur-3607344>.

Kazmi, Sahar Shah and Rasool, Sheikh Waleed: “Peace Pipeline or Strategic Gamble: Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project: Challenges, Opportunities and Foreign Policy Implications”, *Journal of Xi’an Shiyou University*, Vol. 20, No.05 (May 2024)

Khati, Priyanka and Kim, Chanwahn: “Impact of India’s Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN on Its Goods Exports: A Gravity Model Analysis”, *Economies*, Vol. 11, n° 1 (23 December 2022).

Khosla, Inder Pal: “An Overview”, in Vohra, Narendra Nath (ed.) (1999): *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, Delhi, Shipra Publications

Kumar, Gitesh: “Reconnecting India and Central Asia in a Changing Geopolitical Environment.”, *Special Eurasia*, 11 August 2025, at <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2025/08/11/india-central-asia/#:~:text=facilitating%20agri,initiatives>.

Maleki, Abbas: “Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline: Is It a Peace Pipeline?”, MIT Centre for International Studies, September 2007, at <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/iran-pakistan-india-pipeline-it-peace-pipeline>.

Manguin, Pierre-Yves and Wade, Geoff (eds.) (2011): *Early Interactions Between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-cultural Exchange*, ISEAS. p. 20. Also see, Vella, Walter F. (ed) (1968): *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press



Mehdudia, Sujay: “TAPI Project Will Be the New Silk Route, Says Deora”, *The Hindu*, 4 December 2021, at <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/TAPI-project-will-be-the-new-Silk-Route-says-Deora/article15589321.ece>.

Meier, Claudia, and Murthy, Chandra Sekhara Rao: “India’s Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance”, Berlin, GPPI, March, 2011, [https://www.gppi.net/media/meier-murthy\\_2011\\_india-growing-involvement-humanitarian-assistance\\_gppi.pdf](https://www.gppi.net/media/meier-murthy_2011_india-growing-involvement-humanitarian-assistance_gppi.pdf)

Mishra, Prabhat Palit: “India’s Historical Impact with Southeast Asia”, *Education about Asia*, Vol. 26, n° 1 (2021)

Mohan, Chilamkuri Raja: “Modi and the Middle East: Towards a Link West Policy”, *The Indian Express*, 5 October 2014, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/modi-and-the-middle-east-towards-a-link-west-policy/>.

Narayanan, Sripathi: “Mekong-Ganga Cooperation @25.”, Indian Council of World Affairs, December 2025, at [https://www.icwa.in/show\\_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls\\_id=14008&lid=8505](https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=14008&lid=8505).

Nehru, Jawaharlal: *India’s Foreign Policy 1946-1961*, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, pp-2, at <https://archive.org/details/indiasforeignpol00nehr/page/n7/mode/2up?ref=olNehru>,

Pandey, Ayush: “India’s Humanitarian Leadership Shines in 2023: A Year of Global Aid and Compassion”, *The Times of India*, 31 December 2023, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indias-humanitarian-leadership-shines-in-2023-a-year-of-global-aid-and-compassion/articleshow/106425124.cms>.

Prabhu, Swati: “The Future of India’s Development Cooperation in Afghanistan”, May 2024, Observer Research Foundation, at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-future-of-indias-development-cooperation-in-afghanistan>.

Press Trust of India: “How Sushma Swaraj’s Intervention Led to Evacuation of Kerala Nurses from Iraq”, *The Times of India*, 7 August 2019, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/how-sushma-swarajs-intervention-led-to-evacuation-of-kerala-nurses-from-iraq/articleshow/70578015.cms>.

Press Trust of India: “Plea for Motor Vehicle Agreement between India and Myanmar”, *The Economic Times*, 16 February 2017, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/plea-for-motor-vehicle-agreement-between-india-and-myanmar/articleshow/57186840.cms>.

Pulipaka, Sanjay, Singh, Antara Ghosal and Sircar, Saranya: “India and Connectivity Frameworks” in Krishan Singh, Hemant (ed.) (2017): *Delhi Policy Group*, Delhi Policy Group, at [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/india-and-connectivity-frameworks-1074.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/india-and-connectivity-frameworks-1074.pdf).

Putz, Catherine : “A ‘New Chapter’ for India and Central Asia?”, *The Diplomat*, 8 September 2025, at <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/a-new-chapter-for-india-and-central-asia/>.

“Question no.186 Appreciation of India’s Humanitarian Rescue Operation in Yemen”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 February 2016, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/26411/Q\\_NO186\\_APPRECIATION\\_OF\\_INDIAS\\_HUMANITARIAN\\_RESCUE\\_OPERATION\\_IN\\_YEMEN](https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/26411/Q_NO186_APPRECIATION_OF_INDIAS_HUMANITARIAN_RESCUE_OPERATION_IN_YEMEN).

“Question no-3857 vaccine maitri”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Media Center, 11 August 2023 at



[https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/36996/QUESTION\\_NO3857\\_VACCINE\\_MAITRI](https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/36996/QUESTION_NO3857_VACCINE_MAITRI)

“Question no-2149 details about operation Kaveri, Operation Ganga and Operation Ajay”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 21 December 2023, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/37469/QUESTION+NO2149+DETAILS+ABOUT+OPERATION+KAVERI+OPERATION+GANGA+AND+OPERATION+AJAY>

Raina, Radha: “Pioneering Pilgrims, Artisans and Merchants”, in Vohra, Narendra Nath (ed.) (1999): *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, Delhi, Shipra Publications

Roy-Chaudhury, Shantanu: “From ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’: Mapping India’s Southeast Asian Engagement”, ORF Issue Brief, n° 800 (May 2025), at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/from-look-east-to-act-east-mapping-india-s-southeast-asian-engagement>.

Sajjanhar, Ashok: “The India-ASEAN Partnership at 25”, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (January 2018), at <https://www.idsa.in/publisher/comments/the-india-asean-partnership-at-25#:~:text=The%20India,ARF%29%20in%201996>.

Sinha, Dilip: “India’s Look East Policy and the Northeast”, *Distinguished Lectures Details*, Uploaded by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 April 2016, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?505#:~:text=Date%3A%20April%2025%2C%202016>.

Subramanian, Nirupama: “Simply Put: On Road to Mandalay, Beyond”, *The Indian Express*, 14 August 2018, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-myanmar-land-border-crossing-open-sushma-swaraj-imphal-mandalay-bus-service-5305229/>.

Sumi, Tolivi H.: “Connectivity Projects of North-East India Under Act East Policy”, *Dimapur Government College Journal*, Vol.10, n°1(December 2024)

“The First Meeting of the India-Central Asia Summit”, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34759/The+First+Meeting+of+the+IndiaCentral+Asia+Summit#:~:text=Prime%20Minister%20Shri%20Narendra%20Modi,at%20the%20level%20of%20leaders>.

“The Great Indian Evacuation of 1990: How India Rescued Its Citizens from Kuwait During the Gulf War”, *The Hindu*, 27 October 2025 at <https://www.thehindu.com/infographics/2025-10-27/the-great-evacuation-1990/index.html>.

TOI Business Desk: “Agri Ties Boost: India, Israel Discuss Deeper Farm Cooperation; Focus on Tech, Innovation, Trade”, *The Times of India*, 23 November 2025, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/agri-ties-boost-india-israel-discuss-deeper-farm-cooperation-focus-on-tech-innovation-trade/articleshow/125508701.cms>.

Wani, Ayjaz: “INSTC Eastern Corridor: India’s Gateway to Central Asia”, 27 November 2025, ORF Expert Speak, at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/instc-eastern-corridor-india-s-gateway-to-central-asia>.

Wolters, Oliver William: “History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives”, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982.