

BRIDGING THE TRUST GAP: Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh with his Pakistani counterpart Yusuf Raza Gilani and Pakistan Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar



LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

Thanks to some deft moves, New Delhi's ties with neighbouring countries improved, while there were hardly any gains in relations with major powers

By Ashok Tuteja

NO ONE wants a big neighbour. If wishes were horses, many countries would have changed either their own location or that of their neighbour. In a sensitive region like South Asia, this analogy becomes more pertinent, largely because of the predominant position India occupies. Due to their own sense of insecurity, most South Asian countries regard India as a regional bully, out to finish them.

But things are changing, thanks to some deft moves by New Delhi recently, vis-a-vis the neighbouring countries. India no longer looks for reciprocity from them. Rather, India has gone out of its way to appease them, offering generous aid packages to least developed countries (LDCs) and addressing their concerns with sincerity. The 'Gujral doctrine' has truly started yielding results if one closely looks at India's ties with its neighbours in the year gone by.

India's most difficult relationship without doubt is with Pakistan. The highlight of 2011 was the revival of the normalisation process with Islamabad. After two years of tension in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, the two countries put back on track their dialogue process to resolve the outstanding issues. Pakistan's decision to grant the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to India, 15 years after New Delhi accorded it the same designation, is being seen as one of the major confidence-building measures (CBMs) that is expected to transform South

Asia's political economy. However, critics argue that the new-found bonhomie in the accident-prone relationship can again be put to test if there is another Mumbai-like terror attack in India, masterminded across the border.

A historic land-swap deal with Bangladesh during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in early September has drastically changed the dynamics of ties between the two nations. The hostility of the past seems to have given way to an unprecedented upswing in the bilateral ties. Due credit must be given to the friendly Sheikh Hasina government in Dhaka for cracking down on anti-India elements operating from the Bangladesh territory.

In the case of Nepal, the election of India-educated Baburam Bhattarai as the new Prime Minister has provided New Delhi an opportunity to re-design the relationship and put an end to anti-India campaign there. New Delhi must keep nudging the new leadership in Nepal to complete the peace and constitution-making processes, while not being seen as an all-powerful neighbour, hell bent on interfering in the internal affairs of the Himalayan nation.

India-Sri Lanka relations have been fluctuating through the years. The rehabilitation of the people, affected by the prolonged civil war in the island nation, has become an emotive issue in Tamil Nadu, introducing strains in ties between India and Sri Lanka. However, events in the past few

years have certainly led Sri Lanka to move a shade close to China and Pakistan for military and political support.

With the situation in Afghanistan worsening by the day, the embattled nation continues to pose a big challenge to Indian diplomacy. New Delhi has invested heavily in terms of aid for rebuilding the infrastructure in Afghanistan but the ground situation has hardly changed in the battle-scarred country during the past decade. The fear of the Taliban riding piggyback on Pakistan continues to haunt the mandarins of the Foreign Office.

When it comes to relations with major powers, nothing worthwhile happened in India-US ties. The two countries are still busy ironing out their differences over the historic civil-nuclear deal signed three years back. One heartening thing, however, has been that Washington no longer looks at India through the prism of its ties with Pakistan.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Moscow from December 15-17 gave an impetus to India's time-tested relationship with Russia.

The decision of the ruling Labour Party in Australia to allow the sale of uranium to India is being seen in strategic circles as a major diplomatic gain for the country. The Japanese Prime Minister will be visiting New Delhi soon when the two countries are expected to resume negotiations on a civil-nuclear deal.

NEWSPICK



Dragon King gets a Queen

Media networking sites were in news throughout the year for their constructive role in the Arab Spring. However, during the UK riots people used text messages. BlackBerry phones and social media platforms such as Twitter to coordinate attacks and stay ahead of the police.

All is not well with Zardari

Pakistan's ailing president Asif Ali Zardari has scotched speculation that he could be ousted under a constitutional provision that provides for the removal of a president on the ground of "physical or mental incapacity". Zardari has been at the centre of a storm since reports linked him to an alleged secret memo that was delivered by Pakistani-American businessman Mansoor Ijaz to the US military after the killing of Osama bin Laden in May.



Power of social networking

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SINGH ON A SONG: (Clockwise) Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck and Nepal's new Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai came calling, while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh went to Bangladesh to meet his counterpart Sheikh Hasina. A historic land-swap deal during the visit to Dhaka in early September drastically changed the dynamics of ties between the two nations.

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