



India's Global Rise and Regional Retreat

This editorial is based on [“The paradox of India’s global rise, its regional decline”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 04/05/2024. The article brings into picture that while India's influence on the global stage is growing, its clout in South Asia is waning, presenting a significant challenge to its aspirations as a pivotal power in international politics.

For Prelims: [South Asia](#), [G-20](#), [I2U2](#), [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#), [BRICS](#), [Shanghai Cooperation Organization](#), [Voice of the Global South](#), [BrahMos Missile](#), [International Solar Alliance](#), [Global Biofuel Alliance](#), [Belt and Road Initiative](#), [Indus Water Treaty](#), [Kashmir dispute](#), [India-Maldives](#), [India-Sri Lanka](#), [India-Nepal](#).

For Mains: Factors Leading to India’s Global Rise, Factors Leading to Regional Decline of India in South Asia

India's global stature has undoubtedly grown in recent decades, propelled by its **economic might, military prowess, and demographic advantages**. From being a prominent voice in global forums like the [G-20](#) and participating in multilateral groups like the [I2U2](#), India has established itself as a significant player on the world stage.

However, this global ascent is paradoxically accompanied by a concerning **decline in its regional influence**, particularly in [South Asia](#), where it once held sway.

What are the Factors Leading to India’s Global Rise?

- **Economic Boom:** The [World Bank](#) forecasts India's output growth to reach **7.5% in FY24**, driven by resilient activity in services and industry
 - This economic strength translates to global influence. For instance, Indian companies like [Tata Consultancy Services](#) are holding significant global presence.
 - Strong economy also attracts higher investments as well.
- **Strategic Partnerships and Alliances:** India has actively pursued strategic partnerships and alliances with major powers, such as the [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue \(Quad\)](#) with the United States, Japan, and Australia.
 - These partnerships have helped India counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region and enhance its global standing.
 - Additionally, India's participation in multilateral forums like [BRICS](#) and the [Shanghai Cooperation Organization](#) has strengthened its global presence.
 - India's emergence as a [Voice of the Global South](#) has propelled it into a leadership position on the global stage.
 - It is showcased through inclusion of the [African Union](#) in [India’s G20 presidency](#), and swift passage of [G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration](#) which was considered hard to achieve.

- **Rising Military Capabilities:** India has steadily **modernized, indigenised and strengthened** its military capabilities, making it a formidable force in the region and beyond.
 - [INS Sahyadri](#), [LCA Tejas](#) and [INS Vikrant](#) are prime examples of India's recently built military capabilities.
 - India recently delivered the first batch of [BrahMos Missile](#) to the Philippines, giving a push to defense diplomacy.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** India's strategy of non-alignment and reformed multilateralism, such as **abstaining from voting against Russia in the UNGA** and **providing humanitarian support to Israel while maintaining a clear diplomatic stance with Palestine**, reflects its commitment to strategic autonomy and being globally applauded.
 - India also subscribed to **India First Policy** that is visible in its purchase of Russian crude oil despite western apprehensions, keeping strategic interest on top.
- **Technological Prowess:** India's advancements in various fields of technology, particularly in information technology (IT), space exploration, and renewable energy, have played a crucial role in its global ascent.
 - India's recent achievements with [Chandrayaan-3](#) and the [Aditya-L1 Mission](#) highlight its capabilities in the space sector.
 - Additionally, India's leadership in the [International Solar Alliance](#) and [Global Biofuel Alliance](#) demonstrates its commitment to promoting renewable energy.
- **Soft Power and Cultural Influence:** India's rich cultural heritage, vibrant democracy, and thriving diaspora have contributed to its soft power globally.
 - **Indian cinema, cuisine, yoga**, and spirituality have found widespread appeal across the world.

What Factors are Leading to Regional Decline of India in South Asia?

- **Rise of China:** China's extensive economic investments, infrastructure projects through [Belt and Road Initiative](#), and diplomatic initiatives in South Asia have eroded India's traditional sphere of influence in the region, leading to a relative decline in India's power and sway.
- **Low Regional Trade:** Intra-regional trade in South Asia is already among the lowest in the world. India's trade with the South Asian countries has remained roughly between **1.7% and 3.8%** of its global trade.
- **Perception of Indian Hegemony:** Some smaller nations in South Asia perceive India's actions as an attempt to assert its hegemony in the region.
 - This perception has led to a sense of mistrust and a desire to counterbalance India's influence through **Balancing, Bargaining, Hedging and Bandwagoning strategies.**
- **Strained Relations with Neighbors:** India's relations with some of its neighbors have been strained due to various factors, including **border disputes, cross-border terrorism, and water-sharing issues.**
- **Internal Challenges:** India's own internal challenges, including domestic political issues, and resource constraints, have diverted attention and resources away from proactive regional engagement, contributing to its **decline in influence within South Asia.**

Note

South Asia encompasses the southern part of Asia, delineated by geography and ethno-cultural factors, and includes **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.**

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What are the Main Challenges India faces with its Neighboring Countries?

- **Pakistan:** [Kashmir dispute](#) and cross-border terrorism remain the primary sources of tension between India and Pakistan.
 - The [Indus Water Treaty of 1960](#) allocates water rights from the Indus River system. However, disagreements over water sharing and infrastructure projects on the rivers remain a source of tension.
- **China:** While not strictly a South Asian nation, China's growing influence in the region impacts India. A long-standing unresolved border dispute exists between India and China, particularly over the [Line of Actual Control \(LAC\)](#).
 - This has led to several military standoffs and tensions including the recent **Galwan Valley Standoff**.
 - China's String of Pearls Strategy and [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor](#) is heavily contested by India.
 - Also, China's recently released "standard map" that includes the state of **Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region** as part of its territory has generated significant tensions.
- **Maldives:** Recent Maldivian politics has seen a campaign called "India Out," labeling Indian presence as a threat to sovereignty.

- This campaign, coupled with a **tourism strain stemming from a diplomatic dispute and China's rising influence in the Maldives**, has sparked concerns about India-Maldives Relations.
- **Bangladesh:** India and Bangladesh have signed only **2 treaties out of 54 common rivers they share**, including the Ganga Waters Treaty and The Kushiyara River Treaty.
 - Negotiations are ongoing for major rivers like the **Teesta and Feni**.
 - Also, illegal migration from Bangladesh to India, involving refugees and economic migrants, remains a significant issue, straining Indian border states and raising security concerns.
- **Sri Lanka:** The India-Sri Lanka relationship faces challenges such as tensions regarding ownership of **Katchatheevu** Island, concerns about border security and smuggling.
 - It also includes sensitivity surrounding the **Tamil minority issue in Sri Lanka**, and India's apprehensions about China's growing influence in Sri Lanka (especially through **Hambantota Port**).
- **Nepal:** Although relations have improved recently, some lingering issues persist.
 - It includes Boundary disputes, especially regarding the **Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh trijunction area** in western Nepal and the Susta area in southern Nepal.
 - Nepal recently announced the printing of a new **Rs 100 currency note** featuring a map that includes the Indian territories of **Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura, and Kalapani**, a move that has been contested by India.
 - Gorkhas are increasingly deviated to China from India forces due to the new **Agniveer Scheme**.

What Steps can India Take to Enhance its Regional Relationships?

- **Development-Centric Diplomacy:** It is high time for India to move beyond just offering loans and **focus on collaborative development projects** that address specific needs in neighboring countries.
 - This could involve joint research in areas like **agriculture, renewable energy, or disaster management**.
- **Cooperative Security:** India needs to shift towards a purely military-centric approach to security and promote cooperative security measures.
 - This could involve joint counter-terrorism exercises, regional disaster response teams, or a **South Asian hotline for managing border tensions**.
- **Focusing on Regional Blocs:** Instead of trying to dominate the entire region, India can focus on building stronger relationships with sub-regional blocs like **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical Cooperation)** or **SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)**.
 - Success in these smaller groups can translate to wider regional influence.
- **Revitalising Neighbourhood First Policy:** India must relook through its **Neighbourhood First policy** and **prioritize inclusive development projects** fostering mutual trust through transparent communication, and **leveraging digital connectivity** for collaborative initiatives within the region.
- **South Asia at Heart of Global South:** India can enhance its regional diplomatic ties by showcasing the South Asian region as a pivotal player in the Voice of Global South Summits.
 - This approach can bolster India's influence and cooperation within the region.

Drishti Mains Question:

Despite India's global rise, what factors contribute to its diminishing influence within the South Asia region, and what strategies could India employ to address this challenge?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. Consider the following statements: (2020)

1. The value of Indo-Sri Lanka trade has consistently increased in the last decade.

2. "Textile and textile articles" constitute an important item of trade between India and Bangladesh.
3. In the last five years, Nepal has been the largest trading partner of India in South Asia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Q. Which one among the following South Asian countries has the highest population density? (2009)

- (a) India
- (b) Nepal
- (c) Pakistan
- (d) Sri Lanka

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. 'China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia'. In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbour. **(2017)**