

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA

STARRED Q. NO. 262

ANSWERED ON 13.12.2024

INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY

***262. SHRI MANISH TEWARI**

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:-

- (a) The core objectives and guiding principles of India's Neighbourhood First Policy;**
- (b) The specific initiatives and programme undertaken under this policy to enhance bilateral and regional cooperation with neighbouring countries;**
- (c) The details of neighbouring countries that have an explicit "India First" policy;**
- (d) Whether changes in regimes in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives have impacted India's bilateral relations with them, particularly in the context of ongoing projects and strategic partnerships;**
- (e) If so, the details thereof; and**

(f) The manner in which the Government plans to address the challenges posed by geopolitical competition especially from China in India's immediate neighbourhood?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR)

(a) to (f) A statement is laid on the table of the House.

Statement referred to in reply to parts (a) to (f) of the Lok Sabha Starred Question No. *262 for reply on 13.12.2024 regarding “India’s Neighbourhood First Policy.”

(a) to (f): The ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy, which guides the management of India’s relations with countries in its immediate neighbourhood, focuses on creating mutually beneficial, people-oriented, regional frameworks for stability and prosperity, including through the building of physical, digital and people to people connectivity. India engages with these countries on a consultative, non-reciprocal and outcome-oriented basis, driven by the principles of Samman (respect), Samvad (dialogue), Shanti (peace), and Samriddhi (prosperity).

As part of India’s ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy, the Government has been extending necessary developmental assistance and capacity building initiatives, as per needs and aspirations of the neighbouring countries, thereby contributing towards holistic economic development of their countries. Under this approach, India has been assisting neighbouring countries on development of infrastructure projects ranging from large scale infrastructure to community related provisioning of assets and platforms, augmentation of capabilities and extending financial, budgetary and humanitarian assistance.

A very large number of initiatives and programmes have been undertaken by India within the ambit of this policy. Among them are:

(i) humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in the form of food and medical aid, as well as scholarship schemes for Afghan students;

(ii) several development cooperation projects in Bangladesh in the areas of cross-border power, energy and transport linkages;

(iii) assistance to Bhutan for capacity building and in the development of its hydropower resources, as well as cross-border connectivity linkages, including energy, rail links, road, trade infrastructure and digital connectivity;

(iv) with Maldives, cooperation has focused on maritime security, connectivity, people to people exchange, and creation of community building infrastructure projects, besides assistance to overcome financial instability;

(v) assistance to Myanmar for several connectivity infrastructure development projects and capacity building, besides humanitarian relief and aid to help it recover from natural disasters;

(vi) a very elaborate programme of development cooperation with Nepal aimed at promoting connectivity, and developing economic, energy, digital and cultural ties, including through the implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP) in building hospitals, schools, colleges, drinking water facilities, sanitation, drainage, rural electrification, hydropower, embankment and river training works, so as to improve the overall quality of life at the local level.

(vii) cooperation with Sri Lanka, including connectivity, agriculture, power, education, human resource development, culture and economic engagement, as well as a significant financial assistance programme.

India's assistance under its Neighbourhood First policy is regarded as valuable by diverse sections of public opinion among our neighbours, ensuring a sustainable basis for these assistance programs to continue despite changes in administration in these countries. India's comprehensive and longstanding ties with its neighbouring countries also stand on their own footing and are independent of the relations of these countries with third countries. Government keeps a vigilant watch on all developments which have a bearing on India's national security and takes all necessary measures to safeguard it. India is confident about the strength and enduring nature of its bilateral ties with the neighbouring

countries and will continue to work together with them towards advancing bilateral ties for mutual benefit as well as safeguarding India's interest in the region
