



ROLE OF INDIA AS A NATION IN THE TRANSITION OF SOUTH ASIAN DEMOGRAPHY: INFLUENCED BY EMERGING MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER

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Abstract: A land holding over one-fourth of the Global Population, the South Asia presently undergoing a Geo-political transformation in respect of emerging multipolar world order. This paper considers the upcoming strategic, economic, and political changes of South Asian countries—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan—within contemporary global power reshuffling. It is furthermore establishing that South Asia is transitioning from a historically fragmented and Pro - conflict region into a critical segment of global competition, cooperation, and strategic resetting. The study integrates demographic realities as a central variable influencing regional geopolitics, giving stress on how population size, youth bulge, urbanization, Sex ratio and labour dynamics shape state behaviour and regional integration. Considering the recent developments such as China's expanding influence, India's rise as a regional and global power, changing U.S. strategic priorities, and economic susceptibilities linked to global crises, the paper offers a comprehensive analysis of South Asia's repositioning in the global system. In fact, the region possesses immense potential through its demographic advantage and economic growth, persistent structural challenges—political instability, security dilemmas, and uneven development—continue to oppose its emergence as a coherent geopolitical alliance.

Keywords: Global Population; multipolar world; regional integration; Demographic advantage; Geopolitical alliance.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is transforming from Unipolarity, dominated by the United States—to a multipolar stature by the rise of new power canterers such as China, India, the European Union, and regional blocs. In this new era of world order South Asia occupies a uniquely significant position due to its demographic weight, strategic geography, and economic viability.

South Asia comprises approximately **2.1 billion people, accounting for over 25% of the global population**. It is the most densely populated sub-region in the world. This demographic scale is not merely a statistical fact but an established geopolitical force influencing economic growth, labour markets, migration, and security policies.

This entire land is historically marked by colonial legacies, partition, and interstate conflicts, South Asia has struggled to achieve regional coherence. However, contemporary geopolitical shifts—especially the rise of China, India's growing global stature, and intensified great power competition—have relocate the region within global strategic calculations.

This paper seeks to analyse how South Asia is going through these transformations, concentrating particularly on the interplay between geopolitics and demography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent Research Texts, editorials, Articles on South Asian geopolitics has traditionally revolved around three main themes. 1. **Conflict and security**, particularly India–Pakistan relations and presently India – Bangladesh Relation. 2. **Regional cooperation**, especially through SAARC and 3. **External power influence**, notably China and the United States.

Recent studies have expanded this framework to include **economic integration, connectivity, and demographic transitions**. The concept of a “demographic dividend” has become central, emphasizing the region's youthful population as a potential driver of economic growth.

However, critical literature highlights that demographic advantages can turn into liabilities if not matched with employment generation and institutional capacity. Recent developments in some South Asian Countries Like, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan reflecting the fact. Reports indicate that job creation in South Asia has lagged behind population growth, threatening the realization of its demographic dividend.

This paper is an effort to contribute in literature by integrating demography more explicitly into geopolitical analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a mixed method both Qualitative and Quantitative approach based on:

- Secondary data from international organizations (UN, World Bank, etc.)
- Recent geopolitical developments and policy shifts
- Comparative analysis of South Asian countries
- Integration of demographic indicators (population, age structure, urbanization)

The study follows a thematic structure, combining descriptive and analytical methods to interpret regional trends.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SOUTH ASIA

Table 1: Describing the Demographic status of South Asian Countries

			SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES DATA ANALYSIS														
SL NO	NAME OF THE COUNTRY	FORM OF GOVT	TOTAL POPULATION, 2024	PROJECTED POPULATION, 2040	URBAN	RURAL	MALE	FEMALE	AGE BRKDN(EFF CTIVE)	HINDUS	MUSLIMS	CHRISTIANS	BUDDHIST	UNAFFILIATED	OTHERS		
1	AFGANISTAN	THEOCRACY	4,26,47,490	6,26,37,433	27%	73%	50%	49.50%	54.70%	<1%	99.90%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%		
2	BANGLADESH	PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC	17,35,62,360	20,19,08,614	41%	59%	49%	50.80%	65.50%	7.90%	91.10%	0.30%	0.60%	0%	0.10%		
3	BHUTAN	CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY	7,91,520	8,60,537	45%	55%	53%	46.60%	72.60%	22.50%	0.20%	0.60%	74.70%	0%	1.90%		
4	INDIA	FEDERAL PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC	1,45,09,35,790	1,61,87,66,795	37%	63%	52%	48.40%	68.20%	79.40%	15.20%	2.20%	0.70%	0%	2.50%		
5	MALDIVES	PRESIDENTIAL REPUBLIC	5,27,800	5,63,377	42%	58%	62%	38.10%	75.80%	2.50%	94.10%	1.60%	1.30%	0.10%	0.30%		
6	NEPAL	FEDERAL PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC	2,96,51,050	3,28,06,503	22%	78%	48%	52.10%	65.10%	81.20%	5.10%	1.80%	8.20%	0%	3.80%		
7	PAKISTAN	FEDERAL PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC	25,12,69,160	32,25,38,176	38%	62%	51%	49.30%	59%	2.10%	96.50%	1.30%	0%	0%	0%		
8	SRILANKA	PRESIDENTIAL REPUBLIC	2,19,16,000	2,44,99,783	19%	81%	48%	51.60%	56.20%	14.50%	10.20%	5.60%	69.60%	0.10%	0%		

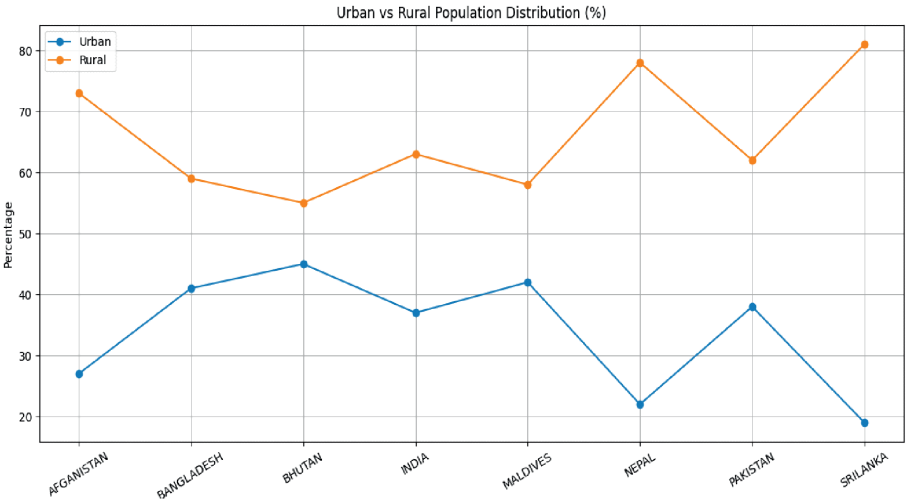


Chart 1: Urban and Rural Population Distribution

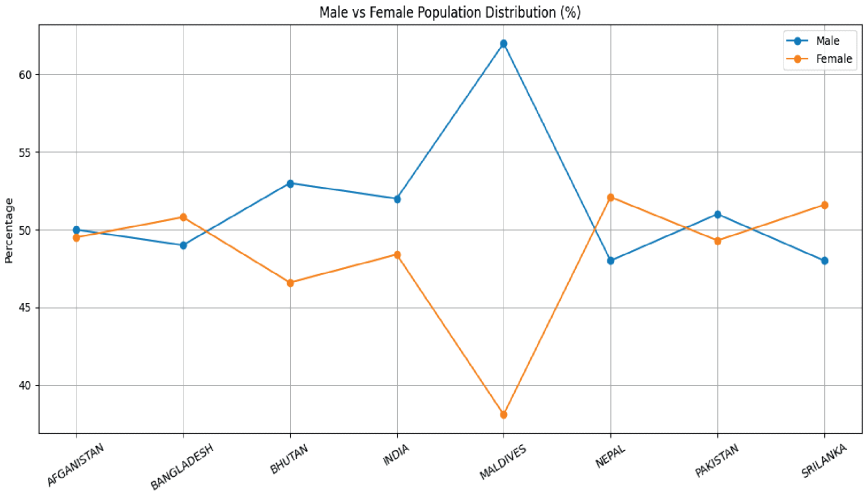


Chart 2 : Male and Female Population Distribution

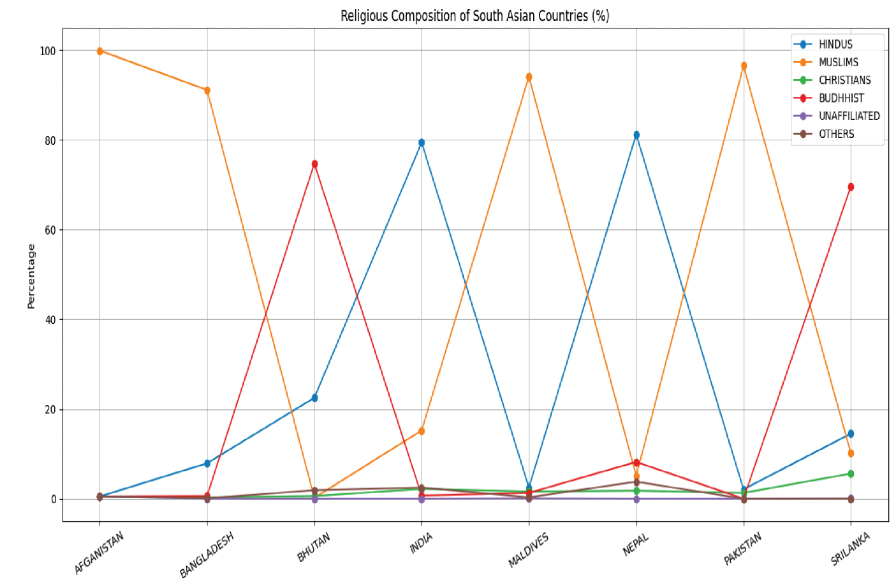


Chart 3: Religious Demographic Composition

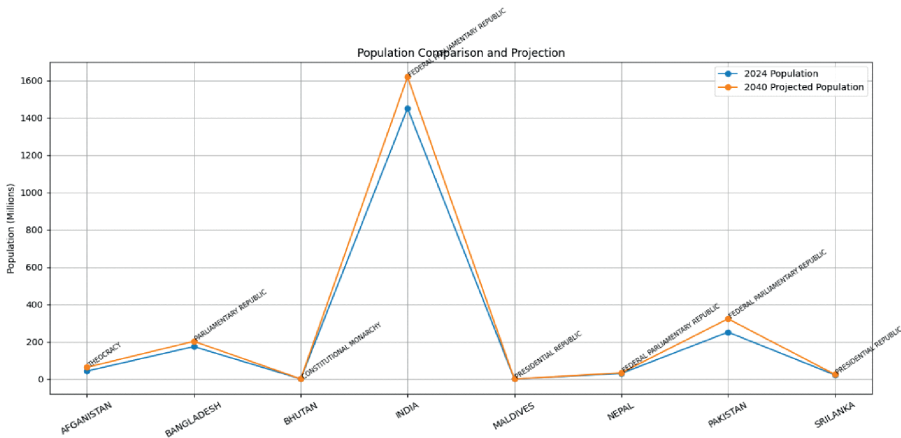


Chart 4: Population Projection with Government Types

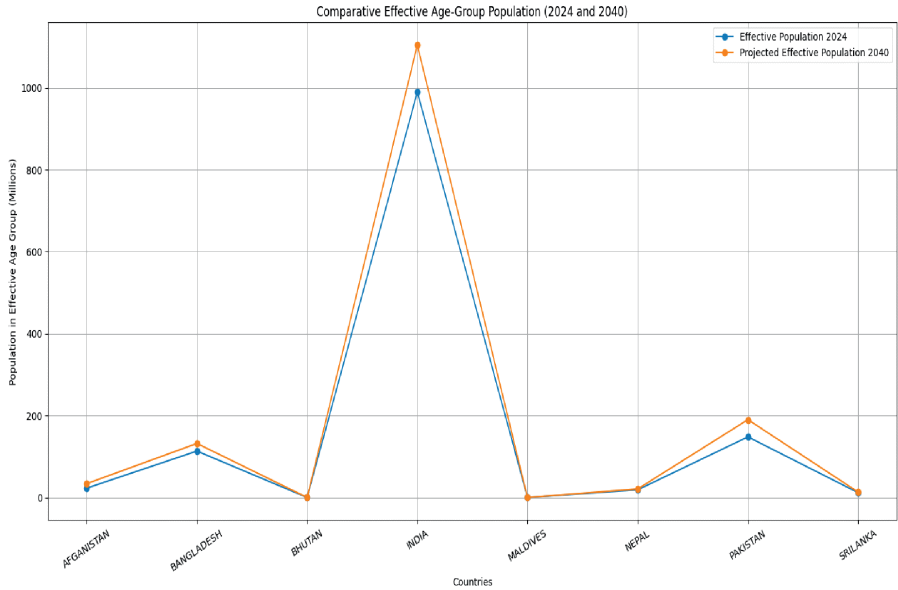


Chart 5: Population Projection with Effective Age Group (15yrs -65 yrs.).

1. South Asia in the Emerging Multipolar world order

If we consider the power projection of the world now, the apex or in the first tier, there are superpowers such as the U.S. and China - states with the ability to project power globally and to shape, the international order itself; In fact, influence spreaded in all domains like military, economic and institutional segments on a worldwide scale. The next tier consists of global powers, which possess enough capabilities to project power across multiple regions, as represented by Russia. In the next tier there are middle powers, which lack comprehensive global reach and do not dominate multiple regions, yet exert meaningful influence through partnerships and economic and military capacity; countries such as Türkiye, South Korea, Indonesia and Brazil are often cited as examples. Next are regional powers, which dominate a specific geographic area but have limited ability to project influence beyond it, such as Saudi Arabia in the Gulf. Finally, there are minor powers comprising most states whose influence remains largely confined within their own borders and whose role in shaping regional or global outcomes is limited.

Presently the National Power are being estimated by combining hard and soft capabilities into a single analytical framework. Assuming 55%

(appx.) weight to material power means economic size, military capability, and resources and on the other hand 45%, softer dimensions such as diplomacy, economic networks, and institutional influence. (The Lowy Institute Data).

In the post-Cold War era We saw U.S. dominance but in the 21st century things have been changed very dynamically. Some major changes in the world evaluating South Asia as a theatre of multipolar competition.1. The rapid rise of China. 2.India's economic and strategic growth to become a Superpower.3. Regionalization of global politics. South Asia is increasingly becoming a **theatre of multipolar competition**.

Analysing multiple economic indicators over the years shows that China is catching up US with a very steady pace, considered World's number one Superpower both economically and militarily after the Collapse of Soviet Union. Today, China's economic strength has grown dramatically to rival that of the United States. The reports on GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and Investment in R&D representing the facts. In the year 1990 the GDP of US was 15 times larger than that of China but by the year 2025, as per the data of IMF (International Monetary Fund) it was only 1.5 times larger. According to WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), China already overtook the US in R&D Expenditure for the first time in 2024.The US Spent \$781.8 billion and China spent \$785.9 billion which is 20 times jump from \$41 billion spent in the year 2000.

2. India's Rising Role

India has emerged as a key factor in Global politics due to 1. Economic growth 2. Strategic partnerships 3. Military capabilities. India's GDP growth continues to drive regional dynamics, with projections showing it as the primary engine of South Asian growth.

India's foreign policy reflects a balance between:1. Strategic autonomy 2. Regional leadership 3. Global engagement. India's vast demographic scale, characterized by a massive working-age population bulge, positions the country as the central demographic anchor of South Asia. This demographic dominance defines its geopolitical role: serving as the region's primary engine of economic growth, a hub for labour and technological collaboration, and a net security provider.

The specific geopolitical roles India plays in respect to other South Asian nations—driven by these demographic realities—include:

Regional Economic and Labour Hub: India accounts for roughly 70% of South Asia's population and 80% of its GDP. Its large, youthful demographic window fuels domestic economic expansion, positioning India as the main destination for intra-regional trade, labour mobility, and foreign investment. Neighbouring countries rely heavily on the Indian market to support their own employment and export sectors.

Leverage for Strategic Autonomy: While smaller nations like Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives sometimes leverage external powers like China to balance India's overarching influence, India's demographic heft ensures that New Delhi remains the most critical long-term partner for regional integration. India is using this weight to forge multi-alignment strategies and secure technology and labour mobility pacts with global powers, cementing its position as a rule-shaper rather than a rule-follower.

Provider of Development and Connectivity: Because India's demographic dividend is projected to last until around 2055—peaking when the working-age share will exceed 65%—India has the capacity to underwrite extensive infrastructure and connectivity initiatives across South Asia. Frameworks such as the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative leverage India's demographic and economic size to integrate the region's energy grids and supply chains.

Regional Stability and Security: The sheer size of India's population and economy enables it to act as a net security provider. In times of regional crisis, such as political volatility or economic distress in neighbouring states, India frequently steps in with critical relief packages, essential supplies, and diplomatic mediation.

Balancing "Big Neighbour" Perceptions: The sheer scale of India's population and geography creates a complex dynamic; smaller neighbours sometimes view it with apprehension. Consequently, India's geopolitical role requires highly sensitive, inclusive diplomacy to ensure that its demographic advantage fosters cooperative, mutually beneficial partnerships rather than being perceived as hegemonic dominance. For comprehensive analysis on how this demographic shift is altering regional integration, explore the insights published by the Observer Research Foundation or the regional economic outlooks provided by the World Bank.

3. China's Expanding Influence

Role of China has expanded in South Asia mainly through the following activities – 1. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) 2. Infrastructure investments 3. Strategic partnerships. Countries like Pakistan (CPEC), Sri Lanka (Hambantota Port), and Nepal have witnessed significant Chinese engagement.

The following outcomes of Chinese involvement in South Asia

1. Strategic competition with India 2. Debt dependency concerns 3. Shifts in regional alignments

The Asian giant deliberately using its Economic growth to enhance its diplomatic influence. According to Aid data, China was the largest official creditor in the world (year 2023), and US is the biggest recipient of China's official sector credit. Most interestingly, Lowy Institute's Asia Power index ranked Beijing's Economic relations and Diplomatic Influence higher than those of the US in the year 2025.

4. United States and External Powers

The United States has re-engaged South Asia as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy, focusing on: 1. Counter balancing China 2. Strengthening ties with India 3. Promoting regional stability. Other actors such as Russia, Japan, and the EU (European Union) also play roles in shaping the region's geopolitical landscape.

5. Regional dynamics & Bilateral Relations:

5.1. India – Pakistan Relation

The Soviet-Afghan War (1979) was the pivotal point when Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), supported by U.S funding, cultivated jihadi infrastructure in a systematic way that ultimately evolved into today's sophisticated terror network. This deliberate move created fighters with diverse objectives - Kashmir-focused aggression, control in Afghanistan, sectarian violence, and ideological warfare. Thus, Pakistan's terror infrastructure represents a deliberate, state-supported system that has survived for decades through deep institutional support within Pakistan's security establishment, which views these proxy forces as strategic assets rather than terrorist threats. The April 2025 Pahalgam attack, killing 26 civilians and forensically linked to LeT (Laskar -e-Taiba) operatives trained in Pakistan, demonstrates the enduring threat.

The demographic pressure, combined with accelerating urbanization and internal displacement, increases the risk of radicalization and cross-border terrorism, directly threatening Indian security, altering regional power dynamics, and affecting global interests in South Asia.

What is possibly most painful for India is the rise of Pakistan as a mediator, or, to use Mr. Trump's phrase, "an indispensable broker" in the conflict. Even while Mr. Trump tries to take all the credit, claiming that he has prevented the 10th major war during his time, Pakistan's role and influence are increasing. The change in situation, where Pakistan rather than India helped in negotiating peace, is likely to make India unhappy, but this is the reality today. The special relationship between Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir and the U.S. President is different from the usual close relations Pakistani generals had with U.S. Presidents in the past. This has helped Pakistan emerge as a peacemaker, and this cannot be ignored. It should also be noted that Pakistan has recently managed to present itself as a net "security guarantor" for the Islamic world. In these circumstances, India must act carefully. This may not have been something India expected, but any attempt at this time to criticize Pakistan and Asim Munir's role could prove harmful. Patience has always been India's great strength, and this is the time for India to show it fully.

The unplanned urbanization (e.g., Karachi, Lahore) overstretches infrastructure, fostering slum proliferation and social unrest. Poor governance combined with a growing, unemployed young population increases the risk of ideological radicalization. This poses a direct security threat to India's territorial integrity, particularly in Jammu & Kashmir. As a nuclear-armed nation with high instability, the demographic trends in Pakistan increase the threat of "nuclear leakage" or terrorist access, a matter of major international concern and complicating India's regional security strategies also. Faced with economic decline and internal demographic pressure, Pakistan is increasingly pivoting to China. The 'all weather friendship' enhances the "two-front" scenario for India, as Pakistan and China coordinate more closely in the region.

5.2. India – Bangladesh

The ethnic tensions have broken out repeatedly in the Chittagong Hill from the last year Tracts between indigenous communities, such as the Chakmas and the Mongs, and the Bangladesh military, with the ethnic groups

accusing Dhaka of encroaching upon their habitat. In the neighbouring Cox's Bazar, the Rohingya crisis has been brewing for the past eight years. That apart, there are several reports of the presence of international forces on Bangladeshi soil that have gained greater currency. In a significant departure from the Hasina era, there have also been sightings of foreign military personnel in different parts of the country without any clarity about their duties. The security situation is also being watched by India because of the rise of several Islamist elements in Dhaka, which is located barely 120 km from the Indian border.

The post-2024 political instability in Bangladesh, marked by the ouster of Sheikh Hasina, presents severe demographic and security challenges for India, including potential influxes of refugees, extremist growth, and protection concerns for the Hindu minority. These shifts, combined with increased Chinese and Pakistani influence, pose a risk of altering regional security dynamics, destabilizing India's bordering Northeast states, and threatening India's "Act East" policy.

A shift away from secular governance threatens to allow extremist elements to gain a foothold, challenging India's border security and increasing the risk of cross-border terrorism. With the breaking of a trusted ally (Hasina), Bangladesh may accelerate its shift toward military and economic cooperation with China, allowing Beijing to strengthen its "String of Pearls" strategy around India.

5.3. India – Afghanistan

With the following of Kautilya's Mandala theory, Afghanistan should be a close friend of India. The theory states that in the 12 concentric circles around a country, its closest neighbour will be a natural enemy (Prakritik Ari), but the neighbour's neighbour will be its closest friend (Prakritik Mitra). Kautilya, or Chanakya, was Prime Minister to Chandragupta Maurya, who is believed to have conquered and unified the Indian subcontinent, including Afghanistan, in the Mauryan empire (322 BCE-185 BCE). For much of the last century, Afghanistan has fulfilled that role and New Delhi and Kabul have been amicable, with Afghans travelling to India to study, work and do business, and India committing to Afghanistan's development through aid and trade.

Being the regional leader, it is harder for India to turn away, and for many reasons, including the Kautilyan Mandala theory, New Delhi has shifted

its position dramatically in recent months, even as tensions with Pakistan have exploded.

5.4. India – Nepal

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) with its landslide victory started a new era in Nepali politics. Traditional political parties were Touted; prominent leaders of the past regime, including senior leaders from the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), or CPN (UML), lost to fresh political faces. For New Delhi, this is the time to shape the bilateral relationship in a new direction.

The elections were held after the “Gerr Z” movement in September 2025. This mass movement by Nepal’s youth was mainly against corruption and nepotism. As a result, a temporary government was formed under former Nepal Chief Justice Sushila Karki, who became the interim Prime Minister with the clear responsibility of conducting the next elections. Following Ms. Karki’s recommendation, the President dissolved the lower house of Parliament, and general elections were announced. In Nepal’s 275-member House of representatives, 165 members are elected through the FPTP (First Past the Post) system, while 110 members are chosen through the PR (Proportional Representation) system, where voters vote for political parties. It is the Ms. Karki’s credit that the elections were conducted peacefully. A party needs 138 seats in Nepal’s Parliament to form a government, and it is clear that the RSP will easily form the new government without any requirement of any coalition partner. The RSP became very popular among young people because the party gave tickets to many candidates below the age of 40. Nearly 52% of Nepal’s voters are between 18 and 40 years old. The party manifesto, or “Bacha Patra,” attracted young Nepalis by focusing on clean governance, corruption-free politics, and administrative and judicial reforms.

However, the RSP is still largely untested. It gained support mainly from voters who were unhappy with political instability, widespread corruption, and weak economic development.

The new government should focus on socio-economic development, completing ongoing projects and identifying new ones which will benefit younger Nepalis. The path for India to take India has congratulated Ms. Karki for successfully conducting the elections and Prime Minister Narendra Modi

has said that “as a close friend and neighbour, India remains steadfast in its commitment to working closely with the people of Nepal” and [wished] “their new Government to scale new heights of shared peace, progress and prosperity” The real course of India's policies must be guided by three principles.

First, respect for Nepal's democratic process. Governments will rise and fall, and coalitions will form and dissolve. India's engagement should remain consistent, whatever the political configuration in Kathmandu.

Second, there should be partnership through development rather than patronage. Infrastructure connectivity, energy cooperation and educational exchange can deepen trust far more effectively than overbearing political oversight.

Third, focus on quiet diplomacy. India's influence in Nepal has historically been the strongest when exercised with sensitivity rather than visibility.

The Nepal election was not merely a domestic political event. It was part of a larger story -the evolution of a young democracy navigating its own aspirations in a complex geopolitical environment.

5.5. India – Bhutan

Bhutan will be an ageing society. high youth unemployment, weakens Bhutan's internal stability and economic sustainability, increasing its reliance on external aid, and providing opportunities for Chinese economic influence. The loss of local presence in remote border regions makes it harder for Bhutan to defend its borders, which directly impacts India's security, as those areas are adjacent to the sensitive Siliguri Corridor ("Chicken's Neck"). However, Bhutan's economic and demographic constraints necessitate a more robust Indian response to ensure security cooperation remains strong. To address these changes, India is focusing on economic integration and supporting Gyalsung (national service), a policy designed to build human capital and secure the border, ensuring a stable and secure neighbor.

5.6. India – Sri Lanka

The new Anura Kumara Disanayake administration had swept into power, promising greater stability and transparency, and raising citizens' expectations for a steady recovery from the economic turmoil of the preceding years. Sri Lanka is undergoing a rapid demographic transition—characterized by

a shrinking working-age population, aging trends, and low fertility rates—which will likely peak at 21.9 million by 2031 before declining. This shift creates economic instability and increased reliance on foreign investment, fuelling intense competition for influence between India and China in the Indian Ocean. As Sri Lanka's population shifts, its reliance on external debt—specifically from China to build infrastructure like the Hambantota port—creates security concerns for India, as this brings Chinese naval presence closer. India, as the regional power, is challenged to support its neighbour to prevent further economic crises, while managing the risk of a "string of pearls" encircling its maritime boundaries.

5.7. India – Maldives

On July 26, 1965, Maldives gained Independence from the British rule. Maldives is also part of the Colombo Security Conclave, an India-led regional security initiative. Additionally, the two nations have held joint army training exercises titled Ekuverin.. High unemployment and economic reliance on China's [Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)] create reliance on Beijing, allowing China to secure strategic infrastructure, like the (Sinamale Bridge) and port infrastructure, directly competing with India's "Neighbourhood First" policy.

6. Challenges faced by India

This country as the central demographic anchor of South Asia. This demographic dominance defines its geopolitical role: serving as the region's primary engine of economic growth, a hub for labour and technological collaboration, and a net security provider.

India accounts for roughly 70% of South Asia's population and 80% of its GDP. Its large, youthful demographic window fuels domestic economic expansion, positioning India as the main destination for intra-regional trade, labour mobility, and foreign investment. Neighbouring countries rely heavily on the Indian market to support their own employment and export sectors.

While smaller nations like Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives sometimes leverage external powers like China to balance India's overarching influence, The sheer size of India's population and economy enables it to act as a net security provider. India frequently steps in with critical relief packages, essential supplies, and diplomatic mediation.

India's geopolitical role requires highly sensitive, inclusive diplomacy to ensure that its demographic advantage fosters cooperative, mutually beneficial partnerships rather than being perceived as hegemonic dominance

CONCLUSION

The present context does not demand what was the mere Past of this region but demands a focus on the future by assembling all the regions of South Asia as an entity which can find its true self. In this perspective India should take a leading role as it is the most developed and stable country in this South Asian Region.

The recent geopolitical and demographic changes in South Asia have made India's role more important than ever before. India today is not only a regional power but also a stabilizing force in a neighbourhood facing economic crises, political instability, demographic imbalance, and growing external influence, especially from China. From Afghanistan to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, and Pakistan, every country in the region is experiencing different forms of transition, and these changes directly affect India's security, economy, and strategic interests.

India's policy in the region is therefore based on maintaining peace, strengthening economic cooperation, supporting development, and ensuring regional stability. Its engagement with the Taliban in Afghanistan reflects a practical approach to safeguard security interests and maintain access to Central Asia. At the same time, India is trying to counter increasing Chinese influence through development partnerships, connectivity projects, humanitarian support, and diplomatic engagement with neighbouring countries.

In countries like Sri Lanka, where demographic aging and economic pressure are growing, India has emerged as a reliable partner during times of crisis. In Bhutan and other Himalayan regions, India continues to support policies related to human resource development and border security, helping to create long-term regional stability. On the other hand, Pakistan's demographic pressure, unemployment, and political instability continue to create challenges for regional peace and security.

Thus, India's role in South Asia today is not limited to protecting its own national interests alone. It is also acting as a responsible regional power that seeks cooperation, stability, and balanced development in an increasingly

uncertain geopolitical environment. The future peace and progress of South Asia will largely depend on how effectively India manages these demographic and geopolitical transformations while maintaining trust and cooperation with its neighbours.

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