

# World's Largest Democracy with A Shattered Neighbourhood

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## Abstract

India's position as the world's largest democracy is increasingly shaped by political instability in its immediate neighborhood. Since 2022, a series of revolutions, regime changes, and economic crises in South Asian countries have altered regional dynamics, directly affecting India's security, trade, migration, and diplomatic influence. This article examines these developments through the case of Nepal's 2025 Gen Z-led protests, which began as resistance to a social media ban and evolved into a broader anti-government movement resulting in regime change. The study analyzes why Nepal is strategically significant for India, highlighting factors such as the open border, economic interdependence, shared cultural ties, and growing Chinese influence. It further evaluates the risks posed by political instability—including border security challenges, refugee flows, diplomatic uncertainty, and external interference—while also identifying opportunities for India to strengthen regional engagement through development cooperation, youth partnerships, economic integration, and digital policy leadership. The article argues that India must adopt a balanced, non-interventionist yet proactive approach to manage neighborhood upheavals. Ultimately, it underscores that regional stability and cooperative neighborhood relations are essential for safeguarding India's national interests and sustaining its democratic leadership in a fragmented South Asian order.

**Keywords:** India's Neighborhood; Nepal Crisis; Youth-Led Protests; Regional Stability.

## Introduction:

*"Our neighbors are our brothers; their peace is our peace, their progress our progress."*

— **Mahatma Gandhi**

This statement highlights that peaceful neighborhood relations are essential for mutual cooperation among states. However, in reality, the world's largest democracy—**India**—shares borders with countries that have witnessed significant political upheavals and revolutions since 2022. A series of revolutions and political crises in India's neighborhood have reshaped regional politics and diplomatic ties. These developments carry **direct and indirect consequences for India's security, trade, migration, and regional influence.**

Political upheavals in **Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar** have tested India's ability to balance its foreign policy amid instability. While some crises have opened opportunities to strengthen ties, others have created serious challenges. Understanding these revolutions, their causes, and their aftermath is essential for managing bilateral relations and safeguarding India's national interests.

## The Neighborhood: Political Upheavals & Revolutions

### 1. Nepal

#### I. What Happened in Nepal

- **4 September 2025:** Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli ordered a ban on 26 social media platforms, including Face book Messenger, Whats App, Instagram, and YouTube, citing privacy concerns and the need to regulate digital spaces.
- **6 September:** Citizens took to the streets protesting the ban.
- **8 September:** Protests escalated into violence, resulting in at least 13 deaths.
  - The government revoked the social media ban.
  - However, the movement transformed into a broader **anti-government revolution**, highlighting nepotism, corruption, and poor governance.
- **10 September:** Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli resigned, leading to the fall of his government.
- **13 September:** Former Chief Justice **Sushila Karki** was appointed Prime Minister by a Gen Z–led coalition.
  - The President dissolved Parliament and announced fresh elections for **5 March 2026**.

#### II. Why Nepal Is Important for India

India and Nepal share a unique relationship rooted in **history, culture, religion, trade, and geography**. Instability in Nepal has immediate repercussions for India due to the **open border**, shared rivers, economic interdependence, and security concerns. Following the Gen Z–led protests and regime change in Nepal (2025), India must carefully calibrate its response.

Key factors include:

- India and Nepal share an **open border of over 1,700 km**, spanning Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim. This facilitates migration but also raises concerns about smuggling, crime, and insurgent movement.
- Nepal remains highly sensitive to perceived **Indian interference** in its domestic politics, shaped by past experiences such as the 2015 blockade controversy.
- **Rising Chinese influence** through the Belt and Road Initiative, infrastructure loans, and political engagement poses strategic challenges for India.
- The protests reflect **youth frustration** over unemployment, corruption, and lack of opportunities—an area where Indian engagement can generate goodwill.
- The movement signifies a **generational shift** in Nepalese politics that India must acknowledge.
- Developments in Nepal can influence politics in Indian border states with strong ethnic and cultural ties.
- As the protests were triggered by a social media ban, they also raise broader questions about **digital freedom and governance**, an issue India itself grapples with.

#### III. Risks and Challenges

1. **Border Security and Law & Order Spillovers:** Large-scale unrest may lead to refugee flows, criminal movement, and security challenges across the open border.
2. **Refugee Flows and Humanitarian Concerns:** Escalation of violence could push civilians into India, placing pressure on border states.

3. **Political and Ideological Influence:** Youth-led democratic movements may inspire similar demands within India, creating domestic pressure.
4. **Bilateral Relations and Diplomacy:** Political uncertainty may affect hydropower projects, trade agreements, and transit arrangements. Any perception of Indian interference could harm public opinion.
5. **Influence of External Actors:** China may attempt to deepen its strategic footprint during Nepal's political transition, altering the regional balance.

#### IV. Opportunities

1. Strengthening ties through reform and development -If Nepal's interim government seeks legitimacy and popular support, India could support reforms, help rebuild infrastructure, social welfare, youth job creation. That can strengthen India-Nepal ties.
2. Economic cooperation -With possible changes, new policy may be more open to Indian investment, trade. Joint infrastructure (roads, trade corridors), cross-border energy / hydropower projects might get renewed boost.
3. Youth engagement -Given the youth-led nature of protests, India can engage with Nepali youth via cross-border cultural, educational, or tech partnerships. Helps in building goodwill and reducing misperceptions.
4. Digital policy leadership -Nepal's experience (social media bans, regulation vs free speech) offers lessons for India's own policy in digital regulation. India could position itself as a regional leader in balancing regulation with rights

#### V. What India Should Watch (or) Do

1. Improve Border Safety - India should make its border with Nepal safer by using digital tools like CCTV cameras and by building fences in the most sensitive (e.g., crime-prone) areas.
2. Cooperate on Crime -India needs to work closely with the Nepali government on two specific security issues: tracking criminals or prisoners who cross the border and quickly acting on government requests for extradition (sending a criminal back to face justice).
3. Stay Neutral in Policies -India must remain officially neutral. It should not take sides or make public statements that either support or oppose Nepal's temporary government or its upcoming elections.
4. Invest More in Shared Projects -India should increase its involvement in large infrastructure projects like hydropower plants, roads, and rail lines shared with Nepal. This deepens economic ties and connectivity.
5. Offer Better Financial Option -To reduce Nepal's reliance on China, India should provide attractive alternatives to the large loans offered by China. This helps decrease China's influence in the region.
6. Focus on Youth Partnerships -India should create programs to work with young Nepalese people on Start-up businesses, Information Technology (IT), and the digital economy. This promotes stability by providing jobs and opportunities for the youth.
7. Learn from Nepal's Mistakes -India should closely study Nepal's experience as a warning sign or a lesson. This preparation is meant to help India know how to quickly stop any similar internal protests or revolts from happening within its own borders in the future.

## Conclusion

Regime changes in Nepal and Bangladesh, alongside political and economic crises in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Pakistan, have made South Asia one of the most volatile regions in the world. For India, these upheavals represent both **challenges and opportunities**. A balanced, cautious, and forward-looking foreign policy is essential to preserve regional stability and India's strategic influence.

As **Kautilya** wrote in the *Arthashastra*, “*The king's welfare lies in the welfare of his neighbors.*” Cooperative and stable neighborhoods are vital for India's security, prosperity, and its role as the world's largest democracy amid a fractured regional order.

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