

1. What strategic leverage can India enjoy by maintaining close ties with the Maldives? Explain.**Approach**

Introduce in general terms how are the historical relations of India and Maldives. In next part mention the importance of Maldives in strategic sense for India. Further write recent initiatives taken by the government and at last mention some irritants in the relationship. Make a summary based conclusion showing positive efforts taken by Indian government in recent times.

Introduction

India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links steeped in antiquity and enjoy close, cordial and multi-dimensional relations. India was among the first to recognise the Maldives after its independence in 1965 and to establish diplomatic relations with the country. India established its mission at the level of CDA in 1972 and resident High Commissioner in 1980. The Maldives opened a full-fledged High Commission in New Delhi in November 2004, at that time one of its only four diplomatic missions worldwide. This shows how historically both the countries have been maintaining close relationships.

Body

In this regard, India can have following strategic leverages by maintaining close relations with Maldives :

- Strategic location – In the Indian Ocean, Maldives archipelago comprising 1,200 coral islands lies next to key shipping lanes which ensure uninterrupted energy supplies to countries like China, Japan, and India. This can be leveraged by India in times of strategic need.
- At the Heart of International Geopolitics – Since China started to send naval ships to the Indian Ocean roughly 10 years ago and right up to the Gulf of Aden in the name of anti-piracy operations Maldives' significance has steadily grown as it falls right in the middle of Ocean.
- Regional Security – As the pre-eminent South Asian power and a 'net security provider' in the Indian Ocean region, India needs to cooperate with the Maldives in security and defence sectors. Further, India can tackle extremism in the region with the help of Maldivian authorities.
- Member of SAARC – It is important for India to have the Maldives on board to maintain its leadership in the region especially in SAARC due to the constant acrimony with Pakistan.
- Diaspora – There are 25,000 Indian nationals living in the Maldives (second largest expatriate community). Indian tourists also account for close to 6% of tourists Maldives receives every year.
- UNSC Support – Maldives has extended its support for India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded and reformed UN Security Council.

The Maldives also has reiterated support for India's candidature for a non-permanent seat for the year 2020-21.

- China's footprint: The Maldives has undoubtedly emerged as an important "pearl" in China's "String of Pearls" in South Asia. This can be countered by having a close strategic relationship with Maldives.

Consequently, India has taken the following measures to boost the India-Maldives Strategic relationship:

- The signing of the US\$800 million Dollar Line of Credit Agreement in March 2019, for assisting the Maldives to achieve sustainable social and economic development.
- The recent joint exercise Ekatha conducted in April 2019 to strengthen coordination in enhancing maritime security in the region, through coordinated patrolling and aerial surveillance, exchange of information, and capacity building.
- Technical agreement on sharing 'White Shipping Information' between the Indian Navy and the Maldives National Defence Force was also signed, enabling the exchange of prior information on the movement of commercial, non-military vessels.

Potent Irritants in Relations of India and Maldives

- Political Instability: India's major concern has been the impact of political instability in the neighbourhood on its security and development. The February 2015 arrest of Maldives' opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed on terrorism charges and the consequent political crisis have posed a real diplomatic test for India's neighbourhood policy.
- Radicalisation: In the past decade or so, the number of Maldivian's drawn towards terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Pakistan-based madrassas and jihadist groups has been increasing. Political instability and socio-economic uncertainty are the main drivers fuelling the rise of Islamist radicalism in the island nation. This gives rise to the possibility of Pakistan based terror groups using remote Maldivian islands as a launch pad for terror attacks against India and Indian interests.
- China Angle: China's strategic footprint in India's neighbourhood has increased. The Maldives has emerged as an important 'pearl' in China's "String of Pearls" construct in South Asia. Given the uncertain dynamics of Sino-Indian relation, China's strategic presence in the Maldives remains a concern. Also, the Maldives have started using the China card to bargain with India.

Conclusion

It is important for India to have Maldives in its sphere of strategic influence. India should reach out to all governmental and nongovernmental actors of the atoll in economic, socio-cultural and political arenas. Further the recent India-Maldives

defence cooperation will enhance India’s capability to monitor Chinese maritime and naval movements along vital sea lanes of communication that run alongside the Maldives. In accordance with the “Neighbourhood First Policy” of the government, India remains a committed development partner for a stable, prosperous and peaceful Maldives.



2. How can India's soft power be leveraged in the subcontinent and to what advantage? Suggest.

Approach

Define soft power and contextualise to the demand of the question. In next part mention what soft power advantages does India possess in subcontinent. In next part mention the advantages of this soft power. In conclusion make an affirmative statement on India's soft power and mention some recent initiatives in this direction.

Introduction

According to Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye, who coined the term, soft power is the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without resorting to force or coercion. Soft power lies in a country's attractiveness and comes from three resources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies. India boasts an amazing variety and wealth of soft power resources. This soft power has been used by India to leverage its needs, relations in the Indian subcontinent as well as the world over the years.

Body

How can India's soft power be leveraged in the subcontinent

- India's spiritualism, yoga, movies and television, classical and popular dance and music, its principles of non-violence, democratic institutions, plural society, and cuisine have all attracted people across the continent. Further all these culture, arts forms are being practised in subcontinent whose historical heritage rests with India.
- International Day of Yoga reflects yoga's immense popularity worldwide, underscoring its richness as a soft power resource. To further this India organised Yoga day in more than 156 countries including the subcontinent.
- Indo-ASEAN music festival in Delhi was a bridge between the youth of India and ASEAN. This helps in establishing people to people contacts and further spread Indian heritage.
- India is a civilisation which has offered refuge to cultural and religious freedoms to Jews, Parsis, Christians and Muslims. In today's context India has provided refuge to Sri Lankan Tamils, Rohingyas and recently Afghans this boasts India's soft power in humanitarian way.
- Buddhism is an important bridge between not just India and South East Asia and East Asia, but also with South Asia. Countries like Sri Lanka and Myanmar are majorly Buddhists, this serves a spiritual connect between the nations.
- India is a country in which all major religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism – coexists which has been the strength of India's soft power. This in contrast to Indian neighbourhood which have been a strife ridden area.

- India is dipping into its soft power resources in its diplomatic engagements abroad. Personal visits by Indian prime minister to Maldives, Afghanistan, Bangladesh highlights the diplomatic connections.
- Offer subsidised courses in foreign capitals to teach appreciation of Indian culture.
- Indian Diaspora is seen as ambassadors of carriers of our soft power.
- India's successful Aadhaar programmes which can help countries do similar things and India's IT capabilities are huge source of soft power.
- Student exchange programs, increase in scholarships, medical tourism and research scholars have resulted in a vibrant democracy. Indian Diaspora is seen as ambassadors of carriers of our soft power.
- Recently India provided vaccines, essential medicines to fight against covid to all the subcontinent countries. This shows India's medical superiority and thus helps in leveraging in relationships.

India's Soft Power proposal in budget 2020-21

- Proposal to consider issuing Aadhaar Card for NRIs with Indian Passports on their arrival without waiting for 180 days.
- Mission to integrate traditional artisans with global markets proposed, with necessary patents and geographical indicators.
- 18 new Indian diplomatic Missions in Africa approved in March, 2018, out of which 5 already opened. Another 4 new Embassies intended in 2019-20.
- Revamp of Indian Development Assistance Scheme (IDEAS) proposed.
- 17 iconic Tourism Sites being developed into model world class tourist destinations.
- Present digital repository aimed at preserving rich tribal cultural heritage, to be strengthened.

Potential Advantages gained by India through soft power

- Diplomacy need not backed by the military and economic hard power. This presents a 'technology' in our hand to compete and overtake Chinese 'check book' diplomacy.
- It gives moral high ground at world forum especially due to non-violent manner in which we had achieved our independence and have been thriving democracy in contrast to the neighbourhood. Indian election commissioners have been sent as observers in elections to Maldives, Srilanka .
- International Support for tough decisions like abrogation of article 370. No neighbourhood country other than the traditional rival Pakistan commented on the decision taken by India.
- India have gained access to both economic projects and strategic projects in countries like Maldives, Seychelles, Bangladesh, Myanmar. This help both in development and strategic hold.
- India receives highest tourism flow from its neighbouring countries, this helps in giving boost to Indian economy and further spread of Indian values.

- India gains backing in important decision at world stage such becoming a permanent member of security council , nuclear supplier group, etc.
- Bhutan and Nepal have traditionally being aligned to Indian point of view.This helps in leveraging its positions vis a vis China.In 2017 , Bhutan asked fo Indian support explicitly.

Conclusion

It is imperative that India expands its soft power and civilisational strength, both for national unity and to gain the proper place in the continent for its magnificent heritage that can benefit all humanity. India has the cultural and civilisational depth to lead the world to a new era of peace and higher consciousness, but needs the political will and the diplomatic skill in order to do so.Recent initiatives such mission SAGAR, South asian satellite, opening credit lines of support will help in leveraging soft power further.



3. What are the major issues of convergence and confrontation between India and Afghanistan? Examine.**Approach**

Introduce the historical relations between India and Afghanistan with the present context. In next part write what are the points of convergence in the current context. Further write what are points of confrontation in present context. In conclusion make a pragmatic statement on the current situation.

Introduction

India and Afghanistan have had a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links. The relationship was not limited to the governments and had its foundations in the historical contacts and exchanges between the people. In recent past, Indo-Afghan relations have been further strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between the two countries in 2011. But the recent events of Taliban take over of Afghanistan after withdrawal of Western forces have put India- Afghanistan relationships at the crossroads. In this context it becomes imperative to evaluate what are the points of convergence and divergence between both nations in current context.

Body

Points of convergence between both the nations in past and future.

- Bilaterally, India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan. India's extensive developmental assistance programme, which now stands at around US 3 billion, is a strong signal of its abiding commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan during this critical period of security and governance transition. This area of support can be sustained further if the current Taliban takeover doesn't harm Indian interests.
- India fully recognises the pre- eminence of Afghanistan as a junction of trade routes between central, south and west Asia. This will become a new point of convergence between both the nations as India's goal to reduce the distance between India and Central Asia can benefit both the nations.
- Afghanistan is important for India not just from the strategic viewpoint but also because it holds business potential for Indian companies. The peaceful Afghanistan can be beneficial for Indian trade and which in return will prosper and stabilise the Afghan country from the current war torn scenario and fear on the street.
- Major Indian exports to Afghanistan are man-made filaments, apparels and clothing accessories, Pharma products, cereals, dairy and poultry products. Afghan exports to India primarily comprise of dry and fresh fruits. This will remain a link between both the nations as the new Afghanistan government would want to diversify its financial resources.

- India has a vast experience in handling democratic setup and to govern people from diverse backgrounds. This can become a point for both countries to talk upon and share knowledge for better transition.
- The current Taliban takeover will need legitimacy before the world government and India being current head of security council can help it gain legitimacy, given that India's concerns are not hampered and the new government gives consideration to the humanitarian values.
- India wants to check Pakistan influence in the new Afghanistan government and the Taliban itself may want to come out of the hold of Pakistan if it wants a peaceful Afghanistan. This can be a potent point between both nations to build upon.
- The current situation of Covid-19 can be an opportunity to converge for both nations to help Afghanistan in essential medicines and vaccines.

Given the current situation and how it evolves these all points will remain a theoretical scenario as the practicalities on the ground may change drastically given the past history of Taliban and its antagonism towards the moderate forms of Islam and non muslim countries.

Issues of confrontation between India and Afghanistan.

- Terrorism : The current government in Afghanistan have been a state supporter of terrorism. In past it has launched Mujahideen attacks in Kashmir in 1990s and also had a role in Hijack of plane in 1998. Thus India cannot work with a state supporter terrorism and it will create friction.
- India has invested heavily in Afghanistan both in material and moral support over the years. The current government may do away with all these linkages which might hurt India both economic and strategically.
- Drug Trafficking : Afghanistan is the hotbed of drug trafficking as it is largest producer. The inability to curb the movement of opium can become a point of friction between both the nations.
- India being the current head of UNSC and being at forefront of handling the crises created by Taliban takeover can itself become a point of confrontation.
- Migrants : The huge population Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan and the atrocities and forceful conversions as created in past can lead to friction. Further the open offer of India to help Afghans citizens can be creating issues .
- The alignment of Pakistan- Taliban – China can pose a threat to Indian security and can lead to confrontation not only with the current Afghanistan but also with China and Pakistan

Conclusion

The situation in Afghanistan has evolved very rapidly. Therefore the most prudent step for India will be to align with the opinion of the world and also start a diplomatic dialogue with Taliban to secure its strategic and economic assets and leverage historical relationships with the people of Afghanistan. A peaceful Afghanistan is very

essential for India from both security and strategic point of view. Therefore India should wait and take appropriate steps to through Security council and direct diplomacy to reduce future frictions between both nations.

