India-Pakistan Disaster Diplomacy

Why in news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences and hoped for an early restoration of normalcy in flood ravaged Pakistan.

What is the current Pakistan flood about?

- The flood has devastated the regions of Sindh and Baluchistan (Western half of Pakistan) badly, although Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa too have been affected.
- Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority claimed that about 15% of the country's population had been affected by the floods.
- More than 3,500 people have been injured, and there are massive shortages of wheat and fuel.
- Preliminary estimates suggest a third of the country's cultivated land have been inundated.
- About 2 million homes will have to be rebuilt from scratch.

To know more about the Pakistan floods, click here

How is the current Indo-Pak relation?

- **Promise of a new beginning**- The Prime Minister's statement came as a surprise, given the steady deterioration of India's relationship with Pakistan over the last 8 years.
- Modi's swearing-in ceremony had been attended by Pakistan's then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in May 2014 along with the leaders of other SAARC nations.
- The meeting between the two Prime Ministers had held the promise of a new beginning for the bilateral relationship that had suffered a severe setback after the 26/11 terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008.
- Track two diplomacy between the neighbours had seen the opening of the Kartarpur corridor in 2019 that allows visa free access for Indian pilgrims to Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan.
- **Deteriorated ties**- India's red line on the meeting between Pakistan's diplomats and leaders of the separatist Hurriyat, the terrorist attacks in Pathankot and Uri, etc. impacted the relationship negatively.
- Ties have been hit further after the Pulwama terror attack in 2019, and the abrogation of Article 370.
- There are no full-time High Commissioners in either country now.
- **Positive noises**- After the ouster of Imran Khan, the new PM Shehbaz Sharif has given the scope for addressing the Kashmir issue.
- Mr. Modi congratulated the new leader of Pakistan, and said that India desired peace

and stability in a region free of terrorism.

Talks and terror can't go together.

How about the two countries in responding to disasters?

- In 2001, after the earthquake hit Bhuj in Gujarat, Pakistan had reached out with help, and had sent tents and blankets for the survivors.
- During 2005 earthquake, India sent aircraft with relief supplies to Pakistan and pledged 25 million dollars through the United Nations (UN) to support Pakistan's relief efforts.
- During 2010 superflood hit Pakistan, India offered 5 million dollars in help, but Islamabad declined to accept it.

What is the case for help now?

- The Indian Prime Minister's outreach by way of a message created a potential opening for "**disaster diplomacy**".
- The case for extending humanitarian help ties with its desire to project itself as the "**first responder**" in times of crisis in the neighbourhood.
- Vaccine diplomacy and the efforts to brand India as the "**pharmacy to the world**" have been billed as major achievements of the government.
- Recently, India has extended its hand of help and cooperation to the Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan.
- Trucks filled with Indian grain have travelled to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan via Pakistan.
- However, it is believed that the government's stated policy of "talks and terror can't go together" and the extending of help to Pakistan are at odds with each other.

References

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