

## **Policy of Gradual engagement**

### **What is the issue?**

India should maintain with Afghanistan a policy of gradual engagement rooted in realism.

### **How is India-Afghanistan diplomatic ties now?**

- India shuttered its embassy in Kabul in August 2021, days before the Taliban takeover, but has maintained a line of communication with them.
- In September, India's Ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, met senior Taliban officials, at the Indian Embassy in Doha.
- In October, Indian officials met the Taliban's Deputy Prime Minister, Abdul Salam Hanafi, in Moscow at a regional conference on Afghanistan.
- Here, India also joined nine other countries to recognise the "new reality" in Afghanistan.
- Later, New Delhi sent humanitarian assistance when the country was facing a near-total economic collapse.
- This includes 20,000 metric tonnes of wheat, 13 tonnes of medicines, 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines, and winter clothing to Afghanistan.
- India is also planning to send one million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Iran for distribution among Afghan refugees staying in Iran.
- Now India has sent a team of senior diplomats to Afghanistan for the first time since the Indian Embassy in Kabul was evacuated in August 2021 following the arrival of the Taliban regime.

### **Why did Indian diplomats visit Kabul?**

- The visit is solely focused on ensuring proper delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.
- However during discussions Taliban urged India to reopen its embassy in Kabul.
- The Indian team included a woman official to intimate the Taliban to ensure equitable treatment for women in Afghanistan.
- The team also visited the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital, the Habibia High School and the Chimtala Electricity Sub-station which were built with assistance from the Government of India.

### **What the recent visit indicates?**

- The visit shows a marked difference from the policy New Delhi took in the 1990s.
- Back then, India had taken a policy of disengagement with Kabul and supported anti-Taliban militias.
- But this time, Afghanistan's internal situation and the regional dynamics seem to be different, prompting many neighbouring countries to adopt a more constructive line towards the Taliban regime, despite their differences with the group's extremism.
- The visit would also pave the way for better understanding and engagement given the bad

blood in the past.

- Addressing India's concerns cannot

## Why should India maintaining a policy of gradual bilateral engagement?

- India has three main concerns when it comes to the Taliban's return to Afghanistan.
- Investments worth billions of dollars made in the past 20 years needs to be protected.
- Retain the Afghan people's goodwill.
- Present Taliban regime should not offer support for anti-India groups that led to sharp rise in violence in Kashmir during Mujahideen-Taliban regime.
- Also Taliban remaining a Pakistani satellite forever is not in India's strategic interest.
- India cannot pursue any of these objectives if it does not engage with the Taliban.
- But, at the same time, India should not hurry in to offer diplomatic recognition to the Taliban's predominantly Pashtun, men-only regime, which has imposed harsh restrictions on women at home.
- India should work with other regional and global players to push the Taliban to adopt a more inclusive regime while at the same time maintaining a policy of gradual bilateral engagement rooted in realism.

### Reference

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