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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