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India-Pakistan: Scope of Soft Diplomacy

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Why in News?

Deterioration of bilateral relations **between India and Pakistan and withdrawal from all level of talks and summits from both the sides, post Pulwama attack on 14, Feb 2019** has created a need for **comprehensive and sustainable conflict resolution mechanism.**

Background

- India and Pakistan have originated from a common subcontinent but after the partition of 1947, they have an unstable relationship due to many unresolved issues like Kashmir issue.
- The two countries had fought 4 wars in the past and currently there is no engagement between them at level of political leadership on account of terrorist attack motivated from Pakistan soil. Since both countries are nuclear capable therefore cost of conflict will be very high, nothing short of mutually assured destruction.
- In this light, role of soft diplomacy is discussed to establish peace between India and Pakistan.

What is Soft Power or Soft Diplomacy?

- Power in international relations has traditionally been understood in the context of military and economic might.
 - It is known as **Hard power (which is quantifiable)**
 - Hard power is deployed in the **form of coercion: using force, the threat of force, economic sanctions etc.**
- In contrast to the coercive nature of Hard power, **Joseph Nye suggested concept of soft power in post cold war world**
 - Soft power is the ability to **shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction.**
 - The three pillars of soft power are: **political values, culture, and foreign**

policy.

- Nye argues that **successful states need both hard and soft power**, the ability to coerce others as well as the ability to shape their long-term attitudes and preferences.

For Instance, The United States can dominate others, but it has also excelled in projecting soft power, with the help of its companies, foundations, universities, churches, and other institutions of civil society.

What are India's Dimensions of Soft Power?

India is unique country to be bestowed with multidimensional soft power. for eg:

- Ayurveda
- Buddhism
- Cricket, Culture
- Democracy, Diaspora
- Entertainment: Bollywood
- Food (Indian style of cooking and spices)
- Gandhian ideals
- Colonial historical linkages with the nations
- Yoga

How soft power can change India-Pakistan equation?

• Recent chronological events between India and Pakistan

- 2014 - As a goodwill gesture all leaders of SAARC countries were invited in swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister of India.
- 2014 - Both countries in New Delhi held talks expressing willingness to begin a new era of bilateral relations.
- 2015 - PM Modi makes a surprise visit to the Pakistani eastern city of Lahore.
- 2016 - Pakistani backed militants launched terrorist attack on armed forces base at Uri (J&K), in reaction to which India launches "surgical strikes" on "terrorist units" in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.
- After that India held that it will not engage with Pakistan diplomatically and that terror and talks can't go together.
- 2019 - Again similar terrorist activity conducted in pulwama (J&K) against which India conducts air attacks in balakot training camp of Pakistan-based rebel group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).
- However finalizing of Kartarpur corridor has shown a narrow ray of hope for starting of talks between India and Pakistan.

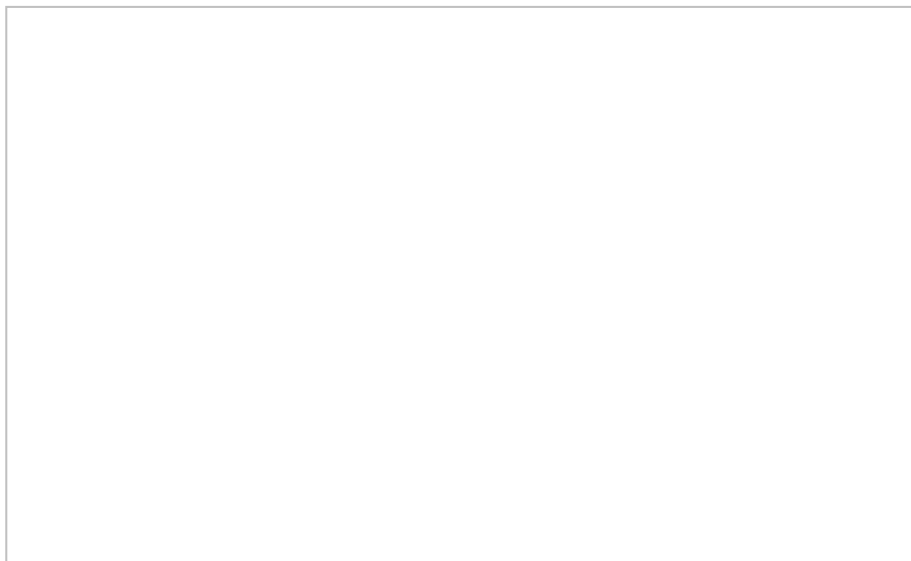
Kartarpur corridor: India and Pakistan agreed to set up the border crossing linking Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur to Dera Baba Nanak

shrine in India's Gurdaspur district. Kartarpur Sahib is located in Pakistan's Narowal district across the river Ravi, about four km from the Dera Baba Nanak shrine

- **Soft power can be a potent tool for bringing harmonious relations and peace between two Nuclear Powers of Asian region. Certain dimensions of Soft power which can be engaged are:**

By using Hydro Diplomacy: Indus water treaty can be used as the tool of hydro diplomacy where India is entitled to unrestrictive use of eastern rivers namely Sutlej, Beas and Ravi and non consumptive use (mainly for irrigation, storage and hydroelectricity production) of western rivers namely Jhelum, Chenab and Indus.

- **Even without violating the terms of the treaty India can use its rights** of non consumptive use of the water of western river, and can send signals to Pakistan to depart from its coercive measure and shift to peaceful means for bringing more stability in bilateral relations.
 - **Construction of Water Grid** between two nations can also be a viable solution to the water problems of the region.
- **By using Cultural Diplomacy:** Nye, one of the propounder of the word soft power, defines cultural diplomacy as a course of action based on the **exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity to strengthen relationships, enhance socio- cultural cooperation or promote the national interest.**
 - Broad spectrum of cultural diplomacy is not restricted to performing arts instead it extends to bilateral exchanges of art, music, dance, theatre and artists and even organization of sports events at bilateral level like cricket will definitely ease out the political anxiety and will bring more stability and peace in bilateral relations between the two.



- For example **urdu poetry and ghazals from Pakistan and shows like Coke studio, Mtv unplugged** has wider range of fan following in both the countries.

- **"Model of drama"** for conflict transformation can be applied for conflict transformation between India and Pakistan as a part of cultural diplomacy.
 - The main connecting agents according to the model are **people and their personal relationship** is vital to diffuse confrontations.
 - Therefore, the **citizen's diplomacy** or people to people contact between India and Pakistan are significant in building peace between the two nations.
- **Cricket Diplomacy:** Cricket diplomacy implies using Cricket as one of the **strategic diplomatic political tool** for transcending the ethnic and social divide while dispelling historical stereotypes and age-old prejudices between the two countries by bringing more engagements between the cricket teams, fans and authorities of both the nations.
 - For instance, in past also, **cricket diplomacy has been used for bringing normalcy to India Pakistan relations like in 1999** when Chennai gave a standing ovation to Wasim Akram's men after they had just beaten India and after six months the two countries met again in a world cup match against the hostile backdrop of the Kargil war.
 - As a result of Pakistani PM's visit in 2005 to India to watch a cricket match between India and Pakistan had effectively turned into the summit and the both countries agreed to open up the militarized frontier dividing the disputed Kashmir region.
 - Thereby India can ask its **Cricket Board to expand the T20 league to include clubs from three Pakistan cities such as Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi and one from Jammu and Kashmir** to play in the City of Srinagar.
 - Expanding IPL to include cities from Pakistan and Kashmir could lay a strong foundation for a peaceful relationship between the two nations.
- **Economic Diplomacy:** Economic Interdependence between two nations can be used as one of the dimension of soft power :
 - **Economic interdependence through bilateral trade** will help in easing out the tensions at the cross border arising out of the unemployment, poverty and low living conditions, as bilateral trade brings more employment opportunities and prosperity in the region that in turn will help in dismantling the military institutions and their coercive means to capture the power in Pakistan that are aimed at anti India agenda and are generally responsible for ceasefire violations in India.
 - India can deepen its economic ties with Pakistan **by reducing the import tariffs which is presently 200% and by invoking its Most Favoured Nation status** at time when Pakistan's economy is in its worst phase.
 - **ASEAN region** can be used as the example where many territorial disputes have been resolved by increasing the economic interdependence between the nations.
- Harnessing similarities between two nations for **strategic diplomatic engagements**

and **establishing confidence building measures.**

- **Cultural similarities** between both the nations in terms of similar food habits can be translated into deepening diplomatic engagements (like Halwa Puri, Daal Chawal, Chicken Karahi, Biryani and the drink of Lassi are not only famous in Pakistan they are equally liked in India as well. Sweet dish is common with Kheer and Mithai the most famous sweet dishes).
 - By organizing events like **food fairs, festivals and cooking competitions**, between two nations it would be easier to strengthen the bond of love and prosperity between two nations.
- **Geographical similarities** as they are neighbouring countries and are located in Asia, more specifically South Asia.
 - Both countries can exploit their common or disputed territorial regions (like that of Kashmir) for carrying out some **common scientific expeditions or research** that will be mutually beneficial for development and growth of both the nations.
 - **Kartarpur corridor between India and Pakistan** used for connecting the Sikh shrines of Dera Baba Nanak Sahib and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur can be used for strengthening and harmonising people to people contact between two nations.

But Soft Power is not the only solution

Soft power can not be the only solution for dealing with the bilateral engagements between India and Pakistan as in past few instances of soft power diplomacy has failed to fulfill its intended objectives and it's the hard policy that has to come in picture like:

- Soft power projects such as '**Destination Pakistan**' that were implemented back in 2007 failed to yield the required results.
- **National day receptions** are one of the best available forums for diplomats to project their country's clout in a capital as well as present its soft power and renew contacts. Unfortunately, the lack of resources in most Pakistani diplomatic missions abroad has made these celebrations redundant and unfruitful.
- **Lahore declaration** in February 1999 that intends to end the nuclear race between both the nations **lost its relevance with the outbreak of Kargil war in May 1999.**
- **Mumbai terror attacks of 2008** stalled the whole **process of composite dialogue** between India and Pakistan and India also cancelled its cricket team's tour of Pakistan that was scheduled for January-February 2009.
- Efforts under **Neighbourhood first policy** made by our PM, like inviting Pakistani counterpart for his swearing in ceremony, unscheduled visit to Lahore, at residence of Pakistani PM, has been diluted with incidence of attack on Indian Air force in January 2016 (Pathankot attack), that ended with complete suspension of all types of talks and bilateral engagements between two nations.

- After the **uri attack** in september same year, our PM made statement that **'talks and terrorism' cannot go hand in hand.**
- **Post Pulwama attack** (attack on CRPF personnels bus in Jammu and Kashmir) on February 14, 2019, the Pakistan government has **banned** the airing of **Indian content** on television and also screening of Indian films in cinema halls. On Pakistan government's directives, they also blocked all Indian sports channels in the country.

Way Forward

- In order to strengthen the bilateral engagements between India and Pakistan need of the hour is to employ **perfect balance of soft and hard power diplomacy coupled with International diplomacy.**
- **International Organizations** can be used for building pressure over Pakistan for carrying out anti terrorist activities like Pakistan's inclusion on the FATF Grey list makes it harder for its government to access international markets at a time when its economy is weakening.
 - **UN's designation of Masood Azhar as Global terrorist** will built pressure on Pakistan to freeze its assets and dilute the existence of its jaish e mohammed based organization which is responsible for carrying out many attack on Indian army establishments.
- **Initiation of bilateral dialogue** between India and Pakistan based on the **"UFA" agreement** aimed at combating terrorism, freeing fishermen, meeting of military personnels, encouraging religious tourism will bring new dimensions to the diplomatic engagements.
- **India's diplomatic engagement with other South asian countries and Western powers** like USA will help India in creating pressure over Pakistan, for curbing its funding to terrorist activities and bringing an end to the influence of non state actors in its politics, as both countries being nuclear powers cannot afford to take route of militarised attack and war like situation.