

2. The New Worry of Depleting Diplomatic Capital

Prelims Level: International Relations.

Mains Level: GS-II Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's Interests, Indian Diaspora.

Why in News?

- This article discusses about how India's domestic affairs and policies has a huge impact on India's bilateral, multi-lateral relations and how it showcases India in the international arena.

Background Info:

- The present government's tenure started with a bang by developing good relations with majority of the neighboring countries and other super powers.

For E.g.:

- Visiting American president Barack Obama and developing a bonhomie which resulted in the genesis of Indo-pacific policy.
- Developing Cordial relations with china.
- Enhanced engagement with neighboring countries.
 - ✓ This engagements had obviously raised India's stature in the international arena.
 - ✓ But in recent months, due to various internal policies and decisions, India has been in bad light of the global scenario.
 - ✓ Among them, the decision to amend Article 370 of the Constitution on Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, or the CAA, 2019, and the proposal for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have been called into question by several countries and international organisations.
 - ✓ The objections raised by various countries and its impact on India's relations with various countries and stature at global arena are discussed in brief below.

Ties with US & European countries:

- At the "Howdy Modi" event in September 2019, there were only three Democrat leaders at the event signalling a depletion of support from the Democrats. This is not a good sign as our P.M enjoyed special friendship with Barak Obama during his Presidentship.
- State Department and several bipartisan committees of US have issued statements of concern over continued detentions in Kashmir and the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

- Lawmakers in US have inserted language on Kashmir into the annual Foreign Appropriations Act for 2020.
- A resolution urging India to lift restrictions in Kashmir, sponsored by Indian-American lawmaker, now has 29 co-sponsors, including two Republicans, and a lawmaker who had earlier attended “Howdy Modi”.
- India’s External Affairs Minister recently cancelled a meeting with US lawmakers as a Indian lawmaker was also on the list and as our minister was not comfortable to deal with hard questions on Kashmir and recently passed CAA.

India and U.K Relations:

- The above issues also found voice in the U.K. Parliament. In the European Parliament, last September, there were also discussions on Kashmir.
- It also led to heated battles within their polities, as Kashmir became a campaign talking point between Labour and Conservative candidates in the U.K. elections.
- The government’s invitation to far-right Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to visit Kashmir last October has riled European diplomats from various countries as they were denied similar access to Kashmir amid lockdown.

Impacting Bangladesh Relations:

- In the neighbourhood, the government had upset both its friend and foe with its wording of the CAA.
 - ✓ In the past decade, especially after completing the Land Boundary Agreement, Dhaka and New Delhi had worked hard on building connectivity, opening energy routes, trade and developing travel links.
 - ✓ But by clubbing Bangladesh with Pakistan and Afghanistan on treatment of minorities (stating in CAA that these countries allow “Persecution of minorities”) India has introduced a note of bitterness that is hard to mistake in the bilateral engagement.
 - ✓ Some in Sheikh Hasina’s government have pointed out that Indian government’s desire to naturalise only one group of immigrants from Bangladesh but castigate the others as “illegal immigrants” and “termites” will be seen in a communal light by Bangladesh Government.
 - ✓ This will also affect India’s relation with Islamic countries including Arab countries as such a step will be seen as discriminatory on grounds of Religion.
 - ✓ The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation plans for a special meet on Kashmir and the CAA in April 2020, possibly in Islamabad.

Other Impacts:

- ✓ Questions will be asked by international community on crackdown in Uttar Pradesh and protests across the country including Delhi on CAA.
- The U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has already recommended sanctions be considered for Home Minister Amit Shah and other officials.
- This seems far from reality, but it was USCIRF that first recommended a visa ban against Mr. Modi, as Gujarat Chief Minister, in 2005. To date, Indian Prime Minister remains the only individual worldwide sanctioned under the U.S.'s International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.
- Even in U.S. Congress, lawmakers can effectively block defence sales to India, or pursue sanctions on the S-400 missile system purchase from Russia, for example, regardless of support in the Trump administration for India.
- On the international stage, the United Nations and its affiliated bodies, which often seem toothless, could provide a platform for targeted criticism on India.
- New Delhi's break in ties with Turkey and Malaysia for their comments at the UN on Kashmir could also lead to them vetoing India's legitimate position at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), where it hopes to blacklist Pakistan for terror financing this year.
- Thus, the government must weigh its diplomatic posture on these issues carefully, as all of them are likely to dominate its time in 2020.

Way Ahead:

- Ministry of External Affairs should devote its foreign missions in order to prevent the fallout due to domestic concerns.
- External Affairs Minister can proceed with multiple interviews to the European and U.S. media and the "think-tank blitz" in Washington and New York to deal with questions about Kashmir and the NRC.
- This diplomatic capital is a complex combination of the goodwill the country has banked on over several decades as a democratic, secular and stable power. So, the government must consider the impact of its domestic actions on India's diplomatic capital which must be preserved and defended.