

M110: India's response to the earthquake emergency in Turkey and Syria is not just humanitarian. It's strategic. Critically analyse.

(Answer in 250 words) : 15 Marks

Subtopic M110: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.

M110

In 2023, India responded to the earthquake emergency in Turkey and Syria by swiftly launching 'OPERATION DOST'. Political analysts have remarked

that India's response is not just humanitarian but also STRATEGIC. It reflects a policy of robust engagement in the Middle East, which is also seen in other recent events:

i) Egyptian president invited as the chief guest on Republic Day, 2023.

ii) India's involvement in the new grouping I2U2.

India's renewed focus on the Middle East can be explained by its vital role in 4 key areas :

i) Gulf accounts for 16% of India's total imports.
[UAE and Saudi Arabia in top 5]

ii) India's reliance on GCC countries and Iran for 40% of its fuel needs.

[Most of India's refineries configured to process the sulphur-heavy sour grades from this region]

iii) Around 90 lakh Indians reside in the Gulf.

iv) The region accounts for 55% of India's remittance inflows.

In light of the region's importance to India's energy, investment and security calculus, it is no wonder that India is trying to leverage humanitarian assistance as a tool of soft power. It can help establish people-to-people contact with a wider population of a foreign country without the use of coercion.

Another important aspect of such soft power projection is the emphasis laid on historical factors:

- India and Middle East share historical and civilizational ties going back more than 2000 years.
- Contact between Harappans and Mesopotamians and Egyptians.
- Close ties between India's freedom fighters and the leaders of the region's anti-colonial movements.
- Cold-war — region's involvement in NAM.

Thus, India's engagement with the Middle East reflects

- i) its desire to be seen as a country of first response.
- ii) its desire to be a more assertive global power in a multi-polar world.

Despite such strategic and geopolitical implications, India's assistance is rooted in HUMANITY.

India has always followed the principle of 'VASUDAIVA KUTUMBAKAM', even with countries which have differences with India.

↳ Turkey being the most recent example, where India's operation dost was hailed globally even when Turkey was constantly raising Kashmir issue in international forums.

India has a long tradition of providing humanitarian assistance to countries without expecting any returns. This is reflected in the historical 'QUJRAL DOCTRINE' as well as the more recent MISSION SAGAR (during COVID-19) and aid to Afghanistan (earthquake).

SYNOPSIS

India's Humanitarian assistance

- India's assistance to Turkey and Syria in the face of a natural calamity of such a great magnitude is part of the country's tradition of providing humanitarian assistance without expecting returns or following a quid-pro-quo policy. India even proclaimed in the UNGA that "Nations can and indeed must, cooperate to find collective and cooperative solutions to the challenges that disasters represent".
 - Examples – 2015 Nepal earthquake, Gujral Doctrine, Mission Sagar (during COVID-19)

India's approach: humanitarian + strategic

- India's response to the recent devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria reflects its policy of robust engagement in the Middle East.
- India's engagement with the Middle East in recent years reflects India's desire to be a more assertive global power in a multipolar world.
- It also shows India's desire to be seen as the country of first response.
- The latest emergency response called "**Operation Dost**" – which includes an entire field hospital and medical team along with machines, medicines, and hospital beds – is part of several actions enhancing India's profile across the Middle East.
 - On Republic day (2023), the Egyptian president was the chief guest
 - India's engagement with the new grouping I2U2 (Includes India, Israel, USA, UAE)

Reasons for renewed focus on the Middle East

- The Middle East is a critical source of investment, energy, and remittances for India.
 - Around 8.9 million Indians reside in the Gulf

- Fifty percent of India's over \$80 billion in remittances annually come from the Gulf countries
- Trade and investment between India and Middle Eastern countries have grown exponentially over the last decade, especially with Egypt
- The United Arab Emirates is India's third-largest global trading partner – since the signing in 2022 of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), India's trade with the UAE has increased by over 38 percent. Additionally, UAE has been integrated into the UPI payments ecosystem and India has opened up its central government procurement market to UAE under the FTA.
- Saudi Arabia is India's fourth-largest trading partner and the source of 18 percent of India's crude oil imports. Saudi investments in Indian infrastructure — railways, roads, ports, and shipping — are growing, as are investments in India's manufacturing and digital sectors.
- Energy security – India imports 80 percent of its oil and gas, sourced 60 percent of its energy imports from the Gulf countries
 - A large proportion of India's refineries are configured to process the sulphur-heavy sour grades of crude that are produced in the Gulf region
 - Therefore India's crude purchases have over the last two decades gradually shifted to being more weighted towards the Oman and Dubai sour grades
- Israel is one of the top three suppliers of defense equipment to India, with 43 percent of Israel's arms exports being sold to India.
- The region also shares India's security concerns, especially about Islamist extremism and terrorism.
- India wants to be ready for any fallout from U.S. withdrawal from the greater Middle East.

Humanitarian assistance as a tool of soft power

- Soft power approach is the ability to reach out to people and countries abroad without using coercion.
- Humanitarian aid can help establish people-to-people contact with a wider population of a foreign country

- Other aspects of soft power – emphasis on historical factors
 - India and the Middle East share historical and civilizational ties going back more than 2000 years [eg: contact between Harappans and Mesopotamians]
 - Close ties between leaders of India's independence struggle and the region's anti-colonial movements
 - Cold War – the region's involvement in the NAM (Egypt)
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