International Relations · GS - II

Multilateral platforms can sustain diplomatic engagement even between countries facing serious bilateral tensions. Discuss the opportunities and limitations of India's participation in the SCO Civilisations Dialogue Forum in the context of India–Pakistan relations.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Multilateral diplomacy, SCO's regional mandate, civilisational dialogue, confidence-building measures, cultural diplomacy, terrorism concerns, Indus Waters Treaty dispute, sovereignty, strategic autonomy, bilateral and multilateral engagement.

Model Answer

Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) provides a platform for regional cooperation among Eurasian countries. Pakistan's participation in the SCO Civilisations Dialogue Forum in New Delhi offers an opportunity for limited diplomatic engagement despite continuing India–Pakistan tensions.

Opportunities

- **Diplomatic communication:** Multilateral meetings create opportunities for official interaction and reduce the complete absence of diplomatic channels.

- **Cultural diplomacy:** Civilisational exchanges can promote people-to-people contact and mutual understanding.
- **Regional cooperation:** The SCO provides avenues for dialogue on connectivity, counterterrorism, economic cooperation and regional stability.
- **Confidence-building:** Participation in common forums can help maintain institutional engagement even when bilateral relations remain strained.
- **India's regional role:** Hosting such events enables India to engage with Central Asian and other Eurasian countries.

Limitations and Concerns

- **Terrorism:** India's concerns regarding cross-border terrorism remain a major obstacle to normalisation.
- **Bilateral disputes:** The Indus Waters Treaty controversy and other unresolved issues continue to generate mistrust.
- **Limited mandate:** The SCO cannot independently resolve bilateral disputes or compel member states to change their policies.
- **Political rhetoric:** Threatening statements and domestic political sensitivities can undermine confidence-building efforts.

Way Forward

India should use multilateral platforms for constructive engagement while maintaining clear diplomatic positions on terrorism, sovereignty and treaty obligations. Bilateral disputes require peaceful, direct and sustained dialogue.

Conclusion

Multilateral engagement cannot substitute for bilateral diplomacy, but it can preserve communication and create limited areas of cooperation. India's approach should combine regional participation with consistent protection of its national interests.

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