International Relations · GS - II

To what extent can participation in multilateral organisations preserve diplomatic engagement between politically adversarial states without necessarily indicating bilateral normalisation? Examine with reference to India's engagement with Pakistan through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Multilateral diplomacy, SCO framework, bilateral tensions, diplomatic engagement, host-country obligations, strategic signalling, regional cooperation, diplomatic flexibility

Model Answer

Introduction

Multilateral organisations provide institutional platforms where states with strained bilateral relations can continue engagement on shared regional interests. Participation, however, does not necessarily signify improvement in bilateral relations.

Significance of multilateral engagement

1. **Institutional continuity:** Participation in SCO activities preserves channels of communication despite bilateral disagreements.
2. **Regional interests:** Cooperation on connectivity, security and economic issues may require engagement with all member states.
3. **Diplomatic flexibility:** Multilateral participation allows states to fulfil institutional commitments without making bilateral concessions.
4. **Strategic signalling:** Attendance can indicate willingness to engage within a regional framework, without implying a political rapprochement.

Limitations

- Bilateral disputes may restrict substantive cooperation.
- Political mistrust can prevent institutional dialogue from producing concrete outcomes.
- Multilateral participation cannot substitute for resolving bilateral concerns.

Conclusion

The reported Pakistani ministerial visit demonstrates the distinction between multilateral engagement and bilateral normalisation. India's future participation in SCO meetings should therefore be understood within the broader context of regional interests and its diplomatic and security considerations.

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