

India and regional powers should ensure that the Afghan rulers respect their people's rights

India's participation in a meeting of 10 nations with Taliban officials in Moscow and the signing of a joint statement that recognised the "new reality" in Afghanistan signal a decisive shift in the country's approach towards the Islamist group. India had earlier taken a strong position against any kind of engagement with the Taliban.

In recent months, when the Taliban were making steady advances towards Kabul, India had established contacts with the Taliban's political office in Doha, (the capital of Qatar) but this is the first time India met a top Taliban delegation, which included Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi, and, according to a Taliban spokesperson, promised to send aid.

India has vital interests in Afghanistan. Over the 20 years, it has made investments worth billions of dollars which it would want to be protected. Last time the Taliban, which have close ties with anti-India terrorist groups such as **Lashkar and the Jaish**, were in power, India saw a rise in violent incidents in Kashmir as well as the hijacking of an Indian plane to Kandahar.

Now the Taliban say they will not allow Afghan soil to be used by any terrorist organisation. It is in India's interest to make sure that the Taliban walk the talk. It would also not like to see an isolated Taliban being a Pakistani satellite. To meet these goals, given the new reality in Afghanistan, engagement with the Taliban looks a strategic necessity.

But this is a policy that needs to be pursued more through regional diplomacy than bilateral engagement. Bilaterally, India does not have much clout over the Taliban. But Afghan's new rulers, who are struggling with an economy on the brink of collapse, are keener this time to engage with regional powers. So the **Moscow 10**, which includes China, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian republics, has some leverage. These countries also have shared interests in seeing the Taliban severing its terror ties and Afghanistan being stabilised.

If not, instability could, once again, spread beyond Afghanistan's border. For this, the Taliban should be ready to open up their government, share power with other political and ethnic communities, and start respecting the fundamental rights of Afghans. The last 40 years of Afghanistan's history are a brutal example of what could go wrong if one party or group tries to amass all powers in its hands.

Despite these historical precedents, the Taliban have shown little readiness to change their ways. In the joint statement, India and the others asked the Taliban to keep their commitment on forming an inclusive government and ensure that their territory is not being used by terrorist groups. These calls should not end with the statements.

While India and other regional countries should help Afghans during this period of economic miseries, they should also use their collective economic and political clout to mount pressure on the Taliban to make political concessions at home.



Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

- Q. In which place was the meeting of ten countries with Taliban representatives held recently?
- (a) Moscow
 - (b) Delhi
 - (c) Kabul
 - (d) Doha

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

- Q. 'In view of the increasing interference of Pakistan-China, India is required to hold talks with the Taliban.' Analyze this statement and also underline the importance of the recent Moscow-10 talks.

(250 Words)

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.