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CURRENT AFFAIRS-FINAL MOCKQUESTION NO. 1

The HTS Islamist rebels have toppled down Bashar-ul-Assad regime in Syria. Critically evaluate the reasons and implications of the unprecedented change in Syria.

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ANSWER NO. 1INTRODUCTION

Long held totalitarian centralized system of governance of Bashar-ul-Assad in Syria was recently toppled down by Hayat Tahrir-al-Sham, Islamist rebels. The power transition in Syria gave rise to a hope of opportunities for stability in Syria. The point of time chosen by Islamist rebels was very crucial as the allies of Assad's government, like Russia, Iran and Hezbollah were already in full-fledge war and facing sanctions from USA, which led to the reasons of success of HTS and failure of Assad. This unprecedented change is highly favourable for Israel to support its ideological expansionist nationalism of Greater Israel and disruption of Iran's influence in Syria and supply of weapons to Hezbollah with the help of Syria. However, this development has introduced new challenges for Syria and its allies.

FALL OF DAMASCUS - FINAL BLOW TO ASSAD'S

REIGN

"The end of tyranny begins not with the fall of dictator but with the rise of people uniting for freedom".

- Vaclav Havel.

After the death of Bashar al-Assad's father Hafez al-Assad from 1971 to 2000 - Assad became the president of Syria who ruled for five decades and recently got ousted by the His Islamist rebels. Rule of Assad was concentrated with the brutalities against own citizens and economic decline with rising poverty and unemployment. However, the government of Assad was supported constantly by Regional Allies - Hamas and Hezbollah - and Global Allies - Iran and Russia. His government was always backed by the allies which helped him rule for five decades, but, now when the allies couldn't support the hollow power of Assad's government failed to resist against the His Islamist rebels.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS:

Nov 29 - Coalition of opposition groups

Nov 28 - Response to offense by airstrikes.

Nov 29 - Rebel forces entered Aleppo

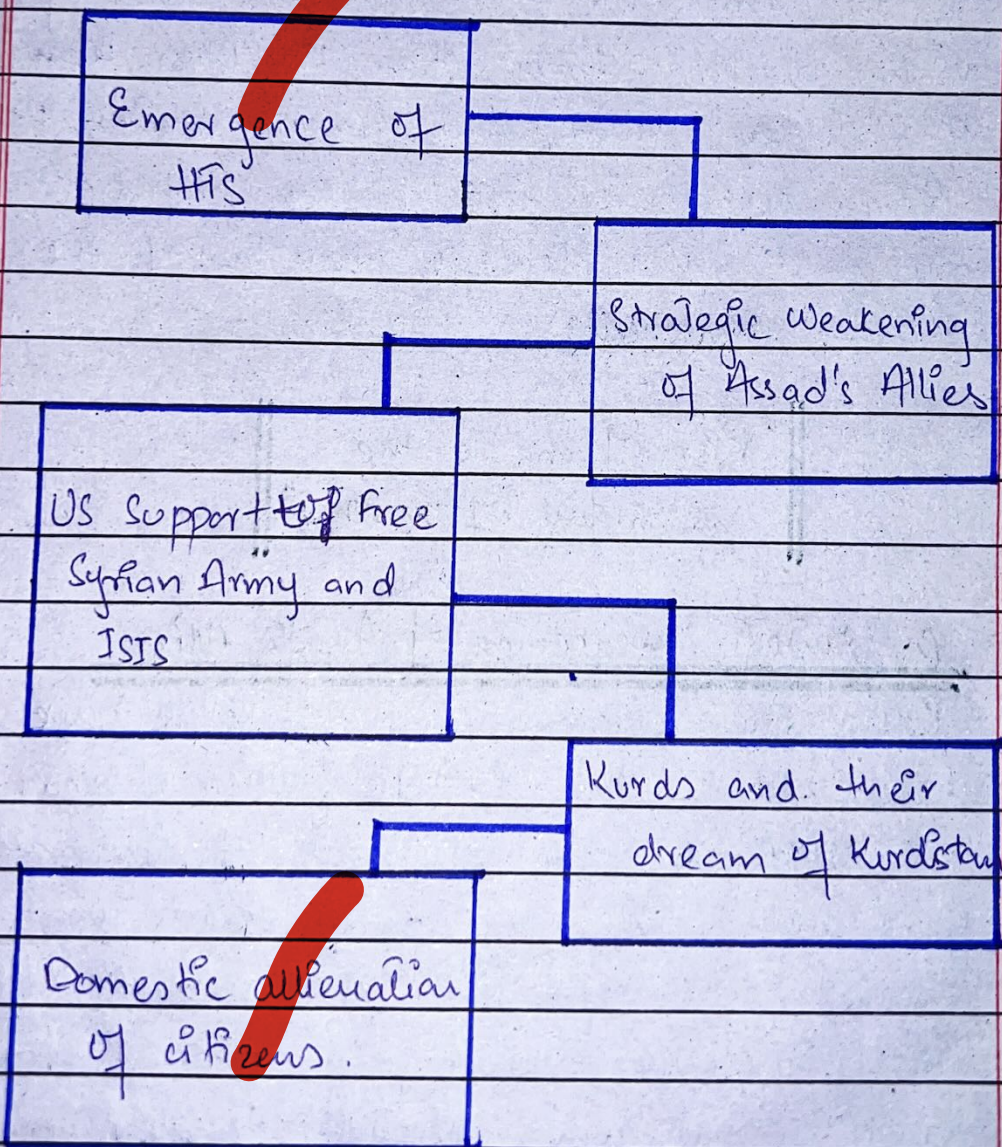
Nov 30, Rebels got into Hama and Hama

Dec 7 - Rebels reached outskirts of Damascus

Dec 8 - Rebels captured Damascus.

MULTI FACETED FACTORS BEHIND THE DOWNFALL OF ASSAD'S REGIME

Downfall of Assad's government in Syria was a good mix of various complex and interconnected factors, which collectively created a storm that led to its collapse. Some of them are as follows;



① Emergence of HTS against Bashar-ul- Assad:

HTS was established in 2017 with the merger of multiple militant gangs. HTS has ties with Al-Qaeda before 2017 but they parted their ways in 2017. HTS was never fully failed but was in power from the start and controlled a third part of Syria, seeking to establish Sunni Islam as the dominant governance model. ~~By~~ Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani is the leader of HTS who was backed by US and received funds from US. Other than US, Turkey, Qatar and Ukraine against the Assad's government. These factors helped HTS rise and which led to downfall of the Assad's government.

|| "Rise of one is the
downfall of the other" ||

② Strategic weakening of Assad's Allies:

Russia, Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah have always been the strategic allies of Syria and supported the government of Bashar-ul-Assad which was the reason Assad was successful to maintain the autocratic rule for 5 decades. However, this time Russia and Iran were already tangled in wars against Ukraine and Israel respectively.

and also facing sanctions by US, due to which they were unable to support Assad this time which led to failure of hollow military strategies of Assad's government.

③ US Support to Free Syrian Army and ISIS:

Against the narrative of Russia, US provided military support to the Free Syrian Army and ISIS to oppose ~~the~~ Russia. Analysing the historical rebels like Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi who was launched by CIA, Musaad and M16 which was highlighted in the Edward Snowden leaks of National Security Agency gives a pointer to the possibility that this is also backed by US.

④ Kurdistan - A dream of Kurds:

Kurdish population is predominantly spread across Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. They aspire to merge parts of these countries into a new independent state called Kurdistan. Kurds are also engaged in conflicts against Turkey to weaken Turkey and incorporate parts of Turkey into Kurdistan. US has historically supported Kurds as well which also fueled the tensions in the region.

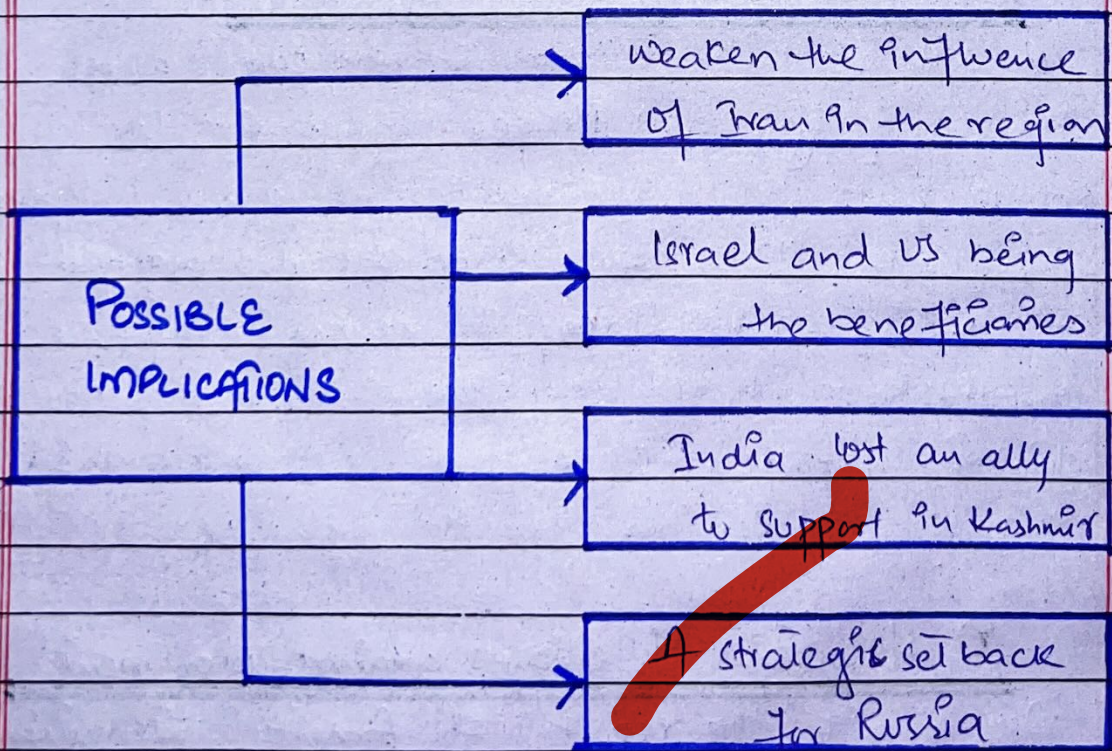
⑤ Alienation of citizens against government:

According to the reports of Amnesty International from 2011 to 2015, over 13000 prisoners were executed

by hanging in Syrian jails and an estimated 100,000 individuals were killed under the direct orders of Bashar-al-Assad. Such inhumane orders and policies of Assad's government against own citizens led to alienation of citizens and free Syrian army.

These multiple reasons contributed in the cause of toppling down of Bashar-al-Assad's regime.

POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF FALL OF ASSAD'S GOVERNMENT



① Weaken the Influence of Iran and Proxies in the region.

The ~~to~~ ouster of Assad from Syria is also a loss of Iran and the jihadist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah. As Hezbollah's attacks on Israel via Syria from Lebanon will now be hindered resulting in loss of Iran in the Palestinian cause against Israel and US.

② USA and Israel - Beneficiaries in Syrian Developments:

Downfall of Iran and the jihadist organizations in the region ~~are~~ beneficial for US and Israel. It is expected ~~to~~ ^{that} Syria is to be divided into two parts supporting the idea of Greater Israel as indicated by maps published by the Israeli army.

③ India - Syria Agreement: India lost an ally against Pakistan:

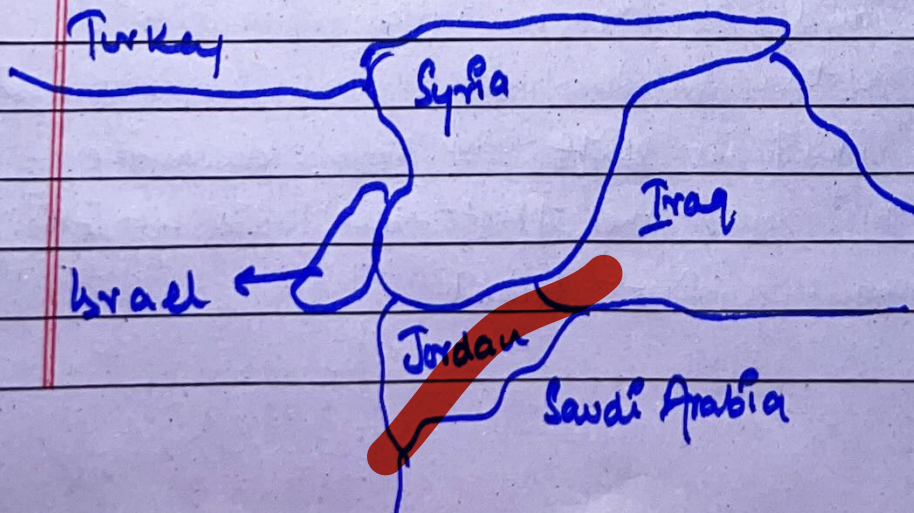
India and Syria had entered into an agreement where India recognized Golan Heights as part of Syria and in return Syria pledged not to support Pakistan in Kashmir issue. This agreement marked a significant shift in India's diplomatic posture. This was the first time India got into an agreement against Israel.

④ A Strategic Setback For Russia:

Russia being tangled in problems like war in Ukraine and sanctions by US, Russia has withdrawn from the Syrian conflict pulling back its military presence in Syria, including the tanks and ships and clearing out the borders.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DOWNFALL:

The overthrow of Bashar-ul-Assad's regime by HTS has majorly favored Israel and US. This significant power transition has supported the greater Israel narrative of Netanyahu and his ideology to expansionist nationalism. This power shift also has implications regionally, disrupting the existing alliances and power structures. However, the atrocities committed by Bashar-ul-Assad against the Sunnicitizens also contextualize the within border authoritarian rule in the Arab world, particularly when compared to the regime of Saddam Hossain in Iraq, who targeted Shia population.



- ~~Countries~~
- States majorly affected by the power transition.

CONCLUSION

The significant power shift in Syria has disrupted the longstanding alliances which have notably affected the Iran's influence in the region and altering the dynamics of the "Axis of Resistance", which also includes the groups of jihadists like Hamas and Hezbollah. Domestically the new Islamist led government also faces the formidable task of unifying diverse factors into a cohesive national army, which is a complicated process. However, the situation still remains complex with the potential of both the positive reforms and also further challenges as Syria navigates this unprecedented transition.



QUESTION NO.3

Russia-China growing economic, strategic and geo-political collaboration is an effort to potentially challenge the US-led world order. Discuss.

ANSWER 9/20

INTRODUCTION

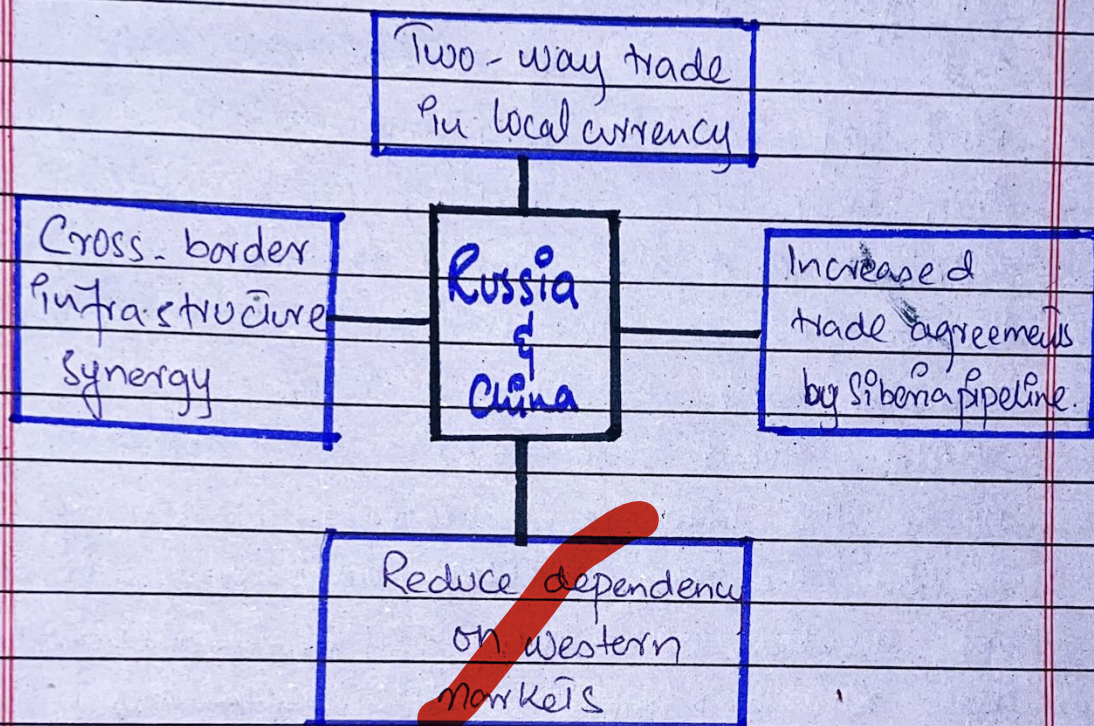
Russia + China are two giants who have joined hands long-ago to challenge the US led world order. This partnership is rooted in multiple economic, strategic and geo-political collaborations which are significant developments in the contemporary international relations.

The economic collaborations of the two hawks has recently boosted which include energy trade, Belt and Road Initiative of China is aligned with the Russia's Eurasian Economic Union and bilateral trade among two has also increased in local currency. Joint military exercises and technology

sharing are the examples of strategic collaboration. At last the geo-political collaborations among the two include SCO, BRICS and Africa's engagement by investing in the resource rich area. These collaborations of the two are a strong steps to counter the hegemony of US and establish multipolar world order.

ECONOMIC COLLABORATION AMONG TWO

GIANTS

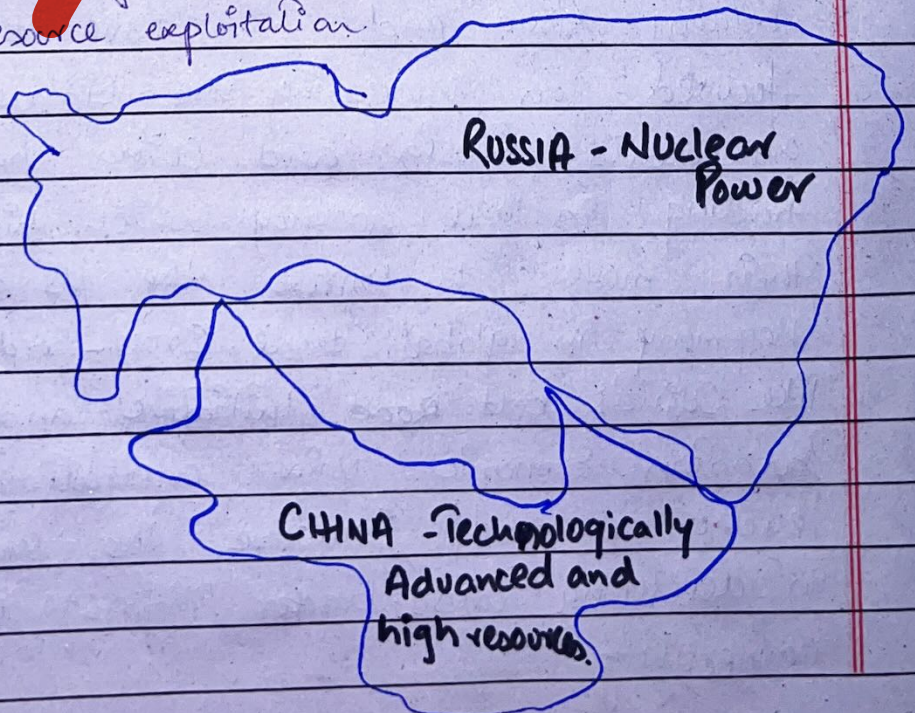


Strong roots of economic ties have been seen between Russia and China have majorly focused on increasing the bi-lateral agreements. Russia and China have been trading in local currency which highlight their move to bypass the US dollar hegemony in global trade. Cross-border projects like China's Belt Road Initiative and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union aspirations complement each other and increase the synergy in developing cross-border infrastructure and connectivity.

STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS AGAINST US

HEGEMONY

Analysing from the strategic lens, Russia and China have not established any kind of formal military alliance. However, they have been conducting joint military exercises and also shared advanced strategic technologies. The two nations have common concern over the US led alliances like NATO, AUKUS and QUAD. These alliances of US in the Indo-Pacific region are seen to contain the power of the two giants against the US-led world order. Russia and China have also cooperated on Arctic shipping routes and resources which strengthens their position in a region which is critical for trade and resource exploitation.



GEO-POLITICAL COLLABORATIONS - TO

MAINTAIN MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER

Geopolitically, Russia and China align in opposing the western-led initiatives and advocate for a rule-based international system. Both the nations have focused on multilateral alliances like SCO and BRICS, whose platforms are used to strengthen the cooperation and challenge the US hegemony. Central Asia particularly is a sensitive battleground for influence, with China's economic dominance by BRI complementing Russia's historical and security ties.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THIS BI-LATERAL

RELATION

Russia and China's growing collaborations are the evidence that both are playing a pivotal role in countering the US-led world order. The partnership grounded in economic, strategic, and geopolitical dimensions seek to promote a multipolar world order. This alignment represents a shift in global order. However, challenges exist among the

two, which includes mutual distrust, asymmetric economic power which favours China and divergent long-term interests in certain regions. While their collaboration poses a significant challenge, it may not yet constitute a cohesive alliance capable of fully overturning the US dominance.

CONCLUSION

The multi-faceted collaboration of the two giants highlights their dedication to counter the US led world order and maintain a multipolar world. Russia and China both have been struggling to work hard against US hegemony which seems to be little difficult due to the long held hegemony of US and its allies in the international system.



QUESTION NO. 5

Critically evaluate the opportunities and challenges for neighbours in post Sheikh Hasina Bangladesh. Also analyze the opportunities for Pakistan and Islamabad approach towards Dhaka.

11/20

INTRODUCTION

Creation of Bangladesh in 1971 was a major set back in the history of Pakistan. India's military involvement in Bangladesh led to Bengali demanding independence from Pakistan. However, in the recent history Bangladesh experienced a transition where the country student protest insisted Sheikh Hasina to flee the country. Tenure of Sheikh Hasina has been marked by allegations of election-rigging, coercive use of force against the opposition and global criticism of the degradation of democracy in Bangladesh during her three previous terms. The post Hasina^{era} holds significant implications for its neighbours, especially Pakistan. This transition has unfolded many opportunities for Pakistan and opposite for India, which will be highlighted in the answer.

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A GLIMPSE OF THE DARKEST DAY IN

THE HISTORY OF PAKISTAN - 16 Dec, 1971

Creation of Bangladesh was a tragic incident in the history of Pakistan, when Pakistani troops laid down their arms and surrendered for secession of East Pakistan. It is considered as the darkest day in the history of Pakistan. The grievances of Dhaka were political one which should have been handled with a political approach. Due to failure thousands of civilians lost their lives in this tragedy.

DOWN FALL OF SHEIKH HASEENA

In January 2024, Sheikh Haseena was sworn in as prime minister for a fourth consecutive term, despite being stated to rig the elections and use force against the opposition. She was still able to ensure her victory by using state machinery. However, the students protests which emerged in June 2024 against Sheikh Haseena was the major reason of downfall.

STUDENTS PROTESTS AGAINST SHEIKH

HASEENA'S POLICIES

The student protest emerged in June 2024, against the Prime Minister and her administration. The students protests initially focused on country's controversial quota system which reserved 30% of government jobs for relatives and dependants of the freedom fighters who took part in 1971 liberation war. Protests eventually spread to educational institutions across Bangladesh, as students demanded the abolition of the quota system, which they viewed as discriminatory and contrary to equal opportunity rights.

POST SHEIKH HASEENA BANGLADESH - OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEIGHBOURS

Enhanced Regional Connectivity

Foreign Policy For Collaboration.

New Economic Partnerships with neighbours.

① Enhanced Regional Connectivity:

Bangladesh being resource rich country and larger producer of Cotton after China can benefit itself and the neighbours by enhancing the relations in the region other than India only.

Countries like China, India and Myanmar may benefit from increased access to markets through improved infrastructure projects like BBIN Corridor and BRI links.

② Collaborative Foreign Policy:

Leadership transition can lead to recalibration of foreign policy which can enable Bangladesh to collaborate with regional powers like China and counter the overwhelming influence of India.

③ Economic Partnerships with Neighbours:

Prioritizing economic partnerships can create new openings for investment from neighbouring countries in manufacturing, infrastructure and technology sectors. Collaborating with regional initiatives like BIMSTEC can also gain momentum.

CHALLENGES FOR NEIGHBOURS:

① Political instability can disrupt trade and bilateral agreements.

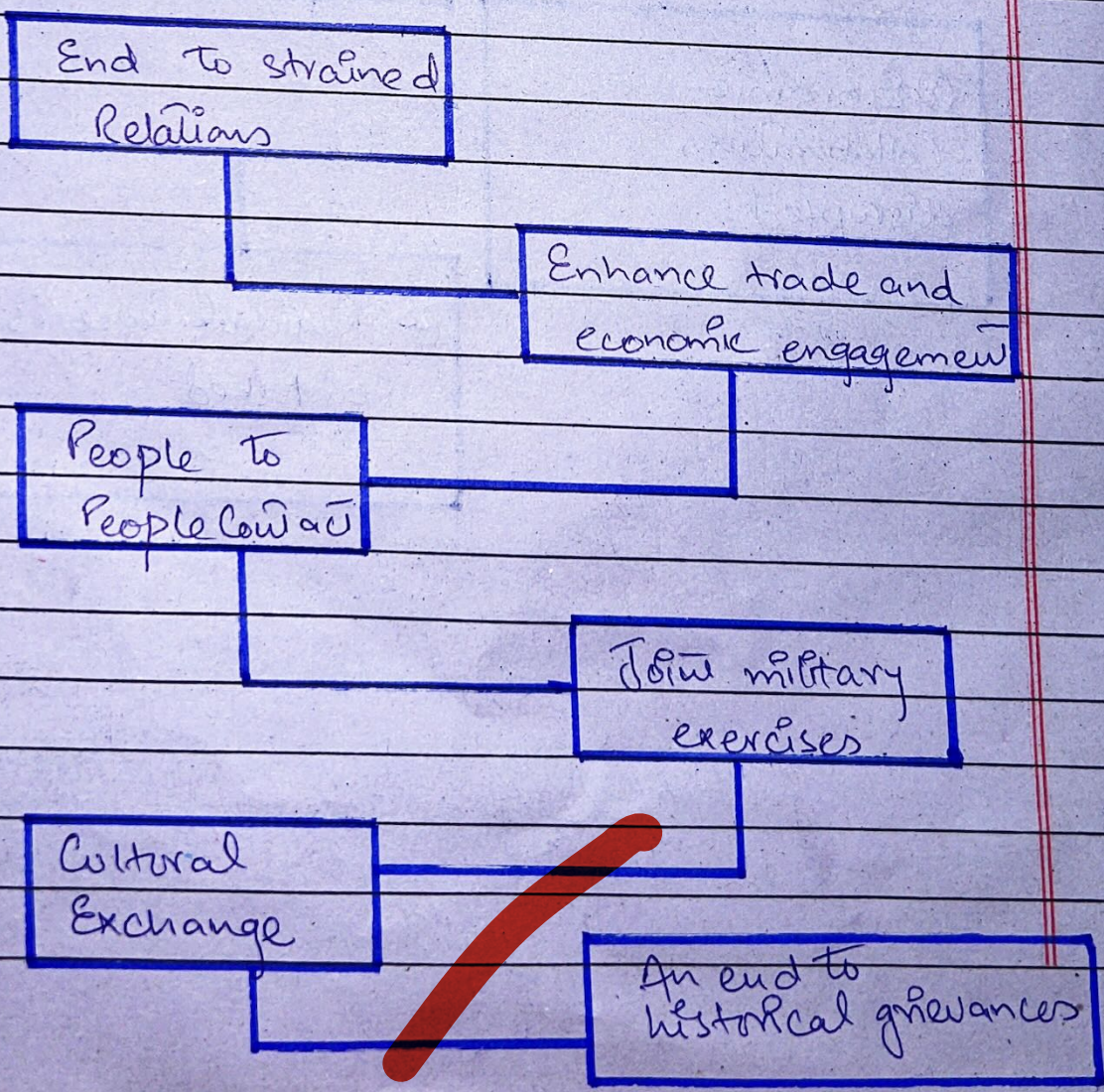
② Slow economic growth while transition can affect regional supply chains

③ Economic Collaborations disrupted.

④ Regional Peace is disturbed


POWER TRANSITION - OPPORTUNITIES FOR PAKISTAN

The post Sheikh Hasena era in Bangladesh is a highly beneficial for Pakistan. As Muhammad Yunus the leader of interim government is inclined more towards Pakistan and recently announced to start trade with Pakistan, countering the dominance of India. Opportunities for Pakistan after power transition in Bangladesh are highlighted below;



These are the opportunities for both the countries which must be followed and adapted by both to challenge India and strengthen bilateral relations.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH OF BANABAN TOWNERS DHAKKA:

- 
- Acknowledge historical grievances and extend diplomatic ties to foster trust.
 - Increase people-to-people contact with mild rules and soft policies.
 - Promote cultural and educational exchange to rebuild goodwill.
 - Utilize multilateral forums like SAARC and OIC.
 - Adapt a balanced foreign policy to counter India's dominance and enhance relations.

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF POWER TRANSITION

The leadership transition in Bangladesh holds immense importance for the region as well as for Pakistan. Sheikh Hasena's policies have always been in the favour of India and against Pakistan with no trade and people-to-people contact. However, this transition is highly beneficial for Pakistan as it ~~ca~~ helped Pakistan improve its relations with India and overcome the historical grievances. Enhancing economic collaboration and bilateral trade agreements will be favouring both the developing countries.

CONCLUSION

Post Sheikh Hasena Bangladesh is a mix of opportunities and challenges for the neighbours of Bangladesh. However, a potential for enhanced trade, connectivity and cooperation has been now given room, especially for Pakistan. As the Indian backed ~~Sheikh~~ Sheikh Hasena has always been against Pakistan and ~~ca~~ complexed the relations with Pakistan, which now got a vacuum to be stable and ~~increase~~ enhance collaboration.



QUESTION NO. 4

Islamabad - Kabul tensions

Give possible recommendations.

ANSWER NO. 4

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INTRODUCTION

The rising tensions between Islamabad and Kabul are due to Terrorist Taliban Pakistan. As the government of Pakistan have blamed Afghanistan to provide TTP a base for launching terrorist attacks into Pakistan. The situation is ~~an~~ escalating violence within Pakistan and further strained the relations between the two nations. In 2021, Pakistan experienced a notable increase in terrorist activities, with over 2500 fatalities resulting from such incidents, reported by Financial Times. However, Pakistan has been promoting and trying to promote peace as highlighted in recent SCO conference as well but Afghan Taliban to do not seem to cooperate at all. To mitigate these tensions the two nations need to cooperate and overcome this issue to maintain peace.

FRAGILE AND COMPLEX RELATIONS

OF PAK - AFGHAN

Pak-Afghan relations have never been smooth enough to cooperate. After the war on terror and ouster of US forces, Taliban have never cooperated with Pakistan and recently Taliban government has been strengthening ties with India - rival of Pakistan - which is yet again a major concern for Pakistan.

SURGE IN TTP ATTACKS:

In 2024, Pakistan experienced a significant increase in terrorist activities with over 2500 fatalities. More than 700 attacks were made by TTP which further gave rise to tensions.

RETALIATION BY PAKISTAN:

In response to the escalating attacks, Pakistan retaliated and conducted airstrikes targeting the suspected TTP hideouts within Afghanistan. In the recent airstrikes by Pakistan, Paktia province was reportedly targeted and a TTP training facility was dismantled. These actions were escalated by Pakistan only to retaliate when

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Afghan Taliban initiated attacks and caused civilian casualties in the airstrikes.

STRAINED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN

THE TWO

It is evident from several recent reports and the recent SCO conference as well, that Pakistan has consistently urged the Afghan Taliban to take decisive action against the TTP. Despite high-level diplomatic engagements, including visits by Pakistani officials to Kabul, the Afghan Taliban's response has been perceived as inadequate. The reluctance is majorly due to the historical reliance, as well, between the Afghan Taliban and TTP.

Pakistan's Defense Minister also warned before the attacks and highlighted in his ~~pre~~ speech, in following words:

"We won't serve them with cake and pastries. If attacked, we'll attack back."

- Defense Minister Khwaja Ajaz to BBC

POSSIBLE STEPS TO ENSURE PEACE AND STABILITY

-
- Enhanced diplomatic engagement
 - Conduct joint counter terrorism ~~initiatives~~ initiatives.
 - Engage Regional stakeholders like China.
 - Use international platforms like SCO to maintain peace.
 - Major changes in foreign policies of the two states.
 - Avoid constructivist ideology and try to cooperate.
 - Address the root cause of militancy by focusing on ~~bilateral~~ ~~cooperative~~ bilateral agreements.

① Enhanced Diplomatic Engagement:

The two states should prioritize sustained diplomatic dialogues to address mutual security concerns.

② Conduct joint ~~ter~~ counter terrorism initiatives:

Collaborative efforts like intelligence sharing and coordinated military operations, can more effectively target TTP networks operating across borders.

③ Engage Regional Stakeholders:

Engaging regional stakeholders like China, who has ~~an~~ ~~interest~~ in both countries can help mediate tensions and promote stability.

④ International Platforms like SCO to maintain peace:

Seeking assistance from international organizations for capacity building in counter-terrorism and use of RATS force of SCO can enhance the effectiveness of efforts.

⑤ Major Shift in Foreign Policies:

The two nations must bring about major shifts in their foreign policies and focus on collaboration instead of rivalry.

⑥ Avoid Constructivist Ideologies and Cooperate

Both the nations must cooperate instead of highlighting past grievances and boosting the instability in the nation.

⑦ Address the Root Causes

Both governments should work towards addressing the socio-economic factors which contribute to militancy. Bilateral cooperation can help reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Pakistan has been trying to cooperate and maintain peace at the border which has been tried in Pakistan. Afghan Taliban's soft reaction to TTP has allowed TTP to intensify its attacks on Pakistani soil. This situation has not only undermined Pakistan's internal security but also strained its diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. However, the recent airstrikes by Pakistan were condemned by Afghan Taliban and still they did not take any action against TTP. The cycle of actions and reactions has destabilized the region and increased the tensions between the two states, which need to be sought through cooperation and bilateral agreements.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the Islamabad - Kabul tensions, fueled by TTP's ~~cross~~ cross-border activities, require an approach which combine diplomatic, military and developmental strategies. Constructive engagement and mutual cooperation are highly essential to achieving long-term peace and stability in the region.

