

Block Exams - CGS 2026

Current Affairs

Part - II

Q. 2

Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep historical, cultural, religious, and ethnic ties; yet their bilateral relationship has remained fraught with mistrust and volatility. Despite regional mediation efforts - most recently by China - relations continue to oscillate between cautious engagement and open hostility. The persistence of cross-border terrorism, border disputes, political blame games and conflicting strategic interests have prevented the establishment of durable peace. However, both nations' stability is interlinked, and improving their ties is crucial for the peace and prosperity of the entire region.

Major Factors Behind Tense Pak-Afghan Relations

1. Cross-Border Terrorism and Security Concerns

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of harboring Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants who carry out attacks across the border in Pakistani region.

The government of Pakistan has repeatedly conveyed to the Afghanistan to take actions against the militants. But the Afghan Taliban's reluctance to act decisively against TTP has strained relations. Conversely, Kabul blames Pakistan for allegedly supporting certain militant factions in the past to maintain "strategic depth".

2. The Durand Line Dispute

Afghanistan has historically refused to recognize the Durand line as the official border. It claims certain areas of KP and Balochistan as part of Afghanistan. Moreover, frequent skirmishes and attacks on border fencing projects have deepened mistrust. The border issue also fuels nationalist sentiments in Afghanistan, making compromise politically sensitive.

3. Refugee and Economic Issues

Pakistan was hosting around 1.7 million Afghan refugees, creating socio-economic and security challenges. Recent deportation drives have further complicated relations. Furthermore, bilateral trade has suffered due to political tensions, frequent

border closures, and non-tariff barriers.

4. Divergent Political Interests

Pakistan seeks a stable and cooperative Afghanistan that does not allow Indian influence to threaten its western border. Afghanistan, meanwhile, aspires for strategic autonomy and resists perceived Pakistani interference. As a result, Kabul's increasing engagement with India, Iran, and the West is viewed by Islamabad with suspicion.

5. Role of External Actors

China's mediation has not produced tangible results due to deep-rooted mistrust. The U.S. withdrawal left a power vacuum and emboldened groups like TTP. And Indian involvement in Afghanistan's infrastructure and intelligence sectors is a long-standing irritant for Pakistan.

Steps to Improve Pak-Afghan Relations

1. Counter-Terrorism cooperation

Both states must institutionalize intelligence sharing and create joint mechanisms to counter cross-border terrorism. Establishment of a Joint Security Commission

under Chinese or SCO supervision could help rebuild trust.

2. Border Management and Dispute Resolution

The Durand line issue requires confidence-building measures rather than confrontation. Moreover, fencing completion, regulated crossings, and biometric systems can control illegal movement. Additionally, a neutral mediation framework through the OIC or SCO can help depoliticize the border issue.

3. Reviving Economic and Transit Links

Restoration of Afghanistan - Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) and development of cross-border markets can enhance mutual interdependence. Also, extending China's CPEC into Afghanistan could become a win-win scenario for both sides.

4. Refugee Movement with Dignity

Gradual, coordinated repatriation of Afghan refugees in collaboration with UNHCR can reduce tensions. Humanitarian handling of refugee issues will

also improve Pakistan's international image.

5. Regional and Multilateral Cooperation
Utilizing China's influence
through trilateral mechanisms (China-
Pakistan - Afghanistan) can ensure sustained
dialogue. The SCO can provide a platfo-
rm for both to discuss counterterrorism
and trade integration.

Q. 3

The debate over the creation of new provinces in Pakistan has persisted since independence. Proponents argue that smaller administrative units would ensure better governance, equitable resource distribution, and greater political participation. However, the issue remains politically charged and constitutionally complex. Despite periodic discussions - such as the demand for a South Punjab province, Hazara Province, or Sindh urban province - no concrete steps have been taken due to political resistance, ethnic sensitivities, and institutional hurdles. Thus, while the idea carries administrative merit, its execution faces multiple obstacles rooted in Pakistan's political and social fabric.

Major Hurdles in the Formation of New Provinces

1. Constitutional and Legal Complexities

Article 239(4) of the Constitution requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament and consent of the concerned provincial assembly - a high bar rarely achievable in a polarized

political climate. This legal rigidity has made any practical move toward new provinces nearly impossible.

2. Political Resistance and Power Politics

Major political parties often exploit the issue for electoral gain but avoid taking legislative steps. Ruling elites fear loss of political power and control over resources if new provinces are created. Inter-party rivalry, especially between federal and provincial governments, prevent consensus.

3. Ethnic and Linguistic Sensitivities

The demand for provinces often aligns with ethnic identities, raising ~~for~~ fears of division and separatism. For example, calls for Hazara Province or Mohajir Province are perceived as threats to ethnic unity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, respectively. Moreover, the specter of 1971's secession still looms large, making governments hesitant to redraw boundaries.

4. Administrative and Financial Constraints

Creating new provinces entails establishing new bureaucratic structures, assemblies, police and judiciary, which

require enormous funding. Therefore, Pakistan's limited fiscal capacity and existing provincial debts make the move economically challenging. Critics argue that improved governance can be achieved through administrative decentralization rather than political fragmentation.

5. Lack of National Consensus

No broad-based national dialogue has been held to define clear criteria for new provinces. Furthermore, public opinion remains divided: some view it as a governance reform, others as a threat to national cohesion.

Critical Evaluation

While the creation of new provinces may improve administrative efficiency, it cannot be treated as a political shortcut. Without institutional reforms, smaller provinces could replicate the same governance failures at a micro level. Additionally, the debate should shift from ethnic and political narratives to functional and administrative criteria: population size, area, service delivery, and resource management. Moreover, strong

local governments could serve the same purpose without creating new provinces, as envisioned under Article 140-A of the Constitution.

Recommendations

1. Establish a National Commission on Provincial Reorganization

A bipartisan commission should be formed to assess feasibility, economic viability, and public consent before any decision. The process must be data-driven, not politically motivated.

2. Strengthen Local Government Systems

Instead of more provinces, empowered local bodies can bring governance closer to the people. Regular local elections under Article 140-A would reduce pressure for new provinces.

3. Adopt Administrative Criteria, Not Ethnic Lines

Boundaries should be redrawn only where administrative efficiency demands it. Avoiding ethnic divisions will preserve national harmony and reduce polarization.

4. Public Awareness and Dialogue
Engage civil society, academics, and local communities in open discussions about costs and benefits. This will prevent the issue from being hijacked by political rhetoric.

5. Economic and Resource Planning
Conduct economic impact assessments to ensure financial sustainability of new provinces. A revised NFC formula can be negotiated beforehand to avoid post-creation disputes.

The formation of new provinces in Pakistan remains a complex but significant governance debate. While the idea promises improved administration and inclusivity, its success depends on political maturity, constitutional reform, and consensus-building. True federalism demands that power and resources flow downward - not merely be redistributed horizontally among provinces.