



Gujral Doctrine

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This article is based on **“Remembering Inder Kumar Gujral – and his elevated vision for India’s South Asian neighbourhood”** which was published in The Times of India on 04/12/2019. It talks about the applicability of Gujral Doctrine in contemporary times.

The Indian Prime Minister had launched the **Neighbourhood First Policy** in 2014, which envisaged **actively focussing on improving ties with India's immediate neighbours**. However, relations between India and its neighbours currently are not as good as it is needed to propel the South Asian region into a state of prosperity.

In this context, the **Gujral doctrine** can play a significant role in shaping South Asia.

IK Gujral

- Inder Kumar Gujral was sworn in as the **12th Prime Minister of India** from April 1997 to May 1998.
- IK Gujral can be remembered for **two significant contributions to Indian foreign policy**:
 - One, he propounded the '**Gujral doctrine**' when he was the union minister of External Affairs in the HD Deve Gowda Government. It is considered a milestone in India's foreign policy.
 - Two, despite international pressure, Gujral firmly **refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)** in October 1996.

What is the Gujral Doctrine?

- The Gujral Doctrine is a set of **five principles** to guide the conduct of foreign relations with India's immediate neighbours.
- These five principles arise from the belief that **India's stature and strength cannot be isolated from the quality of its relations with its neighbours**.
- It, thus, recognises the **supreme importance of friendly, cordial relations with neighbours**.

- These principles are:
 - With neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, India **does not ask for reciprocity** but gives and accommodates what it can in good faith and trust.
 - No South Asian country should allow its territory to be used against the interest of another country of the region.
 - No country should interfere in the internal affairs of another.
 - All South Asian countries must respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
 - They should settle all their disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations.

Application of Gujral Doctrine

- The resolution of the **water-sharing dispute** with Bangladesh in just three months in 1996-97.
- This almost coincided with the treaty with Nepal for taming the Mahakali river for the generation of hydel power.
- It was followed by agreements with Sri Lanka for expanding development cooperation.
- Also, it led to the starting of **composite dialogue** with Pakistan.
 - The composite dialogue was based on the principle that while entire spectrums of relationships came under **sincere problem-solving dialogues**.
 - Cooperation must begin on agreed terms in agreed areas (trade, travel, culture etc.) even as certain disputes remained unresolved (Kashmir, terrorism).

Relevance of Gujral Doctrine

- **Pakistan:** For 200 years, Britain practised the **principle of divide and rule** in its empire.
 - India and Pakistan were born as two sovereign nations into a pool of mutual hatred, hostility distrust and suspicion.
 - To this inherited pool, new tensions and confrontations over religion (the two nations theory), territory (Kashmir) and national aspirations were added.
 - Further, the creation of Bangladesh sharpened the strategic conflict between India and Pakistan.
- **Nepal: Domestic politics in Nepal** has led to a strategic deadlock between the two close neighbours.
- **Srilanka:** The outbreak of the **armed insurgency of Tamil Tigers** in Jaffna created an almost inevitable chasm between India and SriLanka.
- **Bangladesh: Illegal migration** has always been a contentious issue between India and Bangladesh.

Challenges to Gujral Doctrine

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- **China's footprint** in the subcontinent has expanded (**Belt and Road initiative**) and the logic of improved connectivity within the subcontinent is often trumped by heightened security concerns.
 - **Development cooperation** as an instrument of India's neighbourhood policy is weakened by the paucity of resources.

India is unable to match the scale of resources China is able to deploy in our neighbourhood to win influence.
 - The **current slowdown in the Indian economy** has meant that there is less willingness on India's part to further open its market to its neighbours.
 - India's borders become **transmission belts for security threats** such as cross-border terrorism, contraband trade or drug trafficking.
 - November 2008 Mumbai attacks, reflected the weakness of this doctrine: **that 'inherent goodwill' may not work with openly hostile neighbours.**

Way Forward

- There is no doubt that the challenges which India must deal with in its neighbourhood have become more complex and even threatening compared to two decades ago.
- In an age of shifting geopolitics and altered the balance of power, India will need to re-strategise its neighbourhood policy.
 - Connectivity must be pursued with greater vigour while security concerns are addressed through cost-effective, efficient and reliable technological measures which are in use in other parts of the world.
 - India should become a **transit country** of choice for all its neighbours by extending national treatment on its transport network and ports.

Above all, **"neighbourhood first"** must be anchored in the sustained engagement at all levels of the political and people to people levels, building upon the deep cultural affinities which are unique to India's relations with its neighbours.

Drishti Mains Question

Gujral Doctrine recognises the supreme importance of friendly, cordial relations with neighbours. Analyse the relevance and challenges associated with the application of Gujral Doctrine in the neighbourhood of India in present times.