

Hafiz Saeed Conviction

Why in News?

An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan has sentenced a hard line Islamist cleric Hafiz Mohammad Saeed to 11 years in jail for financing terrorist operations.

How this conviction is viewed?

- Hafiz Saeed, the alleged mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, was tried to be protected by the Pakistani government for years.
- Along with Saeed, his close aide Malik Zafar Iqbal has been sentenced to 5½ years by an anti-terrorism court.
- This conviction vindicated India's years-long position that Saeed had been using his organisations to finance terrorist activities.
- While the conviction is a welcome step, Pakistan has to do more if it wants the international community to take its self-declared resolve to fight terror seriously.

Why should Pakistan do more?

- This is because Pakistan's actions in the past against terrorist outfits have hardly been convincing.
- It started cracking down on Saeed's groups in 2018 only after it was threatened to be put on the "grey list" of the FATF.
- [FATF (Financial Action Task Force) - An inter-governmental body fighting money laundering and terror financing].
- The Pakistan government endorsed the UN ban on these organisations in February 2018, just a few days ahead of an FATF meeting.
- Despite these actions, Pakistan was placed on the grey list.

Why the timing of the conviction matters?

- Unsurprisingly, the conviction of Saeed and Iqbal comes a few days ahead of another crucial FATF meeting.
- In the October 2019 meeting, FATF warned Pakistan to take measures for the complete elimination of terror financing and money laundering.
- If the FATF is not satisfied with Pakistan's actions, the country faces the risk of being downgraded to the "black list".
- This downgrading could bring tough sanctions on its financial system and it

is evidently under international pressure.

- So, the question is whether Pakistan's actions are half-hearted steps aimed at avoiding the wrath of the international community or part of a genuine drive against terror.

How did Pakistan protect Saeed?

- Pakistan had avoided taking action against him and his groups for years.
- Saeed was put under house arrest several times, only to be released once the international attention turned away.
- The fundamental problem is Pakistan's policy of exporting terrorism to its neighbours for geopolitical leverage.

What could Pakistan do?

- Historically, Pakistan has adopted a **dual policy towards terrorism**,
 1. Fight it at home but
 2. Export it through proxies to its neighbours.
- It could change this policy and join the regional drive against terrorism.
- Doing so would protect the peace and stability of the region.
- The international community shouldn't let up its pressure on Pakistan.
- Pakistan could be asked to take legal action against terror financing and also hard measures against terror groups and infrastructure.

Source: The Hindu

Quick Fact

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- FATF was set up in 1989 by the western G7 countries, with headquarters in Paris.
- It acts as an 'international watchdog' on issues of money-laundering and financing of terrorism.
- It has 37 members that include all 5 permanent members of the Security Council, and other countries with economic influence.
- Two regional organisations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the European Commission (EC) are also its members.
- India became a full member in 2010.