Immigration conundrum - U.S.-Mexico border

Why in news?

The nearly two-month-old U.S. government under President Joe Biden is facing the highest number of migrants reaching its border with Mexico in 20 years.

What is the extent of the crisis?

- There is an unprecedented surge of unaccompanied minors at the U.S.-Mexico border in few weeks.
- The number of unaccompanied teens and children taken into U.S. custody along the border surged in few weeks to nearly 30,000 in February 2021.
- Migrant adults and families continue to be sent back to Mexico when they are caught.
- Unaccompanied children are being processed, and they get help resettling with U.S. relatives.
- Efforts are also stepped up to have children apply for asylum from their homes in Central America instead of making the dangerous journey to the U.S. border.

Why now?

- The former President Donald Trump adopted a “zero tolerance” policy toward undocumented immigrants.
- Trump-era emergency rule gave border agents the authority to summarily turn away most migrants other than unaccompanied minors.
- It denied them the right to have their asylum claims heard.
- In a sense, the mounting crisis now is related to a sweeping immigration reform proposal unveiled by Mr. Biden’s administration a month ago.
- The migrants are thus apparently encouraged to try to enter the U.S. by Biden’s rejection of Trump’s “zero tolerance” policy.

What are the other plans under way?

- There are smaller Bills that the Democrat-controlled Congress could pass with less resistance.
- These include measures to quicken the process for grant of legal status to agriculture workers and “Dreamers”, or undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. as children.

- There are also plans under way to redress the ills of the legal migration system.
- Many obstacles to this were erected by the Trump White House.
- These include a controversial rule to raise mandatory minimum pay for foreign workers on the H-1B visa for skilled immigrants that is largely granted to Indian nationals.
- Mr. Biden's broader, omnibus immigration legislation proposal includes an eight-year pathway to citizenship for the nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants.
- It also proposes the use of hi-tech systems for border patrol enforcement.
- [It is suggested that the Biden administration's proposed immigration bill could potentially increase annual 'green card' or permanent residency numbers by 35%.]

What challenge does the immigration crisis pose?

- Undoing some of the damaging policies implemented by his predecessor is getting to be a real challenge for Biden and his administration.
- The immigration crisis now has pushed the need for a comprehensive reform.
- The numbers so far is already wearing federal resources thin.
- The issue has made a call to choose between -
    - the American Dream with an inclusive vision of economic growth premised on embracing diversity and skilled migration
    - the Trumpian 'America First' battle cry for nativist populism
- What Mr. Biden does in the months to come becomes truly significant.

Source: The Hindu

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