India-Afghanistan Relation

Why in news?

Reports suggest that Prime Minister Narendra Modi may allow a new envoy for India's embassy in Afghanistan.

Who are Taliban?

- **Origins (1990s)** – They are founded in 1994 composed of Pashtun Islamic students and ex-mujahideen, emerged during the Afghan Civil War after the Soviet withdrawal (1989).
- **Rise to Power (1994-1996)** - They seized Kabul in 1996, overthrowing Burhanuddin Rabbani and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.
- **Rule (1996-2001)** – They imposed strict Sharia law and banned music, TV, and women's education.
- **Al-Qaeda attack on US** - Sep 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S. by Al-Qaeda, killed nearly 3,000 people.
- **US intervention** - Al-Qaeda's leader Bin Laden was in Afghanistan, under the protection of the Taliban who refused to hand him over.
- **Overthrow of Taliban** –The US intervened militarily and US-backed forces in the north swept into Kabul and removed Taliban from power in 2004.
- NATO allies had joined the US and a new Afghan government took over in 2004.
- **Doha Agreement (2020)** - The United States–Taliban deal, the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan brought an end to the 2001–2021 war in Afghanistan and Taliban returned to power in 2021.

What is the status of India Afghanistan relation?

- **India- Afghanistan Relations** - India and Afghanistan share a deep-rooted relationship built on historical and cultural ties.
- **Strategic Partnership Agreement** – It was signed in October 2011 facilitating assistance to help rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions, education and technical assistance.
- **Commercial Relation** - India is Afghanistan's largest trade partner in South Asia, with bilateral trade reaching USD 1.5 billion in 2019-20.
- **Chabahar Port** - Iran's only oceanic port, provides strategic direct trade route between India and Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan.
- **Salma Dam** – India helped Afghanistan in building the Salma dam, known as Afghan-India Friendship Dam in 2016.
- **Cultural Relations** - India-Afghanistan Culture Week (2017), musical troupe visits, and instrumental performances fostered people-to-people ties.

- **India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF)** – Established in 2007, IAF funds projects in economic, educational, technical, and cultural cooperation.
- **Sports Cooperation** - India and Afghanistan have robust relations in the field of sports.
- **Cricket-** Cricket has been a major factor in promoting people-to-people ties between the two countries.
- The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) uses Noida, Dehradun, and Lucknow as home grounds.
- India also supported the construction of a cricket stadium in Afghanistan.
- **Football-** Since 2011, Afghan youth teams have participated in India's Subroto Cup International Tournament.
- **Scholarships & Training—**Over 3,500 Afghan students receive training in India annually, and more than 15,000 study on a self-financed basis.
- **Educational Initiatives-** India has assisted in establishing institutions like the Afghanistan National Agricultural Sciences and Technology University (ANASTU) and has provided technical training in sectors such as agriculture and mining.
- **Humanitarian Assistance** - India has provided significant humanitarian aid to Afghanistan during COVID 19 and other political crisis times.
- **Community Development** - Since 2005, India and Afghanistan have partnered in the area of community development through the High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP).
- **Indian Diaspora in Afghanistan** - Approximately 1,710 Indians currently reside in Afghanistan, engaged in banking, IT, construction, healthcare, NGOs, security, and academia.

What are the challenges in India – Afghanistan relation?

- **Pakistan Factor** - Transit restrictions through Pakistan have posed challenges in accessing the Afghanistan.
- **Influence of China** - China has already accepted Taliban credentials and invested in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan and integrate into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

  China has become the first country to name a new ambassador to Afghanistan since the Taliban retook power in 2021.

- **Terrorism Risk** – Activities of terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS), has increased in Afghanistan.
- The Taliban has been accused of supporting the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has carried out deadly attacks on Pakistan’s military.
- **Human Rights Issue** – Taliban administration has faced international criticism for human rights violations, curtailing women’s rights and freedom of expression.

What lied ahead?

- Given Afghanistan’s history of instability and India’s past experience with terrorism, the risks of engagement remain high.
- India has begun to engage with the Taliban through high-level meetings, such as the recent discussions between Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Taliban officials.
- India shall work together with other like-minded states so that a regional framework for engaging with the Taliban regime can be worked out.
- India can influence the Taliban through its soft diplomacy to respect international human rights laws.

References

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