India’s Afghan Policy, a Tricky Affair

What is the issue?

India has been confronted with one of the most important diplomatic challenges of devising viable policies to deal with a Taliban ruled Afghanistan Government.

What are the concerns of India with respect to Taliban?

- **Terrorism**- India had joined the international community to back the democratically elected governments, after the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Taliban Government’s support to the radical Islamic causes from across its borders is the major concern for India.
- It has to be noted that the Taliban provides safe haven to radical Islamic groups, ranging from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Al Qaeda, to the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed in Pakistan.
- **Human right violations**- Taliban have ruthlessly crushed attempts by the Tajiks and Shia Hazara population who seek a little bit of autonomy.
- The Taliban thrives on suppression of the majority non-Pashtun population.
- There is now a consensus that ethnic minorities (who constitute 55 % of the population) and women should enjoy their basic human rights and representation in national life in Afghanistan.
- **China’s presence**- China’s economic corridors in Pakistan and Afghanistan will soon be utilised for increasing Beijing’s economic presence in mining Afghanistan’s vast natural resources.
- The Taliban has stayed away from providing safe-haven and support to the long persecuted, fellow Uighur Muslims, in China’s neighbouring Xinjiang Province.

What actions were taken by India aftermath the Taliban takeover?

- India realised that some form of contacts were needed with the Taliban through engagement with Afghanistan’s western neighbours, who share similar concerns.
- As a non-permanent member of the UNSC, India backed resolutions in the

Security Council to ensure that the Taliban-led government was denied membership of the UN, in view of the Taliban's support to terrorist groups like the Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.
- New Delhi has worked in close collaboration with Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbours, with whom India has excellent relations, while formulating its policies on Afghanistan.
- India, Iran and Russia have a history of working together with the Central Asian Republics in dealing with the Taliban, even before the US invaded Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks.
- India organised a meeting of **National Security Advisers** of Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbours, Russia, and Iran, to discuss developments and to work out a strategy to get the Taliban to form a more inclusive government.

What about India's engagement with Afghanistan?

- India assisted in building the **Salma Dam**, a 42 MW hydro-electric project in Afghanistan's Herat Province.
- Hundreds of Afghan students have received their education in schools and colleges in India.
- Children's education has been facilitated in Afghanistan by India providing mid-day meals.
- **Zaranj-Delaram Highway** was built by BRO along the Khash Rud River to provide an alternative route into landlocked Afghanistan through Chabahar port.
- **Stor Palace** was restored in Kabul by India.
- Construction of Parliament buildings, children's hospital, 400 buses and 200 mini-buses for urban transportation, Air India aircrafts, Sulabh toilet blocks etc were undertaken by the Indian government.
- **e-Emergency X-Misc visa** was introduced by India to fast-track urgent applications for entry to India especially for Afghans as the situation worsens after the Taliban takeover.
- There have been repeated requests from Taliban for India to resume its economic assistance programme which had amounted to around $3.5 billion.
- The situation in Afghanistan became desperate where 50% of the population is seriously short of food, and 8.7 million are one step away from famine.
- So, India offered to supply 50,000 tonnes of wheat through the shortest route, across the Wagah-Attari border-trading post in Punjab.
- India has airlifted 6 tonnes of essential medical supplies to Kabul.

- In these circumstances, India has joined the international community in adopting a two-track approach to dealing with Afghanistan.
- It has decided that the highest priority needs to be given to dealing with the suffering of the people of Afghanistan.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/indias-afghan-policy-a-tricky-affair/article37963132.ece

