

Iran-Afghan Water Conflict

Why in news?

Iran and Afghanistan are locked in a long-standing dispute over the sharing of water from the Helmand River.

What is the conflict?

- Helmand River is a vital source of water for both Iran and Afghanistan.
- The river supports agriculture, livelihoods and ecosystems in the region.
- Afghanistan and Iran have been at loggerheads over the sharing of river water for over a century.



- **Helmand River** - The Helmand is Afghanistan's longest river.
- It originates near Kabul in the western Hindu Kush mountain range.
- It flows in a southwesterly direction through desert areas for a total of about 1,150 kilometers before emptying into Lake Hamun, which straddles the Afghanistan-Iran border.
- **Lake Hamun** - It is the largest freshwater lake in Iran.
- Fed by the Helmand, it used to be one of the world's largest wetlands, straddling 4,000 sq.km between Iran and Afghanistan.
- But it has since dried up, experts blame on drought and the impact of dams and water controls.
- The lake is of great importance for the regional environment and economy.

What is the Helmand River Treaty?

- Afghanistan and Iran signed an agreement called the Helmand River Treaty in 1973.
- The treaty was signed to regulate the allocation of river water.
- But the accord was neither ratified nor fully implemented, causing disagreements and tensions to persist.

According to Iran's parliament, 25% to 30% of the population has left the region over the past two decades because of the water shortages.

What do Tehran and Kabul accuse each other of?

- **Iran** - Iran has accused Afghanistan of violating its water rights for years.
- Iran argues that far less water than the amount agreed to in the 1973 treaty flows into Iran.

- Afghanistan's construction of dams, reservoirs and irrigation systems along the Helmand River is a concern for them.
- They feel these projects might reduce water flow into Iran.
- **Afghanistan** - Afghanistan has rejected Iran's accusations.
- Afghanistan blamed climatic factors like a shortage of rainfall, which resulted in reduced river water volumes.
- They argue that they have rights to expand water storage and irrigation capacities within Afghanistan.

What's the state of Tehran-Taliban ties?

- Iran and Afghanistan share a 950-kilometer land border.
- Both countries have no major territorial disputes.
- Iran has so far refrained from formally recognizing the Taliban government.
- But it has been pragmatic and maintained relations with Afghanistan's current rulers.
- Both Iran and Taliban were united in their opposition to the US's presence in the region.

What's the current situation?

- Both sides are looking for short-term solutions, so that they could go ahead in solving their internal problems.
- There is a widespread demonstration and political unrest in the Sistan-Baluchistan region.
- Public anger in the eastern Iranian region is growing with the water shortages amidst other socio-economic problems.
- The latest clash between Iranian and Taliban troops has increased the tensions.
- Both the countries have also agreed to set up a commission of inquiry to investigate on the border shootout.

What is the need of the hour?

- Water resources from Lake Hamun are critical to the drought-stricken province.
- Both sides should address the mismanagement of water resources and tackle the environmental problems in the region.
- They should come up with a sustainable solution to resolve the water dispute.
- Both countries need to work more closely together and share information to determine availability and flow of water into Iran.
- Iran-Afghanistan relationship has to be closer to achieve goals such as the preservation of Lake Hamun.

Reference

1. [IE - All about the Iran-Taliban water conflict](#)



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