

Lithium in the Sahel - Armed Groups Exploitation

Prelims: Current events of national and international relations | International Relations

Why in news?

Lithium extraction and exploitation reported to fund armed group in Sahel region in Africa.

- Lithium is a critical mineral used in rechargeable batteries for electric vehicles, smartphones and laptops.
- Rising demand is linked to the growth of electric vehicles and renewable-energy storage.



- The Sahel is a semi-arid belt stretching across Africa between the Sahara Desert and tropical savannas.
- Nigeria and Mali have promising lithium deposits, while exploration is expanding in Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad.

Lithium and insurgency

- Growing lithium extraction is becoming linked with insurgency, organised crime and cross-border smuggling due to weak governance.
- Groups such as *Boko Haram and ISWAP* are reported to exploit weak oversight of lithium mining to generate revenue.
- *Armed groups can tax miners*, control mining sites, charge traders and transporters, and demand protection payments.
- **Nigeria** - Informal mining and weak regulation create opportunities for criminal groups.
- **Mali** - Armed groups involved in the gold economy are extending taxation and extortion to lithium regions.
- **Burkina Faso** - Jihadist groups exploit informal mining networks and tax extraction.
- **Niger** - Political instability and weakened border controls after the 2023 coup have increased smuggling risks.
- **Chad** - Weak governance and corruption facilitate illicit cross-border trade.
- Similar resource-conflict links have previously been seen with diamonds, gold and oil in Africa.
- **Way forward** -
 - Formalise artisanal mining,
 - strengthen mineral traceability
 - cross-border intelligence,
 - improve state control,
 - promote domestic lithium processing instead of exporting raw ore.

Reference

[Down To Earth| Lithium in the Sahel - Armed Group Exploitation](#)