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India-Afghan Relations after Taliban Takeover

What is the issue?

With the [Taliban takeover of Afghanistan](#), here is what India's response should be, and the challenges and opportunities therein.

What is the response so far?

- The U.S. and European countries relocated their diplomatic outposts to the Kabul airport where Taliban control is lesser.
- Russia, China and Iran decided not to vacate their embassies there.
- The Indian government is **completely evacuating** Indian nationals in Afghanistan, including the entire embassy and security personnel.

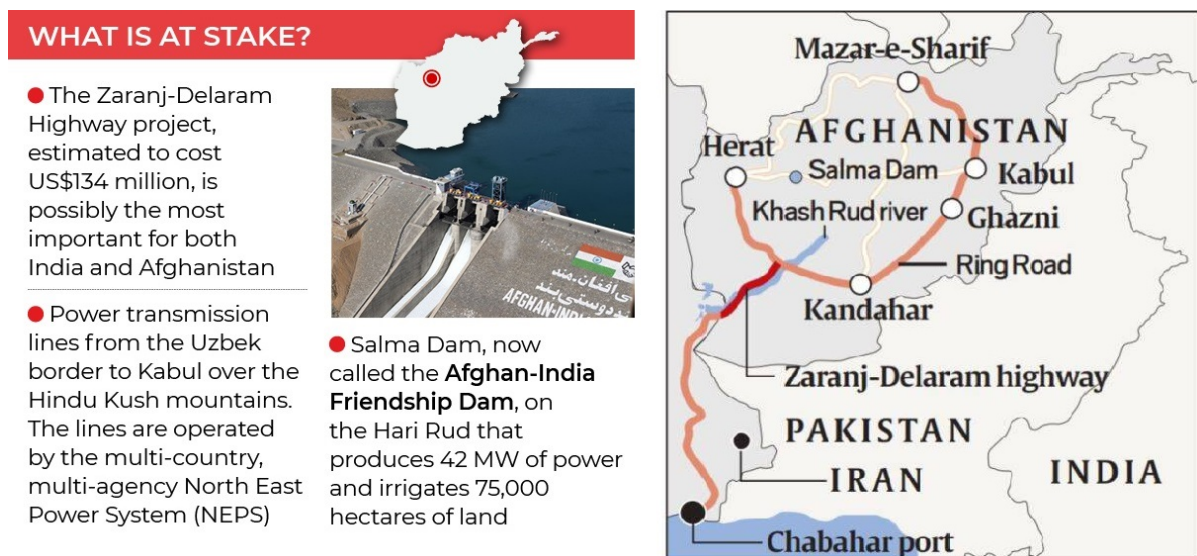
Is complete evacuation by India a wise option?

- India had undertaken evacuations during the 1990s too when the Taliban first came to power.
- But the presence of Indian nationals was not as large and Indian stakes in Afghanistan were not as deeply rooted as it is now.
- Since 2001, India has built considerable interests in Afghanistan:
 1. Contributed to major infrastructure and development projects.
 2. Helped in scripting the Afghan Constitution and conduct of elections.
 3. Enabled the training and education of the next generation of officials, soldiers and professionals.
- The decision to pull up all stakes, despite such significant investments made in the past, raise

concerns.

How much has India invested in Afghanistan?

- The 2011 India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement recommitted Indian assistance to help rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure.
- Unlike in other countries where India's infrastructure projects have barely started, it has delivered in Afghanistan.
- India's development assistance is now estimated to be worth well over \$3 billion.
- Bilateral trade is now \$1.3 billion, with exports from India worth approximately \$900 million



Zaranj-Delaram Highway - 218-km highway built by BRO goes along the Khash Rud river. With Pakistan denying access, it provides an alternative route into landlocked Afghanistan through Chabahar port.

Stor Palace - restored the Palace in Kabul, which was the setting for the 1919 Rawalpindi Agreement by which Afghanistan became an independent country

Other Projects - Parliament buildings, reconstruction of a children's hospital, 400 buses and 200 mini-buses for urban transportation, Air India aircrafts, Sulabh toilet blocks etc

Afghan exports - fresh and dried fruit through the Wagah border

Indian exports - pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, computers and related materials, cement, and sugar through government-to-government contracts with Indian companies

Why should India strengthen the relations?

- India has huge investments and stakes there.
- India should make use of the great love that the People of Afghanistan have for India while Pakistan is not very popular.
- The Taliban of 2021 seems to be relatively mature and liberal than the former.

1. It is holding talks with former Afghanistan President Hamid Karza

2. Negotiations are under way for a more inclusive coalition, including several former leaders of Afghanistan.

What are the risks involved?

- Taliban's Pakistan support is a particular security concern.
- Groups such as the LeT and JeM could use Afghanistan as a staging base for terror attacks in India.

What lies ahead for the government?

- Explain how it will approach the new regime in Afghanistan.
- Clarify its stance on Afghan people/refugees whose lives are in danger.
- A more open, liberalized visa policy, and more swift processing of the newly launched special "e-Emergency X-Misc" visas.

"e-Emergency X-Misc" visa is a special category of electronic visa introduced by India to fast-track urgent applications for entry to India (for those who are not covered in the available categories but need to visit India urgently due to an emergency.) It has been introduced especially for Afghans as the situation worsens after the Taliban takeover.

- Retain traditional and historic interests in Afghanistan and its people, despite the adverse events there.
- In all, India should adopt a "wait and watch" mode and be in no hurry either to recognize or dismiss the new Taliban regime.

Source: The Hindu



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