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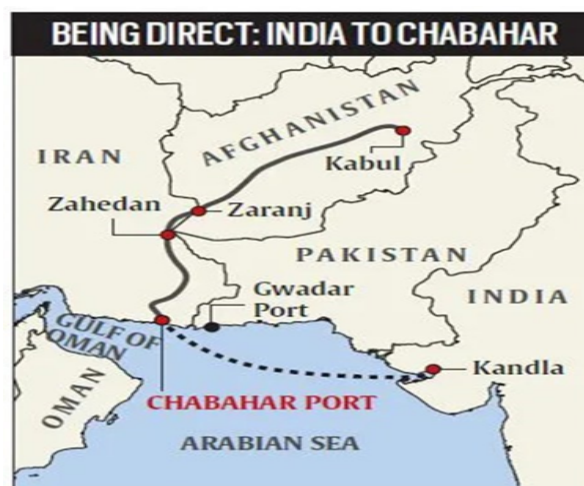
Kurdistan Independence Vote

Why in news?

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Iraqi Kurds have planned to go ahead with a proposed referendum on seceding from Iraq.

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Who are the Kurds?

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- Kurds constitute the fourth largest ethnic group in West Asia but don't have a nation of their own.

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- They are scattered in various countries and are a considerable minority in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

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- They have historically been oppressed by their respective governments which has fueled the desire for establishing a Kurdish nation that encompasses the Kurdish regions different countries.
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- In Turkey, Kurdish rebels are involved in a civil war for secession, while in Syria they have already established a regional government.
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- As Baghdad is weakened by IS, Kurds have used the situation to enhance the territory under their control.
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- Currently, Iraqi Kurds are planning a referendum on secession on their own.
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What have been the reactions to the referendum?

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- The Iraqi Supreme Court has already asked the Kurdistan Regional Government to suspend the vote, till its legality is settled.
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- Although a Yes in the referendum doesn't guarantee secession, it has been perceived as a message to the outside world reiterating that there is popular support for independence.
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- Kurds are an important partner for Baghdad in the fight against the IS, with the U.S. also treating the Peshmerga forces as an ally.
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- The move by the Iraqi Kurds is being viewed with alarm by the Turkish and Iranian regimes.
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- Turkey has in the past treated Kurdish demands for minority rights such as recognition of their language, let alone autonomy, as secessionist.
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- Iran is also fighting a minor insurgency by kurds in the mountains of its northern region and has recently closed its eastern borders in the light of the referendum .
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- Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria remains tactically silent on the matter for now.
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- So the referendum has geopolitical ramifications
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What is the current political status of Iraqi Kurds?

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- Iraqi Kurds were granted some autonomy after 1991 when a regional government was constituted at Erbil.
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- In recent years, both Baghdad and Erbil cooperated in the fight against the Islamic State.
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- Although independence remains the proclaimed goal of Iraqi Kurds, Mr.Barzani - who heads the regional administration at Erbil, has often personally signalled a compromise.
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- While Baghdad has chosen to ignore such gestures, the current developments makes restarting negotiations essential.
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Source: The Hindu

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