THE HINDU
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Daily News Analysis

# The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

## Wednesday, 26 March, 2025

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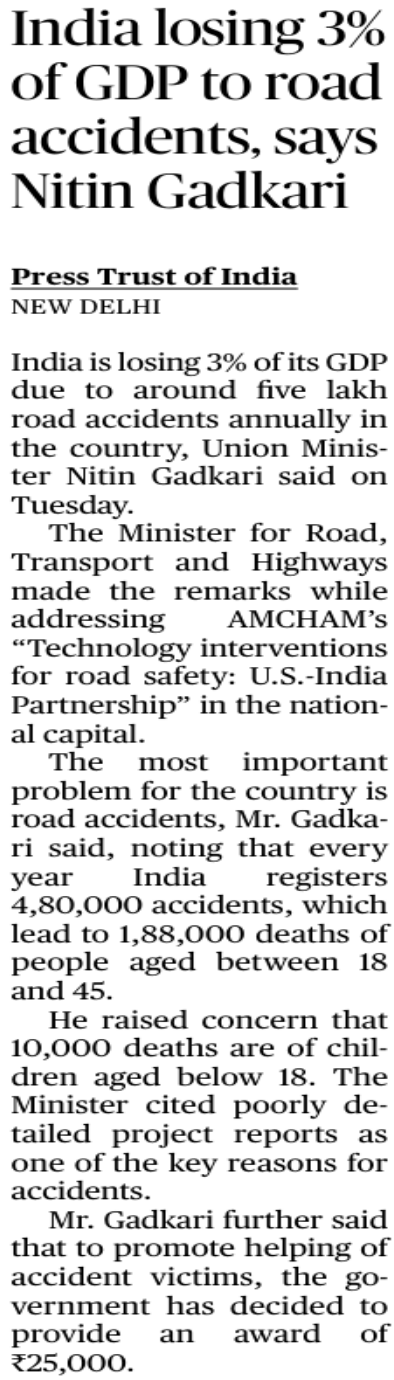
- Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, recently highlighted that India loses 3% of its GDP due to road accidents, which amount to nearly five lakh accidents annually. This issue not only causes economic losses but also results in significant social and human costs.



India losing 3% of GDP to road accidents, says Nitin Gadkari

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India is losing 3% of its GDP due to around five lakh road accidents annually in the country, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Tuesday.

The Minister for Road, Transport and Highways made the remarks while addressing AMCHAM's "Technology interventions for road safety: U.S.-India Partnership" in the national capital.

The most important problem for the country is road accidents, Mr. Gadkari said, noting that every year India registers 4,80,000 accidents, which lead to 1,88,000 deaths of people aged between 18 and 45.

He raised concern that 10,000 deaths are of children aged below 18. The Minister cited poorly detailed project reports as one of the key reasons for accidents.

Mr. Gadkari further said that to promote helping of accident victims, the government has decided to provide an award of ₹25,000.

**Key Issues Highlighted**

- High Number of Road Accidents:
  - India records 4,80,000 road accidents annually.
  - 1,88,000 deaths, mainly among individuals aged 18-45 years.
  - 10,000 deaths of children below 18 years.
- Economic Impact:
  - The loss of 3% of GDP due to accidents signifies a major drain on resources.
  - Reduced workforce productivity and healthcare costs add to the economic burden.
- Reasons for High Accident Rates:
  - Poorly Designed Roads & Project Reports: Many road designs lack safety features, leading to accidents.
  - Lack of Awareness & Poor Enforcement: Traffic rule violations, rash driving, and low adherence to safety norms.
  - Deficient Emergency Response System: Delay in medical assistance leads to preventable fatalities.

**Government Initiatives for Road Safety**

- Good Samaritan Law & ₹25,000 Award: Encourages bystanders to help accident victims without fear of legal hassles.
- Advanced Road Infrastructure: Adoption of new technologies such as AI-based surveillance and smart traffic management.
- Stricter Road Safety Regulations: Enforcing stricter penalties under the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019.
- Awareness Campaigns: Programs like Sadak Suraksha Jeevan Raksha to educate citizens.

**Way Forward**

- Investment in Safe Road Designs: Ensuring proper planning and execution of road infrastructure projects.
- Technology Integration: AI-driven traffic monitoring, automatic braking systems, and better road signages.
- Swift Emergency Response: Expansion of the Golden Hour concept and improved ambulance services.
- Public Awareness & Education: Making road safety an integral part of school curricula.

**Conclusion**

- Road safety is a critical concern impacting India's economy and human resources. Addressing it through policy reforms, technology, and awareness is essential for sustainable development. The government's focus on safer infrastructure and incentivizing accident assistance is a step in the right direction, but further efforts are needed to minimize road fatalities.

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Page 07 : GS 3: Science & Technology

A recent study published in Nature Astronomy suggests that water, a key ingredient for life, may have formed much earlier in the universe than previously believed. This discovery could push back the timeline for the emergence of life, challenging existing astrophysical theories.

# Search for universe's first water could reset timeline of life's origins

The findings of new research validate previous studies that have shown that at least some of the earth's water was delivered by comets early in the planet's history. They also confirm that water molecules remain unchanged from their interstellar origins as they reach planets elsewhere in the universe

Prakash Chandra

Astronomers may be closer to solving one of the most intriguing mysteries in science: how did water originate in the universe?

A study published in the journal *Nature Astronomy* on March 3 suggested that the universe's oldest stars became founts of water as their nuclear fires were extinguished in massive explosions called supernovae.

If this finding is borne out in further research, astronomers will have to revise current theories to factor in potentially life-bearing planets being born billions of years earlier than previously thought.

## The first stars

Water is the third most abundant molecule in the universe, after hydrogen and carbon monoxide, but its origins have remained obscure.

Billions of years ago, all matter and energy existed as an extremely small fleck in the void. This incredibly dense blob exploded some 13.8 billion years ago with a Big Bang to create the known universe.

The first stars were born just a few hundred million years after the Big Bang, at a time when all visible matter comprised primordial hydrogen and helium atoms. The nuclear furnaces at the cores of these early stars were powered by hydrogen, and as they shone, they heated up the surrounding intergalactic gas and dust. Hundreds of millions of years later, when the stars ran out of hydrogen to burn, they blew up as supernovae.

But by then their heat had ionised the interstellar medium around them, which set the stage for the formation of new stars and triggered a cycle of star births in perpetuity.

## The third population

The longevity of a star depends on its mass. More massive stars die faster as more mass means more heat, and the hotter a star becomes, the faster its nuclear fuel is exhausted. Temperatures of millions of degrees and high densities inside a star force four hydrogen atoms to fuse into a helium atom, releasing enormous amounts of energy.

Scientists have calculated that 0.7% of the mass is converted into energy, summed up by Einstein's mass-energy equation.

Based on their age and metallicity (i.e., the proportion of any element other than hydrogen and helium), astronomers divide stars into three groups. Population I stars, like the sun, are the youngest and are the most metal-rich, while population II stars are older and are less metallic.

NASA's Hubble Space Telescope unveiled in stunning detail this small section of the expanding remains of a massive star that exploded about 8,000 years ago, now called the Veil Nebula, February 17, 2024. NASA, ESA, AND THE HUBBLE HERITAGE TEAM (STSCI/AURA)

The universe's oldest stars form population III: massive stars composed completely of hydrogen and helium. These forerunners, the researchers of the new study have surmised, were the stellar nurseries where water must have first appeared in the cosmos.

## The right conditions

Astronomer D.H. Whalen of the University of Portsmouth, England, who led the new study, said his team ran 3D simulations of population III supernovae looking for the signatures of water. They found that the conditions required to create water existed at around the same time when those first supernovae lit up the cosmos: sometime between 50 million and 1 billion years after the Big Bang. Gigantic stars, hundreds of times more massive than our sun and with short lifespans, provided these conditions when they exploded, leaving behind hydrogen, oxygen, and other elements as their stellar remnants.

According to Whalen, the oxygen produced in these supernovae combined with hydrogen to create water, which is crucial for forming the elements necessary for life (as we know it).

The earliest stars could not have possibly engendered water in the universe before they became supernovae, however.

"The supernovae have to expel oxygen, which only forms during late stages of nuclear burning in massive stars that are destined to explode."

> Astronomers had an idea that metal-poor stars generated oxygen which would combine with hydrogen to produce water. The current paper shows that generation of water in early galaxies was likely more efficient

## Water in an infant universe

It may be a while before astronomers redraw their theories on the origins of water in the cosmos. "The water formation happens after the supernovae throw out most of the stellar material," K.C. Sarkar, an associate professor of astronomy and astrophysics at the Raman Research Institute in Bengaluru, said in an email interview.

"Astronomers already had an idea that the massive, metal-poor stars generated a lot of oxygen and that this oxygen would later combine with hydrogen to produce water in the universe. The current paper shows that the generation of water in early galaxies could be more efficient than [in] today's galaxies."

Scientists believed for decades that only traces of water were present in the early cosmos and that it became more common when newer, bigger stars exploded, yielding more of the heavier elements to an evolving universe. But the latest findings indicate that the first supernovae themselves produced enough water to drench the infant universe.

This would mean planets, a crucial refuge for water molecules, could have formed even before the first galaxies were born, and that there could have been enough water and other elements in the interstellar molecular clouds to kickstart life. If so, this pushes the timeline for potential life to have arisen in the universe way back.

## Remain unchanged

There are concerns that the model used by the University of Portsmouth researchers was based on the use of indirect methods, like numerical experiments, to study population III stars. These stars are so distant that it is nearly impossible to 'see' them even with the most sophisticated telescopes.

However, Whalen said this challenge did not affect the accuracy of the study. "The important thing is to capture how ionising UV radiation from the stars heats and drives away ambient gas over their lifetimes. We have those from stellar atmosphere and evolution models that are well established in the field."

The findings validate previous research that has shown that at least some of the earth's water was delivered by comets early in the planet's history. They also confirm that water molecules remain unchanged from their interstellar origins as they reach planets elsewhere in the universe.

*(Prakash Chandra is a science writer. prakashisat@gmail.com)*

### THE GIST

Water is the third most abundant molecule in the universe, after hydrogen and carbon monoxide, but its origins are obscure

Researchers found that the conditions required for water existed around the time when the first supernovae lit up the cosmos. Gigantic stars exploded, leaving behind hydrogen, oxygen, and other elements. The 'oxygen combined with hydrogen to create water'

The latest findings indicate that the first supernovae produced enough water to drench the infant universe. This means planets could have formed before the first galaxies, and that there was enough water to kickstart life. This would push the timeline for potential life way back

## Key Findings of the Study

- Origin of Water in the Universe
  - Water is the third most abundant molecule after hydrogen and carbon monoxide.
  - The first massive stars (Population III) synthesized oxygen, which combined with hydrogen post-supernovae to form water.
  - This process occurred 50 million to 1 billion years after the Big Bang.
- Role of Supernovae
  - The earliest stars, composed of hydrogen and helium, underwent nuclear fusion.
  - When these stars exhausted their fuel, they exploded as supernovae, releasing oxygen, hydrogen, and other elements into space.
  - These elements facilitated the formation of water molecules.
- Redefining the Timeline of Life's Possibility
  - Previously, scientists believed that only traces of water existed in the early universe, accumulating over billions of years.
  - The study suggests that the first supernovae produced enough water to drench the early universe.
  - This means planets could have formed before the first galaxies, providing an environment conducive to life much earlier than expected.
- Implications for Earth and Other Planets
  - Water molecules remain chemically unchanged from their interstellar origins.
  - Previous studies suggested that Earth's water was partially delivered by comets.
  - The new findings reinforce the idea that water has been a cosmic constant, appearing early in the universe and reaching planets unchanged.

**Scientific and Philosophical Implications**

- Cosmology and Astrophysics:
  - Challenges the existing understanding of stellar evolution and element formation.
  - Suggests a higher efficiency of water formation in early galaxies.
- Astrobiology & Search for Extraterrestrial Life:
  - Expands the potential habitable zones across time and space.
  - Raises the possibility that life could have emerged much earlier than thought.
- Impact on Theories of Planetary Formation:
  - Implies that planets rich in water could have existed before galaxies were formed.
  - Could reshape our understanding of exoplanet formation and habitability.

**Challenges and Future Research**

- Observational Limitations:

- Population III stars are extremely distant and cannot be directly observed, requiring indirect numerical simulations.
- Researchers rely on stellar atmosphere and evolution models to predict conditions.

- Further Studies Needed:
  - Improved telescope technology (e.g., James Webb Space Telescope) may help confirm these findings.
  - Future observations of ancient interstellar clouds may provide direct evidence of early water.

**Conclusion**

- The discovery of early water formation due to Population III supernovae challenges existing theories and extends the timeline for potential life in the universe. If confirmed, this finding reshapes our understanding of cosmic history, planetary evolution, and the search for extraterrestrial life.

- Astronauts aboard the International Space Station (ISS) experience microgravity, which significantly reduces the effects of weight and friction. This lack of gravity leads to muscle atrophy and bone density loss, making exercise essential for maintaining health. Scientists have developed innovative workout solutions to simulate gravitational resistance.

QUESTION CORNER

# Simulating gravity for space workouts

**Q. Does walking in space lead to weight loss?**

Are you trying to lose weight? Because in space you are already weightless. However, it is interesting to think about how astronauts can exercise in space, which they need to do to keep from losing muscle mass.

Work is defined by a force displacing an object by some distance. When you lift a 5-kg dumbbell on the earth, you work to move it through the air. The amount of work depends on the amount of force exerted in this activity.

On the ground, you work to overcome the downward force the dumbbell exerts on your hand, called its weight, and to move the dumbbell up. If you're onboard the International Space Station (ISS) in low-earth orbit, both components almost completely vanish, and you do very little work to move the dumbbell up and down.

Similarly, unlike walking on the earth, where you work to overcome your own weight and friction against the air and the ground, in space the former is very small and the latter is zero. (In low-earth orbit, astronauts experience microgravity, not zero gravity.)

Astronaut Sunita Williams uses the treadmill onboard the ISS in 2012. The harness is visible reaching from the treadmill's base to a ring on her hip. NASA

To exercise onboard the ISS, astronauts use a special weight-lifting machine called the Advanced Resistive Exercise Device. An astronaut uses their hands and shoulders to push against resistance provided by air-filled pistons, which can simulate a weight of up to 270 kg. Similarly, the ISS has a treadmill where astronauts can strap themselves down using a harness: the tighter it is, the closer the force it exerts will be to gravity.

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**For feedback and suggestions** for 'Science', please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Daily page'

**Key Concepts: Gravity and Exercise in Space**

- Microgravity and Its Effects

- In microgravity, astronauts experience weightlessness, which reduces the work needed to move objects.
- Bone loss (osteopenia) and muscle atrophy occur due to the absence of gravitational resistance.
- The heart and circulatory system undergo changes, leading to weaker cardiovascular function over time.

- Work and Force in Space
  - On Earth, physical activities like walking or lifting weights involve overcoming gravity and friction.
  - In space, gravitational force is minimal, and friction with the ground is absent, making traditional exercises ineffective.
- Exercise Solutions on the ISS
  - To counteract muscle loss and maintain bone strength, astronauts use specialized equipment:
- Advanced Resistive Exercise Device (ARED)
  - Uses air-filled pistons to provide resistance.
  - Simulates lifting weights up to 270 kg, maintaining muscle strength.
- Treadmill with Harness System
  - Astronauts use elastic harnesses to simulate body weight.
  - The tighter the harness, the closer it mimics Earth's gravitational force.
- Cycling & Resistance Bands
  - Stationary bicycles with foot straps help maintain cardiovascular health.
  - Elastic bands offer resistance-based muscle workouts.

**Implications for Space Exploration & Human Health**

- Long-Term Space Missions
  - Exercise technologies will be crucial for missions to Mars and beyond, where astronauts will spend months or years in space.
  - Artificial gravity solutions, such as rotating habitats or centrifugal force-based workouts, could be developed.
- Medical & Physiological Insights
  - Space-based muscle loss research helps in understanding age-related osteoporosis on Earth.
  - Resistance exercise models could benefit rehabilitation therapy for bedridden patients.
- Relevance to Artificial Gravity Research
  - Future deep-space missions may use centrifugal force-based artificial gravity systems to reduce health risks.
  - Ongoing research in space medicine aims to enhance human adaptability to prolonged weightlessness.

**Conclusion**

- Simulating gravity for workouts is essential to preserve astronaut health in space. Advances in artificial gravity research and exercise technologies will be key to future deep-space missions, shaping the future of human space exploration and benefiting medical science on Earth.

**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

**Ques :** Discuss the physiological challenges faced by astronauts in prolonged space missions. How do current exercise technologies help mitigate these issues? (**250 words)**

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has launched BHIM 3.0, the latest version of the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app. NPCI is responsible for developing digital payment infrastructure in India, and BHIM is one of its flagship UPI-based applications designed to promote cashless transactions in line with the Digital India initiative.

# BHIM 3.0 launched with option to track shared expenses

**The Hindu Bureau**
MUMBAI

National Payments Corporation of India's (NPCI) wholly owned subsidiary NPCI BHIM Services Ltd. (NBSL), on Tuesday, launched Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) 3.0 with enhanced features for users and new offerings for businesses and banks.

BHIM 3.0 will be rolled out in phases across platforms, with complete availability expected by April 2025. "BHIM 3.0 is designed to meet the needs of today's users in the fast-evolving world of digital payments. Built for Bharat, it prioritises safety, convenience, and inclusion," said NBSL CEO Lalitha Nataraj. Users can split bills with friends and family seamlessly. For dining out, rent payments, or group purchases, the BHIM app now allows users to divide expenses and make payments directly.

Users can now onboard family members, track shared expenses, and assign specific payments.

This feature enables better financial planning by giving families a consolidated view of their expenses, the NBSL said.

**Key Features of BHIM 3.0**

- Expense Tracking & Cost Splitting – Users can split bills and track shared expenses among friends and family, making financial management easier.
- Family Account Management – Users can onboard family members, assign payments, and maintain a consolidated expense overview.
- Business & Bank Integration – New features enhance usability for businesses and banking institutions.
- Enhanced Security & Inclusion – The app is designed to prioritize safety, convenience, and financial inclusion, ensuring ease of digital transactions for a larger section of society.

**Significance & Analysis**

- Boost to Digital Payments & Financial Inclusion
  - This initiative strengthens UPI adoption and promotes cashless transactions, a major goal of Digital India.
  - Encourages financial literacy and structured expense management for individuals and families.
  - Helps in the formalization of the economy by promoting digital transactions over cash.
- Impact on Governance & Economy
  - Reduces dependence on cash, thereby curbing black money and enhancing transparency.
  - Helps in better economic planning, as digital transactions provide real-time financial data useful for policymaking.
  - Supports government initiatives such as Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity, which aims for direct benefit transfers (DBT) and financial inclusion.

**Conclusion**

- BHIM 3.0 represents a significant step toward a cashless, inclusive, and transparent financial ecosystem. While it enhances digital transactions and financial planning, ensuring security and accessibility remains crucial for its success.

**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

**Ques : Discuss the role of fintech innovations such as UPI and BHIM 3.0 in transforming India's financial sector. What challenges do they face, and how can they be addressed? (250 words)**

## In News : Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Parties to the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture recently gathered in Rome for their 20th meeting (CGRFA-20).

**About Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**

- It was initially established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1983 to address plant genetic resources (PGR).
- It became the primary permanent international forum for governments to discuss, negotiate, and decide on matters specifically relevant to genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA).
- Over time, the mandate of the Commission expanded, and now it deals with all sectors of GRFA – plant, animal, forest, aquatic, and microbial and invertebrate genetic resources, covering the vast scope of biodiversity for food and agriculture.
- The Commission also considers a number of cross-cutting topics, including food security, nutrition and human health, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, access to genetic resources and benefit sharing (ABS), and digital sequence information (DSI) on GRFA and biotechnologies for the characterization, sustainable use, and conservation of GRFA.
- **Member:**
    - It has 179 countries as its members.
    - India is also a member of this commission.
- The work of the Commission on Animal Genetic Resources (AnGR) initiated in 1997 resulted in the preparation of the first-ever Report on the State of the World's AnGR in 2007 and led to the negotiation and adoption of the Global Plan of Action for AnGR (GPA), also in 2007.
- Some of the Commission's landmark achievements include: the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA).
- It was adopted by the Thirty-First Session of the Conference of the FAO of the United Nations on 3 November 2001. The Treaty aims at:
    - Recognizing the enormous contribution of farmers to the diversity of crops that feed the world.
    - Establishing a global system to provide farmers, plant breeders, and scientists with access to plant genetic materials.
    - Ensuring that recipients share benefits they derive from the use of these genetic materials with the countries where they have originated.

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# The 'Great Abandonment' of Afghanistan

Suhasini Haidar

The showdown in the Oval office between United States President Donald Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last month and the subsequent developments were watched everywhere, but they have echoed the loudest for Afghans around the world, many of whom live in exile. The comparisons to how the U.S. – under Mr. Trump and then former President Joe Biden – lost interest, cut funding, pulled out stakes and left it to be ruled by the Taliban regime, were evident.

**A reflection of the present**

What may surprise many is how other U.S. actions resemble the present: in September 2017, for example, Mr. Trump shook hands with then-President Ashraf Ghani for a deal that would give U.S. companies access to rare earth mineral deposits in Afghanistan. In July 2018, U.S. officials began talks with the Taliban directly, without bringing the elected Ghani government on board. In February 2020, they announced the Doha Accords – heavily skewed in the Taliban's favour – virtually accepting the narrative that the Taliban were the representatives of Afghanistan, extracting no binding commitments on a political process, shutting terror camps, securing rights of women or minorities. This flawed ceasefire accord was presented as a *fait accompli* to the Afghan government, which turned tail and fled, easing the path for the Taliban.

The years that followed have shown what the cost of that compromise for a ceasefire was. Even though the regime has not so far been recognised by any country, Taliban 2.0 (2021-present) has a firmer grip on the country, is more brutal to women, and is less tolerant of any opposition. That they are able to ban girls from school, college, all employment, and even from sight, is all the more horrifying as it follows two decades when such official restrictions did not exist, women worked in many spheres, and Afghanistan even had a woman candidate for President. While the past (2001-2021) was by no means utopian, the present is clearly hell-like. The situation led a speaker at a recent conference of exiles in Spain to say that rather than the "Great Game", Afghanistan today was witnessing a "Great Abandonment".

The U.S. and Europe have washed their hands of the problem inside Afghanistan, while Russia, China, Pakistan, and the Central and West Asian countries have embraced the regime within it, allowing the Taliban flag to fly at embassies of the erstwhile Republic.

India has been teetering on the edge, not allowing a Taliban-appointed Ambassador into the Embassy in New Delhi, but not supporting the Republic's diplomats either. After closing its embassy in Kabul in 2021, India reopened a "technical mission" in 2022, engaging Taliban ministers at the level of a Ministry of External Affairs official. That may be set to change, as a wide range of sources say that India is now negotiating to expand its presence in Kabul, while allowing a Taliban-appointed Ambassador to serve in Delhi. In addition to the humanitarian aid it sends, India also wants to revive its development projects in Afghanistan. Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's meeting with Taliban Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai in January 2025, that discussed these possibilities, was the first such meeting announced publicly, as, thus far, it was the Joint Secretary in charge of the region who dealt with Taliban 'Ministers'.

The U.S. and Europe have washed their hands of the problem inside Afghanistan; India should worry about losing mind-space among Afghans

**Engaging with Taliban 2.0**

What then is prompting the Narendra Modi government, especially given the Bharatiya Janata Party's political base, to make overtures to the band of radical Islamists that controls Kabul? Several reasons are being proffered by officials, who mostly pitch this as a matter of pragmatism and realpolitik.

The first is that the "Taliban is here to stay", and it makes sense for India to come to terms with it. While some engagement with the Afghan regime is inevitable in this second tenure, there is no reason to believe that the Taliban's grip is eternal. Already, reports indicate the tussle between Haqqani factions and Kandahari clerics over the issue of girls education has grown serious. According to the reports, Sher Abbas Stanekzai and Sirajuddin Haqqani, who are both India's main interlocutors within the Taliban, have had to flee the country for suggesting that the restrictions on females were unfair. The Taliban's mismanagement of the economy, and the drying up of foreign assistance, especially now with the Trump administration's freeze on the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and even the Chabahar port, will squeeze the situation further. A surge in refugees being returned by Pakistan and tensions with Pakistan along the Durand Line will exacerbate these fault-lines.

The second explanation, that India can help common Afghans only by working closely with the Taliban, is easily refuted. Between 1996 and 2001, India had kept up aid consignments to Afghanistan through other aid agencies. In any case, it is hardly likely that the Taliban would refuse to accept aid from India, given its importance.

The third explanation is that India would lose strategic space in Afghanistan by not reopening its embassy there when all other countries in its neighbourhood have. However, expecting strategic space from the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, given its ideology, is a risky proposition. The relationship India forged with the Afghan Republic: a strategic partnership (Afghanistan's first), intelligence sharing with the National Directorate of Security (NDS), and working with the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to protect Indian interests, cannot be built with the Taliban. If Taliban 2.0 has not changed from Taliban 1.0 in other respects, it would be foolhardy to assume a change of heart on India too, given how the group targeted Indian missions, workers, diplomats and security force personnel for the 25 years prior to the takeover of Kabul.

New Delhi should worry instead about losing mind-space amongst Afghans, who have been deeply disappointed by the Modi government's decision not to open out visas for Afghans fleeing the Taliban in 2021, including those who risked their lives to protect Indians. According to officials privy to a high-level meeting on the issue, India's security establishment worried that those who come as "refugees" would later prove to be "terrorists".

The lived experience, however, is that those who took shelter in India in the past and came as students, patients and traders, built reservoirs of goodwill for India back home and proved invaluable in positions of power during the tenures of President Hamid Karzai and Ghani. The legacy of India's support to leaders of the Northern Alliance such as Ahmad Shah Massoud (1990s) has lived on in the hearts of many who are hurt by the harsh rejection they face today, even as India moves closer into a clinch with the Taliban.

**Reversing policy**

For all these reasons, the government must study the developing situation in Afghanistan more closely and reconsider any plans to allow the creeping Talibanisation of the Embassy in Delhi. Ties with the regime in Kabul may be a necessity, but there is an urgent need to rebuild ties with those opposed to the Taliban as well. India must speak up about the situation of women and provide them a platform when possible. It is surprising that with all its clout, The Board of Control for Cricket in India did not push the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) to recognise the Afghan women's cricket team that has regrouped in Australia, or even to host the women's team in India.

India should not shy away from allowing leaders of the exiled community to hold conferences and forums in India to raise their voice for political representation inside Afghanistan either. If there is one thing India's past problems in its neighbourhood have revealed, it is that New Delhi must engage with those in power, without abandoning contact with others across the political spectrum, if it wants to remain relevant in all eventualities and outcomes.

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**Paper 02 : International Relation**

**UPSC Mains Practice Question: Discuss India's evolving approach toward the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. How should India balance realpolitik with its strategic and moral considerations?**

## Context :

- The article highlights how Afghanistan has been abandoned by the international community, particularly the United States and Europe, after the Taliban takeover in 2021. It also examines India's evolving policy toward the Taliban regime, weighing pragmatism against moral and strategic considerations.

**Key Issues Discussed**

- U.S. Withdrawal and Its Aftermath
  - The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, following the Doha Agreement (2020), left Afghanistan under Taliban rule.
  - The U.S. did not extract binding commitments on women's rights, minority protections, or democratic governance, leading to a reversal of progress made between 2001-2021.
  - Afghanistan is now more brutal towards women and has limited political freedoms, but the regime remains unrecognized globally.
- India's Dilemma in Engaging with the Taliban
  - India initially shut down its embassy in Kabul (2021) but later reopened a technical mission (2022) to maintain limited engagement.
  - Reports suggest India is considering allowing a Taliban-appointed Ambassador in New Delhi, signaling a possible policy shift.
  - India has historically supported anti-Taliban factions, like the Northern Alliance, and has had strong ties with the Afghan Republic (2001-2021).
  - The challenge lies in balancing engagement with the Taliban while preserving goodwill among Afghan exiles and democratic forces.
- Challenges in Dealing with the Taliban
  - Internal Taliban divisions: Conflicts between Haqqani factions and Kandahari clerics over issues like girls' education and governance.
  - Economic crisis: The Taliban's mismanagement and declining foreign aid are making Afghanistan increasingly unstable.
  - Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions: The Durand Line conflict and Pakistani deportation of Afghan refugees could create new security challenges.

- Why India Must Be Cautious
  - The Taliban remains ideologically unchanged, posing risks to India's security.
  - Unlike past engagement with democratic Afghan governments, India cannot expect strategic partnerships with the Taliban.
  - Ignoring Afghan exiles, women's rights activists, and opposition groups may erode India's long-term influence in Afghanistan.

**Implications for India**

- Geopolitical Strategy
  - India must balance pragmatism (engaging with Taliban 2.0) with principles (supporting democracy, human rights, and strategic interests).
  - A stronger Taliban could embolden Pakistan-based terror outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), increasing security risks for India.
  - India needs to maintain relations with exiled Afghan leaders, ensuring a future stake if a political transition occurs.
- Security & Counterterrorism
  - The Taliban's links with terror groups (like Al-Qaeda) and potential ISKP (Islamic State – Khorasan Province) expansion pose a direct threat.
  - India's reluctance to offer refugee visas to fleeing Afghans (including those who helped India in the past) risks losing goodwill and local allies.
- Humanitarian & Cultural Engagement
  - India must support Afghan women's rights activists and provide platforms for their voices.
  - India could play a role in education and development aid, even without full diplomatic ties.

**Way Forward for India**

- Balanced Engagement: Maintain official contact with the Taliban, but not at the cost of abandoning ties with exiled Afghan opposition.
- Selective Diplomacy: Avoid fully endorsing the Taliban government but continue humanitarian and infrastructure aid.
- Strategic Alliances: Strengthen partnerships with Iran, Russia, and Central Asia, ensuring regional stability in the absence of U.S. influence.
- Humanitarian Leadership: Offer scholarships, visas, and asylum to Afghan students, professionals, and dissidents, reinforcing India's moral leadership.