



NEWS ANALYSIS

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BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

Analyse the impact of the Taliban's return to power on India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. What challenges and opportunities does it present?

REQUEST CONVEYED BY MUTTAQI TO INDIAN DELEGATION IN DUBAI

Grant visa to Afghan students, patients and businessmen, Taliban urge India

Aware of Indian security concerns, Taliban assure vetting of visa seekers

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 9

HOURS AFTER India and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan held their first high-level meeting, the Taliban announced that they had urged Delhi to issue visas to Afghan businessmen, patients and students.

Hafiz Zia Ahmad, deputy spokesperson for the Afghani-

stan Foreign Ministry, in a series of posts on X, said the request for issue of visas was conveyed by acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri when they met in Dubai Wednesday.

The issue of granting visas is complicated and a hard ask for mainly three reasons: the Indian government does not officially recognise the Taliban government; the Indian security and in-



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with Afghan acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai. ANI

telligence establishment has flagged security threat perceptions regarding visa seekers from Afghanistan; and the Indian government does not have a functional visa section at the Indian embassy in Kabul or functional consulates in Afghanistan.

To assuage Indian security concerns, Muttaqi and the Taliban delegation, sources said, assured the Indian side that there would be no threat from those who would travel to India. The Taliban said they would ensure the vetting of those being granted visas.

But this is a very tricky issue for the Indian government since it has been very strict in issuing visas to Afghans after the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021.

Following the capture of Kabul by the Taliban and the collapse of the Ashraf Ghani-led Afghan government on August 15 that year, the Indian government decided, four days later, to cancel all physical visas issued earlier to Afghan nationals, who were yet to arrive in India.

Afghan nationals who had

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HELPING HAND

India's pledged assistance to Afghanistan stands at \$3.1 billion since November 2001.



Infrastructure projects with Indian help:

- 1 A 218 km-road project from Zaranj to Delaram in south-western Afghanistan.
- 2 A 220 kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul.
- 3 The Salma Dam power project in Herat province.
- 4 The Afghan parliament and the Indra Gandhi Institute of Child Health and Habibia School, both in Kabul.
- 5 A 220/110/20 kV substation at Chimtala.

The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 has created significant shifts in India's foreign policy, particularly regarding its strategic, security, and economic interests in Afghanistan and the broader region.

Impact on India's foreign policy

1. The Taliban's return amplifies threats from terror networks like Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which may leverage Taliban's support against India, especially in Kashmir.
2. India's \$3 billion investments in Afghan development projects face uncertainty, as Taliban's alignment with Pakistan could limit India's influence. - Key projects like the **Zaranj-Delaram Highway and Salma Dam are now in a fragile state.**
3. **Pakistan and China gaining influence** over Afghanistan, India faces challenges in maintaining its diplomatic foothold.-India was excluded from key negotiations like the Troika Plus

- ❑ **Humanitarian engagement dilemma:** While maintaining a non-recognition stance, India continues humanitarian aid to avoid humanitarian crises, positioning itself as a responsible regional player. -India's provision of **50,000 metric tons of wheat to Afghanistan**

Challenges India likely face due to Taliban

- ❑ **The Taliban's return could embolden terror groups**, with concerns over spill over effects into Kashmir and increased radicalization across South Asia.
- ❑ **The Chabahar Port, a strategic project** for accessing Central Asia, now faces uncertainty as Afghanistan under the Taliban regime may pivot towards China-Pakistan routes.
- ❑ **India's non-recognition of the Taliban regime** might isolate it diplomatically, as regional powers like Russia, Iran, and China engage more directly with the Taliban.
- ❑ **India's stance on human rights**—especially regarding women's rights and freedom of expression—in Afghanistan poses a challenge in determining the extent of engagement with the Taliban.

Opportunities for India to improve its relations

1. By continuing to provide humanitarian aid, **India can maintain soft power** influence, ensuring goodwill among the Afghan people, even without formal recognition of the Taliban.

2. **Regional engagement through SCO**: By participating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), India can engage with Afghanistan diplomatically, leveraging multilateral platforms to counter Pakistan's and China's influence.

3. **India can collaborate with other global powers, like the USA, Russia**, and Central Asian Republics, to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a breeding ground for terrorism.-India's participation in FATF discussions aimed at **monitoring terror financing linked to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan**.

4. **India's long-standing cultural ties and educational support** to Afghan students continue to present an opportunity to maintain a people-to-people connect.

PM to open Z-Morh tunnel

PM to open Z-Morh tunnel, key feature in year-round Kashmir-Ladakh corridor

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The Z-Morh tunnel is set to become the first major milestone in the effort to build a strategic corridor between Kashmir and Ladakh which is open all through the year, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi slated to inaugurate it on January 13.

The tunnel, in Ganderbal district, is key to keeping the tourist destination of Sonamarg open for visitors around the year. Earlier, snowfall and avalanches would cut off the tourist spot every winter.



The tunnel in Ganderbal district would keep the tourist destination of Sonamarg open for visitors around the year. FILE PHOTO

This will be Mr. Modi's first visit to Kashmir since an elected government took over the reins in the Union Territory. A security

assessment of the project was done on Thursday to set up foolproof security arrangements ahead of the PM's visit. Security across

the Valley, especially in Srinagar, has been stepped up and additional checkpoints set up on the main roads.

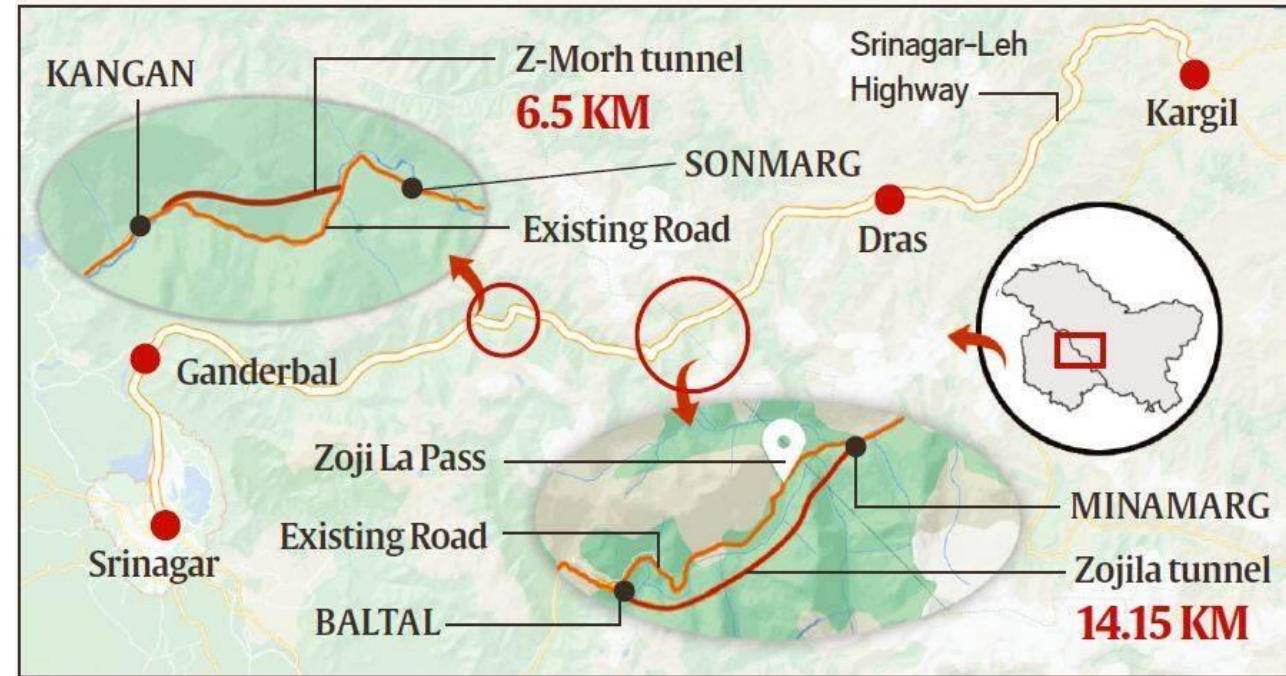
Hoteliers are enthusiastic about the tunnel. "It was much needed to have Sonamarg on the winter tourism map of Kashmir. There is a need to open up new winter destinations in Kashmir given the growing footfall. It would be safe to drive to Sonamarg in winters now," said Sajid Majeed, a hotelier.

At present, most hotels remain closed because of unreliable road access and infrastructure problems.

- ❑ **The Z-Morh tunnel** is set to become the **first major milestone in the effort to build a strategic corridor** between Kashmir and Ladakh which is open all through the year, with the Prime Minister slated to inaugurate it.

- ❑ It is a **2-lane road tunnel between Gagangir and Sonamarg** on the **Srinagar-Leh Highway** in **Jammu and Kashmir**.
- ❑ The name **“Z-Morh”** refers to the **Z-shaped road** section near the construction site.
- ❑ The area where the tunnel is being constructed sits at **an altitude of over 8,500 ft** and is prone to snow avalanches, which make the **road to Sonamarg impassable during most parts of the winter**.
- ❑ The tunnel is designed for the flow of **1,000 vehicles an hour** at an approved maximum speed of 80 km per hour.
- ❑ **No toll tax** will be collected from vehicles using the tunnel.
- ❑ **Intelligent Traffic Management System** has been installed in **Z-Morh Tunnel** which will make it easier to control traffic. Along with this, traffic will be facilitated through the dedicated escape tunnel.

- ❑ In addition to providing **all-weather access to Sonamarg**, the tunnel is **vital for ensuring year-round connectivity to Ladakh**.
- ❑ This is particularly important for the **movement of military personnel** to border areas.
- ❑ **Along with the 14.15 km Zojila Tunnel to its east, it aims to enhance the Indian military's capabilities in Kashmir and Ladakh along** both the Line of Control (LOC) to the north and the Line of Actual Control (LAC) further east.



History of Indian diaspora

Modi calls for documenting history of Indian diaspora

Addressing Pravasi Bharatiya Divas event in Bhubaneswar, PM lauds journey of Persons of Indian Origin and speaks about their remarkable achievements; he also highlights country's global role

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Lauding the journey of Persons of Indian Origin across different eras to various countries, their remarkable achievements, and contributions to the societies, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for documenting the history of the Indian diaspora.

Addressing the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas here, he said, "The history of the Indian diaspora across the globe, their journeys to various countries, and their remarkable stories of success form a unique part of India's heritage. There are many interesting and inspiring stories which deserve to be told, seen, and documented. They represent our shared legacies



Key event: Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Bhubaneswar on Thursday. ANI

and cultural heritage."

Mr. Modi said in a world in turmoil due to wars across the globe, the future lay in Buddha, a symbol of peace, rather than in war.

Symbol of peace

"Right here in Odisha is the place named Dhauli which is a great symbol of peace. Emperor Ashoka had cho-

sen the path of peace here while the world was expanding empires through the power of the sword. This is the strength of our heritage, with the inspiration of which India can say to the world today that the future lies in Buddha and not in war," he said.

"The pace at which 21st-century India is advancing

and the scale of its development efforts are unprecedented. In just a decade, the country has lifted 25 crore people out of poverty. During the same period, India has risen from being the world's 10th largest economy to the fifth largest. It won't be long before India secures its position as the third largest economy in the world," Mr. Modi said.

Underlining the country's growing global role due to its achievements and prospects, the Prime Minister said, "Today's India not only firmly asserts its own point but also strongly amplifies the voice of the Global South. The World patiently listens to what India says."

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Context

- ❖ Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention**. This significant event, celebrated once every two years, honoured the **contributions of the Indian diaspora to their homeland**.
- ❖ The **theme** for this year was the **"Diaspora's contribution to a Viksit Bharat"**.

Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas (PBD)

- ❖ The PBD is observed on **January 9 to strengthen the engagement of the Indian community overseas** with the India government and reconnect them with their roots.
- ❖ **January 9 was chosen as the day** to celebrate PBD as it was on this day, in 1915, that Mahatma Gandhi had returned to India from South Africa.
- ❖ It also marks the contribution of the Indians living abroad in the development of the land of their ancestors.
- ❖ Since 2015, its format has been revised. PBD is now celebrated once in every two years.

Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award

- ❖ During the Convention, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) is conferred on the selected overseas Indians.
- ❖ It is the highest honour conferred on a Non-Resident Indian, Person of Indian Origin; or an organisation or institution established and run by Non-Resident Indians or Persons of Indian Origin.

- ❖ PBSA is conferred by the President of India.

Overseas Indians are classified into the following categories:

Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) - Indian citizens residing in foreign countries.

Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) - **Foreign nationals of Indian origin** registered under **Section 7A** of the Citizenship Act, 1955. Eligibility criteria include:

- ❖ Eligible to be Indian citizens on January 26, 1950, or were Indian citizens after this date.
- ❖ Belonged to territories that became part of India after August 15, 1947.
- ❖ Minor children of eligible individuals, except those from Pakistan or Bangladesh.
- ❖ The **Persons of Indian Origin (PIO)** category was abolished in 2015 and merged with the OCI category.
- ❖ **According to the Ministry of External Affairs**, more than 3.5 crore Overseas Indians (that is, Non-Resident Indians or NRIs and Persons of Indian Origin or PIOs) are based abroad.

Message at the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention

Call for Global Peace: From Yuddha to Buddha

- ❖ PM Modi emphasized that the future lies in peace, symbolized by Lord Buddha, not in war.
- ❖ Cited Emperor Ashoka's transformation at **Dhauili in Odisha** as an inspiration for India's advocacy for peace.

India's Expanding Global Role

- ❖ India represents the **Global South** and advocates initiatives like making the African Union a permanent G20 member.
- ❖ Stressed the principle of '**humanity first**' in India's international engagements.

Vision for a Developed India by 2047

- ❖ Acknowledged the contributions of the Indian diaspora toward making India a developed nation by its 100th year of independence.
- ❖ Encouraged collaborative efforts to celebrate and protect the diaspora's role in India's progress.

Decoding Indias genetic blueprint

India releases compilation of 10,000 human genomes from 83 population groups

The 'Genome India' database will be available to researchers across the world; it will serve as a template for investigations into disease, drug therapy; PM says it will strengthen biotech economy

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India has completed and made available a year-long compilation of 10,000 human genomes representing 83 population groups, making up about 2% of the country's 4,600 population groups, as a database. This collection will serve as a template of future investigations into disease and drug therapy.

The 'Genome India' database, as it is known, will now be available to researchers across the world for investigation and is housed at the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC), in Faridabad, Haryana.

A first analysis of the genomes estimates around 27 million low-frequency (or relatively rare) variants, with 7 million of them not found in similar reference databases around the world. Certain population groups show higher frequencies of alleles, or different versions of the same gene. Over the last two de-



A major focus of the Indian reference genomes is to have researchers study diseases. GETTY IMAGES

cadecades, many countries have created databases of the genomes of their population – for a variety of purposes including estimating disease risks, adverse drug reactions, establishing genealogy and DNA-profiling databases.

However, a major focus of the Indian reference genomes is to have researchers study diseases. "The discoveries from Genome India are not just scientific

– they hold the potential for targeted clinical interventions, advancing precision medicine for better healthcare," said Union Minister of State (independent charge) for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh, at an event here to announce the project.

Researchers wishing to access the genomes must send in a proposal that will be perused by an independent panel with a commit-

ment that will adhere to data sharing and privacy policies. Though the database stores information on population groups, this data will not be classified by the names of castes or tribes but will be numerically coded, Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, told *The Hindu*.

Describing the project as "historic", Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a video address, said this paved the way for India strengthening the biotechnology economy as well as biotechnology-based manufacturing.

Experts said that while only a small fraction of India's population groups were studied, the door was open to expanding the database to a million genomes. "Though costs are a limiting factor, a million would dramatically scale insight into India's genetic diversity," said Kumaraswamy Thangaraj of the Centre for Cellular Microbiology, Hyderabad and one of the project leaders.

CONTEXT

- ❖ **The Genomics Data Conclave, hosted by the Department of Biotechnology, PM Modi also unveiled the sequencing database of 10,000 Indians. The sequencing data will now be accessible to researchers through the Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC).**

Genome Sequencing

- ❖ While the sequence or order of base pairs is identical in all humans, there are differences in the genome of every human being that makes them unique.
- ❖ The process of deciphering the order of base pairs, to decode the genetic fingerprint of a human is called **genome sequencing**.
- ❖ In other words, Genome sequencing is the **process of determining the complete DNA sequence of an organism's genome**.
- ❖ There are several methods of genome sequencing, but the most common is called **next-generation sequencing (NGS)**.
- ❖ NGS allows for rapid, accurate, and cost-effective sequencing of large amounts of DNA.

Genome India Project

- ❖ Approved in 2020, the Genome India Project aims to create a **comprehensive catalogue of genetic variations** within the Indian population.
- ❖ Sanctioned by the **Department of Biotechnology**, project aims to sequence the genomes of over 10,000 Indians from different regions of the country and establish a reference genome for the Indian population.

Significance

- ❖ **To learn about genetic variants unique to the Indian population**
- This project allows researchers to learn about genetic variants unique to India's population groups and use that to customise drugs and therapies.

Human Genome Project (HGP)

- ❖ In 1990, a group of scientists began to work on determining the whole sequence of the human genome under the **Human Genome Project**.
- ❖ The project released the latest version of the complete human genome in 2023, with a 0.3% error margin.
- ❖ The process of whole-genome sequencing, made possible by the Human Genome Project, now facilitates the reading of a person's individual genome to identify differences from the average human genome.
- ❖ These differences or mutations can tell us about each human's susceptibility or future vulnerability to a disease, their reaction or sensitivity to a particular stimulus, and so on.

Enhancing Drug Efficacy and Safety

- ❖ Genetic studies can identify resistance-indicating variants, ensuring safer and more effective treatments.

Advancing Targeted Treatments

- ❖ An Indian genome database can aid in the development of targeted therapies, particularly for rare genetic diseases.



Thank you

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