

Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

Why in news?

The Taliban has decided to cease fire for three days during Id-ul-Adha.

What does this decision mean?

- This has come as a relief for Afghans who have seen unabated violence despite a peace agreement between the insurgents and the U.S.
- This is the third official respite since the war started in 2001.

What were the previous respites?

- In June 2018 and May 2020, the Taliban had briefly ended hostilities to mark the end of the holy month of Ramzan.
- On both occasions, it refused to extend the ceasefire.
- It returned to war as soon as the celebrations were over.

What is the difference this time?

- This time hopes are high that the ceasefire could be extended.
- This is because the Afghan government and the insurgents are preparing to launch the intra-Afghan talks.
- These talks were promised in the U.S.-Taliban deal, which was signed in February 2020.
- According to the deal, talks were to begin in March 2020.

Why the talks did not begin as per the deal?

- Both sides failed to reach an agreement on prisoner exchange, which the U.S. had agreed with the Taliban.
- The insurgents complained that the government was not complying with the terms of the agreement.
- The officials of the Ashraf Ghani administration said the Taliban's demands were unacceptable.

Why talks will begin now?

- Finally, President Ghani decided to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners.
- This is followed by the Taliban's ceasefire announcement.

- Both sides have now agreed to kick-start talks after Id.
- They could do it in a peaceful environment if the ceasefire is extended.
- There are underlying issues that continue to plague the peace process.

What are the underlying issues?

- When the U.S. entered into talks with the insurgent group, it did not insist on a ceasefire.
- So the Taliban continues to engage in **war and talks** simultaneously.
- The Americans were badly looking for a way out of the conflict.
- So, they kept the Afghan **government out of the peace process**.
- According to the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the U.S. agreed to pull out its troops in return for security assurances from the Taliban.
- The onus was on a weakened Afghan government to start talks even as the Taliban continued attacks.

What happened after the deal?

- According to the government, 3,560 government troops and 775 civilians have been killed in conflict since the deal was signed.
- Also, infighting made matters worse for the government.
- Last year's presidential election saw a record low turnout.
- The results were contested by the main Opposition candidate, Abdullah Abdullah, who formed a parallel administration.
- He backed off, but only after being appointed the head of the High Council for National Reconciliation that will lead talks with the Taliban.

What would be some challenges?

- These above factors allowed a resurgent **Taliban to maintain the upper hand** - in war and in talks.
- Taliban sees itself as the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan.
- In addition, it has **not recognised the Constitution** of the country.
- This will be the government's key challenge when its representatives and that of the Taliban would be holding talks.

Source: The Hindu