- The present engagement is therefore seen as change in India's approach with respect to Taliban.
- The **government has however clarified** that the ongoing visit did not amount to granting diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime in Kabul.

BACKGROUND OF AFGHAN-TALIBAN ISSUE: THE STORY SO FAR



The **Taliban emerged** in the **early 1990s** around the southern Afghan city of Kandahar and was one of the factions **fighting a civil war** for control of the country following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1989.



Taliban **ruled Afghanistan** from **1996 to 2001** imposing a brutal version of Sharia law that included public executions and amputations, and the banning of women from public life.



Following the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States (US) in 2001, the U.S., together with its NATO allies led a military campaign against Al Qaeda and the Taliban government in Afghanistan that harboured and supported it.



The US and the Taliban signed a landmark deal in Doha in February 2020 to end the war in Afghanistan and allow US troops to return home.



In the intervening time, an elected Afghan government replaced the Taliban, and most measures of human development have improved. But approximately a third of Afghanistan was still a "contested" area.



With 14,000 troops in Afghanistan US engagement continued for nearly 20 years so as to prevent any resurgence of the Taliban group. This involved heavy human and economic cost For US but without a clear victory over the Taliban.



However, with withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan in 2021, Taliban and their several allied militant groups began their offensive, entered Kabul and sought the unconditional surrender of the central government.

Why should India engage with Taliban?

- Rising International Engagements: India has so far focused on the isolating Taliban. However, beyond a point, this option will yield diminishing returns, as many other countries are now starting to engage the Taliban and India is an important stakeholder in Afghanistan.
- **Declining Influence of Pakistan:** Back in the 1990s, apart from security assistance, Pakistan was also able to help the Taliban financially and economically. While Pakistan remains a pivotal player even today, its influence and control over the Taliban are circumscribed by its own economic, diplomatic, and security challenges.
 - The Pakistani Taliban (TTP)'s terrorist activities in Pakistan and disagreements between the Kabul and Pakistan, over Durand Line (disputed border) are among the factors responsible.
 - A view that has gained ground in the Indian establishment is that it is time to **de-hyphenate Pakistan from the Taliban** especially in this scenario.
- National Security: Afghanistan in the past, provided space to terror groups like al Qaeda and ISIS. Taliban also has ties
 with the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. An engagement with the Taliban would give an opportunity to
 convey Indian concerns directly and encourage those elements within the group who wish to open up its diplomatic
 choices.