

1. Israel-Hamas war: Gaza's humanitarian situation**Gaza Strip**

The Gaza Strip is 365 square kilometers (141 square miles) in size and home to around 2.2 million people, 1.7 million of whom are refugees, according to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The UNRWA provides services in eight refugee camps across Gaza.

The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world at 5,900 residents per square kilometre. Some 41% of the population in Gaza are under the age of 15.

**Ever more displaced Gazans and a rising death toll**

Over 1.4 million Gazans have been internally displaced since Hamas' attacks on Israel earlier this month. Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the EU, US and several other nations. More than 4,000 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the conflict.

Health care sector under strain with dead and dying

The Gaza Strip has 13 hospitals, which are "only partially operational due to supply shortages and fuel rationing."

The Gaza Strip has one power plant, generating about 70 megawatts of electricity per day. This covers a small fraction of the territory's total energy needs of at least 400 megawatts. In addition, some 120 megawatts of power are ordinarily imported from Israel. On average, Gazans have received an average of 13 hours electricity per day this year.

Following Hamas' assault, Israel stopped supplying electricity to the Gaza Strip. With Gaza's only power plant now out of fuel and offline, the territory is without electricity, meaning residents and institutions alike are dependent on power generators.

Unemployment and poverty define life in Gaza

Gaza's unemployment rate stands at over 45%. Some 60% of people aged 15-29 are without work.

As per Data gathered in 2021, over 80% of Gazans employed in the private sector earned less than the minimum wage of \$442 (€419) per month. Nearly 80% of Gazans rely on humanitarian assistance.

When did the Gaza Strip blockade begin?

Israel imposed a land, sea and air blockade of the Gaza Strip in 2007, after Hamas took control of the territory. Since then, people's movements into and out of the area through Israeli checkpoints and the sole crossing into Egypt at Rafah have been severely restricted.

Following Hamas' October 7 terror assault, Israel imposed a "total blockade," shuttering all checkpoints and halting the delivery of food, aid, and fuel into the Gaza Strip.

This means the Rafah crossing to Egypt — the only checkpoint not controlled by Israel — is the sole route for food, aid and other items into Gaza. In the past, the Rafah crossing has been shut for extended periods and only open on an irregular basis.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express

2. A Look at provisions of Dam Safety Act

Introduction

India has almost 6,000 large dams and about 80% of them are more than 25 years old and carry safety risks. A new Dam Safety Act (DSA) was passed in late 2021. On October 4 this year, a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in North Sikkim's South Lhonak Lake washed away one of the biggest hydropower projects in India, the Teesta III dam at

Chungthang. Reports have since revealed there were no early warning systems, no risk assessment or preventive measures in place as required under the Act.

Context of Dam Safety Act, 2021

Dams are artificial barriers on rivers which store water and help in irrigation, power generation, flood moderation, and water supply. In India, dams higher than 15 m or between 10 m and 15 m height that fulfil certain additional design conditions are called large dams.

As on June 2019, India has 5,745 large dams (includes dams under construction). Of these, 5,675 large dams are operated by states, 40 by central public sector undertakings, and five by private agencies. Over 75% of these dams are more than 20 years old and about 220 dams are more than 100 years old. Most of these large dams are in Maharashtra (2394), Madhya Pradesh (906), and Gujarat (632).

As a large amount of water may be stored in a dam's reservoir, its failure can cause large scale damage to life and property. Therefore, monitoring dam safety is essential. The Central Dam Safety Organisation, under the Central Water Commission (CWC), provides technical assistance to dam owners, and maintains data on dams.

The National Committee on Dam Safety devises dam safety policies and regulations. Currently, 18 states and four dam owning organisations have their own Dam Safety Organisations. CWC provides that each dam owner should carry out pre and post monsoon inspections (covering site conditions, dam operations) every year. However, as per a CAG report on flood forecasting, from 2008 to 2016, of the 17 states studied, only two had carried out such inspections.

Key Features

The Act applies to all specified dams in the country. These are dams with: (i) height more than 15 metres, or (ii) height between 10 metres to 15 metres and satisfying certain additional design conditions such as, reservoir capacity of at least one million cubic meter, and length of top of the dam at least 500 metres.

Obligation of dam owners

Dam owners will be responsible for the safe construction, operation, maintenance and supervision of a dam. They must provide a dam safety unit in each dam. This unit will inspect the dams: (i) before and after monsoon season, and (ii) during and after every earthquake, flood, calamity, or any sign of distress. Functions of dam owners include: (i) preparing an emergency action plan, (ii) carrying out risk assessment studies at specified regular intervals, and (iii) preparing a comprehensive dam safety evaluation through a panel of experts.

Dam safety authorities and delegated legislation

The Act provides for dam safety regulatory and monitoring authorities at the national and state level. The functions of the national bodies and the State Committees on Dam Safety have been provided in Schedules to the Act. The central government can amend these Schedules through a notification.

At the national level, it constitutes (i) the National Committee on Dam Safety, whose functions include evolving policies and recommending regulations regarding dam safety, and (ii) the National Dam Safety Authority, whose functions include implementing policies of the National Committee, and resolving matters between State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs), or between a SDSO and any dam owner in that state. The central government may notify the qualifications, and functions of the officers of the National Dam Safety Authority.

At the state level, it constitutes the (i) State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs), whose functions include keeping perpetual surveillance, inspecting, and monitoring dams, and (ii) State Committee on Dam Safety which will supervise state dam rehabilitation programs, review the work of the SDSO, and review the progress on measures recommended in relation to dam safety, among others. State governments may notify the qualifications, and functions of officers of the State Dam Safety Organisations. They may also notify dam safety measures to be undertaken by owners of non-specified dams.

Offences and penalties

Anyone obstructing a person in the discharge of his functions under the Act or refusing to comply with directions may be imprisoned for a year. In case of loss of life, the person may be imprisoned for two years.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. Canada recalls 41 diplomats from India: Why the 1961 Vienna Convention has been invoked?

Recall of diplomats on ground of Parity

Amid the ongoing standoff between India and Canada, the Canadian government announced it has recalled 41 diplomats posted in India, and their family members, on October 20. Canada's Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said this was because they were "in danger of having immunity stripped on an arbitrary date" and that would have "put their personal safety at risk".

Earlier this month, India had sought 'parity' with Canada, asking it to downsize its diplomatic staff here. India has about 20 diplomats in Canada and said there should be a similar number of Canadian diplomats in India as well.

What led to Stand off?

The move followed a row over Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's remarks in Canadian Parliament in September 2023. He had then claimed a potential Indian government link to the killing of pro-Khalistan separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada earlier this year — which India rejected, terming the claims to be "absurd" and "motivated".

Now, the US and UK have backed Canadian diplomats' presence. Further, they spoke of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which has also been mentioned by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S Jaishankar.

What have the US and the UK governments said?

The US and UK backed Canada, stating that diplomats are required to be on the ground to resolve differences. US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said, "Resolving differences requires diplomats on the ground... We expect India to uphold its obligations under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, including with respect to privileges and immunities enjoyed by accredited members of Canada's diplomatic mission."

What has India said?

India rejected Joly's contention, where she said that the "unilateral revocation of the diplomatic privilege and immunity is contrary to international law" and a violation of the Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

In a press release, the MEA said, "The state of our bilateral relations, the much higher number of Canadian diplomats in India, and their continued interference in our internal affairs warrant a parity in mutual diplomatic presence in New Delhi and Ottawa." It added, "Our actions in implementing this parity are fully consistent with Article 11.1 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations."

What is the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations?

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) is a United Nations treaty that set some common principles and terms on how countries must treat each other's diplomatic representatives, in order to ensure friendly relations and maintain proper communication channels between countries.

One prominent example of such principles is that of diplomatic immunity. It's the privilege of exemption from certain laws and taxes granted to diplomats by the country

in which they are posted. It was framed so that diplomats can function without fear, threat or intimidation from the host country. Diplomatic immunity flows from two conventions, popularly called the Vienna Conventions — the 1961 Convention and the Convention on Consular Relations, 1963.

The 1961 Convention says, "Article 29: The person of a diplomatic agent shall be inviolable. He shall not be liable to any form of arrest or detention. The receiving State shall treat him with due respect and shall take all appropriate steps to prevent any attack on his person, freedom or dignity."

Today, 193 countries have ratified the convention, meaning they agree it should be legally binding on them. Ratification means that a country should seek approval for the treaty on the domestic level and enact a law in their country to give effect to it. India ratified it through the Diplomatic Relations (Vienna Convention) Act of 1972.

What does the 1961 Vienna Convention say about recalling diplomats?

Article 9 of the convention states that the receiving State may, at any time and without having to explain its decision, notify the sending State that the head of the mission or any member of the diplomatic staff of the mission is *persona non grata* or unwelcome.

"In any such case, the sending State shall, as appropriate, either recall the person concerned or terminate his functions with the mission," it says. Further, if the sending State refuses or fails within a reasonable period to carry out its obligations here, that is if they refuse to recall their diplomats, the receiving State may refuse to recognise the person concerned as a member of the mission.

Article 11, cited by the MEA in its press release, says, "In the absence of specific agreement as to the size of the mission, the receiving State may require that the size of a mission be kept within limits considered by it to be reasonable and normal, having regard to circumstances and conditions in the receiving State and to the needs of the particular mission."

On Canadian diplomatic presence in India, EAM Jaishankar said on Sunday, "Parity is very much provided for by the Vienna Convention, which is the relevant international rule on this. But in our case, we invoked parity because we had concerns about continuous interference in our affairs by Canadian personnel."

Around 2017, Russia and the United States also asked for each other's diplomats to be recalled over the principle of parity and reduced the presence of their missions, following a low in their relations.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express