

Taliban Joins Third UN- Meet

Why In News

- A **Taliban delegation** attended a United Nations-led meeting in Qatar on Afghanistan after organizers said women would be excluded from the gathering. The **two-day meeting is the third UN-sponsored** gathering on the Afghan crisis in the Qatari capital of Doha.



- **Zabihullah Mujahid**, the chief spokesman for the Taliban government who leads its delegation, wrote on social media platform X that the delegation met with representatives from countries including Russia, India, and Uzbekistan on the sidelines of the meeting.



Who Will Be There?

- **Zabihullah Mujahid**, the spokesman for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will lead the Afghan delegation.
- The Taliban has also sent **government officials** responsible for banking, trade and narcotics control.
- **UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres** will not be present. He had attended the two previous meetings held since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, but this time the UN will be represented by **Rosemary DiCarlo**, undersecretary-general for political and peacebuilding affairs.
- **Qatar's special envoy to Afghanistan**, Faisal bin Abdullah al-Hanzab, will be present as will the US special representatives for Afghanistan, Thomas West and Rina Amiri.



What's On The Agenda

- **UN says the talks** are part of an ongoing process aimed at a future where Afghanistan is at peace internally and with its neighbours, fully **integrated into the international community** and where it meets international obligations, including on human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls.
- The Taliban, on the other hand, is eager to discuss restrictions on the country's **financial and banking systems** – the main challenges to the growth of its private sector – as well as the action it is taking against drug trafficking.



- **Among the Taliban's demands** is the release of about \$7bn of the country's central bank reserves that are frozen in the US. It also plans to discuss providing farmers with alternative livelihood sources after the ban on cultivating poppy.
- Afghanistan has long **wrestled with the illegal drug trade**, being the world's largest producer of opium. Large amounts of heroin and meth also originate in the country. About four million people in the country, nearly 10 percent of its total population, are drug users, the UN estimates.



- **In April 2022, the Taliban introduced** strict new laws banning the cultivation of opium poppy. In the seven months following the ban, poppy cultivation and opium production plunged more than 90 percent, decimating a key trade for thousands of farmers and labourers, according to a UN report.

Do These Talks Mean Recognition For The Taliban

- The meeting does not **equal official recognition**. However, the group has welcomed the talks as it aims to salvage Afghanistan's cash-strapped economy, expand relations with trade partners, and deal with its drug problem.
- **"The Doha meeting** will discuss the independent assessment on engagement with Afghanistan submitted to the [UN] Security Council in November 2023,".

UN-Taliban Qatar Talks Not Recognition

- **Taliban refused to participate in the first Doha-hosted meeting in May 2023**, saying its demands – including the recognition of its emirate as the sole official representative of Afghanistan and assurances its governance would not be criticised – were not being met.



- When the **second meeting took place** in February this year, the Taliban said its invitation had been “sent too late” for it to attend, while the UN’s Guterres said the group had set unacceptable conditions for its attendance, including demands that Afghan civil society members be excluded from the talks.
- **Another bone of contention** has been the appointment of a UN special representative for Afghanistan, proposed by Guterres in December and subsequently approved by the UN Security Council and ratified in the February meeting.
- **A UN special representative coordinates** the work of the UN and acts as the political representative for the secretary-general in the country he or she is appointed to. The agenda for the third Doha meeting does not include discussions about appointing a special representative for Afghanistan.

Will Women Be Included In The Talks

- **No. The meeting’s organisers** have been criticised for not inviting women, with the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women saying it is “deeply concerned” about the exclusion.
- **“Failure to ensure participation** will only further silence Afghan women and girls already facing escalating violations of their rights,”.



- **Human Rights Watch** described the decision to exclude women as “shocking”.
- **Women and girls in Afghanistan** have been increasingly denied access to education and employment, and restrictions have been placed on their movement and presence in public spaces since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

- In March 2022, the **Taliban decided against reopening schools** for girls beyond the sixth grade. Girls and women are also barred from higher education. This is despite calls from some Islamic scholars and Muslim-majority nations to reverse these policies. In 2022, a Taliban official acknowledged to Al Jazeera that Islam grants women the right to education, work, and entrepreneurship.
- In 2022, the **Taliban barred women from using gyms** and public parks and working with national and global nongovernmental groups. They also imposed a dress code, requiring women to be covered head-to-toe, with only their eyes visible.

Taliban's 'economic orientation'

- **While delivering a speech at the UN-led meeting** in Doha, the Taliban spokesperson said **"economic orientation"** is at the heart of the regime's foreign policy.
- "We appreciate the countries that **provide humanitarian aid**, however, the main solution to the economic obstacles of Afghans is to remove unilateral and multilateral sanctions...", he said.
- He further said, **"With our economically oriented** foreign policy, we have been able to provide connectivity to the region through Afghanistan. With the construction of **the transportation railway from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan** in the north, Central Asia will be connected with South Asia. Our respective entities are working closely with our Uzbek and Pakistani counterparts."



- Last July, a joint protocol for the **'Trans-Afghan project'** was signed in Islamabad. This envisioned **700-km railway line seeks** to connect Uzbekistan's

and Pakistan's railway networks through Afghanistan. Though progress has been slow, it is estimated to be completed by 2027. Other regional projects involving Afghanistan, like the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) Pipeline, have also faced major snags due to security issues in the region.



- “We perceive the current Doha meeting as a crucial opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue regarding the unilateral and multilateral sanctions imposed on some officials and our financial and banking sectors, as well as the broader challenges,” said Taliban’s Mujahid in his speech.
- He added: “I **do not deny that some countries** may have problems with some measures of the Islamic Emirate. I think that policy differences amid states are natural, and it is the duty of experienced diplomats to find ways of interaction and understanding rather than confrontation.”

