

Date: 19 Oct 2024

Israel versus the UN

(The Hindu, 19-10-24)

Context: Israel has banned UN Secretary-General António Guterres from entering its country in the backdrop of his criticisms of Israel's action in Gaza war.

What actions has Israel taken against the UN system?

- Israel has deliberately targeted the UNRWA, an organisation India supports, accusing the UN agency of Hamas links.
- Israeli PM Netanyahu referred to the UN as an "anti-semitic" swamp
- Israeli forces launched attacks on the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), where 903 Indian soldiers are deployed as a part of a 50-nation, 10,000 strong force.
- Banned UN Secretary-General António Guterres from entering Israel

Why is India's position on this matter significant?

- India didn't join other countries in publicly backing the UN leader and disapproving of Israel's actions against him.
- India is a leading member of the UN system and has made significant contributions
- India's stance is seen as an exercise of 'realpolitik' restraint
- India has close bilateral ties with Israel

What is the article's stance on India's position?

- Expresses disappointment that India kept itself at arm's length from statements critical of Israeli actions against the UN
- Argues that when it comes to the importance of UN-based international rule of law and global order, there can be no half-measures
- Suggests that India should have taken a stronger stance in support of the UN system

Can you answer the following question?

Examine India's approach to balancing its strategic interests with its commitment to international organizations like the UN, in the context of Israel- Gaza war.

A perilous highway to salvation in the Himalayas

(The Hindu - 19-10-24)

Context: The environmental and social impacts of the Char Dham Highway Project in Uttarakhand

What are the main environmental concerns associated with the Char Dham Highway Project?

- Increased landslides: The study identified 309 road-blocking landslides along the 247 km stretch
- Road-widening has doubled the impact on road-blocking landslides
- Predicted increase in summer monsoon precipitation due to climate change, leading to more frequent extreme rainfall events and landslides
- Destabilization of the entire region due to massive construction activities
- Ground subsidence in many parts of the Himalayas

How has the project been implemented, and what are the criticisms?

- The project was divided into 50-plus smaller projects to bypass environmental clearance and impact assessment reports
- It violates environmental norms and conservation strategies for the Himalayas
- Initially presented as a tourism project, later defended as a defense-related requirement
- Implemented without proper scientific assessment in an unstable and fragile region

What are the socio-economic impacts of such large-scale projects in Uttarakhand?

- Depopulation and land abandonment in rural areas
- Shift from agriculture to tourism-related employment
- Local people selling land to private entrepreneurs from the plains
- Increased unemployment and migration

What solutions does the article suggest?

- Scale down ongoing massive construction programs, including dams
- Formulate sound ecological solutions for the existing environmental issues
- Respect important environmental caveats before commencing large engineering projects in the Himalayas
- Follow the government's original policy framework recommending "best practice" norms for infrastructural expansion in mountainous regions

Can you answer the following question?

Critically examine the environmental and socio-economic impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects like the Char Dham Highway in ecologically sensitive regions such as the Himalayas. Suggest sustainable development strategies that balance economic growth with environmental conservation in these areas.