



Current Affairs of the Day

Biden ropes in 20 Indian-Americans, 17 in key White House positions

Theme: Indian Diaspora, Soft Power and Geopolitics

U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has nominated at least 20 Indian-Americans, including 13 women, to key positions in his incoming administration, a record for the small ethnic community that constitutes one percent of America's population. As many as 17 of them would be part of the Biden administration in the powerful White House complex.

Highlights:

1. The January 20th inauguration, where Mr Biden, 78, would be sworn in as the 46th President of the U.S., is already historic as it is for the first time ever that a woman, Kamala Harris, would be sworn as the Vice-President of the country.
2. Ms Harris, 56, is also the first-ever Indian-origin and African-American to be sworn in as the Vice-President of the U.S.
3. It is also for the first time ever that so many Indian-Americans have been roped into a presidential administration ever before the inauguration.
4. Topping the list is Neera Tanden, who has been nominated as Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget and Dr Vivek Murthy, who has been nominated as the U.S. Surgeon General.
5. Three Indian-Americans have made their way to the crucial National Security Council of the White House, thus leaving a permanent imprint on the country's foreign policy and national security.
6. The dedication that the Indian-American community has shown to public service over the years has been recognised in a big way at the very start of this administration. Particularly remarkable is that the overwhelming majority are women.



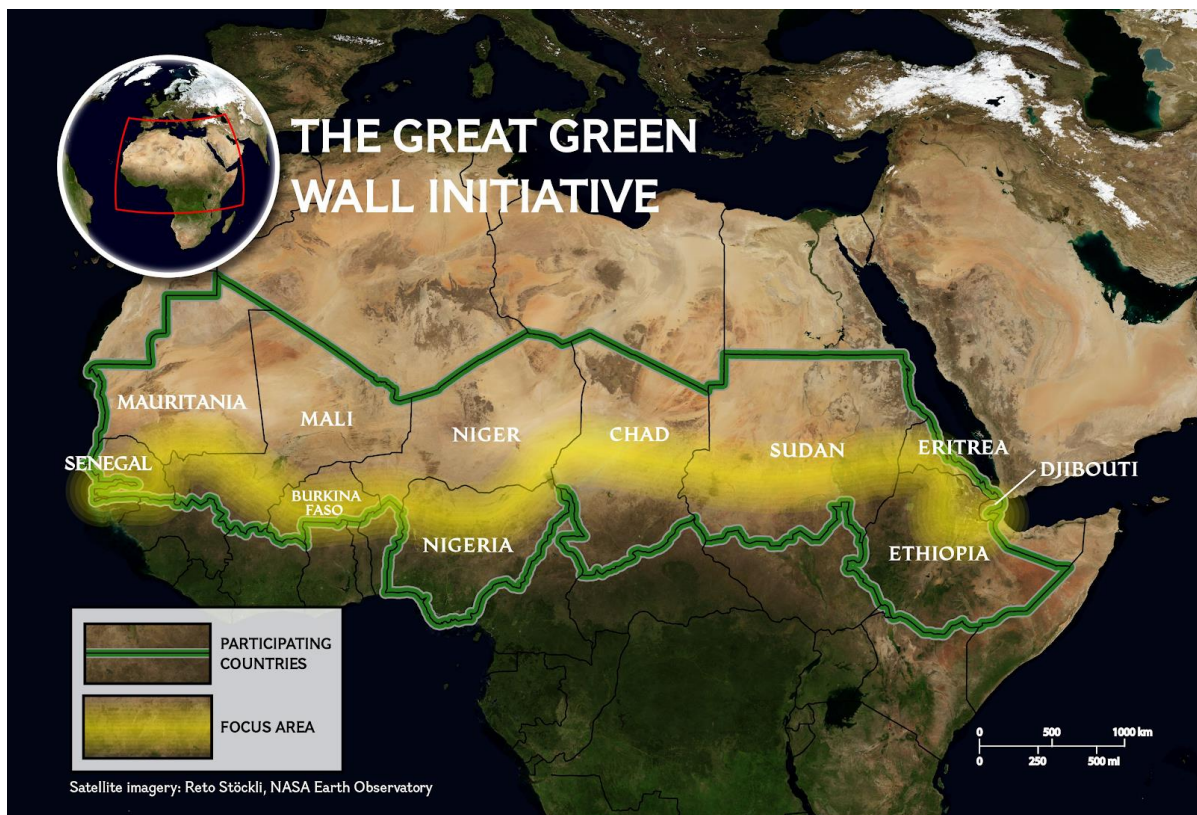
Great Green Wall: How funding can help Sahel fight desertification again

Issues: Combating desertification

More than 13 years after the Great Green Wall (GGW) initiative was started by the African Union to address desertification, land degradation and climate change in the Sahel region, the project has hit a wall due to funds crunch.

Highlights:

1. The project aims to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land by 2030; only four million hectares had been restored between 2007 and 2019.
2. GGW, as conceived by 11 countries located along the southern border of the Sahara and their international partners, is aimed at limiting the desertification of the Sahel zone.



Once complete, the Wall will be the largest living structure on the planet – an 8,000 km natural wonder of the world stretching across the entire width of the



continent. A similar initiative proposed in India Green wall along Aravali from Gujarat to Delhi to combat the spread of deserts beyond aravallis.

SHIELD AGAINST DESERT



Rough contours of proposed 1,400km 'green wall'

- Forest belt likely to run roughly from **Porbandar to Panipat**, covering entire Aravali range and beyond
- 'Green wall' will act as barrier for dust from west and check eastward march of Thar desert
- It will check desertification by **restoring degraded land through massive afforestation**
- Project yet to get formal nod, details to be worked out

Key hearing in Russian Arctic diesel spill case rescheduled

Issues: Oil spill disasters (GS 1, GS III, Prelims place in news question)

A hearing that would have decided the damages to be paid for the second-biggest oil spill in modern Russian history has been rescheduled, the Siberian Times newspaper has reported.

Highlights:

1. It was to decide whether the Norilsk-Taimyr Energy company owned by Nornickel was to pay \$2.1billion for gross damages to the Arctic ecosystem following the deadly diesel spill in May last year.
2. *The Norilsk diesel oil spill* began on May 29, 2020, when a fuel storage tank at Norilsk-Taimyr Energy's Thermal Power Plant No. 3 owned by Nornickel



near the city of Norilsk failed, flooding local rivers with up to 17,500 tonnes of diesel oil.

3. President Vladimir Putin declared a state of emergency in early June.

