

Saur Revolution in Afghanistan - [April 27, 1978]: Notes for UPSC

In this article, you can read about the Saur Revolution that took place in Afghanistan in 1978 changing the face of the nation forever. This is an important part of world history and polity which you must learn for the IAS exam.

Background of Saur Revolution

Mohammed Daoud Khan overthrew his cousin, King Zahir Shah in a coup d'état. The 1973 coup was supported by a minority political party known as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Thus the first Republic of Afghanistan was established.

Upon becoming president, Mohammed Daoud was of the opinion that closer ties and military support from the Soviet Union would allow Afghanistan to end that one issue which has always been a thorn on the side of Afghan politics - the Durand Line.

Historically Pashtun lands had been conceded to the British Empire, following the Anglo-Afghan wars. Upon the Independence of India, the lands had passed into the newly created state of Pakistan. These lands were separated from Afghanistan by the Durand line and as such taking those lands back has always been the dream of many Afghan politicians. take control of Pashtun lands in northwest Pakistan. However, Daoud, who was committed to a policy of non-alignment, as he knew that allowing any form of Soviet interference would allow them to dictate Afghanistan's foreign policy, and relations between the two countries eventually deteriorated.

Under the secular government of Daoud, factionalism and rivalry developed in the PDPA, with two main factions being the Parcham and Khalq factions. On 17 April 1978, a prominent member of the Parcham, Mir Akbar Khyber, was murdered. Although the government issued a statement deploring the assassination, Nur Mohammad Taraki of the PDPA charged that the government itself was responsible, a belief that was shared by much of the Kabul populace. PDPA leaders apparently feared that Daoud was planning to purge them.

During the funeral ceremonies for Khyber a protest against the government occurred, and shortly thereafter most of the leaders of PDPA, including Babrak Karmal, were arrested by the government. Hafizullah Amin, was put under house arrest, which gave him a chance to order an uprising, one that had been slowly developing for more than two years. Amin, without having the authority, instructed the Khalqist army officers to overthrow the government. Thus began the Saur Revolution.

Events during and after the Saur Revolution

- On 17th April, 1978, Mir Akbar Khyber, a senior member of the Parcham faction was murdered.
- Many in Kabul suspected government-hand in the murder.
- Many leaders in the PDPA had their suspicions that the President, Daoud Khan had plans to eliminate them.
- In fact, the government arrested many members of the party during a protest at Khyber's funeral.
- Hafizullah Amin was only put under house arrest. This gave him the opportunity to order the coup through army officers even though he did not have the explicit authority to do so.
- The coup started on 27th April and by evening, the state-owned radio announced that the Daoud government was overthrown by the Khalq faction.
- During the coup, soldiers had surrounded the palace of the president and had asked him to surrender. But Daoud Khan and his brother came out of the palace and fired at the soldiers. This led to them being shot and killed.
- Initially, the people were happy with the coup and the new government as many citizens were unhappy under the Daoud administration.
- In the early days of the new government, there was unity between the Parcham and the Khalq factions although this did not last long.
- The new president was Nur Muhammad Taraki of the Khalq group. He executed many leaders of the revolution by August that year insinuating that a 'plot' had been discovered.
- However, in September 1979, Taraki himself was overthrown and executed by Amin.
- The PDPA in power implemented many changes in Afghan society. Many modern regulations were put in place replacing the old Islamic codes. Socialism was introduced. However, there were many haphazard regulations brought in that unsettled many. Land reforms were brought in that affected the peasants adversely.
- The PDPA was also an advocate for women's rights. They made a public statement announcing that the "Privileges which women, by right, must have are equal education, job security, and health services". This only alienated a large segment of the Afghan population who were still conservative in their beliefs. The PDPA despite having a strong urban support, lost popularity in the rural areas of Afghanistan, where most of their worker support was based out of.
- They suppressed all opposition brutally. There was severe discontent among the people and this was manifest in many uprisings for the next two years. Finally, this political instability prompted the USSR to intervene, leading to the beginning of Soviet-Afghanistan War. The civil war that followed between insurgent groups (called Mujahideen) and the USSR and the PDPA lasted 9 years further dragging the country

back in terms of development. This period also saw a huge humanitarian crisis in the country leaving millions dead and millions refugees in other lands particularly Pakistan.

Conclusion

Instability remained in Afghanistan, following the withdrawal of the Soviet forces. The many factions that had united to fight the USSR, now turned on each other further deteriorating the situation in Afghanistan. With war still continuing to plague the country for more than four decades after the revolution, Afghanistan has never known peace ever since the Saur Revolution took place.

Relevant Questions about the Saur Revolution

Why did the Soviets invade Afghanistan?

The Soviet Union feared the loss of its communist proxy in Afghanistan. Central Asia and Afghanistan were valuable locations through which the Soviet Union could spread its influence, countering Western influence in the region courtesy of the Baghdad pact. Thus this is the reason why the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.

What does the word Saur mean?

Saur is the Dari (Persian) name of the second month of the Persian calendar, the month in which the uprising took place.