Loya jirga approves prisoner release

- The Afghan government and the Taliban are on the verge of peace talks after thousands of prominent Afghans approved the release of about 400 contentious militant prisoners.
- The resolution was passed at the end of a three-day loya jirga.

Significance:

- The prisoners’ fate has been a crucial hurdle in launching peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, which had committed to completing a prisoner exchange before negotiations can start.
- “The decision of the loya jirga has removed the last excuse and obstacles on the way to peace talks. We are on the verge of peace talks,” said Abdullah Abdullah, who is leading the government’s peace process and was appointed head of the loya jirga.
- Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said he would sign a decree to release the prisoners.
- The decision has raised hopes for talks between the two warring sides.
- The Afghan government has demanded the Taliban to agree to serious, immediate and lasting ceasefire.

What is Loya Jirga?

- A loya jirga is a special type of jirga, or legal assembly, in Pashtunwali, the traditional code of laws of the Pashtun people.
- It is mainly organized for choosing a new head of state in case of sudden death, adopting a new constitution, or to settle national or regional issues such as war.