

1. Tamils of Sri Lanka

Prelims Level: India and Sri Lanka

Mains Level: GS-II Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Context:

- During the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Rajapaksa's visit to India, Indian Prime Minister used the occasion to raise India's concerns about the incomplete process of reconciliation and the devolution of powers to Sri Lanka's Tamil minority.

India - Sri Lanka Relations:

- The relationship between India and Sri Lanka is more than 2,500 years old.
- Both countries have a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic interaction.
- In recent years, the relationship has been marked by close contacts at all levels.
- The progress in implementation of developmental assistance projects for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and disadvantaged sections of the population in Sri Lanka has been the core issue between the two countries.
- The nearly three-decade long armed conflict between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE came to an end in May 2009.
- During the course of the conflict, India supported the right of the Government of Sri Lanka to act against rebel forces.
- At the same time, it conveyed its deep concern at the plight of the civilian population, emphasizing that their rights and welfare should not get enmeshed in hostilities against the LTTE.
- India's consistent position is in favour of a negotiated political settlement, which is acceptable to all communities within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and which is consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for humTamils and Sinhalese are the two major ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

What are the causes of the Sri Lankan Civil War?

- Sinhalese eternal conflict with Tamils for power had been gathering strength since before its independence.
- Under the Colonial rule, many Tamils attended English language schools which were the passport to higher education and better employment.

- And the Tamil-dominated Northern Province had comparatively better facilities in terms of education and employment.
- Post-independence Sinhalese nationalism sought to curb the Tamil presence in education and civil administration.
- In 1949 Indian Tamil plantation workers disenfranchised, the start of a wave of Sinhalese nationalism which alienated the Tamil people in the region.
- The passing of the infamous “Sinhalese Only Bill” in 1956 was another attempt in the same lines.
- The constitutional provisions in the 1972 Constitution favoring the Sinhalese language and Buddhist religion, along with their educational policies convinced many Tamils that they had been perceived as a marginal community.
- As a result of open discrimination, in 1976 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed to fight for Tamil rights and in 1983 Civil war started.

What is the relation between LTTE and India’s involvement in the Civil War?

- The LTTE was founded in 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran with the goal of creating an independent Tamil Eelam out of Sri Lanka.
- From clashes with the Sri Lankan military, the LTTE in the early 80s launched a full scale nationalist insurgency in the north and east of the country, carrying out a string of major terrorist attacks against both military and civilian targets.
- India’s relationship with the LTTE was complex — from providing support to the guerrillas initially to sending the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990.
- The LTTE pioneered suicide bombing as a weapon of terror, and in 1991, an LTTE suicide bomber killed Rajiv Gandhi in an attack on Indian soil.
- Among the other high-profile assassinations carried out by the Tamil Tigers was that of the Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993.
- The LTTE, which used women and children in combat, controlled, at its peak, over three-quarters of Sri Lanka’s northern and eastern provinces.
- The organisation was finally crushed in a ruthless military offensive by the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2009.
- The LTTE was designated as a terrorist organisation by 32 countries, including, besides India, the United States, Canada, and the European Union.
- The US designated the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) in 1997.

- India first banned the LTTE after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi; the ban was last extended for five years in 2014.

What is the role of India in the Sri Lankan Civil War?

- The bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka deteriorated in 1980's with the rise of the Tamil militant separatism in Sri Lanka.
- In 1987 with the objective of improving ties, the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was signed between India and Sri Lanka.
- It proposed a political solution to Sri Lanka's conflict by establishing a provincial council system and devolution of power for nine provinces in Sri Lanka - **The Thirteenth Amendment (13A)** to the Constitution of Sri Lanka
- India also deployed Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka intended to perform a peacekeeping - **Operation Pawan**.
- The effect of which ultimately resulted in the assassination of PM Rajiv Gandhi.
- After two years of constant military engagement, the IPKF was withdrawn as it failed to defeat LTTE.
- Finally, in 2009, 25 years of violence ended when the Sri Lankan government seized the last area controlled by Tamil Tiger rebels.
- India at that point agreed to reconstruct the war-torn areas and started many rehabilitation programs.
- However, the pro-LTTE governments in Tamil Nadu influenced the decisions of the Central Government which posed a roadblock in humanitarian assistance in Sri Lanka.
- Also, the relationship started deteriorating when India voted against Sri Lanka in 2009, 2012 and 2013 at the US-sponsored UNHRC resolution to investigate alleged human rights violations by the state against the Tamil rebels.

What is 13A and how does it affect the socio-political landscape of Sri Lanka?

- In 1987, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene signed the Indo Sri Lanka Peace Accord to resolve the civil war.
- Under the terms of the agreement, Colombo had to devolve power to the provinces - including northern provinces, while LTTE had to surrender the arms.
- But LITE was not a party to this agreement. Initially, they accepted it but then later said that they would continue their struggle.

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- Before this peace accord, enactment of the sixth amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution in August 1983 had classified all separatist movements as unconstitutional. In the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace accord the Sri Lankan Government made a number of concessions to Tamil demands, which included
 - ✓ Devolution of power to the provinces
 - ✓ Merger (subject to later referendum) of the northern and eastern provinces
 - ✓ Official status for the Tamil language.
 - The Thirteenth Amendment (13A) to the Constitution of Sri Lanka:
 - ✓ The provisions for setting up of a Provincial Council for each Province;
 - ✓ Establishment of a High Court for each Province;
 - ✓ Making Tamil an official language and English the link language.
 - ✓ Provincial councils are to directly elected for five 5 year terms.
 - ✓ The leader of the council majority serves as the province's Chief Minister with a board of ministers; a provincial governor is appointed by the president.
 - Thus, the 13th amendment, sought to grant regional autonomy as a political solution.
 - However, even after several years of decimation of the LTTE, the ethnic reconciliation remains a distant dream in Sri Lanka.
 - ✓ Indian government has reiterated several times that Sri Lanka needs to complete the process of devolution of power to provinces by implementing its constitution's 13th Amendment. However, the political will of the Sri Lankan governments have kept the issues of Tamils at bay.