30th Anniversary of Berlin Wall Fall

Why in News?

It is the 30th Anniversary of fall of the Berlin Wall, which happened on November 9 to 11, 1989.

What is the Berlin Wall?

- The Berlin Wall measured 161 km. Not that all of it was wall; rivers and forests were lined with barbed wire.
- The police presence was all pervasive, though. There is watchtower every half a kilometre.
- The bloodless revolution came from East Germany, but it was West Berlin which demolished the wall.
- The checkpoint was opened before midnight on November 9, 1989 by the East German police, following which passports were displayed, and entry gained into West Berlin.
- East Berliners walked into West Berlin and West Berliners into East Berlin too without passports.

When it all did begin?

- The Berlin Wall came down on **November 9, 1991**, but the collapse had begun earlier.
- In a pre-planned move, the East Germans on a trip to Hungary breached the wire fence to enter Austria on **August 20, 1989**.
- Then the West German external affairs minister rushed to the aid of a bewildered Austrian government.
- Having exerted immense pressure on Austria to grant shelter to the East German deserters, he brought them back to West Germany.
- The incident received huge coverage in the West German media, and snippets reached the east too.
- An inspired East German populace was ready for revolution.
- The government was forced to open multiple Berlin checkpoints and Communist Party's politburo read out an incomplete announcement from a scrap of paper and the evening of November 9 arrived.

Why the fall is incomplete?

- For those who saw the fall of the Wall, the history of the fall is not yet in the past. The 30 years may seem like yesterday.
- This is because the Wall still exists. The fall isn't complete. This wall is made of **politics, economics and discrimination**.
- For tourists to Berlin, a few metres of the "real" Wall is still there standing at one designated spot.
- The area previously covered by the Wall is marked by signposts that read "Mauer (wall) 1961-89".
- Bits of the Wall are still sold to visitors from abroad, complete with government authentication.
- **Current generation** - They do not agonise over the Wall, or East-West Berlin. They are simply not interested.
- Their problems are rooted in today's Germany. Unemployment is on the rise, living spaces increasingly scarce, the youth are headed abroad.
- The political establishment is seemingly indifferent, and the right-wing is exploiting the situation.

How the fall is causing even greater turmoil?

- Germany is now the smoke in the European Union's eye. The two Germanys have united to become the EU bully.
- They are a large, unified nation, economically dominant, politically monopolistic, crooking its finger at random EU nations, monitoring their every move, with no room for manoeuvre.
- They are paying lip service to the oneness of shared democratic values.
- In the past three decades, Germany has become a critical factor not just within the EU, but in the world.
- The richest nation in the EU, fourth in the world, is plagued by its own internal politics, if one were to study the political map of the last decade.
- It was thought that the collapse of the Wall would ring the death knell for Communism (including the Soviet Union).
- But what we see today is that the Communists are forming the government in Thuringen.

What are the East Germans' concerns?

- In the past 30 years, no major new industry has come to East Germany. The government and large industrial companies are not interested.
- East Germans now openly question what they have gained from the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- Close on the heels of the German reunification, the government announced, "The East must look as good as the West. And the money will come from West Germans."

- So, the West Germans began contributing to the "Solidarity Fund", their contributions to be deducted from the income from jobs or businesses.
- The contribution would be returned in 5 years, with interest.
- Since 1991, the government has been promising to return the Solidarity Fund contribution - principal plus interest - "after the next budget".
- The contributors have given up.

What are the other problems?

- Another serious issue has emerged since 2015 - 1.5 million refugees from Syria and the Middle East.
- Taxes have risen, accommodation has become scarce, essential commodities cost 5 times of what they used to.
- Water, electricity, gas, public transport, all cost 3 times as much now.
- A West German citizen earns 20% more than an East German earn for the same job they do.
- Prices in East Germany are 20% lower than those in the west, but on their daily visits to the west, East Germans are not entitled to any discounts on public transport fares or any kind of shopping.
- No discounts on plane fares while travelling abroad either.
- Since the reunification, only two central ministers have come from East Germany, under pressure of strong criticism, only to be discarded later.

Source: The Indian Express

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