Battle for Bengal: On West Bengal-Home Ministry Tussle

What is the issue?

- Three IPS officers of the West Bengal cadre were appointed to various posts by the Union Home Ministry.
- The decision comes as part of the long-standing differences between the State of West Bengal and the central government.

What is the recent trigger?

- The tug of war began after a convoy of BJP President J.P. Nadda came under stone pelting in the State.
- The BJP apparently holds the IPS officers accountable for the incident.
- An initial move to recall these officials was resisted by the State.
- So, the Centre has invoked Section 6(1) of the Indian Police Service (Cadre) Rules.
    - This says that "in case of any disagreement, the matter shall be decided by the Central Government...."

What are the other concerns?

- The central schemes, Ayushman Bharat and PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, are also a bone of contention.
- The TMC (Trinamool Congress) government in West Bengal has refused to implement them, demanding that the funds be routed through the State.
- The CM has also complained of insufficient central assistance to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and cyclone Amphan.
- The Centre's earlier demand that the Chief Secretary and DGP attend a meeting in New Delhi on the State's law-and-order situation increased the tensions.

What is the State's stance?

- The recent events have escalated the confrontation between the State and the Centre.
- Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has objected the deputation order for three IPS officers despite the State's objection.
- She termed the deputation "a colourable exercise of power and blatant misuse of emergency provision of IPS Cadre Rule 1954".

What is the significance?

- The constant hostility between the State and Central governments is now taking a turn for the worse ahead of the 2021 Assembly election.
- The tussle mirrors the high stakes political contest between the BJP and the ruling Trinamool Congress.
- The CM's style of managing the police force has gained attention for the wrong reasons in the past.
- Senior officials are seen as allied with the TMC.
- On the other hand, the BJP's determined drive to capture power in the State is multi-pronged.
- Besides these, by enforcing its writ on IPS officers, the Centre is also sending a signal to all officers that their conduct will now be under scrutiny.

How does the future look?

- The Supreme Court has restrained West Bengal from taking any "coercive action" against several BJP leaders in criminal cases registered against them by the State Police.
- In the coming days, the BJP is likely to approach the Court and the Election Commission of India to bring pressure on the State government.
- But, police personnel should not be made instruments of a political battle.
- All told, the partisan use of the personnel and instruments of the state by parties in power is a disturbing signal for democracy and federalism.

Source: The Hindu

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