Catalonia’s cry for secession

Why in news?

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A referendum is being planned in Catalonia following the long-standing demand for independence.

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How did the issue evolve?

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- Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain in the north-east end of the Iberian Peninsula.
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- It has four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona.
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- Catalonia was historically an autonomous region of the Iberian peninsula, which encompasses Spain and Portugal.
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- However, its autonomy was never recognised despite having its own language, laws, and customs.
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- Many sovereigns tried to impose the Spanish language and laws in order to culturally unify the kingdom.
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- This fuelled Catalan separatism which was crushed under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco in 1940s.
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- However, calls for complete independence continued to grow.
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- This is further amplified by economic crisis with rising unemployment and spiralling inflation.
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- Separatists feel that the wealth from Barcelona region is being diverted

disproportionately to other poorer provinces.
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What is the current crisis?

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- The legislature of Catalonia recently passed a law to back a supposed “Vote for Secession” to be held on the 1st of October.
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- The Spanish constitutional court has swiftly declared the law illegal.
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- Subsequently, the union government at Madrid is gearing itself to invoke Article 155.
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- This would confer the union, extraordinary powers to suspend provincial self-governance and help prevent the referendum.
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- Madrid’s hard-line stance will further stoke a defiant sentiment against the national government.
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- Irrespective of the outcome of the referendum, a political confrontation is thus imminent.
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What has been EU’s reaction?

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- The EU has so far distanced itself from any secessionist demand in Spain, on the lines of how it handled the Scotland issue.
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- Staying aloof on Catalonia may however cause some embarrassment to the EU as it has earlier come out strongly against attacks on democratic freedoms in Hungary and Poland.
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How can the future be best approached?

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- The separatist conflict is rooted in the demand for greater regional autonomy, which needs to be recognised by the Madrid establishments.
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- Also, Spain’s austerity measures following the Euro-zone debt crisis has been highly unpopular in Catalonia.
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- Currently, as Madrid stares at improved economic prospects, it shouldn’t be hard to strike strategic compromises with Barcelona.
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- Such a conciliatory stance is imperative considering the risk of a populist upsurge in a region where separatism remains a live issue.
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Source: The Hindu

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