Detention of Elected Representatives

What is the issue?

- More than 1,300 people including dozens of elected representatives were detained around the Centre's abrupt move that bifurcated Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).
- This detainment is still continuing no even after 15 weeks since the incident.

What is the current situation?

- Among the detained representatives is a member of the Lok Sabha, Farooq Abdullah, who also happens to be the former Chief Minister.
- Senior functionaries of the government have repeatedly said the **situation is normal in J&K**.
- But the indefinite preventive detention of people is difficult to justify under any circumstances.
- With continuing restrictions on communication, **gauging the mood of the people may be tricky**.
- But some signs of normalcy are visible as more businesses open and vehicular traffic increases in the Valley.
- The government cannot possibly see merit in undermining mainstream political leaders in J&K.

What was the reaction in the Parliament?

- Prime Minister (PM) spoke about the Constitution Day and the role of the Rajya Sabha (RS) in sustaining India's federal structure in the winter session of Parliament.
- And there was a stark about the paradox of continuing detentions and restrictions in J&K.
- Parliament is for giving meaningful voice to the people.
- But, those prevented from attending the House are denied the right to speak for the people they are elected to represent.
- The PM's call for frank discussions and dialogues in the current session would ring hollow when some of them remain in detention.
- The government has refused to make any commitment on Mr. Abdullah's release.
- The non-deliberative manner in which a full-fledged State was reduced into

two UTs in one stroke was an unprecedented assault on federalism.

- Disruption by the Opposition is a marginal challenge to the role of Parliament at present.
- The real and graver trial of the legislature is the executive's refusal to be scrutinised by it.
- By undermining parliamentary committees and labelling any Bill as a money Bill in order to bypass the RS, the government has shown inadequate regard for parliamentary precedents and processes.

What could be done?

- Now that the first Lieutenant Governor has also taken charge in J&K, **immediate steps** must be taken to open up political and civil society space.
- Instead of trying to hard sell an improbable portrait to the outside world, the Centre would do well by **engaging with those most affected** by its decisions - the people of J&K.

Source: The Hindu

