Ethnic Armed Organisations against the Junta in Myanmar

Why in news?

- Protests against the military coup in Myanmar have assumed new dimensions.
- Some "ethnic armed organisations" (EAOs) are mounting their own resistance against the junta (a military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force.)

What are the recent tensions?

- The generals are hitting back the EAOs with airstrikes, a sign that they are ready to use the most brutal means to crush opposition.
- The Myanmar military bombed villages on its border with Thailand.
- It carried this out in retaliation for the loss of one of its outposts in the southeastern Karen (now renamed Kayin) state that the Karen National Union (KNU) had seized earlier.
- The air strikes sent hundreds of Karen, one of Myanmar's many ethnic minority groups, scattering across the border.
- Some 24,000 Karen people have been displaced in fighting in the past one month.
- Another area of tension is in the north, in Kachin state bordering China and forming a trijunction with India.
- Aerial bombardment has been going on here for days since the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) attacked two police outposts and a military base.
- Some 5,000 people are displaced with this.
- In Myanmar's western Chin state, which borders Mizoram, 15 soldiers were killed in two separate incidents.
- This was claimed by a new ethnic armed militia called the Chinland Defence Force (CDF).
- **Impact** - The resistance by the EAOs seems to have taken the Myanmar army by surprise.
- In all, 21 EAOs, and several more militias, are active in the border states of Myanmar.
- Many of them have been waging armed resistance against the state for decades now.

What is the unfulfilled Federation dream of Myanmar?

- One of Aung San Suu Kyi's priorities when her party was governing Myanmar from 2015 to 2020, was to take forward the efforts of her father, Gen Aung San.
- Gen Aung San led the movement for independence from the British.
- He aimed for building a federal Myanmar of the Bamar majority and ethnic minorities, who form one third of the country's 54 million population.
- But after a ceasefire agreement with 12 EAOs in 2015, the NLD (National League for Democracy) government was unable to make much further progress.
- At least four more meetings held to bring the other groups on board were not successful.
- By the end of her first term, Suu Kyi was convinced that unless the army could be tamed through reforms to the country's constitution, Myanmar would never become the federation that her father had envisioned.

Who are the Bamars and the ethnic minorities?

- The army draws its power from the divisions between the majority Bamar and the minority ethnic groups, and the hostilities between the ethnic groups themselves.
- However, since the February 1 coup, some EAOs, including some that had signed the ceasefire agreement, have expressed solidarity with the pro-democracy protesters.
- The military had offered a ceasefire to all groups, but this was rejected by many of the influential groups.
- Reportedly, in a throwback to protests of the 1980s and 1990s, many Bamar youth are now in Karen state for arms training.
- This belies the notions of divisions between the Bamars and the ethnic groups.
- The troubles in the three border states have distracted the army's attention for the moment from the pro-democracy protests in the central regions, including in Yangon.

Will it be a challenge for the army?

- More EAOs are likely to rise up against the army, joining hands or even fighting separate battles.
- If this happens, Myanmar's armed forces may find themselves engaged in multiple mini wars in the border regions.
- And all this would happen at a time when it would like to focus on entrenching itself in the same way as it had done in the 1990s.
- Reportedly, the combined strength of the EAOs and other militias is about 1,00,000, while the Myanmar army is 350,000 strong.

- The use of air power by the military could be a warning to the EAOs to “back off”.
- It is perhaps due to the outbreak of fighting in these places that the junta has said it will “consider” a plan put forth by ASEAN.

What is the ASEAN’s plan for peace?

- This would work for a resolution in Myanmar, but only “when stability is restored”.
- The five-point ASEAN consensus plan was put to the head of the Myanmar army, Gen Min Aung Hlaing, in Jakarta.
- The five points are:
    1. immediate cessation of violence by the Myanmar army
    2. peaceful resolution through dialogue between all parties
    3. mediation by an ASEAN special envoy
    4. a visit by the special envoy
    5. humanitarian assistance from ASEAN
- The protesters have dismissed the plan, since it does not include the release of Suu Kyi and others arrested by the junta.
- The new generation of protesters have also demanded that the 2008 constitution, drafted and voted in by the military, should be scrapped.

Source: The Indian Express

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