Formation of a New Country

What is the issue?

- Various territories across the world want to form a new country.
- As new countries are suddenly in high demand, let us look into how a country is formed.

How does a territory become a new country?

- There is **no straightforward rule**.
- Beyond a few set requirements, a region's quest for nationhood mainly depends on how many countries and international organisations it manages to convince to recognise it as a country.
- The biggest sanction of nationhood is the United Nations recognising a territory as a country.

Who can declare themselves a country?

- **Anyone**. There is no law barring regions from declaring independence.
- **Bougainville**, an island in the Pacific, is holding a referendum to decide if it wants to remain a part of Papua New Guinea or become an independent country.
- A fugitive godman of India has reportedly founded his own country somewhere in the Pacific and named it as **Kailaasa**.
- Across the world, various territories are agitating for independence - **Catalonia** in Spain, **Kurdistan** in Iraq, **Tibet** in China, etc.,
- In Jharkhand in 2017-18, as part of the Pathalgadi movement declared the gram sabha as the only sovereign authority.

What criteria must a nation-hopeful meet?

- Broadly, four, as decided in 1933's Montevideo Convention.
- A country-hopeful must have a defined **territory, people, government, and the ability** to form relationships with other countries.
- A country's "people" are defined as a significantly large population sharing a belief in their nationality.
- Factors also kept in mind are if a majority has clearly expressed the desire to break away from the parent country, and if the minority communities' rights will be safeguarded.

What is self-determination vs territorial integrity?

- In June 1945, the right of "self-determination" was included in the UN charter.
- This means that a **population has the right to decide** how and by whom it wants to be governed.
- However, another of the oldest, widely accepted international rules is that of countries respecting each other's territorial integrity.
- While a population has the right to break off from the parent country, quick recognition of their claim would mean other nations are agreeing to the carving up of one country.
- **The conflict** - The right to self-determination was introduced when a few colonial powers were dominating most countries, and questions of right were relatively easier to settle.
- Today, the issue becomes thorny and shapes up either as granting of greater autonomy to certain regions within a country, prolonged armed conflicts, or both.
- Thus, though Taiwan says it is a country, other nations defer to China's feelings about it.

Why UN recognition matters?

- UN recognition means a new **country has access** to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.
- Its **currency is recognised**, which allows it to trade.
- Often, UN member states recognise a country, but not the UN as a body.
- This puts a country in the grey area with respect to protection against parent country's aggression, and international trade.
- **Factors** - By and large, so far, a country swinging the UN's opinion in its favour has depended on,
    1. How many of the big powers back it, and
    2. How much international influence its parent country wields at that time.
- **Instance** - East Timor, then a Portuguese colony, was invaded by Indonesia in the 1960s.
- But the western powers then needed Indonesia as an ally against Russia, and East Timor's woes didn't get much attention.
- By the 1990s, power alignments had changed, and East Timor managed to hold a referendum by 1999 and declare independence in 2002.

Source: The Indian Express



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