India's Role in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict

Why in news?

India's involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, focusing on the 13th Amendment, with India supports the 13th Amendment, promoting provincial autonomy.

What are the Background of Ethnic Conflict in Srilanka?

- **Ethnic Composition** - Sri Lanka has a multi-ethnic society, primarily composed of Sinhalese (majority), Tamils (minority), and Muslims.
- The conflict primarily involved the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.
- **Colonial Roots -** British colonial policies favored Tamils in education and administration, creating resentment among the Sinhalese majority.
- **Post-Independence Discrimination -** After gaining independence in 1948, successive Sri Lankan governments implemented policies favoring the Sinhalese, such as:
    - **Sinhala Only Act (1956)** – Made Sinhala the sole official language, marginalizing Tamils.
    - **University Quotas** – Reduced Tamil students' access to higher education.
- **Rise of Tamil Nationalism** - led to the demand for autonomy by Tamil political parties, resulting in the formation of militant groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
- **Civil War (1983–2009) -** The ethnic tensions escalated into a full-scale war between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, seeking an independent Tamil Eelam in the north and east.
- **Indo-Lanka Accord (1987) -** The Indo-Lanka Accord was signed on 1987, between India and Sri Lanka to address the ongoing ethnic conflict and civil unrest in Sri Lanka.
- **Indian Peacekeeping-** The agreement aimed to establish peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka, with India playing a role in overseeing the cessation of hostilities.
- **Territorial Integrity -** Both nations affirmed the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.
- **Devolution of Power -**The accord proposed the devolution of powers to provincial councils to meet the aspirations of all communities.
- **Tamil Language Recognition-** It recognized Tamil as an official language of Sri Lanka, alongside Sinhala.

What are the features of 13th Amendment?

- Enacted in November 1987, created Provincial Councils in Sri Lanka.
- **Legislative Powers -** These councils were granted legislative powers over specified subjects, including education, health, and agriculture.
- **Executive Authority -** Each council had an executive committee headed by a Chief Minister, facilitating local governance**.**
- **Financial Autonomy -** Provincial Councils were empowered to manage their finances, including taxation within their jurisdiction.

By End of the War (2009) Sri Lankan military defeated the LTTE, but Tamil grievances over political representation, devolution, and human rights violations persist.

What are the Current Challenges in implementing the 13th Amendment?

- Political opposition from Sri Lankan parties, including the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).
- Supreme Court annulled Northern and Eastern Province merger in 2006, limiting Tamil political aspirations.
- Delay in conducting Provincial Council elections, leading to concerns over devolution of power.

What are Potential Impacts on India?

- **Regional Stability** - Unrest among Sri Lanka's Tamil population could lead to instability in South Asia, affecting security in the region.
- **Ethnic Relations -**The situation of Tamils in Sri Lanka directly impacts Tamil Nadu, influencing India's domestic politics and inter-community relations.
- **Refugee Influx -** Rising tensions could force Sri Lankan Tamils to seek refuge in India, creating humanitarian and logistical challenges.
- **Strategic Interests -** Instability in Sri Lanka could allow external powers to increase their influence in the Indian Ocean, affecting India's security.
- **Bilateral Relations -**Strained ethnic relations in Sri Lanka could impact India-Sri Lanka ties, affecting trade, security, and regional cooperation.

What are India’s Recent Diplomatic Approach?

- PM urged full implementation of Sri Lanka’s Constitution, including the 13th Amendment.
- No explicit reference to the amendment during Sri Lankan Minister’s visit to Delhi in 2024 raised concerns.
- India’s silence may reflect a strategic shift in its diplomatic stance on the Tamil issue.

What Steps India Can Take?

- **Diplomatic Engagement -**Urge Sri Lanka to fully implement the 13th Amendment, ensuring proper devolution of power to Tamil-majority regions.
- **Support Reconciliation -**Share India's federalism and diversity management experiences to help Sri Lanka in its reconciliation efforts.
- **Humanitarian Assistance-** Be prepared to support Tamil refugees if tensions escalate while working with Sri Lanka to prevent displacement.
- **Regional Cooperation-** Collaborate with South Asian nations to promote stability and address concerns arising from Sri Lanka's internal issues.
- **Monitor External Influence -**Keep an eye on foreign involvement in Sri Lanka to safeguard India’s strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region.

What Lies ahead?

- India's role in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is complex. Implementing the 13th Amendment is important for lasting peace.
- India must balance its interests while encouraging Sri Lanka to meet the needs of the Tamil minority.
- This situation needs careful diplomacy, ongoing involvement, and a deep understanding of the historical and political background.

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Reference

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