India’s Tactical abstention in UNHRC

Why in news?

Recently India abstained from voting on a resolution on Sri Lanka in the U.N. Human Rights Council.

What was the resolution about?

- The resolution is about Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka.
- It was adopted after 22 states of the 47-member Council voted in its favour.
- But India abstained from voting on Sri Lanka’s rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).
- Before the voting session, India stressed on both meaningful devolution to meet Tamil aspirations and the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka.

Why was the resolution adopted now?

- Sri Lanka is seen moving towards days of democratic deficit which was seen prior to the 2015 elections.
- The present regime withdrew from the commitments made to the UNHRC by its predecessors.
- The commitments stressed on constructive engagement with the international community and the consensual resolution on justice and accountability.
- Moreover UN High Commissioner’s report raised concerns over increasing militarisation, heightened surveillance against rights defenders and NGOs.
- The report also mentions state’s interference in the few prosecutions of important cases from the past and there is dangerous anti-minority rhetoric.

Why India abstained from voting?

- Political opposition may criticise India’s abstention as to shield Sri Lanka from a credible investigation into allegations of war crimes.
- But India seems to have utilised the opportunity to preserve its diplomatic space.
- It wanted to contain China’s influence in Sri Lanka and also aimed to maintain its support for the Tamil minority to achieve equality, justice, dignity and peace.

- It is not comfortable with externally mandated investigative mechanisms.

How is India's approach different from other countries?

- In 2012, India voted in favour of resolution for a credible investigation into human rights violation in Sri Lanka.
- But it incorporated the need for Sri Lanka's concurrence to any assistance that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights may offer in such a probe.
- India's concern in Sri Lanka is always different from the rest of the international community.
- It wanted a long-term well-being of the Tamil people and ensured that power-sharing must foster reconciliation.
- This means that India emphasised on devolution rather than accountability.

What we can infer from this?

- India doesn't want to severe its ties with Sri Lanka but it does not want Sri Lanka to ignore the political aspirations of the Tamils.
- It is clear that India has its own limitations in expressing disappointment over Sri Lanka's approach of moving away from reconciliation and devolution.
- India weighed down by the Chinese presence in the region and India adopted a tactical strategy.
- When pragmatism and principle were needed in equal measure, India chose abstention as an easy way out.

Source: The Hindu

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