IS Influence in India

What is the issue?

- Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for the Ester Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka that claimed close to 250 lives.
- With the threads of the attack being closely connected to India, it is essential to make an assessment on the IS influence in India.

How is IS presence in India?

- Islamic State came to the notice of Indian intelligence agencies way back in 2013.
- Reports from Syria had then suggested that some Indians were fighting alongside the IS there.
- However, it was more considered a problem of the Middle East.
- The perception of Indian agencies changed in 2014 when IS kidnapped 39 Indians in Iraq and executed them.
- Further, a closer look at the outfit's plans revealed that they have had India in their targets since the beginning.
- An IS map of the Khorasan Caliphate showed some of India’s states as its part.
- Since then, multiple Indians have travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight alongside the IS.
- As many as 100 have been arrested by the agencies either on return from Syria or while preparing to join them.
- Many have also been arrested for preparing to carry out an attack in India after being inspired by the IS.

How is it in South India?

- Generally, the North India regularly sees communal clashes.
- States such as Jammu and Kashmir, MP and UP in North India have seen some IS influence on the youth.
- But strikingly, it is the southern states which have sent maximum recruits to IS.
- Reportedly, almost 90% of all recruits who have gone to Syria are from the southern States.
- A majority of those arrested while preparing to launch an attack are also

from southern States.
- These include Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- In fact, the first recruit from India to join Islamic State in 2013 was Cuddalore (Tamil Nadu)-born Haja Fakhruddin.
- He joined the IS and migrated to Syria while working in Singapore.
- Most recruits from Kerala who joined the Islamic State were working in the Gulf.
- Otherwise, they had come back from the Gulf with an already developed liking for IS's extreme ideology.

Does IS provide any organisational support?

- The IS had not provided any kind of organisational support to its recruits in India.
- It has largely focused on inspiring the youth to either migrate to Syria and Iraq or carry out attacks in India with their own resources.
- Many Indians have not even had a handler and have merely come together on their own to allegedly carry out attacks in the name of IS.
- They have formed various groups such as the Ummat E Mohammadiya, Harkat ul Harb-e-Islam, Ansar ul Tawheed fi Bilad Al Hind and Junud Al Khilafa e Hind.
- However, none have had any influence beyond their close-knit group.
- Most of these groups were made to arrange for explosives and arms on their own with members contributing from their pockets.

How has India's response been?

- The Indian security establishment has approached the issue of IS influence with caution.
- Some of the youth who were learnt to be eager to join IS are merely swayed by the IS online propaganda.
- It has attracted restless youth with video-game-like macabre videos.
- So realising the fact that they may not be fully radicalised given their clean background, India has taken the counselling approach.
- Many IS recruits have been counselled, made to go through a de-radicalisation programme and let off with a warning.
- These were done on slight detections of surfing IS's online material or apprehended while trying to migrate to Syria.
- India's approach had been positive given the fact of less recruits to the IS despite a very large Muslim population in India.
- Only those who were in the process of carrying out an attack or had made multiple attempts to go to Syria despite counselling were arrested.

Source: Indian Express

