Kosovo-Serbia Conflict

Why in news?

The tensions between Kosovo and Serbia escalates and clashes broke out between Serbs protesting in North Kosovo and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFor).



What is the Kosovo-Serbia conflicts?

- Both Kosovo and Serbia are countries that lie in the Balkan region of Europe.
- Kosovo is a former province of Serbia.
- Kosovo unilaterally declared Independence in 2008 and is recognised as a country by about 100 nations including the U.S. and several EU- countries.
- However, Serbia does not recognise Kosovo's sovereignty and continues to consider it as a part of it.

What are the roots of the conflict?

- **Historic Significance -** The Serbian Empire had gained control of Kosovo in the 12th century.
- Kosovo become the heart of the kingdom with several significant Serb Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries.
- **Ethnic Shift -** In the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, Serbia lost Kosovo to the Ottoman Empire for 500 years.
- During Ottoman rule, there was a shift in ethnic and religious balance in Kosovo, it became a region with majority of ethnic Albanian Muslims.
- **Made a province -** Kosovo became part of Serbia in the early 20th century.
- Post the Second World War, it was eventually made a province (with autonomy) of Serbia.
- **Ethnic rift -** At this point, Kosovo had ethnic Albanian as 90% of its population and they felt the reunion unfair.
- In the 1980s, Kosovo Albanians sought separation from Serbia.
- **Conflict** - In the late 1990s, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), consisting mainly Kosovo Albanians, led an insurgency against the Serbian rule of Kosovo.
- Serbia cracked down on the rebellion by deploying heavy forces in 1998 and 1999.
- **NATO and UNSC -** In 1999, NATO intervened to pull out Kosovo and subsequently, NATO deployed peacekeepers.
- Through the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1244, a transitional UN-led administration began to head Kosovo.
- **Independence -** In 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia.
- Serbia challenged Kosovo's actions before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
- The ICJ was of the opinion that Kosovo's declaration was not against international law.

What has happened since 2008?

- An ethnic Serb minority resides in Kosovo makes up to 5.3% of its population.
- The Kosovo Serbs do not recognise Kosovo state institutions.
- The Kosovo Serbs receive pay and benefits from Serbia's budget but do not pay taxes to neither of the governments.
- Since 2008, clashes have broken out on and off in Kosovo's northern region.
- In 2013, both Serbia and Kosovo reached the ***Brussels Agreement*** brokered by the EU.
- But the agreement was not fully implemented on the ground.
- In July 2022, violent clashes broke out in the northern region over the issue of changing Serbian number plates of vehicles while in Kosovo.
- The ethnic Serbs in the north in protest put up blockades at the 2 border entry points between Serbia and Kosovo, only through which Kosovo citizens can travel to Western Europe.

Why have tensions flared again?

- Kosovo held mayoral elections in municipalities in April 2023.
- These ethnic Serbs boycotted the elections to northern municipalities.
- As a result of low turnout, ethnic Albanian mayors got elected in these municipalities.
- In protest, ethnic Serb mayors in northern municipalities, local judges and police officers had resigned and also opposed fresh elections to their posts.
- The ethnic Albanian mayors took office in northern Kosovo's Serb-majority area.
- These moves faced protests by Serbs and the U.S. and its allies to rebuked Kosovo.
- These triggered violent clashes between NATO soldiers and Serb protesters.

Where do the resolution talks stand?

- Since late 2015, there has been little progress in reaching new agreements or implementing existing ones.
- In 2018, the then Presidents of Kosovo and Serbia had proposed redrawing borders and swapping some territories between the 2 countries to normalise ties but the EU rejected it.
- **EU plan -** In February 2023, the EU proposed a plan to which both Serbia and Kosovo tentatively agreed to. It states -
- Serbia would stop lobbying against Kosovo's candidature in international organisations including the United Nations.
- In turn, Kosovo was to form an association of Serb-majority municipalities.
- However, the two parties walked out of singing the deal as a result of opposition against it from their own countries.
- Now, the talks have also stalled doubting the EU's seriousness.
- **Russian factor -** Serbia has strong historic and military ties with Russia and Russia also supports Serbia's claim.
- Kosovo does not want the spillover of Ukraine conflict in the Balkan region.

What lies ahead?

- Kosovo has indicated that a solution for de-escalation is close.
- It is open to holding fresh elections in Serb dominant municipalities, provided they are held in a free and fair manner.
- Kosovo wants the election to be held without Serbia pressuring ethnic Serbs to boycott the vote.

References

[The Hindu | What is the Kosovo-Serbia conflict all about?]

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