Maharashtra-Karnataka Border Dispute

Why in news?

- Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Sharad Pawar released a book published by the state government.
- It is titled 'Maharashtra-Karnataka Seemavad: Sangharsh Aani Sankalp' (Maharashtra-Karnataka Boundary Dispute: Struggle and Pledge).

What is the book about?

- The book is a collection of articles, news, and other material on the demand that Marathi-speaking areas in Karnataka should be integrated into Maharashtra.
- The matter has been in the Supreme Court since 2004.
- Thackeray said that until the Supreme Court gives its verdict on the dispute, the areas should be declared a Union Territory.
- On the other hand, Pawar said that the government must make all legal efforts to ensure a favourable verdict in the apex court.

What is the dispute on?

- Maharashtra has staked claim to over 7,000 sq km area along its border with Karnataka.
- This comprises of 814 villages in the districts of Belagavi (Belgaum), Uttara Kannada, Bidar, and Gulbarga, and the towns of Belagavi, Karwar, and Nippani.
- All these areas are predominantly Marathi-speaking.
- Maharashtra wants them to be merged with the state.

How did this originate?

- The genesis of the dispute lies in the reorganisation of states along linguistic and administrative lines in 1956.
- The erstwhile Bombay Presidency was a multilingual province.
- It included the present-day Karnataka districts of Vijayapura, Belagavi, Dharwad, and Uttara Kannada.
- In 1948, the Belgaum municipality requested that the district, having a predominantly Marathi-speaking population, be incorporated into the proposed Maharashtra state.

- However, The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 made Belgaum and 10 talukas of Bombay State a part of the then Mysore State (which was renamed Karnataka in 1973).
- While demarcating borders, the Reorganisation of States Commission sought to include talukas with a Kannada-speaking population of more than 50% in Mysore.
- But the opponents of the region's inclusion in Mysore have maintained that in 1956, Marathi-speakers outnumbered Kannada-speakers in those areas.

How significant is the issue?

- Political parties in Maharashtra are united on the merger of the border areas with the state.
- The dispute features in every election manifesto of the Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena, and BJP.
- Over the last six decades, every Governor's address to the joint session of the Maharashtra Assembly and Council has mentioned the border dispute.

What are the recent incidents?

- Maharashtra CM Thackeray recently referred to the contentious areas as "Karnataka-occupied Maharashtra" in the Assembly.
- He also named two senior ministers to a co-ordination committee to oversee the expeditious resolution of the case in favour of Maharashtra in the Supreme Court.
- Following this, tensions flared on both sides of the border.
- This is not the first time that this matter has arisen in the last 13 months of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition government.
- But bus services between Kolhapur (Maharashtra) and Belgaum (Karnataka) had to be suspended for a few days after the recent tensions.

What is Karnataka's response?

- The BJP government in Karnataka has accused Maharashtra of seeking to incite violence on the border dispute.
- Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa has vowed he would "not part with an inch of land".
- Yediyurappa said that the Mahajan Commission had "long ago settled the dispute."

What is the Mahajan Commission?

- The Mahajan Commission was set up by the Government of India in October 1966 to look into the border dispute.

- The Commission, led by former Chief Justice of India Mehr Chand Mahajan, submitted its report in August 1967.
- It recommended that 264 villages should be transferred to Maharashtra, and that Belgaum and 247 villages should remain with Karnataka.
- However, Maharashtra rejected the report, calling it biased and illogical, while Karnataka welcomed it.
- Despite demands from Karnataka, the Centre never implemented the recommendations of the report.
- And irrespective of the party in power, both states have from the beginning struck to their positions.

Source: The Indian Express

