Maratha Reservation Demand

Why in news?

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Maratha community in Maharashtra is holding aggressive protests demanding reservation.

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What is Maratha protests all about?

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- Quotas for Marathas, a politically influential community that constitutes around 33 per cent of the state's population, has been a hugely contentious issue.
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- The Marathas began to agitate for their demands mainly reservations for the community in jobs and education, less than two years ago.
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- Through 2016-2017, the protests took the form of tens of thousands of people marching in silence, not only staying away from violence but also cleaning up the streets after themselves.
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- The aim of their protests and agitation is to force the government to act decisively on its long-pending demands.
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- For the last four-five days, Maharashtra is witnessing sporadic incidents of violence like torching of buses, tyres mainly in Marathwada, western Maharashtra and Konkan regions.
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What are the demands of Marathas community?

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- Referring to a study of farmers' suicides in 2014-16, the affidavit said

nearly 78% of suicides had taken place in Marathwada and Vidarbha, and “most” of the victims were Marathas.
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- There are also extraordinary circumstances including displacement, high illiteracy faced by the community.
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- Maratha leaders demand the government to give them OBC status and not reservation because any reservation, beyond the existing 50 per cent, would be difficult to implement.
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- Destruction of environment resources due to climate change, and consequent suicides by farmers also justifies reservations of the community beyond the 50% ceiling.
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- Apart from this the community also demands for hostels for Maratha students in every district, and interest-free loans for the economically backward members of the community.
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What is government’s plan on Maratha reservation?

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- The state government responded the protesters that it would provide 16 per cent reservation in government jobs to the Maratha community.
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- State administration said a recruitment drive would be taken up once Maratha reservation gets constitutional and legal sanction.
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- Apart from this the government is waiting for the consent of the Backward Class Commission which is already considering the proposal to accord OBC status to Marathas.
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What are the challenges in resolving this issue?

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- **Delayed Process -** It is to be clear that any government do not have any right to declare reservation, it has to be done by the Backward Class Commission, the High Court and the government.
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- But there is a cap on the reservation to be given by a state government. The Constitution mandates that there should be an upper limit of 50 per cent on reservation.
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- The Backward Commission was currently going around the state to find out the social and economic status of Marathas.
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- However, the commission is going very slow in its job which has sparked apprehension that the community's demand will remain pending again
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- **Judicial Supremacy -** Bombay High Court has twice rejected a proposed quota for Marathas, striking down an ordinance issued by the earlier Congress-NCP government.
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- **Cascading Effects -** On the other hand, if the Marathas are granted OBC status, they would qualify for the existing OBC quotas.
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- **Vote bank Politics -** The community claims that the government need not wait for the commission to finalise its report.
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- This means the government will be get a chance to play vote bank politics by promising quota for the community during election campaigning.
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- **Lack of cause and leadership -** The Maratha mobilisation is linked to the continuing agrarian crisis in Maharashtra, for which there is no quick fix.
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- Their insecurities are not fundamentally different from those of other dominant castes such as Patels, Gujjars and Jats, which have triggered shows of assertion elsewhere, too.
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- There is no single leadership in the community, due to this the government does not know who in the Maratha leadership to talk to.

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Source: Indian Express

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