Militants' Surrender in Assam - Karbi Insurgency

Why in news?

1,040 militants of five militant groups of Karbi Anglong district ceremonially laid down arms at an event in Guwahati in the presence of Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal.

Who are the surrendered militants?

- The surrendered militants comprised cadres from five outfits —
    i. Karbi People's Liberation Tiger (KPLT)
    ii. People's Democratic Council of Karbi Longri (PDCK)
    iii. Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF)
    iv. Kuki Liberation Front (KLF)
    v. United People's Liberation Army (UPLA)
- Over 300 weapons and 11,000 bullets were surrendered by the militants.
- Among the surrendered militants is Ingti Kathar Songbijit, a primary accused in multiple cases of militancy and ethnic violence in the state.
- The developments come a year after a peace and development agreement was signed with multiple Bodo militant outfits.
- The agreement was aimed at bringing an end to a violent movement for a separate Bodoland.

How did the Karbi insurgency evolve?

- Karbi is a major ethnic community of Assam.
- The Karbi groups have several factions and splinters.
- The insurgency by Karbi groups has had a long history in Assam.
- It is marked by killings, ethnic violence, abductions and taxation since the late 1980s.
- These outfits originated from a core demand of forming a separate state.
- Today, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) is an autonomous district council.
- It is protected under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- The Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and Karbi People's Force (KPF) came together to form the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) in late 1990s.
- In November 2011, UPDS gave up arms.

- It signed a tripartite memorandum of settlement with the Centre and the government of Assam.
- They settled for enhanced autonomy and special packages for the KAAC.
- The Lok Sabha constituency here comprises of three districts of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong (split from the former in 2016) and Dima Hasao.
- The entire political discourse in this constituency revolves around the demand for -
    i. granting of "Autonomous State" status to the region
    ii. more autonomy and power to the KAAC and the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (which administers over Dima Hasao district)

What is the significance of the surrender?

- The surrender means that all insurgent outfits of Karbi Anglong district have now been brought into the mainstream society.
- Karbi Anglong is a very important district in the state, and the largest in terms of area.
- Karbi Anglong militant outfits joining the mainstream means a decline in influence of Naga militant outfits in Assam.
- With this surrender, a huge number of weapons have come overground.
- This is a major step towards peace in the state.
- It is a very significant development, not only for Karbi Anglong or Assam but also for Nagaland.

Who is Ingti Kathar Songbijit, the militant who surrendered?

- Songbijit is the self-styled chief of the outfit PDCK [People's Democratic Council of Karbi Longri].
- He is a primary accused in multiple cases of militancy and ethnic violence.
- He has been a 'most-wanted' militant in Assam. His surrender is thus very significant.
- Interestingly, Songbijit is a Karbi by birth and ethnicity but had long been related to Bodo insurgency.
- In 2012, he broke away from one faction of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) — the NDFB(RD).
- He then formed his own faction, NDFB(S).
- The faction is alleged to be responsible for the massacre of 70 Adivasis in Assam in December 2014.
- In 2015, Songbijit was removed as the chief of the group and B Saoraigwra took over.
- Then, Songbijit went on to form his Karbi outfit.
- Songbijit has been charge-sheeted by the NIA.

- So now it needs to be seen as to what decision will be taken on him by the NIA, the government of India and the government of Assam.

What is the way forward?

- The government's role is not limited to only bringing back the militants.
- It is also committed to ensuring a life of dignity and respect for those who have surrendered arms.
- The government should facilitate opportunities for their livelihood and employment.

Source: The Indian Express

