Resettlement in Sri Lanka

Why in news?

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Refugees from Sri Lanka demand the Sri Lankan Navy to release their lands.

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What is the history?

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- After the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam expelled them from the north in the early 1990s, **thousands of Tamil-speaking Muslim families were displaced** to other parts of the island for nearly three decades.
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- Several thousand acres of formerly civilian-owned or occupied land across the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern Provinces remained with the Sri Lankan armed forces after the war ended in 2009, severely **hampering post-war resettlement in Sri Lanka.**
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What are the demands of the protest?

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- Before the war, the people of the north were predominantly farmers or fisher folk, their land and waters gave them a sense of place and importantly, economic security.
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- The civil war and the multiple displacements it caused denied them access to both.
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- After waiting for decades, frustrated northern Tamils and Muslims organized a wave of protests in the past few months, asking for their lands. **Their protest is also about the right to return.**
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What is the stand of the government?

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- Pressured by their relentless agitations, the military began returning land in different areas.
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- **The Resettlement Ministry** claims that the armed forces have so far released 70,000 acres of land they held.
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- Neither the national unity government nor the Ministry was proactive in communicating with the affected people trying to restart their lives after years of strife.
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- The people are disillusioned with new government's disconnected approach to resettlement.
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- Recent instances of the military returning some of the occupied land brings much needed relief to communities, but **getting back to their land only means facing new challenges.**
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What is the way forward?

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- Resettlement was never going to be easy and the government knows that.
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- Headline housing schemes and vocational training centers alone cannot provide solutions to people who have been subjected to brutal violence and displacement.
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- It takes a far more comprehensive approach and a thoughtful strategy to rebuild a war-battered community.
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- After much impressing at the UN Human Rights Council, **it is time for the Sri Lankan government to get its act together on the ground.**
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- It is not the state's benevolence or patronage that the people want. As citizens, they simply want the state to do its duty. And that is to make everyone on this island feel at home.

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Source: The Hindu

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