

## **Sri Lanka at the UN Rights Council**

### **Why in news?**

At the current session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Sri Lanka faces another resolution on human rights violations and war crimes.

### **Why is this significant?**

- Sri Lanka abruptly withdrew in 2020 from an earlier UNHRC resolution (Resolution 30/1) on war crimes.
- Under the resolution, it had committed, 5 years previously, to a time-bound investigation of war crimes.
  - war crimes that took place during the military campaign against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
- In this backdrop, the country faces another UNHRC resolution now.
- Sri Lanka has described the resolution as “unwanted interference by powerful countries”.
- It has officially sought India’s help to gather support against the resolution.
- Whichever way it goes, the resolution is likely to resonate in India-Sri Lanka relations.
- For India internally, it will reflect in the run-up to the Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu.

### **What does the resolution say?**

- The draft resolution is based on a report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights).
- The report warned Sri Lanka on the failure to address human rights violations and war crimes committed in the past.
- It said that this had put the country on a “dangerous path” that could lead to a “recurrence” of policies and practices that gave rise to the earlier situation.
- The report flagged the “warning signs”:
  - accelerating militarisation of civilian governmental functions
  - reversal of important constitutional safeguards
  - political obstruction of accountability
  - exclusionary rhetoric, intimidation of civil society
  - use of anti-terrorism laws

## **What is the changing scenario in Sri Lanka?**

- The report pointed to the appointment of at least 28 serving or former military and intelligence personnel to “key administrative posts.”
- It also mentioned the appointments of two senior military officials implicated in UN reports on alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity during the final years of the conflict.
- The report expressed concerns at these appointments.
- Also, the government had created parallel military task forces and commissions that encroach on civilian functions.
- It has reversed important institutional checks and balances, threatening democratic gains, the independence of the judiciary and other key institutions.
- The shrinking space for independent media and civil society, and human rights organisations are also themes in the report.

## **What did the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights say?**

- Michelle Bachelet has said that the government in Sri Lanka was “proactively” obstructing investigations into past crimes to prevent accountability.
- This had a “devastating effect” on families seeking truth, justice and reparations.
- UN member states “should heed the early warning signs of more violations to come.”
- She also called for “international action” including targeted sanctions such as asset freezes and travel bans against “credibly alleged” perpetrators of grave human rights violations and abuses.
- States should also pursue investigations and prosecution in their national courts of international crimes committed by all parties in Sri Lanka.
- She has also asked the UNHRC to support “a dedicated capacity” by countries to collect and preserve evidence for future accountability processes.

**Source: The Indian Express**