The Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

What is the issue?

The breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus has been at the centre of three wars and multiple clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia,

Where is Nagorno-Karabakh located?

- Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked, mountainous and forested region falling within the boundaries of Azerbaijan.
- Nagorno-Karabakh, called Artsakh in Armenian, hosts a predominantly ethnic Armenian population with an Azeri minority.
- It is located in the South Caucasus region, which straddles the border between eastern Europe and western Asia.
- It is roughly made up of modern-day Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.
- The capital of Nagorno-Karabakh is Stepanakert, with Susha being another major city in the region.

How did the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh begin?

- Nagorno-Karabakh was once a part of the Armenian Kingdom and has been ruled by several empires such as the Ottomans, the Persians, and the Russians.
- Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia later became separate Republics, with the Azeris incorporating Nagorno-Karabakh into their Republic.
- The Soviets officially placed Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous Oblast (administrative region) in Azerbaijan's territory, despite the chiefly Armenian population.
- As Soviet power began to wane in the 1980s, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh expressed a desire to become a part of Armenia, organising a vote for the same in 1988.
- With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Armenian rebels in Nagorno-Karabakh declared it an independent territory, which was not recognised internationally.
- This led to an open war between Armenia and Azerbaijan where Armenia had taken control of around 13% of Azerbaijan's territory.
- The war ended in 1994 when both countries entered into a ceasefire brokered by Russia but this could not prevent multiple flareups in the region.
- In 2016, a clash between the rebels and the Azerbaijani military transformed into a four-day war which led to a ceasefire.
- Fresh clashes erupted on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in 2020, which turned into a fierce six-week war in which Azeri forces took back territories including 40% of Nagorno-Karabakh.

What about the peace talks organised by the Minsk Group?

The Minsk Group was created by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to facilitate talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Group was co-chaired by Russia, the United States and France.

- The Group came up with three peace proposals in the 1990s.
- **The package deal (1997)**- It envisaged simultaneous removal of Armenian forces from occupied areas and the determination of Nagorno-Karabakh's status but was rejected.
- **The step-by-step approach (1997)-** It suggested gradual steps starting with Armenian withdrawal, return of displaced refugees, and ending of hostilities followed by talks for a future resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue which was rejected too.
- **The common state proposal (1998)-** It would endow Nagorno-Karabakh with a separate passport, law enforcement and currency, but within Azerbaijan's internationally recognised borders.
- The entry of Azeri forces would be barred without Nagorno-Karabakh's approval and Armenian people of this region would also have the right to vote in Armenian elections.
- This was rejected as well.
- **The Madrid Principles**- The peace deal was followed by 2007, later modified in 2009.
- These principles proposed
    - Giving control of seven Karabakh districts to Azerbaijan
    - Self-governance to the region
    - A corridor link with Armenia
    - Giving the region's inhabitants an opportunity to express their will
    - Return of refugees
    - Setting up of a peacekeeping operation
- The Minsk Group held another meeting in Geneva in 2017 but it did not produce any concrete outcome.

What about the role played by other countries?

- **Role of Turkey**- The conflict turned into a regional one in the years following the 2016 war, with the entry of Turkey.
- The Azeris and Turks share strong cultural and historical links as Azerbaijanis are a Turkic ethnic group of mixed heritage, speaking a language belonging to a branch of the Turkic family.
- In 2020, Turkey offered support to Azerbaijan in line with its foreign policy of expanding the interests to the former territories of the Ottoman empire.
- **Role of Russia**- Russia established small military outposts along the Armenian border and conducted a massive airstrike in Syria's Idlib region against Turkish-backed militants.
- In 2020, Russian President accepted the Azerbaijani victory and ensured that Azeri forces remai out of major Nagorno-Karabakh territories.

Where do the current peace talks stand?

- With the efforts of the Minsk Group remaining largely unsuccessful, Baku saw an opportunity to introduce its own peace proposal, which calls for the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijani territory.
- The European Union has emerged as a potential peace broker by spearheading meetings between the leaders of both countries.
- Armenian President has been facing civilian unrest and protests wanting to oust him for

agreeing to peace talks.
- Armenians are also asking Turkey, which has allied itself to Azerbaijan, to recognise the 1915 Armenian genocide.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/what-is-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-explained/article65459587.ece?homepage=true

