Unification of Cyprus

Why in news?

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Talks to end the **43-year-old political deadlock** on Cyprus broke down, as Turkish and Greek cypriot negotiators failed to reach compromises over the security of the island.

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What is the history of the dispute?

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- The British formally annexed Cyprus in 1914.
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- In the 1950s, Greek Cypriots engaged in a guerrilla war against the British, calling for unification with Greece.
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- In 1960, British granted independence to the island, instituting a power-sharing arrangement between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.
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- In 1974, Greece's military junta government backed a coup against Cyprus's president, with Athens demanding a greater say in Cypriot affairs and pushing for union with the island.
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- In response to the coup, Turkey launched a military invasion, occupying the northern third.
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- Greek Cypriots were forced to flee from the north to the south, while Turkish Cypriots fled in the opposite direction.
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- In 1983 the northern part of the island was declared as the breakaway state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus but the only country to recognise it was Turkey.
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What’s happening now?

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- The objective is a federation of two states, one largely Greek-speaking and the other mostly Turkish-speaking.
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- The two regions would be largely autonomous, but there would be one head of state.
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- The talks are being facilitated by the United Nations. It said reaching an argument would be hard but not impossible.
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- The potential for reconciliation also have been boosted by **Turkey’s bid to join the EU,** which was then high on the agenda in Brussels.
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- But, more than a decade later, a reunion seems to be as elusive as ever.
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What are the main obstacles?

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- **Land and property** are two of the main sticking points.
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- Whether Turkish Cypriots displaced from the southern part of the island should be allowed to return to their old homes, and vice versa.
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- That would mean turfing some families out of homes that they have lived in for decades.
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- It’s envisaged that the disputes could be addressed through a combination of land swaps and financial compensation.
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- The establishment of an institutional framework to **secure the interests of both ethnic groups** is another.
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- Assurances of a rotating presidency between Greek and Turkish-Cypriots in a future federal union have not soothed anxieties in the north.
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- Another challenge is **Turkey’s refusal to withdrawal of its troops**

stationed in the north.
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What are the benefits of a united Cyprus?

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- A united Cyprus would allow both parts of the island to realise their **immense tourism potential.**
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- The prospect of exploitation of **offshore gas reserves** in the Mediterranean is something the two sides could set their eyes on.
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- A successful settlement would allow **Cyprus to be more in control of its affairs,** without both the sides relying on neighbouring powers.
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Source: The Hindu

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