Asia Bibi case

Why in news?

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who was acquitted from the death sentence under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, was released from the jail.

Who is Asia Bibi?

- Asia Bibi is a peasant field worker and mother of four, in a small village outside Lahore, Pakistan.
- She is a Christian, which is a minority community in the country.
- In 2009 she was accused of blasphemy by her neighbors and jailed pending trial.
- She was sentenced to death in 2010 by a trial court.
- She always maintained her innocence.
- She has spent most of the past eight years in solitary confinement.
- She was the first woman to be sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.
- Her case is one of the most controversial in Pakistan.
- Blasphemy carries an automatic death penalty in Pakistan's legal system.
- Although the state has never executed anyone for the offence, vigilante mobs have killed at least 65 people since 1990, according to the centre for research and security studies.

What is the recent development?

- The Supreme Court of Pakistan allowed Asia Bibi's appeal and declared her innocent of the charges.
- She has been released and expected to be granted asylum in Europe.
- Her lawyer has fled Pakistan and the judges now fear for their lives.
- Pakistan faced the threat of mob violence led by the radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan party.

Why the case lead to violence in the country?

- In 2011, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was assassinated by his bodyguard for appealing on Ms. Bibi's behalf after meeting her in prison.
- Mr.Tasser called for a review of what he called the country's "Black" anti-blasphemy laws.

- After his assassination, Pakistan's only Christian Minister Shahbaz Bhatti was gunned down for suggesting the same.
- Each time there has been talk of revising the laws or freeing Ms. Bibi, mobs led by both the mainstream and fringe Islamist parties have taken to the streets.
- They bring major cities to a standstill with their violence and loot and burn the property.
- After her release, there was a violent protest preventing her from leaving the country.

What does this case highlights?

- Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws are often used maliciously.
- False accusations are made against Christians and Ahmadis, a tiny minority that reveres a modern-day prophet from India.
- In recent years, numerous minority neighborhoods and places of worship have been attacked by frenzied mobs, enraged by rumors that someone had torn or defaced a Koran.
- The case against Bibi highlighted two issues with blasphemy laws in Pakistan:

1. how allegations can be used to settle personal scores
2. Lower-court judges feel unable to acquit defendants for fear of their lives.

Is this issue bears any similarity to India's current scenario?

- Pakistan is at a point where its institutions have had to defend themselves before doing justice to minorities due to years of majoritarianism.
- India is at a stage, where its majority is seeking to bring its institutions to comply passively with majoritarian instincts.
- For instance the Sabarimala case where there is violent protest against the implementation of the verdict.
- The question is whether the people and the institutions succumb to pressure or adhere to principle.
- Each individual, regardless of birth attributed identity, is a minority of one entitled to an individual guarantee of rights protected by the Constitution.
- It is in the adherence to individual rights that the greater public good rests.
- Those who sacrifice a little man or woman's liberty for the security of the many will find neither liberty, nor security.

Source: The Hindu



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering