

Sri Lanka's Constitutional reform

Why in news?

\n\n

Sri Lankan Prime Minister has presented an interim report on the drafting of a new Constitution.

\n\n

Why a new Constitution?

\n\n

\n

- The Tamil community in Sri Lanka has long been concerned of the discrimination by the majority Sinhalese.

\n

- The TNA (Tamil National Alliance) has been demanding a federal solution to address the political aspirations of the Tamil community.

\n

- The 13th Amendment in 1987 to the 1978 Constitution was the first time when power sharing arrangements between the Centre and the Provinces were made.

\n

- This, being without total consensus, successive governments have come up with improved proposals to bring a final resolution to the issue.

\n

- The recent report is that of an all party steering committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, on formulating the Constitution in Parliament.

\n

\n\n

What are the highlights?

\n\n

\n

- The report envisages an undivided and indivisible country, with the province as the unit for **devolution of power**.

\n

- It introduces the concept of '**subsidiarity**'.

\n

- Under this, function that can be performed by the lowest tier of government should be vested in it.

\n

- The report also provides for the creation of a **second parliamentary chamber** representing the provinces.

\n

- The report commits that the controversial terms 'unitary' and 'federal' be avoided.

\n

- Instead, Sinhala and Tamil terms that suggest an undivided country be used to describe the republic.

\n

- Besides, the **electoral system** solely based on proportional representation is proposed to be changed.

\n

- A mixed method under which 60% of parliamentary members to be elected under the first-past-the-post system is to be introduced.

\n

- Complying to earlier demands, the interim report aims at **abolishing the executive presidency**.

\n

- The government has promised that the pre-eminent status given to Buddhism will remain as such; an assurance that may help overcome opposition from the majority.

\n

\n\n

What is the way forward?

\n\n

\n

- While the interim report is a significant step, there is a possibility that the whole process could be derailed by the extremists.

\n

- Demands from some opposing factions for retaining the state's unitary character and the feature of executive presidency are getting stronger.

\n

- On the other hand, the TNA had taken the unprecedented position that they would agree with the contents of the interim report.

\n

- It is for the government to ensure that the reforms are materialised, to resolve Sri Lanka's long drawn controversial issue.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

