

Sri Lanka's hill-country Tamils

Why in news?

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's took a public rally with Sri Lanka's hill-country Tamils on his two-day visit to the country.

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Who are hill-country Tamils?

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- They are Tamil people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka.
- They are partly descended from workers sent from South India to Sri Lanka in the 19th and 20th centuries to work in coffee, tea and rubber plantations.
- The other group of Tamils called Sri Lankan Tamils descended from the Tamils of the old Jaffna kingdom and reside in the east coast.

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What is their condition?

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- Most estate schools lack teachers for mathematics and science, limiting higher education and employment choices for students.
- While Sri Lanka excels in public health delivery and indicators, services in plantation areas are woefully inadequate.
- The India-funded hospital is also short-staffed, overburdened and is struggling to serve the local community.
- Several decades of neglect by the plantation companies and the state, have pushed hill-country Tamils to the margins of society.

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- It will take substantial political commitment from the government to deliver what is due to this community and bridge the gap between the hill country and the rest of the island.
- Their cabinet decided to provide seven perches of land to estate residents to address their landlessness.
- Acknowledging the estate sector as “most deprived”, the government unveiled an ambitious National Plan of Action for the Social Development of the Plantation Community (2016-2020).

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What is the significance of the visit?

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- PM’s visit to the region is the first by an Indian Prime Minister.
- The visit was a strong affirmation of the community’s economic and political significance.
- Hill-country leaders sought greater assistance in education.
- India also has offered to build 14,000 houses, a drop in the ocean of the nearly 1,60,000 homes the community needs.
- Indian assistance to a deprived region is certainly welcome but it can only supplement what Sri Lanka ought to deliver.

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Source: The Hindu

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