

Kurdish people of Turkey

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In news– The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and to the Syrian Kurdish group, the Democratic Union Party, or PYD was blamed for involvement in the recent attack in Istanbul.

The PKK and its armed movement-

- In 1978, the Marxist revolutionary Abdullah Öcalan formed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê or PKK in Kurdish) with the aim of **setting up an independent Kurdistan**.
- PKK guerrillas fought the Turkish army from 1984 until Öcalan's capture in 1999, during which some 40,000 Kurdish civilians were killed.
- PKK's primary targets include police, military, economic, and social assets in Türkiye. PKK also attacks civilians and diplomatic and consular facilities. PKK is also involved in extortion, arms smuggling, and drug trafficking.

The Kurdish people-

- The **Kurds are a major ethnic group who live in the mountainous geo-cultural region known as Kurdistan**, which extends from southeastern Turkey in the west to northwestern Iran in the east, and from northern Iraq and northern Syria in the south to Armenia in the north.
- Sizable populations of **Kurds live in the highlands of southern and eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, northwestern Iran, and in parts of south Armenia**.
- But the Kurdish people are a minority in the populations of each of these countries taken as a whole. **Small communities of Kurds live in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, and eastern Iran as well**.
- While the Kurds are an ancient people – Kurdish

nationalists claim a history that goes back 2,500 years – they became identifiable as a distinct community in the 7th century, when most tribes in the area adopted Islam.

- **The majority today are Sunni Muslim**, with a minority following Sufism and other mystical practices.
- **The Kurds speak a language that is related to Persian and Pashto**, although local dialects differ.
- **Kurmanji, which most Kurds in Turkey speak, uses the Latin script; the other widely spoken Kurdish dialect, Sorani**, is written in the Arabic script.
- Kurds have long had a reputation for being fearless fighters, and they have served as mercenaries in many armies over the centuries.
- The mediaeval warrior Saladin, founder of the Ayyubid dynasty that replaced the Fatimids in Egypt and ruled over large parts of the Middle East in the 12th and 13th centuries, was of Kurdish ethnicity.

The Kurds' long struggle for a homeland-

- The Kurds are often **described as the world's largest stateless ethnic group**.
- The total Kurdish population across the countries in the region is estimated at between 25 million and 35 million – which is broadly comparable to the populations of Indian states like Assam, Jharkhand, Kerala, and Telangana, and of countries like Canada and Australia.
- But their numbers, and their distinct cultural and ethnic identity notwithstanding, the Kurdish people have never had their independent national homeland.
- **At the Versailles peace conference after World War I, the Kurdish Ottoman diplomat Mehmet Sherif Pasha proposed borders of a new Kurdistan** that covered parts of modern Turkey, Iraq, and Iran; however, the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which partitioned the old Ottoman dominions, marked out a much smaller territory, entirely

in what is now Turkey.

- But Turkey negotiated with the Allied powers and, in 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne overtook Sèvres and ended the idea of a self-governing Kurdistan.
- Over the decades that followed, the Kurds made repeated attempts at establishing a de facto Kurdistan with defined national borders – and in the process attracted massive Turkish repression, including bans on the Kurdish language, names, songs, and dress.
- In Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the infamous military commander Ali Hassan Abd al-Majid al-Tikriti, known as **Chemical Ali**, attacked them with chemical weapons.
- In Iran, Kurdish uprisings in the 1980s and 1990s were ruthlessly crushed.