

Tussle over Belagavi

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Manifest pedagogy: In light of the new theme of cooperative and competitive federalism some of the old conflicts and tussles between the states WRT water and border disputes should be resolved. But some of these disputes have eluded resolution for decades. They need visionary leadership and good understanding among the states to resolve these disputes. Of these, the current article deals with the issue of Belagavi.

In news: Maharashtra has raked up the Belagavi border issue once again

Placing it in syllabus: Inter state boundary disputes

Static dimensions: History of the tussle

Current dimensions: Commission setup and report

Content:

History of the tussle:

- With the implementation of the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, Maharashtra demanded readjustment of its border with Karnataka.
- In 1957, it invoked **Section 21(2)(b) of the Act** and submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Home Affairs stating its objection to Marathi-speaking areas being added to Karnataka.
- An **area of 2,806 square miles** that involved **814 villages, and three urban settlements of Belagavi, Karwar and Nipani** with a total population of about 6.7 lakh were claimed by it.
- These areas **were part of the Bombay Presidency before**

independence.

- **At present,** the villages are **spread across Belagavi and Uttar Kannada in north-western Karnataka, and Bidar and Gulbarga districts in north-eastern Karnataka** with all sharing border with Maharashtra.
- It claimed to seek the **readjustment of its border on the basis of contiguity, relative linguistic majority and wishes of the people.**
- It also laid its **claim over Karwar and Supa** where Konkani is spoken by citing Konkani as a dialect of Marathi.
- Maharashtra has also pointed out that the revenue records in these Marathi-speaking areas are also kept in Marathi.
- However, **Karnataka has argued that the settlement of boundaries as per the States Reorganisation Act is final** (States Reorganisation Commission vested Belagavi with Karnataka) and the issue would reopen border issues that have not been contemplated under the Act.
- Karnataka also points out that when Congress redrew its circles on linguistic basis in 1920, included Belagavi in the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee.
- The **Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES)** was launched in 1948, spearheading the movement in Karnataka.
- Since the formation of the Karnataka State on November 1, 1956, MES has observed the foundation day as a **“Black Day”**.
- **In 1960, both states agreed to set up a four-man committee** with two representatives from each State.
- Maharashtra expressed willingness to transfer predominantly Kannada-speaking 260 villages with a population of about 3.25 lakh in lieu of accepting its demand for 814 villages and three urban settlements.
- However the proposal was turned down by Karnataka and respective representatives submitted reports to their government.
- Though between the 1960s and 1980s, chief ministers of

Karnataka and Maharashtra have met several times, no solution has been arrived at yet.

- The **agrarian politics along the Krishna river bank in Belagavi** has also put the merger issue on the backburner.
- To reiterate its stand on the border issue, **Karnataka has declared Belagavi its second capital, holds its winter session at the newly constructed Vidhana Soudha**, changed the name of Belgaum to Belagavi and also has held the **World Kannada Summit** there.

Mahajan Commission and report:

- In **1966**, the Centre set up a **one-man commission** under former CJI of India **Mehar Chand Mahajan** to look into border issues between Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- The commission was also asked to look into **Karnataka's demand for integration of Kannada-speaking areas in Kasargod, Kerala**.
- While Maharashtra reiterated its demand, Karnataka sought areas in Kolhapur, Solapur and Sangli districts from Maharashtra.
- The commission **submitted its report to the Union government in 1967** and was placed in the Parliament in 1972.

Report:

- The Mahajan commission used the **1961 census**.
- According to maps of 1961 census, **Belgaum was surrounded by Kannada speaking areas on all sides**.
- Hence the commission said that its decisions on border dispute is not related with the number of Marathi schools and students in Belgaum.
- It **recommended Belgaum to continue in Karnataka**.
- Around 247 villages/places including Jatta, Akkalakot, Sholapur to be part of Karnataka.
- Around 264 villages/places including Nandagad, Nippani

Khanapur to be part of Maharashtra.

- **Kasaragod (of Kerala) to be part of Karnataka.**
- **Maharashtra rejected the report** as inconsistent and unfair. **Kerala refused to hand over Kasaragod** to Karnataka. The **Karnataka government continued to press for the implementation of the report** or maintaining the status quo.
- On 15 March 2006, the Maharashtra government filed a petition in the Supreme Court. under **Article 131(b)** of the Constitution. With one of the judges recusing, the court has to set up a new bench.