Syllabus subtopic: India and its neighbourhood-relations

News: Sri Lanka People’s Front party presidential election candidate and former wartime defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa is all set to become president of the island nation after his main rival conceded defeat on Sunday.

Prelims and Mains focus: India-Sri Lanka relations,

Context:

- Gotabaya’s election heralds the return of the family which oversaw the elimination of the dreaded Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) separatist group in 2009 into the political mainstream in Sri Lanka.
- One of Gotabaya’s pre-poll promises was to bring back his brother—former president Mahinda Rajapaksa—as his prime minister to ensure a firm pair of hands at the helm of security affairs given that the polls followed deadly bombings by Islamist militants in April that threw the country with a population of 22 million into turmoil. Ironically, the attacks, blamed on Islamic State terrorists came exactly a decade after the elimination of the LTTE in May 2009.
- Most Sri Lankans are Sinhalese Buddhists with Muslims and Christians making up the religious minority.

Way ahead:

- With the return of the Rajapaksa, New Delhi will be keeping a close eye on ties between Colombo and Beijing.
- India has been wary of increased Chinese influence in Sri Lanka during the years the Rajapaksa were in power.
- India has also been worried about Colombo signing up for China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. With the Rajapaksas back in power, New Delhi would be worried about an increase in Chinese investments in the island nation that will grow Beijing’s sway over a country that is seen as lying within India’s sphere of influence.