Afghanistan Presidential Election - Ashraf Ghani

Why in news?

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani appeared to have won a second term as per the preliminary election result.

What is the procedure?

- President Ashraf Ghani has won 50.64% of the votes counted.
- If ratified, this will obviate the need for a second round of polling.
- A second round, after a gap, would prolong the uncertainty around the polls.
- Notably, even these results took more than three months to announce.
- A prolonged election process will do little to end political instability in Afghanistan.

What is the significance?

- The current elections are the fourth Presidential poll since the Taliban's fall in 2001.
- It consolidates the country's democratic process in the face of odds, including continuing violence and terrorism there.
- It is a great success that these polls were held, having been delayed for months.
- It was almost cancelled after progress in reconciliation talks with Taliban leaders, who do not recognise the electoral process.
- The U.S.'s decision to cancel the talks, which is now resumed, gave the necessary breather for the polls and counting to be carried out.

What are the concerns?

- Voter turnout was a record low, with only about a quarter of 9.6 million registered voters voting.
- Thousands of votes were also disqualified after biometric match failures and other irregularities, setting off allegations of voter fraud.
- As a result, Afghanistan's former Chief Executive Officer and Mr. Ghani's chief rival, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, has rejected the preliminary results.
- Mr. Ghani's vote margin over Mr. Abdullah is only around 2,14,000.
- If more votes are disqualified during the review process, then they may have to fight the second round.

- This will possibly be more divisive for Afghanistan.
- [Mr. Ghani, a Pashtun leader, has drawn much of his support from the Pashtun-majority south.
- On the other hand, Mr. Abdullah has won mainly in the Northern areas with Tajik presence.]
- The U.S.-Taliban talks also cast a shadow over whether the results will be respected if the Taliban negotiates its way into a power-sharing arrangement in Kabul.

How have nations reacted to this?

- Indian PM Modi congratulated Mr Ghani for winning the elections.
- He reaffirmed India's close and strategic partnership with Afghanistan since 2010.
- The move came in sharp contrast to the rest of world that has chosen to be more cautious at present.
- The U.S. Ambassador has reminded all that "many steps remain" before the final results are certified and declared.
- The UN has also called for all candidates to "safeguard and complete the election".
- It will be in everyone's interests if the remaining steps of the electoral process are completed at the earliest, and democracy is reaffirmed in Afghanistan.

Source: The Hindu

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