Belarus Elections

Why in news?

The results of the Presidential Election of Belarus are being contested.

What is the problem with the results?

- The Election Commission of Belarus announced that the long-term President Alexander Lukashenko was the winner of the recent election.
- His main rival, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, rejected the results and called for a recount.
- This was the hardest fought election in Belarus, a former Soviet republic, since the USSR's disintegration.

What is the response?

- Protests broke out in the capital, Minsk.
- This was met with a violent security crackdown.
- Then, as the country was slipping into chaos and anarchy, Ms. Tikhanovskaya fled to neighbouring Lithuania.
- But her campaign committee has said that it would continue to support the protests against the election fraud.

Why are there protests?

- There has been widespread anger against the government over a stagnant economy.
- Mr. Lukashenko had cracked down on the Opposition even before the election.
- Sergei Tikhanovsky, husband of Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, was to contest the elections against Mr. Lukashenko.
- But he was barred from contesting for allegedly inciting unrest.
- Only after this, Ms. Tikhanovskaya entered the race.
- Throughout the campaign, the Opposition accused the government of intimidation, cracking down on journalists and activists, and prohibiting independent observers.
- All these raised doubts about the fairness of the election, which led to protests.

What would be the impact of the protests?

- This is a time of growing economic troubles.
- If the protests questioning the legitimacy of Mr. Lukashenko's presidency continue, it could substantially weaken him.
- The crisis has already derailed his plans for a strategic realignment in Eastern Europe.
- In recent years, Belarus, a geopolitical ally of Russia, has shown a willingness to work closer with the West.
- He wants to raise his country's strategic profile at a time when there is a contest for influence in Eastern Europe between Russia and USA.
- But many western countries have condemned the handling of the election and the protests, and called for a peaceful settlement.

What did Russia do?

- Russia immediately sensed an opportunity to cement ties with Belarus.
- This is because Belarus is an important transit route of Russian gas to Europe as well as a buffer between Russia and European powers.
- Mr. Lukashenko has nowhere to turn to other than Russia.

What could be done?

- Mr. Lukashenko could ensure the formation of a legitimate government that could address the country's vital problems.
- He has to reach out to the Opposition and offer talks to find a peaceful settlement to the crisis.

Source: The Hindu

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