Bolivian Crisis - Evo Morales' Exit

Why in news?

The Bolivian senator Jeanine Anez has declared herself the country's interim president after the resignation of Bolivian President Evo Morales.

Who is Mr. Morales?

- Mr. Morales is Bolivia's first indigenous President.
- He came to power in 2006, riding South America's so-called "pink tide".
- He rose to the top office through left-wing unionism.
- He presided over one of the most stable governments.
- But, cracks began to appear in his Movement for Socialism party when he sought a fourth consecutive term earlier in 2019.

How had Morales' Bolivia been?

- On coming to power, Morales promised economic development and equitable wealth distribution.
- Under his fairly good track record, Bolivia has seen a drop in extreme poverty, from 33% of the population in 2006 to 15% in 2018.
- His government also stepped up public investments, opened more schools and health clinics.
- The economy has also seen a steady growth rate.
- Mr. Morales made some major political mistakes as well.

What were the contentions during his term?

- Primarily, Morales failed to bring up a second-rung leadership in the Movement for Socialism to whom he could pass the baton of his "21st century socialist revolution".
- In 2016, his push to end presidential term limits through a referendum failed.
- He then said he accepted the verdict.
- But later, a constitutional court lifted the presidential term limits, allowing the President to seek re-election.
- This had got to be a concern to the Opposition, which claimed that the President's electoral participation itself was unconstitutional.
- This was followed by allegations of electoral fraud, which further weakened

his stature.

What led to Morales's resignation?

- Pressure had been growing on Mr Morales since his narrow victory in the October 2019 presidential election.
- The result was called into question by the Organization of American States, a regional body.
- It had found "clear manipulation" and called for the election result to be annulled.
- The Opposition contested the results and launched widespread protests, demanding a fresh election.
- In response, Mr Morales agreed to hold fresh elections.
- But his main rival, Carlos Mesa, who came second in the vote, said Mr Morales should not stand in any new vote.
- The chief of the armed forces, Gen Williams Kaliman, then urged Mr Morales to step down in the interests of peace and stability.
- Mr Morales then announced his resignation.
- He had taken the decision in order to stop fellow socialist leaders from being "harassed, persecuted and threatened".
- He also called his removal a "coup".
- He has flown into exile in Mexico.
- In asylum in Mexico, he has vowed to fight the "coup".

What are the concerns with power transition?

- The forced resignation of Evo Morales has thrown the poorest country in South America into its biggest political crisis in 13 years.
- Both Morales and his opponents failed to ensure a peaceful, orderly transition.
- Violent protesters insisted on Mr. Morales's resignation. The police forces rebelled against the government. The Military generals forced the President to step down.
- All these destroyed the possibility of a peaceful transition.
- According to the Bolivian Constitution, if the President steps down, the Vice-President should take over.
- The heads of the Senate and chamber of deputies are the other leaders in the hierarchy who could assume acting presidency.
- But in the present case, all four officials, all Socialists, have resigned.
- This had left a vacuum, which the military could exploit.
- In this backdrop, Anez has declared herself the president without having a quorum in the parliament.
- More violence could be awaiting the country.

Source: The Hindu, BBC

