Israel's New Unity Government - Challenges

Why in news?

Israel's longest-serving PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, was sworn in along with his rival-turned-partner, the Blue and White party leader, Benny Gantz.

What happened?

- No single party in Israel has ever won an outright majority in parliament.
- Mr. Netanyahu failed to get enough seats in Parliament with consecutive elections.
- The rival factions were unable to strike a deal and assemble a ruling coalition.
- However, the rival factions recently ended a deadlock by joining hands.
- This happened after three consecutive snap elections and more than a year-long political impasse between the rival factions.
- As per the deal brokered, Mr. Netanyahu will serve as Prime Minister for the first 18 months.
- He will hand over the role to his erstwhile opponent Gantz for the remainder of the three-year term.
- Until then, Gantz will serve as the Defense Minister.

What was the rival party's stance?

- Netanyahu’s Likud party is right-wing.
- On the other hand, Benny Gantz represents the centre-left of the country, and leader of the Blue and White party.
- Also a former Army Chief of Staff, Gantz entered politics with the sole mission to oust the Likud party head from office.
- The two political stances are very different from each other.
- Benny Gantz proposed legislation to set term limits for the premier.
- In his election campaigns and during difficult coalition negotiations, Mr. Gantz was firm that he would never work under a PM who faced criminal charges.
- He was even ready to join a unity government with Likud, provided that Mr. Netanyahu stepped aside.
- Ironically, the judicial trial into Mr. Netanyahu’s indictment for corruption, bribery and breach of trust is yet to begin.

- The courts are also hearing challenges to his choice as PM, as Mr. Netanyahu could influence the nomination of judges and the prosecutor.

What are the contentions?

- The coalition partners differ on the extent of judicial authority and the role of ultraorthodox groups in the military.
- Gantz believes in protecting the independence of courts.
- In contrast, Netanyahu is accused of curbing judicial freedom under the garb of making judicial reforms.
- [The new government will also have to witness the corruption trial against Netanyahu.]
- Benny Gantz believes the annexation of occupied Palestinian lands should be carried out with an international consent.
- On the other hand, Netanyahu only believes it necessary to cooperate with the US.

What are the tasks ahead?

- Israel's new unity government has ended a protracted political deadlock, but challenges remain.
- The government is likely to oversee worsening tensions with the Palestinians.
- This is because annexation of Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank is high on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's agenda.
- Mr. Netanyahu, Israel's longest serving leader who just began his fourth consecutive term, has already initiated discussions on this plan.
- A criticism against Gantz by his own centre-left supporters is his failure to secure a veto on the annexation of the settlements on the West Bank in the coalition agreement.
- Gantz is an advocate of a united Jerusalem and not a vocal supporter of a two-state solution.
- So, it is doubtful if Mr. Gantz would block Mr. Netanyahu's annexation bid.
- But any move to annex West Bank territories, which the Palestinians see as part of their future state, could worsen an already fragile situation.
- The 18 months aspect in the deal is a potential grey area.
- This is given the uncertainty that would arise for the coalition from a judicial verdict against Mr. Netanyahu.
- In all, the months ahead will test the real strength of the unity government.

Source: The Hindu



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