Political crisis in Venezuela

Why in news?

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Recently, Juan Guaidó declared himself as the interim president of Venezuela, challenged the leadership of President Nicolás Maduro.

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What are the reasons behind the crisis?

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- Maduro assumed the presidency of Venezuela following the death of his mentor, Hugo Chávez, in 2013.
- Ever since, he has seen the economic fortunes of the oil-rich nation slide further.
- There was corruption and mismanagement, intense centralisation of power and a severe clampdown on dissent.
- When oil prices started falling from its 2014 highs, it badly hit Venezuela that was over-reliant on petroleum exports.
- The country was also borrowing heavily to fund its over-spending on social welfare programmes.
- However, Mr. Maduro's government was clueless when the economy started collapsing.
- At least 90% of the people now live below the poverty line, inflation is forecast (by IMF) to touch 10 million per cent (hyperinflation) this year and the food and medicine shortages are widespread in the country.
- The economic woes have also triggered a massive migrant crisis, with nearly three million are estimated to have fled the country in recent years. (United Nations migration agency)

- After the attempted overthrow by the opposition in 2017, the Venezuelan government tried to deepen public participation by the formation of a Constituent Assembly.
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- But this was being regarded as anti-democratic by the opposition.
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- In May 2018, Maduro won a re-election in the midst of economic and humanitarian crises that have increasingly buffeted the country.
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- The elections were held despite main opposition boycotted last year's presidential election.
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- Hence, Mr. Guaidó claimed that election was not free and fair and therefore Mr. Maduro is not the legitimate President — a claim that the U.S. and its allies back.
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What is the consequence?

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- It is against this fraught political backdrop that Guaidó, a staunch critic of Maduro and Chavez, was elected president of the National Assembly this month.
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- Guaidó, as the new head of the National Assembly, declared himself "acting President", challenging the authority of President Nicolás Maduro.
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- The US was the first to recognise Guaidó as president minutes after his declaration.
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- A slew of Latin American nations with conservative regimes have also supported Guaidó, including Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Costa Rica.
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- On the opposite side, Russia, China, Iran, Syria and Cuba supports the incumbent regime.
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- Following the U.S. move, Mr. Maduro cut diplomatic ties with the U.S. and ordered American diplomats to leave in 72 hours.
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What should be done?

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- While Mr. Maduro shares a lot of the blame for the mismanagement of the economy, forcibly removing him from power with support from foreign nations may destabilise the country further.
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- U.S. officials called upon the military of Venezuela to rise up against the government of President Nicolás Maduro.
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- This was against the charters of the United Nations and of the Organisation of American States (OAS).
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- But that plan appears to have failed with the military declaring its loyalty to President Maduro.
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- Mr. Maduro had invited the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Venezuela.
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- He also wanted the UN to host a dialogue with the Opposition to restore some balance to the politics in the country.
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- Thus, the people of Venezuela deserve a better deal from a government that has led them to untold suffering and forced millions to flee the country.
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- However, Destabilisation by interfering in the political process is not the solution.
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- A coordinated international effort is required to restore some degree of economic and political normalcy.
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- On its part, the US must be careful, since back then in 2002, a failed coup in Venezuela was traced to senior officials in the then US government.
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- Given the volatility of Venezuela right now and its checkered past, the US must act with responsibility.
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Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

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