

Singapore Election Results - Place for Opposition

Why in news?

The incumbent People's Action Party (PAP) led by prime minister Lee Hsien Loong won the 13th general elections in Singapore.

Why is it significant?

- The Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) has been the face of Singapore's managed democracy since 1965.
- The PAP won a super majority with 61% of the vote.
- This translates into 83 seats out of 93 contested.
- However, this is way below the 69.9% vote it obtained in 2015.
- [The 2015 election was held during the commemoration of 50 years of Singapore's independence.
- It also took place in the aftermath of the death of the country's founder and first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister Lee's father.]
- The PAP's victory with a 'reduced majority' this time has led to questions on how it could reinvent itself.
- Another dilemma for Mr. Lee is the slight margin of victory for the country's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.
- He is notably set to succeed as Premier in 2022.

What does this imply?

- The elections were called months ahead of the schedule.
- Also, the COVID-19 restrictions denied the Opposition even the normal channels of outreach during the 9-day campaign period.
- So, the ruling PAP's poor showing in the elections is all the more significant.
- Mr. Lee has described the reduced majority as a reflection of the desire of younger voters for greater diversity of voices in Parliament.

What is the decision made?

- Crucially, Mr. Lee has acknowledged the real meaning of the PAP's reduced majority.
- Acknowledging this, he has announced that Workers' Party (WP) chief, Pritam Singh, would be formally recognised as the leader of the Opposition.

- This is an unprecedented development in Singapore's unicameral legislature.
- The 10 seats the WP has won, up from six in 2015, is the highest ever by an Opposition party.
- These are gains in what is in effect a one-party state.
- [The Workers Party opposition won its first parliamentary seat in 1981, 16 years after Singapore's separation from Malaysia.]

How does the future look?

- Mr. Lee has to fix an economy that is in recession, and continue to fight the coronavirus outbreak.
- Besides this, he has to adapt himself to the political changes.
- Visibly, there is a gradual democratisation of the polity in Singapore.
- Its customary method of settling the leadership question behind closed doors would sooner rather than later become a subject of public debate.
- That is a sign of an evolving society.
- Besides the benefits of economic affluence, citizens recognise the value of greater political participation for its own sake.
- They come to regard a respect for dissenting opinion as a necessary factor.
- It is now for the Singapore's political leadership to read the election mandate correctly and fast-track the democratisation process.
- The reduced majority is thus an opportunity for Singapore's ruling party to initiate reforms.

Source: The Hindu