South Korea General Elections - President Moon Jae-in's Victory

Why in news?

President Moon Jae-in's Democratic Party (DP) of Korea won a big mandate in South Korea's 21st General Election.

Why is this victory notable?

- The results marked a substantial change in public sentiments from the last year.
- South Korea witnessed 3 years of slow economic growth.
- In 2019, protests broke out amid a slowing economy and corruption allegations.
- President Moon Jae-in's diplomatic efforts with North Korea also made no big changes.
- Given these, Moon's popularity had fallen in early 2020.
- He was expected to follow the same trend as previous Korean presidents, lapsing into lame duck status in the final 2 years of presidency.
- But the coronavirus changed everything.
- South Korea under Moon's Presidentship, took up aggressive test and trace measures, widespread monitoring, and strict quarantine measures.
- It flattened the curve faster than almost any other country.
- As a result, Moon's popularity rose above 50% before the election.
- Despite the health-care crisis, he decided to go ahead with the poll, with stringent precautionary measures in place.
- Now, the Democrats have won more seats than even the most audacious analysts predicted.
- President Moon Jae-in is into the third year of his five-year presidency.
- With more parliamentary seats, he can now follow his reform agenda and North Korean rapprochement without legislative bottlenecks.

What are the tasks before Moon now?

- The ruling party's win is a chance for President Moon to expedite peace efforts.
- The desire for normalcy with North Korea is evident among other things.
- There is a growing impatience to end the disruption of business activity

across the border.
- Since the thaw in ties between the neighbours began in 2018, Mr. Moon and North's leader Kim Jong-un have also met on the Demilitarised Zone.
- A foremost priority for Moon would be to consider the implications of his initiatives towards North, given South's military alliance with the U.S.

What are the challenges in this regard?

- Seoul (South) and Washington have suspended their annual military exercises in South Korea.
- But besides this, they have been unable to agree on more substantial measures to ease tensions with the North.
- There is the more recent international demand for the Korean Peninsula's denuclearisation.
- So the formal declaration of an end to the Korean war of the 1950s, where the U.S. was involved, would be dependent on the above demand.
- But progress on the North's nuclear stand-off has been stalled ever since the Trump-Kim Hanoi summit, in February 2019, broke down.
- Their meeting, in Singapore in June 2018, resulted in no more than vague promises to end the long deadlock.
- Pyongyang (North) insists on ending the crippling economic sanctions as a precondition for any meaningful reduction of nuclear testing in future.
- Washington has, on the other hand, been demanding access to the North's nuclear sites in exchange for a relaxation of sanctions.

What are the future prospects?

- Mr. Trump, himself facing re-election in November 2020 and focused on combating the pandemic, is unlikely to renew attention to this dispute.
- However, paradoxically, there is a collective desire among nations to confront the unfolding health emergency.
- This could open avenues of cooperation, even defying the ordinary operation of realpolitik.
- This offers some hope, and Mr. Moon must make the most of the situation.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering