Cuba without the Castros

What is the issue?

- ‘Raul Castro’ recently initiated a power transition in Cuba on his own volition by anointing ‘Miguel Díaz-Canel’ as his successor and getting him elected.
- This is very significant as it marks a calculated break from the Castors, who’ve been at the helm for about 6 decades now.

Who have ruled Cuba thus far?

- The 1959 revolution saw Fidel Castro led communist rebels take over the Cuban administration from the pro-U.S. Batista regime.
- Since then, Fidel held on to the helm for 49 years till 2008, when he retired due to health reasons after anointing his brother Raul Castro as his successor.
- Notably, Cuba is a single party state and elections for political positions are held from within its party members.
- Raul Castro recently completed his 2nd five year term as President and had anointed ‘Miguel Díaz-Canel’ as his successor.
- Notably, Raul made it clear as early as 2011 that he would relinquish power after the 2nd term and ensure a smooth transition.
- He also started grooming his successor early into his 2nd term and has now got him elected to the top within the National Assembly.
- Hence, Mr.Miguel, an engineer who rose through the ranks of the Communist Party has now assumed charge, in what is seen as a historic power transition.
What are the challenges?

- **Transition** - For any state born in revolution, 1st transfer of power to a new generation is always politically risky.

- Mr. Miguel now faces the tough task of balancing the interests of the ideologically rooted older revolutionary comrades who still dominate the Communist Party.

- But Raul will continue till 2021 as the First Secretary of the Communist party - the main body that formulates major national policies.

- Hence, while the transition at the helm is indeed significant, it is not expected to unleash any instability as Raul would continue to wield considerable power.

- **Economy** - Cuban economy presents its own set of challenges, and abolition of the troublesome “Duel currency system” is the immediate challenge.

- Also, resorting to IMF or WB for assistance is not an option for Cuba as its revolution was rooted in antipathy against these institutions.

- Raul had earlier began a slow and tricky market reforms by easing restrictions on private enterprise, and now this will have to be furthered cautiously.

- If markets are liberalised too fast, it would alienate the ‘Old Guard’ and if too slow, growth will take a beating and regime critics will become more vocal.

- **Political Freedom** - A growing cohort of critics against the regime is another major challenge to deal with in the internet era.

- Notably, Mr. Miguel supported a recent counter offensive launched by hardliner communists, vilifying critical bloggers – which has worried liberals.

- Censorship is another stress point that Raul had sought to delicately address during his rule by a policy of “slow continued incremental liberalisation”.

- But Raul had enjoyed undisputed influence over the Communist Party to
make these bold moves, which his successor might find hard to emulate.

- **US relations** - The Obama regime build a positive relation with Cuba and even established diplomatic ties for the 1st time, but Trump has reversed all.

- Additionally, the Trump administration has largely outsourced Cuba policy to the conservative anti-Castro Cuban-Americans in the Congress.

- Trump has also downsized the U.S. embassy in Cuba as strange incidence of unexplained sickness was reported by diplomats.

---

**How is the public reception?**

- A considerable chunk of the younger masses look optimistic with a new leadership at the helm and excited about the power transition.

- But as Castros had held sway for as long as most Cubans could remember, there is anxiety on whether newer leadership wound mean instability.

- Nevertheless, Mr. Miguel represents a younger and aspiring generation that is looking forward to strong economic progress and political freedom.

- He could ensure that by co-opting all stakeholders, political stability get entrenched despite the reforms.

---

**Source: The Hindu, The Wire**