



Sanctions Imposed Against Belarus

Why in News

The **UK, the US and Canada** have issued **fresh trade, financial and aviation sanctions on Belarus**, in a bid to increase pressure on the country's leader Alexander Lukashenko.



Key Points

- **Background:**
 - **Europe's longest-serving ruler**, President of Belarus (**Lukashenko**) took office in **1994** amid the chaos caused by the **collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991**.
 - Often described as **Europe's "last dictator"**, he has tried to **preserve elements of Soviet communism**.
 - He has been in power for 26 years, keeping much of the economy in state hands, and using censorship and police crackdowns against opponents.
 - In **2020**, after **Lukashenko was announced as the winner in elections**, protests broke out in the capital, Minsk which were met with a violent security crackdown.

- There has been **widespread anger against the government** over a **stagnant economy** and doubts about the fairness of the election.

▪ **Sanctions' Targets:**

- The idea is to **focus on the regime and Lukashenko's associates** as precisely as possible and **discourage Western companies from doing business with Belarus**.
- The latest sanctions **restrict exports of surveillance and military technology** to Belarus.
- The sanctions partially **ban imports of potash fertilizer, petrol and petrol-based products** from Belarus.
- In the cases of the **EU, U.K. and Canada**, the **embargo also restricts financial trade** such as buying state debt and insuring or reinsuring state-related entities.
- The EU and US have **sanctioned Belarus' tobacco industry**, which contributes to the lucrative cigarette smuggling trade.

- More than 90% of cigarettes smuggled into Lithuania came from Belarus in 2019.

- Western countries also **blacklisted some Belarusian citizens**.

▪ **Impacts:**

- **Targeting Belarus' potash sector** was a strategic move insofar as the country is the **second largest exporter of the fertilizer** behind Canada, covering 21% of the world's potash exports in 2019.

- But, sanctions cover **only 15% of all potash exports** to the EU.

- Also, **Russia represents 49.2%** of all Belarusian trade and **Belarus can export its sanctioned goods across the Russian border** for re-export from there.
- The impact of restrictions on dual-use goods, monitoring and interception goods and technology, and goods used in cigarette manufacturing would be negligible.

▪ **Opportunity for Russia:**

- Since, Russian President Putin has tense relations with Lukashenko, and the sanctions are an **opportunity for Russia to impose its own conditions** on Lukashenko's survival in control of a crumbling state, which Russia has financially supported for decades.

▪ **Belarus' Stand:**

- **Accused the U.K., US and Canada of ignoring the will of the Belarusian people** and employing the "entire arsenal of **'cold war'** methods" in pursuit of regime change.

Way Forward

- The **President of Belarus** should **ensure the formation of a legitimate government** that could address the country's vital problems.
- He has to **reach out to the Opposition** and **offer talks to find a peaceful settlement to the crisis**.

Source: IE