Referendum in Russia

Why in news?

Russians are voting on a constitutional referendum proposed by President Vladimir Putin.

What is a referendum?

- Referendum is an electoral device of direct democracy.
- By referendum, voters may express their wishes with regard to government policy or proposed legislation.

What is this vote about?

- In his address to the Russian Federal Assembly, Putin proposed substantial amendments to Russia's constitution.
- For these amendments, he suggested holding a nation-wide constitutional referendum.

What are the proposed amendments?

- The proposed amendments would allow Putin to occupy the highest office in the country post 2024, when his term is set to expire, till 2036.
- They would allow the President to appoint the heads of law enforcement agencies in Russia in consultation with the Federation Council.
- The upper house of Russia's Parliament would be able to propose the dismissal of federal judges.
- In specific cases, the Federation Council can remove the judges of the Constitutional and Supreme courts following the proposals by President.
- A presidential candidate would have to have lived in Russia for at least 25 years and cannot ever have held foreign citizenship or residency.
- Other proposed amendments include provisions for the Russian constitution to take over international law.

What do critics say?

- **Criticism** - The critics say that Putin thinks that these amendments may clear the obstacles for his rule over Russia beyond 2024.
- However, they say that the process may not be straightforward.

- Putin has indicated that he has no plans of staying in office beyond his term.
- **Indications** - The proposals have already been accepted in both houses in Russia's parliament.
- Legally no referendum is required to enforce these amendments to the Russia's Constitution.
- However, Putin is conducting a referendum.
- Observers do not believe that Putin will face challenges in the passing of these amendments.
- These moves indicate that Putin plans to exert influence over the government after his tenure, but from the sidelines.

How has Covid-19 impacted this referendum?

- Due to surging cases of coronavirus infections, this referendum was postponed initially.
- Russia has some of the highest cases of coronavirus infections in the world, after countries like the US, the UK and Brazil.
- Critics believe that holding a nation-wide referendum during a pandemic would unnecessarily put the lives of people at risk.

Source: The Indian Express

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