Simultaneous Election (One Nation, One Election)

Why in news?

The Central government set up a panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to explore the feasibility of the 'one nation, one election' (ONOE) plan.

What is simultaneous election?

> *Article 324 constitutes Election Commission which is responsible for conducting polls to the offices of the President and Vice-President of India, Parliament, the state assemblies and the legislative councils.*

- Simultaneous Elections refers to structuring the Indian election cycle by synchronizing the elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- It means that the voters will cast their vote for electing members of the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies *on a single day*, at the same time or in a phased manner as the case may be.
- **Current scenario-** The elections to the state assemblies and the Lok Sabha are *held separately* (whenever the incumbent government's 5-year term ends or whenever it is dissolved).

To know more about simultaneous election click here

What is the history behind simultaneous election?

- **Single party dominance**- Lok Sabha and State Legislatures went to polls together in 1952 and 1957.
- **Article 356-** In 1959, the synchronised cycle was first broken in Kerala when the Centre invoked Article 356 of the Constitution to dismiss the Kerala Government. This was followed by state elections in 1960.
- **Emergence of regional parties**- Defections and counter-defections ultimately led to the dissolution of Assemblies, which separated the poll cycles of many states from the central one.
- **Revert to simultaneous election**-The idea of reverting to simultaneous polls was mooted by
  - Election Commission annual report in 1983
  - Parliamentary Standing committee report 2015- 'Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies'.
  - Law Commission report in 1999 and 2018
  - NITI Aayog working paper in 2017

- **Completion of tenures-** It is mainly because of the anti-defection law of 1985 and Supreme Court judgments on invoking Article 356.
- The Supreme Court had held that the President can put a State Assembly in suspended animation, but cannot dissolve it without the concurrence of Parliament.
- Further, the validity of the proclamation of President's rule may be examined by the judiciary.

Feasibility of Simultaneous Election Report 2015
Holding of simulataneous elections would reduce burden on • **Fund**-The massive expenditure that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections • **Policy paralysis**-It results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time • **Impac**t on delivery of essential services and • **Burden** on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time.

What are the advantages of simultaneous elections?

- **Reduce election expenditure-** Cost reductions for political parties, candidates and public.
- Economic costs associated with Model Code of Conduct.

A NITI Aayog paper says that the country has at least one election each year; each state has an election every year.

- **Reduce the manpower**- It prevents the duplication of efforts by administrative and law enforcement agencies in conducting multiple elections.
- **Improve governance**- The system will help ruling parties focus on governance, instead of being constantly in election mode.
- It reduces the distractions from long-term planning and policy goals.
- **Boost voter turnout**- According to the Law Commission, it increases voter participation.
- **Improve administration**- It will increase the focus of administrative machinery on nation to remain consistently focused on developmental effort.
- **Reduce policy paralysis**- This system will lead to minimised disruption of essential services.

What are the challenges in holding simultaneous election?

- **Logistical issues**- It requires around 30 lakh electronic voting machines (EVMs) and voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) machines.
- **Increased man force**- It needs immense deployment of central forces around the country
- **Lack of synchronisation**- Parliament and state elections were held simultaneously until 1967, but over the years as Assemblies and Lok Sabhas were dissolved before the end of their terms, the elections fell out of sync with each other.
    - Currently, elections to the Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and

Sikkim Houses are held along with Lok Sabha polls.

- **Opinion of CECs**- There are difference of opinion with the former Chief Election Commissioners of India.
- **Infrastructure deficit**- The Election Commission would need more time and money to manufacture more EVMs and VVPATs.
- Currently it has 13 lakh control units and 17 lakh ballot units which is not sufficient.
- **Time constraints-** It will take a year to manufacture 6-7 lakh EVMs, hence it makes the task of simultaneous polls in 2024 difficult.
- **Increased costs**- As per 2015 report, the simultaneous conduct of elections would require large scale purchase of EVMs and VVPAT.
- **Regular replacement**- The machines would also need to be replaced for every 15 years which increases the expenditure.
- **Reduced utility-** As of now ECI, delivers the cheapest election in the world with one dollar, one vote.
- If there are simultaneous polls, EVMs would be used for three elections as their life span is about 15 years.
- **Movement of forces**- The requirement of central forces to maintain law and order during the poll process may pose another challenge as states ask for central force.
- **Complexity-** It would benefit the nationally dominant party at the cost of regional players.
- **Unstable government-** Complications would arise if any of the governments were to collapse before completing its term.
- Even central government could fall, which would result in ineffective administration.

How to address the concerns?

- **Law commission report 2018**- The simultaneous elections could not be held within the existing framework of the Constitution.
- These could be held together “through appropriate amendments to the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act 1951, and the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies”.
- **States ratification**- At least 50% of the states may ratify the constitutional amendments.
- The Commission recommended that all elections due in a calendar year be conducted together.
- **No-confidence motion**- If passed, may curtail the term of Lok Sabha or an Assembly, the Law Commission recommended replacing the “no-confidence motion” with a “constructive vote of no-confidence”.
- A government may only be removed if there is a confidence in an alternative government.

What lies ahead?

- If the elections are held over a span of three-four months then simultaneous elections can be done.
- Former CEC Sunil Arora has asked the government to do the requisite amendments in the law, so that poll cycle can be brought together.

References

1. Indian Express- Government committee for simultaneous election
2. Indian Express- Challenges in holding simultaneous polls

