Simultaneous Elections

Why in news?

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Prime Minister has made a persuasive case for holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State assemblies.

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Why is it important to hold simultaneous elections?

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- Holding simultaneous elections will help **reduce cost** and also reduce diversion of both security and teaching staff towards election duty.
- The Election Commission (EC) estimates the cost of holding simultaneous polls at Rs 4,500 crore whereas **each Assembly election would cost the exchequer about Rs 300 crore.**
- Simultaneous elections to the Centre and the States were held between 1951 and 1967, after which the out-of-turn collapse of governments threw the cycle out of gear.
- Former EC officials, Supreme Court judges and the Law Commission of India, besides a recent report by an all-party Parliamentary Standing Committee, have endorsed, either wholeheartedly or with caveats, the idea of simultaneous elections.
- **A NITI Aayog paper** points out that in the last 30 years, there has not been a single year without an election to either the State assembly or the Lok Sabha or both.
- **The Model Code of Conduct** will be in operation for four months in a year till 2021 under the current election schedule, disrupting government functioning.
- Simultaneous polls may **reduce the circulation of black money** by

lowering campaign costs and the corruption involved in recovering that sum.
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- The logistical convenience and economic merit of the move is beyond dispute.
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What are the issues involved in such method?

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- **The issue is whether it undercuts federalism.**
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- An IDFC Institute study, cited by NITI Aayog, says that there is a **77% chance of the voter choosing the same party at the Centre and the State** if elections are held simultaneously, while others have suggested that regional parties are likely to suffer.
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- However, the causation between simultaneous elections and such trends is yet to be established.
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- The ability of the voter to differentiate between local and national issues should not be underestimated.
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- Questions are raised questions about **how the transition will be achieved** since it needs extending or curtailing the tenure of State governments to synchronise their cycle with that of the Centre.
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- Constitutional amendments will be required at least to allow for extending the tenure of governments, a situation that is permissible only in an emergency.
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- At present, a premature election is possible if the assembly is dissolved by imposition of President's Rule, or if the legislature opts for it.
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- If a government loses confidence on the floor of the House before elections are due (which cannot be held in the event of simultaneous polls), it should not lead to a constitutional crisis.
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- These issues should be resolved through consultation with stakeholders.
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- It is possible for about 14 States to go to the polls in May 2019 with the general election and the rest in 2021, coinciding with the mid-term of the 17th Lok Sabha, without inordinate disruption of tenures.

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Source: Business Line

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