Simultaneous Elections

Why in news?

In the recent monsoon session, the Law Ministry has talked about the potential benefits of simultaneous election.

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.
- **One nation One election-** 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).

What is the history behind simultaneous election?

- **Dissolution** Simultaneous elections were the norm *until 1967.* It was disturbed by the dissolution of
  - Some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 and
  - Lok Sabha in 1970
- **Revert to simultaneous election-**The idea of reverting to simultaneous polls was mooted by
  - Election Commission annual report in 1983
  - Law Commission report in 1999 and 2018
  - NITI Aayog working paper in 2017

Key Recommendations of Law Commission Report 2018

• The report examined legal and constitutional questions related to the conduct of simultaneous elections.
• **5 Constitutional recommendations**
1. Appropriate amendments to Constitution and Representation of People Act 195
2. To replace no confidence motion with the constructive vote of no confidence.
3. In case of hung assembly the President/ Governor should give an opportunity to the largest party along with their pre or post-poll alliance to form the government.
4. Proper amendment to Anti defection law 1985.
5. Framework to synchronise elections.

What are the advantages of simultaneous elections?

- **Reduce election expenditure-**
  - Cost reductions for political parties and candidates during their election campaigns.
  - Economic costs associated with Model Code of Conduct.
  - Cost savings for public.
  - Intangible costs due to lack of leadership as ministers focus on elections

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 issues with simultaneous elections?

- **Against federalism-** It undermines the fundamental tenet of federalism, which constitutes an integral component of our Constitutional framework.
- **Tenure -** Synchronisation would involve curtailment or extension of the tenure of a House.
- **Constitutional challenges -** The move requires amendment to the Representation of Peoples's Act 1951 and the Constitution's basic structure, posing a challenge.
- **Multiple amendments-** It requires amendment in five Articles of the Constitution, namely Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356.

- **Practical difficulties -** The Election Commission sometimes holds elections to even one state in many phases.
- Given this, holding simultaneous elections for the whole country has many practical difficulties.
- **Dissolution challenges** - It is possible for Lok Sabha to be prematurely dissolved on account of a vote of no-confidence.
    - **Example**- Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government faced dissolution within 13 days of taking power.
- It raises the question of whether new elections would be required in all 29 states, even if the ruling party holds an absolute majority in those states in case of simultaneous elections.
- **Impact on regional parties-** It will benefit the dominant national party or the incumbent at the Centre while disadvantaging the smaller regional party and issue.

What lies ahead?

- There must be a mechanism for the measures that can be taken to ensure that simultaneous polls provide equal opportunities for regional parties in comparison to national parties.
- There is a need to work on drawbacks before implementing *One Nation One Election*.

References

1. Indian Express- Debate on simultaneous elections
2. PRS- Draft report on simultaneous elections

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