

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Why in News?

THE UNION Cabinet on Wednesday accepted the recommendations of the High Level Committee on **One Nation, One Election (ONOE)**, which laid out the road map to hold simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies and, ultimately urban and rural local bodies.

The Historical background:

- During the first four general election cycles in **1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967**, the elections to the Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies were held simultaneously.
- However, due to the subsequent premature dissolution of the Lok Sabha on seven occasions and the premature dissolution of legislative assemblies on various occasions, the elections to the Lok Sabha and various State assemblies are held at different times.
- At present, elections to the Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim Assemblies are held together with Lok Sabha elections.

What is simultaneous Election?

- Simultaneous elections in India refer to the practice of holding elections for the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament) and all state legislative assemblies on the same day.
- This system aims to streamline the electoral process, reduce costs, and minimize the disruption caused by frequent elections.

Cost

The desirability of simultaneous elections can be discussed from the perspective of:

government. While this is the official expenditure of the government, the expenditure by parties and candidates are manifold times higher.

- Each State assembly election would also cost considerable amount of money according to the size of the State.
- Simultaneous elections would entail a reduction in these costs

Governance

- **Secondly**, there are at least 5-6 State elections that happen every year. This results in political parties, including Ministers, being in permanent campaign 'mode, which acts as a hindrance to policy making and governance.
- Further, the Model Code of Conduct that is enforced during the election process ranges usually from 45-60 days where no new schemes or projects can be announced by the Centre and concerned State governments.

Administrative convenience

- **Third**, administrative machinery in the districts slow down during the election period with the primary focus being the conduct of elections.
- There are also paramilitary forces that are withdrawn from the locations in which they are posted and deployed to the concerned State for the smooth conduct of elections.
- Frequent elections every year have an impact on administrative efficiency

Social Cohesion

- Lastly but very importantly, high stake elections each year in various States result in polarising campaigns by all parties in order to win the elections.
 - This trend has exacerbated in the last decade with the advent of social media thereby creating and deepening the fissures in our multi-religious and multilingual country
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- There are also significant issues that surround such a proposal both from **democratic** and **Constitutional** perspectives.
 - India is a federal country of **sub-continental proportions**. Various States have their own unique set of issues that are significantly different from one another.
 - The Union and State governments have their respective powers and responsibilities towards the electorate as per the division of powers under the Constitution.
 - Conducting elections simultaneously to the Lok Sabha and all State assemblies would result in national issues overshadowing regional and State specific issues.
 - National political parties would have a significant advantage over regional parties on account of this mechanism.
 - This would be detrimental to the federal spirit of our country which has been declared as a basic structure of the Constitution.
 - Elections also serve as an effective feedback mechanism for governments in power. There have been many policies that have been initiated by various Central and State governments in the past due to such electoral feedback.
 - If elections are held only once in five years, it can affect this process. Apart from the federal and democratic issues discussed above, simultaneous polls will also require constitutional amendments.
 - India is a parliamentary democracy where the governments at the Centre and the State need to enjoy majority in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly respectively.

- The duration of these houses is five years but it may be dissolved earlier if the party or coalition in power loses majority, and no alternative government can be formed.
- It may also be dissolved prematurely by the council of ministers in power to seek an early election.
- Further, State legislative assemblies can also be dissolved by imposing President's rule under Article 356 of the Constitution.
- Having a fixed tenure of five years for the Lok Sabha and State assemblies will therefore require constitutional amendments to Articles 83, 85, 172 and 174 that deal with the duration and dissolution of Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.
- It will also require the amendment of Article 356.
- There is a lack of consensus among various political parties about the conduct of simultaneous elections
- The ECI has faced challenges in scheduling elections simultaneously due to **requirements of security, weather conditions, festivals, and other factors.**
- Simultaneous conduct of elections would require large-scale purchase of **Electronic Voting Machines (EVM)** and **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines..** a total of Rs 9,284.15 crore will be needed... The machines would also need to be replaced every 15 years which would again entail expenditure.
- Further, storing these machines would increase the warehousing cost
- The ECI estimated that a total 53.76 lakh ballot units and 38.67 lakh control units of EVMs, and 41.65 lakh VVPATs would be needed for simultaneous elections in 2029.
- This entails the addition of 26.55 lakh ballot units, 17.78 lakh control units, and 17.79 lakh VVPATs to the ECI's existing inventory at an estimated cost of Rs7,951.37 crore.
- ✓ This amount does not include the costs of transportation, warehousing, first-level checking, and other related costs,
- The ECI also said that the two state-owned companies that make the EVMs and VVPATs, Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL), would need time to manufacture the additional units that would be needed for simultaneous elections.
- Some 400-500 additional companies of security forces would be needed, which would not be possible to mobilise with Lok Sabha elections also under way in the country

The recommendations by various institutions

- The idea of simultaneous elections has been mooted in the past by the Election Commission of India (1982) and the Law Commission (1999) and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2015), have dealt with the issue of simultaneous elections.
- The elections to the Lok Sabha and nearly half of the State assemblies may be clubbed together in one cycle, while the rest of the State assembly elections can be held in another cycle after two and half years.
- This will require curtailing or extending the tenures of existing assemblies that will entail amendments to the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1951;
- Any 'no confidence motion' in the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly should be mandatorily accompanied by a 'confidence motion' for the formation of an alternate government.
- If for any unavoidable reason, the Lok Sabha or State Assembly is to be dissolved prematurely, the duration of the newly constituted House should be only for the remainder period of the original House.
- This would act as a deterrent for MPs and MLAs pushing for premature dissolution of the House.
- It would instead encourage the members to explore the possibility of forming an alternate government through feasible realignments;
- The bye elections necessitated by death, resignation or disqualification of members can be clubbed together and conducted once in a year.
- It may be noted that Parliamentary democracies like South Africa, Sweden and Germany have fixed tenures for their legislatures.

- The elections to the National Assembly and provincial legislatures happen simultaneously in South Africa every five years, with the President of the country being elected by the National Assembly.
- The Prime Minister of Sweden and the Chancellor of Germany are elected by their respective legislatures every four years. A lack of confidence against the German Chancellor can be moved only by electing a successor.
- **What can be an ideal solution?**
- The ideal middle ground may be to conduct the Lok Sabha election in one cycle and all State assembly elections in another cycle after two and a half years.
- The formation of an alternative government in case of the fall of an incumbent government,
- The duration of the newly constituted houses being only for the remainder period in case of premature dissolution and,
- The clubbing of bye elections to be held once every year may be adopted through suitable amendments.

Conclusion:

- This approach will help realize the key advantages of simultaneous elections while upholding democratic and federal values.
- If all political parties are engaged in the process, this goal could be reached over the next decade and maintained beyond that.