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TOPIC OF THE DAY (DATE: 01.09.2023)

ONE NATION - ONE ELECTION

WHY IN NEWS?

After making an announcement for a special session of the parliament from September 18-22, the Government of India set up a committee under the chairmanship of former president Ram Nath Kovind to work on "One Nation One Election", legislation, a move set to be the central theme for the next Lok Sabha polls

BACKGROUND

- The **idea of 'One Nation, One Election'** refers to holding simultaneous elections across the country. This means that elections for the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies across India will be held simultaneously — with voting presumably taking place around the same time.
- The idea has been around since at least 1983, when the Election Commission first mooted it. However, until 1967, simultaneous elections were the norm in India. In 1999 Law Commission report also pushed for simultaneous elections.
- In 2022, the then Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra said the Election Commission is fully prepared and capable of conducting simultaneous elections. However, he said that to implement the idea, there needs to be a **change in the Constitution and it should be decided in Parliament**.
- In December 2022, the Law Commission sought the opinion of stakeholders including national political parties, the Election Commission of India, bureaucrats, academicians and experts on the proposal to hold simultaneous elections in the country.
- The first General Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and all State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously in 1951-52 this practice continued in three subsequent General Elections held in the years 1957, 1962 and 1967. However, due to the premature dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle got disrupted.
- In 1970, the Lok Sabha was itself dissolved prematurely and fresh elections were held in 1971. Thus, the First, Second and Third Lok Sabha enjoyed full five-year terms.

Arguments in favour of Simultaneous Election

A NITI Aayog paper says that the country has at least one election each year; actually, each state has an election every year, too. In that paper, NITI Aayog argued that multiple elections incurs many direct and indirect disadvantages.

- **Incalculable Economic Costs of Elections:** Directly budgeted costs are around Rs 300 crore for a state the size of Bihar. However, there are other financial costs, and incalculable economic costs. o Each election means government machinery misses out on their regular duties due to election duty and related work. o These costs of the millions of man-hours used are not charged to the election budget.
- **Policy Paralysis:** The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) also affects the government's functionary, as no new significant policy can be announced and executed after the elections are announced.

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- **Administrative Costs:** There are also huge and visible costs of deploying security forces and transporting them, repeatedly. A bigger invisible cost is paid by the nation in terms of diverting these forces from sensitive areas and in terms of the fatigue and illnesses that repeated cross-country deployments bring about.
- In 2019 elections, there were 610 political parties, around 9,000 candidates and poll expenses of around **60,000 crore rupees (declared by ADR) are yet to be declared by the political parties.**

Challenges to 'One Nation One Election'

- The term of the Lok Sabha and that of the State Legislative Assemblies needs to be synchronised so that the election to both can be held within a given span of time.
- For instance, the term of the present Lok Sabha will go upto 2024, but elections to some of the legislative assembly had already taken place last year (for e.g. Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan) and some are due this year (for e.g. Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand), resulting in different dates of completion of the term.
- To **sync the term of the State Legislative Assemblies with that of the Lok Sabha, the term of the state legislative assemblies** can be reduced and increased accordingly and for the same, constitutional amendment would be needed in:
- **Article 83:** It states that the term of the Lok Sabha will be five years from the date of its first sitting.
- **Article 85:** It empowers the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha.
- **Article 172:** It states that the term of the legislative assembly will be five years from the date of its first sitting.
- **Article 174:** It empowers the Governor of the state to dissolve the Legislative Assembly.
- **Article 356:** It authorises the Central Government to impose President's Rule for failure of constitutional machinery in the state.
- The Representation of the People Act as well as related parliamentary procedure will also need to be amended.
- The core issue which hinders its implementation is India's Parliamentary Form of Government in which the government is accountable to the Lower House (Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly). It is quite possible that the government can fall before completing its term and the moment government falls, there has to be an election.
- It is difficult to **convince all the political parties on 'One Nation One Election'.**

Conclusion

- Simultaneous election is an idea whose time has come. However, since the issue is concerned with the federal structure of the Constitution, it needs to be discussed and debated properly across the political spectrum to assuage the concerns of regional parties. This will make it easier to implement the idea in the country.
- Ideally, the 'one nation, one election' system should reduce the amount of time, energy and resources invested in the conduct of polls. If simultaneous polls do reduce the duration of conducting polls, political parties will have ample time to address national issues and enhance governance.