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The Big Picture – One Nation One Election

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The Prime Minister of India invited heads of all political parties to a meeting on 19th June, 2019 to discuss the "one nation, one election" idea and other important matters. The idea of **One Nation One Election** is about **structuring the Indian election cycle in a manner such that elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies are synchronized together.**

Advantages

- The concept of 'One Nation One Election' can **help keep a check on the poll expenses, party expenses etc.**
 - When the first elections to the Lok Sabha took place in 1951-52, 53 parties contested the elections, around 1874 candidates participated and poll expenses

were 11 crore.

- 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.
- It will **save public money, reduce burden on administrative setup** and security forces, ensure **timely implementation of the government policies** and ensure that the administrative machinery is engaged in developmental activities rather than electioneering.
- The **voters will be able to judge the policies and programmes of the government**, both at the state level and the central level. Also, it would be easy for the voters to determine which political party promised what and how it actually implemented the same.
- It is also necessary **to solve the problem of governance** on the part of the politicians who are ruling. It is generally seen that for short term political gains from a particular assembly election, ruling politicians avoid taking a harsh long term decision which can ultimately help the country in the long run.
- Holding elections once in five years can provide more time to all the stakeholders i.e. political parties, ECI, paramilitary forces, civilians for its preparation.

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'.

Logistical Challenges

- At present, one voting machine is being used at every polling station for taking a poll. For holding simultaneous elections, **the requirements for EVMs and the VVPATs will double**, because for every polling station, the ECI has to provide two sets (one for election to the Legislative Assembly and second for that to the Lok Sabha).
- There will also be an additional requirement of the polling staff.
- There will be difficulty in transporting materials to the polling stations.
- There will be a need for **better security arrangements** for simultaneous elections thus **augmenting the Central Police Forces** accordingly.
- The ECI is already facing problem in storing EVMs after elections.

Solutions

- India had held the elections for the assembly as well as the Lok Sabha from 1951-52 to till 1967. As such, therefore, there are **no disagreements on adequacy and efficacy of 'One Nation One Election'**. India can even think of holding elections at the same time even for the local bodies. The main problem is only that of the synchronization considering the traditions and conventions that India's Parliamentary system follows.
- One radical solution is **to switch to the Presidential form of Government** where the President is not accountable to the House.
 - In America, the election day is fixed. After every four years, the tuesday that falls after the first monday in the month of November is the election day for the seat of the President and the Vice President.
 - Similarly, the dates for holding the elections for the House of Representative and the Senate, are also fixed. The dates are between 2nd and 8th of the month of November. By law, these dates have been fixed.
 - In India, fixing the dates is not feasible because of the Parliamentary form of government.
- If India wants to continue with the Parliamentary form of government, there are following solutions:
 - First one is **inviting** the second or the third **leading person in the house** or the leader of a political party **to form the government** or the House being given the opportunity to elect its leader, in case the government falls before completing its term.
 - Second is **amending the constitution to a certain extent** and provide that any

assembly whose term is ending within the six months to the Lok Sabha elections, after or before, the election for it can happen with that of the Lok Sabha.

- **Synchronising only the elections to the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.**
- There is no doubt that implementation of the 'One Nation One Election' will involve some logistical costs. But there will be saving on other counts (e.g. reduced election expenditure) which would result in net savings.

Problems within the Solutions

- The **amendments** would require apart from the **two thirds majority of both houses** of the Parliament, also **ratification by at least half of the state assemblies.**
- It is so that even if the constitution gets amended, there still will be reasons due to which an assembly may get dissolved, therefore, one nation-one time-one election is not possible.
- Switching to the Presidential form of government would mean **altering the basic structure of the constitution.**
- Any ruling political party would hardly like to dissolve the assembly for the sake of simultaneous polls.

There needs to be a consensus on whether the country needs one nation one poll or not. All political parties should at least cooperate in debating this issue, once the debate starts, the public opinion can be taken into consideration. India being a mature democracy, can then follow the outcome of the debate.