

Time for Simultaneous Polls

What is the issue?

- Elections in four states and one UT in March-April 2021 are suspected to have contributed to the second wave of Covid infections.
- This has again called for a well-reasoned debate on the concept of “one nation, one election.”

Why simultaneous elections?

- Simultaneous Elections refers to structuring the Indian election cycle so that elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are synchronized.
- The idea has been around since at least 1983, when the Election Commission first mooted it.
- The concept of simultaneous elections needs to be debated mainly around five issues:
 1. Financial costs of conducting elections
 2. cost of repeated administrative freezes
 3. visible and invisible costs of repeatedly deploying security forces
 4. campaign and finance costs of political parties
 5. the question of regional/smaller parties having a level playing field

What about the cost factor?

- Directly budgeted costs of conducting elections are around Rs 300 crore for a state the size of Bihar.
- But there are other financial costs, and incalculable economic costs.
- Before each election, a “revision” of electoral rolls is mandatory.
- Each election means teachers missing from schools and colleges.
- The economic costs of lost teaching weeks, delayed public works, badly delivered or undelivered welfare schemes to the poor have never been calculated.
- The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) has economic costs too.
- Works may have been announced long before an election is announced.
- But tenders cannot be finalised, nor work awarded, once the MCC comes into effect.
- Add to this the invisible cost of a missing leadership.
- The time for Ministers' (politicians too) ministerial duties reduces sharply.

- There are also huge and visible costs of deploying security forces and transporting them, repeatedly.
- A NITI Aayog paper says that the country has at least one election each year; actually, each state has an election every year, too.
- So, these financial and economic costs are incurred repeatedly.

Will simultaneous elections impact regional parties?

- There are fears that the Centre might gain greater power and regional parties might be at a disadvantage.
- Fixed five-year terms for state legislatures in fact take away the central government's power to dissolve state assemblies.
- But regional parties may be at a disadvantage because in simultaneously held elections, voters are likely to predominantly vote one way.
- This might give the dominant party at the Centre an advantage.
- Nevertheless, in any case, votes cast the same way may help regional parties tot up a nice enough number in Parliament to be a part of the central government.

What is the concern with instability?

- There is an argument that if a government loses its majority in the House, it necessarily means fresh elections.
- Firstly, with the current anti-defection law, it is virtually impossible for a ruling party/coalition to lose numbers.
- Secondly, even if a Prime Minister or Chief Minister loses a vote of confidence, those who voted against him/her have a majority.
- And their leader should become the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister.
- So, the dissolution of Parliament or Assembly is not a necessary consequence.

Source: The Indian Express