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‘One Nation, One Election’ in India: Advantages, Disadvantages, Amendments

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Introduction

‘One Nation, One Election’ is a concept that advocates for synchronizing the elections across all levels of government in a country, i.e. holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) and all state legislative assemblies in India. In the Indian context, this idea gained prominence as a means to streamline the electoral process and reduce the frequency of elections which often disrupts governance and diverts resources towards frequent election campaigns.

History of ‘One Nation, One Election’

The first few general elections post-independence were held together with the state legislative assembly elections. This practice continued till 1967 and was then discontinued due to the premature dissolution of some state assemblies in 1968 and 1969.

Narendra Modi has been proposing the idea of simultaneous elections since 2014 stating that it will reduce wastage of public money and will ensure the smooth flow of developmental work.

In August 2018, the Law Commission of India released a draft report on simultaneous elections. The report stated that, in order to conduct such simultaneous elections, appropriate amendments need to be made to the constitution, the Representation of the People Act 1951, and the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.

In September 2023, the Union Government set up a 'High Level Committee on One Nation, One Election' under the chairmanship of former President of India, Ramnath Kovind. The High Level Committee has met on three occasions and sought the views of various national and State political parties on the subject of a common elections schedule. The views of the general public and eminent jurists were also solicited recently.

Need for Simultaneous Elections in the Nation

- Frequent elections at different levels of government can lead to a continuous cycle of electioneering, diverting attention and resources away from governance and development. Simultaneous elections aim to provide stability by ensuring that the focus remains on policy formulation, implementation, and long-term planning rather than on election-related activities.
- Conducting multiple elections involves substantial financial resources. Simultaneous elections could potentially reduce the overall cost of the electoral process, as resources such as manpower, security, and election infrastructure would be utilized more efficiently.
- Simultaneous elections could save time and energy for both political parties and the electorate. Voters would only need to engage in the electoral process once in a fixed time frame, reducing voter fatigue and streamlining the democratic exercise.
- The implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during election periods can disrupt ongoing government initiatives. Simultaneous elections would limit the frequency of MCC enforcement, allowing governments to carry out their programs without frequent interruptions.
- Frequent elections can lead to policy discontinuity as incoming governments may have different priorities and policy directions. Simultaneous elections could contribute to policy continuity and provide a more stable policy environment.

- Synchronizing elections could optimize the use of human resources, including election officials, security personnel, and volunteers. It would also reduce the strain on administrative machinery at various levels.
- Some argue that simultaneous elections could potentially lead to increased voter turnout as people might be more inclined to participate in a single, comprehensive electoral exercise.

Challenges to Simultaneous Elections in India

- The implementation of simultaneous elections in India would require significant changes to the existing constitutional and legal framework. Article 83 and Article 174 of the Indian Constitution along with the Anti-defection law would need amendments to facilitate the implementation of ‘One Nation, One Election’ proposal.
- Conducting simultaneous elections across the country would involve substantial financial resources.
- Coordinating elections on a national scale poses significant logistical challenges.
- Simultaneous elections are an attack on the autonomy and independence of state governments. The idea of simultaneous elections not only weakens the federal structure but also increases the conflict of interest between the Centre and states.

Latest Update on Proposal for ‘One Nation, One Election’

On **18th September, 2024** the Cabinet gave its assent to the ‘One Nation, One Election’ Proposal. The cabinet accepted the recommendations on the proposal made by a high-level committee headed by former President Kovind.

On **2 September 2023**, the Government of India had issued a notification constituting a high-level committee to examine the proposal of conducting simultaneous elections across the nation.

This committee was constituted under the chairmanship of former President of India Ram Nath Kovind. The other members in the committee were:-

- Amit Shah (Union Home Minister)
- Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury (Congress leader)
- Ghulam Nabi Azad (Former Leader of Opposition)

- NK Singh (Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission)
- Dr Subhash C Kashyap (Lok Sabha's Former Secretary General)
- Harish Salve (Senior Advocate)
- Sanjay Kothari (Former Chief Vigilance Commissioner)

Conclusion

If **simultaneous Lok Sabha and assemblies elections are held in India**, the Election Commission would require an estimated ₹10,000 crore every 15 years to procure new electronic voting machines (EVM). While countries like South Africa, Sweden and United Kingdom conduct simultaneous elections, the proposal is under debate in India. Keeping both its benefits and disadvantages in mind, the proposal is being deliberated upon currently by the High Committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind.

Read: Election-Related Offences in India

Note: This post was updated on September 18, 2024.