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# Kovind panel's recommendations on Simultaneous Elections

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**Why is in news?** One Nation, One Election: Highlights of the Kovind panel's recommendations

The High-level Committee (HLC) on One Nation, One Election submitted its report to President Droupadi Murmu on March 14. The comprehensive 21-volume, 18,626-page report contains 11 chapters plus Annexures.

## Simultaneous elections:

Simultaneous elections, popularly referred to as **"One Nation, One Election"**, means holding elections to **Lok Sabha, all state Legislative Assemblies at the same time**.

Currently, all these elections are held independently of one another, following timelines dictated by the terms of every individual elected body.

## History of simultaneous elections:

Following efforts made by the central government, state governments, and political parties along with the Election Commission of India, **simultaneous elections were held in the seven states of Bihar, Bombay, Madras, Mysore, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal in 1957**.

Simultaneous elections were by and large in vogue until the fourth general elections of 1967.

However, as successive central governments used constitutional provisions to dismiss state governments before the end of their term, and as coalition governments in the states and the Centre kept collapsing, a country came to see elections at different times through the year.

According to the HLC report, the country now sees five to six elections in a year — if municipalities and panchayat elections are also included, the number of elections will increase manifold.

In 2019, only 4 States had their assembly elections, along with the Lok Sabha. We now have at least two rounds of Assembly general elections every year.

## Reasons in favour of simultaneous elections:

Frequent elections burden the government exchequer with additional expenditure. If the expenditure incurred by political parties is also added, these figures will be even higher.

Asynchronous elections cause uncertainty and instability, thwarting supply chains, business investments and economic growth.

Disruption of government machinery due to asynchronous elections causes hardship to citizens.

Frequent use of government officials and security forces adversely affect discharge of their duties.

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Frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) causes policy paralysis and slows down the pace of the developmental programmes.

Staggered elections induce ‘voters’ fatigue’ and present a significant challenge in ensuring their participation.

### **About the panel:**

The HLC, popularly known as the Kovind panel after its chairman, former President Ram Nath Kovind, was constituted in September 2023, to go into the issue.

The panel had as its members Home Minister Amit Shah, former Rajya Sabha Leader of Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Lok Sabha Secretary General Subhash C Kashyap, former chairman of the 15th Finance Commission N K Singh, Senior Advocate Harish Salve, and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari. Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal was a Special Invitee to the Committee.

The Kovind panel held a total of 65 meetings at Jodhpur Officer’s Hostel in New Delhi.

The final meeting was held on March 10. The committee referred to a number of reports and studies, and met a wide range of stakeholders.

### **Recommendations of the committee:**

#### **Amending the Constitution:**

The Constitution should be amended to enable simultaneous elections in **two steps**.

In the first step, simultaneous elections will be held to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. For this, **no ratification by the states** will be required for the constitutional amendment.

In the second step, **elections to municipalities and the panchayats will be synchronised** with elections to Lok Sabha and state Assemblies in such a way that local body elections are held within 100 days of the elections to Lok Sabha and state Assemblies. This will require ratification by not less than one-half of the states.

#### **Single Electoral Roll and Election Id:**

For the purpose of preparation of single electoral roll and electoral photo identity cards for use in elections to all the three tiers of government.

The **Constitution should be amended**, so that the Election Commission of India can prepare a single electoral roll and election ID in consultation with the State Election Commissions.

These amendments will require ratification by not less than one-half of the states.

#### **In Case Of Hung House, Etc.:**

In the event of a hung House, a no-confidence motion, or any such event, fresh elections should be held to constitute the new Lok Sabha or state Assembly for the **unexpired term of the House**.

#### **Meeting Logistics Requirements:**

The committee has recommended that for meeting logistical requirements, the Election Commission of India will plan and estimate in advance, in consultation with the State Election Commissions, and take steps for the deployment of manpower, polling personnel, security forces, EVMs/VVPATs, etc., so that free and fair simultaneous elections are held in all the three tiers of the government.

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### **Insertion of Article 324A:**

The committee recommended an Article 324A, which states that Parliament may make a law to ensure that elections to municipalities and panchayats be held together with General Elections.

### **Rejected the Germany model:**

The committee rejected the **concept of constructive vote of no-confidence**, which is the model in Germany.

In this model, to bring a no-confidence motion against a government, a positive vote of confidence in an alternate leader or government is required.

The committee said that the prevailing Parliamentary practice in this regard is appropriate and does not require any change.

Making a motion of no confidence by the Members of Parliament is not only their right, but also their responsibility. The Committee would not like to dilute this feature of the Indian Parliamentary system.

### **Way Ahead:**

**Build all party consensus:** The government must build an all party consensus before introducing the two constitutional amendment bills as recommended by the Kovind Panel Report on Simultaneous Elections.

**22nd Law Commission Report** on simultaneous polls: The government must also wait for the recommendations of the 22nd Law Commission Report on simultaneous polls before moving ahead with the idea.

**Public awareness:** Public awareness must be created around the issue of simultaneous election through media deliberations.

### **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.

If India opts for 'one nation, one election', the world's biggest democracy will set another unique example as India will be the 4th country in the world after Belgium, Sweden and South Africa which will conduct simultaneous election.