

30 SEPTEMBER 2024 - MAINS DAILY QUESTIONS & MODEL ANSWERS:

Q1. Examine the feasibility of conducting simultaneous elections to both parliament and legislatures in India.

GS II → Election related issues

Introduction:

- Simultaneous elections refer to holding elections to Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats and Urban local bodies simultaneously, once in five years. The idea of holding elections simultaneously is in news after it got a push from Prime Minister and ex-President of India. However, political parties are divided on the issue of holding simultaneous elections
- The recent elections in four states and one Union territory in March-April are suspected to have contributed to the second wave of Covid infections, a well-reasoned debate on a concept as important as “one nation, one election”.
- The Law Commission of India has also proposed holding simultaneous state and general elections and has sought public opinion on its recommendations regarding the same. Simultaneous elections were held in India during the first two decades of independence.
- **Merits of Simultaneous elections:**
- **Governance and consistency:**
- The ruling parties will be able to focus on legislation and governance rather than having to be in campaign mode forever.
- Parties and workers spending too much time and money in electioneering, can make use of the time for social work and to take people-oriented programmes to the grassroots.
- To overcome the “policy paralysis and governance deficit” associated with imposition of the Model Code of Conduct at election time which leads to putting on hold all developmental activities on that area and also affects the bureaucracy’s functioning.
- **Reduced Expenditure of Money and Administration:**
- The entire State and District level administrative and security machinery will be busy with the conduct of elections twice in a period of five years as per the current practice.
- Expenditure can be reduced by conducting simultaneous elections.

- It is felt that crucial manpower is often deployed on election duties for a prolonged period of time. If simultaneous elections are held, then this manpower would be made available for other important tasks.
- For instance, for the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, which was held along with 4 state assemblies saw the deployment of 1077 in situ companies and 1349 mobile companies of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF).
- **Continuity in policies and programmes:**
 - Will limit the disruption to normal public life associated with elections, such as increased traffic and noise pollution.
 - Large numbers of teachers are involved in the electoral process which causes maximum harm to the education sector.
- **Efficiency of Governance:**
 - Simultaneous elections can bring the much-needed operational efficiency in this exercise.
 - Populist measures by governments will reduce.
 - During frequent elections there is increase in “vices” such as communalism, casteism, corruption and crony capitalism.
 - Simultaneous elections can also be a means to curb corruption and build a more conducive socio-economic ecosystem.
 - The impact of black money on the voters will be reduced as all elections are held at a time.
- **Challenges to simultaneous elections:**
 - **Illiteracy:**
 - Not all voters are highly educated to know who to vote for. They may get confused and may not know whether they are voting for candidates contesting assembly or parliament elections.
 - IDFC study says that there is 77% chance that the Indian voter will vote for the same party for both the state and centre, when elections are held simultaneously.
 - Evidence from Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Germany, the US and Europe supports the idea that elections that are held simultaneously produce greater alignment between national and regional election outcomes.
 - **Functional issues:**
 - Frequent elections bring the politicians back to the voters, create jobs and prevent the mixing of local and national issues in the minds of the voters.
 - There is a dearth of enough security and administrative officials to conduct simultaneous free and fair elections throughout the country in one go.

- **Changes in Constitution and Legislations:**

- **The following constitutional changes need to be made:**

- **Amendments needed in the following articles:**

- Article 83 which deals with the duration of Houses of Parliament need an amendment
- Article 85 (on dissolution of Lok Sabha by the president)
- Article 172 (relating to the duration of state legislatures)
- Article 174 (relating to dissolution of state assemblies)
- Article 356 (on President's Rule).

- The Representation of People Act, 1951 Act would have to be amended to build in provisions for stability of tenure for both parliament and assemblies.

- **This should include the following crucial elements:**

- Restructuring the powers and functions of the ECI to facilitate procedures required for simultaneous elections
- A definition of simultaneous election can be added to section 2 of the 1951 act
- Articles 83 and 172 along with articles 14 and 15 of the 1951 act be appropriately amended to incorporate the provision regarding remainder of the term i.e., post mid elections, the new loksabha/assembly so constituted shall be only for the remainder of the term of the previous loksabha or assembly and not for a fresh term of five years.

- **Constructive vote of no confidence:**

- The 170th law commission report suggested a new rule i.e., rule 198-A has to be added to rules of procedure and conduct of business in Lok Sabha and similar amendment to such rules in the state legislatures.
- The report suggested introduction of motion of no confidence in the incumbent government along with a motion of confidence in the alternative government.
- To avoid premature dissolution of the house/state assemble in case of Hung parliament /assembly and to advance simultaneous elections the rigour of anti-defection law laid under in tenth schedule be removed as an exception.
- Local and national issues will get mixed up distorting priorities.
- The terms of different state governments are ending on separate dates and years.

- **Spirit of Constitution:**

- One nation, one election” would make sense if India were a unitary state. So “one nation, one election” is anti-democratic.

- Simultaneous elections threaten the federal character of our democracy.
- Frequent elections act as checks and balances on the functioning of elected representatives.
- **Way forward:**
 - Any changes must require both a constitutional amendment and judicial approval that they do not violate the “basic structure” of the Constitution.
 - A focused group of constitutional experts, think tanks, government officials and representatives of political parties should be formed to work out appropriate implementation related details.
- **Other alternatives should be explored to reduce election related expenses like**
 - State funding of elections
 - Decriminalisation of politics
 - Bringing in transparency in political funding
 - Setting up National Electoral Fund to which all donors can contribute.
- One year one election as suggested by Election Commission can be executed by amending Section 15 of the RP Act 1951. If the six-month stipulation is extended to nine or 10 months, elections to all states, whose term is expiring in one year, can be held together.
- The Law Commission of India in its report of 1999 has dealt with the problem of premature and frequent elections. It had recommended an amendment of this rule on the lines of the German Constitution, which provides that the leader of the party who wants to replace the chancellor has to move the no-confidence motion along with the confidence motion. If the motions succeed, the president appoints him as the chancellor.
- If such an amendment to Rule 198 is made, the Lok Sabha would avoid premature dissolution without diluting the cardinal principle of democracy that is a government with the consent of the peoples’ representatives with periodical elections.
- It will also be consistent with the notion of collective responsibility of the government to the House as mentioned in Article 75 (3) of the Constitution.
- **Conclusion:**
 - Election Commission’s idea of “one year one election” will better suited as it will require fewer amendments to the constitution, it will respect the essence of the exercise of popular will, unlike one nation one election which prioritizes economic costs of elections over the exercise itself, it will avoid clubbing of national and state issues, it will not disturb federalism much, not much issues generated by emergencies like need to hold by-election etc will be addressed by this option.

Q2. What is climate smart agriculture? Delineate the scope of climate smart agriculture in India. Can it solve the twin crisis of achieving food security and tackling climate change? Critically analyse.

GS III → Agriculture related issues

Introduction:

- Climate change directly affects agricultural production as this sector is inherently sensitive to climatic conditions and is one of the most vulnerable sectors at the risk and impact of global climate change.
- FAO defines Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) as “agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, enhances resilience (adaptation), reduces/removes GHGs (mitigation) where possible, and enhances achievement of national food security and development goals”
- **India’s vulnerability: Scope of CSA in India:**
 - India’s agricultural ecosystem is distinguished by high monsoon dependence and with 85% small and marginal landholdings, it is highly sensitive to weather abnormalities.
 - There has been less than normal rainfall during the last four years, with 2014 and 2015 declared as drought years.
 - There are also reports of an escalation in heat waves, which in turn affecting crops, aquatic systems and livestock.
 - The Economic Survey 2017-18 has estimated farm income losses between 15% and 18% on average, which could rise to 20%-25% for unirrigated areas without any policy interventions.
 - These projections underline the need for strategic change in dealing with climate change in agriculture.
 - There will be an increased risk of pests and diseases due to change in the pattern of host and pathogen interaction. For every two-degree rise in temperature, the agriculture GDP of India will reduce by five percent.
 - The recent locust attack is also attributed to climate change, which can have highly disastrous effect on food security.
 - Poor agricultural performance can lead to inflation, farmer distress and unrest, and larger political and social disaffection, all of which can hold back the economy. It will force farmers to either adapt to challenges of climate change or face the risk of getting poorer.
- **Climate Smart Agriculture: Solving food security and climate change problems:**
 - Increased productivity: Produce more food to improve food and nutrition security and boost the incomes of 75 percent of the world’s poor who live in rural areas and mainly rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.

- Enhanced resilience: Reduce vulnerability to drought, pests, disease, and other shocks; and improve capacity to adapt and grow in the face of longer-term stresses like shortened seasons and erratic weather patterns.
- Reduced emissions: Pursue lower emissions for each calorie or kilo of food produced, avoid deforestation from agriculture and identify ways to suck carbon out of the atmosphere.
- The climate-smart agriculture approach seeks to reduce trade-offs to make crop and livestock systems, forestry, and fisheries and aquaculture more productive and more sustainable.
- Climate-smart agriculture explicitly looks for where there are synergies and trade-offs among food security, adaptation and mitigation. Climate smart agriculture works through several dimensions to reorient agricultural development and management to take climate change into account.
- Management of farms, crops, livestock, aquaculture and capture fisheries to balance near-term food security and livelihoods needs with priorities for adaptation and mitigation.
- Ecosystem and landscape management to conserve ecosystem services that are important for food security, agricultural development, adaptation and mitigation.
- Farmers, especially smallholder farmers, need handholding during their scaling up to adopt CSA.
- Mobile telecommunication systems are increasingly cost-effective and an efficient way of delivering weather-based agro-advisories to farmers at a large scale.
- Radio (especially community radio), television, newspapers, folk media, and village level public address systems will also need to be used to bridge this “communication divide.”
- Weather-based agro-advisories must be locale-specific, crop-and farmer-specific; need to also recommend soil, water, and biodiversity conservation practices. Integrating this with Soil Health Card scheme will be a good step forward.
- Build adaptive capacities to climate variability and strengthen the sustainability of farming systems.
- On-site training and awareness campaigns, technology demonstrations, farmer-specialist interactions, and engagement with local governance bodies.
- Soil health and need-based irrigation management need to be addressed adequately.
- Closer collaboration between public, civil society, and private technology and financial service providers so that farmers get access to accurate information, and affordable technologies.