

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Edition: International | Table of Contents

Page 01 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	Special court in Karnataka orders Lokayukta investigation against CM
Page 07 Syllabus : GS 1 & 2 : Geography & International Relations	Leaders at UN urge world's wealthiest to do more on climate
Page 10 Syllabus : GS 3 : Environment	How global warming affects forecasting?
Page 15 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	Hezbollah uses Fadi rockets with more power but little precision against Israel
Term In News	Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary
Page 08 : Editorial Analysis: Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	The misplaced move of 'one nation one election'

Bengaluru Special Court has directed Lokayukta police to register a criminal case against Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others over alleged illegal allotment of sites worth ₹56 crore by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority to his wife.

► The case involves charges under the Prevention of Corruption Act and various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Special court in Karnataka orders Lokayukta investigation against CM

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A special court in Bengaluru on Wednesday directed the Lokayukta police in Mysuru to register a criminal case against Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others on the alleged illegalities in the allotment of 14 sites worth ₹56 crore to his wife by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA).

The court directed the Superintendent of Police of the Lokayukta police to invoke provisions on prevention of corruption, prohibition of benami properties and land grabbing under various laws.

While exercising its power under Section 156 (3) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr.PC), the

Lokayukta:

- **Historical Origin:** Lokayukta is an anti-corruption ombudsman, first instituted in Maharashtra in 1971.
- **Appointment:** Lokayukta is appointed by the Governor after consulting the Chief Justice of the High Court and the Leader of the Opposition.
- **Qualifications:** Judicial qualifications are mandated in some states (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh), but not in others (e.g., Maharashtra, Rajasthan).
- **Jurisdiction:** Varies across states. In some, the Chief Minister is under the purview (e.g., Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat), while in others, they are excluded.

court directed the Superintendent of Police to submit the investigation report within three months.

Santhosh Gajanan Bhat, the judge of the Special Court of Sessions that deals with criminal cases related to former and sitting MPs and MLAs in Karnataka, issued the direction on a private complaint filed by Snehamayi Krishna of Mysuru. Mr. Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi B.M. has also been named as an accused in the complaint. The Special Court passed the order as the High Court of Karnataka on Tuesday vacated its earlier interim order, in which the Special Court was directed to pause its proceedings on the private complaint till the High Court adjudicated on Mr. Siddaramaiah's petition. In



Siddaramaiah

his plea, the Chief Minister had challenged the permission granted by the Governor under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act for conducting an investigation against him.

Relevant sections

The Special Court has directed the Lokayukta police to invoke Sections 120B (criminal conspiracy), 166

(public servant disobeying law, with intent to cause injury to any person) 403 (dishonest misappropriation of property), 406 (criminal breach of trust), and other relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code in the first information report to be registered against the accused persons. The police were also directed to invoke Sections 9 (offence relating to bribing a public servant by a commercial organisation) and 13 (criminal misconduct by a public servant) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

Further hearing on the complaint has been adjourned till December 24 pending the investigation report.

NOT AFRAID: SIDDARAMAIAH
» PAGE 3

Daily News Analysis

- ▶ **Powers:** The Lokayukta has judicial powers to conduct inquiries, summon officials, and recommend actions against corrupt practices. However, it does not have punitive powers to convict individuals.
- ▶ **Challenges:** Jurisdiction, powers, and appointment processes are not uniform, leading to inefficiencies. In some states, key officials (e.g., CM) are excluded from Lokayukta's ambit.
- ▶ **Legislation:** The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 mandated the establishment of Lokayuktas but left their powers and scope to state discretion, leading to variations.



Page 07 : GS1 – Geography : Climate Change ; GS2 – International Relations

At the U.N. General Assembly, developing nations, especially small island states, urged the wealthiest countries to increase efforts in combating climate change.

- ➔ These vulnerable nations emphasised the need for substantial actions from major emitters, particularly G20 members, to address the growing climate injustices they face due to global warming.

Plea from Developing Nations at the U.N.

- ➔ On September 23, developing nations urged the world's richest countries at the U.N. General Assembly to do more in addressing climate change and its impacts.
- ➔ Leaders from small island states, particularly at risk from rising sea levels, emphasised the need for nations contributing the most to fossil fuel emissions to take stronger action beyond mere "lip service."

Call for Climate Action from Vulnerable Nations

- ➔ Samoan Natural Resources Minister and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), questioned the global commitment to protecting vulnerable populations, urging the Group of 20 (G20) to lead in emissions reductions and climate finance.
- ➔ A representative speaking on behalf of the Least Developed Country bloc highlighted the responsibility of industrialised nations to spearhead climate action.

Growing Global Inequality in Climate Impact

- ➔ The pleas from these nations highlight the disparity between those most responsible for global warming and those bearing the brunt of its consequences, framing climate change as a matter of global justice.

Renewed Commitment to Renewable Energy

- ➔ During the same period, major companies and banks pushed for an increase in renewable energy capacity, with calls for a tripling of renewable and nuclear energy investments by 2030, aligning with agreements made at the COP28 summit.



World Bank president Ajay Banga views the impact of sea level rise in Funafuti, Tuvalu. REUTERS

Leaders at UN urge world's wealthiest to do more on climate

Reuters

Developing nations on September 23 pleaded at the U.N. General Assembly for the world's richest to do more to help them cope with the hardships they face from climate extremes.

Leaders of small island states most at risk from rising sea levels said it was time for those countries that burn most of the fossil fuels blamed for rising temperatures to stop paying "lip service" to the issue.

"I wonder if our countries are moving further and further away from the unity and the moral fortitude we require to protect our people," said Samoan Natural Resources and Environment Minister Cedric Schuster, who chairs the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

The island nations of AOSIS have gained a powerful voice in global climate talks. During a news conference on Monday, Schuster called out the world's biggest economies in the Group of 20, which together account for more than 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions. "We need all countries, but particularly the G20, to lead the way" on emissions cuts and climate finance, Schuster told reporters. "The vulnerable people of our world are drained by lip service."

Delivering a similar message on behalf of the Least Developed Country negotiating bloc, Malawi's climate and natural resources minister, Yusuf Mkungula, said: "Industrialised countries must lead the way."

The pleas underscore the widening disparity between the nations

Scientists say that at least six of the planet's natural systems are damaged, with the ocean's chemistry also threatened by acidification, which occurs as it absorbs carbon dioxide from air

contributing most to global warming and those suffering its worst effects, demonstrating how climate change has become not just an environmental issue but a matter of global justice.

Some country leaders spoke during a special U.N. 'Summit for the Future,' while others addressed reporters and panels at one of the 900 or so climate-themed events being held this week across New York City.

Separately, scientists at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research warned that humanity has now damaged at least six of the planet's natural systems, including the climate equilibrium, with a seventh – the ocean's chemistry – now threatened by acidification, which occurs as the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide from the air.

"Climate events are coming at us faster and more frequently," said Bahamas Prime Minister Phillip Davis, adding that he was pleading with wealthy nations to "stay focused" on the problem.

So far, he said, "the signals being sent [by countries] do not match the commitments that were made."

Earlier on Monday, executives from major companies, including massive energy-user Amazon.com and power producers like Vestas and Iberdrola, urged world leaders to follow through on an agreement made at last year's COP28 summit to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030.

Elsewhere, 50 U.S. banks announced plans to cooperate on accelerating investment in clean energy, while a separate group of 14 banks, including Citi and Bank of America, called for a tripling of nuclear energy capacity globally.

Page 10 : GS 3 : Environment – Environmental Pollution and Degradation

The extreme weather events of 2023-2024 highlight the urgency of addressing global warming, with record temperatures exceeding the 1.5° C threshold.

- The unpredictability of climate patterns raises concerns about the effectiveness of current climate models, emphasising the need for improved forecasting techniques and focused projections for future climate scenarios.

How global warming affects forecasting

Existing models cannot reproduce monsoon trends in the past half century and are considered unreliable for the future. Meteorologists will need to figure out if the predictability of natural modes such as hurricanes, El Niño, La Niña, and the Indian Ocean Dipole will decrease as the warming is relentless, if not accelerating

FULL CONTEXT

Raghu Murtagudde

With the record warming of 2023-2024, we are getting a clearer picture of what global warming does. The medley of extreme events across the planet has covered the gamut from deadly heatwaves to devastating cyclones and floods, from droughts to wildfires. According to some estimates, the world has already crossed the 1.5° C warming threshold (that is, the earth's average surface temperature has increased by more than 1.5° C over the pre-industrial average). The caveat is that global temperatures are an estimate produced from a combination of data and climate models. As the 1.5° C limit is part of a demand by the Alliance of Small Island Developing States, scientists have built models to predict what environmental disturbances crossing this threshold could invite. However, and more importantly, it is not yet clear how long the warming has to remain above the threshold for the projected impacts to materialise.

The spectacular show that nature has put up during 2023-2024 is also a stark reminder that we are far from able to predict the weather and the climate with the requisite skills and spatial-temporal scales to manage disasters effectively. The loss of lives, property, and infrastructure continue to traumatise humanity, especially the poor, who remain very vulnerable to extreme events.

2024 versus our predictions
Meteorologists predicted 2023 El Niño as early as in the spring of that year, which is remarkable. But the level of warming during 2023-2024 has caught them, and the public, by surprise because it was much higher than expected from the addition of the so-called mini-global warming by the El Niño to the ongoing background warming. We speculate that water vapour thrown up by the underwater volcano Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai during 2022 and CO₂ emitted by the wildfires exacerbated the warming. The 2023 monsoon was deficit but it did not qualify as an El Niño drought, the reasons for which researchers are yet to diagnose. Predictions from nearly all major weather centres earlier promised a strong La Niña in late 2024. Now this seems less likely. Perhaps nature has another googly in waiting. Similarly, weather forecasts have called for the most intense hurricane season in decades but this has yet to step beyond the normal.

The monsoon season has evolved erratically and has once again left many parts of India dry while producing devastating floods and landslides in many others. Now 2024 is set to emerge as a monsoon-surplus year; yet it can hardly be called a typical La Niña monsoon. The cyclone season in the North Indian Ocean has also been weaker than what one would expect from a La Niña year. While some weather centres were very gung-ho about an Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) emerging in the Indian Ocean, it has played truant so far.

To be clear, this is not a litany of grievances against predictions. It is an expression of caution that we will be remiss if we don't learn all the lessons from this extraordinary period of warming vis-à-vis their implications for the future of predictions and for the climate projections we keep producing.

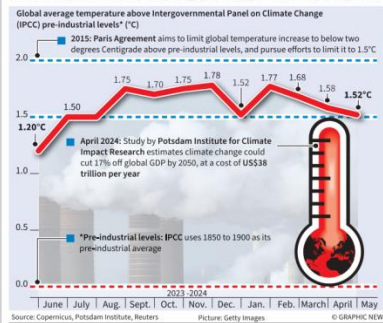
Predictions may pose challenges
A quote often attributed to physicist Niels Bohr is apt here: prediction is difficult,



Blazing heat: Residents collect drinking water from a tanker amid a water crisis in Delhi, on a hot summer day in New Delhi on June 6. SHRI KUMAR / GETTY IMAGES

Global warming

The global average temperature for the last year was the highest ever documented, at 1.63° C above pre-industrial levels, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service



especially if it's about the future. Weather and climate predictions frequently remind us of this. We do learn our lessons and continue to improve the models and the observational networks we need to produce better predictions.

But what if predictions continue to become more difficult with global warming? Put another way, are all the midfires we have had this year just a coincidence or are they a portent of what is to come?

Many studies have reported the impacts of warming on hurricanes, monsoons, El Niños, La Niñas, the IOD, etc. But the bigger question is: if the world is already warmer than 1.5° C, are there any conclusions we can draw about how all these natural variabilities have responded thus far?

Unfortunately, the period of warming we have experienced of late hasn't been long enough for us to confidently say what changes we can already detect in the dominant climate modes. The models are

amazing in their ability to reproduce all natural modes given just the energy coming from the Sun at the top of the atmosphere. But they are not perfect: model answers often disagree; even the same model can produce different answers depending on its configuration.

For example, existing models cannot reproduce monsoon trends in the past half century and are considered unreliable for the future – they can only make skillful forecasts for the present. We have also not sorted out yet whether monsoon patterns are variable from decade to decade – patterns that we may currently be calling trends. We also don't know whether climate change can extend the timescale of natural decadal variability and make it a real trend. We need to address these critical questions to advance our understanding of processes and to make better predictions.

Predicting the future of predictions
There is plenty of hope for the future of

predictions, but as the adage goes, hope is not a strategy. We have our work cut out for us. We obviously need to continue to improve our models and build on the fact that models are already capable of amazing feats, with some deficiencies. We need to figure out if the predictability of natural modes such as hurricanes, El Niño, La Niña, IOD, etc. will decrease as the warming is relentless, if not accelerating. Well-trained and enthusiastic scientists toil to improve models and data networks and bring the latest technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, and sensor-fitted drones, to bear on this pressing challenge.

We have plenty of reasons for optimism vis-à-vis reliable and actionable early warnings at the hyperlocal scale. **Lessons from 2023**
We currently make climate projections using the same or similar models that project future climate based on how the concentrations of specific emissions increase, how populations grow, and what mitigation policies we implement, among other factors. For the coming decade or two, projection uncertainties depend on the model uncertainties themselves plus natural variabilities in a warming world.

The uncertainties in projections beyond a couple of decades are related entirely to the imagined scenarios that drive model simulations.

The inability to capture the response of natural modes to warming will continue to haunt all projections. It will be necessary to translate improved weather and climate predictions to improve the models.

The best strategy to ensure projections are reliable may be to restrict ourselves to just a decade or two into the future. The ongoing geopolitical perturbations and their cascades into markets, economies, and societies underscore the difficulty of imagining the future beyond a decade or so as well.

Overall, it is critical that we assess the costs and benefits of the considerable human, financial, and computational resources for climate projections out to 2100.

Raghu Murtagudde is professor, IIT Bombay, and emeritus professor, University of Maryland.

THE GIST

Meteorologists predicted the 2023 El Niño as early as in the spring of that year, which is remarkable. But the level of warming during 2023-2024 has caught them, and the public, by surprise because it was much higher than expected from the addition of the so-called mini-global warming by the El Niño to the ongoing background warming.

According to some estimates, the world has already crossed the 1.5° C warming threshold (that is, the earth's average surface temperature has increased by more than 1.5° C over the pre-industrial average).

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Record Warming and Its Impacts

- The record warming of 2023-2024 has provided a clearer understanding of global warming, showcasing a range of extreme weather events, including heatwaves, cyclones, floods, droughts, and wildfires.

- Estimates indicate that the world has crossed the 1.5° C warming threshold, although this figure is based on a combination of data and climate models.

Challenges in Weather Predictions

- The extreme weather patterns observed in 2023-2024 serve as a reminder of the limitations in predicting weather and climate effectively.
- The ongoing loss of lives, property, and infrastructure particularly impacts poorer populations who are more vulnerable to such extreme events.

Unforeseen Climate Developments

- Meteorologists accurately predicted the 2023 El Niño but were surprised by the unprecedented level of warming due to its combination with previous background warming.
- The monsoon season has been erratic, leading to droughts in some areas and severe floods in others, while predictions for strong La Niña and hurricane activity have also been inconsistent.

The Future of Climate Predictions

- The unpredictability of climate phenomena raises questions about the reliability of current prediction models, particularly in light of recent warming trends.
- Existing models struggle to reproduce past monsoon trends and may not accurately predict future climate patterns.

Need for Improved Models

- There is a crucial need to enhance climate models to improve predictions for various natural phenomena affected by warming.
- Advances in technology, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, hold promise for better forecasting.

Focused Projections

- Future climate projections should ideally focus on shorter timeframes, such as a decade or two, due to uncertainties and the complexities of natural variabilities.
- It is essential to evaluate the effectiveness and resource allocation for long-term climate projections, particularly towards 2100, amidst evolving geopolitical challenges.

Hezbollah has employed Fadi rockets in response to Israeli attacks, marking their first use since the escalation of conflict in Gaza, raising concerns about their destructive potential and precision.

Hezbollah's missile targets Tel Aviv in its deepest strike

Military intercepts the surface-to-surface missile, which sets off air-raid sirens in Tel Aviv and across central Israel; it responds by striking the site in southern Lebanon where missile came from

Associated Press

TEL AVIV

Hezbollah hurled dozens of projectiles into Israel early on Wednesday, including a missile aimed at Tel Aviv that was the militant group's deepest strike yet and marked a further escalation after Israeli strikes on Lebanon killed hundreds of people.

The Israeli military said it intercepted the surface-to-surface missile, which set off air-raid sirens in Tel Aviv and across central Israel. There were no reports of casualties or damage. The military said it struck



Proof of strike: An Israeli official holding the remnants of a rocket at the site of a strike, fired from Lebanon, in the city of Safed. AFP

the site in southern Lebanon where the missile was launched.

Fleeing families have flocked to Beirut and the

coastal city of Sidon, sleeping in schools turned into shelters, as well as in cars, parks and along the beach. Some sought to leave the

country, causing a traffic jam at the border with Syria.

Hezbollah said it fired a Qader 1 ballistic missile targeting the headquarters of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, which it blames for a recent string of targeted killings of its top commanders and for an attack last week in which explosives hidden in pagers and walkie-talkies killed dozens of people and wounded thousands, including many Hezbollah members.

Hezbollah's latest strikes included dozens of rockets fired on Wednesday into northern Israel, the military said.

The Fadi Rocket:

- The Fadi rocket is a tactical multi-use ground-to-ground rocket used by Hezbollah against Israel.
- It has more explosive power and range compared to previously deployed rockets but lacks precision.
- Hezbollah first utilised Fadi rockets in response to Israeli attacks after the outbreak of conflict in Gaza in October 2023.
- The rocket is named after Fadi Hassan Tawil, a Hezbollah militant killed by Israel in 1987.
- The Fadi is similar in design to the 302-mm Syrian Khaibar rocket, which is based on China's WS-1.
- Hezbollah is estimated to possess thousands of unguided rockets with ranges from 45 to 200 kilometres.

Daily News Analysis

- ▶ The precision of Fadi rockets is relatively low, often resulting in discrepancies between intended targets and actual impacts.
- ▶ Experts predict an increased frequency of Fadi rocket usage as the conflict escalates.



GEO IAS

—It's about quality—

Term In News : Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary

- ▶ A rarest of rare weather phenomenon- the collision of two cyclones- has been found to have caused flattening of thousands of trees in the Eturnagaram wildlife sanctuary in Mulugu district.



About Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary:

- ▶ **Location:**
 - Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary is located near the border of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Telangana in the village of Eturnagaram, a tribal village in Mulugu district of Telangana.
 - It is located 100 km from Warangal and 250 km from Hyderabad.
 - It was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in 1952 by Hyderabad Nizam Government.
 - It is spread over an area of around 806 sq. km.
- ▶ **River:**
 - It has a water source called Dayyam Vagu, which separates the sanctuary into two parts.
 - River Godavari also passes through it.
- ▶ **Flora:**
 - The region is covered completely with thick natural vegetation and it falls in the tropical dry deciduous.
 - It is rich in the growth of teak, bamboo and other trees like madhuca and terminalia.
- ▶ **Fauna:**
 - This sanctuary provides shelter to Tiger, Leopard, Panther, Wolf, Wild Dogs, Jackals, Sloth Bear, Chousingha, Black Buck, Nilgai, Sambar, Spotted Deer and Four Horned Antelope etc.
 - The plethora of water in the sanctuary is attributed to the presence of reptiles like the famous Muggar crocodiles and snakes like the Cobra, Python and Krait.
 - The famous Sammakka-Saralamma Temple is situated inside the sanctuary.

The misplaced move of 'one nation one election'

The idea of simultaneous elections, to the Lok Sabha, the State Assemblies and the local bodies, was thrown up by the Prime Minister a couple of years ago. Frequent Assembly and local body elections kept him busy on the campaign trail in some parts of the country most of the time. This experience may have been the trigger for the idea to hold elections at one time.

This also led to the formation of a high-level committee on simultaneous elections, which was headed by the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind. Other members of the committee included the Home Minister, Amit Shah, former Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Chairman, Fifteenth Finance Commission N.K. Singh, former Secretary-General, Lok Sabha Subhash C. Kashyap, senior advocate Harish Salve and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari. Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ministry of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, was a special invitee. The committee's report was submitted to the President of India in March this year. Thus the recommendations were available to the public before the 2024 general election. Moreover, the idea of 'simultaneous elections' was a part of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's manifesto (BJP) for this general election. If the ruling party had won a majority in this election it could have claimed that the idea had been endorsed by voters. But in the absence of a majority, it becomes difficult to assume that voters are in approval of it.

Be that as it may, it is nothing less than a miracle that a high-level committee could come up with such a voluminous report (18,626 pages) within a relatively short time on an issue of great importance. With the Union Cabinet having approved the recommendation, the subject of 'one nation one election' has reached almost take-off stage. In the first phase, Lok Sabha and Assembly elections will be held simultaneously, while local body elections will be conducted within 100 days of the general election.

An amendment Bill and its fate

The recommendation on simultaneous elections involves amendments to various Articles of the Constitution. The crucial amendment is on the tenure of Assemblies which will no longer have fixity. Since the tenure of the Assemblies will have to be synchronised with that of the Lok Sabha, it is only natural that State Assemblies, which, under Article 172, have a fixed tenure of five years will lose it.

But before going into further details, let us look at what the fate of the Constitution amendment Bill that will be introduced in the 18th Lok Sabha for this purpose will be. After the Bill is introduced, the next important stage is its consideration, which means a general debate on it. After the debate is concluded, the motion for consideration is put to the vote of the House. At



P.D.T. Achary

former Secretary General, Lok Sabha

that stage, the special majority, namely, the majority of the total membership of the House and a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting, will be required.

Only if the motion for consideration is passed with the special majority will the House consider the subsequent stages, i.e., clause by clause consideration, and finally pass the Bill. If all 543 members are present in the House to vote then the support of 362 members will be required. It is understood that the ruling National Democratic Alliance has around 292 members at present. Thus, there is a wide gap between this number and the special majority number of 362. Since the Opposition parties are opposed to the 'one nation one election' proposition, perhaps the government will find it extremely difficult to mobilise the special majority. Thus, in such a situation, the fate of the Constitution amendment Bill will be decided at the stage of consideration itself. The simple message from all this is that without the support of the Opposition, no Constitution amendment Bill will be able to be passed in the Parliament of today.

The arguments are thin

The high-level committee has recommended simultaneous elections for two reasons. First, the issue of savings in expenses given the humongous amounts of money spent in each election. If all elections are held only once in five years the savings will be enormous. But this is an argument that needs closer examination. Under Article 324, all elections to Parliament and the State legislatures are conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI). The money required to hold elections is sanctioned by Parliament as a part of the Budget. For the financial year 2023-24, the total allocation made by Parliament to the ECI is ₹466 crore. Obviously this allocation was made for meeting the expenditure in connection with the 2024 general election. For 2022-23, the total allocation was only ₹320 crore. Thus the total amount allotted to the ECI for the general election – ₹466 crore – is not a very huge amount.

Of course expenditure is incurred also by the State governments to meet logistical requirements in connection with elections. Under Article 324(6), staff are required to be provided to the ECI on demand for the elections. Under Section 160 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, State governments are empowered to requisition premises and even vehicles for election purposes. All these arrangements require money which the States will have to provide. But even after all these expenses are also considered, the total expenditure incurred by the Union and State governments cannot be categorised as being huge or enormous.

Yes, the money spent by the political parties is mind boggling, but the point is that the money that would be saved by the political parties due to the holding of elections once in five years is not

going to be spent on, for example, road building or the building of bridges or hospitals. No political party has ever done such things. After all, we had simultaneous elections from 1951-52 to 1967. There is no evidence that the political parties have ever built roads for instance during this long period. Therefore, the assumption that the money saved can be used for building infrastructure does not seem to be based on any empirical evidence.

The second reason is that frequent elections will disrupt developmental plans and projects of the government because of the model code of conduct being in force most of the time. Once again there is no empirical evidence to prove this argument. After all, periodic or frequent elections have been held since 1967 till today. But it is not known that elections have stopped the developmental momentum. It is interesting to note in this context that demonetisation of 85% of India's currency was done close to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election.

A move against federalism

Curtailling the tenures of State Assemblies to synchronise them with the tenure of the Lok Sabha is an act against federalism. Under the Constitution of India, State Assemblies are autonomous law-making bodies within the India federation and are independent of the federal parliament. A fixed tenure of the Assemblies independent of the tenure of the Lok Sabha is a key aspect of the federal setup. Under the *Kesavananda Bharati* decision, Parliament does not have the power to alter the basic structure. Federalism is a part of the basic structure. The proposed amendments which seek to do away with the fixity of tenure of the Assemblies would amount to altering the basic structure. Whether ratification by Assemblies will be necessary or not is not the key issue. If this amendment is carried out, some Assemblies will have a term of three years. It may be two years or so for others.

As a matter of fact, frequent elections have many positive benefits. First, they will enhance the accountability of elected representatives. Frequent elections compel them to go back to the people and reconnect with them frequently. Elections once in five years would mean that representatives would not feel compelled to go to the people. They would slowly move away from them and try to reconnect with them only in the election year. Similarly, if elections are held only once in five years, political parties will slowly become lethargic and, in course of time, will cease to be the effective vehicles of peoples' aspirations. From the angle of governments, frequent elections will show them which way the wind blows and a government in office can do course correction.

In conclusion, simultaneous elections will alter the federal balance of the Constitution and it is not a priority issue for ordinary Indians. Therefore, the game is not worth the candle.

On the contrary, the holding of frequent elections in India has many positive benefits

GS Paper 02 : Indian Polity

PYQ : (UPSC CSE (M) GS-2 2017) : 'Simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will limit the amount of time and money spent in electioneering but it will reduce the government's accountability to the people'
Discuss. (250 words/15m)

UPSC Mains Practice Question Discuss the potential benefits and challenges of implementing simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies in India. How might this impact the federal structure and political accountability? (250 w /15 m)

Context :

- The article discusses the proposal of simultaneous elections in India, examining its political, constitutional, and financial implications.
- It critiques the impact on federalism, savings in election expenses, and the effects of frequent elections on accountability and development. It also highlights challenges in passing the necessary constitutional amendments.

Introduction to Simultaneous Elections

- The idea of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies was proposed by the Prime Minister of India.
- Frequent elections across various states kept him on the campaign trail, potentially triggering this idea.
- A high-level committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind was formed to explore this concept, including several key political and legal figures.
- The committee submitted its report in March, making it public before the 2024 general election.
- Simultaneous elections were part of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election manifesto but did not receive overwhelming voter endorsement due to the absence of a majority.

Recommendation of the High-Level Committee

- The Union Cabinet approved the recommendation, making simultaneous elections a nearly actionable policy.

- In the first phase, Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections will be conducted simultaneously, with local body elections following within 100 days.
- The key constitutional amendment proposed involves the tenure of Assemblies, which will lose their fixed five-year terms to synchronise with the Lok Sabha.

Challenges in Passing the Amendment Bill

- For the bill to pass, it requires a special majority, which is the support of two-thirds of members present and voting.
- With 362 votes required and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) holding around 292 members, the government faces a significant shortfall.
- Opposition parties are largely opposed to the 'one nation one election' concept, making it challenging for the ruling party to gather the necessary support.

Argument for Savings in Election Expenses

- One of the main arguments for simultaneous elections is the potential savings in election expenses.
- The budget allocation for the Election Commission of India (ECI) for the 2024 general election was ₹466 crore, which is not a large amount compared to other government expenditures.
- State governments also incur election-related expenses, but overall costs are not considered enormous.
- The argument that political party expenses will be saved is weak, as there is no evidence that saved money would be redirected to infrastructure projects.
- Simultaneous elections were held from 1951 to 1967, but there is no historical proof of political parties using saved election funds for development.

The Model Code of Conduct Argument

- Another argument is that frequent elections disrupt development due to the model code of conduct being enforced during election periods.
- However, no empirical evidence supports the claim that frequent elections have slowed developmental progress.
- Notably, large policy decisions like demonetization were implemented despite impending elections.

Impact on Federalism

- The proposal to curtail the tenure of State Assemblies undermines the federal structure of India.
- Under the Constitution, State Assemblies are autonomous and their tenure is independent of the Lok Sabha.
- The Supreme Court's Kesavananda Bharati judgement emphasised that federalism is part of India's basic structure, which cannot be altered.
- Forcing synchrony between state and central elections could lead to some Assemblies having much shorter terms, contradicting the federal principle.

Benefits of Frequent Elections

Daily News Analysis

- ▶ Frequent elections ensure elected representatives remain accountable to the people and stay connected with their constituencies.
- ▶ Elections held once every five years could lead to representatives becoming disconnected and complacent.
- ▶ Regular elections also provide feedback to governments, allowing them to make mid-term corrections based on voter sentiment.

Conclusion

- ▶ Simultaneous elections could disturb India's federal balance and are not a pressing issue for ordinary citizens.
- ▶ The risks and challenges associated with this policy outweigh its perceived benefits.