

GS II

SYLLABUS: GOVERNMENT POLICIES & ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THEIR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION.

SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 6.

News: "The looming threat to federalism and democratic tenets."

Simultaneous Elections:

- Idea to **synchronise elections** to Lok Sabha, State legislative assembly, Municipalities & Panchayats **on the same day**.
- **This practice continued till 1967** or 4th General election.
- Currently, **Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim, Telangana** elections to Lok Sabha and Assemblies held together.

Need: Based on Ram Nath Kovind Committee 2023

- Frequent elections **create an atmosphere of uncertainty**.
- **Minimising disruptions & policy paralysis:** by ensuring stability and predictability.
- Helps in **reduction of election costs** and increase in **voter participation**. Eg. In 2019, the **General Election (Lok Sabha) costed Rs.4500 crore**. If State elections added to this, expenses further multiply.
- **Simultaneous elections lead to** increase in economic growth, a lower inflation, increased investments, and improved quality of government expenditure.
- **Political parties behaviour:** keeps **politicians always in campaign mode** due to elections at different times (Local, State, National) rather than their work towards policy making.

Implementation:

- **Requirement of Constitutional amendments:**
 - In relation to terms of Parliament and State assemblies and local bodies (**Art. 83, 172**)
 - For adoption of single electoral roll.
- **Dissolution of Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies at once**, irrespective of their remaining term as a onetime measure.
- **Municipal and Panchayat polls within 100 days of general election.**
- **Single electoral roll:** Currently some State laws allow State Election Commission to prepare separate electoral rolls. Committee recommended that **empowering Election Commission of India to prepare single electoral roll** in consultation with SECs.
- **Logistics requirement:** ECI & SECs to plan and estimate logistical requirements ahead of the rollout.

Note:

- **Constitutional Amendment nature for above:**
 - In case of amending 'term' of Parliament and **State Assemblies, there is no requirement of ratification by States**.
 - However, ratification by States becomes **necessary in case of amending 'local bodies term'**.

Challenges:

- **Premature dissolution of some State's Assemblies or Lok Sabha:** can undermine the federal spirit & concerns of delay in conducting new election.
- **Case Hung Assembly:** if no party secures majority to form govt., a fresh election to the remaining period of 5 year cycle should be conducted—**Ram Nath Kovind Committee 2023**.

P.T.O

- **Case of No-confidence Motion:** if passed, it may curtail the term of Lok Sabha/ State Assembly. **Law commission recommended** replacement of no-confidence motion with 'constructive vote of no-confidence (govt. will only be removed if there is confidence in an alternate govt.).
- **Cases of bye-elections:** due to Death, resignation or disqualification of members can be clubbed together and conducted once in a year—**Standing Committee 2015**.
- **India is a Multiparty system** where coalition and collapses are common, new system will be a challenge.
- **Logistics challenges:** in 2019 general elections about **4 million EVMs and 2 million VVPATs were used**. Simultaneous election can double the demand.
- **Local issues may get overshadowed by National needs:** ultimately diminishing democratic representation at grassroot-level—**NITI Aayog report 2017**.

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PYQs

GS II 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.

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PRE-CONTEXT

INDIA-FRANCE (BILATERAL EXERCISES).

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 8.

News: "French aircraft carrier to have Goa, Kochi stopovers."

Bilateral Exercises:

- **Varuna:**
 - Naval Exercise.
 - Activities: Anti-submarine warfare (ASW), Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) etc.
- **Garuda:**
 - Air Force Exercise
 - Activities: Air combat drills, Aerial refuelling operations etc
- **Shakti:**
 - Takes place between two armies for every two years in either country.
 - Activities: Sharing best practices, Enhancing joint military capability etc.

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P.T.O

MAPPING

PRE-CONTEXT

ALONG INDIA-CHINA BORDER

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 1.

News: "India 'protests' China's new counties in Ladakh."

About Hotan prefecture:

- Hotan prefecture is a major oasis town in southwestern Xinjiang, an **autonomous region in Northwestern China**.
- On December 27, 2024 **Chinese authorities declared the formation of He'an County and Hekang County**, in the Hotan prefecture.
- In the declaration, **Hotan Prefecture encompasses portions of Aksai Chin**.

Mega Hydro power project on Yarlung Tsang-po:

- Yarlung Tsang-po (Tibetan name of Brahmaputra)**, it flows through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.
- Announced **mega dam project is in the deep gorges of the eastern Himalayas** that fall under Chinese control.
- The mega dam is designed to be the **largest infrastructure project in the world**. Once constructed, the gigantic dam would dwarf even the **Three Gorges Dam**.

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ENVIRONMENT

PRE-CONTEXT

GROUNDWATER POLLUTION

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 6.

News: "Water woes."

Findings reported by Central Groundwater Board:

- Excessive nitrates have been found in groundwater** in 440 districts as of 2023.
 - Largely due to the use of subsidised synthetic nitrogenous fertilizer**, a key input for farming.
- Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu reported the **highest nitrate contamination problem**.
 - Leads to **Blue-baby syndrome** in infants (a reduced ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen).
 - Once nitrates in groundwater rise to the surface and become part of lakes and ponds, **algal blooms harm aquatic ecosystems**.
- Rajasthan and Punjab reported the **highest number of samples with uranium concentration**.
- Other major chemical contaminants affecting groundwater **quality are fluoride and uranium**.
 - Fluoride pollution causes **Knock Knee syndrome**.

About Central Groundwater Board:

- Statutory body** constituted under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- Nodal agency** for ground water development and management in the country.

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TECHNOLOGY

PRE-CONTEXT

TUNGSTEN MINING

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 7.

News: "In Madurai, mining for tungsten and trouble."

Context: The Ministry of Mines announced that it had granted tungsten mining rights in eight blocks, spanning 5,000 acres, through an auction, to Hindustan Zinc Limited, a subsidiary of Vedanta Limited, a listed company.

About Tungsten:

- Rare, hard, heavy metal notable for its extremely high melting point (~3,422 °C) and tensile strength**.
- It is primarily obtained from the minerals **wolframite and scheelite**.
- India has limited tungsten reserves**, found primarily in states like **Rajasthan (Degana) and south of Deccan plateau**.
- Classified as a **Critical Mineral** by the Govt of India.

Issues:

- Koolampatti, Arittappatti, Nayakkarpatti, and Meenakshipuram villages have **historical significance**.
- These hills contain evidence dating back to the 16th century **Pandya kingdom**.
- They also feature **several megalithic structures, rock-cut temples, Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, and Jain beds**.
 - Two Brahmi stone inscriptions dating back 2,300 years could be found in the Kazhinja malai, one of the seven hills.
- Presence of **Laguleesar sculpture** in a 7th-8th century rock cut temple in the area was rare.
- Region is also home to wildlife, including the **Indian pangolin (EN) and Slender Loris (EN)**.

About Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957:

- Schedule 1:**
 - Energy/ Hydrocarbon Minerals:** Coal and Lignite.
 - Atomic Minerals:**
 - Rare earths, containing uranium and Thorium.
 - Phosphorites containing uranium.
 - Beach sand minerals etc.
 - Metallic and Non Metallic Minerals:**
 - Metallic:** Bauxite, Chrome ore, Copper ore, Gold, Iron ore, Lead, Manganese ore, Zinc.
 - Non-Metallic:** Asbestos, Precious stones.
 - Critical and Strategic Minerals.**
 - Critical minerals are essential for our country's economic development and national security.
 - Eg. such as **lithium, graphite, cobalt, titanium and rare earth elements (REE)**.
 - Identified by **Ministry of Mines**.
- Schedule 2:**
 - Deals with **rates of Royalty of Minerals** payable to govt.
- Schedule 3:**
 - Rates of **Dead rent** (A fixed charge a leaseholder must pay the state, regardless of mining operations or mineral production).
- Schedule 4:**
 - Introduced in 2015, This schedule lists minerals for which **auction-based mining leases are mandatory**.
 - Iron ore, bauxite, limestone, manganese ore, and other.**

Power to grant Mineral licence:

- Central Govt:** **Major Minerals under first schedule:** Coal and Lignite, Atomic Minerals, Critical minerals.
- State Govt:** **Minor minerals** like building stones, gravel, ordinary clay, ordinary sand (not used for prescribed industrial purposes), and other minerals declared as minor minerals.

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SYLLABUS: BILATERAL GROUPINGS AND AGREEMENTS AFFECTING INDIA'S INTERESTS.

INDIA-MALDIVES RELATIONS

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 9.

News: "India pledges support to Maldives to help it navigate economic issues".

"Whoever conquers the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia."

—Alfred Mahan.

Significance of Maldives to India:

- Maldives is located right in middle of Indian Ocean.
- **Strategic point in Indian Ocean** Eg. Maldives is closer to **Channel 8 and 9 degrees** and sea lanes through these channels carry:
 - 50% of India's external exports;
 - 80% of India's Energy Imports;
 - 85% of China's energy requirement;
 - 65% of world's oil trade.
- **For India's Geo-political influence:**
 - Maintains India's military power for prompt responses Eg. Aircraft carriers, Balancing China presence in region.
 - To maintain **India's active leadership in Indian oceanic region.**
- **Regional security and stability:**
 - **Gathering information and intelligence** to counter terrorism, sub-surface oceanic data (for submarine deployment).
 - **Monitors & detect** enemies, pirates to prevent piracy and smuggling.
- **Cultural and Historical bonds:**
 - Enhancing India's soft power with shared heritage and mutual goodwill (i.e Cultural diplomacy).
 - **Diaspora:** almost 30,000 Indians reside in Maldives contributing to its economy.

India-Maldives relations:

- **India as the "First Responder":**
 - India's prompt assistance **during 1988 coup** attempt led to development of long-term and friendly bilateral relations with Maldives.
 - India was first to assist **during 2004 Tsunami** as well as **Drinking water crisis in 2014.**
 - India's swift dispatch of **30,000 doses of measles vaccines** in January 2020 to prevent an outbreak.
 - India's rapid and comprehensive assistance to Maldives during **COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **Economic relations:**
 - **Bilateral trade** stood at 300 million USD in 2019—**MoC&I.**
 - **Tourism:** in 2019, Indian tourists accounted for 15% of total tourist arrivals in Maldives—**Maldives Ministry of Tourism Annual report 2020.**
- India's relationship with Maldives is **free of any political contentious issues.**

Major concerns:

- **Political instability in Maldives:** Eg. 2012 coup etc affecting bilateral relations.
- **Growing Chinese influence:**
 - **Unsustainable debts:** 1.5 billion USD as loan from China—**IMF 2019.**
 - Building infrastructure like hospitals, Roads.
 - **Strengthen String of Pearls policy:** Bagamoyo port (Tanzania)—Djibouti port (Djibouti)—Gwadar port (Pakistan)—Humbantota port (Sri Lanka)—Chittagong port (Bangladesh).

- **Presence of Chinese surveillance vessel** Yuan Wang 5 in the Indian Ocean in Jan 2024.
 - This is perceived as strategic challenge by India.
- **Terrorism and radicalisation:**
 - Maldives has one of the highest per capita rates of foreign fighters joining extremist groups like ISIS—**UN-Office on Drugs and Crime report 2018.**

India's initiatives for Maldives:

- **Development Assistance:**
 - **Financial Aid and Grants:**
 - In Oct 2024, India signing **USD 750 million currency swap agreement**, saving Maldives from BOP crises.
 - **Reliving from most imminent crisis in September 2024**, where SBI subscribed to Maldivian govt. bonds worth of USD 50 million.
 - In 2018, India extended **financial package of USD 1.5 billion** to Maldives and soft loans for economic recovery.
 - **Currency swap agreements of 400 million USD & Line of Credit** of 800 million under 8 infrastructure projects.
 - Funding of USD 5.5 million to **High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP)** in areas of health, education etc.
 - **Infrastructure development:**
 - **Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP):** a 7km bridge and causeway linking Malé with three neighbouring islands.
 - **Water and Sanitation projects** on 34 islands.
 - **Capacity Building and Training:**
 - **Education scholarships** provided to over 1000 Maldivian students.
 - **Defence training** to Maldivian personnel.
 - **Humanitarian Assistance to Maldives:**
 - **Operation NEER:** 2014 drinking water crisis.
 - **COVID 19 support:** **Vaccine Maitri 2021** (delivered 1 lakh doses), medical supplies in 2020.
 - **Defence cooperation:**
 - India gifted **Fast Patrol Vessels** to enhance maritime security.
 - **Joint Military exercises:** Eg. Exercise **Ekuverin** (counter terrorism), **Dosti** (trilateral coast guard exercise with Sri Lanka).

Current situation of Maldives:

- **At major risk akin to the one faced by Sri Lanka in 2022:**
 - High external debt to GDP ratio (110% of GDP).
 - Falling Foreign Exchange Reserves.
 - Global credit rating agencies (Eg. Moody's and Fitch) downgraded the ratings of Maldives.
 - Default on payments is likely to spiral.

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TECHNOLOGY

PRE-CONTEXT

E-GOVERNANCE

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 9.

News: "EPFO completes rollout of centralised system for pensioners."

About Centralised Pension Payment System:

- Benefits about 78 lakh pensioners under the **Employees Pension Scheme 1995**.
- New system will be a **great relief to pensioners** who have moved to their hometown after retirement.
- **Pensioners to access their pension seamlessly from any bank, any branch in the country.** It eliminates the need for physical verification visits and simplifies the pension disbursement process.
- Approval of this new payment system is the part of modernisation of the EPFO.

About EPFO:

- **Statutory body** under **EPFO Act 1952**.
- EPFO is under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Labour & Employment**.

Schemes run by EPFO:

Employee Provident Fund Scheme 1952:

- Accumulation plus interest upon retirement and death.
- Partial withdrawals allowed for education, marriage etc

Employee Pension Scheme 1995:

- Monthly pension for superannuation/ retirement, disability, survivor, widow(er), children.
- Minimum pension on disablement.

Insurance scheme 1976:

- Benefit provided in case of death of an employee who was a member of the scheme at the time of death.

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MAPPING

PRE-CONTEXT

NORTH SEA

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 12.

News: "Trump calls to 'open up' North Sea and get rid of windmills."

About North Sea:

- **Bordering countries:** Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom.
- Crucial part of the global maritime network, **servicing as a gateway between Asia and Europe.**
- **Major Ports in North Sea region:** Rotterdam (Netherlands), Hamburg (Germany), and Antwerp (Belgium),
- The region is a **leader in offshore wind energy.**

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Thank you!