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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS





## Daily Current Affairs from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* & *The Assam Tribune*

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#### GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

##### 1. Cabinet nod to bills on simultaneous elections

**Context:** The One Nation One Election Bill has been approved by the Union Cabinet for the Parliament. The bill proposes to hold simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, State Legislative assemblies and local body elections across the whole country. This proposal aims to align the election process leading to cost cutting and better governance by eliminating election related disruptions. This bill was analysed by a high-level committee chaired by President Ram Nath Kovind. While the opposition is still against this bill, a major number of leaders are looking at the benefits and consistently this bill could bring. In this article, we will look at this bill and the benefits and significance of this proposal.

#### One Nation One Election Bill

- **Overview:** Also known as simultaneous elections, one nation one election bill aims to hold all the elections including that of Lok Sabha, State Elections and panchayat that is the local body elections all at once. In this manner, voters will be able to cast their votes for both the Lok Sabha and State elections all on the same day.
- **History:** The years 1951-52, 1962 and 1967 witnessed simultaneous elections dating back the concept of one nation one election to the early years of Indian Independence. This process was only discontinued after the 1967 elections due to the premature dissolution of a few state assemblies and Lok Sabha in 1970. Since then, the elections are being conducted separately which is only leading to increased costs. The concept of one nation one election has been revived recently with the aim of aligning India's electoral process.
- **One Nation One Election Bill Advantages:**
  - Cost Reduction* - It could save money by eliminating the need for separate election cycles.
  - Focus on Long-Term Governance* - It encourages politicians to prioritize long-term governance over short-term gains.
  - Increased Voter Turnout* - Voters are less fatigued, as they only participate once every few years, potentially boosting voter turnout.
  - Level Playing Field* - Smaller parties can compete more effectively with larger ones due to reduced overall election expenses.
  - Efficient Use of Security Forces* - It allows security forces to be deployed more efficiently for other purposes.
- **One Nation One Election Bill Disadvantages:**
  - Synchronization Challenges* - Synchronizing elections in a diverse democracy like India can be difficult, particularly if governments lose confidence in their assemblies.
  - Constitutional and Federalism Issues* - Its implementation may require constitutional changes and could potentially challenge the federal nature of the Indian political system.
  - Impact on Voter Behaviour* - Voters may confuse national and state issues in simultaneous elections, blurring the distinctiveness of state-level politics.
  - Impact on Regional Parties* - It may favour larger national parties, potentially disadvantaging regional parties.
  - Accountability Concerns* - Fixed terms without the threat of election could reduce government accountability and encourage autocratic tendencies.
- **Implementations of the Bill:** The implementation of the One Nation, One Election policy is not feasible within the current constitutional framework. To enable this policy, certain essential amendments to the Constitution are necessary, including:
  - *Article 83* - Concerning the duration of the Houses of Parliament, amendments are required to fix the tenure and timing for the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.
  - *Article 85* - Pertaining to sessions, prorogation, and dissolution of Parliament, clear guidelines must be established to prevent arbitrary or ambiguous dissolution of sessions.
  - *Article 172* - Governing the duration of State Legislatures, amendments are needed to synchronize their tenure with that of the Lok Sabha.
  - *Article 174* - Like Article 85, this article deals with sessions, prorogation, and dissolution of State Legislatures. Amendments are required to standardize procedures and timelines.

- **Challenges:** While the One Nation One Election implementation could significantly bring down the costs of conducting the elections and align the administrative practices, there are a few challenges that cannot be ignored:
  - *Overshadowing Regional Issues* - Holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies could lead to national issues dominating the discourse, sidelining important regional and state-specific concerns.
  - *Impact on Regional Parties* - Simultaneous elections may disproportionately benefit national political parties, putting regional parties at a disadvantage and potentially diluting their influence.
  - *Political Accountability* - Frequent elections foster greater accountability among lawmakers by subjecting them to regular public scrutiny. Fixed terms, on the other hand, could provide stability at the cost of reduced performance evaluation, challenging democratic ideals.
  - *Federalism Concerns* - Amendments to the Constitution regarding the term of State Legislative Assemblies under Article 172 can be enacted without requiring ratification by the states, potentially limiting their role and undermining the federal structure.
  - *Logistical Challenges* - Implementing the One Nation, One Election policy would demand substantial resources, including a vast number of electronic voting machines and trained personnel to manage the extensive process efficiently.

### TOP RECOMMENDATIONS OF RAM NATH KOVIND PANEL

1. The government must develop a legally tenable mechanism to restore the cycle of simultaneous elections.
2. In the first stage, elections for the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies can be held together.
3. In the second step, the elections to municipalities and panchayats will be synchronised with the Lok Sabha and state assemblies in such a way that the polls to municipalities and panchayats are held within 100 days of the holding of the parliamentary and Assembly elections.
4. For synchronizing the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, the president shall notify the date of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha after a general election as the "appointed date".
5. The tenure of all state assemblies formed via polls after the "appointed date" and before the expiry of the full term of the Lok Sabha will only be for the period ending up to the subsequent parliamentary polls. After this one-time transitory measure, all Lok Sabha and Assembly polls will be held simultaneously.
6. Fresh elections could be held to constitute a new Lok Sabha in the event of a hung House or a no-confidence motion or any such event.

## GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

### 2. Lok Sabha passes Bill to amend the Disaster Management Act of 2005

**Context:** The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed a Bill to strengthen the working of national and State disaster management authorities, with the Centre stressing that the legislation will help State governments deal with disasters better. The new Bill would not only overcome them but also strengthen the disaster management system. The Bill seeks to bring clarity and convergence among stakeholders working in the field of disaster management. However, opposition members said that the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 only talks about creation of a plethora of organisations.

#### Key points

- **Overview:** Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005 was enacted to provide for effective management of disasters and for matters connected therewith. The Bill aims to mainstream disaster management in development plans, aligning with recommendations of 15th Finance Commission.
- **DM (Amendment) Bill, 2024:** *Preparation of DM plans* - National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) will prepare DM plans.  
*Functions of NDMA and SDMA at their respective levels* - Bill adds new functions for these authorities, Taking periodic stock of disaster risks, etc.  
*State & National Disaster Databases* - Contain information on type & severity of disaster risks, allocation of funds and expenditure, and disaster preparedness and mitigation plans.  
*Appointments to NDMA* - Bill empowers NDMA to specify the number and category of officers and employees, with previous approval of the central government.  
*Urban DM Authorities* - Bill empowers state government to constitute a separate Urban Disaster Management Authority (UDMA) for state capitals and cities with a municipal corporation except for Delhi and Chandigarh.  
*Formation of State Disaster Response Force* - Bill empowers state government to constitute a State Disaster Response Force (SDRF).  
*National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) and the High-Level Committee (HLC)* - Bill provides statutory status to NCMC and HLC. NCMC will function as the nodal body for dealing with major disasters with serious or national ramifications. HLC will provide financial assistance to state governments during disasters.
- **Issues with Bill:** *Lack of financial Devolution* - Urban Local Bodies will find difficult to set up, equip, and run the UDMAs due to financial constraints.  
*Centralization* - Bill grants excessive rulemaking power to Central government through delegated legislation to make rules on specific matters, which could potentially overlap with legislative powers reserved for States.  
*Test of Constitutionality* - Bill is brought under Entry 23 of the Concurrent List of Seventh Schedule which deals with “social security and social insurance, employment and unemployment” as Disaster Management is not mentioned in the Seventh Schedule.  
*Restricted definition of ‘disaster’* - Bill does not expand the list of notified disasters to include climate-induced disaster such as heatwaves.
- **Conclusion:** Bill 2024 aims to strengthen disaster risk reduction and management by introducing new structures like Urban Disaster Management Authorities. However, its success will hinge on overcoming challenges related to coordination, authority, and resource allocation among various levels of government.

## GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

### 3. House panel suggests increase in per unit amount for PMAY-G over rising inflation

**Context:** The detrimental effect of rising inflation on new house construction, a Parliamentary panel has recommended that the government revise the per unit assistance to PMAY-Gramin beneficiaries. According to the reports there is an urgent need to increase the monthly pension under the National Social Assistance Program (NSAP). The per unit assistance under PMAY-G for plain areas is Rs. 1.2 lakh and for hilly areas is Rs.1.3 lakh. The committee also recommended an increase in monthly pension under NSAP. The pension is provided to over 3 crore beneficiaries covered under the Indira Gandhi National Disability

Pension Scheme (IGNDPS), Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS) and Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension scheme (IGNOAPS).

### Key points

- **Overview:** The government announced that additional housing units will be built beyond those planned under PMAY-G and PMAY-U by December 2024, extending the original target from March 2022.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G): Launch** - To achieve the objective of "Housing for All" by 2022, the erstwhile rural housing scheme Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) was restructured to Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) from 1st April 2016, as a centrally sponsored scheme.

*Ministry Involved* - Ministry of Rural Development.

*Status* - States/UTs have sanctioned 2.85 crore houses to the beneficiaries and 2.22 crore houses have been completed till March 2023.

*Aim* - To provide a pucca house with basic amenities to all rural families, who are homeless or living in kutchra or dilapidated houses by the end of March 2022.

- **Policy Related Issues in PMAY:** *Kitchen* - PMAY-G provided kitchens, but many prefer extra rooms instead, often cooking outside and using kitchen space as living rooms, which partly explains the limited uptake of PMUY (LPG gas).

*Cooking Fuel* - Despite efforts, many PMAY-G households don't use LPG cylinders due to outdoor cooking habits and the cost of refills, hindering the PMAY and PMUY program integration.

*Toilet Use* - 10% of toilets built with PMAY-G houses are unused. However, it's unclear if this is due to community habits or poor installation and needs investigation.

*Drinking Water* - The National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) aims to provide piped water to most rural homes by 2022, but PMAY-G houses mainly rely on shared water points and lack proper waste collection, drainage, and street lighting.

*Source of Borrowing* - Most PMAY-G beneficiaries take loans from private sources rather than banks to cover additional house construction costs, despite being aware of bank loan options, indicating a policy issue with bank loan accessibility.

- **Way forward:** *Timely Release of Funds* - Some states face delays in receiving central government funds, with a reported deficit of 200 crores in 2020, prompting the need for timely release of state contributions and direct benefit transfers akin to MGNREGA.

*More Inclusive* - The need of the hour is to acknowledge the limitations of the existing scheme and to devise an intervention solely intended to solve the housing problem of the landless rural population.

Q. Among other things, which one of the following was the purpose for which the Deepak Parekh Committee was constituted?

- (a) To study the current socio-economic conditions of certain minority communities
- (b) To suggest measures for financing the development of infrastructure
- (c) To frame a policy on the production of genetically modified organisms
- (d) To suggest measures to reduce the fiscal deficit in the Union Budget

Ans: - (b)



## GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

### 4. Indo-Bangla diplomatic tightrope

**Context:** The troubled history of the partition of India and Pakistan on religious lines in 1947 and the partition of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (Pakistan) in 1971 led to diasporic divisions in the Indian subcontinent. Accusations of religious persecution on either side of the border have time and again been a thorny issue in Indo-Bangladesh relations. The Indian government's accusation of persecution of Hindu minorities in these neighbouring countries as it passed the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 irked the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh. Bangladesh under Hasina has been India's most prominent partner in the South Asian region. However, a range of recent developments has challenged the dynamics of this upward trajectory in India-Bangladesh relations during the Hasina regime.

#### Catalyst for PM's Resignation

- **Overview:** PM Sheikh Hasina's resignation and flight to India amid protests mark a pivotal shift in South Asian geopolitics, raising concerns about Bangladesh's stability and its relationship with India.
- **Nationwide Uproar:** Student protests over job quotas, fuelled by governmental repression and violence from the Awami League's student wing, ignited widespread unrest.
- **Democratic Deficit:** Allegations of electoral violence and rigging diminished democratic credibility and contributed to public dissatisfaction.
- **Economic Challenges:** Falling forex reserves, currency depreciation, and mounting external debt have created a looming debt crisis.
- **Chinese Loans:** Much of the infrastructure development relies on high-interest loans from China.
- **Authoritarian Measures:** Increasing use of stringent laws, such as the Digital Security Act, to suppress dissent led to a more authoritarian governance style.
- **Economic Disparities:** Corruption, high-profile financial scandals, and growing inequality.
- **Authoritarian Practices:** The Awami League's (AL) authoritarian measures, including arrests and harassment of opposition leaders, have fueled resentment among the masses.
- **Corruption and Nepotism:** Perceived corruption and nepotism within the AL have widened the gap between the government and the impoverished population.
- **Islamist Influence:** The AL encouragement of Islamist groups like Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh has created a toxic environment within the ruling party.
- **Radicalization:** Islamist organisations, through religious schools and mosques, have radicalised a significant portion of the population, especially the youth.
- **Islamist Opposition:** The Islamist parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Hefazat, and Islami Oikyo Jote, now fill the opposition space.
- **Political Analyst's Perspective:** Political analysts argue that the AL's crackdown on the BNP has inadvertently strengthened Islamist parties, which seek to implement strict Sharia laws and turn Bangladesh into an Islamic state.

Q. Analyze internal security threats and transborder crimes along Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan borders including Line of Control (LoC). Also discuss the role played by various security forces in this regard. (নিয়ন্ত্রণ রেখাকে ধৰি ম্যানমাৰ, বাংলাদেশ আৰু পাকিস্তান সীমান্তত আন্তঃৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় নিৰাপত্তাৰ ভাবুকি আৰু আন্তঃসীমান্ত অপৰাধৰ বিশ্লেষণ কৰক (LoC). এই ক্ষেত্ৰত বিভিন্ন নিৰাপত্তা বাহিনীয়ে পালন কৰা ভূমিকাৰ বিষয়েও আলোচনা কৰক।)

## 5. What is Disease X and why the world should prepare for it

**Context:** The recent outbreak reported in the first week of December 2024 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has claimed over 400 lives and remains unclassified, has raised concerns that it could be an instance of Disease X. Disease X is not an actual but a hypothetical disease. The World Health Organization (WHO) coined the term in 2018 to describe an unknown pathogen that could potentially unleash a devastating epidemic or pandemic. It was conceptualised by the WHO to prepare for future outbreaks that are difficult to predict or identify.

### Key points

- **Origin:** The term "Disease X" emerged after the West African Ebola epidemic (2014–2016), which exposed gaps in global epidemic readiness. It embodies "known unknowns" (threats we are aware of but lack specifics) and "unknown unknowns" (threats beyond our awareness). The concept underscores the inevitability of new pathogens and emphasizes proactive preparation.
- **Epidemiological Patterns:** Since 1940, over 300 emerging infectious diseases have been identified, with 70% having zoonotic origins (transmitted from animals to humans). Human activities such as deforestation, urbanization, and climate change exacerbate these risks, bringing wildlife and humans into closer contact. Regions with high biodiversity and limited healthcare infrastructure, such as the Congo Basin, are particularly vulnerable.
- **Challenges in Prediction:** Predicting Disease X is challenging due to:
  - The vast number of undiscovered pathogens.
  - Increasing zoonotic spillovers driven by human encroachment.
  - Climate change altering disease dynamics and expanding vectors like malaria and dengue.
  - Risks from antimicrobial resistance, bioterrorism, and accidental lab leaks.
- **Global Preparedness and WHO's Priority List:** The WHO's priority pathogen list includes diseases like Ebola, Marburg, Nipah, and Disease X. This list aims to direct global research, funding, and policy efforts toward combating high-risk diseases with limited medical countermeasures.
  - *Strengthening Surveillance* - Robust systems for early outbreak detection are critical. Technologies like genomic sequencing and real-time data sharing play pivotal roles.
  - *Healthcare Infrastructure* - Low- and middle-income countries require enhanced healthcare systems to mitigate the disproportionate impact of pandemics.
  - *Rapid Response Platforms* - Organizations like the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) are developing "prototype pathogen" platforms to create vaccines within 100 days of identifying a new disease.
- **Need for Global Collaboration:** Pandemics transcend borders, necessitating unified global efforts:
  - *WHO Initiatives* - Efforts like the Pandemic Treaty aim to standardize global responses.
  - *Equitable Access* - Frameworks like the Nagoya Protocol ensure fair distribution of resources and medical countermeasures.
  - *International Cooperation* - Governments must share data, pool resources, and collaborate on diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines.
- **Conclusion:** Disease X serves as a call to action for the global community. Preparedness is not an option but a necessity to safeguard future generations. By prioritizing collaboration, innovation, and robust health systems, humanity can confront and contain the unpredictable threats of emerging diseases.