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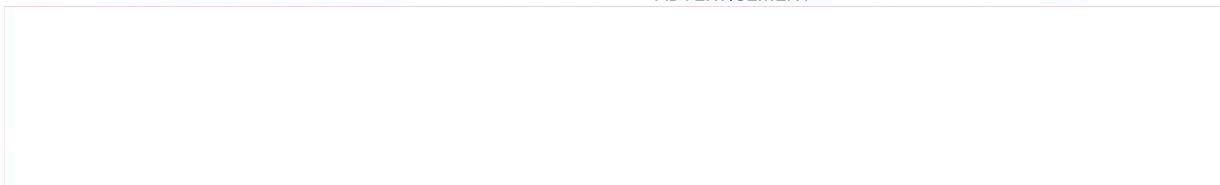
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Premium

Interim unity govt, common voter list: Law panel readies report on simultaneous polls

The 22nd Law Commission, headed by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, is set to recommend the addition of a new chapter on simultaneous polls in the Constitution, sources said.

Written by [Apurva Vishwanath](#) [Follow](#)

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The Commission is likely to recommend insertion of a new chapter, Part XVA, that would make provisions for simultaneous polls.

From making express provisions for [simultaneous polls](#) , prescribing a common electoral roll to formation of a unity government in case a government falls before the end of its five-year tenure, the Law Commission of India has worked out three major Constitutional amendments to set the ball rolling for the ‘One Nation, One Election’ project in 2029, The Indian Express has learnt.

The 22nd Law Commission, headed by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, is set to recommend the addition of a new chapter on simultaneous polls in the Constitution, sources said.

Currently, Part XV of the Constitution deals with elections. It prescribes the role of the Election Commission and for elections to be based on adult suffrage among other aspects. The Commission is likely to recommend insertion of a new chapter, Part XVA, that would make provisions for simultaneous polls.

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While the law panel has not submitted its report to the government, it has made detailed presentations of its likely recommendations before the high-level

committee, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, to “examine and make recommendations for holding simultaneous elections” to Lok Sabha, state assemblies, municipalities and panchayats.

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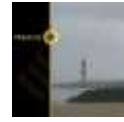
The Law Commission has made a presentation to the Kovind committee. File

In September last year, [The Indian Express](#) reported that the Commission was mulling framing tentative timelines for simultaneous polls in 2024 and 2029. With 2024 elections round the corner, the recommendations will now be for 2029.

The Commission’s report is likely to suggest synchronising assembly elections in two stages in the next five years before all states can go to polls simultaneously with the next Lok Sabha elections in 2029.

While the term of the Commission comes to an end in August, the government Tuesday appointed Justice Awasthi as one of the three judicial members of the Lokpal. Once he takes over as a Lokpal member, it is learnt that Justice Awasthi is likely to demit office as Chairperson of the law panel.

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Sources said, “Elections for states will have to be held collectively in two election cycles over the next five years. The term of some may have to be extended while it may have to be curtailed for others through the Constitutional amendment. Then 2029 can be the third election cycle where the Centre, all states, municipal and panchayat elections can be held together.”

One of the key concerns on simultaneous polls was tackling situations where the mandate results in a hung assembly or when a government falls midway when a no-confidence vote is instituted.

Sources said that a second Constitutional amendment would deal with “sustainability of simultaneous polls” which would address these concerns.

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It is learnt that the Law Commission’s prescription is to first attempt setting up an all-party “unity” government if a government falls during its five-year tenure. “If that is not possible, then the alternative would be holding elections only for the term remaining before another cycle of simultaneous polls can be held,” sources said.

EXPLAINED

A BJP promise

Contesting elections only to form a government for a short term, sources point out, could be a disincentive for political parties to bring down a government.

“This is only a stop-gap measure to ensure that the cycle of simultaneous polls is not broken,” sources said.

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The third Constitutional amendment to be recommended by the law panel would specifically deal with a common voter list.

Currently in many states, the voter list for the panchayat and municipal elections is different from the one used for Parliament and assembly elections.

While the State Election Commissions (SECs) supervise municipal and panchayat elections, the Election Commission conducts polls to the offices of the President and Vice President, and to Parliament, state assemblies and legislative councils.

A BJP promise

The idea of simultaneous polls, for long a BJP promise, has been amplified in recent years by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In its 2019 poll manifesto, the BJP said simultaneous polls were needed to reduce expenditure, ensure efficient utilisation of government resources and security forces and for effective policy planning. It said a common voter list will ensure every citizen gets the right to exercise his/her franchise for all public bodies.

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