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TODAY'S ANALYSIS

(02 September 2023)

TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- **SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS**
- **RICE EXPORT BAN**
- **MILITARY TAKEOVERS IN GABON**



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SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

5 SITTINGS FROM SEPTEMBER 18 TO 22

Govt calls special session of Parliament later this month, keeps all guessing

Speculation on agenda: From new 'big Bills' to 'debate and discussions'

LIZ MATHEW

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 31

IN A surprise announcement Thursday, the government said a special session of Parliament was being convened from September 18 to September 22. It gave no reason for calling the session which will have five sittings.

While sources said the agenda for the session is not yet clear, there is speculation in the BJP and official circles that the Modi government could go for a big-ticket move like initiating the process for ushering in simultaneous elections in the country or the Women's Reservation Bill.

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The Agenda Speculations:

- Simultaneous Elections for center & states
- Women Reservation in Lok Sabha & State Legislative Assemblies.
- Uniform Civil Code

SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA

Simultaneous elections is a sought after political reform in our country since long. India, the largest democracy, witnesses numerous elections almost every year. The General elections, every five years; state elections & local level polls virtually make elections happening almost every year in some or the other corner of the country. This is a big blow on the resources & administrative machinery.

When we talk about simultaneous elections, we want to **streamline elections for centre & states & conduct them at the same time.**

The issue of holding simultaneous Parliamentary and Assembly elections has been referred to the **Law Commission** (July 2022) in order to develop a workable roadmap and framework.

HOW ELECTIONS HAPPEN IN INDIA?

- In India, elections to state assemblies and the Lok Sabha are **currently held separately**, that is, whenever the incumbent government's five-year term expires or is dissolved for various reasons.

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- However, the concept of "**One Nation, One Election**" envisions a system in which all state and Lok Sabha elections must be held simultaneously.
- This will entail **restructuring** the Indian election cycle so that elections to the states and the centre coincide.
- This would imply that voters will vote for **members of the LS and state assemblies on the same day and at the same time.**

HISTORICAL ASPECT OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS:

- **Simultaneous elections** are not new in India, having **been the norm until 1967.**
- However, after the dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, as well as the Lok Sabha in December **1970**, elections to State Assemblies and Parliament **have been held separately.**
- The idea of returning to simultaneous elections was raised in the **Election Commission's annual report in 1983.** It was also mentioned in the **Law Commission's Report in 1999.**
- The most recent push came ahead of the **2014 Lok Sabha elections in the manifesto of one of the contesting parties (BJP).**
- **The PM** again mooted the idea in **2016.**
- **The NITI Aayog** prepared a working paper on the subject in **2017.**

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- **The Law Commission stated in its 2018 working paper that at least "five Constitutional recommendations"** would be required to make simultaneous elections a reality in India again.

BENEFITS OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

- The massive expenditure that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections. Simultaneous polls will reduce enormous costs involved in separate elections.
- **The policy paralysis** that results from the imposition of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** during election time will be less.
- Impact on delivery of essential services will be less.
- Burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time will reduce.
- The system will help ruling parties focus on governance instead of being constantly in election mode.

CHALLENGES:

1. Constitutional challenges
2. It may affect judgement of voters
3. Reduced accountability of the government
4. Logistical challenges

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RICE EXPORT BAN

In a move to check domestic rice prices and ensure domestic food security, the Union government has imposed certain restrictions on rice exports.

IS RICE PRODUCTION LESS IN THIS SEASON?

- According to the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, during the Rabi season 2022-2023, **rice production was 13.8% less**, at 158.95 lakh tonnes against 184.71 lakh tonnes during Rabi 2021-2022.
- Kharif sowing data show that rice is sown on 384.05 lakh hectares this year as on August 25 compared with 367.83 lakh hectares during the same period last year.
- Trade and rice millers say that new season crop arrivals will start after the first week of September and that **El Nino effects** are likely to impact arrivals to some extent.

INDIA'S RICE EXPORTS

- India is the largest rice exporter globally with a **45% share in the world rice market**.
- Overall rice exports in **April-May of 2023 were 21.1% higher** compared with the same period last financial year.
- In May 2023 alone, **export of Basmati rice was 10.86% higher than its exports in May 2022**.

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- The **shipment of non-Basmati rice has been on the rise for the last three years** and the export of Basmati rice in 2022-2023 was higher than the previous year.
- The data shared by the government says that till August 17 this year, total rice exports (except broken rice) were **15% more at 7.3 million tonnes** as against the **6.3 million tonnes during the corresponding period last year.**

GLOBAL OUTLOOK ON RICE:

Thailand expects nearly 25% lower production in 2023-2024; **Myanmar** has stopped raw rice exports; and it is said to be low in **Iraq** and **Iran** as well.

WILL THERE BE PRICE VOLATILITY?

- The government has **increased the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for rice**, and the paddy procured now by rice millers are at a price higher than the MSP.
 - Hence, the prices will not decline for farmers.
- The restrictions on exports will ensure that there is no steep climb in rice prices in the market.
- For domestic consumers, though there is a slight increase in rice prices at present, in the long run, availability is secured and prices are not expected to spiral.

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STEPS TAKEN

- To check domestic rice prices and ensure domestic food security, the Union government has **prohibited the export of white (non-basmati) rice**, levied a **20% export duty on par-boiled rice** till October 15.
- The government has also **permitted the export of Basmati rice** for contracts with value of **\$1,200 a tonne or above**.
- The **export of broken rice has been prohibited since last September**.
- However, it is allowed on the basis of permission granted by the government to other countries to meet their food security needs and based on the request of their government.

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MILITARY TAKEOVER IN GABON

Military seized power in the West African country of **Gabon**. With this Gabon has become the **eighth former French colony in the region to see a coup since 2020**.

The Unfolding:

The coup was announced on national TV after **Ali Bongo** won the elections to become the president for the third time. The public celebrated the coup, which was in contravention to the demand of Ali Bongo to the public to make some noise against the coup.

The issues: Allegations of corruption, Sham elections & failure to spend Gabon's oil & mineral revenue on the poor.

PUBLIC REACTIONS TO COUPS

Almost all recent coups in West Africa have **enjoyed broad popular support**. People are expressing **common grievances against their leaders**:

- Corruption
- Dynasticism
- Cosying up to the west
- Election Frauds

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MILITARY TAKEOVERS IN FORMER FRENCH COLONIES

Less than 3 years, 6 countries, 8 coups



GABON, AUG 2023

What happened: Military arrested President Ali Bongo minutes after it was declared he had won a third term. Election results were annulled.

Present situation: Gen Brice Oligui Nguema has been named "transitional" leader.

NIGER, JULY 2023

What happened: Presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum inside his palace; head of presidential guard, Abdourahamane Tiani, was declared head of state.

Present situation: Negotiations between junta and regional bloc ECOWAS have not made headway. ECOWAS may intervene militarily.

BURKINA FASO, JAN 2022, SEPT 2022

What happened: Last January, the army ousted President Roché Kabore and Lt Col Paul-Henri Damiba took over. But as internal security worsened, there was another coup in September.

Present situation: Capt Ibrahim Traore has been in power since Sept 2022.

GUINEA, SEPT 2021

What happened: Special forces commander Col Mamady Doumbouya ousted President Alpha Conde after the latter changed the constitution to stand

for a third term. Doumbouya promised democratic elections within three years.

Present situation: Transition to democracy was to begin in Jan 2023, but critics complain little has been done so far.

CHAD, APR 2021

What happened: President Idriss Deby was killed while visiting his troops in Chad's war-torn north. A military council dissolved Parliament and violently crushed protests in the capital. Deby's son Gen Mahamat Idriss Deby was named interim leader.

Present situation: Deby is in power, but transitional government's term will end this year.

MALI, AUG 2020, MAY 2021

What happened: President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was ousted by colonels led by Assimi Goita in Aug 2020. Under pressure from West African neighbours, the military ceded power to an interim civilian government. Full democratic transition was to take place in Feb 2022, but coup leaders clashed with interim President Bah Ndaw. Goita led a second coup in May 2021.

Present situation: Goita is in power. The military has promised to hold presidential elections by early 2024.

ENS, AGENCIES



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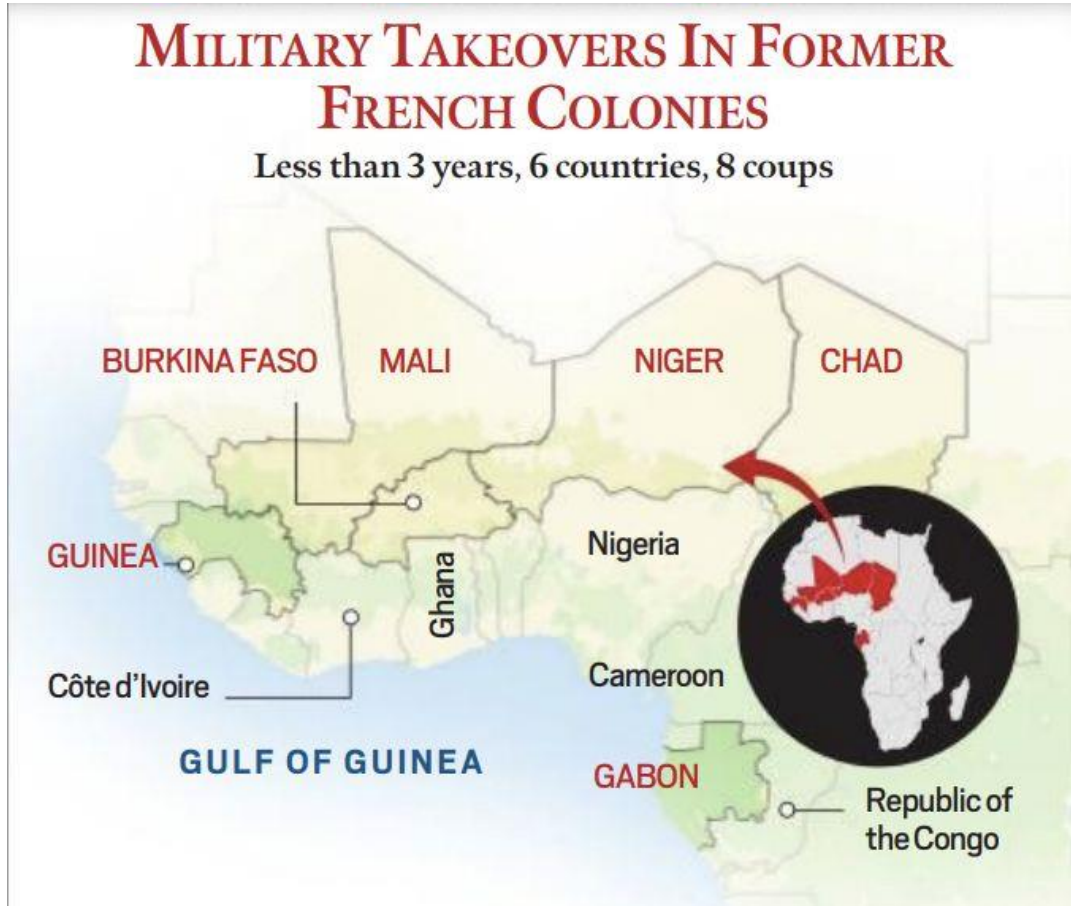
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