



Poll panel to brainstorm on key issues

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Highlights

- The Election Commission will be debating this and seven other issues, including limiting of expenditure and increasing participation of women, at a multi-party meeting.
- All seven registered national political parties and 51 State political parties have been invited.
- The law prohibits canvassing during the last 48 hours before polling.
- This is meant to create an environment of neutrality and “silence” for the voter to exercise the franchise through reasoned reflection rather than be swayed by last-minute appeals by parties and candidates.
- The agenda notes, circulated to all political parties say the Commission has sought suggestions on how to “address the issue of online canvassing to promote or prejudice the electoral prospects of a party/candidate on social media during the last 48 hours”.

Adding print media

- The Commission has asked the parties if the print media should be brought within the ambit of Section 126(1)(b) (which lists mediums in which display of election matter is prohibited and includes television, cinematograph or similar apparatus) of the Representation of the People Act.

Expenditure ceiling

- Seeking to raise a heated debate, the Commission has asked political parties on whether there should be a ceiling on party election expenditure.
- The present election laws only provide a limit on a candidate’s expenditure. The commission has also written to the Law Ministry exploring this question which is yet to respond to the proposal.
- The Commission wants to know the views of political parties on bringing a ceiling for expenditure in the Legislative Council elections.
- In these elections, a huge amount of unaccounted-for money is often spent by the candidates.

Alternative modes of voting

- The Commission has asked the parties to take note of alternative modes of voting for domestic migrants and absentee voters, such as postal, proxy and e-voting. The Commission has proposed five strategies, to ensure that no migrant worker is left out.
- These include developing portability of voting rights by linking voter ID and Aadhaar.
- A one-time voluntary registration system for domestic migrants, electoral support

services to be provided to migrants at the source and destination areas, raising awareness of voters' rights and a helpline for domestic migrants are the other measures suggested by the Commission.

Women in politics

- The Election Commission has asked "what measures can political parties undertake to encourage enhanced representation of women within the organisation structure of the political party."
- It has pulled out embarrassing statistics to build the case for a greater presence of women.
- There are only 11.4% women in the 16th Lok Sabha, substantially lower than the global average of 22.9%, the Commission noted.
- It has said that at least seven countries have laws reserving seats for women in legislature, including Nepal.

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