Poll Panel to Brainstorm on Key Issues

The Election Commission is conducting a multi-party meeting with seven national political parties and 51 State political parties to discuss issues such as limiting of expenditure and increasing participation of women etc for bringing further electoral reforms.

Key Issues to be Discussed

- Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951 prohibits **canvassing during the last 48 hours** before polling is concluded to stop the parties and candidates to sway the voters by last-minute appeals. So the Commission has sought suggestions on how to address the **issue of online canvassing on social media** during the last 48 hours.
- Section 126(1)(b) lists mediums in which **display of election matter** is prohibited **during the last 48 hours** which includes television, cinematograph similar apparatus. So the Commission has asked the parties if the **print media** should be brought within the ambit of this section.
- The present election laws only provide a limit on a candidate’s expenditure. So the Commission has asked political parties on whether there should be a **ceiling on party election expenditure**.
- Further Commission wants to know the views of political parties on bringing a **ceiling for expenditure in the Legislative Council elections** as huge amounts of unaccounted money is often spent by the candidates.
- The Commission has raised the issue of **voting for domestic migrants and absentee voters** and 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 raised the concern regarding poor **representation of women in the Lok Sabha** as there are only about **11.9% women in the 16th Lok Sabha** substantially lower than the average of 22.9%.
- The **Women's Reservation Bill 2008** has lapsed in the Parliament which proposed to amend the Constitution to **reserve 33% of all seats** in the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women.
- Similar Bills for women’s reservation have been introduced thrice before in the late 90's but lapsed with the dissolution of their respective Lok Sabhas.

Suggestions by Election Commission

- For **ceiling on party expenditure** the Commission has written to the Law Ministry that it should be either 50 % of or not more than the expenditure ceiling limit provided for the candidate multiplied by the number of candidates of the party contesting the election.
- The Commission has proposed measures to ensure that **no migrant worker is left out** which includes linking voter ID and Aadhar, one-time voluntary registration system for domestic migrants, electoral support services for migrants, raising awareness and a helpline for domestic migrants.
- The Commission has asked the measures that political parties can undertake to encourage enhanced **representation of women** within the organization structure of the political party.
- The Commission has said that at least seven countries like Sweden, Argentina etc including **Nepal have laws reserving seats for women in legislature**. Further Argentina, **Bangladesh**, Bolivia, Mexico, France and Spain have laws providing for **quotas for women in candidate lists of political parties**.

Steps taken by Online Platforms

Google and Facebook will help the Election Commission (EC) to keep a tab on the online political advertisement and online expenses of political parties.

- The Google will develop a mechanism to ensure pre-certification of political advertisements and only those advertisement will be published which are pre-certified by the Election Commission's Media Certification and Monitoring Committee.
- The google will share the data related to expenses incurred by political parties on advertisements on its platform.
    - This will help returning officer in calculating the election expenditure of individual candidate.
- Like Google, Facebook has also agreed to remove any content related to the election during 48-hour prior to the election.
- Facebook will also develop a mechanism to check fake news and share details of expenditure on election-advertisement.

Election Commission

- Election Commission of India is a **permanent Constitutional Body**. The Election Commission was established in accordance with the Constitution on 25th January 1950.
- The Constitution of India has vested in the Election Commission of India the **superintendence, direction and control** of the entire process for conduct of elections to Parliament and Legislature of every State and to the offices of President and Vice-President of India
- At present, the Election Commission of India is a three-member body, with one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.

NOTE:

- In **postal ballot** one can download the blank post ballot sent electronically, mark his/her preference and post the filled-up ballot back to the respective returning officers.
- In **proxy voting** one can cast his/her vote through a nominated proxy.
- In **e-voting** a voter records his or her ballot electronically in a secure and secret way.

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