

MANDATORY VOTING IS NOT PRACTICAL, SAYS CENTRE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

The government on Friday said in the Lok Sabha that compulsory voting by citizens was an “impractical idea” and may also be open to legal challenges, as voting was a right and not a compulsory duty.

Minister of State for Law and Justice S.P. Singh Baghel said this while responding to a three-year-long debate on a private member’s Bill, the Compulsory Voting Bill, 2019, moved by BJP MP Janardan Sigrwal. Mr. Baghel said that the Bill’s prescriptions on how to make voting compulsory — suggestions such as the Election Commission making an authentic list of those who skipped voting, to impose a fine of Rs. 500 on those who did not vote — were not only impractical but would also lead to other problems. “To ask, say a daily labourer to cough up a fine of Rs. 500 for not voting would be terrible, as would having an authentic list of those who skipped. Many candidates who have muscle power, and would possibly have been promised votes by a particular person may find this a convenient list to settle scores after the polls,” the Minister said.

He added that compulsory voting was in a sense against democratic norms. “Democracy is about government for the people, by the people and of the people, you cannot punish the people for not voting,” he said.

Mr. Sigrwal later withdrew the Bill, after the intervention by Mr. Baghel.

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