

## EC pulled up for backing simultaneous polls

Busy schedule:Thirteen States will go to the polls in 2018, nine in 2019 and one in 2020.PTI

At a meeting of a parliamentary committee on Monday, lawmakers questioned the Election Commission about its recent statements endorsing simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, saying it does not have the mandate to decide the issue.

The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice discussed electoral reforms. Law Secretary Suresh Chandra and a team of Election Commission officials were present.

“Our parliamentary system of governance does not permit simultaneous polls. What is the guarantee that all the State governments and the Union government elected on the same day will survive for the next five years,” asked a member who attended the meeting.

Sources said many members questioned the recent statement by Central Election Commissioner-designate O.P. Rawat in favour of simultaneous elections. He had said the EC was ready to hold simultaneous elections post September 2018. “How can they seek simultaneous elections? It is not for them to decide; the call has to be taken by Parliament and the Assemblies,” the member said.

There had been simultaneous elections until 1967, but the pattern changed after the dissolution of some Assemblies through the imposition of President’s rule under Article 356. Since then, there have been instances of two general elections within a year. The next Lok Sabha election is scheduled for 2019. In 2018, 13 States will go to the polls, nine in 2019 and one in 2020.

The Law Secretary explained the steps needed to amend the Constitution to facilitate simultaneous polls. A constitutional amendment would have to be cleared by both Houses of Parliament followed by ratification by the Assemblies of half of the States. The other way was for all Assemblies and the Centre to agree to the plan voluntarily.

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