Common Electoral Roll

Why in news?

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has pitched for a common electoral roll.

Where was this pitch made?

- This pitch was made by the PMO in its meeting with representatives of the Election Commission and the Law Ministry.
- The PMO discussed the possibility of having a single voters' list to the panchayat, municipality, state assembly and the Lok Sabha elections.

How many types of electoral rolls does India have?

- In many states, the voters' list for the panchayat and municipality elections is different from the one used for Parliament and Assembly elections.
- The distinction stems from the fact that the supervision and conduct of elections are entrusted with two constitutional authorities,
    1. The Election Commission (EC) of India and
    2. The State Election Commissions (SECs).
- **EC** - The EC is responsible for conducting polls to the offices of the President and Vice-President of India, and to Parliament, the state assemblies and the legislative councils.
- **SEC** - The SECs supervise municipal and panchayat elections.
- They are free to prepare their own electoral rolls for local body elections.
- This exercise does not have to be coordinated with the EC.

Do all states have a separate list for their local body elections?

- No, each SEC is governed by a separate state Act.
- Some state laws allow the SEC to borrow and use the EC's voter's rolls in toto for the local body elections.
- In others, the SEC uses the EC's rolls as the basis for the preparation and revision of rolls for municipality and panchayat elections.
- All states, except Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland, adopt EC's rolls for local body polls.
- The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir didn't adopt EC's rolls for local body polls.

Why is the Union government working on a common electoral roll?

- The common electoral roll is among the promises made by the present government in its manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections in 2019.
- It ties in with the government's commitment to hold elections simultaneously to the Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies.
- The government has pitched a common electoral roll and simultaneous elections as a way to **save effort and expenditure**.
- It has argued that preparing a separate voters list causes duplication of essentially the same task between two different agencies.
- This, thereby, duplicates the effort and the expenditure.

Is the pitch for a common electoral list new?

- No. The Law Commission recommended it in its 255th report in 2015.
- The EC too adopted a similar stance in 1999 and 2004.

How does the government intend to implement it?

- In the meeting called by the PMO, two options were discussed.
- **Amendment** - The first one is a constitutional amendment to Articles 243K and 243ZA.
- These articles give the power of superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of local body elections to the SECs.
- The amendment would make it mandatory to have a single electoral roll for all elections in the country.
- **Persuade** - The state governments could be persuaded to tweak their respective laws and adopt the EC's voters list for municipal and panchayat polls.

Source: The Indian Express

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering