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EC not in favour of state-funding of polls, says govt

Various commissions and committees
have given reports in favour of funding

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NEW DELHI, DHNS

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Virtually turning down Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal for state-funding of elections to combat corruption, the Election Commission of India has said the step will not check candidates' own expenditure over and above provided for by states.

Under the state-funding of elections, the government gives funds to political parties or candidates to contest elections.

In India, various commissions and committees have given their reports in favour of state funding of polls. Major among them are, Law Commission report on reform of electoral laws in 1999, National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution in 2001 and the recommendations of Second Administrative Reforms Commission of 2008.

Soon after demonetisation of 2016, Modi had suggested state-funding of elections and simultaneous polls for Lok Sabha and state assemblies reduce corruption and save the time of the government and election machinery. His suggestion entailed linking demonetisation with wider political reforms.

The Election Commission has, however, informed the government that it was not in favour of the proposal.

Not in favour

"The Election Commission has informed the Government that it is not in favour of the state-funding as it will not be able to prohibit or check candidates own expenditure or expenditure by others over and above that which is provided for by the state," Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur said in a written reply to a Lok Sabha question on Monday.

He said the Commission's view is that for addressing the real issues, there have to be radical changes in the provisions regarding receipts of funds by political parties and the manner in which such funds are spent by them so as to provide for complete transparency in the matter.

Thakur added that in order to discourage cash transactions and bring in transparency in the sources of funding of political parties, the government has amended the Income Tax Act and limited anonymous cash donations to Rs 2,000.

The government introduced the electoral bond scheme of 2018 to establish a transparent political funding system in the country with a well-established audit trail, he said.