

## Poll dates clash with religious events, Tamil Nadu parties concerned

*A day after the Election Commission announced the poll dates, representatives of political parties have petitioned the Madurai district collector and Election Officer S Nagaraj expressing concern over the clash in poll dates with the Chithirai festival.*



DMK MLA PTR Palanivel Thiagarajan said the state election commission has failed in its duty to notify about the festival to the EC and raised concerns of fraud and impersonation during polling due to the presence of large crowd in the town. (Photo: Twitter@@ptrmadurai)

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Representatives of political parties have cited lower voter turnout, security arrangements as an impediment to free and fair polls
- The Chithirai festival of Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple attracts lakhs of devotees
- The polling day on April 18 coincides with the car festival of the temple and Edhir Sevai

Political parties in Tamil Nadu have upped the ante against the Election Commission for scheduling the Lok Sabha election on April 18, the day of the famous annual 'Chithirai' festival in the state.

A day after the Election Commission announced the poll dates, representatives of political parties have petitioned the Madurai district collector and Election Officer S Nagaraj expressing concern over the clash in poll dates with the festival.

Representatives of political parties have cited lower voter turnout, security arrangements as an impediment to conducting free and fair polls.

The Chithirai festival of Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple is the most important festival in the temple calendar and attracts lakhs of devotees to Madurai from the neighbouring districts. The festival commences on April 8 with flag hoisting and culminates on April 17 with the celestial wedding of Meenakshi Amman.

The polling day on April 18 coincides with the car festival of the temple and Edhir Sevai -- the welcoming of Lord Kallazhagar into Madurai town by thousands of people.

PTR Palanivel Thiagarajan, the DMK MLA of Madurai Central constituency said the state election commission has failed in its duty to notify about the festival to the EC and raised concerns of fraud and impersonation during polling due to the presence of large crowd in the town.

"Why should the ten lakh devout Hindus who visit Madurai for the festival have to make a decision between exercising their religious faith and carrying out their constitutional duty?" he asked.

VV Rajan Chellappa, AIADMK MLA of Madurai North constituency said he has highlighted the issue to the party high command so that it could take it up with the EC.

Meanwhile, the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court on Tuesday will hear a public interest litigation filed for a direction to the ECI to change the election date for TN on grounds that it coincides with the Chithirai festival.