

'Alert for attempts to create chaos and confusion'

PAFFREL teams monitor social media for polls violations

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The People's Action for Free and Fair Election (PAFFREL) has set up two teams tasked with monitoring online content on social media to curb the spread of hate speech, fake news and racism during the Presidential Election period.

The teams will report to the Election Commission and social media networking sites for further action in the days leading up to the Presidential Election on November 16. **TO PAGE 06**



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Speaking at a media briefing held at the Centre for Society and Religion yesterday, PAFFREL Executive Director Rohana Hettiarachchi said it was the first time that PAFFREL had instituted such action.

He said election monitors were compelled to monitor social media over fears that those with vested interests would use the period before the polls to propagate hate speech, racism and fake news with .

"The teams will begin reporting on content that is posted and shared online as much as possible. There will be information shared with the intention of creating chaos and confusion and this team will report it to

the Election Commission for necessary action," he said. "They will be directed to Sri Lanka's Facebook representatives to follow up as well."

Hettiarachchi also lamented that the number of candidates have increased to 35, the highest in the country's history prompting an extra expenditure of Rs.10 million. "There are lot of practical issues, since the number of representatives will increase to 70 in a polling booth, the ballot paper will be the longest (26 inches), counting of ballot paper will take more time."

He added that many candidates have been contesting at every presidential election for

their own personal gain. "We have found that some candidates garnered below 2 percent of votes during previous elections. It does not make sense for them to contest again. We will be making an appeal to the Election Commission to devise a regulation that will prevent these candidates from contesting again."

"It should be analysed as to how many candidates are willing to work in the best interest of the citizens and those who are in it for themselves," he said. "These candidates should be discouraged from entering the fray and the necessary legal framework should be established."

With reference to the number of complaints related to election, Hettiarachchi said that 62 complaints had been received so far. "The highest number of complaints is on the misuse of state power and resources. New appointments are being awarded, transfers are being granted."

Meanwhile the postal voting for state officials is expected to be held on October 30 and 31, while postal voting for security personnel will be held on November 4. "Anyone who cannot cast their vote on any of these days of postal voting, can vote on November 7 at District polling centres."