



## Casinos to be under watch for cash: CEC

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Taking a serious note of concerns over possible misuse of casinos for cash withdrawal and distribution, Chief Election Commissioner Dr Nasim Zaidi on Sunday said the state administration and special surveillance team will keep an eye on casinos, which could be used to distribute cash to influence voters ahead of the state assembly elections

The Election Commission has roped in the director general of investigation (income-tax) for Karnataka and Goa to deal with the concerns

Dr Zaidi told a press conference here that political parties fear misuse of casinos wherein voters could be given gifts to influence them. Therefore the state administration has been directed to keep an eye on them.

“We have apprised the state administration of the situation..., “ he said

Stating that the entry and exit of casinos and transactions will be monitored, Dr Zaidi said, “The director general of investigation (I-T) and his team in cooperation with state administration are working on a strategy on entry and exit of casinos and different routes of cash.”

Surveillance teams, flying squads and teams of income-tax officials will also keep an eye and action will be taken as per I-T laws, he said.

“Returning officers are being directed to upload affidavits filed by candidates quickly so that I-T authorities carry out real-time monitoring,” the CEC said.

During his state visit to review poll preparedness, Dr Zaidi met representatives of the political parties, top government officials, police and returning officers and officials of state and central enforcement agencies.

He expressed his satisfaction with election-related activities and the level of preparedness.

“Political parties have expressed apprehensions about abuse of money, distribution of gifts and possible misuse of withdrawal of cash in casinos. We were told that the ruling party is using beneficiary database of government schemes for threatening, canvassing and coaxing voters to vote in their favour,” Dr Zaidi told the media persons.

“With regard to single window permission clearance system called Suvidha, we have issued instructions to deploy a police official and a transport officer in each RO office to coordinate and expedite permissions sought by political parties and candidates within 24 hours. We assure political parties that their permission applications would be acted upon in letter and spirit,” he said.

He also reviewed with the enforcement agencies as regards the misuse of money, liquor and gift distribution.

The Election Commission has also asked the excise department to launch a special drive against the bars operating beyond the deadline of 11 pm.

“We have formed 80 flying squads and 21 static surveillance teams to check movement of cash liquor, drugs and other freebies in Goa. We have asked the Chief Secretary that in the next four-five days there should be strictest possible compliance of the directives of the commission and the prevailing drives pertaining to excise; otherwise the commission will have to intervene,” Zaidi said.

The CEC said that since the model code of conduct came into effect in Goa on January 4 not a single instance of cash seizure has been reported. But liquor worth Rs 1.35 lakh had been seized by flying squads and drugs seizures worth Rs 17.22 lakh have been recorded.

He also said that conduct and discharge of duties of election officials would be under constant watch of the commission and anyone found violating the norms will face stern action from the poll panel.

A total 250 candidates are in the fray for the assembly elections following the scrutiny and withdrawal of nominations.

Of the 250 candidates to contest the February 4 polls for the state's 40 constituencies, 131 are in South Goa and 119 in North Goa, as per the data available with the chief electoral officer.