

India to get next President on July 20, announces EC

TNN | Jun 8, 2017, 12.26 AM IST



NEW DELHI: India will have a new President on July 20. The Election Commission sounded the gong on Wednesday on the electoral process, which will be notified on June 14. Nominations of candidates will close on June 28.

The EC's announcement is expected to quicken consultations in the NDA and opposition camps over their respective nominees for the post. Both sides have begun discussions but are yet to decide their candidates even though the numbers in the electoral college decisively favour BJP.

With President Pranab Mukherjee's term ending on July 24, Chief Election Commissioner Nasim Zaidi said voting for the presidential election will be held on July 17. Counting of votes and the declaration of results will take place on July 20.

The EC will scrutinise the nomination papers on June 29. The BJP brass

has held a few rounds of consultations and decided to reach out to regional parties to boost its tally and counter the Opposition's claim of an anti-NDA consolidation. The BJP is banking on the support of parties like TRS, YSR Congress and two factions of the AIADMK. It feels discussions with the BJD can also be fruitful. The party has claimed it has the support of 54% of the electoral comprising MPs and state legislators.

In the BJP camp there has been speculation over the names of senior leaders, like Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan and social justice and empowerment minister Thawarchand Gehlot. BJP leaders are understood to be considering whether a "moderate" political face in the saffron camp can forge a wider consensus outside the NDA. With the vice-president's election also due soon, BJP could look to balance caste equations between the two posts.

The opposition, comprising parties like the Congress, Trinamool, Left, RJD, DMK and NCP, have decided to put a nominee and use the campaign to highlight and oppose BJP's "majoritarian" policies. A sub-committee chaired by NCP chief Sharad Pawar is to identify a "secular" consensus candidate. Some prominent names being spoken of as opposition candidates are former West Bengal governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi and JD (U) leader Sharad Yadav. Names of former Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar and NCP chief Sharad Pawar are also in the reckoning. Pawar has, however, dismissed the speculation.

Polling will be done through secret ballot and candidates will have to support nominations with signatures of 50 electors as proposers and 50 as seconders. A security deposit of Rs 15,000 has been mandated for each nomination. The EC has also said political parties cannot issue a whip to MPs and MLAs to vote for a candidate.

Since presidential polls follow the preferential voting pattern, electors indicate their preference of candidate in numerical order. The EC has ruled out use of electronic voter machines for the polls. "The EVMs are as yet not

configured to facilitate preferential voting. As a result, we will use paper ballots for the polls," Zaidi said.

Zaidi also clarified all elections to vacancies in the state assemblies would only be filled after the presidential polls. There are, at present, 13 vacancies in various state assemblies.

On July 17, voting will begin at 10 am and end at 5 pm. Counting of votes will begin at 11 am on July 20. Zaidi said the EC will notify separately the schedule for VP election. The government and the opposition have three weeks to finalise candidates. Sources said a section of opposition leaders has backed the idea of identifying a person with "high moral standing" to send a strong political message: that there is viable opposition to the Modi government.