

Press note
Commission's State Review of J&K for Poll Preparedness
Dated 4th and 5th March 2019

Jammu 5th March 2019

Chief Election Commissioner Shri Sunil Arora accompanied by Election Commissioners Shri Ashok Lavasa and Sh Sushil Chandra alongwith the team of officers from Election Commission of India, conducted a two day review of Poll Preparedness of the State of Jammu and Kashmir on 4th and 5th March 2019.

During the visit, the Commission met with representatives of various political parties and noted their issues and concerns. The Commission took note of their concerns for holding free, fair and ethical elections. The Commission reviewed the work of District Election Officers, SPs/Commissioner of Police, Divisional Commissioners and IGs and discussed election preparedness with Chief Secretary, DGP and other Nodal Officials of the State. The Commission also met with Nodal officers of Income Tax, Excise, Narcotics Control, Customs, Banks, Postal Department, Railways, Airports and with State Level Bankers Committee convener to review in detail the strategy to curb misuse of money/liquor & freebies distribution during the election.

Highlights of the issues discussed during the meeting and instructions of the Commission include issues regarding Electoral Roll; Polling Arrangements; Security arrangements required for conducting Elections in the State as also Expenditure monitoring concerns among other issues detailed below.

Specifically, the Political Party Representatives mentioned on **Electoral Roll issues**, that copies of the Roll have not been received by their Central offices. They also requested for copies in English apart from Hindi and Urdu. Some instances of duplicate voters were pointed out. Some parties voiced concern for Migrant Voters finding the M Form procedure not very convenient. They desired that special Polling Stations be set up for such migrant voters rather than them needing to make separate trips for filling the form. Delays in printed Electors Photo Identity Cards were mentioned.

Regarding **Polling arrangements**, Some Representatives pointed out that Polling Stations are shifted at very late stages citing security concerns and causing confusion about the location. At times with such relocation, Polling Booths get set up far from their residences and travel to the distant PS makes them vulnerable on commute enroute. The representatives desired that Polling stations be set up closer to areas where large number of voters reside.

On the issue of **Need for Elections**, almost all Political Parties voiced the need to have both – Parliamentary and Assembly Elections conducted at the earliest in the State saying that recent turnout in the Panchayat and ULB elections, suggests that general population in the State wishes to have their democratically elected government in place. They said the party representatives and public at large have full faith in ECI that they would fulfill their constitutional mandate to conduct free and fair elections in the State.

With respect to **Security Arrangements**, Representatives from all Political Parties emphasized that due security arrangements be made to provide adequate security to voters and candidates so as to instill confidence in them for conducive environment for forthcoming elections. Some political party members desired that adequate security should be continued for ex-Ministers and candidates even after actual election process is over.

Among other **Miscellaneous issues**, the Parties cited instances of transfer of some officers in violation of ECI norm was brought to the notice of the Commission. They requested that officials who can adversely influence conduct of free and fair elections, should not be allowed to continue in their posts. They also said given the snowbound conditions in the State, polling dates be considered after month of May.

Commission's assurance and instructions

The Commission is committed to deliver free, fair, peaceful, transparent, ethical and inclusive elections. The Commission attaches prime importance to ensuring conducive environment for conducting elections in the State keeping in view the specific concerns of the State. Effective mechanism is being fine tuned for smooth conduct of the electoral process. The Commission has directed the State level and District Level Election Machinery to meticulously coordinate all logistics arrangements for smooth conduct of elections and **make comprehensive action plans** so as to instill absolute confidence in all stakeholders. Officers have been asked to ensure Effective monitoring and vigilance.

The Commission solicits proactive support of all political parties, media organisations, civil society, youth and community organisations and all voters of the State to join hands with the Commission and wholeheartedly participate in poll process.

Election Commission attaches **utmost priority to ensure purity of Electoral Rolls**. All DEOs have tried their best to enroll all eligible voters. While Final publication of Electoral Rolls has been done on 7th February, 2019 and copies of the same have been distributed at district level, copies as desired will also be made available to all Political Parties in Hard as well soft form. The Electoral Rolls without photographs have also been hosted on the CEO's official website. Efforts are still on to include those who have been left out. Special camps are being organised by DEOs.

Special camps have already been organized by CEO on 23rd & 24th February 2019 and more camps are being organized in the month of March. The Commission's motto is 'No Voter To Be Left Behind' and our officers will make all efforts to register all eligible voters.

As mere possession of Electoral Photo Identity Card is not sufficient – a **#GOVERIFY** campaign has been started so that voters can proactively confirm their own name in the Electoral Roll. Recently it also has been clarified that Electors Photo Identity Card or one of the eleven specified photo identity documents will be essential for casting vote and the Photo Voter Slips issued will not be valid as stand-alone identification document for voting.

As regards the specific concern pointed out for M Forms for Migrant Voters, it was explained to the Party representatives also that to facilitate registration, voting and other issues/grievances, at present there are three AERO-Migrants (Assistant Electoral Registration Officers) who also perform duties of AROs as well as BLOs (Booth Level Officers) appointed specially to register the Kashmiri migrants. Special camps were conducted at the migrant camps during SSR 2019 which resulted in addition of **4988** Kashmiri migrant voters during last one year. Two more Special Camps are being organised on 6th and 7th March, 2019 for migrant voters in all 26 special polling stations.

Similarly to facilitate Voting, Three Assistant Returning Officers (Migrants) are appointed ,one each for Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi. 26 Special Polling Stations are setup for voting by migrants at Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi. Dedicated EPIC printing facility has been provided in the office of Relief Commissioner J&K. Due publicity for these special arrangements shall be scaled up for benefit of all concerned.

Regarding Security Concerns, the Commission is indeed mindful of the specific challenging law and order situation in the State of J&K and especially in certain Assembly segments given their location and concerns. Commission will look into due security arrangements while deciding on the timing and phasing of the elections. Commission does as a matter of practice keep in mind local festivals, geographical conditions and related needs while deciding the schedule of election dates. The Commission would also keep in view the sentiments voiced by the representatives with respect to need for restoring democratically elected government in the State. The Commission is aware that Elections have been conducted in the past under trying circumstances in the State. J&K elections do attract global and national attention more than any other State.

For the first time in the forthcoming general elections, VVPATs will also be used at all Polling Booths along with the EVM machines. Thus the officers need to ensure due awareness to all stakeholders about proper usage of the machines. The officers were also asked to strictly adhere to the laid down procedures and Standard Operating Procedures about use, storage and Transportation of the machines in all the constituencies. The Chief Electoral Officer has been directed that VVPAT awareness campaign be continued upto the booth and hamlet level.

Commission has directed effective use of single window system, facilitation through IT applications. Commission has also facilitated empowerment of Voters to report violations of Model Code of Conduct and abuse of money power by activating the cVigil App. The **cVigil app** will be activated in the State once the election dates are notified. Through this App, any citizen will be able to file complaints regarding MCC violations. The complaints thus received will be settled within the stipulated time frame. This app has been successfully operated in the recent legislative assembly elections held last year in other States.

Samadhan, Suvidha, cVigil Apps have time-stamping facility to ensure transparency. **SAMADHAN** App helps to resolve complaints filed online and Parties or citizens need not depend on officials accepting/not accepting written complaints. The **new SUVIDHA App** is an integrated application – single window service on first come first serve basis to streamline candidate nomination, permissions, counting and results display. In addition **Voter Helpline Mobile App, PwD App, Observers App will be used in forthcoming elections.**

For Voter Facilitation, Commission has instructed the State Election Officers to popularize the **1950 Help Line/NVSP portal for facilitating the Voters.** The facilities of name search, name transfer, deletion, or modification can be done through "nvsp.in". Information can also be obtained by dialing the number 1950.

The Voter Helpline Mobile app provides convenience to all Citizens of finding names in the electoral roll, submitting online forms, checking the status of the

application, filing complaints and receiving the reply on their mobile app. All forms, results, candidate affidavit, press notes, Voter awareness and important instructions are available through the mobile app.

By using the PwD App, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) can request for new registration, change in address, change in particulars and mark themselves as PwD through the use of the mobile application. By simply entering their contact details, the Booth Level Officer is assigned to provide doorstep facility. PwDs can also request for a wheelchair during polling.

For **Expenditure Monitoring**, the officers have been asked to identify expenditure sensitive constituencies. General, Expenditure and police observers will be deployed after the announcement of Election by the Commission in the state to monitor all the activities and advise the local administration in order to ensure that there is no illegal inducement of voters by distribution of liquor and freebies. The contact numbers of all of these observers will be made available to public.

All DEOs will constitute the Election Expenditure Monitoring Teams as per ECI Instructions. Flying Squads and Static Surveillance Teams will be constituted to check distribution of cash, liquor, drugs and freebies in sensitive pockets and border areas. Transaction of money through banking channels will be monitored and fool-proof arrangements would be made to monitor suspicious banking transactions. The Media Certification and Monitoring Committees set up will look out for instances of Paid News also.

Commission has directed that at least one **all women managed polling station** be set up wherever possible. The Commission has revamped the Electronically Transferred Postal Ballot System to facilitate Service Voters whereby their ballot is electronically transmitted one way saving time and on return the Service voters can send their vote by speed post

After Special summary revision 2019 following status of electoral roll has emerged:

- Total No. of Electors: 78,50,671
- Male Electors: 40,37,993
- Female Electors: 37,39,951
- Service Voters: 72,727
- 18-19 Age group: 1,82,182
- EP Ratio: 0.58%
- Gender Ratio: 926
- PER %: 98.61
- EPIC%: 92.93
- Total PwD Electors flagged on ERO Net: 29,305
- Total marked Electors: 916
- Net increase of electors: 3.16% over Draft Roll

After SSR 2019 the total number of Polling Stations in the state is **11,316**. The commission emphasized to ensure 100% AMF in all of them. The State Government has been directed to provide the **AMF facilities** for all the voters, specially to facilitate the PwD voters on all the polling station at the earliest.

Commission has directed to organize a participative, inclusive and people-friendly **Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)** campaign through all modes of communication for ensuring ethical and informed voting.

Commission is aware of the increasing concern about emerging role of social media in spread of information. The Commission has issued orders for partial modification in earlier guidelines that the **Media Certification & Monitoring Committees at District and State level will need to be reconstituted** with the inclusion of an Intermediary expert (intermediary as defined in section 2(w) of IT Act, 2000)/social media expert. For the purpose of the certification of advertisements as per the Supreme Court order dated 13.04.2004, Returning Officer of the parliamentary constituency/District Election Officer, an ARO (not below SDM) and an Intermediary Expert/Social Media Expert shall be the members of the MCMC.

The Commission considers media as its invaluable ally for election management and for implementation of election related laws, instructions and for monitoring the orders. The Commission has directed that regular press briefings must be held by the CEO and the DEOs and all crucial information be passed on to all the stakeholders through the media.
