

SUNIL ARORA, CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER OF INDIA

Will have special observers for Bengal... for law and order, expenses. If needed, we can act swiftly, ruthlessly

The CEC talks about Bihar elections serving as template for coming polls, wishes law would be brought against defections, calls for "sound legislative framework" for handling social media influence on elections, and reiterates support for simultaneous polls. The session was moderated by Senior Assistant Editor Ritika Chopra

RITIKA CHOPRA: What gave the Election Commission the confidence to hold the Bihar polls in the middle of a pandemic?

Successive commissions have been holding elections under very difficult circumstances, at different points in time. The pandemic was unprecedented. As I said in the press conference while announcing the elections, for us it was a leap of faith and not a leap in the dark. We had done a lot of homework. Our team held a series of virtual meetings with various stakeholders and delegations of political parties... Yes, many people were sceptical, but that happens every time. When the first general election in India took place, (the first Chief Election Commissioner of India) Sukumar Sen wrote in his book, the people were not just sceptical, they were also cynical. Many said publicly that this is the last general election in India... The idea was not to delay the (Bihar) elections. We did our homework and took the plunge... The first step we took was to reduce the number of voters per polling booth — from 1,500 to 1,000 per booth. That alone meant an enhancement of 33,000 booths, which in turn meant that so many more people had to be deployed for security and other jobs. I must congratulate publicly our officers in Bihar, the Chief Electoral Officer there... In some cases, the officers and district magistrates themselves got Covid-19, and after recovery they were back on election duty... I must also congratulate the voters of Bihar, especially the women, who turned up to vote in a disciplined manner...

For the election, we had to procure 11 lakh, 500 ml bottles of sanitisers... This was done by the government of Bihar and the CEO. About seven crore gloves were procured and arrangements for their safe disposal had to be done. Apart from these, face shields, masks etc were procured.

RITIKA CHOPRA: Are there any lessons from Bihar that you would like to implement in polls in other states?

We will be holding elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Assam, Kerala... Every major exercise has some lessons. Given the scale of preparations that the Commission has been doing in the past, we will be able to hold these elections successfully. We are also getting some Bihar officers to hold virtual meetings with their counterparts (in election-bound states), so that there can be an exchange of ideas. We have already informally reached out to the health department of Bihar and the state's CEO to have informal discussions with their counterparts in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu to see how the learning of day-to-day operations in Bihar can be utilised in these states.

In West Bengal, we will have to have 28,000 more polling booths. The major lesson would be to ensure that these polling booths are located as near as possible to the main polling station, so that use of resources is optimised, and the deployment of security and staff can be better.

RITIKA CHOPRA: During the Bihar elections, some political parties also raised questions over the delay in the counting process. Did you anticipate that at all? The EC also held several briefings...

When we go for elections, we are prepared for the worst too... Briefing the press more than once (on counting day for Bihar elections) was not a reaction to any situation. It had been thought out before. Our officers thought that the press would be better informed with regular briefings. They synchronised their efforts with CEO, Bihar. I think the last press conference was around midnight. The reaction from the press was also positive about being kept in the loop through the day. The same will now be done in West Bengal too. The Bihar briefings on counting day have virtually become a template for other states.

RITIKA CHOPRA: The RJD had questioned the results. They said a lot of postal ballots were rejected and that they will challenge the results in a few seats in court. Do you see this as a challenge going forward?

Whether it is the RJD or any other party, they have all the right to criticise the Commission, the modalities, the local officials. But our CEO tried his level best and succeeded in explaining... There is a very well laid out procedure in the Constitution which states that you can challenge any election in high court... and if and when any election is challenged, we try and respond and present our own side to the courts.

All I can say is that, lately, which elec-



WHY
SUNIL ARORA

Since taking charge, Sunil Arora has supervised the 2019 general elections and the Bihar polls, the country's first election in a pandemic. The Rajasthan-cadre officer also served as secretary to GoI in two ministries before joining EC



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

tion has not been challenged? In the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, we met representatives of political parties 123 times. We met the delegations from the BJP 20 times, Congress delegations 28 times... Requests from political parties are most important. There have been challenges, there has been criticism, and there will be criticism in the coming elections also, and we respond to it as best as possible. I can assure that the Commission shall keep trying to ensure free, fair, robust, ethical, and now, safe elections. Still, if someone goes to court, we will respond to it. Our record of convincing the Supreme Court and high courts is good.

SANTANU CHOWDHURY: West Bengal has a history of political violence during polls. What is the EC doing to prevent it in the coming elections?

So far, one major delegation has come to us. They had two-three demands. They wanted (early deployment of) security forces and the (early enforcement of) Model Code of Conduct, (because they believed) the local forces are compromised, and that the local staff is also compromised. Now, these are our instruments, we can't doubt all the instruments. There can be an odd black sheep here or there in many states, in some more than others. We would not like to change any officer for the sake of it. However, during the Lok Sabha elections, we changed one chief secretary, one additional DG, five police commissioners, and DG (Intelligence) of one state. In the case of DG (Intelligence), the matter was challenged in the high court. It was said that since the DG (Intelligence) is not DGP, and doesn't supervise the elections on a day-to-day basis, the Commission has no right to make the change. We were able to convince the court that we have inputs to show that the conduct of the person was

not fair. Eventually, the court did not accept the petition, and the person was changed.

We have also started appointing special observers, over and above the normal observers, especially on the law and order and expenditure side. In Bihar, we put two special observers for expenditure... This time also we will be well-prepared, so that when required we come down on these elements swiftly and ruthlessly.

LEENA MISRA: Before the Rajya Sabha elections in 2017 and 2019, we saw a lot of MLAs quitting their parties, and within six months they got re-elected on another party's ticket. Can the EC put a stop to this?

The Supreme Court has laid down very clear norms on defection. But when it comes to quitting a party and re-joining another party, there is no legal or constitutional mechanism to stop it. It is more for parties to take a call on such matters. Once they have taken a call, the EC will be happy to assist them, if such assistance is sought.

(Barring MLAs from contesting immediately on another party's ticket) is only possible if there are widespread electoral reforms, and if we are able to forge a consensus with political parties. Again, it is not for us to move such a thing. But yes, as a citizen I think this (defection) should be avoided and parties must take the lead.

P VAIDYANATHAN IYER: An issue which came up during your tenure was the objections within the Commission to certain decisions taken by the EC. The Commission decided to not make these public. But, when there is no consensus, in the larger interest of transparency, doesn't it make sense for the EC to put out in public domain what each member says on issues?

This controversy was a non-starter... I would like to give you one example, because I don't want to get into individual issues. The UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) is a multi-member commission. We have three people, they have

about 8-10 people. When this controversy was going on, an ex-UPSC chairman met me in some other context, and said that it is very strange because hundreds of cases come to the UPSC for disciplinary proceedings against government officials, seeking their view. Now, one or two members say no, the punishment imposed by X ministry should be enhanced, some say it should be dropped, and the rest say it should be kept as it is. The normal procedure then, to the best of my knowledge, is that there is a meeting convened by the chairman and a consensus is built, and when the letter goes out, it only mentions the decision. It doesn't mention who said what. (Former election commissioner Ashok Lavasa had objected to the clean chit given to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former BJP president Amit Shah on charges of violating the Model Code of Conduct during the 2019 Lok Sabha election campaign).

...Throughout the controversy, I remained silent... It doesn't mean weakness or a desire to conceal something... In such less time, in a day or two, a view has to be taken, it is an administrative thing, it is not a quasi-judicial matter. I don't think it should have been put on the website and I don't think it needs to be shared.

P VAIDYANATHAN IYER: But recording of dissent, like in this case of Mr Lavasa, does it not strengthen the EC eventually?

My colleague has already joined the ADB (Asian Development Bank). I would not like to comment on individual issues. He wanted to say what he wanted to say, he said it. I gave only one statement on the record. I said that yes, commissioners are not expected to be clones or templates of each other and they are not. But having said that, we have to make a distinction

between quasi-judicial proceedings and other proceedings.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: We have reported that the EC held a meeting with the Ministry of External Affairs to permit NRIs to cast their votes from overseas through postal ballots. What are some of the challenges of doing it? Also, for now, Gulf countries are not part of the proposed pilot...

... Whenever we go abroad, the only question that the ECI faces is that when I live in Seattle, why should I travel to Jalandhar or Hoshiarpur or Andhra to cast my vote. Even when I went to Washington, when the present foreign secretary was the ambassador there, this was the only question discussed. So, after a great deal of deliberation within the Commission and with my colleagues, we thought we will move a proposal to the Ministry that this can be

forms broke some clause... The organisations all got together and voluntarily submitted a code of ethics which they would observe during the elections, and they have been observing it. We are concerned, but we are very clear that we would probably want a system, like in Germany or the UK... They have a very sound legislative framework to deal with the subject. We would also not be averse to having a sound legislative framework in India because the complications in India are far too many.

We do not have any legal authority (to assist in vaccine drive). But given our experience, if someone reaches out for a national cause, we will take a call

KRISHN KAUSHIK: In 2018, except for the BJP, all major parties had asked for a limit on party expenditure during elections. How big of a concern is the influence of big money on elections? Also, what are your views on electoral bonds?

We have already given our views on electoral bonds in the Supreme Court and we stand by that. The Commission as a body has told the Supreme Court that it (electoral bonds)... should be less opaque and more transparent.

On the issue of expenditure, we had some specific requirements for the pandemic. So, we enhanced the limits because of the pandemic. We have appointed a committee under Harish Kumar (former IRS officer and DG-Investigation) to look into various aspects of electoral funding. That committee has already met twice. The Commission also had one interaction with the committee and we had given them a term of reference... I'm sure when their report comes, we will ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

HARIKISHAN SHARMA: Do you think it is possible to hold simultaneous elections in post-Covid times?

The Article 83 (2) of the Constitution provides that the House of the people unless sooner dissolved shall continue for five years from the date appointed for the first meeting. And, no longer an expression of a set period of five years shall operate as a dissolution of the House. Similar provisions are there for state Assemblies. This kind of disjointedness between the life of the people's House and state Assemblies started happening sometime in early 1970s due to various reasons. And now it has become a norm. For example, we have just finished Bihar elections. And Lok Sabha elections in normal course will happen in 2024. So, the system has to align the life of Lok Sabha with the life of state Assemblies. For that, across the board amendments would be required in the provisions of Articles 83, 85, 172 and 56 of the Constitution. Now that is the job of the legislature. What the Prime Minister said (about simultaneous polls) is a very desirable goal... The Law Commission has also supported it. Big amendments can take place only on the floor of Parliament.

RITIKA CHOPRA: Given the EC's experience in conducting large-scale exercises, has the government reached out to the Commission for any kind of assistance in vaccinating the population against Covid-19?

It is a devastating pandemic for the entire world. And India is no exception. So the pandemic requires exceptional and extraordinary responses... Currently, we do not have any legal authority (to assist in the administration of the vaccine). To conduct elections, we are empowered under Article 324. But having said that, given the experience and expertise we have, if someone reaches out to us for a national cause, we will take a call.

RITIKA CHOPRA: You have spent a considerable time in the Commission now. Are there any reforms that you think are required in the EC?

... Many times, we have seen that our officers, especially the Chief Electoral Officers, become vulnerable because of their honest and independent conduct during an election. Immediately after elections, such officers are victimised or harassed. There have been instances in which the Commission has authorised me to take up the matter with the chief minister concerned. At the same time, many officers who we had to change (during an election) because of their biased or partial conduct get rewarded when the same party returns to power... We would like to go to the government and say that at least for one year after a state or Central election is over, no (election) officer should be penalised under different alibis, only because he or she was very objective and implemented the law of the land faithfully.

278 WINNERS TO SWEAR IN TODAY

DDC polls: Meet the new faces who trounced heavyweights

ARUN SHARMA

JAMMU, DECEMBER 27

A **HOMEMAKER**, an advocate, a former teacher and a sarpanch, who trounced political heavyweights in the just concluded maiden District Development Council elections in Jammu and Kashmir, are some of the new faces among the 278 elected candidates who will take oath at their respective district headquarters on Monday. A look at some of them:

SHAZIA KOUSAR (INDEPENDENT): A postgraduate in Microbiology, she resigned as a government teacher to contest elections in Budhal Old-A constituency.

She polled 7,982 votes, defeating her nearest rival Shaheen Akhtar (NC) by 2,446 votes and relegating her aunt Zubeda Begum and JKAP candidate to third place. Zubeda is the wife of a former minister and two-time PDP MLA Zulfikar Choudhary who joined Jammu Kashmir Apni Party.

IQBAL MALIK (BJP): A former bureaucrat, he won the polls from Rajouri district's Darhal constituency, defeating NC's Parvez Rashid by 3,748 votes. Significantly, as a BJP candidate, he polled 11,481 votes in an area which has only one Hindu family.

TARANJIT SINGH (INDEPENDENT): A social worker, he defeated BJP's former minister and former legislator Sham Lal Choudhary in Suchetgarh by a margin of 11 votes.

ASIM HASMI (NC): An advocate by profession, he defeated BJP's former minister Shakti Raj Parihar in Doda district's Gundna constituency by 1,336 votes.

As NC candidate, he polled 7,835 votes against Parihar's 6,499 in a Hindu-dominated constituency.

KUMARI SHAVETA (BJP): Married nearly six months ago to a school teacher, she polled 7,717 votes, defeating former MLA Kanta Andotra by 1,675

votes in Kathua district's Keerian Gandyal constituency. The latter is the wife of former minister and founder of Dogra Swabhimani Sangathan Party, Choudhary Lal Singh, a three-time MLA and two-time Lok Sabha MP.

MOHAMMAD ASHFAQ (INDEPENDENT): A contractor, he defeated NC's Zeeshan Javed Rana, son of two-time MLA and one-time MLC Javed Rana, in Mendhar-C constituency by 2,105 votes.

67% turnout in Hry civic body elections

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 27

Sixty-seven per cent turnout was registered during the polling for seven civic bodies in Haryana today. The results will be declared on December 30.

These were the first elections in the state after the BJP-JJP alliance came to power in October last year.

The elections were held for the municipal corporations of Ambala, Panchkula and Sonapat, municipal council of Rewari and municipal committees of Sampla (Rohtak), Dharuhera (Rewari) and Uklana (Hisar).

In Sonapat, where a polling percentage of 56.7 was reported, the police booked a Congress candi-

RESULTS ON DEC 30

Corpn/council	Poll %age
Sampla	81.5
Uklana	79
Dharuhera	74
Rewari	69.1
Sonapat	56.7
Ambala	56.3
Panchkula	54.1

date and his six supporters for allegedly beating up the son of a BJP candidate.

Barring sporadic incidents of verbal spat between workers of various political parties, polling was peaceful in Ambala. Just over 56 per cent turnout was reported. Six mayoral and 101 other candidates are in the fray from 20 wards.



Voters queue up to exercise their franchise at a polling station in Sonapat on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

Sonapat records 56.7% polling



TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SONEPAT, DECEMBER 27

The people in Sonapat on Tuesday exercised their franchise to elect the Mayor and councillors for the Sonapat Municipal Corporation (MC) for the first time. As per reports, 56.7 per cent voter turnout recorded till 7 pm.

The fate of 10 mayoral candidates, including BJP-JJP's Lalit Batra and Con-

IND CANDIDATE'S POSTERS REMOVED

Dikshit Khatri, Independent candidate for the councillor's post in Ward No. 19, set up his booth near the polling centre at Indian Public School and pasted his posters there. But the cops removed them and in the meantime, Khatri's father got aggressive and sat on a dharna in front of the election officer's vehicle. DSP Hansraj reached there and pacified the people

COVID NORMS FOLLOWED

Baroda: As per the Covid protocol, the district administration made arrangements at all 245 polling booths. Health Department teams conducted thermal scanning of the electors and also sanitised their hands. Members of the polling party were also seen wearing the PPE kits.

gress' Nikhil Madaan and 110 candidates, for the councillor posts are now locked in EVMs.

The counting of votes will take place on December 30 at BITS College, Mohana.

Polling passed off peacefully and no untoward incident was reported in the constituency.

Cold wave and Sunday holiday affected the voter turnout. Polling began at 8 am but only

a few voters reached the polling stations in the first four hours. Turnout was only 10.9 per cent till 12 noon.

Voter turnout percentage was lower in the city in comparison to the villages attached with the SMC. As many as 31,500 voters are in 16 villages. As per reports, the highest voting (87.07 per cent) was recorded at booth number 84 in Liwan village followed by (85.7 per cent) at booth number 82 and 82.3 per cent at booth number 83 in Rai village.

District Electoral Officer and DC Shyam Lal Poonia and SP Jashandeep Singh Randhawa visited the polling booths in the constituency.



Electors wait for their turn at a polling booth in Rewari on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

Barring minor snags, voting smooth

REWARI, DECEMBER 27

Barring minor incidents of technical snags in EVMs, the polling for the elections to the Rewari Municipal Council and the Dharuhera Municipal Committee passed off smoothly on Sunday.

Rewari registered 69.1 per cent polling while it was 74 per cent in Dharuhera. The fate of 217 candidates, 153 from Rewari and 64 from Dharuhera, was locked in the EVMs. The counting will take place on December 30.

As many as 74,268 of 1,07,413 people casted their votes in

69.1% in Rewari;
74% in Dharuhera

**AT 81.5%, TURNOUT
HIGHEST IN SAMPLA**

Chandigarh: The highest polling of 81.5% was seen in polls to the Rohtak's Sampla Municipal Committee. Total 11,735 of the 14,390 electors cast their vote at 16 booths. Hisar's Uklana Municipal Committee had 79% polling, second highest in the state. TNS

Rewari for the posts of chairperson and councillor for 31 wards. Similarly, 16,293 of 22,018 electors exercised their franchise in Dharuhera for the posts of chairman and councillor for 17 wards.

Although the voting started at 8 am in Rewari, the turnout was low due to cold. Merely 14 per cent polling was registered in the first three hours by 11 am. However, it gained momentum at noon when electors, especially women, came to the booths after finishing their household chores. — TNS

56.3% cast vote in Ambala

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMBALA, DECEMBER 27

Barring sporadic incidents of EVMs developing technical snags, names going missing from voting lists and spat between workers of political parties, polling went off peacefully for the Ambala Municipal Corporation election on Sunday.

The fate of six mayoral candidates and 101 ward candidates was sealed in EVMs. Till 8 pm, 56.3 per cent polling was reported in the elections.

Due to cold and fog, polling was slow in the morning. As the day progressed, voters came out in large numbers to exercise their franchise.

While district officials claimed that all safety measures were being taken, there was no thermal scanning at the entrance and social distancing was not observed at some polling stations, especially in rural belts.

At some booths, voters

and polling agents were wearing face masks provided by political parties, which sought votes in their favour. After the matter came to light, officials made them change their masks. There were reports of EVM glitches on booths 6, 85 and 86. The issue was rectified soon afterwards.

At booth 171 in Rattangarh village, a woman claimed that when she went to cast her vote, she was told that her vote had already been cast. After the woman marked her resentment, officials swung into action and a girl was detained on the charge of impersonation.

Presiding officer Sureshpal said polling agents Deepak and Romit raised objection on the identity of the girl. She was detained, handed over to the police and booked. Meanwhile, BKU (Charuni) activists protested with placards near polling stations in Konlan and Mandaur villages.

Highest polling booth in Kangra for 17 voters

PALAMPUR, DECEMBER 27

The Election Commission will set up a polling booth for panchayat elections at the height of 7,700 ft above sea level for 17 voters at Bara Bhangal in Kangra. This will be the highest polling station of the district for panchayat elections.

Rakesh Kumar Prajapati, Deputy Commissioner, Kangra, said here today that election material was being sent to Bara Bhangal for the completion of panchayat elections. The total population of Bara Bhangal is 627 out of which 439 are registered voters of which 422 have migrated to Bir. Prajapati said most of the villagers had migrated to Bir with the onset of winters, therefore, special polling station at Bir would also be set up for facilitating these 422 villagers.

Situated at a height of 7,700 ft in the Dhauladhar ranges of the Himalayas, Bara Bhangal is considered to be the remotest village in Kangra valley. The first polling booth was set up in the village during the Assembly elections in 2007. — OC

About 60% polling in Haryana municipal polls

CHANDIGARH: A voting percentage of nearly 60 was recorded as polling remained peaceful in the elections to municipal bodies in Haryana on Sunday, which were held amid tight security and adherence to the norms in place in view of the coronavirus pandemic, officials said.

The polling started at 8 am and continued till 5:30 pm.

"According to the preliminary figures available at the close of voting, nearly 60 per cent polling has been recorded. No untoward incident was reported from anywhere and the polling remained peaceful," State Election Commissioner Dalip Singh said.

The polls were held to elect the mayors and members of all the wards of Ambala, Panchkula and Sonapat municipal corporations, the president and members of the Municipal Council of Rewari and the municipal committees of Sampla (Rohtak), Dharuhera (Rewari) and Ukalana (Hisar).

Besides, bypolls for ward number 7 of the Municipal Committee, Indri (Karnal), ward number 13 of Bhuna (Fatehabad), ward number 12 of Rajound (Kaithal), ward number 14 of the Municipal Council, Fatehabad and ward number 29 of the Municipal Council, Sirsa were also held.

Singh said elaborate arrangements were made to ensure free, fair and transparent elections. "Adequate police force was deployed to maintain law and order at the polling stations and in sensitive and hypersensitive areas, while poll observers were also put on duty," he said.

The results will be out on December 30.

AGENCIES

All parties optimistic after round 2 of Karnataka Gram Panchayat polls

Bengaluru: As the round two of Gram Panchayat polls concluded all three parties are holding thumbs up and claiming they have done well. Since parties and party symbols are not allowed it is common practice for all parties to claim success in GP polls. All eyes are now on December 30 when the votes will be counted, but since there are no symbols it will not be very evident who has won.

ENS

Municipal body elections in Haryana: Polling is under-way on Sunday in elections to municipal bodies in Haryana amid tight security and adherence to coronavirus norms. Polls opened at 8 am and will continue till 5:30 pm. The results will be out on 30 December. The polls are witnessing a direct fight between the BJP-JJP combine and the Congress. PTI

Delhi Cong asks block workers to prepare report for MCDs bypolls



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 27 DECEMBER

Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Anil Kumar, during a meeting with party workers from the city's all 180 blocks on Saturday, asked them to suggest the names for the post of blocks presidents and submit a detailed report for the coming byelections to the Municipal Corporations of Delhi (MCDs).

The DPCC chief said, "It is high time workers are energized and activated at the ground-level for them to interact with the people, and make them aware of the fall-out of the anti-people actions and

misgovernance by the Modi government at the Centre and the Arvind Kejriwal government in Delhi."

According to a statement issued by the Delhi Congress, Anil Kumar has advised the observers (field workers) to have detailed discussions with the District Congress Committee presidents, MLA candidates, former and present Block Congress Committees presidents, municipal councillors, candidates for MCD elections, ex-MCD candidates, leaders of frontal organizations, various cells and departments, social and residential organisations and prominent citizens of the area, and take their sugges-

tions to be sent to him, so that they become a part and parcel of the process to select the candidates for the MCDs byelections.

Kumar has also directed the observers to suggest probable names for the post of blocks presidents, chairpersons of the booth committees, and social media coordinators at the block-level while giving preference to women in the party's organisational setup, and send them to the Pradesh Congress Committee, said the statement.

"The observers' reports should be sent to the DPCC president in a sealed cover latest 10 January, 2021," the statement added.

Voting for Karnataka panchayat polls ends

BENGALURU

The polling for the second and final phase of gram panchayat elections in Karnataka concluded on Sunday. Votes will be counted on December 30. Over 60% voter turnout was recorded till 3 p.m. in the State, according to officials. In all, elections took place in 5,728 village panchayats in 226 taluks of the State for 72,616 seats. PTI

बंगाल में चुनाव से पहले चल रही कौन सी जंग?

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■ **नई दिल्ली :** पश्चिम बंगाल में चुनावी माहौल दिनों-दिन गरम होता जा रहा है। वोटों की जंग में तो अभी कुछ वक्त है लेकिन बंगाल में परसेप्शन की जंग तेजी होती जा रही है। बीजेपी और तृणमूल कांग्रेस के बीच चल रही इस जंग में दोनों तरफ से जीतने की कोशिश हो रही है। दरअसल जो पार्टी समर्थक हैं उनका वोट तो उसी पार्टी को जाएगा लेकिन बड़ी संख्या में वह वोटर होते हैं जो माहौल देखकर तय करते हैं किस पार्टी के पक्ष में वोट डालना है। ऐसे वोटर्स को अपनी तरफ आकर्षित करने के लिए परसेप्शन का बहुत बड़ा योगदान होता है। इसलिए बंगाल में परसेप्शन की जंग जारी है। बीजेपी और तृणमूल कांग्रेस दोनों खुद को मजबूत और दूसरी पार्टी को कमजोर दिखाने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं।

शुभेंदु का पाला बदलना बीजेपी की बड़ी जीत: बीजेपी के पूर्व राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष अमित शाह की स्टाइल के अनुसार ही बीजेपी पश्चिम बंगाल में दूसरी पार्टी के लोगों को तोड़कर अपने साथ ला रही है। हर राज्य में चुनाव से पहले बीजेपी में दूसरी पार्टी से लोगों का आना शुरू हो जाता है। बीजेपी के एक नेता ने कहा कि हम लोग तोड़ते नहीं हैं बल्कि बीजेपी के पक्ष में माहौल देखकर लोग खुद बीजेपी से जुड़ना चाहते हैं। पश्चिम बंगाल में बीजेपी ने तृणमूल कांग्रेस में



नंबर 2 माने जाने वाले शुभेंदु अधिकारी सहित तृणमूल कांग्रेस के एक सांसद और 9 विधायकों को पार्टी में शामिल किया। शुभेंदु का बीजेपी में जाना तृणमूल कांग्रेस के लिए एक बड़ा झटका है क्योंकि शुभेंदु अधिकारी पश्चिम बंगाल की राजनीति में एक पावरफुल नाम हैं। वह नंदीग्राम आंदोलन के सूत्रधार रहे हैं। उनका असर राज्य की 65 सीटों पर है जो विधानसभा चुनाव को देखते हुए बेहद अहम है। वह तृणमूल कांग्रेस के लिए मुश्किल खड़ी कर सकते हैं।

प्रशांत किशोर फैक्टर से जंग दिलचस्प: तृणमूल कांग्रेस छोड़कर बीजेपी में शामिल होने वाले नेताओं की संख्या से बीजेपी यह माहौल बनाने की कोशिश कर रही है कि बीजेपी राज्य में लगातार मजबूत हो रही है और ममता बनर्जी का किला ध्वस्त हो रहा है। इसी परसेप्शन की जंग को तृणमूल कांग्रेस के

पक्ष में करने के लिए चुनाव रणनीतिकार प्रशांत किशोर ने दावा किया कि बीजेपी बंगाल में सीटों के मामले में दहाई की संख्या तक भी नहीं पहुंच पाएगी। फिर कहा कि बीजेपी 100 से कम सीटें हासिल करेगी और अगर बीजेपी को इससे ज्यादा सीटें मिलती हैं तो मैं अपना काम (चुनाव रणनीतिकार) छोड़ दूंगा। 2014 में मोदी के लिए काम कर चुके प्रशांत किशोर फिलहाल पश्चिम बंगाल में तृणमूल कांग्रेस प्रमुख ममता बनर्जी के लिए चुनावी रणनीति पर काम कर रहे हैं। बीजेपी ने बंगाल में अब की बार 200 पार का नारा दिया है। प्रशांत किशोर के दावे के बाद यह चर्चा भी गरम है कि बीजेपी पश्चिम बंगाल में अपने लक्ष्य को 200 से बढ़ाकर सवा दो सौ कर सकती है ताकि यह संदेश दे सके कि बीजेपी पश्चिम बंगाल को जीत को लेकर पूरी तरह आश्वस्त है। इससे बीजेपी को अपने पक्ष में माहौल बनाने में मदद मिलेगी।

लोकसभा चुनाव के नतीजों से TMC चौकन्नी

2019 के लोकसभा चुनाव में बीजेपी ने पश्चिम बंगाल में 18 सीटें जीतीं जो विरोधी दलों के लिए झटका भी था और हैरानी भी। बीजेपी पश्चिम बंगाल में अपना मोमेंटम बरकरार रखना चाहती है। इसलिए बीजेपी के सीनियर मंत्री से लेकर नेता तक इस मिशन में जुटे हैं। बीजेपी नेता अमित शाह ने पश्चिम बंगाल दौरे पर न सिर्फ ममता बनर्जी सरकार पर जमकर निशाना साधा पर बल्कि लोगों को लुभाने की भी भरपूर कोशिश की। उन्होंने बाउल गायल बासुदेव दास के घर पर भोजन किया। बीजेपी जहां इस दांव में एक कदम आगे दिख रही थी वहीं कुछ दिन बाद ही तृणमूल कांग्रेस ने यह दांव बीजेपी पर ही पलट दिया। बासुदेव दास ने तृणमूल कांग्रेस नेता की मौजूदगी में पत्रकारों से कहा कि मैं अमित शाह जैसे बड़े व्यक्ति को बाउल कलाकारों की स्थिति के बारे में बताना चाहता था लेकिन उनसे एक शब्द भी बात करने का मौका नहीं मिला। बासुदेव ने यह भी कहा कि अमित शाह के वहां से जाने के बाद बीजेपी के किसी नेता ने न तो फिर मुझसे बात की और न ही कोई फिर पूछने आया। बीजेपी का आरोप है कि बासुदेव यह बातें तृणमूल कांग्रेस के दबाव में कह रहे हैं। किस का किस पर दबाव है इससे इतर यह बात तो साफ है कि पश्चिम बंगाल में चुनाव हो जाने तक इस तरह के दांव-पेंच और शह-मात का खेल देखने को मिलेगा।

पंचायत चुनाव की तैयारियों की समीक्षा करने पहुंचे 'आप' विधायक

जनसत्ता संवाददाता

नोएडा, 27 दिसंबर।

आम आदमी पार्टी (आप) के राष्ट्रीय संयोजक अरविंद केजरीवाल ने कस्तूरबा नगर के विधायक मदनलाल को गौतमबुद्धनगर का पंचायत चुनाव का प्रभारी बनाया है। इस कड़ी में रविवार को मदनलाल ग्रेटर नोएडा सेक्टर बीटा 2 पहुंचे और जिले के कार्यकर्ताओं के साथ समीक्षा बैठक की। उन्होंने अगले वर्ष की शुरुआत में प्रस्तावित पंचायत चुनावों के लिए तैयार रहकर पूरी ताकत के साथ मुकाबला करने की बात कही। मदन लाल ने दिल्ली सरकार द्वारा किए जा रहे कार्यों के बारे में बताया और कहा कि जब दिल्ली सरकार दिल्ली में पूर्ण राज्य ना होने के बावजूद बहुत बेहतर कार्य कर रही है, तो उत्तर प्रदेश में सरकार बनने पर बिजली, पानी, स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा व महिलाओं के सम्मान के लिए और बेहतर कार्य करेगी।

प्रदेश सचिव व गौतमबुद्धनगर जिला प्रभारी मीनाक्षी श्रीवास्तव ने संगठन समीक्षा के दौरान कार्यकर्ताओं का उत्साहवर्धन करते हुए कहा कि हमें बूथ स्तर तक संगठन को मजबूत करना है।

बंगाल में फरार आरोपितों से छिनेगा मतदान का हक

गैर-जमानती धाराओं में केस वालों का मतदाता सूची से हटेगा नाम

राज्य ब्यूरो, कोलकाता: बंगाल में हिंसा मुक्त विधानसभा चुनाव कराने के लिए चुनाव आयोग बेहद सतर्क है। इस बाबत अपराधियों को खास तौर पर चिह्नित किया जा रहा है। इतना ही नहीं, जिन लोगों पर गैर-जमानती धाराओं में केस दर्ज है, छह महीने तक फरार रहने पर उनका नाम मतदाता सूची से हटा दिया जाएगा। इस समय राज्यभर में मतदाता सूची संशोधन का काम चल रहा है।

चुनाव आयोग के सूत्रों के अनुसार गैर-जमानती धाराओं वाले फरार आरोपितों के मामले में उक्त नियम गत अक्टूबर से ही प्रभावी हो गया है। ऐसे में फरार आरोपित अगर अगले साल अप्रैल तक गिरफ्तार नहीं किए जाते तो उनका नाम मतदाता सूची से हटा दिया जाएगा।

गौरतलब है कि बंगाल में अगले साल होने जा रहा विधानसभा चुनाव कई मायनों में अहम है। इस वजह से चुनाव आयोग मतदान प्रक्रिया को पारदर्शी बनाने के प्रयासों में कोई कमी नहीं छोड़ रहा है। मतदाता सूची संशोधन से लेकर अन्य तैयारियों तक सभी मामलों में कड़ी नजर रखी जा रही है। केंद्रीय चुनाव आयोग ने राज्य के मुख्य चुनाव अधिकारी कार्यालय को यह सुनिश्चित करने को कहा है कि मतदाता सूची में कोई विसंगति नहीं रहे। आयोग ने संशोधन के लिए



आज्ञा नदिया में निरीक्षण करेंगे मुख्य चुनाव अधिकारी आरिज

राज्य के मुख्य चुनाव अधिकारी आरिज आफताब सोमवार को मतदाता सूची से जुड़े काम का निरीक्षण करने के लिए नदिया और मुर्शीदाबाद जा रहे हैं। इससे पहले उन्होंने दक्षिण 24 परगना जिले के चुनाव अधिकारियों के साथ बैठक की थी।

तीन साल से जमे पुलिस अधिकारियों के तबादले के निर्देश

चुनाव आयोग ने अब राज्य व कोलकाता पुलिस के मुख्यालयों को चिट्ठी भेजकर सशस्त्र पुलिस बल के कमांडेंट व अन्य अधिकारियों, जोकि तीन साल से ज्यादा समय से एक ही जगह पर जमे हैं, उनका तबादला करने को कहा है। गौरतलब है कि इससे पहले हाल के दिनों में राज्य सरकार की ओर से बड़े स्तर पर आइएएस व आइपीएस अधिकारियों का तबादला

किया गया था। इसके साथ ही चुनाव को देखते हुए विभिन्न पुलिस थानों, चौकियों, सब डिवीजन और जिला पुलिस के अधिकारियों, जोकि दैनिक आधार पर कानून और व्यवस्था बनाए रखने के प्रवर्तक होते हैं, उनका तबादला किया गया था। कोलकाता पुलिस मुख्यालय लालबाजार के सूत्रों के अनुसार, आयोग का निर्देश उन तक पहुंच चुका है।

कई नियम भी जोड़े हैं। उदाहरण के लिए अगर किसी का नाम हटाया गया है तो आवेदक को उसके कारण के बारे में सूचित किया जाएगा।

अशांति नहीं चाहता चुनाव आयोग: उप चुनाव आयुक्त और पश्चिम बंगाल के प्रभारी सुदीप जैन ने राज्य का दौरा किया था। उन्होंने कोलकाता में विशेष बैठक भी की थी। वह तीन दिनों के

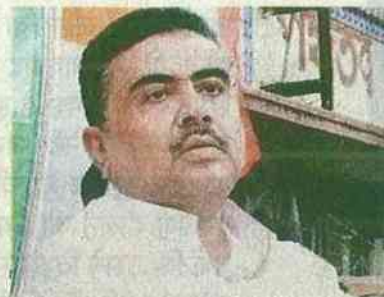
लिए उत्तर बंगाल भी गए थे। उन्होंने राज्य के सभी जिलाधिकारियों, पुलिस अधीक्षकों व पुलिस आयुक्तों के साथ बैठकें भी की थीं। आयोग सूत्रों के अनुसार जिलाधिकारियों को बैठक में स्पष्ट किया गया था कि गैर-जमानती गिरफ्तारी वारंट वाले आरोपितों को वापसी के लिए अदालत में आवेदन करना होगा।

सुवेंदु का तृणमूल पर हमला कहा- यह ट्रेलर है, पिक्चर अभी बाकी है

राज्य ब्यूरो, कोलकाता: तृणमूल कांग्रेस छोड़कर पिछले हफ्ते ही भाजपा में शामिल हुए पूर्व मंत्री व कद्दावर नेता सुवेंदु अधिकारी का तृणमूल के प्रति तेवर बेहद सख्त है। रविवार को उन्होंने एक बार फिर तृणमूल पर करारा हमला बोला। पश्चिम मेदिनीपुर जिले के दांतन में एक रोड शो के बाद सभा को संबोधित करते हुए उन्होंने कहा कि यह तो अभी ट्रेलर है, पिक्चर अभी बाकी है।

उन्होंने तृणमूल के खिलाफ हुंकार भरते हुए कहा कि 2021 के विधानसभा चुनाव में तृणमूल साफ हो जाएगी और भाजपा की यहां सरकार बनेगी। सुवेंदु ने इस दौरान मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी के भतीजे व सांसद अभिषेक बनर्जी का नाम लिए बिना एक बार फिर उन पर भी निशाना साधा और तोलाबाज भाइपो हटाओ (रंगदार भतीजा हटाओ) का नारा बुलंद किया। दरअसल, सुवेंदु भाजपा में शामिल होने के बाद से हर रैली व सभा में अभिषेक के खिलाफ यह नारा बुलंद करते आ रहे हैं।

सुवेंदु ने आगे कहा कि तृणमूल में जितने भी मंत्री हैं, वे कोलकाता शहर के हैं। तृणमूल और राज्य का शासन केवल चार पांच लोगों के हाथों में है। उन्होंने कटाक्ष करते हुए कहा कि गांव के लोग क्या बाढ़ में बह कर आए हैं। यह लड़ाई अब शहर और गांव की हो गई है। उन्होंने तृणमूल नेताओं द्वारा उन्हें विश्वासघाती व मीरजाफर कहे जाने पर भी पलटवार करते हुए कहा कि कुछ लोग मेदिनीपुर की माटी को और उन्हें विश्वासघाती



सुवेंदु अधिकारी • फाइल फोटो

ममता से जनता नाराज, लोगों ने बना लिया सत्ता परिवर्तन का मन: शेखावत

राज्य ब्यूरो, कोलकाता: केंद्रीय जलशक्ति मंत्री व वरिष्ठ भाजपा नेता गजेन्द्र सिंह शेखावत ने रविवार को कोलकाता के इंटाली में रोड शो किया और तृणमूल कांग्रेस सरकार को आड़े हाथों लिया। इस दौरान शेखावत ने कहा कि मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी से बंगाल की जनता नाराज है। रोड शो में उमड़ी भीड़ बता रही है कि अब लोग खुलकर इस सरकार के खिलाफ सड़कों पर उतर रहे हैं। जनता ने सत्ता परिवर्तन का मन बना लिया है। उन्होंने कहा कि ममता दीदी केंद्रीय योजनाओं से गरीब जनता को वंचित रख रही हैं।

कह रहे हैं, लेकिन वे नहीं जानते कि मेदिनीपुर की मिट्टी से खुदीराम और मातंगिनी हाजरा जन्म लेते हैं। सभा से पहले दांतन के पेट्रोल पंप इलाके से सराई बाजार के सभा स्थल तक सुवेंदु ने रोड शो किया।

जीतकर भी चैन से नहीं रह पाएंगे बिहार के 27 विधायक

अरविंद शर्मा • पटना

विधानसभा चुनाव में कम अंतर से जीते विधायकों की परेशानियों में इजाफा होने वाला है। पराजित प्रतिद्वंद्वियों ने पटना हाई कोर्ट में दस्तक दी है। केस फाइल हो गया है। मुख्य न्यायाधीश के सामने प्रस्तुति और लिस्टिंग भी हो चुकी है। अदालत खुलने के बाद सुनवाई की प्रक्रिया शुरू हो सकती है।

मुकदमा दर्ज कराने वालों में सबसे ज्यादा आठ राजद और छह कांग्रेस के प्रत्याशी हैं। पांच निर्दलियों को भी प्रतिद्वंद्वियों की जीत पर आपत्ति है। सत्ता पक्ष के भी पांच प्रत्याशियों ने चुनाव आयोग के फैसले पर सवाल उठाए हैं। इनमें तीन जदयू और दो भाजपा के हैं। माकपा और बसपा के

भी एक-एक प्रत्याशी हैं। दो ने सीधे चुनाव आयोग को ही पार्टी बनाया है। एक मामला विधान परिषद का है। टिकारी के कांग्रेस प्रत्याशी सुमंत कुमार का आरोप है कि रिटर्निंग अफसरों ने पक्षपात कर जीत के बाद भी उन्हें पराजित घोषित कर दिया।

जिन विधायकों की मुश्किलें बढ़ सकती हैं, उनमें सबसे ज्यादा नौ जदयू के हैं, जबकि भाजपा के छह हैं। राजद के भी सात विधायक हैं, जिन्हें हारे हुए प्रत्याशियों ने निशाने पर रखा है। कांग्रेस, माले, हिंदुस्तानी अवाम मोर्चा और लोजपा के एक-एक विधायक के खिलाफ भी मुकदमा दर्ज हुआ है। भाजपा के विधान पार्षद नवल किशोर यादव की जीत को भी निर्दलीय प्रत्याशी अवधेश कुमार सिन्हा ने चुनौती दी है।

CFMA to move SC to scrap e-voting by Franklin

FE BUREAU

Chennai, December 27

CHENNAI FINANCIAL MARKETS and Accountability (CFMA), one of the petitioners against the winding up of six schemes by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund (FTMF), on Sunday said that it is moving an urgent interim application before the Supreme Court on Monday seeking to declare the entire e-voting process initiated by FTMF as non est in law.

The SC had in its order of December 9 directed Sebi to appoint an observer to oversee the e-voting process by FTMF which has already commenced on December 26 and is to be concluded on December 29.

According to CFMA, the appointment of T S Krishna-

murthy, former chief election commissioner of India, as an observer was publicly made by Sebi only after the e-voting process began.

A couple of days, CFMA had filed an application in the Supreme Court alleging that despite the apex court's December 9 order, no apparent steps have been taken by the Sebi to appoint an observer for overseeing the e-voting process with regard to winding up Franklin Templeton's six mutual fund schemes.

In the urgent interim application filing on Monday, CFMA is pointing out that Sebi had announced the appointment of observer only after the e-voting began and it was against the letter and spirit of the order passed by the SC on December 9.

CFMA said it is seeking to

declare the entire e-voting process scrapped by the SC besides praying the apex court to direct an independent enquiry into whether there was a notice issued by Sebi on December 18 on appointment of the observer and also to verify as to why for a 8 day period this information was not divulged to the public at large. CFMA is also seeking the e-voting process to be undertaken under the aegis of the SC.

On December 3, the apex court had asked Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund to initiate steps within one week for calling a meeting of unit-holders to seek their consent for closure of six mutual fund schemes. Consequently, on December 7, FTMF had said it has sought consent of the unit-holders for the orderly winding up of the six schemes.