

Minutes of meeting held on 26.02.2024 with Political Parties chaired by the Chief Electoral Officer for the upcoming General Elections 2024

The Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim, Shri. D. Anandan, IAS, convened a meeting with the representatives of Political parties of the State on 26.02.2024, to brief them about the preparations made so far by the Election Department for the upcoming General Elections, 2024 and also to ensure that there is transparency in every step of the way.

At the outset, the Additional Chief Electoral Officer, Sikkim, Ms. Pema Lhaden Lama, SCS welcomed the representatives of the Political parties and requested their cooperation for the upcoming General Elections, 2024. She informed that these meetings were to share information and for effectively building confidence amongst the political parties and the Election machinery in the State.

Next, the Chief Electoral Officer addressed the political parties and the following points were discussed in detail:

1. Electoral Roll – Continuous Updation :

The Chief Electoral Officer informed that during SSR w.r.t. 1.1.2024 as the qualifying date, the office had held 3 meetings with the Political parties and had shared the list of claims and objections received during those periods with them. In the same lines, he said, meetings will be held periodically with the Political Parties during the General Elections 2024 also, for timely sharing of critical information.

He then informed the representatives of the political parties about the Continuous Updation of the Electoral roll, which is currently being carried out. He gave them the details of the numbers of Form 6, 7 and 8 received so far under the Continuous Updation, for inclusion, deletion, correction and shifting of names in the Electoral Roll, as follows:

Type of Form	Received	Disposed	Pending
Form 6	4957	3599	1358
Form 7	4652	3365	1287
Form 8	8379	5969	2410



He reiterated the fact that the Final Electoral Roll that will be published upon the announcement of General Elections 2024, after incorporating these changes, would be the Electoral Roll that would be used for the polling.

The representatives of the political parties were also informed that during the continuous updation, the forms 7 and 8 will be accepted only till date of announcement of elections and thereafter the Electoral Rolls will be frozen and printing of final Electoral Roll will be initiated.

The Chief Electoral Officer informed the Political Parties that all the instructions issued by the Commission are available in the Commission's website and they can go through these instructions in detail.

2. Appointment of ROs/AROs for PC and AC:

The Chief Electoral Officer shared the following Notifications issued by the ECI for the upcoming General Elections with the Political Parties:

- i. Notification No. 15/2024/Elec dated 29.01.2024, notifying Appellate Authority
- ii. Notification no. 16/2024/Elec dated 30.01.2024 notifying RO for PC
- iii. Notification no. 17/2024/Elec dated 30.01.2024 notifying AROs for PC
- iv. Notification no. 18/2024/Elec dated 03.02.2024 notifying ROs for AC
- v. Notification No. 19/2024/Elec dated 03.02.2024 notifying AROs for AC
- vi. Notification No. 20/2024/Elec dated 21.02.2024 for amendment of notification for RO for ACs of Gyalshing district.

He further informed that one more notification is being issued by the ECI regarding assignment of AC segments to AROs for PC, which after re-publication will be shared with the Political Parties.

Further, the Chief Electoral Officer explained to the representatives of the political parties about the duties of the Returning Officer in detail and informed that an ARO can carry out all the functions of the RO except scrutiny of nominations, which can only be done by the Returning officer.

3. Polling Station – Finalization, AMF/EMF, Connectivity :

Next the Political parties were informed about the changes that have been made to the location of 17 Polling Stations for the convenience of the voters, as proposed by the DEOs in consultation with the political parties, which has been now approved by ECI. He stated that the Final List of Polling Stations will be announced by the District Election Officers after the announcement of Elections.



The CEO also informed the political parties that some changes in the nomenclature of Polling Stations, due to upgradation of the schools are being taken up and approved by Chief Electoral Officer. The final list will also incorporate these changes.

4. Postal Ballots for IRB Personnel posted in New Delhi :

The CEO also apprised the political parties about the significant changes that have been brought in by the ECI through an amendment of Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, for casting of Postal Ballots. He informed them that the Voters on Election Duty who are given Postal Ballot to exercise their franchise can now cast their vote through Postal Ballot only at the Facilitation Centers to be set up by the Returning Officers for this purpose.

The representatives of the Political Parties were also informed about the direction of the ECI to treat the IRB personnel posted outside the State as "Service Voters" in accordance with the provisions of Section 20(8)(c) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. The CEO told that action has already been initiated for enrolling them as Service Voters in coordination with the Police Department in order to enable them to avail the facility of Postal Ballot.

The concept of Service voters, ETPBMS and last part of electoral roll for the Service voters were explained in full detail to the political parties.

5. Home Voting for 80+ and PwD Voters :

The CEO went on and explained about the facility of Home Voting for the Senior Citizens who are 80+ years and Persons with Disability possessing Certificate of Benchmark Disability, introduced by the ECI. However, he clarified that this facility is only optional and those who would like to cast their vote at the Polling Booth may do so.

He also explained them about the procedure of Home Voting and informed them that the Political Parties can also send their representatives to ensure transparency. The list of absentee voters who have opted for Home Voting under 80+ category and PwD category will be provided by the DEOs to all the Political Parties and the Candidates.

The representatives of political parties were then told about the list of services to be considered as Essential service, in consultation with State Government, has been sent to ECI for approval and notification. After re-publication of the Notification, the same will be shared to all political parties. They were also informed that this category of voters will vote in a Postal Ballot Voting Centre (PVC) which will be set up in the respective DC offices.



6. Facilitation Centres for PB Voting :

The CEO explained about the concept of Facilitation Centres for Postal Ballot as per the recent amendment of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. He informed them that the Voters on Election Duty will henceforth be allowed to cast their Postal Ballot only at the Facilitation Centres set up by the concerned Returning Officer and that the representatives of Political Parties/Candidates will be allowed to be present in the Facilitation Centres to witness the proceedings, while maintaining the secrecy of voting at the same time.

7. Rates for maintaining Accounts of Election Expenditure by Candidates :

The CEO asked the Political parties to ensure that the candidates of their party strictly maintain the Accounts of Election expenditure and that they submit the election expenditure reports with the Expenditure Observers three times during the period of election.

Next the rate charts for items to be accounted for election expenditure was discussed and it was decided that a tentative rate chart for the upcoming General Elections, 2024 will be prepared taking approximately 25% inflation on the rates decided during GE 2019. This tentative list will be sent to all the political parties and another meeting will be convened for discussion and finalization of the rate chart for the upcoming General Elections, 2024.

8. Training of Election Officials- Present Status-MCMC :

The CEO informed that almost all categories of election functionaries have been trained for the General Elections, 2024. He added that in order to ensure that the elections are error free and that the polling teams are better equipped, the Presiding & Polling officers are being given four rounds of training, instead of usual three times.

Further, they were also advised that any campaign material will have to come to State Level MCMC for approval and certification. He stated that another meeting will be convened to discuss the instructions and requirements for MCMC.

The representatives of political parties raised the issue of fake pages/accounts in Social Media, to which the CEO stated that the matter falls under the jurisdiction of Police Department and the onus lies on the Political Parties themselves to approach the Police Department for necessary action under the relevant Acts.

9. EVMs and FLC :

The CEO informed the Political Parties about the sufficient availability of EVMs for the conduct of GE-2024. He stated that an additional 100 Control Units was requisitioned and FLC of these additional machines have also



been completed. He informed that the Reserve EVMs available in the State are more than the minimum limit fixed by the ECI.

10. Strong Rooms and Counting Centers :

The Political Parties were informed about the location of Strong Rooms and Counting Centres as proposed by the District Election Officers as follows:

Gyalshing:	Kyongsa Girls SSS, Gyalshing.
Soreng:	B.Ed College, Soreng
Namchi:	Kamrang College, Namchi
Pakyong:	Dikling SSS, Pakyong
Gangtok:	DIET College, Burtuk, Gangtok
Mangan :	Election Office, Mangan

He stated that he has inspected the Strong rooms for all the districts except Mangan, which he will do in the coming week. The representative of SKM Party requested for permission to visit the strong room/ counting centers, to which the CEO said that the District Election Officers will be informed accordingly.

The CEO informed them that due to the limited number of large Halls in the Counting Centres, the counting in some of the Halls will be done for more than one AC, in a sequential manner, ensuring that only after the counting of one AC is completed, the counting of next AC will be taken up. However, he said that the DEOs have been asked to identify as many Counting Halls as possible, so that counting of more than one AC is taken up simultaneously in these Halls. He also explained about the mandatory counting of Slips of VVPAT for minimum 5 Polling Stations for every AC/AS. He also informed that it is proposed to take up counting of 32-Sangha AC at the first round itself, since it involves tabulation of results from all six districts, at Gangtok, at the level of Returning Officer.

On query from representatives of SDF Party, the CEO clarified that counting of Postal Ballot will first commence at 8.00 AM on the Counting Day and after a gap of 30 minutes, counting of EVMs will be taken up.

11. Election manifesto – Copies and Declaration-


Lastly, the CEO shared the instructions of ECI with regard to Election Manifesto received vide letter no. 437/6/INST/FUNCT/MCC/2024 (Election Manifestos) dated 2.01.2024 whereby the Political Parties are required to make a declaration along with the manifesto that the program/ policies and promises made therein are in consonance with Para-VIII of MCC.



He requested all political parties to abide by the instructions laid down and that within 3 days of declaration of their Election manifestos, they may share 3 copies of the manifestos to the CEO. Further they were advised that if the Manifesto is in English they may share it as it is, but wherever the Election Manifesto is in Nepali, they have to share the translated English version as well and also to submit a declaration along with the manifesto that the program/policies and promises made therein are in consonance with Para -VIII of MCC to the CEO.

At the end, the CEO thanked all the political parties for attending the meeting. He appealed to all the Political Parties to extend their full cooperation for a smooth and peaceful General Elections 2024.




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