

# ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

*Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001*

No. ECI/PN/138/2024

24.09.2024

## PRESS NOTE

**EC reviews poll preparedness for forthcoming assembly elections in Jharkhand**

**Ensure strict implementation of law and ECI guidelines without any bias; EC cautions state & district administration against partisan conduct**

**Zero-tolerance against inducements; Stringent directives to enforcement agencies to curb money power**

**EC directs to expedite Assured Minimum Facilities at all polling stations**

**Engage voters with SVEEP activities involving local culture, sports & influencers**

CEC Shri Rajiv Kumar along with ECs Shri Gyanesh Kumar and Dr. S.S. Sandhu held a detailed & comprehensive review of the poll preparedness for the forthcoming Assembly Elections in Jharkhand at Ranchi. The term of State Assembly in Jharkhand is due to expire on 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2025 and elections are scheduled for **81 ACs (44 General; 09 SC; 28 ST)** in the State.



During the two-day review visit of the Commission on September 23-24, representatives of national and state political parties namely Aam Aadmi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Bharatiya Janata Party, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Indian National Congress, National People's Party, AJSU Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Rashtriya Janta Dal came to meet the Commission. All political parties conveyed their appreciation for successful & peaceful conduct of Lok Sabha Elections 2024.

**The main issues raised by political parties included:**

1. Most parties unanimously requested consideration of various festivities like Diwali, Chhath, Durga Pooja and state foundation day in the month of October and November, before deciding on the election schedule for enhanced participation in election process. It was informed that many voters in the state will be travelling during Chhath pooja.
2. Many parties also requested for a single-phase election.

3. Parties requested for an error free electoral rolls and to ensure a free and fair elections with non-partisan action by local civil and police administration for a level playing field.
4. A proper mix of CAPF and State police for appropriate deployment at sensitive and rural booths, monitored by an IG Level Officer.
5. 100 % Webcasting in all polling stations.
6. Regarding polling stations, one of the parties requested availability of ramps and sufficient lights in all polling stations, along with priority in voting for elderly, PwDs and pregnant women.
7. All polling stations to be set up in proximity of residential areas for convenience of voters. Pick and drop facility may be provided for polling stations set-up farther from residential areas. Accessibility Observer may be deployed for ensuring facilities at polling stations.
8. One of the parties raised a concern that in some cases, members of same family residing together were allotted different polling stations and some polling stations have more than 1500 electors.
9. To avoid any undue harassment by authorities, few parties raised need for clear guidelines and demarcation of area for setting up of polling desks near polling station by parties on poll day.
10. One of the parties also raised concern regarding deletion of name of voters in certain constituencies in previous elections, after final publication of the electoral roll.
11. One of the parties requested enquiry of a sudden increase of voters in certain Assembly Constituencies.
12. Some parties raised concerns on Hate Speech during campaigning. One of the parties requested ban on raising sub-judice matters like illegal immigrants in the state during campaigning.
13. Strict vigil and action on use of illicit cash, liquor and freebies to sway voters. A grievance that administration is slow to cooperate/proceed with complaints of opposition parties/candidates and there is a need for swift action on any such complaints.
14. Monitoring of campaigning by candidates 24x7 for any violations and prohibiting campaigning through IVRS calls on poll day
15. More awareness on ECI directions regarding display of party flags by voters voluntarily in their home after election announcement to avoid misuse of Public Defacement Act by authorities.
16. Details of EVM to be used at polling stations to be given to parties/candidates. Reserve EVMs to be made available at all polling stations for smooth voting process
17. Voter Information Slip to be distributed in advance for awareness
18. Videography of counting of postal ballots
19. Other demands included the timely sharing of voter lists with candidates; curb diversion of funds received by certain NGOs for development work towards election related campaigning and reduction in nomination fee for the contesting candidates.

The Commission assured the representatives that it has taken cognizance of suggestions and concerns of the political parties and ECI is committed to conduct free, fair, participative, inclusive, peaceful and inducement free elections in the state. The Commission after reviewing these issues, decided and conveyed the following to state and district administration:

1. Beyond the Commission's mandate of webcasting in 50% polling stations, webcasting will be done in all polling stations, wherever feasible technically.
2. Assured minimum facilities including ramps, sufficient lighting, wheelchairs, and volunteers for elderly and PwD voters will be provided at all polling stations.
3. Priority voting for elderly, PwDs and Pregnant women would be ensured
4. Polling stations will be on the ground floor and within 2 kms of the residence of the voters. Pick and drop facility would be provided for few polling stations beyond 2km range.
5. All divisional commissioners are directed to assess and ensure compliance of AMFs at polling stations.
6. None of the polling station will have more than 1500 electors.
7. Clear demarcation of area i.e. 200mt from the periphery of the polling station premises, where Polling Parties can set up their desks on poll day would be ensured.
8. There would be no undue harassment of persons under Public Defacement Act. DEOs and SPs directed that law should be implemented equally and without any bias.
9. As per ECI guidelines, EVM & VVPAT details will be shared with all contesting candidates after first and second randomization. FLC & First randomisation is done in presence of recognized parties. Second randomization of EVMs and VVPATs is conducted, before commissioning of EVMs and VVPATs, in the presence of contesting candidates to allocate polling station wise and reserve machines.
10. Video recording of counting of postal ballots would be ensured as per ECI guidelines.
11. District Administration would ensure vigil and prohibition on campaigning/advertisement using bulk SMS and IVRS calls during silence period.
12. Voter information slips will be distributed timely
13. DEOs were specifically told to be equally accessible to all political parties and to ensure prompt resolution of their complaints and grievances, apart from meeting them regularly through periodic meetings.



During the review meeting with nearly 20 central and state Enforcement agencies like DRI, NCB, State & Central GST, RPF, RBI, State Police, Income Tax, Enforcement Directorate, etc., the Commission underscored its focus for an inducement-free elections. Without mincing words, the Commission conveyed its zero tolerance towards use of money power in the elections. However, CEC Rajiv Kumar also cautioned the officials to avoid any undue harassments to the public in the name of checking during elections. **The following directions were given to enforcement agencies:**

1. All enforcement agencies to work in a coordinated manner to curb illicit liquor, cash, and drugs inflow in the state.
2. Agencies to synchronise and update their route maps of flow of inducements with actual sensitivity on the ground.
3. SPNO to ensure Joint teams of police, transport, State GST, Excise and forest for coordinated and synergistic action.
4. Police and excise department to focus on action against liquor and drug kingpins and establish backward linkages for wider deterrence.
5. Review inter-state border and Naka arrangements, particularly those which lie on illicit liquor and drugs inflow. Special focus on border with West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar.
6. 24x7 CCTV monitoring at critical check posts on interstate borders and feeds to be followed up earnestly.
7. Focus on movement of synthetic drugs apart from rigorous monitoring of Ganja and poppy cultivation and destruction. Special watch of destruction of illegal poppy cultivation in districts of Palamu, Chatra, Hazaribagh, Latehar, Gumla and Khunti.
8. National Highways particularly connecting Jharkhand with Odisha and West Bengal to be kept under close watch.
9. Apart from road routes, rail and forest routes to be kept under close watch.
10. Enforcement Agencies to mutually share intelligence and work in a coordinated manner.
11. State Level Bankers Committee to ensure cash transfers only in designated vehicles during designated hours.
12. Strict vigil over illicit online cash transfers through wallets.
13. Special vigil on cargo movement through airstrips and helipads.



During its two-day review, the Commission also held meeting with the Chief Secretary & Director General of Police to review the overall poll preparedness and law and order matters. Commission directed CS that AMF should be ensured in all polling stations. DGP was directed to ensure regular co-ordination meetings with counterparts in border states. Jharkhand shares a long border with 5 states namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh. CEC Rajiv Kumar highlighted that implementation of law and ECI guidelines should be in letter and spirit without any bias.

On the second day, detailed review with DEOs/SPs/Divisional Commissioner's/IGs was held on every aspect of election planning and conduct. The Commission specifically reviewed all the issues and concerns raised by the political parties during their meeting. CEC Rajiv Kumar emphasized that all DEOs/SPs to ensure free and fair elections, maintaining highest standards of impartial conduct for a level playing field. He emphasised that district administration needs to create a festive and comfortable voting experience for voters.

DEOs to engage voters through innovative voter awareness and outreach activities for enhanced voter turnout. He emphasised that DEOs should organize SVEEP activities using local culture and sports like archery and hockey. Paintings competitions can be organized with local tribal folk themes. Local influencers/icons to be roped in for awareness activities. DEOs were told to intensify outreach activities in urban areas like Bokaro, Dhanbad, Ranchi, etc to address urban apathy noticed in previous elections. All DEOs and SPs were instructed to monitor social media for fake news and to respond swiftly with appropriate legal action, if required.

The Chief Electoral Officer and State Police Nodal Officer gave a detailed overview of the poll preparations, including the Special Summary revision of Electoral Rolls in the state with respect to July 1, 2024 as the qualifying date. The final electoral roll was published on August 27, 2024, a copy of which was provided to all recognized parties free of cost. The details are summarised in Annexure A. The Commission reviewed in detail the law and order and requirement of forces with CEO & SPNO in for smooth and peaceful conduct of election.

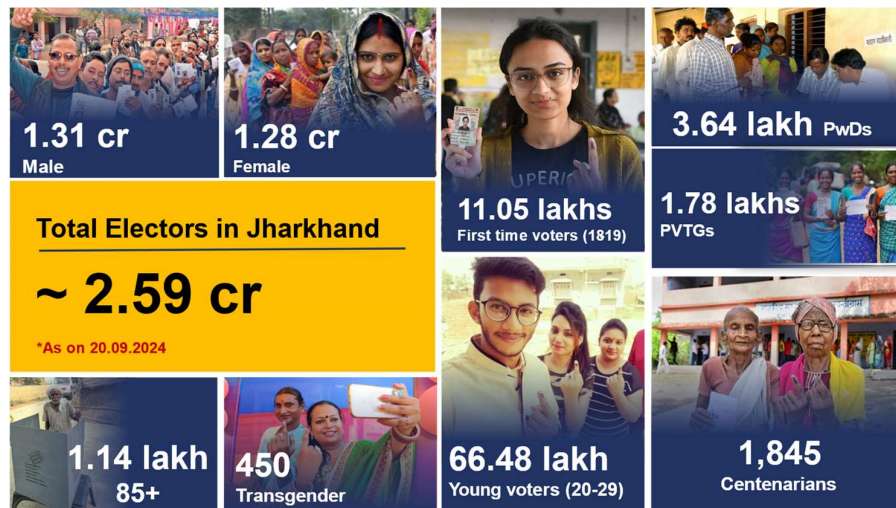
Senior officials from the Commission were also present during the review meetings.



## Annexure- A

### Electors

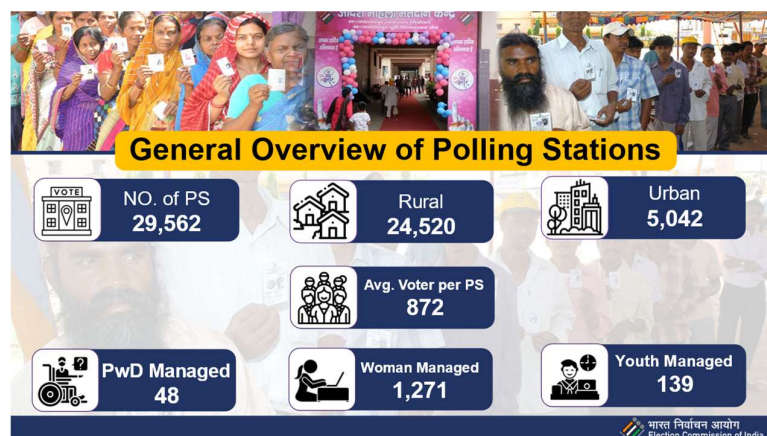
CEO Jharkhand informed 2<sup>nd</sup> SSR in the state with respect to July 1, 2024 as the qualifying date has been completed and electoral roll was published on August 27, 2024 and copies of the same were provided to political parties. With continuous updation of the electoral roll and as on 20.09.2024, a total of 2.59 crore electors are registered in the state with approx. 1.31 crore male, 1.28 crore female electors. Over 11.05 lakh first time voters (18-19 years); 1.14 lakh 85+ senior citizens and 3.64 lakh PwDs voters are registered in the state. More than 1845 voters are 100+ years old. There is 100% enrolment (1.78 lakhs) of the 8 PVTGs in the electoral roll. With focus on inclusive and participative elections, all DEOs were directed to enhance participation of PVTGs and tribal groups in the elections. The state Electoral gender ratio is 978.



### Polling Stations

While giving an overview of the polling stations during the review, CEO Jharkhand informed that a total of 29,562 polling stations will be set up on 20,276 locations in assembly elections. While 24,520 of these will be in rural areas, 5,042 will be urban polling stations with an average of 872 voters per polling station.

1271 PS will be managed solely by women and 139 will be youth managed (young employees) to promote voting amongst the key demographics of women and youth. 48 Polling stations will be manned by persons with disabilities.



## Assured Minimum Facilities at Polling Stations

All DEOs assured that polling stations across the state will have Assured Minimum Facilities like ramps, drinking water, toilets, electricity, shed, chairs etc. for convenience of voters.



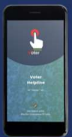
## Technology

DEOs informed that they will use an ecosystem of IT Applications to facilitate all stakeholders including voters and political parties.

**cVIGIL:** This app empowers citizens to report any electoral violations and malpractices. Flying squads are deployed to address the complaints raised through an easy to use, intuitive app which preserves the anonymity of the complainant and assures a response within 100 minutes.

**SUVIDHA:** It is a single window app for candidates to raise requests for permissions for meeting halls, booking grounds for political rallies etc. The technology is a step towards ensuring a level playing field as permissions are accorded on a first in first out basis, without any discretion.

### Leveraging Technology

 <p><b>VHA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply Forms online.</li> <li>मतदाता सूची में अपना नाम जांचें</li> <li>View polling booth details</li> <li>Connect with your BLO/ERO</li> <li>Download e-EPIC</li> </ul>	 <p><b>cVigil</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single App for recording, reporting, and resolving violation.</li> <li>Response in 100-minute timeline</li> <li>Complaints can be made anonymously</li> </ul>	 <p><b>KYC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Candidate Affidavit available on affidavit portal &amp; KYC App</li> <li>Candidates with Criminal Antecedents must publish information publicly.</li> <li>Mandatory for Political parties to publish information publicly across designated channels</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Suvidha Portal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online portal for filing nomination &amp; Affidavit</li> <li>Candidates can use the portal for seeking permissions for meetings, rallies etc.</li> <li>Ensures Level Playing Field – First in First Out</li> </ul>
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**KYC or Know Your Candidate App** is a step to promote an informed and aware electorate. The app contains the criminal antecedents, if any, of the candidates in the electoral fray and their assets and liabilities, educational details.

**Saksham App** is specially designed for PwD voters with various accessibility features built-in. One can request for Pick-n-Drop facility, wheelchair assistance, or volunteer assistance at the polling booth through this app to make the voting experience smooth for PwD voters.

**Inclusive & Accessible Elections:**

For the first time in State Assembly Elections in Jharkhand, Senior Citizens over 85+ years and PwDs with 40% benchmark disability will be provided an option to vote from the comfort of their homes. Home Voting facility is optional. If an elector is willing to visit the polling station physically to cast their vote, necessary assistance will be provided at the polling station. Application form 12D is distributed and collected by BLO within 5 days of the notification, from such electors who opt for this facility and deposit it with the Returning Officer. The complete process is videographed and representatives of political parties/candidates are always involved in the entire process of voting from home.



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