

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi – 110001.

No.23/METRO/2008-ERS

Dated: 30th January, 2009

To

The Chief Electoral Officers of
Andhra Pradesh, NCT of Delhi, Karnataka,
Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Sub: Election Management in Metropolitan Cities.

Sir,

Management of election processes in metropolitan areas poses certain unique challenges and there are multiple factors responsible for this. These factors have made the management of elections in metropolitan areas substantially different from other areas. With rapid in-migration to the big cities and recent delimitation, the magnitude of the challenge has increased and the need for having different strategy for metropolitan areas has been increasing. To discuss the issues involved and possible strategies, the Commission had called a workshop of the CEOs, Municipal Officers and select DEOs responsible for size big cities of the country. Issues related to administrative structure, roll management, reaching out to the citizens and poll management were discussed at length.

Administrative Issues

On the administrative structure, issues pertaining to offices ranging from office of the CEOs, right upto the ward level were discussed. It was appreciated that wide range of structural arrangements, ranging from one where municipal staff is fully involved in Chennai, to one where they are completely not involved like in Kolkata & Delhi, with cities like Hyderabad having a mid-way situation, exist in the country. In some cases it has been felt that the existing system is working well, in some cases, need for a change in the system is felt.

CEO's Office

The Commission is of the view that CEOs offices that are dealing with metro cities should have an exclusive Joint/Dy. CEO for metropolitan areas, with adequate supporting staff. It is felt that due to heavy mobility of people from and

to metropolitan areas, the work relating to continuous updating would always be there, which would be sufficient to justify such an officer dedicated for these aspects. The CEOs are directed to assess the requirement and formulate a proposal keeping these requirements in mind.

District Level

At district level, a proposed change in introduction of a Municipal Election Officer (MEO) within the municipal system, below the DEO, who should be solely responsible for the purposes of management of election and related processes and shall assist the DEO in the same. Since he shall be a part of the municipal system, he shall have access to the resources of Municipal Authority and since he will solely be for election purposes, he shall not be bogged down by the day-to-day functioning of the municipality. The Commission has accepted this as a hybrid model and the CEOs are directed to examine the need of such a system in their State and formulate a proposal.

Ward Level

At the lowest cutting edge ward level, the Commission concluded that, there is requirement of a dedicated Ward Election Officer (WEO) who would work under the control and superintendence of the ERO/AERO and assist mainly in maintenance of electoral rolls at the ward level. He shall be responsible for supervision of the BLOs responsible for parts falling within his ward. He shall also act as a one-point contact for the citizens residing in the ward for all election related activities. CEOs were directed to take up with respective authorities, creation and filling up these positions.

Management of Electoral Roll

Booth Level Officers

On the roll issues, the first aspect pertains to the effectiveness of BLOs in these areas. Although, the effectiveness of BLOs in metropolitan areas may not have been upto the expectations, but simultaneously, it is in these areas where the system of BLOs is most required. The Commission feels that the system of BLOs needs to be fine tuned in these areas. Special care needs to be taken that the BLOs are residents of the part, or a nearby part for which they are BLO. A

BLO appointed far from his place of residence may turnout to be completely ineffective. To bring this policy into effect, there is a need to capture the residence part number and assembly constituency off all government employees. For this purpose, a flag in the Electoral Roll database, regarding the fact that which all electors can be appointed as BLOs needs to be maintained at the back end.

Regarding the remuneration, the Commission has recently reviewed the issue and agreed to revise the amount upwards to Rs.1500.

On the issue of using services of citizens other than government servants as BLOs, the Commission has, previously approved involvement of retired government servants to be appointed as BLO.

Involvement of Other Agencies

The Commission has approved bulk submission of claims and objections. This provision can be used by citizen groups and NGOs for taking up activities for enrolment of electors. The CEOs should take steps to promote any such efforts by Citizen Groups and NGOs in their States. The CEOs should also attempt for creation of systems for collection of information about electors through other sources like telecom service providers, LPG suppliers, Cable TV/DTH TV service providers, Newspaper vendors, etc.

CEOs can also examine involving Corporate, Public and Semi-Public sector organization in the Electoral Registration process where they can accept the claims and objection from their employees and forward them to EROs with necessary documents after verification and certification. Since this is not possible in the current framework, specific proposals need to be sent for approval of the Commission.

Other strategies like using drop boxes and post offices

For receipt of claims and objections, alternatives like post offices, drop boxes etc should be explored. In any case, Commission desires that it should be ensured that the facility offers anywhere-anytime filing of applications. If drop boxes are used, it should allow the user to drop the application in any box in the entire city irrespective of the AC of the applicant. Sorting of the application and forwarding them to the respective ERO should be the responsibility of the system rather than that of the applicant. Every ERO should be responsible for drop boxes

in his area and it should be his responsibility to sort all applications received and forward them to respective EROs.

Use of IT

In metropolitan areas, there is need to adopt a multi pronged approach to reach out to the citizens and internet is a very strong medium to reach out in metropolitan areas. The Commission has desired that the database of electors for metropolitan areas should be centralized and a comprehensive locality-based search should be enabled. It needs to be appreciated that amongst everybody else, it is most difficult for a citizen residing in metropolitan area to know his Assembly Constituency unless a comprehensive database mapping localities at the lowest level to the Assembly Constituencies is created and a search based on such a database is implemented. The elector should be able to reach the name based on the locality where he resides in and the system should guide to whom, where and how he should apply if he is not an elector. Similarly, the search system should enable the elector in locating his polling station where he is supposed to cast his vote.

Using other methods like SMS based applications, Multi-Service Centers, toll free numbers, self service kiosks (like ATMs) also need to be explored to maximize reach. Use of technologies like GIS should be moved towards that would provide friendlier interface to users. CEOs should explore piggybacking on efforts of other ministries/ departments of Government like urban development, Registrar General of India etc.

Poll related interventions

Management of poll related issues are equally a challenge in metropolitan areas as the roll related issues owing to the same set of factors. Voter awareness is one aspect that needs attention in metropolitan areas, use of print and electronic media in these areas can be effective. Special campaigns aimed at motivating people to come out and vote need to be undertaken.

Use of Signages during poll

Proper display of directions through use of signages in prominent locations can be of great help in urban areas. Signages can be designed at three levels,

the highest giving details of entire constituency. They can give the details of constituency boundaries, polling stations locations and major physical features. These can be displayed at prominent locations in the assembly constituency. The middle level of signages should focus on a set of parts comprising a compact residential area. These signages can give part boundaries and the polling station locations including broad directions. They can be installed within the area they pertain to. At the lowest level, simple signages giving direction for polling station for specific areas (parts) can be installed at every intersection to assist voters on the day of polling.

Voter Assistance Booths

Voter assistance booth are being set up in polling station locations with multiple polling stations in the same location. These booths are equipped with alphabetically arranged rolls of all the relevant parts to enable faster location of electors. The voter assistance booths should be established wherever required, without fail and the staff designated to man it should be properly trained.

Basic amenities at Polling Stations

Provision of basic amenities like drinking water, uninterrupted electricity, toilets etc in the polling stations gain prominence in metropolitan areas. The Commission has directed that all polling station buildings in use, are reviewed against this aspect and necessary changes proposed wherever possible. Similarly, all polling stations should enable easy access for physically challenged voters. Efforts towards decongestion of polling stations in certain areas should be continued to allow easy access to voters.

Metropolitan areas have their own special needs and require special efforts for proper conduct of election. CEOs should take special steps to tackle the metropolitan issues and come out with different strategies to tackle the different situation prevalent in metropolitan areas.

Yours faithfully,

(Ashish Chakraborty)
Under Secretary