

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

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To

The CEOs of all States/UTs.

Sub: - Training of election machinery including polling and police officials associated with conduct of elections.

Sir/Madam,

Elections in India involves the largest event management exercise in the world. Millions of Govt. servants and other persons are directly or indirectly involved in the election process and this inevitably throws up a major human resource management challenge to the election managers and administrators.

A proper and a professionally organized training forms the core of the Human Resource management. Almost all the problems/difficulties confronted during pre-poll process and on the poll day can be traced back to lack of adequate training at various levels.

The importance of imparting proper training has been highlighted in the instructions issued by the Election Commission of India in the past to the CEOs. The Handbook For Returning Officers also underlines the importance of training. After the universal use of EVMs in all polling stations in the elections to the Lok Sabha, 2004, imparting training about the technical and procedural aspect of EVM elections has become the central focus of the training to the election machinery. Besides, there has been a gradual shift in the approach and methodology involved in the conduct of elections and the elections are now very closely supervised. In such a situation, if proper training is not given at every level, the objective of ensuring free and fair election will suffer a serious setback. Considering this, the Election Commission of India has decided to issue a comprehensive instruction on human resource management in elections with a specific focus on training at various levels. The

instructions are as follows: -

1. CEO's office

A checklist for the CEOs office shall be prepared by the CEO well in advance. The officers in the CEOs office as per the distribution of the works should get themselves equipped with up-to-date information/instructions/circulars given by the Election Commission of India on various aspects of election management. For example, if an officer is entrusted with the responsibility of EVM management in the State, he should not only be coordinating with EVM manufacturer concerned (BEL or ECIL) and monitor the availability of power packs, availability of EVM at different districts etc. but should also get himself thoroughly informed about new instructions such as EVM randomization, mock poll certificate, dummy EVM at polling stations etc. so that he will be in a position to guide the DEOs and other nodal officers at the district level who deal with the EVM management. He will also ensure proper training material is prepared and standardized for use at the district level. This is only an illustrative example. Like this on various aspect of election management, the officers in the office of CEO should get themselves fully equipped with up-to-date information.

The CEO shall review the learning and training material available in the State for the purpose of imparting training to the field functionaries as well as aiming at voter awareness. He should prepare a set of multimedia training input on EVM elections as well as prepare a good power point presentation separately on various aspect of election management. While preparing this presentation, he shall make use of the services of some of the efficient DEOs and ROs so that the presentation material has the benefit of field experience. The CEO shall review as to whether the Handbook for Returning Officer, Handbook For Presiding Officer and copies of other relevant books and guidelines are available in adequate number.

The CEO in consultation with some of the efficient DEOs and ROs shall prepare a work chart and a checklist for key election functionaries such as DEOs/ROs/Zonal Officers/Sector Officers/Presiding Officers and micro observers. He shall also prepare an effective FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) covering all aspects of election management so that the doubts at various levels are cleared.

Recently, in NCT of Delhi and Madhya Pradesh an experiment was made at the level of CEOs by organizing an E-Mail group in which all the stakeholders in election such as DEOs, ROs, SLA and others are included and this platform was used for raising questions and clearing doubts. This E-Mail group functioned as an effective

tool in disseminating information and clearing doubts. This can be adopted by all the CEOs right from the beginning during General Election to the Lok Sabha, 2009.

2. District Election Officers

At the district level, the wheel of election machinery revolves around the DEO. The DEO shall provide an effective leadership to the election machinery. Most of the DEOs will have the dual responsibility of being the DEO as well as the RO of a parliamentary constituency. The DEO should prepare a separate checklist for himself as DEO as well as RO. He will hold a meeting with all key election functionaries such as AROs and other senior officials of the district administration associated with elections and explain to them all the new circulars issued by the Election Commission of India in recent times. He will identify a nodal officer for each thematic activity of the election management. For example there shall be a nodal officer for EVM management and EVM training; another nodal officer for tracking Model Code violations and another one for observer coordination and so on. These officers shall get themselves familiarize with relevant instructions and guidelines so that they are in a position to clarify doubts which could be raised by their subordinate officers.

Further, the DEO shall develop a good work chart and checklist for all key functionaries such as AROs, nodal officers, Zonal Officers, Sector Officers, Presiding Officers and so on. If the CEO of the State has developed and supplied such checklist, the DEO can suitably modify that to suit the local condition so that the outcome will be more functional and elaborate. The RO and ARO shall equip themselves thoroughly with all the statutory aspect of the election management so that the statutory processes such as nomination, scrutiny, allotment of symbol etc. are performed effectively and as per law.

3. Training of polling personnel

The date and venue for training of polling personnel shall be decided well in advance. The polling personnel selected for undergoing training through randomization process should be informed about the training programme in time through sponsoring authorities. The nodal officers appointed by the sponsoring authority shall be made accountable for ensuring the polling staff appointed to attend the training without fail. For this purpose, the sponsoring authority-wise nodal officers' name, designation and contact numbers shall be maintained separately.

Before organizing the training programme, DEO shall review the training material. He should have proper power point presentation, printed leaflets etc. so that the training is effectively conducted. The training programme should not be converted into a huge *mela*. The training should be conducted in smaller group so that there is adequate opportunity for interaction and clearing doubts. More emphasis should be given for 'hands on' training rather than classroom lecture mode. The polling staff shall be encouraged to ask questions and get their doubts clear. It is relevant to note that in the recent past, in many places repolls had to be ordered not on account of any electoral malpractices and vitiation of poll but due to mistakes committed by the Presiding Officers while handling the EVMs. The reason was very basic and the lack of training resulted in such mistakes. This is avoidable. Hence, the Commission directs that a clear emphasis should be given to impart proper training to the staff.

The Commission has recently issued an instruction to run postal ballot facilitation centers for the benefit of polling staff. Whenever and wherever such facilitation center are organized, care shall be taken by the DEOs to ensure that the operation of facilitation center does not result in compromise of training. A proper record of attendance shall be maintained for each and every training schedule so that no untrained person even inadvertently gets deployed as a polling staff. Apart from imparting training on the technical and procedural aspect of EVM election, the importance of mock poll and mock poll certificate, use of dummy EVM for explaining the method of voting to the illiterate voters also shall be highlighted. A complete set of election material which would be handed over to the Presiding Officer at the time of dispatch shall be kept in the training hall as a model kit so that each and every document, forms and election related material kept in the Presiding Officer kit is explained to them properly. Besides, a copy of the electoral roll, a copy of supplementary roll and other additional information such as list of absentee voter etc. shall also be shown to the Presiding Officers so that they would become aware of those documents and perform duty as per the instruction of the Election Commission of India on the poll day.

Apart from the statutory and non-statutory reports, the Election Commission has directed the Presiding Officers to submit an additional report in the newly prescribed format for quick tracking of information by the RO and the Observer. This form should also be explained to the Presiding Officers so that there is no confusion in their mind.

4. Dissemination of recent and subsequent instructions

During the course of election process, the Election Commission may be issuing various instructions on day-to-day basis. There is every possibility of some of the instructions being sent after the training programmes are over. In such cases, the DEO shall take care to ensure that all the subsequent instructions are printed in the form of leaflet circulated among the polling staff at the time of dispatch of EVM and other election material at the disposal center.

5. Accountability for imparting training

There should be a clear accountability which should be spelt out by the DEO as to who will impart training to whom. As the polling staff cannot perform the polling duty in a constituency where he is a voter, where he is working and in his native constituency, he will end up doing his election duty in another assembly segment but may be within the same district/PC. In some places, the training is conducted by the sponsoring RO/ARO. In some places, the receiving RO conducts the training and in some places, the officials deputed by the receiving RO/ARO conducts the training in the location of the sponsoring RO/ARO. Whatever the system is adopted, there shall be a clear accountability spelt out by the DEO in this regard. The DEO himself should visit the training location and supervise the training. If the observer is available, he will also participate in the training programme. The process of training shall be videographed and kept for the inspection by the observer or any other officials of the ECI. The CEO will track the system being adopted by the districts.

6. Facilitation at training centre

At the training location, in the light of the recent instructions of the Commission, proper facility should be ensured for the polling staff. Proper drinking water facility provision for first-aid, medical facilities and toilets shall be ensured. The choice of the training hall should be personally supervised by the DEO from the ventilation point of view.

7. Training counter at the dispatch center

Whatever inputs given at the time of training, there is every possibility of some of the Presiding Officers and polling staff still having some doubts about various aspects of poll day management. In order to clear the last moment doubts and give opportunity for 'hands on' training at the dispatch center depending on the strength of

the polling staff, few training counters shall be set up at the dispatch center. In this counter, a master trainer who has thorough knowledge about all the aspects of EVM election will explain and clear the doubts of the Presiding Officer about handling EVM. He should encourage Presiding Officers and polling staff to ask questions and clear the doubts. If this is not done, there is a possibility of the Presiding Officer and polling staff experimenting with the EVM machine after reaching the polling station which may result in draining of power pack as well as give scope for rumour among the rural voters about the staff handling EVM on the previous day. In order to avoid this situation, emphasis shall be given for last moment 'hands on' training and leaflet containing recent instructions in the form of bullet points; important dos and don'ts etc. can be prepared and circulated at the training counter at the dispatch center. Apart from this, other procedural aspects of election and maintenance of Form-17A register, Form 17C, mock poll certificate, visitor sheet, entry pass system etc. shall also be explained.

There is a tendency among the polling staff who have conducted election during the previous years to remain complacent as they believe that they have enough experience in conducting elections. It is relevant to note that lot of new instructions have been given by the Election Commission in recent times. There is possibility of the Presiding Officers not performing their duty properly if they do not become familiar with new instructions. Hence, the importance of training shall be emphasized at every stage and at every level.

As the Commission attaches very high importance to the human resource management, the instruction given in the circular shall be followed scrupulously.

Any deviation from this will be viewed seriously.

Yours faithfully,

(SUMIT MUKHERJEE)