SUKUMAR SEN was born on January 2, 1898. He was educated in Presidency College, Kolkata and University College, London and joined the Indian Civil Services in 1922. During his service, he held several important posts, including the Chief Secretary of West Bengal (1947-1950). He served as the first Chief Election Commissioner of India from March 21, 1950 till his retirement on December 19, 1958. He conducted the first two Lok Sabha elections of India held in 1952 and 1957 simultaneously with the legislative assembly elections based on universal adult franchise under challenging circumstance.

Sukumar Sen is also credited with conducting the first general elections of Sudan in 1953 as the Chairman of the International Election Commission. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan (1954) for his distinguished contribution to public life. He was one of the earliest recipient of the award.

An annual lecture series is envisaged as a tribute to Sukumar Sen (1898-1963), the first Chief Election Commissioner of India, who commendably conducted the first two general elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, thereby putting India into the *terra firma* of democracy.

The rationale behind instituting the lecture is to make a positive and constructive intervention in the democratic discourse of the nation within the constitutional mandate of the Election Commission of India.

**First Sukumar Sen Lecture Series**

**January 23, 2020**
It gives me pleasure to share with you the moments of pride as we prepare to celebrate important milestone in the chronicle of India as the Election Commission of India (ECI) Completes Seven Decades of its dedicated service to the Nation.

The Commission was established on January 25, 1950 and it has delivered seventeen General Elections to the ‘Lok Sabha’, the House of People or the Lower House of the Parliament during the last seven decades in a free, fair, inclusive and credible manner. The Commission has conducted elections to the office of the President of India 15 times, to the office of the Vice President of India 15 times, the Upper House of the Parliament in a continued manner besides the elections to the State Legislatures 377 times (besides the current General Election to the Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi) in fulfillment of its constitutional mandate right from the year 1950.

You would be glad to know that the Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP), the Flagship Voter Education Programme of the Commission also completes a decade of its operations as also the National Voters’ Day Celebration completes one decade of their major contribution empowering the voter and enhancing of electoral participation through world class innovation and initiatives in making the election experience memorable for the voters.
Election in world’s largest democracy has its own challenges in terms of sheer scale, diversity and complexity besides logistics for men and materials management. The Commission has always addressed the challenges as a matter of pride and honor with demonstration of professionalism, commitment, integration of state-of-the-art technologies, structured consultations with the stakeholders, strategic interventions and meticulous planning down to the polling station level. In the process we have evolved and brought in place a comprehensive, efficient and effective framework for smooth and timely delivery of free, fair and credible elections in line with commitment to the constitutional mandate, legislative obligation, institutional values and traditions established since independence.

Termed as ‘Desh Ka Mahatyohaar’, General Elections to the 17th Lok Sabha was the biggest electoral exercise among the democracies of the world with 61.3 Crore voters exercising their franchise in the elections. The General Election was completed on time in an informed, inclusive, accessible, transparent and ethical manner. The exercise establishes leadership role of the Election Commission of India and undoubtedly, in recognition of the same and as a rare honor India has taken over the Chair of Association of World Election Bodies in September last year.

One year back, I had the privilege of presenting on behalf of Commission, the First Copy of the Inaugural Issue of the Magazine to Hon’ble President, the ‘First Citizen of India’ on eve of Ninth National Voters’ Day. It is matter of great satisfaction that the magazine has completed one year of sharing of rich real life experience of country’s elections and electoral processes with the Stakeholders.

It is indeed heartening to see the contributions to the Magazine from across the country and from our colleagues at the ECI as they bring to you the fascinating stories of evolution of Indian elections right from 1950 onwards besides the real life experiences of our present day elections. The narration and the pictures are very informative, educative and inspiring.

The Commission would like to compliment Shri Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, ECI and the Editor-in-Chief of the Magazine and his entire team for the magnificent work done in bringing out this issue.

Sunil Arora
Chief Election Commissioner of India
Dear Reader,

First of all, give me the privilege of extending greetings and wishing you a very Happy New Year 2020.

I am extremely delighted to present you issue 4 of ‘My Vote Matters’ (MVM) on the eve of National Voters’ Day celebration 2020. With this, our magazine completes one year of its journey of sharing knowledge and experience of Indian elections; the then and now, real life stories of the ‘Desh Ka Maha Tyohaar’ the General Election 2019, Voter Education campaigns, integration of technology and initiatives for making elections free, fair, inclusive, accessible, transparent, efficient and a memorable participation experience.

Every issue of the MVM is a story of a milestone achieved. This time the release this Issue coincides with an important date in the chronicle of India. Election Commission of India was established on 25th January, 1950 and we celebrate completion of ‘Seven Decades of the Journey of the Indian Elections’. During this 7 Decades the ECI has successfully delivered 17 General Elections to the ‘Lok Sabha’, to the office of the President of India 15 times, to the office of the Vice President of India 15 times, the Upper House of the Parliament in a continued manner and elections to the State Legislatures 377 times (besides current General Election to the Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi) in fulfillment of its constitutional mandate. I may also mention
that the Systematic Voter Education and Participation (SVEEP), the Flagship Voter Education Programme of the Commission completes a decade as also 10th NVD is to be celebrated on 25th January 2020.

In this context, the issue brings to you a variety of very interesting articles from senior officers of the Commission on evolution of elections and their role in consolidation of democratic polity in our country. The issue further includes vibrant field reports on General Elections to the State Legislatures, on field experiences from the States, Voter Experiences, Campaigns, events, new initiatives and lot more.


Stories from states visit the inspiring experience from Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Odisha, Rajasthan and West Bengal; and the Election updates provide you the happenings in the field to demonstrate that the ‘Desh Ka Maha Tyohaar’ continues in the elections to the State Legislatures. The issue also shares with you valuable information on the vibrant action in the form of events, visits of international delegations, capacity building for election machinery through workshops, training at our premier institution Iiidem and lot more.

On behalf of MVM community, I take this opportunity to congratulate Hon’ble Chief Election Commissioner of India, Sh Sunil Arora for taking over as the Chairperson of Association of World Election Management Bodies (A-WEB) when India hosted the Fourth General Assembly on 2-4 September, 2019. We continue to look forward to his valuable guidance especially in sharing ‘My Vote Matters’ with the entire A-WEB Community. I am thankful to Hon’ble Election Commissioners Sh Ashok Lavasa and Sh Sushil Chandra for their valuable guidance in enriching and moving forward in consolidation of ‘My Vote Matters’.

I take this opportunity to heartily thank all the contributors and the editorial team for contributing to the Issue. Their sincere efforts and dedication helps ‘My Vote Matters’ grow and become richer in its content.

I dedicate this issue to all voters of the country.

Umesh Sinha
Secretary General, ECI &
Editor-in-Chief, MVM
MAKING ELECTIONS ACCESSIBLE FOR PwDs AND SENIOR CITIZENS

National Advisory Committee
Set up in ECI to ensure accessible and inclusive electoral process

Disability Coordinators
Appointed in all Assembly Constituencies to assist PwD voters

PWD Mapping
Persons with Disabilities mapped polling station wise

All PwD Polling Stations
Manned by officials and personnel with disability to empower and encourage PwD electors

Consultations
Numerous National, State & District Level Consultations for inclusion of PwDs in the Electoral Process

Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF)
Separate queues, seating arrangement, wheel chairs, ramps, assistance at polling stations, conveyance to polling station for senior citizens and PwDs

EPICs in Braille
Provided to visually impaired electors

Braille Voter Guides
Distributed with Voter slips, produced in Braille for blind voters

Postal Ballot
Facility for PwD Electors and Senior Citizens above 80 years of age
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With great pride India is celebrating the 10th National Voters’ Day (NVD) all over the country. On this National Voters’ Day, the festival is being celebrated at over ten lakh locations that include poll stations, government offices, and educational institutions at district and state headquarters all over the country. On this day, the entire nation reverberates with the festivities of democracy as crores of Indians celebrate their right to vote.

Every Vote Counts in the elections and NVD was initiated in 2011 by the Commission to highlight the value of vote and importance of every vote in democracy. NVD marks the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on this day in the year 1950. The main purpose of the NVD celebration is to encourage, facilitate and maximize the enrollment, especially for the new voters. Dedicated to the voters of the country, the day is also utilized to spread awareness among voters for effective participation in the electoral process.

Since 2011, NVD has been celebrated all over India with gusto and has become more festive with each passing year. Each year, simultaneous celebrations are organized at the National level, State level, District level down to the Polling Station level making it the largest celebration of democracy in the world.

National level function is organized at New Delhi by ECI where Hon’ble President of India graces the occasion as Chief Guest. NVD celebration at the national level is marked by giving away awards to the chosen district and state officials, government departments, civil society organisations, media houses for their outstanding contribution in holding free, fair, peaceful, accessible, inclusive, ethical and participative elections. The key areas of awards are Voter Education, Security management; Infrastructure Management; Expenditure Monitoring Use of Technology; Management of Electoral Rolls and Innovative Practices, Facilitation to Persons with Disabilities and Senior Citizens and so on. New voters (18+ year old) are given their Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPIC).

At the state level, the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) organize similar celebration in association with state administration, State Election Commission, media, Civil Society organizations (CSOs), educational institutions, youth organizations, representatives of political parties etc. Honorable Governor of respective state presides over state level functions. State awards for excellence, proficiency and innovation in electoral process and outstanding achievement are given at the state level NVD functions.

Then at the district level, District Election Officers (DEOs) organize similar events including voter education activities. Panchayats, academic institutions, Civil Society Organizations, (CSOs), media, youth and as such all sections of society and citizens are involved. The Booth Level Officers (BLOs) in Polling Station areas felicitate new voters at a brief ceremony and hand over...
Elector Photo Identity Card (EPIC). Moreover, the freshly eligible and registered voters are given a badge with slogan ‘Proud to be a Voter – Ready to Vote’; and all participants are administered Voters’ Pledge.

Voters’ Pledge

‘We, the Citizens of India, having abiding faith in democracy, hereby pledge to uphold the democratic traditions of our country and the dignity of free, fair and peaceful elections, and to vote in every election fearlessly and without being influenced by considerations of religion, race, caste, community, language or any other inducement.’

Voters’ Pledge is administered to every participant on National Voters’ Day during the celebration on each level. Voters’ Pledge

conveys Commission’ commitment to ensure ‘Informed and Ethical Voting’. The theme for NVD 2020 is Electoral Literacy for a Stronger Democracy. ECI launched the Electoral literacy programme under SVEEP on the eve of 8th NVD and by now about 6.8 lakh Electoral Literacy Clubs, Chunav Pathshalas, Voter Awareness Forums have been set up across the country. These forums work on the principle of engaging the target populations through hands on experience on the electoral process. The ELC’s operate at the level of schools, colleges and other institutions of learning, Chunav Pathshalas operate at community levels and the VAF’s operate at the level of organizations including government offices. The programme is envisaged to expand and cover all the institutions.

Mandate for universal equal suffrage emanates from Article 326 of the Constitution.

Themes for NVD

NVD celebrations focus on a specific theme every year which sets the tone for the activities conducted throughout the year. Year wise themes are as follows:

1st NVD 2011 ‘Greater Participation for a Stronger Democracy’
2nd NVD 2012 ‘Women’s Registration’
3rd NVD 2013 ‘Inclusion’
4th NVD 2014 ‘Ethical Voting’
5th NVD 2015 ‘Easy Registration, Easy Correction’
6th NVD 2016 ‘Inclusive and Qualitative Participation’
7th NVD 2017 ‘Empowering Young and Future Voters’
8th NVD 2018 ‘Accessible Elections’
9th NVD 2019 ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’
10th NVD 2020 ‘Electoral Literacy for a Stronger Democracy’

This year marks an important milestone in the history of Indian democracy as Election Commission of India (ECI) completes 70 years of its journey and also celebrates 10th National Voters’ Day.
The mandate was further enhanced with the Constitution (Sixty-first Amendment) Act, 1988 that reduced the voting age to 18 years. As per its mandate, the Commission made sustained efforts to enroll all eligible electors. Yet, voter apathy and lack of enrollment and participation of certain sections of society, especially the new voters (18+) was a challenge. During the Diamond Jubilee celebration in 2010, the Commission had a focused analysis of both, the enrollment and electoral participation especially among the young voters.

The Commission decided to take up a rigorous exercise to identify all eligible voters attaining the age of 18 as on January 01 every year in each polling station area of the country, enroll them and hand over their Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPICs) on January 25. The initiative aimed at providing youth a sense of citizenship, empowerment and pride in electoral participation as also to inspire them for exercise of newly acquired franchise. Thus as a measure of enhancing participation of citizens, especially the youth in democratic electoral process, ECI decided to celebrate January 25, its Foundation Day, as the National Voters’ Day every year.

Outcomes in terms of year wise enrollment of voters emanating from the NVD initiative and other initiatives have been encouraging.

Lok Sabha Election 2019 saw a historic Voter Turnout
of 67.47%. Voter turnout had increased to a record 66.44% in 2014 from 58.19% in 2009. The number of electors that was 83.4 crore on the eve of 2014 General Elections rose to 91 crore ahead of Lok Sabha Election 2019. This is an addition of over 7.46 crore electors which included 4.07 crore women and 3.3 crore men. Moreover, women participation also increased to a historic 66.79% in 2019 reducing the gender gap to 0.01% as compared to 1.46% in 2014 elections. Also, with an aim to ensure Accessible elections, 62 lakh Persons with Disability (PwD) electors were identified.

The Commission has demonstrated fulfillment of its mandate through conduct of successive elections in the country right from 1950 onwards. The strength of its electoral processes is seen both with awe and respect among democracies of the world. Today the electoral operations of India are the largest in the world as demonstrated in the Lok Sabha Election 2019 where about 1.2 Cr polling officials worked at over ten lakh polling stations in the country.

**A voter is the central unit of a democracy and its electoral processes. NVD connects voters with the electoral process and renews both, their relevance and contribution to the democracy.**

NVD inspires the voters, the key stakeholder in democratic polity besides other stakeholder’s including election machinery. Today, NVD initiative has been institutionalized as an annual feature for celebration of democracy and electoral participation in the country.
EVMs 100 Per Cent Secure

More than 315 crores votes have been recorded in EVMs to date. Not even one vote has been recorded wrongly.

SUDEEP JAIN
DEPUTY ELECTION COMMISSIONER, ECI

The Election Commission of India has been using EVMs in all elections to the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha since 2001. More than 315 crores votes have been recorded in EVMs to date. Not even one vote has been recorded wrongly. Yet, there are allegations that sometimes, with the help of dishonest election insiders or other criminals, election results can be altered by replacing parts of the machines with malicious look-alike parts, or by using portable hardware devices to change the vote records stored in the machines by local election officials without being detected by the Election Commission of India or the EVM manufacturers.

These misleading allegations are based on hypothetical theories and imagination without taking into consideration the multiple administrative layers of security enforced by the Commission on the storage and safety of EVMs and VVPATs.

Storage of EVMs and VVPATs

EVMs and VVPATs are stored in EVM warehouses at the district headquarters. However, if it is not possible to store the EVMs there, then EVM warehouses are at a place not below the Tehsil headquarters. The District Election Officers are responsible for their physical security and upkeep.

- The following rules are observed regarding the opening of EVM/VVPAT warehouses:
  - Even Election Commission of India cannot open the EVM warehouses without involving political parties/candidates.
  - The EVM warehouses are opened only in the presence of the representatives of political parties/candidates.
  - Several steps are taken for the security of the EVM/VVPAT warehouses:
    - Armed police security is provided at all such EVM/VVPAT warehouse in each district, throughout the election, as well as, in non-election period.
    - CCTV surveillance is mandated from the start of the first level checking.

EVMs and VVPATs stored at warehouses of district headquarters
First Level Checking of EVMs and VVPATs

Before every election a first level checking is done for each EVM and VVPAT to be used in the election. This is carried out by the engineers of the manufacturers in the presence of representatives of National and State Recognised Political Parties. Any malfunctioning EVM/VVPAT is kept separately and is not used in the election.

(i) The manufacturers certify, at the time of the FLC, that all components in the EVM are original. Following this, the plastic cabinet of the control unit (CU) of the EVM is sealed using a ‘Pink Paper Seal’, which is signed by the representatives of political parties. After this, the plastic cabinet of control unit of the EVMs cannot be opened and there is no access to any component inside of EVMs.

(ii) A full physical verification and functionality check of each and every EVM and VVPAT is carried out along with mock poll on each and every EVM and VVPAT. Additionally, a higher rate of mock poll in 5 per cent of EVMs, i.e., 1 per cent of EVMs of 1,200 votes, in 2 per cent of EVMs of 1,000 votes and in 2 per cent of EVMs of 500 votes, is done using VVPATs. After the mock poll, the printed ballot slips are tallied with the electronic result of the CU and shown to the representatives of political parties present at the FLC.

Randomization of EVMs and VVPATs

EVMs/VVPATs are randomized twice, using the EVM Management System (EMS), while being allocated to an Assembly and then to a polling booth, ruling out any fixed allocation. Lists of EVMs/ VVPATs are also shared with political parties/candidates. During the process of candidate setting on the EVMs, the ballot paper is fixed on the Balloting Unit (BU) and the EVMs are prepared. The sequence of contesting candidates are placed alphabetically on the ballot paper, first for National and State Parties, followed by other State Registered Parties, followed by independents and NOTA. Thus, the sequence in which the candidates appear on the BU is contingent on the names of the candidates and their party affiliation and cannot be ascertained beforehand. It is therefore clear that the serial no. of any
political party candidate is not fixed or pre-determined in all the constituencies of the State. Hence, until the candidate setting is done, no one, not even the Returning Officer or the District Election Officer or the Chief Electoral Officer or the Commission can know which button on which Balloting Unit will be assigned to which candidate.

Commissioning of EVMs and VVPATs

After the finalization of list of the contesting candidates, the commissioning (candidate setting) of EVMs and VVPATs is done in the presence of the contesting candidates/their representatives. After this, one mock poll with one vote for each candidate is cast in every EVM and VVPAT. Additionally, a mock poll of 1,000 votes is conducted in 5 per cent randomly selected EVMs, as well as VVPATs. The electronic result is tallied with the paper count.

Mock Poll on Poll Day

Poll day is one of the most crucial days in the election process, and the health and security of EVMs and VVPATs is ascertained once more on the day.

- On poll day, 90 minutes before start of the actual poll, a mock poll is conducted by casting at least 50 votes at every polling station in the presence of polling agents of the candidates, and the electronic result of the CU and the VVPAT slips count are tallied and shown to them. A certificate of the successful conduct of the mock poll is made by the Presiding Officers.
- Immediately after the mock poll, the CLEAR button on CU is pressed to clear the data of the mock poll and the fact that no votes are recorded in the CU is displayed to the Polling Agents present. The Presiding Officer also ensures that all mock poll slips are taken out from the VVPAT and kept in a separate marked envelope before the start of poll.
- After the mock poll, the EVMs and VVPATs are sealed in the presence of the polling agents and the signatures of polling agents are obtained on seals.

Poll Day and the Storage of polled EVMs and VVPATs in Strong Rooms

- On poll day, a copy of the Form-17C, having details of total polled votes, seals (unique number), and EVMs and VVPATs used in polling stations, is provided to the polling agents of the candidate.
- After the completion of poll, EVMs and VVPATs are sealed in the respective carrying cases in the presence of polling agents and the signatures of polling agents are obtained on seals.
- Polled EVMs and VVPATs are escorted back to the strong room for storing under a double lock system in the presence of the candidates/
their representatives under videography.
- Candidates or their representatives can put their own seals on the strong rooms, where polled EVMs/VVPATs are stored after the poll. They can also camp in front of the strong room. These strong rooms are guarded 24x7 in multiple layers, along with having CCTV facilities.

The various layers of security of polled EVMs/VVPATs include:
- Central Forces in adequate strength guard the EVM strong room.
- The unique ID of BUs, CUs and VVPATs are randomised polling-station-wise and shared with political parties/candidates.
- The CUs and BUs are sealed with Pink Paper Seals at the FLC and commissioning respectively, on which political parties and candidates put their signatures.
- The EVMs/VVPATs are sealed before starting the actual poll, and polling agents also put their signatures on the seals.
- The carrying cases of EVMs/VVPATs are sealed after the closing of poll, and here, too, polling agents put their signatures on the seals.
- There is a double lock system on the door of strong room.
- CCTV feed is given to the candidates’ camping area from where they can monitor the strong room.
- Double-cordon round-the-clock security is maintained; the inner perimeter is manned by CAPF and the outer perimeter by the State Armed Police.
- A log-book and videography of officers inspecting the two cordons daily is maintained.

Counting of Votes at Counting Centres
- The polled EVMs are brought to the counting centres under security and CCTV coverage in presence of candidates/their agents.
- On the day of counting, the strong room is opened in the presence of candidates, the RO and the Observer under videography.
- Round-wise CUs are brought to the counting tables from the strong rooms under continuous CCTV coverage.
- On counting day, before retrieving the result from the CUs, the seals are verified and the unique ID of the CU is tallied in front of counting agents deputed by the candidates.
- Counting agents can verify the polled votes displayed on a CU with that of Form-17C. Candidate-wise polled votes are recorded in part-II of Form-17 C and the signatures of counting agents are obtained thereof.
- EVMs and VVPATs are stored back in the strong room in the presence of candidates/their representatives until the completion of the election petition period.

These administrative safeguards make the Election Commission of India’s EVMs 100 per cent tamper-proof and ensure that the ECI fully fulfils its mission to achieve free and fair elections. No wonder that they are called ‘the pride of Indian democracy’.
Presidental Elections: Seven Decades

Election Commission of India conducts indirect elections to the office of President and Vice President. Here are essential facts about the last election conducted in 2017.

CHANDRA BHUSHAN KUMAR
DEPUTY ELECTION COMMISSIONER, ECI

Aricle 324 of the Constitution read with the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952 (as amended) and the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Rules, 1974, vests the superintendence, direction and control of the conduct of election to the office of the President and Vice-President of India in the Election Commission of India.

The President is elected by the members of the Electoral College consisting of:
(i) elected members of both Houses of Parliament, and
(ii) elected members of the Legislative Assemblies of all States including the National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

(The nominated members of either Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha or Legislative Assemblies of the States are not eligible to be included in the Electoral College. Similarly, members of the Legislative Councils are also not electors for the Presidential election).

Article 55 (3) of the Constitution provides that the election shall be held in accordance with the System of Proportional Representation by means of single transferable vote and the voting at such election shall be by secret ballot. In this system, the elector has to mark preferences against the names of the candidates.
Preference can be marked in the international form of Indian numerals, in Roman form, or in the form in any recognised Indian languages. Preference has to be marked in figures only. The elector can mark as many preferences as the number of candidates. While the marking of the first preference is compulsory for the ballot paper to be valid, other preferences are optional. The winning candidate has to secure the required quota of votes to be declared elected, i.e., 50 per cent of the valid votes polled +1.

Normally, members of Parliament are expected to cast their votes at the place of poll in the Parliament House, New Delhi, and members of State Legislative Assemblies are expected to vote at the respective State capital. However, in case of any exigency or special circumstances, the Members of Parliament can vote in any of the polling stations in the State capital/Delhi/Puducherry. Similarly, any MLA may vote at New Delhi instead of voting in the respective State capital.

For this purpose, the MPs/MLAs concerned have to apply in advance to the Election Commission in the prescribed format so as to make sure that the application reaches the Election Commission at least 10 days before the date of poll. The format for making such application is available with the Returning Officer and with the Assistant Returning Officers.

The Constitution has expressly provided that election to the office of President shall be conducted by secret ballot. Therefore, the electors are expected to scrupulously maintain secrecy of vote. There is no concept of open voting at this election and showing the ballot to anyone under any circumstances in the case of Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections is strictly prohibited. The voting procedure laid down in the 1974 Rules provides that after marking the vote in the voting compartment, the elector is required to fold the ballot paper and insert it in the ballot box. Any violation of the voting procedure will entail cancellation of the ballot paper by the presiding officer.

In this connection, the Commission has also clarified that political parties cannot issue any whip to their MPs and MLAs in the matter of voting in
the Presidential election. It is also clarified that as per Section 18 of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952 (as amended), the offence of ‘bribery’ or ‘undue influence’ as defined in Sections 171B and 171C of IPC, by the returned candidate or any person with the consent of the returned candidate, are among the grounds on which the election can be declared void by the supreme Court in an election petition.

Under Article 58, a candidate should fulfil the following eligibility conditions to contest the election to the Office of President:

1. Must be a citizen of India;
2. Must have completed 35 years of age;
3. Must be eligible to be a member of the Lok Sabha;
4. Should not be holding any office of profit under the Government of India or the Government of any State or under any local or other authority subject to the control of any of the said Governments.

However, the candidate may be holding the office of President or Vice-President or Governor of any State or Ministers of the Union or any State and shall be eligible to contest election. The Election Commission has directed that the ballot papers should be printed in two colours – in green for use by Members of Parliament, and in pink for use by the Members of the State Legislative Assemblies.

The value of votes of electors is basically determined on the basis of the population of the States in accordance with the manner laid down in Article 55(2) of the Constitution. The Constitution (Eighty-fourth Amendment) Act, 2001, provides that until the population figures for the first census to be taken after the year 2026 have been published, the population of the States for the purposes of calculation of value of the votes for the Presidential Election shall mean the population as ascertained at the 1971 census. The value of the vote of each member of a State Legislative Assembly included in the Electoral College is calculated by dividing the population of the State concerned (as per 1971 Census) by the total number of elected members of the Assembly, and then further dividing the quotient by 1000. If the remainder, while so dividing, is 500 or more, then the value is increased.

The Presidential election, held in 2017, was the fifteenth of such elections to the office of President.

Venkaiah Naidu being sworn in as the Vice President

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUE OF VOTE: 2017</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) Value of each vote of members of parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lok Sabha (543) + Rajya Sabha (233) = 776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Each Vote  = [\frac{5,49,495}{776}] = 708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) Total Value of Votes of 776 members of parliament = 708 x 776 = 5,49,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Total electors for the Presidential Election = MLAs (4120) + MPs (776) = 4896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Total Value of Votes of 4896 Electors for the Presidential Election 2017 = 5,49,495 + 5,49,408 = 10,98,903</td>
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Paid news – A challenge for conducting of elections

DHIREN德拉 OJHA
DIRECTOR GENERAL, ECI

Election Commission of India is at the threshold of 70 glorious years of conducting free and fair elections in the Country. During these years ECI has overcome many challenges, updated its guidelines, enhanced its robust mechanism to make the electoral process more efficient, error free, inclusive, transparent and most importantly free and fair to maintain the Constitutional mandate entrusted upon by the Indian Constitution. Media is an important stakeholder for monitoring the smooth conduct of free and fair election.

The phenomenon of “paid news” has acquired serious dimensions making all the stakeholders; viz Media, Political Parties, Electors besides ECI itself express their concern about the pernicious influence of such malpractices. Many Media organisations, columnists, influencers and civil society groups studied about paid news and how does it affect the level playing field in elections. Many articles and studies tried to come up with different approach with various remedial measures to check this malpractice. Paid News is a complex challenge affecting the conduct of free and fair elections and preventive measures must be taken to control this.

Definition:

Paid news has been referred as propaganda in favour of a candidate masquerading as news reports or articles for cash or kind. It is a “grave electoral malpractice” on the part of candidates to circumvent expenditure limits. Press Council of India which is operating under the Press Council Act of 1978 has been an important ally in curbing the paid news in elections. As defined by the Press Council of India (PCI), Paid News is “any news or Analysis appearing in any media (print and electronic) for a price in cash or kind as consideration”. PCI has also acknowledged that it is not easy to find clinching evidence that can make individuals, parties and organizations accept and accountable for it. Recognizing expertise of PCI being a regulatory authority for Print Media and supportive role with ECI during elections, ECI acknowledges the definition provided by PCI for Paid News.

ECI Mechanism for Paid News; MCMCs

ECI considers that ‘Paid News’ disturbs level playing field in election and adversely affects free and fair poll by circumventing election expenditure laws and also causing undue influence on voters. On the basis of requests received from political parties, media representatives and
Press Council of India to take appropriate regulatory action ECI, in the year 2010 constituted Media Certification and Monitoring Committees (MCMCs) at District and State Levels. At State level the committee is headed by the Chief Electoral Officer of the State whereas at District level Committee is headed by the District Electoral Officer or Returning Officer of the Parliamentary Constituency. The Committees at State level and District level also include one expert from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and one Social Media Expert. The Commission issues instructions/ guidelines from time to time to strengthen the MCMCs.

MCMC examines all the newspapers, print media, electronic media, cable network, mobile network etc., and keeps record of the advertisements, advertorials, messages, discussions and interviews relating to the candidates and parties. On suspected cases of Paid News, Returning Officer issues notices to the candidates on the recommendation of MCMC. Once the case is established as a confirmed case of Paid News, a notional amount, calculated on the basis of DAVP/DIPR rates is added to the candidate’s election expenditure account. The same is also forwarded to Press Council of India in case of print media and to News Broadcasters Association (NBA) in case of electronic media for appropriate action against involved media house.

Parallel Monitoring of Election Expenditure-an antidote

Keeping in mind the intricacies of Media Ownership and affiliation of media houses with Political Party or Candidate, the Commission in the year 2011 issued another important and comprehensive guideline pertaining to political advertisements promoting a candidate on TV/Cable channels owned by political parties or their functionaries/office bearers during elections. As per the guideline, the office of Chief Electoral Officer of the State obtains standard rate cards of all the television channels/radio channels/newspapers at least six months before the due date of Lok Sabha or the State/UT Legislative Assembly Election and submit to the Commission. These guidelines also sought to take into account politically biased news coverage giving

The Handbook for Media is prepared during every General Election to Lok Sabha primarily for Media persons. All possible updates, instructions and guidelines issued by ECI related to Media and issues related to election reporting and overall media coverage during elections are concisely incorporated before every Lok Sabha Election.
undue advantage to candidates, even if payment was not involved, which is indicated in the very definition of Paid News as ‘cash or kind’.

In the year 2016 the Commission introduced a new provision by adding a separate column in the Election Expenditure Statement of the candidates for including the expenses of such advertisements which has made the existing mechanism even more effective. MCMCs keep a close watch on such channels to identify malicious content and apply the same procedure to add the notional expenses as per standard rate cards of TV channels/newspapers into election expenditure account of the candidate even if, they do not pay any amount to the channel/newspaper in monetary terms.

Considering the complexity of Paid News cases and its probable loopholes, ECI has issued a comprehensive guideline regarding functions of MCMCs to check this menace during elections. The guidelines emphasise strict compliance on timely submission of paid news cases and the candidates’ election expenditure statement associated with it.

With the advent of social media, the task of identification of paid news has become more challenging. To include social media into this ambit, instructions were issued to scan social media as the other mode of media and to include expenditure on advertisement on social media, both for maintaining a correct account of expenditure and for submitting the statement of expenditure.

Guideline issued in 2013 made it mandatory for the candidates to submit information about their authentic Social Media account. This has helped to monitor the expenses through these social media accounts.

**Partnerships**

Press Council of India and News Broadcasters Association have issued elaborate guidelines on paid news for journalists/media persons to follow. Since 2012, Commission issues a dedicated Press Release ahead of all general elections for the Media to be observed during elections, so that the set of guidelines remains afresh and reiterated. This Press Note incorporates all the necessary guidelines issued by the Press Council of India and News Broadcasters Association for print and electronic media respectively.

**Paid News Cases**

During the Lok Sabha Election 2014, over 1200 confirmed cases of paid news were identified whereas the total number of confirmed paid news cases were increased above 4000 during the General Election to the 17th Lok Sabha in 2019.

**Essence of providing level playing field for all**

Paid news during election has always been a matter of serious concern for the Election Commission of India though Paid news has not been enlisted as an electoral offence yet. It is felt if this be made an electoral offence it will serve as a deterrent on those violating the law. Therefore ECI has recommended to the Ministry of Law & Justice that the Representation of the People Act, 1951, be amended to make Paid News an electoral offence with punishment of a minimum of two years imprisonment. The Law Commission report no. 255 dated March 12, 2015 on Electoral Reforms calls for amendments in laws to check the menace of paid news. While it is expected from Media, being the fourth pillar of democracy to remain objective under all circumstances, especially when there is a possibility of menace like paid news affecting the right to correct information of the citizen during elections, there is a strong need to sensitize political parties, candidates and electors on menace of paid news.

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**MY VOTE MATTERS ● JANUARY 2020**
A Brief History of Political Finance

It is evident that from the greatest democracy in the world to the largest democracy in the world, money, and vast amounts of it, is required to keep the wheels of democracy turning.

VIKRAM BATRA
DIRECTOR, ECI

Almost 70 years ago, the founding fathers of our republic mandated that every adult Indian regardless of gender, formal education, socio-economic status or location would have the right to vote and every vote would count equally. To many it looked like a leap in the dark, an audacious aspiration, even impracticable in a country of our size – with limited physical infrastructure and literacy, and great diversity.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has a very small secretariat headquartered in Delhi. However, it has developed a unique way of micro-managing elections, which for the Lok Sabha Election 2019 involved about 12 million election officials.

Here, it would be relevant to pause and draw a comparison between the reach of the ECI and that of political parties that aspire to reach each and every potential voter through their workers. In the case of political parties, this penetration to the grassroots level requires the raising of large resources in terms of capital. In current times, it is practically impossible to campaign or contest elections without large ‘war chests’ and ‘war rooms’ at their disposal.

Political parties require funds to run their day-to-day affairs and much larger sums to finance elections. The intensity with which elections are being contested at the State and national levels requires ever-growing financial outlays, and consequently political parties are quite resource hungry. It has been stated by an American politician that “money is the mother’s milk of politics.” It is evident that from the greatest democracy in the world to the largest democracy in the world, money, and vast amounts of it, is required to keep the wheels of democracy turning.

The use of ‘money power’ raises a series of questions: Where does the money come from? Who are the people/organisations contributing such large sums? Are there a few large contributors, or many contributors who donate small sums of money for the election campaign? Do the large contributors demand anything in return? Do these large contributors continue to wield influence over policy-making? Can pumping huge sums of money for hiring workers, advertising in all forms of media and organising a large number of public rallies and meetings giving voters cash and expensive gifts, not vitiate the level playing field?

Evolution of Election Finance

The nature of financing of political parties in India has varied over the years. In the early years after Independence, there was one dominant political party, which was primarily financed by membership contributions with some assistance from big business houses that had supported it during the struggle for Independence. Corporate contributions grew in keeping with the growing democratisation of elections.
and these had to be declared under the Representation of the People Act. In the 1960s, questions began to be raised regarding the influence of business in policy-making and, in 1964, the Santhanam Committee flagged the possibility of adverse effects of election finance due to close ties between businessmen and politicians. In 1969, the Companies Act was amended to impose a complete ban on corporate funding of political parties.

The ban on legal and reported corporate donations led to a period of “briefcase politics”, which was marked by the entry of ‘black money’ into the political system. Despite corporate funding being legalised again in 1985, the system of political finance had got distorted and it has not been able to free itself of dependence on unaccounted cash.

However, this does not mean that efforts have not been made to clean up or better regulate the system of political finance – from the point of raising of funds to how expenditure is undertaken by candidates and political parties. These issues have come up during elections and in election related matters during non-election periods – whether agitated in court or brought to the notice of the Election Commission of India – and have had a great influence on the framing of the guidelines and circulars issued by the Commission in connection with election expenses and political finance.

Some of the key judgements that have shaped ideas about and led to the framing of rules in connection with political finance are:

i) The Supreme Court, in its judgment in Kanwar Lal Gupta Vs Amar Nath Chawla (A.I.R.1975SC308), dated 10-04-1974, held that the expenditure incurred by the political party which can be identified with the election of a given candidate, as distinguished from the expenditure on general party propaganda, would be liable to be added to the expenditure of that candidate as being impliedly authorised by the candidate.

ii) Supreme Court of India, WP (C) No. 24 of 1995, dated 4.4.1996, Common Cause Vs Union of India & Others: It was found that most political parties with the provisions of the Income Tax Act.

iii) In L.R. Shivaramagowde Vs T.M. Chandrashekhar (AIR1999SC252), the Supreme Court held that the Commission can go in to the correctness of the account of election expenses filed by the candidate and disqualify a candidate under Section 10A of the Representation of the People Act,1951, in case the account is found to be incorrect or untrue.

iv) The Supreme Court of India had directed in Common Cause Vs Union of India in 2005 that political parties should also submit a statement of expenditure of elections to the ECI and such statements are required to be submitted within 75 days of Assembly elections and 90 days of Lok Sabha elections.

The Court directed the Ministry of Finance and the Income Tax authorities to ensure strict compliance by the political parties with the provisions of the Income Tax Act.
Commitment to Transparency

The Commission, on its part, has tried to make political finance and its reporting as transparent as possible by issuing, in 2014, guidelines regarding transparency and accountability in party funds and election expenditure matters. These ‘transparency guidelines’ prescribe timelines for filing of Contribution Reports, Annual Audited Accounts and statements of election expenditure by political parties. Failure to comply with the lawful direction of the Commission may entail action, as envisaged under para 16 A of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968. The Contribution Report contains details of contributions above ₹20,000. The details of donors – including name, PAN, amount and method of payment – are put up in the public domain.

The Contribution Report contains details of contributions above ₹20,000. The details of donors – including name, PAN, amount and method of payment – are put up in the public domain.

The Commission considers citizens to be force multipliers in its quest to promote transparency and engender debate and discussion about political finance. It is quite heartening to see that citizens and citizen bodies are very aware about these issues and the information featured online does lead to queries under the Right to Information Act as well as filing of writs in public interest. While the Commission strives to put all information in public domain, schemes like the Electoral Bond Scheme could undermine these principles; however, the stand of the Commission continues to be one of promoting total transparency regarding political finance.

The Commission has always had an active dialogue with political parties as it sees them as very important stakeholders in the process of policy formulation and these guidelines were based on suggestions and inputs received from them.

The current challenge facing the Election Commission of India in the area of political finance is to (a) prevent an ‘arms race’ in election spending; (b) ensure a monetarily level political and electoral playing field; (c) keep illicit and criminal money out of politics and elections and (d) incentivise compliance through political finance regulations.

The Commission has successfully converted the mandate it received 70 years ago into a reality and it rises to the challenge time and again. It goes to the Commission’s credit that despite these enormous difficulties, the whole world recognises the electoral exercise in India as a benchmark for free and fair elections. I am sure the challenges posed by the untrammeled growth in financial resources of political parties and their unbridled use to sway the electorate will be met with equal vigour and intent in the times to come.
ENCORE: The Lifeline of the Conduct of Elections

‘Transformations are hard and digital ones are harder’

DR. KUSHAL KUMAR PATHAK
DIRECTOR, IT (PROJECTS) & CISO, ECI

ENCORE has ushered in true digital transformation for conduct of elections by integration of digital technology into all areas of an election process, fundamentally changing how election officials operate and deliver value to voters.

ENCORE stands for ‘Enabling Communications on Real-time Environment’. From planning to poll and from candidates to counting, ENCORE provides an end-to-end solution for the conduct of elections. As many as 4,902 Election Officials, who operate the system, are part of the ENCORE ecosystem whereas candidates and voters become its key stakeholders.

From its inception, ENCORE generated 43,396 candidate nominations, facilitated States in granting 3,25,830 election permissions, and generated 890 million hits in one day on its result management module during the Lok Sabha Election 2019 itself. A number of delivery centres of this project are located all over India and cover nearly 36 chief electoral offices, 700 district offices, 4,120 Returning Officers’ offices and 10,00,000 polling stations.

This application has become the single focal point in the conduct of elections in India. Returning Officer bank upon the system to digitise the candidate affidavit, punch in the voter turnout numbers and use it to compute results. The application has amalgamated disparate applications into one, to provide single interface.

The first module is the Candidate Nomination. The Returning Officer digitises the metadata of the candidate and uploads the affidavit submitted by the candidates. The Election Commission of India makes sure that the exact data uploaded/digitised by the Returning Officer is made available on the https://affidavit.eci.gov.in website. The citizen gets to see the antecedents of their contesting candidate also from the Voter Helpline mobile app. They can view the complete profile of their candidates and then bookmark them to view their application status and, later, their results.

The second module is the Candidate Scrutiny. Returning Officers are able to examine the candidature meaningfully, and accept or reject their application. Each process has
been made transparent, and the voters come to know in real-time about their candidate’s approval status.

The third module is the Election Permissions. During the election for using spaces, rallies, loudspeakers, campaign and so on, the candidates/political party requires approval. The candidate/political parties or any representative of the candidate can apply directly on https://suvidha.eci.gov.in and thereafter receives the permission approval status on the specially designed ‘Suvidha Candidate App’. A specially designed QR code is allocated with each permission, and now any citizen using the cVIGIL app can scan the QR code to directly get the response from the ENCORE server about its validity.

The fourth module is the Voter Turnout. While polling is going on, the Returning Officer fills in the voter turnout data captured from the polling station every two hours into the system. ENCORE computes the voter turnout based on Assembly constituencies, District and State level. This information is then made available on the web and the specially designed ‘Voter Turnout’ App.

The fifth module is the Ballot Generation. Based upon the data entered for the candidates and symbols, the system generates the ballot paper automatically. These ballots can be used directly for the electronically transmitted Postal Ballot System for service voters and also for the EVMs. This has simplified and reduced errors while generating the ballots.

The sixth module is the Counting Management System. All the returning officers enter the counting data into ENCORE for each round. The data is entered table-wise and the result is computed automatically in the system. The Returning Officer takes the printout from the system only by a specially designed form called ‘round declaration form’. As the round declaration is coterminous with the local declaration, the results in real-time get updated on the ECI results websites. Nowhere in the world is the election results as real-time as in the Indian election system. The Returning Officers get the benefit of generating all statutory reports such as Form 20, Form 21C, Form 21 E, among others.

The seventh module is the Result Display System. As and when the counting data is entered and finalized for each round by the returning officer, the results become available from the website http://results.eci.gov.in and also through the Voter Helpline Mobile App. Recently, a new method of displaying results has been developed, called ‘Election Trends TV’. These are the auto-configurable real-time displays of results for large hoardings, outside the counting centres and other such public-interest places. The results website received 50,000 hits per second and, therefore, this
module is augmented by the use of the content delivery network or simple CDN.

The eighth module is Expenditure Monitoring. For monitoring day to day election expenditure incurred by the candidates, the election expenditure monitoring mechanism has been put in place in each constituency. ENCORE covers the candidate’s total expenses, funds given by the political party to the candidate, funds given by others to the candidate, expense understated or not, and whether candidate expenses exceed ceiling amount or not.

The ninth module is the Index Card and Statistical Reports. The final compilation of the complete conduct of elections is done in what is called Index card applications: for example, candidate-wise reports, parliamentary constituency-wise reports, assembly constituency-wise reports turnout to results, and more. It generates 46 types of rich reports which get published on the website.

The recently introduced Booth pp is an integral part of ENCORE. The data captured from the Booth app and from the polling stations are directly captured and displayed in the dashboard of the Returning Officer and from there to the Voter Turnout app. Similarly, ENCORE facilitates the integration of grievance management systems and election planning systems. It is being further developed to do GIS-based asset mapping, which point of interest mapping to facilitate effectively make various election management plans.

One of the upcoming modules of ENCORE is the complete online nomination facility for the candidate. The candidate can directly file their application sitting at home, generate the final application and print it for submission. The system will give the QR code in the application form by which Returning Officers can manage the application receipt process transparently and do the pre-scrutiny of the application. By using various plugins of digital signature and authentication, the whole process of nomination will fundamentally change the election landscape.

ENCORE has succeeded because there was the right digital-savvy leadership in place along with a strong internal training team that tirelessly built the capabilities for the workforce. The administration empowered officials to work in new ways. The technical team continuously gave day-to-day tools a digital upgrade and an extensive communication network was established during the introduction of this cutting-edge technology.

The base has been prepared for the introduction of more sophisticated technologies, such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and advanced neural machine-learning techniques into ENCORE to truly revolutionise the way elections are conducted in a free, fair and transparent manner.
The world has taken notice of the General Election in India right from its first edition in 1951-52. With democracy being adopted in various countries, the demand for holding smooth and clean elections is on the rise. Over the years, journalists, politicians and observers from numerous countries have visited India to see and learn its novel experiment with universal adult suffrage. Moreover, the governments of several countries have sent official teams to India for intensive study of its administrative and legal aspects, and challenges.

Simultaneously, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has reached out to the world through study and observation missions, participation in overseas exhibitions and conferences, and exchange, among other initiatives. Foreign delegates have participated in several events hosted by the Commission. The ECI stands as an institution of repute in imparting knowledge, and in sharing best practices and skills with other Election Management Bodies (EMBs) through its robust International Cooperation Programme.

The ECI has been at the forefront of international organisations promoting the cause of democracy worldwide and is closely associated with a number of international fora working in the field of democracy and election management. These are as follows:

- **Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB):**
  A-WEB is the largest association of EMBs worldwide with 115 EMBs from all the five continents of the globe as its members. The ECI has been closely associated in the process of the formation of A-WEB during 2011-12.
  The Commission has been A-WEB’s Executive Board member since its inception in October 2013, for two consecutive terms (2013-15 and 2015-17); its Vice-Chair for the period 2017-19, and took over as Chair of A-WEB for the 2019-2021 term at the A-WEB 4th General Assembly hosted in Bengaluru, Karnataka, on September 3, 2019.

- **Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA):**
  The ECI was FEMBoSA’s founding member and Chair in 2012-13.
  The 9th meeting of the FEMBoSA was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in September 2018. The ECI is the host for the 10th annual meeting of the forum in New Delhi on January 24, 2020 and will take over as its Chair for 2020.

- **Association of Asian Elections Authorities:**
  The ECI was a founding member of AAEA and also...
its Chair during 2014-2016. Currently, the ECI is a member of its Executive Board.

- **Commonwealth Electoral Network (CEN):** The ECI was on its Steering Committee since its inception in 2010 and till 2014, and at present it is a member of CENI.

- **International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance:** The ECI has been a Founding member of Intl. IDEA, Stockholm.

As part of its international outreach, the ECI has signed the **Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)** for cooperation in the field of election management with 27 EMBs and international organisations across the world, viz., Afghanistan, Australia, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Fiji, Georgia, Ivory Coast, Guinea, the Republic of Korea, the Kyrgyz Republic, Libya, Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, South Africa, Suriname, Yemen, Zambia and United Nations, International IDEA & IFES. The MoUs provide a framework for institutional interaction and cooperation.

Through interaction with EMBs all over the world, the ECI has acquired valuable learnings from its counterparts in other countries. The international cooperation outreach has been formulated in conjunction with India’s foreign policy objectives, which include promoting democracy and strengthening election administration worldwide.

During diamond jubilee celebrations of the ECI in 2010-11, numerous EMBs and delegations from participating countries evinced a keen interest in the electoral technology including electronic voting machine (EVM) operations during Indian elections. The ECI has provided technical assistance to Jordan, Maldives, Namibia, Egypt, Bhutan and Nepal, regarding this. Knowledge sharing has borne fruit and, today, Nepal, Bhutan and Namibia are using EVMs manufactured in India in their elections.

After the ECI started annual celebrations of its **National Voters’ Day (NVD)** on January 25 each year from the year 2011, countries such as Pakistan, Bhutan and Republic of Korea have also emulated this practice, and observe their own national voters days to promote voter education and awareness. Incidentally, we celebrate a decade of NVD celebrations this year on January 25, 2020.

This is not all! Observation missions for elections have been taken to countries such as Tanzania, Russia, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Lesotho, Ecuador, Cambodia, Bhutan,
Bangladesh, Fiji, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Nepal, Sweden, Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the USA. During 2018, ECI officials undertook study/observation missions in 12 countries (viz., Sri Lanka, Russia, Turkmenistan, Bhutan, Malaysia, Iraq, the Republic of Korea, Zimbabwe, Cambodia, Bhutan, Fiji and Bangladesh).

**Election Visitor Programme (EVP) 2019:** This was organised by the ECI during the General Election 2019 with as many as 65 delegations from 19 countries, viz., Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Fiji, Georgia, Kenya, the Republic of Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, Romania, Russia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, the UAE, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe, and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (Int. IDEA) visited New Delhi from May 10-13, 2019, to witness the Lok Sabha elections. Similar EVPs had been organised by the ECI during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of five states, viz., Goa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Manipur held in February-March 2017.

Moreover, more than 200 visits (approximately half of them incoming visits) during the last five years were organised for exchange of experiences and skills, capacity building programmes, technical assistance, conferences/workshops and other events relating to democracy and election management. In 2019, ECI delegates participated in international conferences, seminars and workshops in Sweden, Georgia, Australia, Austria, Romania, Portugal, Indonesia, Cambridge (UK), Sri Lanka, Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Manila (Philippines).

Foreign diplomats, journalists and officials invited to India by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Lok Sabha Secretariat regularly visit the ECI for briefing on the Indian electoral process. During 2018 and 2019, the ECI hosted more than 50 delegations from abroad, including Permanent Representatives of several overseas countries to the UN, a group of 250 ASEAN students, diplomats from several foreign countries, parliamentarians and officials from more than 40 countries. These interactions contribute to promoting India’s foreign policy objectives and raising India’s prestige all over the world.

As part of its continuous pursuit of raising awareness of fair electoral processes and democratic institutions, the ECI had established the **India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM)** in June 2011. This institute is being developed as an advanced resource centre of learning, research, training and extension on participatory democracy and election management. It functions from a new state-of-the-art campus. Apart from training courses for more than 35,300 national stakeholders, the IIIDEM has, since its inception, conducted 71 international capacity building programmes, in which over 1,440 electoral officials from 97 countries have participated. The curriculum for international courses at the IIIDEM has been...
developed in collaboration with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) based in Washington DC, USA.

The Election Commission of India hosted the first ever International Conference on Voter Education in October 2016, which witnessed participation by the EMBs of 25 countries from six continents, besides renowned organizations such as UNDP, International IDEA and IFES, among others. The conclusion, a unanimous one, came up in the form of ‘synthesis’ with the launch of a global initiative – VoICE.NET at the closing session. The participating EMBs and international institutions witnessed a new digital knowledge platform – VoICE.NET – to connect them, and the democracies of the world in due course, for the cause of voter education.

At present, VoICE.NET has 32 members, including EMBs and reputed international organizations besides numerous associates across the world. VoICE.NET contents are provided by the member EMBs/organisations, and in-house research and practice. The portal is maintained by the ECI.

VoICE International, a quarterly e-magazine on voter education, was launched on January 24, 2017 as one of the first events on VoICE.NET. The magazine is presented with a specific thematic focus for each issue. Its editorial board selects the theme and invites, among other things, the members to contribute articles. While presenting rich resources on voter education aligned with the thematic focus, the publication also carries vibrant global coverage of topics of current interest in voter education through insightful articles, case studies, best practices, innovation and special interventions for enhancing a robust culture of electoral participation.

The ECI has also hosted a series of international conferences. An international seminar on ‘Strategies for Empowering Young and Future Voters’ was organised in January 2017. In January 2018 an international conference took place on ‘Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Electoral Processes’, followed by an international conference on ‘Making our Elections Inclusive and Accessible’ in January 2019. Recently, the 4th General Assembly of A-WEB and an international conference on ‘Initiatives and Challenges of Social Media and Information Technology in Elections’ was organized in Bengaluru, Karnataka, from September 2 to September 4, 2019. The 4th General Assembly declared the IIIDEM in New Delhi as the regional centre of A-WEB, where documentation, research and training for sharing best practices and capacity building of officials of A-WEB members would be conducted. The ECI will provide the necessary resources for the A-WEB Centre. Moreover, VoICE International was declared as the magazine of A-WEB.

The ECI’s International Cooperation programme operates in conjunction with India’s foreign policy objectives as well as the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote democracy and strengthen election administration worldwide, thus enhancing India’s image in the world. The ECI’s constant endeavour is to foster closer electoral cooperation with EMBs abroad while strengthening democratic institutions and processes.
India, the world’s largest democracy by electorate was established with independence in 1947. It happens to be the largest democracy with a robust and rich democratic culture marked by faith of Indian People in the electoral process, its non partisan nature and with the basic tenet of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind.’— a perfect intent for inclusion of all categories of voters. It has moved on its path of democratic consolidation through vibrant electoral participation in the last seven decades. The article visits the successful journey of Indian elections during the last seven decades.

Universal Adult Suffrage
As per Article 326 of the Constitution, every citizen of India, who is not less than eighteen years of age (except those who are mentally unsound or who have been declared ineligible otherwise), has the right to vote. Suffrage at 21 originally, was reduced to 18 with effect from April 1, 1989 through Sixty- first Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988. Qualifying for determination of 18 years age is First January of the Year in which the roll is revised. Article 325 states that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in or to claim to be included in a special electoral roll on the grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex.

‘An Act of Abundant Faith’
The decision of the Constituent Assembly to give every Indian, the right to vote under a system of universal and direct suffrage, was, as Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar described it, an act of ‘abundant faith’ in the common man and the ultimate success of the democratic rule.

The message of universal adult suffrage was loud and clear, embedded in Article 325 and 326 of the Constitution and is very base of the Indian electoral exercise.

Overall Strategy: ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’
Preamble to the Constitution proclaims India as a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. Inclusion of all categories of voters in electoral participation is the foundation on which political democracy stands as a way of life in the Indian polity. And the spirit flows through the Statute as a common thread. The Constitution in Part XV Elections provides complete framework for elections in India Drawing support from the constitutional mandate and legislative framework, ECI, works on the premise of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’: a perfect intent for
inclusive and accessible elections. ECI encourages and facilitates participation of all categories of electors.

**The Election Commission of India**
The Commission is a permanent body, independent of the Government and functions in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the law relating to elections. In the matters not covered by the above, Article 324 acts as a vast reservoir of plenary power at the disposal of the Election Commission to enable it to discharge its mandate for conduct of free and fair elections.

Article 324 vests the Election Commission with powers of superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls for, and conduct of, all elections to the Parliament and to the State Legislatures, and of elections to the offices of the President and the Vice President.

The Election Commission of India was established on January 25, 1950, a day before India became a Republic. The nucleus staff of the Commission was essentially drawn from the Secretariat of the Constituent Assembly. The first Chief Election Commissioner assumed charge on March 21, 1950. Till October, 1989 the Election Commission remained a single member body. Two Commissioners were appointed to the Election Commission in Oct., 1989. By October, 1993, the President fixed the number of the ECs to two and the two Commissioners were also appointed on October 07, 1993 and the ECI, thus became a multimember body.

**Elections Conducted till Date**
In Seven decades of its journey, ECI has meticulously, smoothly, efficiently and effectively managed the preparation of the electoral rolls and entire election process - planning, preparing, conducting, counting and declaring results – right from first General Election to the first Lok Sabha in 1952 as per its constitutional mandate. The ECI has successfully conducted seventeen General Elections to the ‘Lok Sabha’, the House of People or the Lower House of the Parliament during the last seven decades in a free, fair, inclusive and credible manner. The Commission has similarly conducted elections to the office of the President of India 15 times, to the office of the Vice President of India 15 times, the Upper House of the Parliament in a continued manner besides the elections to the State Legislatures 377 times (besides the current General Election to the Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi) in fulfillment of its constitutional mandate.

**The First General Election: Issues, Challenges and the solutions.**
The first General Election in 1952 was a milestone in laying a strong foundation of democracy in independent India. This General Election was conducted by the Election Commission in 1951-52 for 489 seats to the House of the People (The Lok Sabha) and about 3,283 seats of different State Assemblies. This election was held under the First-Past-The-Post System (FPTPS). With over 176 million voters constituting the electorate, the exercise of their registration as electors, logistics for the electoral participation presented a challenge both, complex and gigantic for a young Republic and a young Election Commission. The ECI addressed the multifarious emerging challenges and complex issues with a sense of confidence and high grade professionalism.

Registration of voters came as a major challenge resulting from barriers arising out of the linguistic complexities, the problems of diverse traditions about surnames, the religious inhibitions among the women to
communicate the names of their husband and the ambiguous citizenship status of the large migrant population of refugees. The work regarding preparation of electoral roll was started, much earlier as a matter of abundant caution under the instructions and the guidance of the Constituent Assembly with the intent of holding elections as early as possible. The motion for preparation of electoral rolls was adopted on January 8, 1949. The Representation of People Act was passed on April 20, 1950. As per provisions of the Act all persons who were not less than 21 years of age as on March 01, 1950 and who had resided in a constituency for not less than 180 days during the period April 01, 1947 to December 31, 1949 were entitled for registration as voters.

The Representation of People Act, 1951 was enacted on July 17, 1951 and this facilitated the task of organizing the election process. Issue of Scheduled Castes Order on August 10, 1950, the Scheduled Tribes Order on September 06, 1950 as also the order regarding the delimitation of the Constituencies by mid November, 1950 were important milestones in holding of 1st General elections in the country.

**Use of Symbols: An innovation in First General Elections**

Normally, a ballot paper with the names of contesting candidates and a voter recording his vote by placing a mark against his choice would suffice. A poor level of literacy, as low as 16.6%, was one of the major challenges. After examining various options from all aspects carefully, the Commission decided in favor of symbol system. As per this system, ballot boxes, each bearing the distinctive symbol of a candidate, were placed in the polling compartment. No mark was necessary to be made on the pre-printed ballot paper to cast votes. It had to be put simply in the box carrying
the symbol of the candidate of his choice. This helped preserve the secrecy of the vote as well as enabled illiterate voters to vote as per their choice. With the passage of time, symbol system has become an integral part of the electoral process. Symbol has proved to be an invaluable device not only for casting votes, it has become an important feature of campaigns.

Some Facts on First General Election
The Election Commission set up 1,32,560 polling stations with 1,96,084 polling booths to cater to 176 million electors and deployed some two and a half million ballot boxes. About one million Government officials were deputed to supervise the actual voting. A total of 180 tons of paper was used for 600 million ballot papers at a cost of Rs one million (Rs 10,77,401-13-0). A total number of 3,89,816 phials of indelible ink were used at a cost of Rs 2,27,460. The magnitude of election operation was not the only challenge; physical movement presented a larger challenge full of exacting difficulties especially in the remote areas. Elephants, bullock carts, camels were used for transport in difficult tracts.

The polling continued for four months, from October 25, 1951 to February 21, 1952. Despite difficult climatic and geophysical conditions, the electors braved both the weather and distance. They came to the polling stations, attired in gala dresses, men and women, on foot, by public conveyance, and by almost every conceivable means of transportation and took their responsibilities towards democracy seriously.

The turnout of the voters was impressive, except in a few parts of the country. Of the 176 million electors, 88.6 million, that is to say, slightly more than 50 percent actually voted. Thus, the Indian elector redeemed the ‘Act of faith’ the Founding Fathers had reposed in them. The first general election to the House of People and the State Legislative Assemblies ushered in Democracy and the Rule of Law. The unqualified success of the first general elections and the satisfaction they brought to the country at large and the polity in particular were a pleasant surprise. The adventure and the experience was acknowledged, both at home and abroad, as a remarkable act of faith in democracy, nobly conceived and efficiently implemented.

It was the world’s largest electoral exercise in democracy. Western observers looked at it with disbelief and awe. They wondered how this gigantic experiment would succeed in a new democracy facing challenges of massive migration, low literacy rate, tradition-bound, unaccustomed to franchise and unfamiliar with the ways and tenets of democracy with an under developed economy.

The Second General Election
The second general elections for reconstituting the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies were completed by March, 1957. An element of grave uncertainty emerged on account of reorganization of States in 1956, shortly before the elections. It became rather doubtful whether it would be physically possible to complete the legal obligations and administrative instrumentalities to conduct the elections in time. The Election Commission was opposed to any such proposals for the postponement as it would be setting up a very bad precedent. A series of strategic Constitutional and legislative amendments and administrative measures coupled with time bound action by the Government,

The decade of 1960s, witnessed two Lok Sabha Elections in 1962 and 1967. The elections reflected increasing participation and rising interest of people to contest elections and this certainly meant deepening the roots of democracy in India. The contesting candidates doubled between 1957 and 1967 General Election to Lok Sabha. By 1968, it was mandatory for all political parties to register with the Election Commission with specified minimum election support. One of the salient features of 1960’s is the promulgation of ‘The Election Symbols (Reservation and
With the objective of providing specification, reservation, choice and allotment of symbols at elections in Parliamentary and Legislative Constituencies for the recognition of political parties.

**Model Code of Conduct**

The decade of 1960s witnessed another important development for orderly conduct of campaigns. On the eve of general elections to the Legislative Assembly of Kerala in February 1960, the state administration worked for evolving a code of conduct for observance by the political parties in the state. A draft code was prepared, discussed, approved by the political parties and adopted. The code covered various aspects of campaign, conduct and discipline of the candidates and political parties in contest including the party in power. The ECI circulated the code to the State Governments and all the political Parties. Acceptance of the code in general by various stakeholders and adoption of the same contributed to peaceful and orderly campaigns. The Code was subjected to a comprehensive revision in 1979 and later amplified in certain aspects in consultation with the political parties and the reissued in 1991.

In **1970s**, the then Chief Election Commissioner, in consultation with the political parties, laid down the guidelines to prevent malpractices during the election processes, an integral part of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Strengthening of the MCC has helped political parties in creating a level playing field for the polity in electoral competition, it has helped the Commission in conduct of free and fair elections as a part of its constitutional mandate.

The decade of **1980s** witnessed introduction of technology in the electoral process. In 1982, Electronic Voting Machines (EVM’s) were first introduced on an experimental basis for bye-Election in the 70-Parur Assembly Constituency in Kerala. This started the process of testing and detailed legal enquiries into the technological aspects of the machines and how they could make the voting, collating and the counting process efficient and accurate. The decade also saw in 1988, the lowering of the voting age from 21 to
18 through a Constitutional Amendment that led to inclusion of younger generation to the electoral participation.

In 1990s, Model Code of Conduct was made comprehensive and effectively implemented adding to the strength for free and fair Elections. The Election Commission ordered issuance of the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) in 1993 with a view to introducing proper identification and preventing any impersonation of voters. The EVMs which had been initially tried on an experimental basis became an integral feature of the State Assembly Election from 1998 onwards.

**Use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)**

In the last two decades of the Twentieth Century, taking advantage of the developments in the scientific and technological fields in the country, the Election Commission introduced the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) for conduct of poll and counting of votes at elections from Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies. After pilot run in 1982, introduction in 16 Assembly Constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi in 1998, gradual expansion of use of EVM’s in different States from 2000 and the ultimate complete switchover to their country-wide use in all Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies in India since 2004 has brought about a revolutionary change in our electoral system. Use of EVM’s has several advantages such as it obliterates invalidation of votes, saves massive amount of paper, efficient polling and the counting.

Since 2004, three country-wide general elections to the Lok Sabha in 2004, 2009 and 2014 and more than 107 general elections to the State Legislative Assemblies have been successfully conducted in the country by using EVMs. Allegations about vulnerability and security of EVM’s have been raised but found to be baseless. Stakeholder consultation, Open EVM Challenge, High Grade Technical support, randomization, and security protocols have helped in stakeholder confidence building and acceptance of EVM system to sustain.

**Use of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)**

When an elector records his vote by pressing a button on the balloting unit against the name and symbol of the candidate of his choice, attached VVPAT machine produces a small printed slip showing the name and symbol of the candidate voted. The voter can see that printed slip through a transparent window for seven seconds for his personal satisfaction that the vote has been recorded for the candidate of his choice and thereafter the printed paper slip gets automatically drops into a box in the VVPAT Unit. In case of any dispute regarding the votes cast at a polling station, the printed slips contained in the box can be counted for verification and reconciliation with the votes recorded in the control unit of the EVM. In General Election 2019 VVPAT machines were used at all the polling stations.

**Regulating Money Power: Election Expenditure Monitoring**

The Commission is committed to curb the misuse of Money Power in elections. An Election Expenditure Monitoring Division has been set up in the Commission. Expenditure ceilings have been prescribed for Lok Sabha and State Assembly
Ceiling has also been prescribed for cash transactions. Deployment of Expenditure Observers (EOs), Flying Squads and Static Surveillance Teams to keep vigil over movement of cash linked with candidates or political parties, items of bribe meant for inducement of electors, including liquor and other illicit items during elections and their seizure. Large amounts of cash and other seizures have been made and prosecutions launched. Sanctity of electoral process is important. Occasions have arisen for rescinding of election notification under use of plenary power of the Commission in the case of large seizures of cash meant for misuse in elections.

Fake news, paid news and media ads are monitored for penal action in case of violation of Codal provisions. Expenditure Observers keep a close watch on expenditure of each candidate and oversee the functioning of the Video Surveillance Teams to monitor major items of expenditure. The Income Tax Department, in close co-ordination with the ECI, also keeps a vigil over movement of cash through the airports, hotels, financial brokers, etc. in the constituency during election process.

**Voter Education**
Not that the program for voter information and awareness did not exist earlier, Information, motivation and facilitation of voters as a practice started as pilot at Saraikela in the year 2009 during Assembly Elections in Jharkhand. A totally new orientation was given to voter education in 2010 State Assembly elections in Bihar and launched as the 'Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)'. The programme has matured into the prestigious Flagship Voter Education programme of the Commission which addresses the connect over 91 Cr. voters spread over 10.36 Lakh polling stations in the country. Essentially an outreach oriented programme, SVEEP has evolved as a transformational intervention for strengthening democratic and electoral participation in the country starting from 2010.

This programme has gone through three phases since 2009 and up to 2016. Under the First Phase of this programme (2009-2013), gaps in the voter registration and actual voter turnout were seen as the areas of serious concern and the programme was initiated to address these concerns. The theme chosen for the Diamond Jubilee Year of the ECI in 2010 was ‘Greater Participation for a Stronger Democracy’.

The Second phase (2013-2014), focused on awareness for informed, inclusive, fear free and inducement free voting under a broader framework of civic education. It witnessed institutionalization of its implementation structure along with strengthening of the partnerships for maximizing the impact of the outreach.

The Third Phase (2016-2020) puts forward, inter alia, a goal to create a long term sustainable mechanism for all India coverage of inclusive voter
education for all. One of the major initiatives in this phase relates to ‘Mainstreaming of Electoral Literacy’ through Curricular, co curricular and extracurricular interventions.

Computerisation of Electoral Rolls
In the run up to the 2009 Lok Sabha Elections, computerization of Election rolls was taken up and Photo Electoral Rolls were prepared on a nationwide basis. Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPICs) are given to every voter as also the Photo Voter slips to facilitate participation.

NOTA
Democracy envisages freedom of choice in electoral participation. While exercising choice, as the Supreme Court has held, a mechanism of negative voting serves a very fundamental and essential part of a vibrant democracy. As per the directions of the Supreme Court, a NOTA button has been added to the EVM’s thereby providing choice of selection to the electors.

‘Desh Ka Maha Tyohaar’ General Election 2019 to 17th Lok Sabha
General Elections 2019 demonstrate the strength of the Indian Electoral System along with the synergy that has emerged from the initiatives taken by the Commission over last 7 decades.

The Election Commission of India conducted the General Elections to the 17th Lok Sabha along with provincial legislatures of four states from March 10, 2019 to May 27, 2019. Termed as ‘Desh Ka Maha Tyohaar’, it was a unique celebration of the democracy, largest in the world, that engaged about 91 Cr. electors spread over more than 10.36 Lakh polling stations in the country.

General Election (GE) 2019 is characterized by the quantum jump in electoral participation. For illustration 7.6 Cr. additional electors were registered, almost 1 Lakh new polling stations were added and 61.3 Cr. voters cast their vote in comparison with the General Election 2014 when 55.38 Cr. voters cast their vote at 9.28 Lakh polling stations in the country and a voter turnout at 66.44% thereby reflecting an increase of about 5.9 Cr. Voters.

Enhanced participation mentioned in the foregoing was achieved through focused initiatives for making our elections voter friendly and accessible; inclusion of all categories of voters through Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP), innovation and integration of state-of-the-art technology in election process and operating procedure.
UNFOLDING INDIAN ELECTIONS

70 Years

ECI Established On 25th January 1950

First General Elections Conducted 1951-52

Symbol Order Introduced 1960s

EVM Use Started 1982

Political Publicity Banned in Electronic Media during Silence Period 1996

EVM Universalised 2000

Filing of Affidavit by Candidates 2003

SVEEP Launched 2010

First National Voters’ Day Celebrated 2011

‘NOTA’ Option Introduced 2013

National Voter’s Services Portal (NVSP) Launched 2015

Use of VVPAT Universalised, ETPBS for Service Electors Started 2017

Electoral Literacy Club Launched, Publicity of Criminal Antecedent by Candidates Started 2018

Postal Ballot for PwD & Senior Citizens Above 80 Years Initiated in Jharkhand Assembly Elections 2019
Quest for Representative Government during Pre-Independence period

A sustained constitutional battle for ‘representative government’ led to evolution of elections in India. A resolution passed at the first session of Indian National Congress in 1885 demanded ‘admission of considerable proportion of elected members. The Government of India Act, 1919 envisaged a ‘gradual development of self-government institution.’

Delegates at the first session of the Indian National Congress at Mumbai, 1885 - a resolution urging introduction of elective principles in the councils was adopted

Winners of the Assembly Elections held in 1937 under the Government of India Act, 1935

FACTS

As a large number of voters were illiterate, election symbols like cycle, horse, tree, hand and flag etc were introduced and there was an experiment with boxes of different colours to receive the ballots.

A typical ballot paper used in Bombay Presidency in 1920s - a voter had to put a cross mark against his/her choice
Independence heralds Universal Adult Suffrage

The first general elections to the Lok Sabha and the elections to the state assemblies were held during 1951-52. Both were conducted on the basis of universal adult suffrage. Article 326 of the Constitution of India, adopted on November 26, 1949 by the Constituent Assembly, empowered every citizen above 21 years of age, on a qualifying date, to vote in territorial constituencies. The size of the electorate was 173.2 million voters.

FACTS

24,73,850 metal boxes and 1,11,095 wooden boxes were used to receive ballots in the first General Elections held simultaneously with Legislative Assembly elections. This was because each candidate was assigned a separate box.

ANECDOТЕ

Madras, Mysore and Orissa reported that a few voters had apparently tried to oblige all the contesting candidates and 225 proceeded to do so by tearing their ballot papers into pieces and inserting a piece into the ballot box of each of the candidates.
FACTS
The elections were a new phenomenon to most Indians in 1951-52. Media was a great aid in educating them. Interestingly, as many as 397 newspapers were started during the First General Elections in 1951-52 and most of them ceased publication with its conclusion.

▲ When counting of votes took days on end
◄ Mixing the ballot paper before counting, Delhi 1998
▼ Before the advent of 24x7 news channels - displaying election results outside the Red Fort, Delhi 1971

◄ Enabling the specially-abled: ensuring participation of all

The elections were a new phenomenon to most Indians in 1951-52. Media was a great aid in educating them. Interestingly, as many as 397 newspapers were started during the First General Elections in 1951-52 and most of them ceased publication with its conclusion.
From Ballot Papers to EVM-VVPAT

A common design of EVM evolved which was used in a limited number of assembly polls in Nagaland, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tripura and metropolitan council elections in Delhi during 1982-83. VVPAT or Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail is a method of providing feedback to EVM voters. It was first deployed in the bye-election for the Noksen Assembly seat in Tuensang district of Nagaland in September 2013.
Shompen Tribe, one of last surviving aboriginal tribe, in Andaman and Nicobar Islands participated for first time during Lok Sabha General Elections, 2014. The keenness to see what an EVM looks like made them come to the polling booth and vote!

ECI introduced the ‘None of the Above (NOTA)’ option on EVMs and ballots as per the orders of the Supreme Court dated September 27, 2013. It gave voters an option to cast their vote regardless of whether they preferred any candidates.

Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) was first used in 51-Noksen Assembly Constituency in Nagaland in September 2013. It enables the voters to verify that their vote has gone to the intended candidate only.

FACTS
Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are the new ballot
Journey of EVM-VVPATs

The EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines) are the new ballots. Their usage has trimmed the bulk and cost of election material, lessened manpower requirement, eliminated invalid voting and accelerated the counting process. This has been done with indigenously developed technology.

Whether they’re flying high above the mountains or wading through deep waters, our election officials ensure no voter is left behind.

▲ Andhra Pradesh, 2014

▼ Jammu & Kashmir, 2019

▼ Assam, 2014

▼ Arunachal Pradesh, 2019
An EPIC journey

Imposters personating as voters listed on electoral roll was a menace that was detected quite early. The remedy lay in issuing photo identity cards, or EPIC to every voter in vulnerable constituencies.
The Election of President and Vice-President

The elections to two highest constitutional offices of the Indian Union viz. the President and the Vice-President are conducted on the basis of proportional representation by means of single transferrable vote. Both elections are held by secret ballot.

FACTS

To be a candidate in the Presidential election, one must be nominated by at least 50 electors as proposers and at least another 50 electors as seconders. In the case of Vice Presidential election, a candidate needs to be proposed by at least 20 electors and seconded by another 20.
Evolving a Model Code

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of conventions applicable to political parties and candidates during the elections. Its purpose is to keep the campaigning, polling and counting orderly and prevent any breach of peace. It is in force from the date of announcement of elections till the official declaration of results.

ANECDOCET

A contesting candidate by the name of ‘Adolf Lu Hitler Marak’ who filed from 57-Rangasakona Assembly Constituency in Meghalaya during 2008 elections was arrested for violation of model code of conduct by the Superintendent of Police of the area whose name was John F. Kennedy. Newspaper headlines screamed, Adolf La Hitler arrested by John F Kennedy. Hitler went on to win that election.
Sharing with the world

India is the chair of A-WEB for the term 2019 to 2021. Election Commission of India has reached out to the world through study and observation missions, participation in overseas exhibitions and conferences and exchange tours etc. Foreign delegates have participated in several events hosted by the Election Commission of India. VoICE.NET, which serves as a global knowledge network on voter education with 32 active members from EMBs and International Organizations along with numerous associates is hosted by ECI.

FACTS
The Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) is a regional establishment for cooperation among the SAARC Election Management Bodies which was formally launched in New Delhi in 2012 where the charter of FEMBoSA was signed. ECI is a founding member of FEMBoSA and also its first Chair.

▲ India takes over as Chair of A-WEB for 2019-21 term

▲ An annual meeting of FEMBoSA in session

▲ IIIDEM—the advance training and resource wing of ECI

70 YEARS

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▲ India takes over as Chair of A-WEB for 2019-21 term

▲ An annual meeting of FEMBoSA in session

▲ IIIDEM—the advance training and resource wing of ECI
ECI has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with 20 Election Management Bodies and international organizations.

A quarterly magazine on Voter Information, Communication and Education on VoICE.net has been declared as the magazine of A-WEB.

The Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA) was established to promote open & transparent elections.

International conference, Bengaluru.
Lok Sabha Elections

As the world’s populous democracy, India holds the world’s largest national elections. The electoral size of 2014 was little above 834 million and for the 17th Lok Sabha Elections it has gone up to 910 million. The Election Commission of India has matured and evolved the last six decades. A strong institutional mechanism has been put in place. The scale and magnitude of the electoral machinery inspire wonder and awe!

2014

▲ Anxious moments: masses eagerly wait for election results outside a counting centre in Pune, Maharashtra

◄ Former CEC V.S. Sampath, H.S. Brahma, EC & Dr. Nasim Zaidi, EC present the list of newly elected members to Lok Sabha 2014 to the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee

▲ Voters’ queue, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, 2014

▲ Making a mark, Uttar Pradesh

FACTS

Malkajgiri, Andhra Pradesh, was the Parliamentary Constituency with maximum electors of 31.08 lakh in LS 2014. With just 49,922 electors, Lakshadweep was the Parliamentary Constituency with the minimum electors in LS 2014.
2019

- With the availability of creché facility, woman voters turned up in large numbers, Karnataka, 2019

- No Voter to be Left Behind, Uttarakhand

- Women voters of Kutch, Gujarat

- EVM-VVPAT demonstration, Telangana

- A centenarian voter casting his vote in Sikkim

- Largest human logo of ECI, Rajasthan

**FACTS**

Lok Sabha Election 2019, *Desh Ka Maha Tyohaar* witnessed the highest ever voters turnout of 67.4% with lowest gender gap of 0.1%
Journey of Indian Elections since Independence (2)

Story of the Second General Elections of India

S D SHARMA
SENIOR FELLOW, ECI

Successful conduct of the first general elections despite serious challenges marked an important milestone in the chronicle of young Indian Republic. It generated a sense of satisfaction among the political executive in general; and both, the credibility and confidence to the Election Commission and its machinery. The achievement was acknowledged at home and abroad as a remarkable act of faith nobly conceived and efficiently implemented.

The interregnum between 1952 and 1957 witnessed successful conduct of a number of bye-elections as also three other General Elections to State Legislative Assemblies of then PEPSU, Travancore-Cochin and Andhra. It was confidently expected, therefore, that the second general elections of 1957 would also pass off smoothly and efficiently.

The second general elections were no less of an adventure or novelty as compared to the first when even the most optimistic people had felt doubtful as to how far a large country which had only just attained its independence and had yet to settle down to a democratic form of government could successfully carry through a country-wide program of democratic elections based on adult suffrage.

The second General Elections to the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies were completed on time by March, 1957, except for the then Union territory of Himachal Pradesh and part of the Kangra District (of then Punjab) where it was physically impossible to conduct poll because of reasons such as in snow-bound in such areas. The Poll in such places had to be deferred.

Correctional Changes to the Constitution and the Representation of People Act
Challenges Posed by Reorganization of States, 1956

Experience of handling the first General Election brought in confidence and expectation that there should not be much of difficulty in handling the second General Elections of 1957 smoothly and efficiently. The election law and the machinery had been fairly stream-lined during the intervening years in the light of experience gained from the first General Election and the subsequent General Elections to State Legislatures so that the shortcomings noticed in the first general elections could be eliminated.
However, serious uncertainty emerged on account of reorganization of States in 1956, shortly before the elections leading to a considerable redrawing of the political map of India. It became doubtful whether it would be physically possible to complete the legal obligations and administrative instrumentalities to conduct the elections in time. Influential sections of opinion makers favored a postponement through the constitutional and legislative amendments. But the Election Commission was opposed to any such proposals for the postponement would be seen as a very bad precedent in the chronicle of Indian democracy.

A series of strategic Constitutional and legislative amendments and administrative measures coupled with time bound action by the Government, Delimitation Commission and the Election Commission ensured timely elections. The entire election machinery of the Centre and the States rose to the occasion and put in sustained efforts to achieve the otherwise impossible task.

It may not be possible to list out all the changes herein, but some of the important changes were as follows:

**Amendments to the Constitution to obliterate operational contradiction.**

Amendments to Articles 81 and 170 of the Constitution were effected with a view to obliterate operational contradiction Article 81 of the Constitution laid down that there shall be one member of the House of the People for every 7,50,000 of the population. On the other hand, article 81(1) (a) of the Constitution had fixed 500 as the maximum number of elected members of the House. In view of the increasing population, it became clear that the contradiction would cause a logjam and create problems in delimitation and lead to consequential serious implications in conduct of elections. The Constitution was amended in 1953 and the restriction that the population of a Parliamentary constituency returning one member shall not exceed 7,50,000 was removed.

Article 170 of the Constitution originally provided that the minimum population for a seat in a Legislative Assembly shall not be less than 75,000. In some States where every Parliamentary seat comprised 9 Assembly seats, this minimum created serious practical difficulties in actual delimitation and often necessitated the splitting up of even the smallest administrative unit. This issue was resolved through amending article 170 of the Constitution by deleting the provision which laid down the above minimum.

**Amendments to the Representation of People Act 1950**

The provisions of the Representation of the People Acts were extensively amended from time to time in the light of the experience gained during and after the general elections of 1951-52. The Representation of People Act, 1950 envisaged preparation of electoral roll separately for the Parliamentary and the Assembly constituencies. Amendment to the Act did away with this duplication. Henceforth the roll for an Assembly Constituency was made the basic roll to constitute the electoral roll of a Parliamentary Constituency. Further, it was not necessary to prepare the roll every year denovo, Roll of an Assembly Constituency is required to be prepared only when the constituency is delimited, subsequent years the roll is required to be ‘revised’ only. Similarly the minimum qualifying period of residence of 180 days in a given constituency was also done away with to ensure a barrier in registration. Qualifying date for inclusion of a name in the roll was changed from 1st April to 1st January.

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer was given a statutory recognition under the RPA, 1950 and the RPA, 1951 and rules made there under.

**Delimitation of Constituencies**

Constitution required that the representation given to the territorial constituencies of the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies had to be
DESIGNS OF SYMBOLS FOR STATE PARTIES AND INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES
redone after every quinquennial census operation as per the final published census figures. The population figures of the 1951 census were finally published in 1953, therefore realignment of constituencies had become necessary. Section 13 of the RP Act 1950 lays down the procedure for the delimitation. In reality, the procedure did not work as sub-section of the Presidential order made the order subject to amendments by the Parliament and as such many were actually amended by the Parliament. The Election Commission recommended to Government accordingly that future delimitation of constituencies should be made by an independent body, more or less judicial in composition and that the scheme of delimitation worked out by it should be made final in law. This recommendation was accepted and the Delimitation Commission Act, 1952 (Act 81 of 1952) was enacted by Parliament. Delimitation Commission was given a degree of latitude in delimitation of the constituencies so that they do not split up the small administrative units in carving out the constituencies. The end of the exercise projected 409 constituencies for Lok Sabha: 82 as two member constituencies, one three member constituency and Petals of flowers dusted with vermillion were left upon a few ballot boxes which indicated that some voters had regarded the ballot boxes as objects of worship.
326 single member constituencies and in all 493 seats in the Lok Sabha.

**Total Number of Seats and Candidates**
In all 1,594 candidates contested the election for 494 seats of the Lok Sabha or the House of People. 10,794 candidates contested the election for a total of 3,102 State Legislative Assembly Seats in the country.

**Ballot Papers:**
A large number of cases had come to light during the first general elections where presiding officers failed to distinguish the ballot papers for the Assembly elections from those for the Parliamentary elections in the result the two types of ballot papers got interchanged at the time of issuing them to the voters. In 1953, the Election Commission introduced new designs of ballot papers which were different in some respects from those used in

The ballot papers were printed and supplied, like the first General Election, by the Security Press, Nasik Road. In order to economize the use of paper, supply of ballot papers to each State was kept to the barest minimum. Despite an increase of over 11% in the electorate, the total number of ballot papers supplied for the second General Elections was about 57.94 Crs. compared to the total of 60 Cr. for the first General Elections.

**Introduction of Marking of Ballot Paper: only in Bye-elections**
Election Commission was given the power to give directions about the method of voting by marking the ballot paper for elections to Lok Sabha or any State Legislature. The ballot paper for use under the ‘marking system’ of voting was substantially different from the ballot papers used previously. The new type of ballot paper had the serial number and name of each contesting candidate along with his respective party affiliation as also a pictorial representation of his symbol. The Representation of the People (Conduct of Elections and Election Petitions) Rules, 1956, had been suitably amended for the purpose. However, in view of the serious opposition to any immediate change at the meeting with the Political Parties, the Commission decided to continue with the existing system of voting until after the second general elections. The ‘symbol’ system of voting continued without any change during the second general elections as well. The Commission worked out a scheme for the implementation of its decision to introduce the marking system
of voting. 28 bye-elections had already been successfully conducted under the marking system of voting, 26 for electing one member and 2 for electing two members, while one bye-election has been held in a Parliamentary Constituency to elect one member.

Additional Safeguard: Introduction of Second Paper Seal in Ballot Box
Before the poll commences, the signatures or seals of the polling agents of the candidates are taken on a paper seal that is then fixed to the ballot box. Paper seals bear an intricate design as a safeguard against any tampering whatsoever. However, candidate and his counting agents very often found it difficult in practice at the time of the counting of votes to identify or check the signature of every one of his numerous polling agents on the paper seals. Therefore, the provision of paper seals with the signatures of the polling agents thereon would fail eventually to provide adequate safeguard against the tampering a ballot box. As a security measure the Commission introduced a second paper seal for use in a ballot boxes. Both the paper seals; the new green one and earlier pink one were printed at the Security Printing Press with distinctive serial numbers and a legend. Presiding Officers were required to keep a strictly correct record of the serial number of the paper seal used in the ballot boxes. The polling agents were permitted to note serial numbers of these so that the same may be compared when the boxes would open at the time of counting. A further check was provided of course by the pink seal bearing the signatures or seals of the polling agents.

The safeguards had the enhanced the stakeholder confidence. There were practically no complaints of tampering of ballot boxes during the second general elections.

Election Period
The Poll was taken on different dates as per schedule between February 25 and March 12 in all the States except the then Himachal Pradesh where it was conducted between May 24 and June 7, 1957 and June-July in Kangra District of the then Punjab because of adverse weather conditions. Thus in a remarkable improvement, the total period of the poll was reduced to just over a fortnight as compared to 17 weeks spent

**Number of Registered Women Voters:**
About 92,141,597 women voters were registered in the electoral rolls of the whole country for the second general elections.

**Total Number of Voters:** 193,646,069

**Votes Casted:** 92,064,682

**Number of Polling Stations:** 2,20,478

**Number of Parliament Seats:** 494

**Number of Assembly Seats:** 3,102

**Total amount spent on Elections:** The expenditure during the general elections 1956-57 amounts to Rs. 5,90,21,786. The overall expenditure on each voter in respect of each Cost per voter, general election (Parliamentary and Assembly) comes to 2.4 annas as compared to 4.8 annas during the first general elections in 1951-52.

**Number of Polling Personnel:** 9,26,328 Excluding Policemen

**Number of Candidates:** House of the People: 1,594

State Legislative Assemblies-10,794

**Amount of Ink used:** 3,16,707 phials of indelible ink were used in the second general elections, as compared to 3,89,816 phials in the first general elections.

**Voter Turnout:** Out of a total of 193,646,069 voters 92,064,682 cast their votes for elections to the Parliamentary constituencies. The percentage of the poll was 47.54%.

**Number of Registered Women Voters:**
About 92,141,597 women voters were registered in the electoral rolls of the whole country for the second general elections.

**Vote awareness Programmes:**
Political education of the electorate through objective publicity.
Broadsheets, Posters and Folders
Short Films
Cinema Slides
Radio Broadcast
for the poll in the first General Elections of 1951-52. The declaration of election results was also considerably expedited. Public confidence in the election machinery had also grown enormously in the intervening years between the two general elections and this was one of the most important factors which materially contributed to the smoothness and peaceful nature of the second general elections.

**Electorate**
The total number of voters enrolled in 1956 in the country (excluding Jammu and Kashmir, Andaman and Minicoy Islands) stood at 193,646,069. The estimated total population of the country excluding the above areas at that time was 384,370,000. Thus about 50.4% of the total population was thus registered on the electoral rolls. With a percentage of the adult population (i.e., persons over 21 years of age) estimated at about 51 per cent, the enrolment of voters would be claimed almost exhaustive. In comparison total number of voters for the first general elections of 1951-52 was 173,213,635. This represented about 96% of the adult population, whereas for the second general elections held in 1957, about 98.8% of the adult population was enrolled as electors.

**Number of Registered Women Voter**
About 92,141,597 women voters were registered in the electoral rolls for the second general elections. One of the issues that came up in inclusion of women in the roll was that women, as a custom at that time were not willing to provide correct names. Political Parties and Local Gender Based Civil Society organizations were engaged in correcting this anomaly. As a result, wrong names were deleted and correct names were entered. This gave a boost to Gender participation. In effect 94% women population were enrolled as electors.

**Polling Stations**
In all a total number of 2,20,478 Polling Stations were set up in the country to facilitate the polling.

**Voter Turnout**
Out of a total of 19,36,46,069 registered voters in the country, 9,20,64,682 voters cast their votes for elections to the Parliamentary constituencies. The percentage of the poll was 47.54%.

**Personnel Deployed.**
A total number of 9,26,328 polling personnel excluding Policemen were deployed for the second General Election.

**Amount of Indelible Ink used**
A total number of 3,16,707 phials of indelible ink were used in the second General Elections as compared to 3,89,816 phials in the first general elections.

**Prompt counting of votes.**
The Commission felt that the counting of votes in every constituency should take place as soon as possible after the poll as the delay lead to complaints and avoidable suspicions of malpractices e.g., tampering of ballot boxes. Dissatisfaction was expressed by the general public and the Press whenever there were such delays in the counting of votes. In the light of the experience of the first General Elections, the Commission discussed the question in 1956.
with the Representatives of the Political Parties. The latter entirely agreed with the views of the Commission in the matter. The Commission reiterated its direction during the second General Elections that the counting of votes should be undertaken in every constituency as soon as it was physically possible and that it should not be postponed merely for the reason that the poll was not complete in the whole State.

**Total amount spent on Elections**
The expenditure during the General Elections 1956-57 came to Rs. 5,90,21,786. The overall expenditure on each voter in respect of each cost per voter, general election (Parliamentary and Assembly) came to 2.4 ‘Annas’ (today’s 15 Paise) as compared to 4.8 ‘Annas’ (today’s 30 Paise) during the first General Elections in 1951-52. The overall expenditure incurred for the preparation and revision of electoral rolls between the first and the second general elections, i.e., from 1952-53 to 1956-57 was approximately Rs. 5,99,55,719 only.

System of Expenditure returns had been brought in place and implemented.

**Vote awareness Programmes**
In a young democracy like India with very poor rate of literacy among the electorate, great deal of ignorance amongst large sections of the public about the fundamental features of our Constitution, the composition, functions and powers of the State Legislatures and the Parliament as also the role of the voter in bringing these legislatures into existence through his vote besides meaning and the purpose of elections. Unless the common citizen appreciates the role, nature and functions of the legislatures he cannot realise the value and significance of nor can he exercise it with the requisite degree of ethical deliberation and clear understanding of the issues involved.

Therefore, it was felt that there was a a vital necessity of non-partisan voter education. The Commission accordingly proposed and to the Government that all publicity for the purpose of educating the public in these matters in connection with the second general elections should be planned and carried out under the direction of the Commission. The Government agreed and accordingly all non-partisan publicity on election and its processes was imparted through following means:

- Political education of the electorate through objective publicity.
- Broadsheets, Posters and Folders
- Short Films
- Cinema Slides
- Radio Broadcast

**Epilogue**
I must admit that it is not possible to describe each and every aspect of the mega exercise in the article, but the effort has been to present the salient features of a success story in the Journey of Indian Elections. Despite serious issues and challenges, the Second General Election was successfully completed. The leadership and strategic role played by the Election Commission and changes in Legislative framework, procedures and processes and above all dedication of the entire election machinery made this otherwise impossible task a reality. Another step had been taken in strengthening of election process and in effect consolidation of democratic polity in the country.
Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) is the flagship Voter Education Programme of the ECI that reaches out to educate citizens through multimedia interventions to enhance their awareness and participation in the electoral process as per the premise of the Commission ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’. It has promoted qualitative participation in terms of information, motivation, facilitation to empower all categories of voters for accessible, inclusive and ethical voting. SVEEP, today, connects the Commission with the 91 crore voters of the country and provides critical support to the Commission in the conduct of free, fair, informed, inclusive, accessible, transparent and ethical elections in the country.

Objectives of SVEEP
- Increased Electoral Participation
- Voter Registration
- Voter Turnout
- EVM & VVPAT Awareness
- Ethical & Informed Voting
- Continuous Electoral & Democracy Education

Evolution of SVEEP

SVEEP I (2010-2013)
The low voter turnout in Lok Sabha Election 2009 led to the initiation of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC), which was further revamped to SVEEP in 2010.

SVEEP II (2013-2014)
The second phase of SVEEP involved a planned strategy for a targeted approach towards meeting various gaps identified in Phase I.

SVEEP III (2015-2020)
A robust plan was undertaken after Lok Sabha Election 2014, which included steps like mainstreaming of Electoral Literacy through interventions, enhanced digital connects and use of social media to maximize outreach and attain higher inclusion.
Plan of Action

Three-pronged strategy of IMF (Information-Motivation-Facilitation)

- **Information**
  - Meeting the What, Where and How of the electoral process through interpersonal and mass communication

- **Motivation**
  - Encouraging voters to participate in the electoral system

- **Facilitation**
  - Delivering services to ensure hassle-free and accessible election

Targeted Interventions for:

- Women
- Young & Future Voters
- PwDs & Senior Citizens
- Tribal Groups
- Third Gender
- Service Voters
- Overseas Voters
- Urban Voters
- Marginalised Segments

Strategized Intervention

- Mass Mobilisation through invitation to vote, events and competitions
- Direct Outreach through field workers, mid-media and the pledge to vote
- Use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) like National Voters’ Service Portal (NVSP), voter helpline app, SVEEP portal and audio-video creatives
- Edutainment like radio shows, interactive games, or comic strips on various facets of elections

Impact of SVEEP over the years

The number of registered electors was 834 million on the eve of the 2014 general elections. This figure jumped up by 75 million in five years, raising the number of registered voters to 910 million, ahead of Lok Sabha Election 2019.

—Sanchari Dasgupta, Executive, ECI
The challenging road to Sario-Saria

The tough journey to Sario-Saria, one of the most inaccessible polling stations of India, shows the determination of polling officers to leave no voters behind.

Crossing deep gorges on a narrow log bridge, climbing on a slippery slope with the help of cane ropes, fording the tricky streams and traversing deep jungles without a compass – the precarious expedition to 40-Sario-Saria polling station of 8-Bameng Assembly constituency is a commando crash course for civilians going up there for the first time.

“The road is steep, slippery and sometime nonexistent,” says 42 year-old school teacher, Jorjo Yangfo, who recently went to Saria village as a Presiding Officer. “I almost lost my life after my hands lost their grip on the cane rope while climbing a steep slope. Luckily for me, the next thing my hands could lay on was a sturdy plant, deeply rooted to the ground, otherwise I would have crashed into the Kameng River some 500 feet below,” Yangfo narrates the terrifying moment with a smile on his face. On the return journey, one needs to rappel on the same stretch, he added.

Jeetendra Kumar Meena, an art...
teacher at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Seppa, who was a part of polling team as a micro-observer, recounted his demanding journey. He said, “The track was very scary and I could barely find space for my feet while negotiating a 90-degree cliff.” ChekuYangfo, the first Polling Officer, echoed that, saying that for the rest of his tracking, Meena walked like a spider, slowly and cautiously. One of the porters was badly injured after he lost balance and crashed his face into a tree trunk. The polling team comprised five polling officials, six security personnel and 14 porters, besides a micro-observer.

**Tribes and Travails**

Situated in the valley of Walla River at 4,175 ft above the mean sea level, Saria, often reckoned in conjunction with neighbouring Sario village as ‘Sario-Saria’, remains one of the most inaccessible villages of the hinterlands of East Kameng district. The picturesque border village, with the snow-capped Himalayas adorning its backdrop, is home to one of the most underdeveloped tribes of the State: the Puroiks or Solungs, whose subsistence largely depends on nature. For centuries, this minority community has endured the domination of their neighbours belonging to the Nyishi tribe, especially at election time, when their neighbours seek proof of their ‘loyalty’.

As per the latest electoral roll, the 8/40-Sario Polling Station, comprising four villages of Sario, Saria, Langcho and Dao, recorded 210 electors ((113 men and 97 women). The total population of the four villages is 236 persons as per the 2011 Census, out of which Saria accounted for 39 persons, the lowest among the four.

Yangfo’s polling team began at the eastern bank of Kameng River Bodo, a Nyishi village recently connected by a kutch PMGSY road, is the last point up to which vehicles can reach during a dry period. “It took our team 14 hours of a continuous foot march to reach the village. We started our journey at 4 a.m. from a village called Lamra. We rested for a bit for water and biscuits on the way at a lone house somewhere after Veu village, and thereafter reached Saria at 6 p.m. We were rather quick on what is otherwise a two-day distance on foot,” Yangfo recounts.

**EVMs for the First Time**

The Presiding Officer, on his team’s arrival at the Receiving Centre, said that the villagers were “quite happy to see and touch EVMs and casting their votes using them for the first time.” In the past, their Nyishi neighbours would come to the booth as polling agents and force them to surrender their right to hit the ballot buttons after the mandatory signing on the Voters’ Register. “This time, however, I briefed the Nyishi agents of all political parties on the rules and that proxy voting would not be allowed, to which they agreed,” said Yangfo. The poll ended peacefully and the teams reached the Receiving Centre safely, two days later, exhausted but satisfied with a job well done.

- Office of CEO (Arunachal Pradesh)
Election duty above all else

Election officers of Arunachal Pradesh showed the way when the challenge was to choose between dedication to duty, and duty to the family.

The day Arunachal Pradesh voted, on April 11, 2019, to choose their parliamentary and legislative assembly representatives, extraordinary dedication by those at the helm of affairs came to the fore.

Two similar real-life stories are that of Thiyam Devaraj Singh, the District Informatics Officer (DIO), NIC, who is posted in East Siang HQ Pasighat and S.S. Chowdhury, the ADC of Jairampur in Changlang district, and in charge of the Nampong assembly constituency.

Devaraj lost his father on April 5, while Chowdhury lost his mother on March 31. However, Devaraj did not go back to Bishnupur, Thiyam Leikai in Manipur, for his father’s last rites and Chowdhury did not go to Kolkata for his mother’s cremation and funeral rituals. All because they could not forsake the call of duty.

“I am really proud to have a colleague officer like Devaraj,” said East Siang HQ Electoral Registration Officer Sibo Pasing, “who has decided to stay back, looking at the enormous responsibilities he has on his shoulders for the successful conduct of the simultaneous elections. The DIO is the one who manages ERONET, SUVIDHA, C-VIGIL, EMS and many more IT-related issues of elections and, without him, we could not imagine the smooth functioning of the district election office at that critical hour.”

Led by East Siang DEO, Kinny Singh, there was a condolence meeting to mourn the passing of Thiyam Shamungouba Singh, Devaraj’s father, at the Siang guesthouse. Most of the officers got to know about the demise of their colleague’s father on April 7, two days after the demise.

Changlang DEO R.K. Sharma said it was rare to find such commitment and spirit of sacrifice. “The officer (Chowdhury) told me that his mother was unwell,” Sharma said. “When it was time, the officer took the call to attend to his professional duty.”

Responding to a question from this daily, CEO Kaling Tayeng said, “The election family, from the ECI down to the DEOs concerned, commends the selfless sacrifice of the officers and the priority they gave to their duty.”

Another electoral official, Obang Mibang, who is the Nodal Officer cum DLMT (EVM and SVEEP) of Upper Siang district, also carried on the responsibilities for the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections despite the fact that he lost his father on March 22, 2019. He is the person responsible for all awareness activities and EVM management in his district. In an effort to create awareness on EVM-VVPAT he reached out to all polling stations under his jurisdiction.

- Office of CEO (Arunachal Pradesh)
Women power
With women leading from the front in all fields, it was not surprising that the women of Saran district in Bihar participated more than the men in the Lok Sabha 2019 polls.

In the last week of October 2018, Subrata Kumar Sen, the District Magistrate of Saran, Bihar, was on a visit to the Maker Block in the district. During the inspection of government works in Phulwaria Panchayat, he was approached by some local women from Mahadalit Tola. While in conversation with them, Sen realized that the women belonged to the marginalized groups of society; they were illiterate and did not have their names on the voters’ list.

Thereafter, the District Magistrate planned to organize a camp in Phulwaria Panchayat with the help of Jeevika (a self-help group for the economic upliftment of rural women) and Anganwadi centres. The camp, named ‘Sashakt Camp’, was highly publicised in all the villages around Phulwaria Panchayat.

By the end of the camp, 123 women voters applied to add their names and 92 women applied to correct their entries, while around 423 women checked their names in the voter list. These results were very encouraging from just this one camp. After the successful completion of this camp, directions were given to organize more camps across the district. As a result, by October 29, 2018, the number of woman applicants for voter card enrollment was much higher than that of men.

Motivated by this step forward,
various programmes were launched to further increase women participation in the electoral process. These included:

**SVEEP activities like ‘Godbharayi’ and ‘Annaprasana’ in Aganwadi centres**

These events created a festive and encouraging atmosphere among women electors just before the elections. It also fostered constructive co-operation at the community level.

**Take Home Ration (THR)**

During THR distribution in Anganwadi centres, bags were distributed with awareness messages displayed on them, to encourage the beneficiaries to vote. The rural women were very enthusiastic to receive the THR bags and also pledged to participate in voting, along with each member of their family. This activity was conducted in all Anganwadi centres in Saran district.

**Model Polling Stations**

Model or mock polling booths were established to train polling personnel. As the Model Code of Conduct was enacted, static model polling stations were also established in all the 20 block offices of the district. Block Development Officers and Child Development Project Officers were instructed to conduct weekly tour programmes and create awareness regarding elections and the polling process among women voters.

**Sugamata Express**

The Sugamata Express was started to connect the PwD voters in the electoral process in Saran district. This vehicle provided EVM and VVPAT training and also facilitated polling-station-wise primary health check-ups for PwD voters. A team of doctors and therapists along with master trainers of EVM and VVPAT were deployed in this vehicle. Rural women voters also participated in the awareness activities conducted by the Sugamata Express.

Saran district consists of two Lok Sabha constituencies, 19-Maharajganj and 20-Saran. With all these measures, Saran saw a considerably higher women voter turnout than men. On poll day, as compared to 53.84 per cent men, 59.57 per cent women turned up to cast their vote and enthusiastically exercised their democratic duty.

- Office of CEO (Bihar)
FROM THE FIELD
CHHATTISGARH

Voting for a wedding with a difference
A young couple set an example with a wedding that celebrated democracy.

Manish Sahoo from Chhattisgarh’s Balod district got married just a few days before the commencement of the 17th Lok Sabha Elections commenced. He tied the knot with Tejashwari on April 13, 2019 and as the country was at the peak of the election season during that time, the couple came up with innovative measures to create voter awareness among their guests.

Tejashwari, the bride, applied mehendi on her hands with the message ‘100% Matdaan’. They even set up a tent for their wedding with vote-appeal boards all around, displaying message such as “Aao milkar matdaan kare” and “Mera vote, mera desh”.

Their wedding was attended by nearly 700 guests, who were all very impressed with the election-related planning of the bridegroom and bride. In fact, before leaving her house, Tejashwari made sure that all her family members and guests took a pledge to participate in the General Election.

- Office of CEO (Chhattisgarh)

A young couple set an example with a wedding that celebrated democracy.
Citizens’ Townhall to #MakeYourMark

A critical interface between the electoral community, especially first-time voters, and policymakers had far-reaching impact.

Being a part of the largest democracy in the world affords us many fundamental rights as citizens, but it also places a crucial responsibility on our shoulders: the duty and power to exercise our franchise. To inspire more than 130 million first-time voters to cast their vote in the Lok Sabha Elections 2019, Facebook India collaborated with Josh Talks to design a pan-India campaign – #MakeYourMark.

Launched in 2018, the campaign was awarded the National Media Award by the Hon’ble President of India for successfully educating young individuals on the power of their vote. The digital campaign, disseminated in eight vernacular languages, tapped into Facebook’s extensive network, and informed citizens about their power to make a difference in the democratic process.

In the second phase of the #MakeYourMark campaign, Facebook and Josh Talks launched a unique series called ‘The Citizens’ Townhall’. The first edition of this series took place on January 21, 2019, followed by events in Jaipur, Hyderabad, Bhopal, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Thiruvananthapuram, Goa, Lucknow, Patna, Shillong, Aizawl, Guwahati and parts of Punjab. The Citizens’ Townhall introduced the concept of having a dialogue with experts, to bridge the gap between our diverse, impactful community and policymakers who implement changes. It aimed to conduct a conversation with young voters, inform and educate them. During the Townhalls, the campaign engaged the offices of 15 State Chief Electoral Officers, more than 2,500 young voters offline and more than three lakh individuals online.

A special session for ASHA activists was also organised. ASHA activists become crucial links in the electoral process. During the #MakeYourMark campaign, more than 200 ASHA activists were sensitised to ethical voting practices, the mitigation of fake news and misinformation, and the steps undertaken by the Election Commission of India to maintain electoral integrity. This special session was successful in reaching the masses right before the polls and, thereby, it created a measurable impact.

- Office of CEO (Delhi)
Despite naxal threat and difficult terrain, Garhwa saw maximum voting

The north-western district of Garhwa in Jharkhand is a Maoist-infested area. In this dense forest lies a mountain peak, Budha Pahad, covered by a dense jungle. This is a main hideout for Naxals in the region. Due to the peculiar geographical terrain and backward socio-political status of the region, it was a challenge to conduct safe elections as well as ensure a higher voter turnout in the area.

Before the Lok Sabha Elections 2019, emphasis had been laid on SVEEP activities, more prominently in the difficult areas, including another mountain peak named Saruwat Peak. The Sub Divisional Magistrate and Block Development Officer conducted the Booth awareness programme on this peak, which requires at least 100-120 minutes of trekking to reach the village. Another development that the district administration accomplished was the establishment of a CRPF camp, including a helipad, within 3 km of the polling station. The SVEEP activities and the relocation of the polling station that required less distance to be covered resulted in one of the highest voter turnouts – 72.87% – being recorded in the district. The voters also felt a greater sense of security and could vote freely as the booth was situated in the CRPF camp.

Under SVEEP, many programmes related to voter awareness were organised. Chunav Pathshala was

"It was a challenge to conduct safe elections as well as ensure a higher voter turnout in the area"
established at this booth. With the help of *Chunav Pathshala*, the Election Literacy Club and a Campus Ambassador, many voter awareness programmes were conducted, such as a signature campaign, a *Matdata Jagrukta padyatra*, and a ‘human chain’. In an important initiative, a *Matdata Jagrukta Shapath Petika* was provided to this booth in which voters put in their ‘Voter’s Pledge’ after filling it and vowing to vote. The Collector’s Appeal was provided to the Chunav Pathshala through which voters were made aware of the entire voting process, and motivated to come and vote on poll day.

Another programme, i.e., the Mashaal (Torch) Marathon was organised to motivate the voters. This run was started from Block Bargarh and wound through the adjoining areas of various booths across five days. This Torch played an important role in motivating and encouraging the voters to cast their vote. As a result of all the SVEEP activities, the area saw a remarkable increase in voting percentage. The effect of the programmes was evident with a 24% increase in the voter turnout at this polling station. Voting percentage increased from 48% in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections to a whopping 72.87% in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

- Office of CEO (Jharkhand)
Got wed, will vote
This newly married couple cast vote on their wedding day, clearly giving out the message that the opportunity to vote must be respected.

There should be no excuses for not voting.
This statement was duly noted by a couple in Hubli, Karnataka, who went ahead to fulfil their democratic duty and cast their vote soon after their wedding ceremonies concluded.

Amit Premnathsa Katwe and his wife took their wedding vows on April 23, 2019 in the presence of family and friends. It was the same day when the city was voting for the 17th Lok Sabha Elections.

Their polling booth was 250 m from their wedding venue. After the wedding ceremony, Katwe and his newly wedded wife went on as a married couple to cast their vote. Besides, their relatives (nearly 15 people), who were also voters in the same polling station also accompanied them cast their votes. In their opinion, every vote holds significant value and it is the duty of every citizen to exercise their franchise.

No wonder that, with such admirable displays of responsibility, the voter turnout in that particular polling station was 79.10 per cent.

- Office of CEO (Karnataka)
Kerala’s vigilant voters
How the cVIGIL App Proved its Worth

Kerala’s use of the cVIGIL app in the Lok Sabha Election 2019 displayed how technology can speed up and support redressal of MCC violations in the election period.

The state of Kerala saw more than 64,000 cases reported via cVIGIL in the country, the maximum number of incidents reported in which action was taken in a state before the 17th Lok Sabha Elections in 2019. cVIGIL (Vigilant Citizen) is an app launched by the Election Commission of India for citizens to report violations related to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and Expenditure. It is a fast-track complaint reception and redressal system during the elections.

This user-friendly android app can be used for reporting violations from the date of notifications for bye-election/assembly/parliamentary elections. The uniqueness of the app is that it only allows live photo/video with auto location capture from within the app to ensure digital evidence for flying squads to act upon in a time-bound manner. By using this app, citizens can immediately report incidents of political misconduct within minutes of having witnessed them and without having to rush to the office of the Returning Officer.

The complaints raised in Kerala included those regarding campaigning during the ban period, campaigning within 200 metres of the polling booth, display of firearms, intimidation, gifts or coupons distribution, liquor and money distribution, paid news, posters without mandatory declaration, posters/banners without permission, property defacement, religious or communal speeches or messages, transportation of public for rallies, transportation of voters on polling day, uses of speakers beyond permitted time and vehicle or convoy without permission, among others. The maximum cases reported were under the category of posters/banners without permission (39,245 cases) followed by property defacement (5699 cases), and religious and communal speeches/messages (332 cases).

Appropriate action was taken in 100% of the cases that were found to be genuine. The matters were taken to logical end before the election results were declared. Flying squads took immediate action when a case was registered by a concerned citizen. In addition, flying squads seized a total of ₹10.6 crore in cash, liquor worth almost a crore rupees, drugs and narcotics worth ₹24.57 crore, precious metals worth ₹4 crore, all adding up to a total of about ₹40 crore. Kannur saw the maximum number of cases reported via cVIGIL (12,381 cases) and the lowest number was from Idukki (308 cases).

cVIGIL connects vigilant citizens with the District Control Room, the Returning Officer and Field Unit (Flying Squads) / Static Surveillance Teams, thereby creating a rapid and accurate reporting, action and monitoring system. All that is required is to click a picture or a two-minute video of the activity violating the MCC and describe it briefly, before registering the complaint. GIS information captured with the complaint automatically flags it to the concerned District Control Room, permitting flying squads to be routed to the spot within few minutes. The app also has inbuilt features to prevent its misuse.

- Office of CEO (Kerala)
The tale of a tractor trolley bridge

Wonders never cease in the voters’ commitment to reach their polling booth!

Two days before the Maharashtra Assembly elections, torrential rainfall in Baramati Taluka, Pune, resulted in heavy water logging. In a village called Kambleshwar, the situation became even worse due to floods, because the village rests on the bank of River Nira. The polling booth area was flooded to four feet and there was no easy access to enter it.

To deal with this problem, the local administration, with help of the people, came up with an innovative solution. They lined up tractor trolleys to set up a bridge. Six trolleys were connected to form a 50-metre-long pathway connecting the main road to polling booth, which the voters could then reach to cast their votes!

- Office of CEO (Maharashtra)
Sailing smoothly on a thermocol boat

Voters in Beed, Maharashtra, show their determination to vote, come what may!

It was difficult, nearly impossible, for the 14 voters from Bhim Naik Tanda in Majalgaon (Assembly constituency), Beed district, Maharashtra. This is a remote habitat of tribals, who had to reach polling booth 131- ZP school Khalwat-Limgaon. As luck would have it, as much as 64 millimetre rainfall was recorded in this area on polling day. River Dev was on in full spate, resulting in no access to the polling station. The helpless voters, including women, men, PwDs and senior citizens, were stranded.

It was then that Surekha Swami, Tehsildar, Vadvani, came forward. With the help of the Mandal Adhikari (Board Officers), she managed to arrange for a hand-paddle boat made of thermocol from the people of the Bhoi community to help voters reach their polling booth.

It was an unusual experience for voters, but more than that it showed the incredible dedication of the administration as well as the electors to ensure that no voter was left behind!

- Office of CEO (Maharashtra)
Elections go green in Meghalaya

A comprehensive plan of action was carried out in Meghalaya to make the Green Election campaign a success.

Climate change is a serious global threat and it is essential to protect our environment for the years to come. The state of Meghalaya initiated measures in both letter and spirit to follow directives from the Election Commission of India (ECI) advisory in the Green Election Campaign. The office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Meghalaya, raised awareness by engaging the public in discussions on substitutes to non-biodegradable and polythene products and paraphernalia with indigenous organic and eco-friendly products. The campaign was anchored on six verticals:

**Public Awareness**

An awareness and training programme of poll volunteers was organized on October 4, 2019, at the Sub-Divisional Officer’s (Civil) office. The CEO urged the public, the political parties and all election stakeholders to accord centrality to the environment by closely following the Green Protocol with respect to Green Election. He also informed the audience, comprising mostly young people, about the initiative of the ECI to ensure that elections are conducted employing eco-friendly practices and eco-friendly paraphernalia in Green polling stations.

The office of the CEO also effectively partnered with various Green ambassadors such as Radio Mirchi’s RJ Madboy Nicky J. who spread awareness on the ills of plastic use. The RJ, already a known Green Champion, used his

![The CEO Meghalaya addresses the gathering](image1)

![RJ Nicky J. (Bah Manik) speaking on the Green Protocol](image2)

![The SDO (Civi) addressing green poll volunteers](image3)
creative ideas to communicate various green practices in an entertaining manner.

Election Icon Kit Shangpliang was also a part of the event and held the attention of the young crowd. The duo interacted with each other and the crowd, effectively communicating the need for everyone to wake up to the menace of irresponsible plastic use. They persuasively urged the gathering to make a difference through Green Election.

**Green Election Logo**
A logo was conceived to build the for the Green Election campaign based on local nuances. This included the prominent ‘living root bridge’ as a symbol of respecting and co-habiting with nature. The logo was used throughout the length and breadth of the 26-Shella (ST) Assembly Constituency to communicate the importance of Green Election.

**Green Messaging**
The public messaging spelled out the need to take ownership the cause of Green Election so that each and every citizen could play a meaningful role to help ensure that elections are conducted while respecting nature. Every voter was reminded that each voter makes a difference by ‘being the change’ for the sake of his village, her family and the entire community.

**Use of Biodegradable Materials**
The CEO and team ensured that all election stakeholders used biodegradable materials. Samples were made of wood, cloth and bamboo to ensure that green ideas percolate to the
last levels. Awareness materials, covering EVM-VVPAT or Accessible Election, were made using planks and earth-coloured drapes. Other remarkably eco-friendly items included dustbins made of beautifully crafted bamboo, paper pens with seeds inside and biodegradable bags, among others. The seed pens used by the polling officers to plant trees and the use of the highly symbolic plantable green pens proved both symbolic and effective, with their messages amplifying and resonating far and wide.

**Engaging with Political Parties**

Reaching out to the political parties was a well-received effort. Every election, political parties would print and publish tonnes of materials, using plastic. The single use of plastic has been a menace for many years, but this year, the Shella Bye Election witnessed the drastic scaling down of single-plastic use and the willingness of political parties to join hands to ensure that the idea of Green Election was a success.

**Training of Green Volunteers**

Green Volunteers were trained to handle waste, and to educate voters and the general public on the Green Protocol to be followed in polling stations on voting day. Role-play and inspirational talks were conducted during the training programme to sensitise and prepare volunteers to deal with instances where voters would violate the Green Protocol.

The combined efforts proved that the voting community can come together to champion the positive ideology and practice of Green Elections. The idea gained organic support from the young people who understand all issues surrounding climate change and pollution very well. The Green Election campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material used for Green Election to 26-Shella (ST) AC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previously Used Plastic Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic bucket and mugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pouch ID Card (Plastic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cup for indelible ink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic container containing black envelopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic pigeon-holes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass for drinking water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunny bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloth bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic scale/ruler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small wastepaper basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry bags (plastic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mementoes for first five early voters (plastic)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Above) Use of clay pot container for indelible ink (Right) Green Volunteer

acted as an ideal model and a catalyst for future endeavours.

- Office of CEO (Meghalaya)
The ‘walk’ for democracy
Making the Inaccessible Accessible. A series of measure taken in Odisha helped poll officers reach the conflicted, unreachable areas to conduct fair and free election.

Actor Rajkummar Rao’s National Award-winning film Newton was based on a government clerk, who was sent out on election duty in the Naxal-affected and conflict-ridden jungles of central India. There, he tries his best to conduct free and fair voting despite the looming fear of guerrilla attacks by Naxals. The film received a positive response from the audience, who were surprised to see the kind of danger present in those dense forests.

This film was inspired by several real-life events of conducting elections in such Naxal-controlled areas. Keeping in mind the previous incidents carried out by Naxal outfits during elections in certain notorious areas of Odisha, a set of robust and meticulous plans were implemented as part of election management. A tight security circle of BSF, DVF and SOG Jawans were also put in place for the election to be conducted in a fair manner.

However, despite all precautions, specific intelligence input received on the morning of April 10, 2019, shifted all the attention towards Bonda Hills in Mudulipada area. The District Election Officer and the Superintendent of Police, Malkangiri, immediately visited the transit house and had a good interaction to encourage the polling parties, who were visibly nervous. A detailed strategic plan to thwart any eventuality was then prepared on the spot by the District Election Officer and the Superintendent of Police.

As a part of this planning, a couple of

“A detailed strategic plan to thwart any eventuality was prepared on the spot"
The runners were sent to Bonda Hill areas at 5.00 p.m. on April 10 by motorcycle and they returned after seven hours at midnight with information regarding the clearance of the path from Khairput to Mudulipada. Only then were the polling parties allowed to start their journey to the respective polling stations during the wee hours of April 11. Until the departure of all the polling parties, the risk, though palpably high at that moment, was not allowed to be felt by any member.

Consequently, all the polling personnel became enthusiastic to move to the polling station and conduct free and fair elections without a shred of fear. The concerned Sector Officers led the party to the destination with spare EVMs and VVPATs in their vehicle. After conducting the election, the real challenge before the District Administration was to bring back the polling personnel safely with the polled EVMs and VVPATs. As a part of the strategy of the District Election Officer, all six polling parties, consisting of 40 personnel, were made to walk down the undulating terrain for 15 kilometres, under the tight protection of security personnel.

This was designed in such a way that there was absolutely ‘zero’ loss to human resources, and no damage to EVMs and other machineries. Thus, the inaccessible areas of Malkangiri district were made accessible and the slogan of ‘Accessible Election’ was emphatically inscribed in everybody’s mind in the truest sense.

- Office of CEO (Odisha)
Jai Jawan! Jai Matdaan!

Young citizens and jawans joined hands to create voter awareness on the border.

Munabao village in Rajasthan marks the last railway station of the North-Western Railways of India, and is also the last railway station for the international Thar Express train, which connects India and Pakistan. In this village, a unique SVEEP cultural event was organised when the youth of neighbouring Barmer and the Border Security Force (BSF) jawans came together. The event conducted by District Administration, Barmer, in collaboration with Western Command of BSF on April 27, 2019, was aimed at creating voter awareness on the farthest frontiers of India.

Young students, mostly girls of Jai Narayan Vyas B.Ed. Girls’ College, Barmer, travelled all the way to celebrate the countrywide ‘Desh Ka Mahatyohar’ (renamed ‘Sarhad Pe Loktantra Ka Utsav’ for the unique event) with the BSF jawans. The other participants were drawn from Scouts and Guides, Rovers and Rangers, and NCC Cadets. The event was graced by the Central General Observer (CGO) of the Election Commission of India Sunil Kumar, who was present as the chief guest.

The CGO saluted the courageous spirit of the BSF jawans, and expressed gratitude on behalf of the people of the country for keeping the borders safe and secure from all external threats. He stated that the contribution of the BSF might be summed up in their official motto ‘Duty unto Death’.

Addressing the gathering, Kumar observed that this unique event, being celebrated at the frontlines of the nation, had the potential to radiate the SVEEP message to all parts of the country, and that the SVEEP spirit would be imbibed by all right up to the farthest corners of India. “It is our brave border patrolmen that keep us safe from perennial external threats, and we should honour their sacrifices,” the CGO said.

Kumar exhorted the youth to lead a life of honesty, hard work and sacrifice, which would help both their country and countrymen. He made an appeal to the electors of Barmer to go out and vote in large numbers on the poll day, April 29, 2019. He expressed the belief that only concerted efforts would fulfil the goal of the Election Commission of India slogan: No Voter to be Left Behind.

Apart from electoral insights, Kumar also explained the mode of
operation of the international Thar Express across the border (given the fact that Munabao is last station for the Thar Express from Indian side). The 240 km Barmer-Pakistan border (out of the total India-Pakistan IB length of 1048 km) is quite porous and sensitive, and the BSF has to be constantly vigilant to see that no contraband (like fake currency, forged documents and arms & ammunition) enters the country through the cross-border train. To ensure this, nobody is allowed to board the train at Munabao railway station (as per Government orders).

The CGO regaled the mixed gathering with a patriotic song in his native Garhwali language, ‘Hamri Dharti Gadhwal’. Uplifted by personal feeling and sentiment, his rendition was appreciated with loud in the Conference Hall.

The 2nd Commandment of the BSF, Anil Singh Rawat, also addressed the young participants. He first enlightened the gathering about the theme of ‘Elections and Voter Participation’, and later offered a number of career tips about the BSF being a great career option for the youth, steeped as it is in the spirit of adventure and sacrifice for the motherland.

A few other participants also took turns to display their artistic talents. BSF jawan Rameshwar Choudhary recited a poem titled “He Jawan”, while another BSF jawan, Mangi Dan Barhat, recited the poem titled “Man Ke Bhaav”. Finally, the young participants collaborated with the BSF jawans to form a colossal 150 feet x 150 feet map of India on ground in the huge compound of the Munabao Conference Hall.

It truly was a collaborative celebration!

- Office of CEO (Rajasthan)
JOGAJOG: An efficient and effective communication system

A mobile app and web portal not only made it easy to communicate fast at critical times, but also established an accessible and extensive platform for comprehensive communication during elections.

The development of an effective communication system can help voters deal with challenges during election days. The election machinery of Murshidabad district in West Bengal analysed these problems and came to the conclusion that a GIS-based communication facility was the need of the hour to combat difficulties faced by electors and achieve an accessible, free, fair and peaceful election. This GIS-based mobile app and web portal, named ‘JOGAJOG’ (a Bengali word meaning communication), was developed for the following reasons:

- It gives electors effective access to information about the location of the polling station and shows directions to it on a real-time basis.
- Using this mobile app, instead of having only a few control room numbers, the electors – based on the type of their requirements/ grievances – could make a call or send an SMS to a large set of election officials directly, ranging from the Booth Level contact person to the District Election Officer. Nearly 40,000 contact numbers of election officials, including polling personnel, and GIS-based locations of polling stations made this a veritable digital election directory. It helped the election officials to monitor any kind of election-related activities through this app or web portal.
- The database was controlled by the Admin User to give partial access of contact numbers to the users, based on the sensitivity of the type of election officials.

JOGAJOG: the App

- This Android-based app was provided free to all. Citizens and election officials could download and install this app on their mobile phones. However, the web portal and its access were limited to election officials such as the ARO/ RO/ Cell In-charges/ ADMs/ DM and DEO/ Observers and control rooms.
- An SMS Gateway was integrated into the application, so that there was no charge for sending an SMS. No network traffic congestion limits were there and multiple users could make a call instantly.
- The platform had integrated GIS Map and Location search systems. It was realised that new electors are mostly unaware of their polling station locations, particularly in

FROM THE FIELD
WEST BENGAL

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urban and peri-urban areas. Any elector or polling personnel could search for any polling station and the GIS-based route map could be accessed to reach the polling station. This significantly helped the new electors and the polling personnel in reaching polling stations without any problem.

The app greatly reduced the need for a paper phonebook. This digital platform was not a mere excel sheet or PDF file, but rather it had a smartly developed user interface to search for an appropriate election official for a particular situation, through Filter Options. A click on the appropriate officer in web page or on the mobile app page, would generate an Auto Call or send an SMS from the smartphone of the user.

The Call Log Directory was an important part of checking the user level activity and it helped to record user level information.

The app worked as an Accidental Crisis Manager from P-3 Day to P+1 Day. As thousands of calls are received on these days. Addressing all these calls, by passing on the information or directing an officer to do a job and later receiving the feedback is a herculean task, and this app made this very easy with a single click on the desktop/mobile screen.

After the completion of the poll, the call log was checked and it was found that nearly 4,000 calls were made or received by using this web platform/mobile app and 500 SMSs were sent over just two days P-1 and Poll Day. The AC, PC and District control rooms used this platform very successfully on poll day and made it an effective instrument of speedy disposal of citizen complaints.

- Office of CEO (West Bengal)
Electoral Literacy Club (ELC)

A platform to facilitate electoral literacy through engaging activities and hands on experience.

Total ELCs
Over 6.8 Lakh
Engaging Resources

Around 25 interesting and thought-provoking activities have been designed, after multiple consultations with key Stakeholders. Each imparts specific learnings. Activities are described in 8 resource guides for specific target groups.

--- Schools ---

ELC Resource Guide for Class IX
ELC Resource Guide for Class X
ELC Resource Guide for Class XI
ELC Resource Guide for Class XII

--- Colleges ---

ELC in Colleges
Future Voters
Operational in Over 1.2 Lakh Schools

--- Chunav Pathshala ---

Community Members
Formed at Over 4.7 Lakh polling stations

--- Voter Awareness Forums (VAFs) ---

Formed at Over 58 Thousand Govt. institutions, Corporates etc.

--- Common FAQs Handbook ---

Voter Awareness Forum
‘NO VOTER TO BE LEFT BEHIND’
Inclusive and Accessible Election

Accessibility to all is not just a slogan but the very spirit of the mandate of the Election Commission of India. The essence of democracy lies in embracing each eligible voter, and especially those who may be hindered by disabilities. Here is a heartening walk-through to the many places where accessibility, especially for PwDs, was a moving, inspiring and elevating reality in the Lok Sabha Election 2019.

Making a Difference to Differently-abled Voting

During the parliamentary elections of 2019, the principle of accessible elections was thoroughly followed in the North and Middle Andaman District to make the world’s largest democratic exercise inclusive and participative for all. PwD voters and senior citizens were mapped polling-booth-wise to provide targeted and need-based assistance on poll day.

A special initiative, called ‘Anganwadi Sevika’, was launched under the Department of Social Welfare to ensure that all differently-abled voters could be facilitated to cast their vote. All the polling stations were equipped with sufficient number of wheelchairs and it was ascertained that all polling stations had sturdy ramps for the convenience of PwD electors. The election personnel were also specially trained to accompany and assist, guide the differently-abled voters and make the voting process smooth for them. Special emphasis was laid on the sensitization of the polling personnel about the unique needs of the differently abled. Braille signage on electronic voting machines (EVMs) was also provided to the differently-abled persons at the requisite polling stations.

Another voter awareness initiative under the theme ‘No Voter Left Behind’ was also undertaken among the remotely located polling stations of Rangat Tehsil, such as Bangaon, Wrafter Creek and Macartu valley, to persuade voters to participate in the election.

All the hard work of polling personnel bore fruit when more than 85 per cent of the differently-abled persons voted with enthusiasm.
Teamwork for Total Accessibility

It was April 11, 2019 – Lok Sabha Election day in the Lower Dibang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh. Yilly Meme beamed with happiness to see members of the Accessible Election team, who arrived at her home to escort and assist her for polling. She had given up on voting previously due to problems in reaching the polling booth. This time, the team helped her into a wheelchair and she was able to exercise her right to vote.

With the objective of ‘No Voter Left Behind’ for the Lok Sabha 2019 polls, the mission for the inclusion of specially-abled people started by constituting an Accessible Election team, months before the election. The team was headed by a Nodal Officer, who undertook a door-to-door survey with the help of BLOs, NGOs and local villagers to identify the accurate numbers and types of disabilities of PwD voters to provide assistance as required. The population of persons with disabilities in Dibang is only 1 per cent of the total voter population. Nonetheless, the importance of PwDs cannot be undermined nor can their right to vote be compromised.

The Scouts and Guides cadets were included to assist the team. The team was able to successfully escort many of the PwD voters from their residences to the polling booths to cast their vote and back to their homes.

The district icon of PwD voters, Arjun Meme, expressed his views regarding the difficulties in winning the confidence of PwD voters while encouraging them to participate on the poll day. According to him, sometimes volunteers in the process are doubted as having a particular political affinity, which is definitely not the case.

T. Modi, Nodal Officer (Accessible Election), while sharing her experiences said that the main obstacle is the discomfort of the family members of the PwD voters towards their disabilities. Many prefer to take their PwD family members to the polling booth at a time when other voters have left and the booth is almost empty.

Despite all odds, the Accessible Election team has left their impact in significantly increasing the PwD voter’s turnout. The Lower Dibang Valley witnessed a PwD voter turnout of 92.06 per cent as compared to the general voter turnout of 81.3 per cent – out of the 126 registered PwD voters in the district, 116 PwD voters turned out to cast their vote.
It was the morning of poll day on April 23, 2019 for Assam’s Goalpara district. There was a buzz of excitement all around with people thronging the polling booths. Voting had begun and the District Election Officer, Varnali Deka, was on her feet from the wee hours, attending to issues and coordinating with officers, master trainers, engineers and security agencies to solve all matters. The focus of the district election machinery was the quick resolution of issues. As the district had polling booths in a number of remote and far-flung areas, meticulous planning had been done with the placement of EVM/VVPATs, engineers, field staff, master trainers and senior officers at strategic points for quick response.

A special focal point for the district on poll day was the facilitation of PwD voters. In order to assist all the identified PwD voters, travel plans had been chalked up, special needs assessment and redressal done, and poll volunteers engaged – in sum, a comprehensive one-to-one mapping of the needs of all the PwD voters had been carried out under the personal supervision of the District Election Officer in keeping with the ECI motto – ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’.

While the DEO was visiting the polling booths in the morning hours, she received the information that a young PwD voter, Arati Paul, was at home and eager to vote. As she was nearby, the DEO herself went to the PwD voter’s house. To the surprise and delight of Arati’s guardians, she picked the young voter up in her own vehicle. On the way, the DEO learnt that Arati was almost 90 per cent locomotor-disabled. She had studied up to class X when she was affected by a nerve disorder that progressively affected her movements.

As wheelchairs had already been kept ready at all polling booths marked with ‘locomotor disabled voters requiring wheelchair assistance’, on reaching the polling booth, the DEO could immediately take the young PwD voter into the compound.

Arati could conveniently and confidently exercise her franchise. She was dropped back by the DEO on her way to the next polling station. She was also felicitated with a traditional ‘gamosa’ and given a special goodie bag with traditional savouries.

This was only one of the many instances of accessibility in the election process. For the first time in the district, a polling station was manned by a team of PwD polling personnel, a positive confidence-building measure much appreciated by the people and media. T-shirts were given to all the PwD polling persons as a measure of appreciation and it encouraged many others in similar circumstances to come out and vote.
“There are so many publicity campaigns urging people to come out and cast their vote, but what about people like me, who are unable to reach the polling station due to physical disabilities? Even if I want, I cannot exercise my right to vote!” a frustrated voice complained to the PwD Nodal Officer over the phone. The caller was Rashmikaben Patel, a registered voter of the 3-Patan parliamentary constituency.

Due to her physical disability and consequent restricted mobility, Rashmikaben was not able to cast her vote in any previous elections. Whenever she would read about democratic duties and rights of citizens, she would always feel left out. But Lok Sabha Election 2019 changed all this for her.

Rashmikaben came across one of the advertisements and awareness campaigns of the Election Commission of India about various facilities being made available for PwDs at the polling stations to help them in casting their vote. That is where she came across the number of the PwD Nodal Officer and made the call.

On receiving the call, the Nodal Officer assured her that the team would provide all possible facilities to help her cast her vote. A team was sent to her residence on poll day with a wheelchair. However, on reaching her home, the team realized that Rashmikaben would not be able to sit in it.

Immediately, a special vehicle was arranged for her and she was assisted to the polling station where volunteers facilitated her in casting her vote, after which she was again taken back home with utmost care.

“I never thought I would be able to participate in the electoral process and cast my vote due to my disability,” an emotional Rashmikaben said. “But the various initiatives by the Election Commission of India, particularly the availability of transport, wheelchairs and volunteers at the polling station are really very heartening. I could cast my vote because of these facilities and I heartily thank all concerned people as I could begin my democratic journey after all these years.

The Beginning of a Democratic Journey in Patan, Gujarat

The Special Story of Two Unique Sisters

An amazing experience unfolded for those at polling station number 97, Samanpura, Digha Legislative Assembly, Patna, on May 19 Lok Sabha election 2019. Sabah and Farah, a pair of conjoined twins, came to vote. More than at their being conjoined, people were awe-struck by their courage, enthusiasm and zeal.

Sherunnishan, a Booth Level Officer, said that Sabah and Farah had cast their vote for the first time in Bihar Assembly General elections 2015 as a single voter on single voter identity card with their name inscribed as Sabah Farah.

However, this time round, for the first time, the conjoined sisters were recognized as separate persons by the Election Commission of India and were able to cast their independent votes. Sabah and Farah shared their emotional experience and said, “We are happy to be physically connected with each other as God has made us this way, but we always wanted to having our separate identities and be independently recognized. Voting as two separate voters is equal to accepting our different existences, which is a very exciting and happy experience for us.” It was nothing less then their ‘dream come true’ moment when they were recognized as two separate citizens of the country who could enjoy their right to vote equally.
Imagine a kind of wheelchair that can be taken up the stairs, brought down and also be safely halted midway! As amazing as it sounds, this idea was successfully executed in the Maharashtra Assembly Election 2019 by a societal organisation called V Citizens Action Network (VCAN), who aimed to ensure maximum participation of PwD voters in the election.

Branded as ‘Seedee’, this is an easy-to-use, portable wheelchair designed to climb stairs. Seedee has a powerful motor that allows a relatively small attendant to safely transport a larger passenger up and down stairways. Seedee is suitable for both indoor or outdoor use in public buildings as well as in private homes.

This first-of-its-kind facility was used in several identified polling booths in Mumbai Suburban and Mumbai City Districts, as well as in a booth in Nagpur. The service was totally free of cost, and it also included a trained staff to operate the wheelchairs. SEEDEE wheelchairs were exclusively used to provide the right assistance to senior citizens and PwD voters in the state.
The Election Commission of India lays high emphasis on accessible elections and the district administration made every possible effort to make election processes PwD-friendly.

A full team of polling personnel, comprising differently-abled persons, manned a polling station in the Lamlong Higher Secondary School polling station under Wangkhei AC in Imphal, Manipur. Their performance in the poll process was commendable and it gave a positive boost and confidence to their participation in the most important process in a democratic nation.

Full team of polling personnel, comprising PwD persons, manned a polling station in the Lamlong Higher Secondary School polling station under Wangkhei AC

Such initiatives go far beyond welfare, to make PwDs feel that they are equally capable and able to perform their duties. They certainly have an impact on their attitudes towards their capabilities and encourage more parity in treatment and societal outlook. The participation of PwDs in the electoral system gives new meaning to India’s unwavering faith in and commitment to democracy.
Accessibility

Hema, a 28-year-old visually impaired citizen of Amritsar, Punjab, wanted to enroll herself as a voter before the Lok Sabha Election 2019, but she had no means to do that. She sought help through the Toll Free Helpline number 1950 and, thereafter, she was not only facilitated with all the necessary information by a call centre executive, but a Booth Level Officer (BLO) also visited her at home to help her fill up form no. 6. She received her Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) on time and she was also facilitated on poll day through the pick-and-drop facility.

In order to make elections entirely inclusive, accessible and hassle-free for PwD electors like Hema, multiple initiatives were undertaken up by the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab. These ranged from identifying the barriers or gaps in the inclusion of PwDs in the electoral process to arriving at solutions for the challenges faced by them in exercising their rights. These interventions and SVEEP initiatives gave confidence to PwD electors that their disability will not be a hindrance in casting their votes.

The accessibility oriented measures included printing 10,274 Braille voter EPICs and Braille voter slips each, and 6,171 Braille voter guides, to ensure a smoother voting experience for visually impaired voters. Besides, at least one wheelchair in every polling booth was available on request for pick-and-drop facility from the PwD voters’ homes to the polling station to enable a barrier-free and inclusive experience for them.

Special vehicles for PwDs, labelled as Divyang Rath, were arranged for to and fro transportation between the PwD voter’s residence and polling station. A total of 1.7 lakh student volunteers were included to sensitize them to the needs of PwDs and they were present at the help desks at polling booths to assist voters in the best way possible.

The apathy and barriers earlier faced by many PwDs like Hema in exercising their right in the election process were successfully erased. Now moving forward, in addition to accessible information and a supportive environment, it is imperative to continue to ensure that the rights of PwD electors are protected and facilitated in the true spirit of the mandate.

We Shall Overcome – with Accessibility

At the Forefront

It was a hot afternoon in April 2019 when a rally on voter awareness by the students of Muthu Rathna Arangam Higher Secondary School in Puducherry was flagged off. An unexpected scene awaited the people of Puducherry.

Joseph, a differently-abled person, was leading the rally. He encouraged all the citizens to participate in the upcoming elections.

Joseph is a volunteer who conducts various social activities, besides running a small shop that makes rubber stamps and binds books. Though a school dropout, he always believed in supporting and working for good causes and is very popular in his neighborhood for this.

Not only did he lead the students’ rally but also created a ‘wave’ in the minds of Puducherrians by promoting ‘100 per cent voting’. His enthusiasm to volunteer and his noble intention to motivate his fellow citizens to come forward to cast their votes was highly commendable.

People like Joseph, who imbibe and display democratic values, are the binding force between electoral institutions and the public. Joseph’s deed was a perfect illustration of how the positive social impact of SVEEP on society can make a responsible citizen become a shining example for everyone to emulate.

We Shall Overcome –

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Age is Just a Number!

They are eager and regular voters, they are determined to exercise their rights and duties as citizens, and they are all 100 not out! Meet the centenarians from around the country...

Proud citizens and voters

DELHI: Every single vote cast in an election is precious. During the General Election to Lok Sabha 2019, a distinguished set of centenarian voters from West Delhi Parliamentary Constituency were very enthusiastic to participate in the electoral process and make their choice matter.

All the three voters have been casting their vote since the first elections conducted in the country. They are 111-year-old Jasbir Singh, 101-year-old Dayal Chand Taneja and 103-year-old Sampati Devi. They have respected the value of our democratic outlook and successfully participated in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The families of these citizens shared that they felt proud of their fundamental right to vote.

They not only cast their vote early in the morning, but also motivated the next generations in their families and communities to vote. They emphasized the power and value of their single vote and that voting is not only the right of every citizen of India, but also his or her duty.

“Every adult citizen should vote”

DAYAL CHAND TANEJA, who is 111 years old, had stopped going out to vote due to age-related issues. But facilities offered by the CEO, Delhi’s office motivated him to vote during the 17th Lok Sabha election. He acknowledges the role of the to-and-fro transport facility on the polling day that helped him fulfil his conviction that every adult citizen of our democratic country must vote in the election.

Every single vote cast in an election is precious.

Ballots are no longer used

WEST BENGAL: In 164 Beleghata Assembly Constituency, a polling station consisted of eight booths during the 17th Lok Sabha Elections. A long queue of voters patiently waited to cast their vote. It was about 3 pm, and the sector officer was about to leave the polling premise. Just then, he saw an old lady on a wheelchair near the main gate of the polling premise. The sector officer hurriedly got out of his car and rushed to help the lady. He also called for the person manning the helpdesk there. Armed personnel also came to help the lady. The sector officer and others assisted the lady in exercising priority voting.

After the lady cast her vote and came out of the booth, the sector officer asked her age, to which she replied, “I have cast my vote in all the elections after independence. This time I am a little late.” The sector Officer understood that she was short of hearing. Her son replied on her behalf that she was approximately 100 years old and frequently took ill. In fact, even that day the doctor had requested her to remain in bed. However, that could not stop this high-spirited woman from fulfilling her duty on the auspicious day of polling. She
The Grand Old Lady of Kalimpong

JAY SHOVA RAI, who is 104-year-old, recollects that she has voted countless times in her life and is happy to continue to participate in the electoral process. She also says that she will vote in the upcoming elections and is determined to continue to vote as long as she lives.

She well recalls how years ago she had to wait in long queues to cast her vote but in recent times accessible voting has given her priority as an elderly voter and she no longer has to wait in queues.

The proud centenarian fondly remembers that when she voted for the first time, it was on a paper ballot. In later years, she has been happy to vote using the electronic voting machine, where she can cast her vote at the push of a button. She found it to be fascinating that in the last election she could see a paper slip in a new box-like machine after pushing the button.

The admirable lady further reminisces that some 20-30 years ago she got a new photo-bearing identity card and she was very excited to get it as it was the only government document in her possession that had a picture of her!

At this ripe old age, Jay Shova Rai, is quite energetic and active, and her fortitude in electoral participation is a source of inspiration to all.

Basappa had cast his first vote when he was thirty-four, during the first general election in 1951. Thereafter, he has participated in all the elections held to date in his constituency. He says, “Many good electoral reforms have been introduced in the country. Social justice and welfare of the people are the major concern for the public. The basic needs such as food, shelter, drinking water, health, clothes are essential for everyone for which we need a good and stable government.” According to him, all the voters must vote for a good and eminent candidate for better public service and no voter should miss the opportunity to vote. “The present system of election is voter-friendly and celebrated as a festival of democracy,” he concludes.

Applauding the voter-friendly system

KARNATAKA: Basappa, now 102 years old, runs his small business in J.C. Pura village in Chikkanayakanahalli, Tumakuru district, where he lives with his six sons and their families.

Basappa, now 102 years old

The present system of election is voter-friendly and celebrated as a festival of democracy

—Basappa
Every voter, every village matters

**ODISHA:** When a lady over 100 years old, escorted on a wheelchair, proudly reached her polling booth to cast her vote, she left everybody amazed with her high spirits. This was Lochana Naik, a voter from Bijepur, Odisha. She was warmly welcomed by the Project Director of District Rural Development Agencies for her effort towards participating in the state by-polls on October 21, 2019.

Be it parliamentary, assembly or district elections, Naik has always exercised her power to vote. Prior to this by-poll, her leg was injured. Nonetheless, her injury or old age did not dampen her will to fulfill her democratic duty.

Despite the lack of formal education, she understands the value of her vote in a democracy and today she is a great inspiration to the voters. She believes that one has the right to rights only if one does their duty towards the nation.

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**Volunteers came to take me to my designated polling station and I was the first person to vote there.**

—Ghungra Devi

**Gulabi Ram**, a farmer from Aala

**Jokhana village, cast his vote when India conducted its first election in 1952 and he has been participating in the electoral system ever since. At the 2019 Lok Sabha Election, he said, “For the first time, I have cast my vote through EVM-VVPAT and received a copy on successful voting. This is an absolutely new experience for me. I think this voting practice is very transparent and accountable. I also appreciate all efforts made by Commission to make the election so convenient to PwDs and senior citizens like me. I want to request every citizen to vote without any fear and any greed.”

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**Ghungra Devi**

**Lochana Naik, Bijepur, Odisha**
Unstoppable on election day

ARUNACHAL PRADESH: Nathong Sawen, who is 107 years old, hails from Jongphohate, a remote village nestled on top of a hillock under Yatdam circle of Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh. The centenarian enthusiastically participated in the Lok Sabha Election 2019 from 53-Changlang North (ST) Assembly Constituency. She lives with her two sons who are 63 and 61 years old respectively.

Though she looks pale and weak, and lacks the energy to move or talk much, she is able to recall her participation in the first election of the state, post its formation. She says, “We walked many miles to cast our votes as there was no road to the village”. She mentions that she has been voting in every election, be it the Lok Sabha election, state assembly elections or Panchayat polls since the election process started in the state in the year 1977.

However, for past ten years she is completely dependent on her sons to take her to the polling station. Her sons carried her on their backs, all the way from home to the polling station, which currently is about 300 meters downhill from her home. The determined lady has been the inspiration for generating voters’ awareness among the women in the village and encouraging them to participate in the election for a stronger democracy. No wonder the village recorded cent percent female voting in the simultaneous elections in Arunachal Pradesh on 11 April 2019.

The determined lady has been the inspiration for generating voters’ awareness among the women in the village.

The spirit of democracy

GUJARAT: Her body may be bent a little forward, but her spirit is ramrod straight! The 101-year-old Khairanbibi Pirmahmad Shaikh from Sarbbon village of Bardoli taluka in Surat district in Gujarat does not use a walking stick or spectacles. She walks on her own to her designated polling station, located at a distance of half a kilometre from her home.

When asked what motivates her to vote in this age, she replies, “As long as God keeps us alive, we should never refrain from any of our duties. As a responsible citizen, voting is our duty and we must cast our votes till we live.”

Khairanbibi is possibly the senior-most citizen of her village, and has voted in nearly every election held during her adulthood. She is very happy with the facilities provided to very senior citizens, PwD voters and other special-category voters. She feels that extending such facilities will encourage and motivate those who could not otherwise vote due to physical constraints.

As a responsible citizen, voting is our duty and we must cast our votes till we live.

—Khairanbibi Pirmahmad Shaikh
Women at the forefront

PUDDUCHERRY: Three centenarian voters, who have been participating in the polling process since the first Elections of Puducherry Union Territory, are the embodiment of a strong democracy.

101-year-old Vedhavalli of Sorapet Village recollects her experience as a voter since the first election held in 1964 after Puducherry became a part of India in 1962. Even after all these years, she has voted regularly and has even grown comfortable with the technological advancement in voting system through EVMs. Vedhavalli said she felt proud to take part in all elections and has always managed to walk to the polling station without the help of others.

Another heartwarming example is of 102-year-old K. Annamalai from Madukarai. He is fascinated by the new facilities implemented by the Election Commission of India during the General Elections to Lok Sabha 2019. He proudly claims that he has been consistently exercising his franchise from the first Indian elections and hopes that every citizen of the nation does the same. He added that SVEEP volunteers helped him reach the polling booth to cast his vote.

And then there’s a third centenarian voter from Veerampattinam, a coastal village of Puducherry. Sharing her tragic past, Mrs Poongavanam remembers that in the 2006 Legislative Assembly, when her village still mourned the deceased victims of the tsunami, she cast her vote and fulfilled her democratic duty.

It is laudable to note that despite their age and physical ailments, the centenarian voters fulfill their fundamental duty of casting their vote in each election to elect their representatives. Voters like them are the strength of a strong democracy and the high percentage of voter turnout out in Puducherry, with an average of 80 per cent and above.

In the 2006 Legislative Assembly, when her village still mourned the deceased victims of the tsunami, she cast her vote and fulfilled her democratic duty.  —Poongavanam

Vote fearlessly

UTTARAKHAND: Ambika Devi is 101 years old and a resident of Almora district in Uttarakhand. She has been a farmer and a homemaker for a large part of her life. Ambika Devi proudly said that she had voted in country’s first election post-independence. She shares her excitement over participating in the election process.

Ambika Devi had voted in country’s first election post-independence.

Lok Sabha election 2019. She says, “The Election Commission has made the election process so smooth by introducing EVM-VVPAT machines. The work done by Mahila Mangal Dal, Yuvak Mangal Dal and other NGOs is also commendable. I request all the voters from my village and country to vote without any fear and work for strengthening the democracy”.

101-year-old Ambika Devi
The Election Commission of India hosted the 4th General Assembly of Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) in Bengaluru, Karnataka, on September 3, 2019. Around 120 participants from more than 50 countries across the globe joined the meeting at Bengaluru from September 2 to September 4, 2019.

About A-WEB

The Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) is the largest association of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) worldwide. A-WEB was established on October 14, 2013 in Song-do, South Korea. The permanent secretariat of A-WEB is located in Seoul. A-WEB’s vision is to foster efficiency and effectiveness in conducting free, fair, transparent and participative elections worldwide. Its activities are guided by its mission to identify the latest trends, challenges and developments in democratic electoral management and electoral processes, and to
facilitate the appropriate exchange of experience and expertise among members with the objective of strengthening electoral democracy worldwide.

The Election Commission of India has been very closely associated with the process of the formation of A-WEB since 2011-12. The ECI has been its Executive Board Member since A-WEB’s inception in October 2013, for two consecutive terms (2013-15 and 2015-17). At the last A-WEB General Assembly held in Bucharest on August 31, 2017, Romania took over as Chair and the ECI was unanimously elected as Vice-Chair of A-WEB 2017-19. India has now taken over as Chair for the 2019-21 term.

At present, A-WEB has 115 EMBs as Members and 16 associations/organisations as Associate Members. It includes 24 EMBs from Asia, 37 from Africa, 31 from the Americas, 17 from Europe and six from Oceania as members of A-WEB. The ECI will continue to remain on the Executive Board of A-WEB for 2021-23 in its capacity as immediate former Chair of A-WEB.

The current Executive Board of A-WEB 2017-19 has 21 members, with the Dominican Republic as the Immediate Past Chair; five members from Africa: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi and Tunisia; four members from the Americas: Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador and Paraguay; four members from Asia: Bangladesh, Palestine, Taiwan and Uzbekistan; three members from Europe: Albania, Belarus, Croatia; and Fiji as the member from Oceania.
September 02, 2019

Sunil Arora, Chief Election Commissioner of India, spoke to the Extraordinary Session of the Executive Board of Association of World Election Bodies in Bengaluru. Arora recalled that the Election Commission of India had been closely associated with the formation process of the A-WEB during 2011-12, and was one of the founding members of A-WEB in October 2013. India has been member of the Executive Board since 2013 and took over as Vice-Chair of A-WEB during 2017-19. India continues to promote A-WEB’s mission wholeheartedly to promote partnership among Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) around the world.

Speaking on the occasion, Arora said the constituent units of the A-WEB are the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) of different countries, structured to work together and learn from the experiences and best practices of one another. With 115 EMBs from 106 countries as its members, and 16 international organisations as Associate Members, the A-WEB has truly become a global organisation to strengthen electoral management in a non-invasive manner.

Those present as Members of the A-WEB Executive Board included Ion Mincu Radulescu, Adviser in the Permanent Electoral Authority of Romania, representing the Chairperson of A-WEB, and chairpersons/presidents and senior delegates from the Election Management Bodies.

"With 115 EMBs from 106 countries as its members, and 16 international organisations as Associate Members, the A-WEB has truly become a global organisation."
of Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Fiji, Kenya, Malawi, Palestine; Paraguay, Tunisia and Uzbekistan. Also participating in the meeting were presidents and senior delegates of the Election Management Bodies of Cameroon and Ecuador as also members of the Oversight and Audit Committee of A-WEB. The current Secretary General Yong Hi Kim, and senior officials of A-WEB and the ECI attended the session.

**September 03, 2019**

On September 3, the Chief Election Commissioner of India assumed Chairmanship of A-WEB for the term 2019-21 as India took over the Chair from Romania. India was unanimously nominated to be the Chair of A-WEB at the last General Assembly held at Bucharest in 2017. The A-WEB flag was handed over to the new Chairman, Sunil Arora, by the Representative of Outgoing Chair,
Ion Mincu Radulescu, Adviser, Permanent Election Authority Romania. The flag will remain with the Election Commission of India for the two-year term till 2021.

Arora announced that an A-WEB Centre would be set up at the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management, New Delhi, for documentation, research and training; for sharing best practices; and for capacity building among the members EMBs of the Association. The Institute has already conducted over 750 training programmes for more than 27,000 election officials in India besides organising 62 International Capacity Building Programmes for over 1,165 election officials from 96 countries.

**September 04, 2019**

An international conference on ‘Initiatives and Challenges of Social Media and Information Technology in Elections’ was held on September 4. Eleven countries, viz., Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cameroon, Malawi, Mauritius, Palestine, Romania, Russia, Sierra Leone and Togo made their presentations on the subject.
Over the years, numerous steps have been taken by the Election Commission of India to make elections accessible to all. Following the motto ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’, the Commission organised a ‘National Workshop on Accessible Elections’ on December 19, 2019 at the Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra in New Delhi.

In 2018, ‘Accessible Elections’ was declared as the theme for National Voters’ Day, observed on January 25. This was followed by multiple consultations at national, state and district levels, the establishment of monitoring committees and the appointment of Disability Coordinators and Accessibility Observers – each a step towards participative and accessible elections.

From exhaustive mapping of PwD (Persons with Disabilities) voters to providing transport facility, special volunteers, Assured Minimum Facilities like ramps, wheelchairs, sign language facility, EVM with Braille at polling stations and, most recently, the provision of postal ballots to PwD voters, the Election Commission of India has made strenuous efforts to uphold the tenet of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’.

The National Workshop on Accessible Elections witnessed the participation of Chief Electoral Officers and District Election Officers from various States/UTs, representatives of Civil Society Organizations, Government Departments and NGOs.

Addressing the participants following the four thematic presentations, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora iterated, “It is our aim to achieve the optimum level of awareness and the optimum level of interventions on the ground. From Booth Level Officers to the ECI, each and every person must work in tandem...”
to achieve our goal of translating our motto ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’ into hard reality. It is essential that we scale up efforts and interventions in a manner that issues of accessibility are removed altogether and our elections are inclusive in the truest sense.”

Reaffirming the ECI’s commitment, Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa stated, “The cardinal principles of our efforts are contained in the quote – ‘Disability is not the problem, accessibility is.’ We must learn from around the world, find out what lies ahead, and identify concrete steps that will empower us to make adequate changes.”

Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra emphasised the importance of sensitisation towards the electoral rights of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and lauded the efforts of election officials on the field.

The cardinal principles of our efforts are contained in the quote – ‘Disability is not the problem, accessibility is.’
initiatives and devising solutions as a part of preparing the thematic presentations that were made to the Commission.

Following the presentations on the given topics, Secretary General Umesh Sinha emphasised the need for structural changes to address critical gaps. He lauded the efforts of the election machinery, Civil Society Organisations and other stakeholders at the grassroots level.

Deputy Election Commissioner Chandra Bhushan Kumar reiterated the importance of the recommendations received from stakeholders across the country as these would pave the way in making all future elections truly inclusive. “With your interventions, critical gaps can be met,” was his message. He informed the gathering that more than 92.43 per cent physically challenged electors exercised their vote in the Jharkhand Assembly Election – a result of the tremendous efforts towards Accessible Elections.

The Commission also released a booklet titled Crossing the Barriers – I Got Inked, based on the unique accounts of voters who overcame all hurdles to participate in the largest celebration of democracy. A comprehensive document highlighting the work done so far, recent initiatives, and recommendations from all States/UTs and various stakeholders, named Accessibility Report 2019 was made available to participants of the workshop, highlighting therein the policies and guiding principles on Accessible Elections.

Accessibility at the workshop was ensured with volunteer assistance, sign-language interpreters, a ramp and screen-reader access, displaying how deeply the Commission is committed to ensuring inclusion of all in the truest sense and at all times.

Besides Chief Electoral Officers and District Election Officers from various States/UTs, the workshop saw the participation of representatives of Civil Society Organisations, government organisations and NGOs representing different disability sectors, including AADI, the Sarthak Educational Trust, the National Association of the Deaf, NCPEDP National Disability Network, Saksham, EcoTatv, NIEPVD, PDUNIPPD, BPA Ahmedabad and ISLRTC.

More than 92.43 per cent physically challenged electors exercised their vote in the Jharkhand Assembly Election
The India International Institute of Democracy and Election management (IIIDEM) organised trainings on various subjects for UECM, as part of the nine-programme series signed on with UECM under the sponsorship of MEA, GoI. A five-day capacity-building training programme on Election Planning was conducted in Myanmar from June 10 to June 14, 2019. Former Director IIIDEM, Vivek Khare; Secretary IIIDEM, S.B. Joshi; Principal Secretary, ECI, N.N. Butolia; and Consultant IIIDEM, Dr Noor Mohammad, trained 25 officers of UECM. The programme covered all important elements of elections and the planning strategies at various levels.

A five-day training programme focused on the use of technology in better election management was organised for UECM officials from June 17 to June 21, 2019 in Myanmar. The programme covered the best practices in technology, highlighting different types of electoral technologies. The 25 participants in the training were also addressed by Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra and Director General Dhirendra Ojha on the extensive use of technology in the conduct of elections to the Lok Sabha in 2019 and the increased use of social media by various stakeholders in the electoral process.
**Capacity-Building Programme on Voter Registration for ITEC Partner Countries**

The IIIDEM organized a six-day capacity-building programme on voter registration for the election officials of ITEC partner countries at New Delhi from September 22 to September 27, 2019. The programme had participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Nigeria, Philippines, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It provided exposure to voter registration to equip and prepare the participants for creating an accurate and inclusive voter register. The topics covered were: the importance of voter registration, guiding principles for voter registration, voter registers, major operational steps, registration data and the voter registration process in India.

**Visit of Delegation from the Maldives**

The IIIDEM hosted a delegation of civil servants of the Maldives on 26 September 2019 as part of a Field Observation Training Programme conducted by the National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG), Mussoorie, Uttarakhand. The participants were trained in the new innovations in election processes, electoral reforms undertaken over the years in India, best governance practices adopted, and the role of civil servants in organising free and fair elections.
A three-day capacity-building programme for the officials of the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission of Afghanistan was organised in New Delhi from August 19 to August 21, 2019. The participants were trained for engaging with the stakeholders, and the areas covered were grievance redressal mechanisms and election petitions, poll-day monitoring and oversight, capacity development of poll staff to identify and prevent fraudulent activities on polling day, approaches to adjudication of complaints, counting of votes and transmission of results.
Workshops on Electoral Literacy Clubs

Workshops to train State Level Master Trainers and SVEEP Nodal Officer from all the states/union territories of India on the curriculum of Electoral Literacy Clubs or ELCs were conducted. ELC is a platform to strengthen the culture of electoral participation among the citizens, specially the young and future voters, through interesting activities and hands-on experiences.

In the month of September 2019, three such workshops were conducted for effective establishment and working of ELCs as well as to strategize on the way forward. The first workshop was held on September 23-24 and the second workshop ran between September 26-27. The third workshop ran for two days from September 30, 2019, at the IIIDEM Campus, New Delhi.

The ELC exhibition was organized by the Chief Election Commissioner, Sunil Arora. The Commission was shown glimpses of ELC activities carried out in the workshops alongwith ELC resources.

Thereafter, addressing the special session of the workshop, Chief Election Commissioner, Sunil Arora said, “Despite attaining a historic turnout we should strive for more and make sustained and dedicated efforts to sensitise people from all over the communities and enhance participation even further.” While interacting with the participants, he said, “You all are brick and mortar of the SVEEP programme of ECI. Having been entrusted with the responsibility of being part of this gigantic effort, I urge you to be pioneers of the ELC project on the field and ensure that the power of indelible ink represents all.” Secretary General, Umesh Sinha and Director General of IIIDEM Dharmendra Sharma were also present at the occasion along with other senior officers of the Election Commission of India.

Briefing on the ELC project, Secretary General Umesh Sinha emphasized the importance of having a strong foundation, stating that “Unless you have a proper root, the grass will not grow. Our aim is to have all eligible voters to register in the electoral roll and ensure it is 100 per cent error free in order to strengthen our democracy even further. One of the main objectives of Voter Education is to make the voters informed and ethical and help in enhancing their participation.” He further added that the ELC project requires a robust movement and momentum by all present by reaching out to schools, colleges, communities, organisations etc.’ Sinha further stated that the ELC would be the biggest electoral literacy movement in the world and through this we can fulfill the aim of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’.

Under its flagship programme ‘Systematic
Voters’ Education & Electoral Participation’ (SVEEP), the project for Mainstreaming Electoral Literacy through Educational Institutions/Organisations was introduced which envisages setting up of Electoral Literacy Club in every educational institution and Chunav Pathshala at every booth to cover those outside the formal education system. Launched on 8th National Voters’ Day on January 25, 2018, ELCs shall serve as a vibrant hub of Electoral Literacy for developing and strengthening the culture of electoral participation through hands-on experience. Till now 5,80,620 ELCs have been established across the country.

The entire project revolves around keeping voter education relevant and practical through a host of co-curricular and extra-curricular methods for the young and future voters. The ELCs and Chunav Pathshala activities are conducted by the Convener using a resource Guide where step by step instructions are given for conducting each activity. Separate Resource books have been developed for Class IX to XII, colleges and communities. A calendar of activities in a year has also been indicated. Total of 6-8 activities, with specific learning outcome, running into approximately four hours in all, have been identified for each category.

The purpose of the workshop is to provide a refresher of ELC activities to the participants in order to ensure their preparedness for subsequent trainings that they shall be conducting with District Level Master Trainers. The Commission’s endeavour is to make the ELC project sustainable and to achieve its vision of establishing 1.5 million ELCs in two lakh secondary and senior secondary schools, 27 thousand colleges and universities and the ten lakh polling stations.
The Commission has time and again taken various measures to ensure that every elector is facilitated to exercise its franchise and make elections participative in true sense. Special initiatives like ramps, wheelchairs, special volunteers, braille ballot sheet for the benefit of visually challenged electors have been provided in the past to provide assistance in the voting process. Apart from senior citizens and PwDs, it was observed that there are many electors who are employed in essential service and the demands of their job does not permit them to take time off to be present in the polling station for voting.

As step in the same direction the Rule 27A of Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 has been recently amended vide Ministry of Law and Justice Notification dated: October 22, 2019 to introduce the facility of voting through postal ballot for Absentee Voters. Electors employed in essential services, senior citizens above the age of 80 years and electors marked as PwDs have been defined as absentee voters in the amendment.

The Commission provided this facility in the Jharkhand Assembly election to senior citizens and PWDs in 7 Assembly constituencies as a pilot. The scheme was to send team of poll officers to the address of the senior citizens and PwDs who have sought postal ballot facility under the new provisions. The poll officers will issue the postal ballot at the residence of these electors and also attest their declaration of identity. They will then wait for the elector to cast vote and return with the sealed envelope containing the marked ballot paper. The electors are given prior intimation about the date and approximate time of visit by the team of poll officers.

For the electors on essential service who desire to vote through postal ballot, the provision is to provide a postal voting centre in every constituency which will remain open for a few days prior to the polling day. The electors can go to such centre on any of the specified days and cast their vote.
Registration of political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. An association seeking registration under the said Section has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation, as per the guidelines prescribed by the Commission in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

In order to enable applicants to track the status of the application, ECI has launched a ‘Political Parties Registration Tracking Management System’ (PPRTMS). The salient feature in the PPRTMS is that the applicant, who is applying for party registration will be able to track the progress of his/her application and will get status update through SMS and e-mail. The status can be tracked through the Commission’s portal at https://pprtms.eci.gov.in/.
The Election Commission of India (ECI) is fully committed to maintain a correct and current electoral roll. That is why, to attain an accurate and updated electoral roll, it has launched a nationwide programme in Delhi—the Elector’s Verification Programme (EVP) on September 1, 2019 for all the States and Union Territories except for Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand and Maharashtra.

The EVP was conducted in Delhi from September 1 to October 31, 2019 and in all other States and Union Territories, and the drive continued to November 30, 2019, for an overall improvement in the health of the electoral roll. The very idea behind initiating this programme in a campaign mode was to obtain a nationwide exact and up-to-date electoral roll with a two-way partnership between electors and the Election Commission of India.

The ECI has publicized and promoted this programme in a campaign through print, electronic and social media extensively. It was the first time that such a drive of nationwide extent has been conducted regarding the electoral roll and it reached every corner of the country. Electors from all over the country responded to EVP by verifying their details in the electoral roll through both online and offline modes.
Ensuring an Error-free Electoral Roll

Updating the electoral roll is a continuous process throughout the year as the Election Commission of India follows the principle: ‘an error-free electoral roll is the bedrock of an error-free democratic election’. Previously, only the manual entries at the office of the Registrar of Births and Deaths were used for removal of the entries of dead electors from the electoral roll. However, steps have been undertaken to minimise mistakes and gaps, and maximise exact data.

Now the Commission is more focused on a two-step verification system in both the manual and online processes. The DEOs and EROs of the concerned areas implement all the online and offline mechanisms and verify the electors’ data on a monthly basis regularly. The ECI has a multifold verification system that consists of: (i) obtaining Form-7 from family members/relatives/neighbours of deceased electors and removing names of verified dead electors on the basis of such information to the ERO concerned; (ii) verifying such details from the in-charge of cremation/burial grounds through the Voter Helpline mobile app (android mobile phone) and on the NVSP by their own login id; and iii) entry of such data in the ERO Net dashboard by concerned DEOs, immediately after getting such information.

The six major objectives of the EVP exercise were (i) to verify the elector’s details and indicate corrections in details, if any, including his/her photograph, and the authentication of entry; (ii) to obtain details of his/her family members and verify their entries; (iii) to obtain contact details/GIS coordinates (with smartphone) to provide better electoral services; (iv) to obtain inputs about existing/probable polling stations; (v) to improve the health of electoral roll; and finally (vi) to improve the delivery of electoral services.

Citizens were prescribed ten optional documents to authenticate and verify their existing details in the electoral roll. The documents were: (i) Indian passport; (ii) driving licence; (iii) Aadhar; (iv) ration card; (v) identity card for government/semi-government officials; (vi) bank passbooks; (vii) farmer’s identity card; (viii) PAN Card; (ix) Smart Card issued by RGI under NPR; and (x) latest water/telephone/electricity/gas connection bill for that address, either in the name of the applicant or that of his/her immediate relation like parents and so on.

The success of the programme could be measured from the huge response – a total of 76,22,95,111 requests were received during the period from September 1 to December 1, 2019 through the campaign. During the 91 days that the drive was being conducted, a total of 73,00,50,926 correct entries were reported through this app. All in all, the EVP was a very valuable and successful campaign.

It was the first time that such a drive of nationwide extent has been conducted regarding the electoral roll and it reached every corner of the country.
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR PARTICIPATIVE ELECTIONS

The inclusion of mobile technologies in overall voter engagement and internal planning played a major role in the Lok Sabha General Election 2019. The ICT tools enabled the Election Commission of India to bring in more efficiency, widespread reach and accountability in the conduct of free, fair and accessible elections.

The Election Commission of India has embarked upon actively using mobile technologies to reduce human error and extended efforts, while completing the poll process within lesser time. Need-based applications, which address specific issues, have been developed to respond to the specific requirements and usage of electors and poll officers. Recently, the Commission rolled out a new mobile application named Booth App, to be used by poll officers for better election management. The ECI has also updated a few features in the existing apps, i.e., cVIGIL, Voter Helpline App and Voter Turnout App, all with the intention to make the elections more transparent and accountable.

**cVIGIL**

During the parliamentary election 2019, cVIGIL played a vital role and received more than 1,40,000 complaints. It is to be noted that of all these complaints, 80 per cent were found to be correct. Initially, the Commission had launched a beta version of the cVIGIL mobile application in November 2018 during the assembly elections, aimed at helping citizens to report any electoral malpractices and violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during the polls. The key highlight of the app is its speedy and effective response by concerned authorities and the assured status report within stipulated time of 100 minutes. The app included the feature of reporting MCC violation and expenditure cases by capturing and uploading real-time photos and videos as the evidence. Considering the success and usage of the application, a few new features have been added to it, such as the facility to submit a voice recording as a part of the evidence, checking the permission status of political parties and candidates, and checking the number of registered cases in the respective district during the ongoing polls, among others.

**VOTER HELPLINE APP**

The Voter Helpline App was first launched in August 2018 and was used extensively in the General Election and the assembly elections conducted in 2019, with the aim of providing a single point of service and information delivery...
to voters across the country. Using this app, users can receive all kinds of election related information, including searching for their personal information in the electoral roll, submitting online forms and checking the status, filing complaints, getting information on elections and updating themselves on the results. The Electoral Verification Programme (EVP) campaign was also featured in the application to encourage users to verify their details in the electoral roll. Recently, a few engaging features have been introduced during the Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand assembly elections, which include:

**Personal Vault** for a QR code-based digital voter slip, which is a replacement for the paper voter slip and can be displayed on mobile phones.

The ‘**My Polling Station Queue**’ feature, using which a voter can check the queue status in their respective polling station and plan to go there accordingly.

**Results** can be checked by simply scanning the EPIC number of the user through the mobile app to see the results of his or her constituency.

**UPDATED VOTER TURNOUT APP AND WEBSITE**

The Voter Turnout App was launched just before the 2019 General Elections to show the estimated turnout of voters by state, gender and polling constituency. Recently, the app has been updated with a new feature wherein citizens can see the phase-wise estimated voter turnout reports. Recently it was used by both media persons and common citizens during the Jharkhand assembly elections. An hourly update of the same report has been made available on the main website of the ECI, too.
Assembly Elections

Conducting Assembly Elections 2019 of Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand

The successful completion of elections reinstates the credibility and strength of the democratic process of election mechanism. The recently concluded Assembly Elections in the States of Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand were also no exception to this. Election Commission of India (ECI), through its vast election mechanism and various initiatives ensured Inclusive, Accessible, Credible & Ethical Assembly Elections.

By virtue of its powers, duties and functions under Article 324 read with Article 172(1) of the Constitution of India and Section 15 of the Representation of the People Act 1951 Election Commission of India announced the schedule of the elections to constitute the new Assembly in the three States. The Commission held General Elections to constitute the new Legislative Assemblies in the States before expiry of their term. The Model Code of Conduct came into immediate effect in Haryana and Maharashtra on September 21, 2019 and in Jharkhand on November 1, 2019 with the announcement of Elections in the States.

The Electoral Roll is considered as the bedrock of any credible election, during these elections too people registered themselves, got their particulars updated in the electoral roll through various off line and online methods. ECI’s Voter Helpline app was a huge success in providing the electors with a handy and quick method of registration, all in all in these three assembly elections the roll stood strong and authentic with large magnitude of electors as mentioned above.

Voter awareness

A multi-pronged approach was also undertaken by the States to reach out to all stakeholders and build partnerships to enhance Electoral registration and voter participation. Initiatives like Mehndi, Rangoli, Matdata dhun, Selfie point, Rallies, Candle march, Human chains, Marathon, Signature Campaign, Cricket Tournament, Talk

Schedule of the Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>No. of Phases</th>
<th>Date of Poll</th>
<th>Date of Counting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.10.2019</td>
<td>24.10.2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.10.2019</td>
<td>24.10.2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Jharkhand  | 5             | Phase I: 30.11.2019  
              |              | Phase II: 07.12.2019  
              |              | Phase III: 12.12.2019  
              |              | Phase IV: 16.12.2019  

Poll Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Assembly Constituencies</th>
<th>Polling Stations</th>
<th>Electorate</th>
<th>No. of candidates contested in election.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>19,578</td>
<td>18,2,82,570</td>
<td>1,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>96661</td>
<td>89,72,20,19</td>
<td>3,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>77,972</td>
<td>23,016,656</td>
<td>1,216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shows, Football Match, Cycle Rallies, Folk Staging, JagruktaRath, Awareness Ballon, Sankalppatra distribution etc. were organized. Awareness materials were prepared in local dialects to attract the rural population while state icons and ambassadors reached house to house through television ads, banners social media with the message of VOTE. Eminent celebrities like Madhuri Dixit and Subhash Ghai were roped in to promote elections in Maharashtra.

A mega voter awareness campaign was launched by Regional Outreach Bureau in Maharashtra during the assembly elections. The SVEEP campaign comprised of 9 travelling exhibition vehicles & live performances at 1500 locations in 20 districts, in 125 Assembly constituencies of the State to aim and achieve an objective of ‘Greater Participation for a Stronger Democracy’. This campaign was flagged off by Chief Election Commissioner Mr. Sunil Arora.

Challenges and election preparedness

All the three states had their own concerns and difficulties and election arrangements were tailored keeping in mind these very unique challenges. Jharkhand for example is a LWE affected State and conducting a free, fair and peaceful election was a major challenge. To effectively tackle this threat, Polling Personnel of 2912 Polling Stations were sent to polling locations two days prior to poll and the same of 3404 Polling Stations were brought back to receipt centre one day after the poll. Helicopters were also extensively used for sending Polling Personnel in hard to reach areas.

Webcasting was also used extensively as a force multiplier to ensure transparency. In fact there was great synergy between CAPF deployment and webcasting and all the critical polling stations (both naxal and non-naxal) were covered either by CAPF or SAP or webcasting,
Harnessing technology for better election management

One highlighting feature across the Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand assembly elections was the innovative use of the technology, be it Voter Helpline App, PwD app, Suvidha or Voter Turnout app for facilitation cVIGIL for vigilance and reporting poll violations.

As an IT innovation Booth App capturing and providing real time information on number of voters in queue at the polling station to the voters was the culmination of the whole election process the end result was updated by ECI on its website and mobile in real time with the announcement of results at the counting centers.

The following table shows the results of the Haryana and Maharashtra assembly elections:

### Haryana Result Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana Lokhit Party</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian National Congress</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian National Lok Dal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jannayak Janta Party</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Maharashtra Result Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahujan Vikas Aaghadi</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party of India (Marxist)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian National Congress</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Surajya Shakti</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krantikari Shetkari Party</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra Navnirman sena</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist Congress Party</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants And Workers Party of India</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prahar Janshakti Party</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashtriya Samaj Paksha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samajwadi Party</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiv Sena</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swabhimani Paksha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>288</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the Haryana and Maharashtra assembly elections show a significant increase in voter turnout and innovation in election management, thereby ensuring absolute fairness of the Poll process.
used successfully in 10 assembly constituencies in Jharkhand.

Haryana and Maharashtra developed applications like Poll Monitoring e-dashboard and ‘PDMS’ i.e. Poll Day Management System respectively for monitoring of various events during poll process including hourly voter turnout on the poll day and also summarized information at State and assembly level. The app was very helpful for real time monitoring up to booth level.

Aaple Sarkar, a web portal for the state of Maharashtra was created for citizens to lodge a grievance and monitor it through their mobile phones or computers.

On the D-day all polling stations were equipped with drinking water, shed, ramps, wheelchairs, first aid and volunteers to facilitate the voters turning up to vote. With the commitment of accessible elections,

**Postal Ballot for Absentee Voter**

In Jharkhand, post amendment in the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, facility of Absentee Voter status was provided for the first time in the country to PwD and 80+ voters of total 7 assembly constituencies. A total of 2018 PwD and 80+ voters exercised their franchise using this provision of Postal Ballot across these 7 assembly constituencies of the State.
Commission decides to set up a Chair in memory of T N Seshan, former CEC

The Election Commission of India deeply mourns the demise of its 10th Chief Election Commissioner Tirunellai Narayana Iyer Seshan. Seshan will remain an icon for the nation forever, said CEC Mr. Sunil Arora. Chief Election Commissioner. He praised Seshan and mentioned that he was a brilliant officer of 1955 batch of Indian Administrative Service’s Tamil Nadu cadre.

Seshan set a high benchmark for the office and became a legend in his lifetime and will always be a source of inspiration to us and all CECs and ECs to come. He continues to captivate the imagination of young voters, as much as the elderly.

To commemorate and celebrate his special connect with the young and aspiring India, ECI has decided to establish a Visiting Chair on Interdisciplinary Approach to Electoral Studies in the Centre for Curriculum Development at India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), New Delhi from 2020-2025.

The Chair will be mentored by former CEC N Gopalaswami.

Voluntary Code of Ethics

On September 26, 2019 Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) on behalf of its members has agreed to observe the ‘Voluntary Code of Ethics’ during all elections and cooperate in ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections. During the Lok Sabha Election 2019 for the first time all major social media platforms and its industrial body in India, Internet and Mobile Association of India came together and mutually devised and adopted a Voluntary Code of Ethics. The code of ethics is a culmination of consistent efforts and deliberations of ECI with various stakeholders of Social Media.

The highlighted features of ‘Voluntary Code of Ethics’ are as follows:

(i) Social Media platforms will voluntarily undertake information, education and communication campaigns to build awareness including electoral laws and other related instructions.

(ii) Social Media platforms have created a high priority dedicated grievance redressal channel for taking expeditions action on the cases reported by the ECI.

(iii) Social Media Platforms and ECI have developed a notification mechanism by this ECI can notify the relevant platforms of potential violations of Section 126 of the R.P. Act, 1951 and other electoral laws.

(iv) Platforms will ensure that all political advertisements on their platforms are pre-certified from the Media Certification and Monitoring Committees as per the directions of Supreme Court.

(v) Participating platforms are committed to facilitate transparency in paid political advertisements, including utilising their pre-existing labels/disclosure technology for such advertisements.

Recent Happenings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appointments</th>
<th>Chief Electoral Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>Juhi Mukherjee, IAS (AGMUT:2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>Kangale Reena Babasahed, IAS (CG:2003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relieving</th>
<th>Director General, Expenditure Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dilip Sharma, IRS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Registration of Political Parties

In the period between October, 2019 and December, 2019 a total of 41 political parties have been registered under the provision of Section 29A of the R.P. Act, 1951 and 1 political party i.e. Jannayak Janta party has been recognised as a State Party in the state of Haryana.

Hindi Diwas Celebration

Like every year, Election Commission of India celebrated its Hindi fortnight from September 01 to 15, 2019 with great enthusiasm. Various competitions like Hindi Essays, Rajbhasha Gyan Pratiyogita, Kavita Paath Pratiyogita, Anuvad Pratiyogita and Hindi Gyan Pratiyogita were held to create their interest towards the use of Hindi Language as everyday official work.

The fortnight concluded with the function of Hindi Divas on September 20, 2019 where the Commission conferred awards to the winners of various competitions coordinated by the official language division of ECI Rachna Gupta, Joint Director (Official Language) highlighting that 20 books/publications were translated and made available on the official website of ECI.

Secretary General Umesh Sinha and Director General Dhirendra Ojha gave valuable suggestions on the use and importance of Hindi language. The awards were also given to the Divisions doing most of their official work in Hindi besides awarding the individual winners.

The Commission encouraged the officers and staff to use more of Hindi language, not only during the fortnight, but also in their routine work, thereby contributing towards achieving the goals as laid down in the Official Language Policy of the Union.
Representatives from various Election Management Bodies (EMBs) have visited ECI headquarters in New Delhi. The Commission and its officers also visited various events related to election management in different countries. Here are some glimpses of those meetings.

A group of 7-member delegation from Papua New Guinea visited the Election Commission of India on September 5, 2019.

34 Diplomats from Libya & Palestine recommended by Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) visited Election Commission of India on September 11, 2019.

47 Parliamentary officials from 20 countries visited Election Commission of India on September 18, 2019.

56 Foreign Diplomats from 55 different countries recommended by Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) visited Election Commission of India on September 20, 2019.

Farhod Arziev, Ambassador of Uzbekistan in India visited the Election Commission of India on September 23, 2019, to meet Chief Election Commissioner of India.
Training and capacity building for better Election management

The complexities involved in the task of Election preparedness and conduct of Elections are increasing manifold. The officials involved in this task need to have the necessary competencies to perform them proficiently and flawlessly. India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) undertakes multiple and multilevel ‘Training and Capacity Building’ activities so that the above mentioned requirements of the Manpower Resource of ECI are met.

IIIDEM conducted extensive Training Programs for various officials for the General Elections to Lok Sabha 2019. The next cycle of Trainings were aimed at Capacity Building activities for the Master Trainers of IIIDEM and the Training of Election officials for the poll-going states in 2019 – 2020. Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand and Delhi were the States that belonged to this category. A brief of the Programs is encapsulated below:

Conference of Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of all States and UTs:
After General elections 2019, the CEO Conference was organised on June 3, 2019. During the conference nine Working Groups comprising of
senior officials from ECI and CEOs deliberated on their suggestions, highlight the best practices and lessons learnt from the General Elections 2019.

**National Level Master Trainers (NLMTs) Workshop:**
IIIDEM conducted a two day workshop for 216 National Level Master Trainers (NLMTs) from July 23 till August 06, 2019. During the workshop the trainers from ECI conducted the Refresher Course, after which ECI Subject Matter Experts evaluated the NLMTs.

**State Level Master Trainers (SLMTs) Workshop:**
As part of the preparations for the General Elections in state legislative assemblies IIIDEM conducted Capacity Building Program for 142 State Level Master Trainers (SLMTs) from August 7 to August 9, 2019. The aim of the training program was to build a resource pool of SLMTs who could pass on the skills and competencies down the ‘Cascade Model’ at district and assembly levels.

**Certification Program for Returning Officers:**
The ROs are central to the electoral process and are involved in all the stages. The first phase of the Certification and Training cycle aimed at Assembly Elections in States was conducted from August 20 to August 30, 2019 for 274 participants from Maharashtra.

Before the assembly elections a refresher course was also conducted for Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers from Haryana, Jharkhand and Delhi.

**Workshop for District Election Officers (DEOs) of Haryana and Jharkhand:**
This was the second phase in the training programs conducted by IIIDEM for the Assembly Elections. The DEOs play an overarching role in the preparedness and conduct of Elections. Considering the criticality, a 1 day Interactive Workshop was organized for them on September 16, 2019. The sessions were conducted by eminent experts and were mainly in the nature of experiential learning, peer discussions, suggestions sharing and deliberations on best practices. 15 DEOs participated in the Program.

**Workshop on EVM/VVPAT for State Level Master Trainers (SLMTs), District Level Master Trainers (DLMTs) and District Information Officers (DIOs) of Delhi:**
A specialized one day Training workshop was organized for 43 trainee officials from Delhi on October 05, 2019.

**BRIDGE Training of Trainers and Facilitators**
In association with International IDEA IIIDEM organized a 12-day training program for key NLMTs/ECI & IIIDEM staff members at IIIDEM Campus, New Delhi. The International Resource Persons from International IDEA taught the participants different methodologies and techniques of BRIDGE.
Having the opportunity to work as a responsible Assistant Returning Officer for two Assembly Segments of Inner Manipur Parliamentary Constituency (6-Keirao and 7-Andro Assembly Constituencies), I was overwhelmed, nervous and also excited with the amount of productivity and good results that was expected from my team in conducting the Lok Sabha 2019 Election.

Creating smart voters was a challenging task as both my Assembly Segments were in rural and remote locations. The SVEEP campaign for enrolment, and creating awareness on EVM and VVPAT machines, were the primary solutions for conducting a successful inclusive and ethical Election. The hands-on awareness campaign conducted at all the polling stations by allowing voters to handle the VVPAT and test their hands on the EVM was a huge success, and it really paid off as, finally, the voter turnout was much higher than the last Lok Sabha Election.

The first SVEEP campaign was for students (‘Future Voter’) and their interest in the election machinery really motivated our team. The second and subsequent SVEEP campaigns were equally exciting and one of the most positive achievements was having a Muslim transgender enrolling herself through our campaign. She said, “I tried to be a voter for the last 3-4 years, but I think my form did not reach the right person. Today, I was reluctant to come and participate for enrolment as everyone else is also here. Your encouragement has made me to fill the form one more time. Please do make me a voter.” She finally became a proud voter.

There were special Campaigns for PwD voters and senior citizens, and special facilities were provided for them in polling booths. They shared their

(Left) With the newly enroled transgender
EXPERIENCES

Special Campaigns and facilities for PwD voters and Senior Citizens, were provided for them in polling booths

excitement and appreciation when the volunteers went to their doorstep for escorting them to their respective polling stations.

In every camp, awareness among voters regarding their role in electing the right candidate was emphasised and they were familiarized with election terms and terminology, such as democracy, franchise, freedom, right and

(Below) Few pictures of smart voters from poll day & the activities to encourage every voter to participate in the festival of inclusive free, fair & ethical voting called election for democracy

manifestoes. These terms may sound familiar anywhere else, but unfortunately not so much in my areas.

Each presiding officer was presented with an eco-friendly pen as a token and as a gentle reminder for conducting free and fair election.

On the poll day, following the Election Commission of India’s instruction for entering the details of identity cards and writing the last four digits in the Register of Voters was a satisfying moment for me. This was appreciated by all the Presiding Officers and other polling officials on duty. They all felt empowered to perform their duty diligently, which helped in achieving the goal of free and fair elections.

The hard work that every member of my team put in and the kind of atmosphere we all tried to create before and on the day of poll to achieving a successful election is in itself is a great story for each one of us and am thankful for being a part of such a Grand Festival of Democracy. As a first-time ARO, I believe that, “Being born in a Democratic country is considered a boon by all humankind. At the same time the democratic government has the responsibility of making the voter understand ethical voting and always practice it.”

—Yumnam Nelson Singh, ARO 1-Inner Manipur Parliamentary Constituency
India is a democratic country and the importance of election in a democratic country can never be neglected. During the British rule, India was under the Constitutional Monarchy of the British Queen and didn’t have any self-government. However, post-independence, it became a democratic republic with a government which is chosen through the hands of its citizens.

Election is the process through which people express their opinion through public voting and elect the candidates to be sent to the public offices. Elections are considered as the base of democracy, as it ensures that the government chosen through election is of the people, by the people and for the people.

A free and fair election showcases the signs of a healthy democracy in a country. Through Election, the citizens of a country express their acceptance or denial for the government’s policies and working.

In this context, the Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) are set up across the country.

There are around 5,60,000 ELCs helping to sensitize students and people through interesting activities and gaining hands-on experience as per the ELC’s main motto “If you tell them, they will forget. If you teach them, they will remember. If you involve them, they will learn.”

The ELCs also carry out the Master Level Training Programs in different parts of the country, giving out a good number of well qualified Trainers. These Trainers, then train the Teachers of the Schools and Colleges. Thus, in-turn, making the teachers responsible for passing it down to their students. In Schools - Students from Class 9th to 12th or 14 – 17-year olds and, in Colleges - 18 to 21-year olds are a part of this. And, the Rural Communities (Chunav Pathshalas) are also a part of this and this comprises all members of the village.
The ELCs mainly focus on imbibing - Voter registration, electoral process and other related processes; EVM and VVPAT familiarisation; Creation of awareness about the contesting candidates’ manifestos and the background of the candidates; Harnessing the potential of ELC members for carrying it forward; Facilitating voter registration for those who haven’t.

ELCs also educate people about the importance of Voting and how it can be used for their welfare, growth and development. Additionally, it makes them aware about the luring and deceptive election campaigns of the political parties and how not to fall prey to cash, liquor or gifts in lieu of their vote.

Thus, in the ELCs, members will be part of interesting and thought-provoking, mostly classroom-based activities and games. There are around 25 such activities and 6 games which have been carefully designed to impart specific learning which will help them become an ‘Empowered Voter’.

It can be said that, through these ELCs, the Election Commission of India, aims at strengthening the culture of electoral participation among young and future voters.

Finally, it can be stated that, the ELCs are doing their best with respect to the Elections in India, which are considered as ‘the Festival of Democracy,’ as this gives immense power to the public, to exercise their voting right which could change the destiny of a nation and elections are also a platform on which a voter sees a new light of hope to strengthen the country and a ray of nation building.

Each and every vote has a high significance and, it is important that it is casted sensibly to the right candidate.

Hence it is the prime responsibility of the youth of the country to educate people about the importance of election and make them understand the power of voting then only we can value the democracy in real terms.

— Raghavendra H S & Spoorthi, Bangalore Political Action Committee
Lok Sabha Elections 2019 saw the contribution from many stakeholders to make people aware of their democratic rights and motivate them to exercise their franchise. Subhash Ghai, an eminent filmmaker and founder of the Whistling Woods International Institute played a paramount role in the Lok Sabha 2019 Campaign. Weaving the soul of democracy in a beautiful tune, Subhash Ghai along with the students of Whistling Woods International composed a song titled, ‘Desh Ke Liye’ which touched the heart of millions.

The song was aired on television as well radio during the Lok Sabha Campaign and garnered a lot of appreciation. It shows an absolute carnival of Indian diversity with celebrities from different fields making an emotional appeal to voters.

The team from Election Commission of India visited the Whistling Woods International campus to express gratitude for their immense contribution in the Campaign. The students were further sensitised regarding the various SVEEP (Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation) interventions and the electoral process.

Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, Election Commission of India, interacted with students and lauded their efforts with a certificate of appreciation. In addition to that he urged the students to keep updated with the SVEEP programs as a responsible citizen and keep motivating their fellow students, friends and family. He presented Subhash Ghai and his team with an appreciation plaque and a letter of recognition from Sunil Arora, Chief Election Commissioner of India.

The session ended with a musical performance by the students of the Whistling Woods International.

—Aradhana, Executive, ECI
The Determined Stand

‘No Voter to be Left Behind’, the motto of the Election Commission of India casts upon us the collective responsibility to ensure that all eligible citizens are able to participate in the electoral process irrespective of their social background, gender and physical disabilities or ability. In the past two years, we have witnessed a tremendous collective effort of Election Machinery and other stakeholders to make elections inclusive and accessible in all aspects. During this endeavour, many inspiring stories of such extraordinary citizens have emerged, who have shown iron-will and resolute to play their role as active citizens, overcoming all personal challenges. Arvind Pawar is one such individual whose journey motivates all of us to exercise our right to vote.

Arvind Pawar is a successful businessman living in Rohini, Delhi and his rags-to-riches story is an inspiration for all. He was born on September 01, 1965 in Jaipur, Rajasthan with Orthopaedic abnormality that left him disabled in both legs. Life wasn’t easy for him and the responsibility to support the family fell on him very early. He started helping his family by setting up a stall of ready-made garments as a street hawker in Jaipur. In the year 2002, he shifted to Delhi where he gradually set up a business of Transport cabs on his own. Sincere diligence always pays! Pawar’s fleet has now gradually expanded to about ten vehicles. His workday starts early morning, and he continually monitors and manages his drivers all through the day. The efficacy of his management skills is such that he also manages to take out time for his family as well as for his own healthcare and treatment. Moreover, despite all of his obligations and challenges, he has never missed an opportunity to cast his vote during any election in Delhi. Recognizing his strong determination, the Commission has recognized him as a voter icon. This has been done so that other electors with disabilities also take inspiration from him and avail the services extended to them by the Commission and cast their vote.

Pawar participated as a delegate and voter icon in the National Workshop on Accessible Elections in January 2020 and shared his insights and perspectives as a Person with Disability (PwD) during the deliberations. Delhi Legislative assembly elections are around the corner, and Arvind Pawar is fully prepared to exercise his right and duty as a responsible voter once again.

—Apoorv Tiwary, Executive, ECI
My Vote Matters - Vol I Issue 3

The year 2019 saw the monumental elections to the 17th Lok Sabha. This issue of ‘My Vote Matters’ mainly describes initiatives and preparations for the General Election 2019. Given the expanse of India and complexity of her terrain, visionary efforts were invested by the Election Commission of India to ensure maximum voter turnout.

The core of this issue constitutes insights from officers of the Election Commission, the experience of polling staff on the field, and SVEEP activities to make elections inclusive and accessible to all.

Accessibility Report 2019

Accessible Elections has been the foundation of the commissions’ commitment while conducting elections. During Lok Sabha Election 2019, The Election Commission of India took various initiatives like braille EPIC, transport to and from the polling station, Assured Minimum Facilities as well as a comprehensive nationwide multimedia campaign to ensure that the major mandate of Election Commission, viz., ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’ is fulfilled in letter and in spirit.

This report enfolds the feedback received from the State Committees across the nation on accessible elections. The recommendations are put forth for further deliberations with the various stakeholders to ensure better facilitation for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in the upcoming elections.
VoICE International-
Vol III Issue 3

This issue of VoICE International highlighted the experiences of different EMBs on ‘Best Practices, Innovations and Initiatives for Enhancing Voter Participation’. Universal adult suffrage, inclusion of all categories of voters; and free, fair and transparent elections are the basic features that determine the health of a democracy. Expanding democracy through maximization of elector registration, and healthy and clean electoral rolls followed by deepening of democracy through informed, inclusive and ethical participation in the poll are the key elements of an electoral process.

The Issue brings to you a very rich experience from different countries such as Georgia, Russia, IFES (Ukraine), Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Nepal, Tunisia and other countries. Further, the Issue also brings to you election updates and several other related readings of interest from across the world.

Crossing the Barriers...
I Got Inked

The Election Commission of India strives to attain maximum voter participation in the electoral process with the motto ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’. The Lok Sabha Election 2019 witnessed multiple initiatives to ensure the participation of voters from all sections of society to make the electoral process truly inclusive and accessible.

This booklet contains some unique accounts and media reports of voters who overcame all hurdles to participate in the largest festival of democracy, ‘Desh Ka Mahatyohar’.
10th NATIONAL VOTERS’ DAY
25th January 2020

Electoral Literacy for a Stronger Democracy

NO VOTER TO BE LEFT BEHIND