ECI NEW INITIATIVES

2015

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Message by CEC

डा० नसीम जैदी
भारत के मुख्य निर्वाचन आयुक्त
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भारत निर्वाचन आयोग
Election Commission of India

MESSAGE BY HON'BLE CEC

Election Commission of India always strive to improve the electoral processes in the country by incorporating better management practices and using advanced technology. The objective of such efforts is to enhance fairness in the system and ensure wider electoral participation of all eligible electors in the country. The Commission has introduced Electors' Photo Identity Cards, Electronic voting Machines, Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail, deployment of officials by randomization, Voter awareness programmes etc., to name a few mile stones, over time.

In this compilation, the *New Initiative – 2015*, the Election Commission of India is documenting various new initiatives/measures taken up to make advancements in the electoral process during the year 2015. It is hoped that this publication will benefit all stakeholders.

I congratulate the team in Documentation Division for bringing out this publication.

(Dr. Nasim Zaidi)

Chief Election Commissioner of India

Dated 26/08/2016

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Message by EC (J)

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भारत निर्वाचन आयुक्त
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Dated:23.008.2016.

It is heartening to share that several New Initiatives have been taken up by the Commission to improve the electoral system in India. As one can see all of these have strengthening Indian Democracy as a common objective. It is hoped that as we devise better Electoral Processes there will be better electoral outcomes.

The Documentation on New Initiatives will help to correlate the policy initiatives with the resultant performance. Also continuity of this publication will help ECI in reviewing outcomes in new scales of performance measures.

I wish all success for this publication.

(A.K. Joti)

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Message by EC (R)

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Message

ECI is coming up with documenting their New Initiatives for its stakeholders. It is interesting to see that a number of New Initiatives were taken in 2015 in varied areas of election management such as electoral roll purification drive, photograph of candidates on ballot paper, emphasis to bring in greater accountability in election expenditure and in political advertisements, strengthening citizen feedback and complaint mechanisms etc. By documenting these, ECI intends to keep all stakeholders fully informed, thereby enhancing transparency and predictability in its own operations. ECI is committed to its constitutional mandate of delivering credible elections and thereby strengthening democracy in India. This publication is furthering and proclaiming the objective and intent of the Commission.

(O.P. Rawat)
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Dated: 23rd August, 2016

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Preface

This short publication is a compilation of new initiatives taken by the Election Commission of India in its functioning through new amendments, programmes, procedures and practices in 2015. Readers can get brief on all changes that has come up in the election management in India. Wherever relevant, links for further reading have been provided. All divisions of the Commission contributed to make this document possible. Utmost care has been made to ensure comprehensive coverage of new initiatives in this document. It was ensured that a background on each of the initiatives are also included so that readers can understand the effectiveness of the initiatives. By reading this document, users can gauge and compare the maturity in procedures of election management in India with the same elsewhere in the world. This document is meant for all stakeholders of ECI. The intent of the Commission is to keep up meaningful engagements with all stakeholders by making its own functioning transparent.

Documentation Division, ECI

Acronyms

AIR	:	All India Radio
APAR	:	Annual Performance Appraisal Report
ATR	:	Action Taken Report
BAG	:	Booth Level Awareness Groups
BLO	:	Booth Level Officer
CEO	:	Chief Electoral Officer
Commission	:	Election Commission of India
CSO	:	Civil Society Organisation
DD	:	Doordarshan
DEO	:	District Election Officer
ECI	:	Election Commission of India
EDMD	:	Election Database Management Division
EMB	:	Election Management Body
EPIC	:	Electors' Photo Identity Card
ERMS	:	Electoral Roll Management System
ERO	:	Electoral Registration Officer
EVM	:	Electronic Voting Machine
FRRB	:	Financial Reporting Review Board
GPS	:	Global Positioning System
IEC	:	Information Education Communication
IIIDEM	:	India International Institute of Democracy & Election Management
IT	:	Information Technology
MCC	:	Model Code of Conduct
MIS	:	Management Information System
MoU	:	Memorandum of Understanding
NERPAP	:	National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme
NGO	:	Non-Governmental Organization
NOTA	:	None Of The Above
NVSP	:	National Voters' Services Portal
PGRS	:	Public Grievance Redressal System
RO	:	Returning Officer
SAARC	:	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SOP	:	Standard Operating Procedure
SVEEP	:	Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation
UIDAI	:	Unique Identification Authority of India
VVPAT	:	Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trial

Introduction

Promoting electoral democracy and safeguarding popular self-rule in a country of continental dimension is a complex challenge. Responding to this, the Election Commission of India has brought about many substantive as well as procedural improvements in the conduct of elections venturing into new areas in 2015. The scope of IT advancement in election management has been widened by launching National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NERPAP) and by many IT applications. To enable voters to identify their preferred candidates, photos of candidates have been incorporated in ballot papers. Procedures were laid down for efficient election expenditure and media monitoring during conduct of elections. Renewed emphasis were given to national and international consultations to learn from best practices and to bring in electoral reforms. To promote research and knowledge creation, internship programme has been initiated. Capacity building was given priority by imparting training to the officials of its Secretariat. Citizens were enlightened for better electoral participation with new ways of engaging people through SVEEP. Complaint disposal by its own officers and field machinery has been put under regular monitoring. To monitor and assess the activities of field machineryand Headquarters, monthly MIS has been initiated so that regular updates on both election and non-election activities are received and adequacy of infrastructure at the field and Headquarters level are informed.

The new initiatives of 2015 has been documented in 10 broad categories in brief. Purpose of this document is to set bench-marks in election management. It is hoped that, such benchmarking will prompt the election managers and other stakeholders to strive for continuous improvement in the electoral system of this country in order to meet the growing democratic aspirations of its citizen.

A   Legal Provisions

(1)   Photograph of Candidates on Ballot Paper

Right from the first elections in 1951-52, election symbols have been in vogue in elections to the Lower Houses both at the central (Federal) level and at the State (Provincial) level which are held from territorial constituencies with the general citizens enrolled in the electoral rolls being the electors. The election symbols serve to facilitate identification of candidates by the electors.

The Commission observed that there are many cases where candidates with same or identical names contests from the same constituency. This can be confusing for the electors notwithstanding the fact that the candidates would have different election symbols. It is also not unusual for persons with names

similar to names of the leading candidates to enter the election fray to create some confusion.

To deal with such cases, the Commission decided to add the photograph of candidates also on the ballot. Now, with this decision, photograph is also printed along with the name of the candidate both on the ballot displayed on the voting machine as well as on the postal ballot papers. This has been made applicable in elections to both the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament and State Legislatures in 2015.

(2)   Amendment of Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment)

ECI in exercising the powers conferred upon it by Article 324 of the Constitution of India, read with Rules 5 and 10 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, amended the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order 1968. Prior to the amendment of para 10-B, the facility of a common symbol was available to the registered (unrecognized) parties subject to the condition that the party has to set up candidates at least in 10% of the Parliamentary/Assembly Constituencies (subject to a minimum 5 assembly constituencies in States having 40 or less seats or minimum two parliamentary constituencies) in the States. The concession of allotment of a common symbol to the candidates of registered (unrecognized) parties under this para was available as a one-time facility at a general election to either the House of the People, or to a State Legislative Assembly. The main amendments that have been made to the para 10-B of the Symbols Order are as under:-

- The facility of a common symbol shall be available to registered (unrecognized) parties subject to the condition that the party sets up candidates at least in five percent of the assembly constituencies (subject to a minimum of three assembly constituencies in States having 40 or less seats) or minimum two parliamentary constituencies in the State in which it seeks allotment of a common symbol.
- The concession of allotment of a common symbol to the candidates of a registered unrecognized party under this paragraph shall be available to a party at any two general elections to the House of the People, or any two general elections to a State Legislative Assembly or at one general election to the House of the People and the other at a general election to a State Legislative Assembly, as the party may choose.
- A party that has availed of this concession on two occasions shall, however, be eligible for the concession in any subsequent general election subject to the condition that on the previous occasion when the party availed of the facility, the votes polled by all the contesting candidates set up by the party at the contesting candidates set up by the party at the

general election in the State concerned was not less than one percent of the total valid votes polled in that State.

(3)   Symbol for ` None Of The Above'

In any election, there would be cases where an elector is not enthused by any of the candidates on the panel and does not wish to vote for any. In such cases, an elector who does not want to passively stay away from the voting process but is responsible and wants to positively exercise his decision of not voting for any candidate should have the facility of exercising his option in secrecy. On this principle, the Commission provided for `None of the Above' option on the ballot, which appears at the end of the ballot after the names of all the candidates. In 2015 the Commission specified a symbol to be printed against the ` None of the Above' option.

None Of The Above (NOTA) symbol

(4)   Prevention of "Tasmanian Dodge" in Legislative Council elections

Tasmanian Dodge is the term used for the fraud in the elections to State Legislative Councils when some voters steal in fake ballot papers (blank papers of the same colour as the original ballot papers). After receiving the original ballot papers from the Presiding Officer/Polling Officer and marking them at the voting compartment, they steal these voted original ballot papers out of the polling station after putting the blank papers into the ballot box. The original ballot papers taken out of the polling station are liable to be misused again. In order to prevent this, the Commission had issued instructions in the biennial elections to the Legislative Councils of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Telangana held in 2015 to ensure that the distinguish mark of the Presiding Officer and his signature be affixed on the ballot papers at a pre-decided space and remain visible after the ballot paper was folded. It was also instructed that after voting, before the ballot paper is inserted into the ballot box, the voter be asked to show the distinguishing mark and signature of the Presiding Officer on the folded ballot paper to the Polling Officer in charge of the ballot box, to prevent any chance of fraud.

B   Electoral Roll

(1)   National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NERPAP)

NERPAP was launched on 3rd March, 2015 with the main objective of building a completely error-free and authenticated electoral roll. The objectives include:

- Linking and authentication of EPIC data of the electors with the Aadhaar data of the UIDAI. Fetching the Aadhaar number is not mandatory but optional.
- Removal of multiple and repeated entries by a Voluntary Disclosure Scheme wherein the electors on their own will disclose such entries pertaining to themselves. There will not be any penal actions against them.
- Corrections of errors and the improvement of image quality, wherever requested so by the electors.
- Enrichment of the Electoral Roll database with the mobile number and email address of the electors.

Electors have been provided the facility to feed their respective Aadhaar number through sms, email, mobile application and National Voters' Services Portal (NVSP), using web services through the ECI website. Electors can also feed their Aadhaar number by calling State call centers or by submitting the details of their Aadhaar and EPIC numbers in appropriate form (offline), along with the relevant documents. Besides this, the collection of Aadhaar information will also be done by the EROs through Special Camps, Voter Facilitation Centres, e-Seva Centres and Citizen Service Centres authorized by the respective DEOs. BLOs will also collect the details of electors during door-to-door surveys.

[However, all activities related to collection, feeding and seeding of Aadhar numbers were suspended in August 2015 in compliance of order of Hon'ble Supreme Court.]

C   Information Technology

The use of IT application is an integral part of election process for planning, monitoring and conduct of Elections. ECI endeavours to create and implement suitable IT applications to enhance the speed and quality of Election Processes with the use of cloud technology, newer and simpler interfaces and strong data bases. ECI operates about 9 major dynamic portals for various stakeholders- EROs, ECI officers, election observers, EVM managers, Presiding Officers, media and the people of this country. Through proper implementation of IT, interface with citizen and other Stake holders has been increasing effectively with time. The year 2015 witnessed further IT advancement in election management.

(1)   National Voters' Services Portal

The year 2015 has been flagged for "*Easy Registration and Easy Correction*" for electoral processes. In keeping with the ECI's endeavour to provide all possible support services to electors with the help of IT tools, it launched the National Voters' Service Portal (NVSP) on 25th January, 2015 to provide single-window services to electors. NVSP is available on the ECI website www.eci.nic.in and http://nvsp.in/ . Users can click on the NVSP link for the following range of services:

- Search their name in the Electoral List
- Apply online in English/Hindi for new registration
- Apply online for corrections, if any
- View details of their polling booth, Assembly Constituency and Parliamentary Constituency
- Find the contact details of BLOs, EROs and other election officers
- Feed their Aadhaar Number to link it with their EPIC data
- Get a link to the websites of the offices of CEOs
- View instructive short audio-visual films about electoral processes as well EVMs

(2)   Mobile Apps

About 34 mobile apps are available for the use of officers, political parties and citizens. Officers can use them in conduct of elections. Citizens can use them for easy access to polling stations. During 2015, the following mobile apps were introduced:

Matdata (Voter)– Matdata App was used for Voters' facilitation. Any citizen can search details of enrollment in Electoral Roll through EPIC Number or through Name by downloading the app on his mobile. S/he can also locate his/her Polling Station on Google Map. Further, all nearby Polling Stations near the location of the citizen can be seen on the GPS enabled mobile.

Matdaan (Polling)– Matdaan App was used for Poll Day Monitoring to track poll events like Polling Parties reached (yes/no), Votes Cast, Images of incidence etc. This application has the feature of using it offline in case of non-connectivity of network. All data captured offline is synchronized with the centralized server as soon as the person using the app comes in the coverage area. Through this app, we can find out voter turnout gender-wise, age-wise and section-wise. Improvement of quality of image in the roll can also be done through this app as we get the recent colour photograph of the voter against old / bad quality photograph in the roll.

Samadhan (Grievance Redressal)– This application provided the people / political party to lodge their complaints on the common platform for all complaints received from all sources. Mobile app was available for the people so that they could submit complaints with photographs / videos on the common

platform. SMS is sent to complainant on receipt / disposal of complaint. Complainant can track status and view ATR online through the android App.

Suvidha (Single Window Clearance)– As part of election campaign, the political parties and candidates are required to obtain permissions for meetings, rallies, vehicles, loudspeakers, temporary party office, helipad and helicopter landing etc. The previous system for granting permission was based on traditional manual processing which involved obtaining consent from various authorities. This was time consuming and non-transparent. In the earlier Single Window System there was no system of proper monitoring, which lead to complaints of delay and bias in grant of permissions. This, at time, lead to allegations against the election related officers. The 'Suvidha' software provided for standard forms for applying for different permissions. It also provided a checklist showing the mandatory and optional documents required for different permissions. This made the task of person applying and accepting the application simple and transparent. This also ensured that the chance of rejecting an application was minimal. At the time of applying the mobile number of the applicant was mandatorily collected and email was collected on an optional basis. As soon as the application was accepted an SMS acknowledgement was sent to the applicant giving the application number, date and time of receipt. The application number can be used to track the status on the website. Permission was mandated to be given within 24 hours in each case.

Sugam (Vehicle Management)– This application was used for management of vehicles in the election right from the requisition of vehicles to its payment / release. The app was used for issuance of requisition letters for vehicles, capturing vehicle details with address, mobile number and bank details of Owner & Driver, Generation of log book, transfer of vehicles from one district to another district, generation of payment calculation chart and release order. Information about payment to vehicle owners are also sent through automated SMS. The mobile app was useful for the vehicle owner to lodge any complaint regarding payment as well as for verifying vehicle movement during election.

ELECON – The ELECON application was used for creating database of Police / Polling personnel, generation of command / appointment letters, sending SMS regarding deputation / training, tagging of patrolling party with force, generation of application for postal ballot, formation of polling party / police party after randomization, for sending polling personnel / police force from one district to another district etc.

E-Counting – Use of online E-Counting software for uploading table-wise/candidate-wise votes polled from the counting hall was made. From android app in the mobile phone one can view the trend of counting / result.

EASY – (Electoral Assistance System)-A web enabled service to all electors including on mobile App and SMS to know all information about Electoral Rolls, Election officers and to apply in Electoral Rolls for inclusion, deletion, modification and migration; details ofPolling stations and how to reach there and to get Voter Slip with Key map to Reach the Polling Station.

E-Netra –(Election- Novel Electronic Tracking &Rapid Action) Unified multimodal GIS enabled web based system deployed for monitoring of the election expenditure and enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct by Political Parties and Candidates, for use by citizens and the election officers on unified web portal, through Mobile App and SMS gateway, for informing/ capturing the violations, to take time bound effective action and sharing the outcome there of with the stakeholders.

Apart from the new application of 2015, seven existing major dynamic portals continued to be used in ECI for Election Management		
Sl.No.	**Application**	**Stakeholder**
1	National Electoral Roll Management System (ERMS)	For the Electoral registration machinery
2	Election Management Dashboard	For Managing election by ECI officers/ CEOs
3	Observer Portal	To place feedback to ECI by observers
4	EVM tracking and management	EVM management by ECI, CEOs and DEOs
5	SMS based Poll day monitoring System	To place feedback by Presiding Officers/Sector Officers
6	Web casting	For monitoring the polling by ECI & CEOs
7	Dissemination of Trends and Results	For media and general public from the counting centres

D   Election Expenditure policy

(1)   National Consultation on "Political Finance and Law Commission Recommendations"

Against the backdrop of the 255[th]Report of the Law Commission, the Election Commission of India organized a National Consultation on "Political Finance and Law Commission Recommendations" at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on 30th

March, 2015, which was attended by Justice Shri A. P. Shah, Chairman, Law Commission, Former Chief Election Commissioners Sh. Lyngdoh, Sh. Krishnamurthy, Sh. Gopalaswami, Sh. Chawla and Sh. Quraishi, Sh. Satyanand Mishra, Former Chief Information Commissioner, Sh. S. S. Khan, Former Member, CBDT and other distinguished guests comprising of academicians, eminent lawyers and representatives of political parties, media, civil society and students.

The consultation was carried out through four working groups which deliberated on the following themes.

Group	Chairman	Topic
A	Shri J.M. Lyngdoh, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India	International Best Practices on Political Finance
B	Shri Navin B. Chawla, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India	Law Commission recommendation and expanding in-kind Government subsidy during election campaign
C	Shri Satyanand Mishra, Former Chief Information Commissioner of India	Law Commission recommendations on contribution to political parties and candidate
D	Shri T.S. Krishna Murthy, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India	Law Commission recommendations and reforms on accounting and disclosure of election expenses by parties, candidates and 3rd party campaigners and reforms on vote buying

A draft outcome paper was prepared and uploaded on the Commission's Website.

(2)   Modification of the Standard Operating Procedure for Seizure and release of cash

The strict vigil on movement of cash during the election period for curbing use of illegal cash for vote-buying was hugely successful. However, it also created difficulty for common people with genuine need for carrying cash. A need was felt to streamline the procedure of seizure as well as expeditious release of explained cash. To address this, an appeal mechanism was put in place in every district by modifying the SOP. The Committee *suo motu* examined each case of seizure made by the Police or Flying Squad or Static teams and also heard appeals from the public. In all cases where the cash could not be linked with any candidate or any political party or any election campaign, immediate steps were taken by the committee to release the same.

(3)   Installation of GPS in the vehicles used by Flying Squads and Monitoring on the Dashboard

It was also decided that all vehicles used by Flying Squads shall be fitted with CCTV camera or shall have video cameras for recording the interception made by the Flying Squads. Similarly, all vehicles to be used by the Flying Squads and Static Surveillance Teams are to be enabled with GPS for tracking of the units and for taking timely action.

(4)   Account Reconciliation Meeting

It was experienced that all the disputes relating to Election Expenditure accounts of the candidates were getting carried to the level of the Commission, as all the differences in expenditure come to the notice only after submission of accounts by the candidates. This has resulted in unnecessary delay in disposal of such cases.

Accordingly, the process of lodging of accounts by candidates was modified by providing for a reconciliation meeting before final submission of the accounts, on the 26th day of the declaration of the results. The modified guideline also allowed a candidate to submit revised accounts, if he has already filed the same before the reconciliation meeting. This new procedure has resulted in significant improvement in lodging of accounts.

(5)   Ethical Voting Campaign by Booth Level Awareness Groups (BAGs)

Under the Electoral Roll Purification programme undertaken by the Commission, Booth Level Awareness Groups (BAGs) had been formed in the month of March 2015. It was decided that the BAGs should also be entrusted with the work of undertaking Ethical Voting Campaign in the locality.

The BAG members were drawn from the para workers, representatives of local bodies, CSO, NGOs, Schools and Colleges. They appealed to the voters to abstain from inducements by speaking on ethical voting. They also made the voters aware about the legal provisions against vote buying. Android based software was made available on the ECI website which could be used by the BAG members and members of public to upload photograph of alleged vote-buying activity.

(6)   Donations received by candidates - to be in cheques or drafts

It came to the notice of the Commission that the candidates are raising large amounts of donations or loans in cash during the election process. In line with the guidelines in respect of donations received by the political parties, an instruction was issued on the 6th June 2015 directing that candidates should not receive any loan or donation exceeding Rs. 20,000/- in cash and all such donations or loans are to be received by cheque or draft or through banking channels only.

(7) Accounting of expenditure incurred for campaign vehicles on the basis of permissions granted

It came to the notice of the Commission that the candidates take permission from the RO for use of vehicles for campaign purpose, but some candidates do not show the vehicle hiring charges or fuel expenses in their election expenditure account. Therefore, it was decided that unless the candidate intimates the RO for withdrawing the permission, the notional expenditure on account of campaign vehicles is to be calculated based on the number of vehicles for which permissions is granted by the RO.

(8) Filing of part statement of Election Expenditure by Political Parties in 30 days

From past experience it was seen that sometimes the funding from political parties shown by candidates did not tally with the corresponding amount shown by the political parties. Accordingly, new instruction was issued and the political parties were required to file part expenditure statement in respect of the lump sum payments made to the candidate, within 30 days after declaration of results.

(9) Financial reporting practices for Political Parties

A programme was organised by Financial Reporting Review Board (FRRB) of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India in June 2015 for the auditors of National & State Political Parties of India. There was consensus on several issues in the programme including the superiority of the 'accrual' method of accounting for political parties. The audited accounts submitted by political parties to the Commission are forwarded to ICAI from time to time, which have been reviewed by FRRB.

SUSPENSION OF RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL PEOPLE'S PARTY, MEGHALAYA

EXERCISING ITS POWER UNDER PARA 16A IF ELECTION SYMBOL'S (RESERVATION & ALLOTMENT) ORDER, 1968, ECI HAS SUSPENDED THE RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL PEOPLE'S PARTY, A RECOGNISED STATE PARTY OF MEGHALAYA, AS PARTY FAILED TO FILE ELECTION EXPENDITURE STATEMENT OF THE PARTY IN STIPULATED TIME DURING LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 2014.

HOWEVER, ON EXPLAINING THE DELAY AND ASSURING FULL COMPLIANCE IN FUTURE, THE SUSPENSION WAS REVOKED IN JULY 2015.

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(10) Grant of permission for landing on priority – in case of change of helicopter

Helicopters carrying leaders during election campaign are required to apply for permission at least 24 hours before landing. However, with last minute change in the helicopter, candidate/ political parties may have hardship in

landing permission. Considering the requests of the political parties, it has been decided that in those cases where permission has already been accorded to the candidates/political parties, if a request for change of helicopter is received from a candidate/political party at the last moment, then it will be dealt with by the DEO on priority basis and decision will be communicated within 3 hours.

E   Media

(1)   Pre-Certification of political advertisements- Use of bulk SMSs /voice messages in political campaigning

The Commission has taken cognizance of the fact that political parties/ candidates often use bulk SMSs and recorded voice messages in their election campaigning. Likewise, their supporters/workers and other organizations supporting them also resort to the said method of carrying out election campaign on their behalf. Apart from use of normal SMS gateway through mobile, internet is also linked with the mobile gateways to send SMSs and recorded messages. This feature may also be sometimes misused for sending malicious and vilifying materials in political campaigning and thereby violating electoral and criminal laws and MCC relating to elections. The Commission vide its letter no. 464/INST/2008/EPS dt 5/11/2008 has already issued direction regarding monitoring of such bulk SMSs by police authorities and inclusion of expenditure on such bulk SMSs into election expenditure accounts of the candidates.

The Commission directed that bulk SMSs/ voice messages on phone in election campaigning shall also be in the purview of pre-certification of election advertisements as in case of TV Channels/Cable Network, Radio including private FM Channels, Cinema Halls, audio-visual displays in public places and Social Media. Legal provisions, as apply on other mode of electronic media, shall also be applicable on bulk SMSs/voice messages.

(2)   Consultation on Social Media

A consultation to discuss the scope of Social media for the Election Commission was organized in Nirvachan Sadan, New Delhi on 17th -18th December, 2015 with a view that the emergence of new tools and platforms of Social Media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WordPress etc. may benefit the Commission by educating the public about the electoral process at large and providing easier communication with the electorate/stakeholders.

Objectives:

- The main objective of the consultation was to understand the functioning of social media and ways to strategize its implementation for the benefit of the Commission and the electors.

- Understanding the primary way to make use of social media to serve the electorate in a better way.
- Its usefulness in terms of engaging with new electors and youth.
- The reach of social media across different categories from age groups to class and culture etc.
- Understanding the grievances of the electors or address them quickly.
- Connecting to different stakeholders.

(3) Allotment of Broadcast/Telecast time to political parties during election

To rule out any confusion and deviation between the approval to the script as approved by All India Radio and Doordarshan, resulting in variation in approved scripts; the Commission desired that Prasar Bharti may constitute an Apex Review Committee in all the States/UTs during elections which may have members/experts of both AIR and DD. In case of any difference of opinion/approval between AIR/DD and political parties related to transcript of broadcast/telecast, matter may be referred to this Apex Review Committee for final decision.

(4) Election Related News Management System

Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC) monitored all election management related news on the major news channel and regional channels and sent reports on two hourly basis, since 2015 Bihar elections, to both the Commission and CEOs office during poll day and a day prior. Based on the reports received, the respective state CEOs took necessary action and filed ATRs to Commission within two hours. The reports sent by the state CEOs was carefully analysed and assessed and further necessary action was taken by respective DEOs/CEOs. This ensured quick response of election machinery to ensure smooth election process and also to keep people informed of the real situation and correct any misinformation.

(5) Pre-certification of political advertisements in print media on the day of poll & one day prior to poll

To avoid instances of advertisements of offending, misleading and malicious nature in print media in the last stage of poll, the Election Commission of India, in exercise of its power under Article 324 of the Constitution, first time during the last phase of poll in the general election to state assembly election of Bihar 2015, issued directions that on poll day & one day prior to poll day, no political advertisement would be published in print media without pre-certification of State/district MCMC. Pre certification of political advertisement proposed to be issued in electronic media is mandatory as per Commission's order dt 15th April,

2004, issued consequent upon the order passed by the Supreme Court dt 13th April, 2004.

F   India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM)

IIIDEM conducts trainings (national & international), seminars, conferences, workshops, international consultations etc. to bring in efficiency, integrity and to deepen knowledge sharing.

(1)   ECI to establish new campus of IIIDEM in Dwarka

Even though the foundation stone for the IIIDEM campus at Dwarka was laid on 30 April 2012, the Govt. of India approved ECI proposal at a total cost of Rs. 121.18 crore in 2015.

(2)   Training for the ECI Officials

In July, 2015 IIIDEM for the first time conducted the trainings designed to meet the needs of all groups of staff within ECI. IIIDEM supports and actively promotes the professional development of all categories of staff at the ECI. This investment provides staff with a means to grow with the organization whilst developing and improving personal and professional skills.

(3)   National Seminar

IIIDEM organized the national seminars on the following subjects

- National Seminar on "Gender in Elections" (29th January 2015)
- National Seminar on "Political Parties & Their Functioning" (25th February 2015)
- Talk on "Budget Implication on Personal Income" (17th March 2015)
- National Seminar on "People with Disabilities in Elections" (26th August 2015)

The seminars were attended by participants from CSOs, NGOs, Academic Institutions & Political stakeholders.

(4)   International Conference on "The Use of Money in Politics & Its Effects on People's Representation" (15th & 16th December 2015)

For the first time ever since its inception, IIIDEM, in collaboration with International IDEA (an intergovernmental body wherein India is one of the founding members), organized a two day (15th and 16th December) international conference on 'The Use of Money in Politics and Its Effects on People's Representation' that culminated in the New Delhi – Declaration 2015 on Political Finance Regulation in South Asia. The Declaration unanimously adopted by the house, is in response to the needs for strengthening the regulation of political finance (uneven access or use of money) across the South Asian region and elsewhere in the world which adequately ensures level playing field among all political parties and ultimately serves the welfare of public rather than special interests.

It contains nine overarching principles including adoption of a holistic approach to regulation, comprehensive coverage, closing of monitoring gaps, coordinates efforts with stakeholders and agencies along with facilitating participation of women in electoral democracy.

The declaration also has nine regulations and implementing guidelines on maintaining reasonable levels of spending, regulation of private contributions, and provision of public funding for political parties, prevention of abuse of state resources public disclosure of political finance, the regulatory authority, compliance, and enforcement among others. These overarching principles and guidelines which are recommendation of the Declarations have been disseminated to Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in South Asian region and elsewhere for appropriate use as per local contexts in their jurisdictions.

The Conference was attended by nearly 100 participants, across the region, that included Maldives Election Commission, Chief Election Commissioner of Nepal, former Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan, President Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), Director, Democracy & Human Rights, SAARC Secretariat, Nepal, and Sri Lanka Election Commission.

Other participants included various stakeholders like representatives of recognized National Political Parties of India, civil society organisations, academicians, journalists (from the rest of Asia, in particular from Bangladesh, Malaysia, Maldives, as well as from Europe), representatives of election management bodies of South Asia, former Chief Election Commissioners of India.

G   Systematic Voters' Education &Electoral Participation(SVEEP)

(1)   Launch of SVEEP III

To meet the challenge of eligible and yet unregistered citizens and not-so-high voter turnout, Election Commission of India consciously introduced a process of dialogue with citizens. It started reaching out to citizens to understand what was stopping them from registering in the electoral rolls and voting. The programme named Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) has run into two successful phases. After success of SVEEP I and subsequently SVEEP II, the Commission directed that the next phase of the SVEEP programme should reflect the learning from the past. Accordingly, various consultations with stakeholders including other ministries/CSO/Partner Departments were undertaken to chalk out the strategy for the next phase of SVEEP named as SVEEP III, which puts forward a goal to create a sustainable mechanism which carries out the work of voter education all over India, polling station by polling station, voter by voter over the next two decades, resulting in a population that is well informed on all aspects of electoral participation and motivated to participate in the process of elections and democratic governance. Qualitative aspect of voting also needs vigorous efforts. Based on all these inputs the components of SVEEP-III have been chalked out. CEOs gave their inputs to the draft that has been incorporated in the final document.

Inclusion of the excluded: Major focus of the Commission is now to ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups like Persons with disabilities, Third Gender and other similarly placed groups. The gap areas like Service Voters, NRI registration, and migrant voters need focused ECI interventions. For this purpose, a series of workshops on various target groups like Service Voters (who vote through postal ballots), Non-resident Indians, Persons with disabilities, prospective voters were organized. The main recommendations of the workshops mentioned above were the following:

a) IEC tools be created at national level i.e. creation of targeted national educational/ awareness tools for meeting the gaps in participation from these groups.

b) Training of the stakeholders for dissemination of the content

However, it was observed that the Commission had very little factual information regarding voting participation of the excluded groups and the same was required for strategic designing in SVEEP III. Moreover, specialized communication strategies were required to be developed to cater to niche audience. As these interventions required expertise, it was proposed that technical committees catering to specific modules be created from among the Officers of the Commission and States/UTs, Representatives from Govt. Department, Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders.

The scope of work of the Technical Committee included the following:

a) Development of educational tools and complete training kits for target audience with comprehensive instructions for use of the training kit by resource persons.

b) Suggest the process to be used for capacity building of CSOs for outreach to the target group

c) Advise on the research, sample survey & and methods for reaching out to the target group

d) Review the outreach material, educational tools and methodology adopted in SVEEP-III

Accordingly, the following 8 technical committees have been formed for the target groups:

- Women
- School Children
- Migrant ; Urban Labour class
- Rural youth,
- Service Voters (incl Wives),
- Overseas Indian Citizens
- Persons with Disability (PwDs)
- Marginalised sections like Transgender& Sex workers

(2) Brochures for various target groups

The Commission has explored varied options for effective dissemination of information to wider target groups. In 2015, emphasis was on generating information brochures. A brochure conveys a much deeper message in a compact and interesting manner and is more effective than more expensive television or print media as it has the retaining ability and offers much more room for information than other print items, such as a newspaper or magazine ad or direct mail letter or postcard. The following categories of brochures were prepared during 2015:

a) Service Voters (English + Hindi + Roman English),
b) General Voters (English + Hindi)
c) NRI Voters (English + Hindi)
d) SVEEP common Brochure (English + Hindi)
e) General Voters Guide in Braille (for visually challenged)

These brochures have been shared with all the States for dissemination of information for target groups. The Chief Electoral Officers of the States have been asked to translate these brochures in local languages and also provide the same to the newly registered electors at NVD function.

The specific procedures of enrolment and voting of service voters and NRI Voters have been highlighted in the respective brochures. While all the brochures have been designed aesthetically, conveying all the requisite information in an interesting manner, special efforts have been made to make the General Voters Brochure as pictorial as possible, with minimum text, in order to convey the information to the masses which may include neo-literate and semi-literate voters.

(3)   Theme of NVD 2015

The theme of 5th National Voters day was 'Easy Registration, Easy Correction'. The focus was that (a) all eligible desirous citizens are enrolled (b) one person registered only at one place therefore promoting surrender of duplicate registration, if any (c) no errors in the details of the elector (d) no ghost electors (e) EPIC to all electors and (f) regular updation of electoral rolls for accuracy.

(4)   Matdata Mahotsav 2015

To extend the celebrations of the National Voters' Day to the central stakeholders-the voters- for the very first time, Election Commission of India organised the first ever Matdata Mahotsav from 20th to 25th of January 2015 at Dilli Haat, INA in New Delhi.

CSOs, NGOs, Ministries and Departments, Radio, TV and print media partners were associated with the event for greater outreach and publicity. The exhibition, the stage and all day activities witnessed huge crowds from sections of society and walks of life. The festivities filled the air throughout the Matdata Mahostav, which reached out and connected millions to the process of elections. Matdata Mahotsav was, indeed, a true salute to the voter.

(5)   SVEEP Portal

SVEEP portal was created as an open source platform and is accessible to all stakeholders including media and public. It shares material related to the Commission's voter education and awareness initiatives. The material showcase initiatives of the Commission to reach out to the voters and share information on events, best practices, creative content and other edutainment material.

H   Working groups for improvement of electoral governance

The Commission has set up working groups on areas of election management which need improvement. The working groups have Chairman/Members from amongst senior officers of ECI and CEOs. The following 10 working groups were set up in 2015.

Sl. No.	Task
1	Committee to study short term and long term requirements in (i) Training, (ii) IT, (iii) SVEEP, (iv) International Co-operation, (v) Election Expenditure (vi) Documentation & Publication (vii) Protocol & (viii) Media division in terms of manpower and to suggest ways and means to recruit suitable persons (from various services including open market) based on requirement, suitability, deliverability, experience etc, so that the desired result can be achieved in time bound manner.
2	Committee to study the organizational structure for Library & Resource Center of the Commission, specifying requirement of manpower at different levels with desired qualification and to make suitable recommendation and report. The Committee can study same comparable models and also consult experts
3	Working Group for preparing strategic plan for ECI preparation of strategic plan for 5-10 years. The group will also study the strategic plans being followed by other Election Management Bodies (EMBs)
4	Working Group for differently-abled voters to address requirement of disabled voters.
5	Alternative voting option for overseas voters by Electronic transmission of postal ballot. The Committee has submitted the report in 2015
6	To study problems of domestic migrants in electoral participation and suggest suitable facilitative measures.
7	Working Group on Printing and Publications of documents to study on compilations of list of current documents, standardization of format, colour scheme, get up, printing quality, number of documents, procedure for annual tender for printing, Budget estimate and phasing, if any.
8	Working Group to update RO manual for election for LC/RS
9	Working group for preparing Standard Operating Procedures for rationalization of polling stations
10	Working Group to prepare compendium on ER.
11	Prepare manual of 'Force Deployment of election Planning & Execution'
12	Working group to draft instructions to evaluate performance of DEOs

	in their APAR
13	Steering Committee to monitor the working and progress of all working Committees/Groups mentioned above.

In July 2014, after the successful completion of Lok Sabha Election 2014, the Commission set up 9 Working Groups with members as CEOs to document on the best practices, challenges faced, interesting experiences and case studies. Based on the reports of each of the Working Groups, recommendations for approval of the Commission has been prepared and in 2015 the Commission considered each of the 270 recommendations and gave directions on implementation on each of these recommendations. To monitor implementation of the each of them we reensured using IT application (COMDIS). The application facilitates each officer to update the Commission on the Action Taken.

I   International Cooperation

(1)   Consultative workshop with Special Electoral Reforms Commission (SERC), Afghanistan

A two-day consultative workshop (9th and 10th December 2015) was organized by IIIDEM for a thirteen-member delegation including two UN advisers and two interpreters of the Special Electoral Reform Commission (SERC) of Afghanistan. SERC is tasked with providing an assessment of the current electoral legal framework, the election management bodies' structures, capacity and mandate as well as with defining solutions and appropriate policies for transparency and sustainability of Afghanistan's future electoral processes. SERC's recommendations aim at informing the Afghan government about the priorities for short, medium and long term electoral reform.

The Consultation aimed at understanding the concerns of the SERC team and look for resolving issues in the way to substantive electoral reforms that would help in creating conditions for the Independent Election Commission (IEC) of Afghanistan to deliver free, fair, credible and acceptable elections in future. It also exposed the SERC delegation to the Electronic Voting Machines and its limitation and future possibilities of its use by IEC.

(2)   Signing of MoU between India and Georgia

India and Georgia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 13th July, 2015 in New Delhi, for cooperation in the field of election management and administration. The major aims of MoU are promotion of exchange of knowledge and experience in electoral processes; exchange of information, materials, expertise and training of personnel; production and distribution of materials pertaining to electoral systems, voting technology, voters' education and awareness, and participation of women and minorities in electoral process.

J   Miscellaneous

(1)   Management Information System (MIS)

MIS (CEO level) is in place at Election Commission of India since April 2015. It started as submitting hard copies of filled-in formats. MIS has been online since September 2015. ROs, DEOs and CEOs update data on pre-designed formats every month.

(2)   Regulatory Audit Division at ECI carried out audits of all the activities of the Commission in the States/UTs

Regulatory Audit Division of the Election Commission of India carried out audit of Electoral roll, EVM storage, SVEEP activities and other election related activities for the first time since Bihar state assembly elections in 2015. The Commission deputed teams of officers and they visited all districts and assembly constituencies of the state. During the audit, the visiting teams noticed several deficiencies and memos were served to DEOs/EROs/AEROs. The audit report was submitted before the Commission.

(3)   ECI News Letter

 The first issue of quarterly ECI Newsletter was launched in August, 2015 by the Commission. Contents of the Newsletter map the range and depth of the ECI's many areas of functioning. This publication will be very useful for whole election machinery in the country and other stakeholders in keeping themselves updated and informed. ECI Newsletter is available on Commission website at http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/Newsletter/index.html

(4) Internship Programme

ECI started internship scheme to provide a platform for skill enhancement of talented and meritorious students coming from various areas of specialization. Internship is provided in the fields of (i) Election Laws (ii) information Technology (iii) Media and Communication (iv) Election Management.

(5) Public Grievance Redressal System (PGRS)

PGRS was given renewed emphasis in 2015 by creating a PGRS cell in the Commission to monitor the disposal and to add complaints which are not in the PGRS stream. Large number of complaints received in the Commission online in the PGRS. Complaints received via emails or in paper being registered in the stream of PGRS by the dedicated cell. A complaint ID is generated and tracking facility is provided to the complainants. All cases are disposed of ordinarily in 14 days' time.

(6) Setting-up of Election Database Management Division (EDMD)

ECI has renamed its Statistics Division as Election Database Management Divisionin view of the advanced data analytics possibilities that can help in taking informed decision. It is hoped that better election management procedures will be evolved and researchers and media will be benefited.

(7) Procurement of 67,000 VVPAT

Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is an independent system attached with the Electronic Voting Machines that allows the voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended. During Lok Sabha election 2014, 8 out of 543 Parliamentary constituencies were selected to deploy VVPAT. To increase the coverage of VVPATs during the General Elections to various Legislative Assemblies scheduled to be held in ensuing elections, the Commission placed a purchase order for procurement of 67,000 new VVPATs in November 2015.

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