

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi – 110001.

No. 51/8/Media/2018-EMS

Dated: 5th February, 2018

To

The Chief Electoral Officers of
All States & Union Territories.

Subject: Setting up of Rapid Response Mechanism in all CEOs offices towards media reporting regarding ECI -EVMs or VVPATs.

Sir/Madam,

With reference to captioned subject, I am directed to state that in the past, there have been instances wherein misinformed and baseless aspersions have been cast on the credibility of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) through various Regional Newspapers, TV channels, News web portals and Social Media platforms, which not only raises unnecessary doubts about the integrity of the election process, but also misguides the general public. It has also been observed that there is a considerable time lag in the escalation of such issues to the Commission, which results in snowballing of controversies. Such rumours and hearsay-based controversies can be easily nipped in the bud through quick response and timely clarification of facts.

2. As we approach the next General Election to the House of the People in 2019, a need is felt by the Commission to develop a '**RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISM**' to purposefully and timely respond to such prejudicial or misinformed reporting in the media at the very outset. Towards this objective, it is of prime importance for the Chief Electoral Officers to suitably brief the Regional /Local media, as well as the electors, through a **Proactive Communication Strategy**.

3. Hence, the Commission has directed that the Chief Electoral Officers shall adopt a comprehensive and multimodal Proactive Communication Strategy based on a clear Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to counter any unwarranted and baseless attack on the credibility of ECI-EVM and sanctity of the electoral process, by transparently and accurately coming out with facts and clarifications in the matter and rebutting the misinformation in its nascent stage. For this purpose, the CEOs shall immediately take the following action:

1. **Rapid Response Mechanism:** A dedicated Rapid Response Mechanism shall be setup at the office of CEOs as a part of SOP to immediately counter any such news appearing in Regional Newspapers, TV channels, News web portals and Social Media platforms.

For this purpose, **Media Feedback Mechanism** may be set up by engaging a professional Media Feedback/Analysis Service that would provide updates on news published/ telecast in Print, Electronic, Social Media platforms and news web portals about the election process, Commission or the EVMs / VVPATs, to the CEO office on real time basis, so as to enable the CEOs to counter the same at the earliest. *To counter misinformed/ orchestrated negative propaganda, CEOs shall only refer to the up-dated Status Paper on Electronic Voting Machines (As of now Edition-2) enclosed herewith, and Press Notes issued by the Commission on the credibility of EVMs from March 2017 onwards.* If there is any uncertainty or ambiguity or confusion in formulating the response, the matter shall immediately be brought to the notice of the Commission for guidance.

2. **Issuing Press Release containing FAQs and detailed security protocols regarding EVMs to media:** The CEOs of poll bound States shall release FAQs on EVMs available at ECI website (http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/current/FAQ-English14012017.pdf) and detailed security protocols regarding EVMs as mentioned the *Status Paper on Electronic Voting Machines (Edition-2)* also available at ECI website (http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/current/StatusPaper-EVM.pdf) to Regional/ Local media in local language, so as to re-assure the Stakeholders, Regional media & voters about the fairness of the electoral process during each election.
3. **Interaction of CEOs with Editors:** CEOs shall remain in constant communication with the Editors/ Chiefs of Bureau of Local/State Media Organizations over phone and through Social Networking Platforms like WhatsApp. **Suo-moto sensitization campaign for media & voters** shall be run at the CEO level. This would help in building trust and rapport with the media, clearing of misconceptions, disseminating of important facts, figures and information and hence avoiding any controversy from being generated at the source only.
4. **Increasing Social Media presence:** In the age of Social Media dominance, it is recommended that the CEOs & other officers need to increase social media presence at personal level, like doing Facebook Q&A, Twitter Periscope sessions, Instagram posts etc. **Social media professionals** may be engaged at the State level to develop infographics, educative WhatsApp messages/ small videos (of max. 1 to 1:30 minutes) on life cycle of EVMs (in Regional language) i.e from Manufacturing –transportation from factory to Districts – Storage during interregnum period (non-election) –Poll process-safe disposal at end of life cycle etc. that may be shared on all social media platforms by

the State CEOs. Employing Social Media platforms would provide wide reach to the above message, counter negative propaganda and would go a long way in building a positive perception among the voters.

It is reiterated that the above measures are predicated on the rationale of speedy and accurate countering misinformed propaganda against EVMs at the very outset by taking proactive steps *for* increasing transparency and publicising the efforts of the ECI in ensuring free and fair elections in India.

Yours faithfully,



(Nikhil Kumar)
Director