

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Nirvachan Sadan, Ashok Road, New Delhi – 110 001.

No. ECI/PN/37/2004

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PRESS NOTE

Sub: Revision of Electoral Rolls in Tamil Nadu with 1.1.2005 as qualifying date.

During the General Elections to Lok Sabha held in April-May, 2004, the Election Commission had received a number of complaints regarding omissions and deletions of names in the electoral rolls in the State of Tamil Nadu from individuals, concerned citizens and political parties. The Commission appointed Shri P.J. Thomas, Chief Electoral Officer of Kerala as the Enquiry Officer for conducting the enquiry into the complaints. He was to enquire into specific complaints and representations from political parties, individual electors, etc.; to ascertain the circumstances and reasons for deletions/omissions; to fix responsibility for lapses by officials; and, to suggest steps for improving the content and quality of the electoral rolls in Tamil Nadu for the next round of revision which is to be done w.r.t. 1.1.2005 as the qualifying date.

2. Shri P.J. Thomas, Chief Electoral Officer, Kerala has completed the enquiry and submitted his report to the Commission on 31st August, 2004. During the course of the enquiry, he and his team have verified individual complaints, complaints received from political parties and complaints received through other channels, most notably through “The Hindu” newspaper group. Complaint cells were set up in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu at Chennai and in the offices of the District Election Officers and meetings were held at various places in the state involving political parties (individually and collectively), citizens’ groups and election officials.

3. The report brings out three key problems that led to displacement of electors from one polling station to another and created confusion in the minds of the electors on the day of poll.

These are: -

- (a) in the Municipal Corporation areas with the house numbering scheme with both old and new house numbers being used simultaneously leading to errors with enumerators not following one scheme uniformly;
- (b) omissions of many of existing householders at the time of intensive revision of electoral rolls carried out in 2002 on account of failure of the enumerating and supervising staff, on the one hand, and data entry operators on the other; to record their names, and
- (c) mismatches between the manuscripts prepared by the Registration Officers and the subsequent computerization of the same.

4. The enquiry has also brought out the shortcomings in the conduct of different levels of election officers at the time of intensive revision of electoral rolls in 2002 and subsequently.

These shortcomings are due partly to systemic reasons cited above and partly to the omissions by the concerned officials.

5. Keeping in view the recommendations of the Enquiry Officer, the views of the different political parties and after analyzing all matters including previous steps taken in the preparation of electoral rolls in the state, the Commission has decided as follows: -

- (a) In the Assembly Constituencies wholly or partly covered in Municipal Corporation areas, a Special revision of Intensive nature with house-to-house enumeration will be carried out with 1.1.2005 as the qualifying date. This revision will be done in six corporation areas namely, (i) Chennai, (ii) Salem, (iii) Coimbatore, (iv) Tiruchirappalli, (v) Madurai, and (vi) Tirunelveli

covering 33 Assembly Constituencies which are either wholly or partly falling within the corporation areas. (Two constituencies each of Tiruvallur and Kancheepuram districts respectively that extend partly into Chennai Municipal Corporation will also be part of this exercise).

- (b) In the remaining 201 Assembly Constituencies of the state a Special revision of Summary nature will be done with 1.1.2005 as the qualifying date. Further, within the Assembly Constituencies falling in this category, for 102 Municipalities, a preliminary exercise will be taken up to correct the house numbers of all electors to make them consistent with a single series, i.e., the new house number scheme. Therefore, for the entire 201 such Assembly constituencies, the existing supplements of the electoral rolls will be integrated with the mother roll prior to the publication of the draft rolls so that all members of one family can be brought together in consecutive serial numbers with correct house numbers.

6. The detailed programmes for taking up the intensive revision as well as summary revision of electoral rolls are being issued separately. The Commission would, however, like to place before the public, through this press note, the following general measures for systemic improvements in the preparation of electoral rolls, for both the intensive and summary revisions: -

- (i) The house numbers, which are integral to the preparation of electoral rolls and its accuracy, will be streamlined to remove the confusion prevailing on account of simultaneous use of old and new house numbers in municipal areas.

- (ii) In areas where intensive revision will take place, a family identification tag will be created in the data-base in order to enable all electors of a family to be placed together in the main roll.
- (iii) In continuation of the policy of the Commission to disseminate the draft rolls to the public at large and to elicit greater participation by them in the preparation of the rolls, the Commission in this exercise, both intensive and summary, will involve the Resident Welfare Associations, Locality-committees, etc. in urban areas and village level institutions like Panchayats and Gram Sabhas in rural areas. Such participation will include reading of rolls in meetings of such bodies and verification of entries. These will be in addition to the already existing statutory requirements of providing copies of the draft rolls to recognized political parties for obtaining their cooperation in preparation of the rolls.
- (iv) A new initiative is being introduced to involve the post-offices in the exercise. After the publication of draft rolls, these rolls will be displayed in area post-offices and relevant forms for inclusion, deletion and transposition of entries will be made freely available there. Postmen will also be involved in the verification of forms which are submitted through the post-offices as well as for cross-checking the enumeration of houses during house-to-house survey.
- (v) To remove complaints on wrong enumeration as well as the lackadaisical approach of the enumerating staff, supervisory checks will be strengthened. The Commission will also carry out sample test checks through Special Observers, Post offices and staff deputed for this purpose.

- (vi) The draft rolls will be displayed on the Internet and there will be search facility to enable electors to obtain their details through the Internet. A system for submitting applications through the Internet will also be incorporated in this design.
- (vii) The computerization aspects relating to the preparation of the rolls will be revised to improve the management of the data. For this, apart from the state level agencies appointed for the purpose, the National Informatics Centre will be utilized both at the district level and level of the Chief Electoral Officer.
- (viii) The scheme of capturing Electors' Photo Identity Card numbers in the electoral rolls will be streamlined in both intensive and summary revision areas to update the data on electors already possessing EPIC. Such an exercise will also seek to correct the inaccuracies in electors' data on EPICs issued. Thereafter, a scheme of issuing EPIC on continuous basis will be introduced to enable the residual electors not issued EPIC to obtain the same at decentralized locations, preferably on on-line basis.
- (ix) At every stage of the preparation of the electoral rolls, both intensive and summary, extensive media publicity will be required for which state level and district level advertisements will be issued. The Commission envisages a multi-pronged media strategy using print and television media to inform and educate the electors on the entire process. Special emphasis will be given to dissemination of information at micro-level particularly on the critical dates for major activities.

7. The Commission has examined the demand from certain political parties on the need to carry out the enumeration by persons other than state government employees or employees of local bodies on account of an alleged bias on the part of these officials towards certain political parties. It has been suggested that unemployed youth, NGOs, etc. should be used for preparation of the electoral rolls. The governing principles for engaging persons for an

activity of the magnitude of preparation of electoral rolls involving millions of electors spread over vast territory are founded in the requirement of transparency, neutrality and accountability on part of the staff engaged. The Commission is unequivocally of the view that service rules and regulations for Government employees adequately ensure both neutrality and accountability. The service rules also provide checks against aberrations and enables action against delinquent officials found wanting in discharge of official duties. The Commission also holds that if the Government servants are trusted to discharge vital public duties in respect of non-election regulatory and development tasks, there is no reason for them not to perform duties connected with preparation of electoral rolls sincerely and objectively.

8. The Commission is committed to act on the Enquiry Report that has revealed acts of omissions and commissions at various levels on part of the officials entrusted with the preparation of the electoral rolls in the state. In all cases where there is *prima facie* evidence of omissions and commissions, the Commission proposes to initiate appropriate disciplinary action against the concerned officials.

9. The exercise of the preparation of electoral rolls is a constitutional mandate vested in the Commission. The Commission solicits the cooperation of all to ensure that the electoral rolls prepared are clean and accurate.

**(K.R. Prasad)
Secretary**