

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

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NO. ECI/PN/47/2017

Dated: 3rd June, 2017

Press Note

Subject – EVM Challenge concludes.

At the outset ECI thanks all the stakeholders for reaffirming their faith and confidence in the EVMs whether by participation or otherwise in the whole exercise of EVM Challenge. The Election Commission of India had, in an extraordinary measure, invited all national and state recognized political parties to come and participate in the EVM challenge announced by it on 20th May, 2017 as per the framework of the challenge. Only two political parties namely, NCP and CPI(M) submitted their interest in participating the EVM challenge till 5.00 PM on 26th May, 2017. Since none of the two political parties specified their choices for EVMs to be chosen from five poll gone states, the Commission brought 14 EVMs randomly in sealed condition kept in strong rooms from 12 Assembly Constituencies of Punjab, Utrakhand and Uttar Pradesh for the EVM challenge scheduled for 3rd June, 2017.

Earlier, Commission had a meeting with all National and State Political Parties on 12 May 2017 in which 42 parties participated. While majority expressed full confidence on the integrity of EVMs, a few continued to raise doubts on functioning of the ECI-EVM.

Commission held a press conference on 20 May 2017 and explained in great detail why it has absolute confidence on non-tamperability of ECI-EVMs working within the technical and administrative safeguards. Commission then announced an EVM Challenge and spelt out a complete framework and send to all political parties on 20th May alongwith invitation.

Today both the parties (NCP and CPI-M) reported to the Challenge Venue on the 7th floor. However CPI(M) told they do not wish to participate in the challenge but only want to understand the EVM process. A detailed demonstration of the entire process was given to them by our technical team. They also expressed desire to interact with the TEC and had a detailed doubt clearing session in which in depth technical doubts were clarified by TEC of the Commission. CPI(M) team then expressed complete satisfaction and suggested that to allay any such doubts Commission should hold such demonstrations and awareness sessions with technical community proactively. Commission welcomes their very constructive suggestion.

NCP team led by Mrs Vandana Chavan, MP, informed that they too do not want to participate in any challenge but were only interested to participate in an academic exercise. She referred to her earlier request to provided them the memory number and battery number of the EVM four days in advance. The Director General Mr Sudeep Jain informed her that Commission had already replied to their request mentioning that the EVMs have to be kept under sealed conditions it is not possible for the Commission to open the EVMs to take out the memory and battery numbers in the absence of party representatives in the Commission. Commission had accordingly informed that the party can access these numbers at the time of the Challenge by opening themselves the sealed EVMs which is provided as per Challenge Framework. DG again informed her that they can choose an EVM and open the same to access these memory numbers. However NCP representative submitted a letter saying they cannot participate in the challenge because of non-provision of this information. In the letter NCP representative also raised an objection of last minute change in the EVM selection protocol by asking them to select an EVM out of the list of 14 EVMs.

Commission then offered her to have all her technical doubts clarified by interacting with TEC. NCP team then had a detailed discussion with TEC which clarified all their issues, including the 8 issues listed by them in their letter submitted today to which the response would be sent separately.

NCP team again met the Commission where the Commission reiterated their offer that they can still participate in the Challenge or by way of academic exercise by selecting the EVM and then accessing the memory and battery numbers by opening the machines themselves. Commission also offered them that they can come back, as they had demanded, to prove their point.

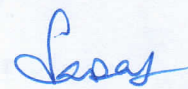
However NCP representative mentioned that the source of all their doubts had been alleged problems with EVMs during Municipal Elections in Maharashtra. Commission clarified that EVMs used by SEC, Maharashtra for urban local bodies elections do not belong to ECI. The NCP team then expressed their willingness to opt out requesting that Commission should evolve a system which clearly distinguishes ECI-EVMs from SEC EVMs. Commission has taken note of NCP's suggestions.

The Commission has already stated publicly and before political parties that all future elections will be mandatorily held with VVPATs. The Commission firmly believes that use of VVPAT machines along with the EVMs in all polling stations, in all future elections, will bring utmost transparency and credibility in the EVM-based voting system. Audit trail will enhance confidence and trust of voters. Use of VVPATs with EVMs must conclusively put to rest all misinformed doubts and misgivings regarding EVMs.

Honourable Uttarakhand high court in its judgement yesterday said "*Prima facie, it is evident from a combined reading of the entire press release of ECI that this system is seal proof. The EVMs are not hackable. There cannot be any manipulation at manufacturing stage. The results cannot be altered by activating a Trojan Horse through a sequence of key presses. The ECI-EVMs cannot be physically tampered with. The EVMs use some of the most sophisticated technological features like One Time Programmable (OTP) microcontrollers, dynamic coding of key codes, date and time stamping of each and every key press etc. These EVMs also cannot be tampered with during the course of transportation or at the place of storage. There are checks and balances to ensure tamper-proofing of EVMs*".

It is clarified that for visual Inspection EVMs can be opened and visually inspected during Challenge-II as this is allowed during First Level Check (FLC).

The Commission is thankful to all the citizens, voters, political parties and all stakeholders for their unwavering faith in the Commission for more than 67 years. The Commission would further like to thank all political parties for showing their continuous trust and confidence in the Election Commission of India as expressed during interventions of political parties on 12th May in the All Party Meeting. The Commission would like to reassure the people of the country that the Commission would leave no stone unturned in preserving the purity, integrity and credibility of the Elections and reinforcing the faith and trust of the people in the electoral democracy of our country. I wish to reassure that citizens of the country that the Commission will never ever allow the faith of the people in the integrity of the election process to be shaken. The Commission desire all citizens and stakeholders to remain aware, vigilant and alert about our electoral processes so that Commission can further strengthen the conduct of free and fair elections in the country.



(Suman Kumar Das)
Under Secretary