

Speech 25th All India State Election Commissioners' Conference at Dhordo (Tent City), Kutch district.

Date : 9th February, 2017

Venue : Dhordo (Tent City),
Ta.:- Bhuj,
Kutch district.

Time : 9.30 a.m.

- I welcome all the State Election Commissioners who are participating in this 25th All India State Election Commissioners' Conference at this pleasant venue. It is my pleasure to be present here to encourage all of you in the direction of thought provoking ideas in your field of strengthening the democracy and to witness your experience sharing of local body elections all over the country.
- All India State Election Commissioners' Conferences are being held annually in different States, which provide State Election Commissioners a good platform for sharing their experiences, information, court judgments, discussion on common issues etc. All these gatherings have always been fruitful in the past.
- 24th All India State Election Commissioners' Conference was held on 5th and 6th October, 2016 at Telangana. This time it is the privilege of Gujarat State to host All India SEC's 25th Conference at Tent City, Dhordo, Kachchh, which is one of the international tourism spots famous for its 'white desert'.

- The voice of people in India is a magnificent amalgamation of various castes and creeds, languages, cultures, religions and ethnic groups. This is the nation where the voice of each and every voter counts. As the largest democratic system of the world, the election process in India has significantly established itself as the first step in the people's access to and participation in the process of governance.
- Almost all the countries of the world and many international organizations have recognized the democratic ideals of our nation and have accepted their importance for the overall development of human race. But while recognizing that, we must never forget the great contribution made by the Election Commission of India and the State Election

Commissions of our States which have acted as the guardians of the Indian democratic system. Today, the smooth election procedure is the result of the pains taken by them in the past. It has been a tough and tumultuous journey riddled with unimaginable complexities and challenges that might seem bewildering to the modern mind.

- Local bodies are the third tier of democracy in India. Holding free and fair local bodies elections both at the panchayats and municipalities levels is vital for strengthening the democratic frame work. I have noticed that all of you have taken various initiatives and used innovative methods by leveraging IT, Digital and Social Media in recently held local bodies' elections.

- All India State Election Commissioners' Conferences provide an ideal platform for sharing your experiences, information, court judgments, discussions on common issues etc, among you and all these gatherings have always been fruitful for you in the past.
- In order to bring uniformity in respect of reservation / rotation of seats, conduct of elections and to give constitutional status to matters related to local bodies, Part IX and IX-A have been incorporated in the Constitution of India by way of 73rd & 74th amendments in the year 1992. Pursuant to these amendments, Government of Gujarat enacted new law called "The Gujarat Panchayats Act, 1993" and suitably amended "The Gujarat Municipalities Act, 1963" and "The Bombay Provincial Municipal

Corporation Act, 1949". In 1994, the State Government also framed separate sets of rules in respect of delimitation of constituencies, allocation / rotation of reserved seats, registration of voters, and publication of voters' list and conduct of election to the local bodies.

- To fulfill the constitutional and statutory obligation, the State Election Commission, Gujarat was constituted on 23rd Sept. 1993. By virtue of the provisions of the Constitution contained in Article 243-K and 243-ZA, the superintendence, direction and control for preparation of electoral rolls for and the conduct of all elections to the local bodies in the State have been vested in the State Election Commission under sub-section (3) of section 15 of the Gujarat Panchayats Act,

1993 sub-section (4) of section 6 of the Gujarat Municipalities Act, 1963 and sub-section (1) of section 14 of the Bombay Provincial Municipal Corporation Act, 1949.

- Moreover the State Government has vested the powers in the State Election Commission to delimit wards / constituencies and allot / rotate reserved seats.
- So far as Gujarat is concerned, the State Government has amended relevant Acts through the Gujarat Local Authorities Act providing for 50% women reservation and compulsory voting including NOTA. The State Election Commissioner, Gujarat, has also provided an additional option to the electors in the form of *On-line Voting System* through Internet since year 2010. It has, with the help of Bhaskarcharya Institute for

Space Application and Geo-Informatics (BISAG), for the first time digitized the details of delimitation of wards / constituencies and allotment of seats including reserved seats of local self government institutions.

- Besides, the SEC, Gujarat has also taken remarkable steps in the direction of creating awareness amongst the voters through its "SVAP" (State's Voters' Awareness Programme), which has resulted in highest voters' turn out in all the general elections held in the year 2015 and 2016.
- The State Election Commission, Gujarat has been proactively creating voters' awareness through innovative messages, mediums and varied partnerships. Scientifically designed such voters' awareness

campaigns are addressed to specific segments of voters and even future voters.

- These campaigns target voters' awareness, knowledge and behavior for various segments based on level of their awareness, usage of mediums and with key messages to enhance voting behavior and strengthen democracy. While the State Election Commission plays nodal and anchoring role, district administration is involved in the State Election's actual plan and implements innovative campaigns.
- The SEC, Gujarat has also introduced 'e-dashboard' for the stake holder which provides real

time poll monitoring. It has, for the first time in the general elections of more than ten thousand Gram Panchayats in December 2016, started uploading declarations of the candidates furnished with their nomination papers on the Commission's web site.

- With these words, I conclude my speech. I thank all the State Election Commissioners from across the country for their participation in the Conference.
- I hope that deliberations in the Conference will be fruitful for further strengthening our present electoral system and its related laws.

Thank You, Jai Hind.