

CEO for intensifying SVEEP activities to achieve highest voter turnout

Visits Budgam, reviews election arrangements



GY CORRESPONDENT BUDGAM, MAY 06
Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), J&K, Pandurang K. Pole, today exhorted upon the officers for intensifying activities under Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) campaign encouraging enhanced electorate participation to achieve highest voter turnout in the district.

The CEO, while chairing a meeting held to review election arrangements being put in place during his extensive visit to Budgam, asked for ensuring high mobilization of people through

related activities including SVEEP awareness activities for encouragement of general public to vote and register highest voter turnout in the district.

District Election Officer (DEO), Budgam, Akshay Labroo, through a PowerPoint Presentation, presented the district profile and overall arrangements in place for free, fair and smooth conduct of elections in the district. He said that all ECI guidelines are being implemented in letter and spirit in the district and efforts are being made to ensure maximum participation of voters in the festival of democracy.

The DEO also briefed about the functioning of MCMC, deployment of SST, FST, VVT and teams, arrangements for senior citizens and PwDs voters in the district.

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constituencies of the district. He had a detailed assessment of arrangements being put in place for the polling staff and designated deployment, home voting and expenditure monitoring.

While reviewing status of commissioning of EVMs and training of designated staff, the CEO emphasized comprehensive hands on training aimed at familiarizing the poll staff with the operation and maintenance of EVMs. He also asked the AROs to ensure proper uploading of data on EMS.

The CEO directed for wide publicity of election

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Lok Sabha Elections: Poll fervor grips Srinagar, voters enthusiastic to cast ballots on May 13

GY CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, MAY 06

The political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir has been undergoing a significant transformation, marked by the region's transition from a state to a union territory after the union government stripped J&K's special status and bifurcated it into two union territories on 05 August, 2019.

However, holding of mega rallies for the first time after the abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A, amidst the ongoing poll campaign for the Lok Sabha polls in Srinagar and elsewhere in Jammu and Kashmir, the workers of mainstream political parties in the Srinagar are upbeat on casting their votes and to see their demands and issues being raised in the parliament in New Delhi.

During a parliamentary poll campaign rally of National Conference in Srinagar constituency on which Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi is contesting, a political worker told that they have been waiting for the change since 2019, and they want their representatives to represent their aspirations in the parliament.

"There is no one who will listen to us, although we were expecting assembly elections, but that unfortunately did not happen. We want to vote for the change and this election is a preparation for the upcoming assembly elections," says a political worker. Several others echo similar sentiments, stating that their desire for change

and the need for their demands to be addressed on a national platform. However, amidst this optimism, there's a palpable sense of frustration among residents too. Nazir Ahmad, a local worker of a political party, lamented the absence of a locally elected government, highlighting the challenges faced by people in having their concerns addressed by the bureaucracy, saying that they have been grappling with their day-to-day issues, stating that bureaucracy does not provide them space to be heard. Another worker expressed optimism about the potential impact of the upcoming polls, citing past disappointments with previous MPs inability to effect substantial change in Jammu and Kashmir. "Although I don't expect much from these polls, but still for a change if new age MPs are going to parliament, let us know what they will do there, however the fact is they can't do anything," he said. Shabir Ahmad, echoing similar sentiments, questioned the purpose of electing representatives when decision-making authority still largely rests with New Delhi. Despite acknowledging the significance of the political developments post-August 5, 2019, Ahmad remains sceptical about the efficacy of the electoral process in bringing about meaningful change to the region.

"As long as New Delhi is holding the command and driving things here, what is the purpose of these MPs or MLAs? For me this is just a new ongoing chapter in Kashmir history", he said.

Political workers from different parties here in Srinagar say the candidates should demonstrate a strong commitment to serving the interests of their constituents, prioritizing their welfare and development, with expectation that MPs will maintain regular communication, address local grievances, and advocate for regional issues effectively. They also emphasize the integrity and accountability were fundamental traits expected from candidates seeking electoral mandates, demanding transparency in actions, ethical conduct, and a willingness to be held accountable for their decisions and performance in office. Amid the rallies and campaigns in Srinagar, the voters expect that the candidates should articulate a clear vision for the socio-economic development of Jammu and Kashmir. Meanwhile, amidst the electoral fervor, some residents have voiced concerns over the use of religious places for political purposes. Criticizing political parties for exploiting sacred sites for their gain, locals have called for restraint and respect for religious sentiments. We respect the democratic process, but using religious places for political rallies is unacceptable," remarked Dawood, a resident of Nowhatta Srinagar. "Our mosques and shrines hold deep significance for us, and they should not be turned into arenas for political campaigns," he said.

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J&K Bank Reports Highest Profit In 85-Year History

SRINAGAR, MAY 6

Jammu and Kashmir Bank has reported annual profit of Rs 1,767 crore for 2023-24, which is the highest in its 85 year history.

This was announced by Jammu and Kashmir Bank's Managing Director and CEO Baldev Prakash on Monday during a media briefing.

The highest ever annual profit was reported by the Bank, almost two months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that his government saved J&K Bank from bankruptcy. During his rally in Srinagar then, Modi had alleged that J&K Bank was a "big victim of nepotism and cor-

ruption" under previous governments. Prakash said that there were some governance issues in the Bank in the past and the capital of Rs 1000 crore was granted by the union government to the J&K Bank.

"That (Rs 1000 crore capital amount) was very critical because capital adequacy ratio of the bank has to be upto minimum expectations as per the regulatory guidelines," Prakash said when asked about PM's statement about the bank. He said there were some governance issues earlier and because of that it had come under the scanner of Anti Corruption Bureau "We

have taken very very concrete steps to ensure that there are no governance and compliance issues. The policies of the Bank are well defined and well institutionalized now and we expect that with the establishment of the state of art technology and as well as the best policies, we will be able to handle all these issues in a more effective manner," the MD asserted.

Prakash said it is a moment of pride for the bank that achieved the highest net profit in the history of the bank. "This is all because of my staff, stakeholders and our top management. It is because of

their efforts and guidance that we have been able to achieve this feat this time," the MD said.

He added that the Bank board has recommended a handsome dividend. "The board has recommended a dividend of Rs 2.15 per share," he said. The MD said the other significant improvement has been in the asset quality of J&K Bank. "We had our biggest problem in asset quality and because of the efforts we have been able to improve by bringing the gross non-performing assets to 4.08 per cent, while the net non-performing assets to 0.79 per cent after a long time," he said.

Zero tolerance against substandard drugs: DFO

GY CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, MAY 06

The Drugs and Food Control Organization (DFO) today rebuffed the report, appearing in an English daily, 'Kashmiris alarmed by white labels concealing expiry dates on medicines', stating that regular surveillance is being maintained to check unethical trade practices.

In its statement, the DFO said that it has taken strong note of the news report while elaborately presenting an overview of drug sampling scenarios in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

"The enforcement staff is undertaking regular surveillance activities as mandated under the provisions of Drug & Cosmetic Act, 1940 and Rules there-under. Also, the empowered authorities appointed by the J&K government are following the directions of the Central Government issued under section 33 (P) of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act to deal with matters of drug samples declared non-conforming to the prescribed standards", added the document. It further said that the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir has adopted a zero tolerance policy in the matters related to reporting of substandard drugs. "As many as 579 court matters are pending adjudication in various courts across the UT. The department has taken all steps to outreach consumers through toll free No.104 for expeditious disposal of grievances", the statement read. It added that as on date, there is no record to suggest that any complaint of such nature has ever been referred to the department for regulatory intervention.

Moreover, the statement said, the department has deputed a team to establish / ascertain the genuineness/genesis of the news article published in the newspaper.

The rebuttal, issued by the department, has briefly summarized the activities undertaken by it as under: Drug Alerts are being

generated & addressed to Sub-Ordinate offices of the respective divisions for immediate necessary action by the enforcement staff of the Organization. Drug Alerts are circulated via whatsapp groups / official email ID's of respective divisional heads for prompt action.

Public Notices in cases of "Not of Standard Quality Drugs - Grossly Sub Standard" are being published in the daily leading locals of the union territory of J&K.

Center - UT & Inter-state communications are being shared to check the further prevalence & effective seizure / recall of drugs declared to be "Not of Standard Quality".

Drug Alerts in case of drug samples procured by JKMSCL & declared to be "Not of Standard Quality" by the Govt. Analysts of Drug Testing Laboratories are shared at this end immediately with MD- Corporation for effective recall of such products from supply chain for effective seizure by the enforcement staff of this organization at a single point. The Drug Alerts are also uploaded on official website of the Organization in the larger interest of general public. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules thereunder identifies following contraventions and provides penal clauses as mentioned below:

Adulterated under section 17-A, purious under section 17-B.

Any drug other than a drug referred to in clause (i) or (ii) stated above. sThe punishment with respect to clause i, ii and iii under section 27(a) of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 is " when a drug is used by any person for or in the diagnosis, treatment, mitigation or prevention of any disease or disorder is likely to cause his death or is likely to cause such harm on his body as would amount to grievous hurt within the meaning of section 320 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860), as the case may be shall be punish-

able with imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine which shall not be less than 10 lac rupees or three times value of the drugs confiscated, whichever is more".

When any drug is deemed to be adulterated under section 17A but not being a drug referred to in clause 27(a) the punishment shall be for a term which is not to be less than three years but which may extend to 10 years and with fine which shall be not less than 1 lac rupees or three time the value of the drugs confiscated, whichever is more". Provided that the court may for any adequate and special reasons to be recorded in the Judgment, impose a sentence of imprisonment for a term of less than three years and of fine of less than 1 lac rupees.

When any drug is deemed to be spurious under section 17B but not being a drug referred to in clause 27(a) the punishment shall be for a term which is not to be less than seven years but which may extend to imprisonment for life and with fine which shall be not less than 3 lac rupees or three time the value of the drugs confiscated, whichever is more". Provided that the court may for any adequate and special reasons to be recorded in the Judgment, impose a sentence of imprisonment for a term of less than seven years and of fine of less than 1 lac rupees. When any drug, other than a drug referred to in clause 27(a), 27(b) or 27(c) is manufactured in contravention to any other provision of chapter IV of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 or any rule made there under, the punishment shall be imprisonment for a term which is not to be less than one year and with fine which shall be not less than twenty thousand rupees. Provided that the court may for any adequate and special reasons to be recorded in the Judgment, impose a sentence of imprisonment for a term of less than one year..

Govt adopted pro-poor approach in GST implementation, revenues reached pre-GST levels: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, MAY 6

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the government has adopted a "pro-poor approach" while implementing Goods and Services Tax, and despite lower taxes rates the revenues as a percentage of GDP have reached the pre-GST level. In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Sitharaman said without GST, states' revenue from subsumed taxes from FY 2018-19 to 2023-24 would have been Rs 37.5 lakh crore. With GST, states' actual revenue amounted to Rs 46.56 lakh crore. "Despite the GST rate being less than the prescribed Revenue Neutral Rate and COVID-19 affecting the revenues, GST collections (as a percentage of GDP) have now reached the levels they were before GST (both net and gross)."

"This demonstrates that the Centre & States, collectively, through better tax administration, are able to collect the same revenue with a lower burden on our taxpayers," she said. GST, which was rolled out on July 1, 2017, had sub-

sumed 17 taxes and 13 cesses into a 5-tier structure, thereby simplifying the tax regime. The turnover threshold for registration rose to Rs 40 lakh for goods and Rs 20 lakh for services (from Rs 5 lakh on average under VAT). GST also reduced 495 different submissions (challan, forms, declarations, etc) across states to just 12. Sitharaman in a detailed post on GST talked about the origin of GST and its role in streamlining the indirect tax system. She also pointed down how GST has benefited people through a pro-poor approach, while underscoring its role in promoting cooperative and fiscal federalism. The minister said GST has improved tax buoyancy from 0.72 (pre-GST) to 1.22 (2018-23). Despite compensation ending, state revenues remain buoyant at 1.15, she said. "Reflecting a pro-poor approach, the effective weighted average GST rate has consistently fallen since 2017. The Revenue Neutral Rate was suggested to be 15.3 per cent but was lower at

14.4 per cent in 2017, and it has come down to 11.6 per cent in 2019," she said. Sitharaman said the idea of GST was first mooted during the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government. In 10 years, UPA was unable to achieve political consensus on GST, she said, adding, "under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the necessary consensus was carefully built, and GST Acts were passed by Parliament in 2016".

GST revenues have touched a record high of Rs 2.10 lakh crore in April buoyed by domestic transactions, the minister said. Sitharaman on Monday administered the oath of office to Justice (Retd) Sanjaya Kumar Mishra as first President of the GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) -- body for resolving disputes. Sitharaman said GST lowered taxes on many essential items compared to pre-GST rates. Common items like hair oil and soaps saw tax cut from 28 per cent to 18 per cent. Electrical appli-

ances taxed at 12 per cent versus 31.5 per cent before. "Movie tickets were taxed lower, too. Further tax rate rationalization has been done since 2017. National Anti-profiteering Authority ensured that companies passed the benefits to the consumers."

GST has exempted many essential items and services, such as unbranded food items, certain life-saving drugs, healthcare, education, public transport, sanitary napkins, hearing aids parts, agricultural services, etc, she said. On the apprehension that Centre is cornering all GST revenue, Sitharaman said, "it is a myth that all GST collections are pocketed by the Centre". GST contributes significantly to state revenues -- States receive 100 per cent of SGST collected in that state, approximately 50 per cent of IGST (i.e. on inter-state trade). A significant portion of CGST, i.e., 42 per cent, is devolved to the states based on the Finance Commission's recommendations, she added.

ECI issues Show Cause Notice to Mehbooba Mufti for Alleged MCC Violation

SRINAGAR, MAY 06

The Election Commission has taken cognizance of purported violations of the Model Code of Conduct during a public rally in Thannamandi Shahdara Sharif, prompting a show cause notice to be issued to Mehbooba Mufti, President of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) who is also PDP candidate from Rajouri. Anantraj parliamentary seat, alongside PDP Assembly incharge Anjum Mirza.

The notice, served by Model Code of Conduct Nodal Officer and

Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) of Rajori, Rajiv Kumar Khajuria, cites a viral video from the May 1, this year rally wherein Mehbooba is purportedly seen involving a minor girl in her political campaign, soliciting votes for the PDP. The footage further allegedly captures PDP President encouraging the said minor post the conclusion of the public rally.

Rajouri Khajuria, in the notice, has highlighted the Election Commission's guidelines explicitly prohibiting the utilization of minors in political campaigning by any political entity.

Failure to provide a satisfactory response to the allegations could potentially lead to the initiation of legal proceedings, including the filing of an FIR against Mehbooba. Moreover, there is a looming prospect of imposing a ban on her campaigning activities in the ensuing days should she fail to adequately address the concerns raised by the Election Commission.

Both Mehbooba Mufti and the PDP have yet to issue a formal response to the allegations levelled against them by the Election Commission.