

Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. Banwarilal Purohit participated as Chief Guest at the State Level National Voters' Day Celebrations on the occasion of Eleventh National Voters' Day

Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. Banwarilal Purohit participated as Chief Guest at the State Level National Voters' Day Celebrations on the occasion of Eleventh National Voters' Day organised by Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu at Kalaivanar Arangam, Chennai today (25.01.2021) and addressed the gathering.

Hon'ble Governor said, "I am indeed happy to be here for the celebration of Eleventh National Voters' Day.

It is on this very day, the Election Commission of India was established on January 1950 with immense responsibilities. Its efficient functioning ushered in a strong bearing on the quality of democracy in the country. To mark this day, the National Voters' Day (NVD) is celebrated all over the country on January 25 every year, since 2011. The purpose of celebrating this day is to increase enrolment of voters, especially young voters. The day is also utilized to spread awareness among voters regarding effective participation in the electoral process. The Election Commission of India provides a theme for NVD every year. For this year 2021, the theme is "Making our voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed".

The Election Commission of India is a Constitutional Body responsible for administering Elections in India according to Article 324 of the Indian Constitution. The ECI exercises superintendence, direction, and control of the entire process for conduct of Elections to Parliament and Legislature of every State and to the offices of the President and the Vice-President of India.

The Election Commission of India provides a theme for the NVD every year. The theme for this year's NVD 2021 is "Making our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed". The theme aims at creating awareness among prospective electors, highlighting the significance of their participation in the electoral process for a stronger democracy. The theme also aims to ensure safe voting during the prevailing COVID-19 situation.

India is the world's largest functional democracy. After attaining independence in 1947, strong democratic foundations were laid in which the role of the Election Commission has been simply outstanding. The challenges it had to

face were daunting. The management of an electorate of around 90 crores and over nine lakh polling stations has been incredible. The Election Commission of India deserves our appreciation for delivering to the citizens of this country, a system that ensures free, fair and safe elections. Its role in promoting democracy has been so efficient that it has gained global recognition as a model worthy of emulation.

The initiatives taken by Election Commission of India to make the process of enrolment easier and convenient, and the voting experience people-friendly is laudable. Eligible voters have been encouraged to verify and ensure that their names are all enlisted by using the Voter Helpline App and also through the www.nvsp.in website.

The Election Commission of India to empower every eligible voter in view of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic situation has extended the facility of Postal ballot to the following categories of electors:

- a. Electors, who are marked as Persons with Disabilities (PwD) in the electoral roll
- b. Senior Citizens (Electors above the age of 80 years)
- c. COVID-19 suspect or affected persons

The Election Commission of India has been using the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail System (VVPAT) in the Elections at every Polling Station. Accordingly, during the recently concluded GELS 2019 and bye elections to Assembly Constituencies in Tamil Nadu VVPATs were used in all Polling Stations in the State.

The First Level Checking (FLC) of EVMs/VVPATs for the ensuing General Elections to Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly 2021 is going on in Tamil Nadu and is scheduled to be completed by 31.01.2021.

Considering the need to maintain Social Distancing during the COVID-19, polling stations are limited to 1000 electors, instead of the existing 1500 electors. This exercise will result in creation of more than 23,000 additional polling stations, from the existing 67,775 polling stations, with assured minimum facilities.

I am told that a slew of IT initiatives were initiated and implemented successfully by the CEO's office, during General Elections to Lok Sabha, 2019 that streamlined the electoral process and made information gathering and dissemination quicker, easier and efficient. A permanent Call Centre has been functioning with a toll free telephone number 1950 throughout the year even during the non-election /

non-revision period. In the COVID scenario, maximum use of Digital and Electronic media is made for creating awareness among electors. Partnership is explored with all Social Media platforms, cellular, telephone and cable networks in the region to run SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) messages related to voter registration, polling awareness, physical distancing, sanitization and respiratory hygiene. IT tools are being suitably used for information dissemination and motivation as well as for facilitation of electors and voters. Keeping in view the present theme, the various Apps developed by the Commission provide a perfect ecosystem to work in tandem during non-election, pre-election, in-election and post-election phases.

This year the Election Commission of India's focus is on popularisation of new technological tools to bring in more efficiency, widespread reach and accountability in the conduct of free and fair elections. The roll out of e-EPIC (electronic-Election Photo Identity Card) is being carried out on the occasion of National Voters' Day 2021 to provide ease of information to voters. e-EPIC will be downloadable on mobile or in a self-printable form on the computer.

I congratulate all the 8,97,694 young 18 + voters of Tamil Nadu, who have enrolled in the electoral roll, during the Special Summary Revision 2021, with reference to 1.1.2021. It is ascertained that as per the final roll of Special Summary Revision 2021, the total electorate in Tamil Nadu is 6,26,74,446 (Male-3,08,38,473; Female- 3,18,28,727; Third Gender – 7,246).

Let me remind you that you now have the power to choose your representatives. Do exercise this power responsibly, use this opportunity and exercise your franchise every time in the most informed and ethical manner, free of any inducement and going beyond narrow considerations.

It is also my privilege to recognize the outstanding officers from the field, who have been bestowed the State Awards for best electoral practices. I congratulate all of you for your invaluable contribution in the various election related processes. Always bear in mind that you and the lakhs of other personnel engaged in elections management have the most crucial pivotal role in reinforcing the grids of Indian democracy.

To conclude, I would like to tell all eligible citizens to register as voters and vote with pride in every election. It is your fundamental right to exercise. Through increased participation, the electoral process and democracy in India will continue to

grow in strength and vibrancy. I once again compliment the Election Commission of India for all its achievements and wish them the very best for the coming years. Let us together join in “Making every voter empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed”.”

On this occasion, Thiru. K. Shanmugam, I.A.S., Chief Secretary to Government, Dr. R. Palaniswamy, I.A.S., (Retd.), State Election Commissioner, Thiru. Satyabrata Sahoo, I.A.S., Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu, Thiru.V.Rajaraman, I.A.S., Additional Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu, Tmt. R. Seethalakshmi, I.A.S., Collector of Chennai, Thiru. G. Prakash, I.A.S., District Elections Officer and Commissioner, Greater Chennai Corporation and other dignitaries participated.

Raj Bhavan, Chennai – 22

Sd/-

Date : 25.01.2021

Addl. Director (PR)