

Honourble Chief Election Commissioner Dr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav's press statement on the preparations of the local level elections scheduled for May 14 in the special press conference held on March 19 at the Media Centre of the EC headquarters.

Respected voters and all Nepali brothers and sisters

- 1) *All of you know that the Election Commission is going to approach your doorsteps with the various programmes to conduct the elections at the 744 local units as per the Constitution of Nepal promulgated by the Constituent Assembly. All of you also have already been informed that the polling will be conducted from 7 am to 5 pm on May 14. The upcoming election, which is going to be held after nearly 20 years, is the only constitutional way to enjoy our rights guaranteed by the new constitution. The long absence of the elected representatives at the local level caused a lot of sufferings to the common people. The local government, which will be elected by the coming elections, will be your nearby government. The local government under the new federal structure will have inclusive representatives of Women, Dalit, Minorities and others. The representation of the women has constitutionally been given high priority in the elections. The elections will elect more than 40 percent women representatives. In addition, an inclusive local government will be formed including more representatives from the Dalit and the minorities.*
- 2) *This is an election to strengthen the foundation of democracy. The political parties that have long contributed to the struggle for democracy are sincerely working to make the elections a success. The political parties and the leaders inside and outside the Legislature-Parliament are committed to the values, principles and ideals of the democracy. The Commission believes that the persons or political parties that are not satisfied with some constitutional issues should try to address their demands on the strength of people by taking part in the coming elections. The Commission is competent and committed to fulfill its constitutional duties assigned by the Constitution. All political parties are aware of the constitutional provisions that the elections to the Local Level, Provincial Assembly and the Federal Parliament must be conducted within January 21, 2018. The Commission has intensified its preparations for the local elections. The preparations of the EC' central office is at the final stage and the EC is moving ahead to the local level through the district level regarding the poll preparations. Finally, the Commission is determined to hold the elections on the stipulated date.*

- 3) *The development of the mass media is possible only on the strong foundation of democracy. That is why the Commission makes a cordial appeal to all media houses and media persons to comply with the Election Code of Conduct themselves and ring a warning bell against those who violates the code. In the capacity of the Chief Election Commissioner, I urge all the media organizations to watchfully play the responsibility of a watchdog if anybody infringe on the rights of the sovereign voters. The role of the mass media is crucial to conduct the elections in a free, fair and credible manner. That is why the Commission again appeals to the journalists to make the election campaign a success by conveying factual, unbiased and credible information related to the elections. It is the high expectation of the Commission that all must obey the Code of Conduct.*
- 4) *The Commission alone could not accomplish all works of the elections. Making the election a success is the responsibility of all Nepalis. The task requires all kinds of support, assistance and trust from all walks of life including the Government of Nepal, political parties, civil society, media persons, intellectuals, civil administration, security agencies, constitutional bodies, common voters. That is why, the Commission cordially urges all concerned to concentrate in the ongoing drive to make the election process historically a success.*

Respected Media persons and journalists

5. *All honourable election commissioners and my colleague staffs are working around the clock by keeping the poll preparations in a high priority. The Commission is doing homework to conduct the elections for 36,639 posts at the 744 local units. The elections will elect 726 local representatives including 263 mayors and deputy mayors at the 4 metropolitan, 13 sub-metropolitan and 246 municipalities. Similarly, as many as 962 presidents and vice-presidents will be elected in 481 village councils. Altogether 6,680 ward presidents would be chosen across the country. Likewise, 26,720 ward members will also be elected from the coming elections. According to the constitutional provisions, the forthcoming elections will elect 13,360 women as local representatives. Among them, the number of the Dalit women will be 6,680. This sort of inclusive representation is going to be possible first time in the history of the local level.*

6. Management of Election Materials

The Commission will have to manage 67 kinds of election materials in the course of the elections. The election body has already moved the process of managing materials in two ways. First, the materials which are available in the country will be managed by the EC itself. We imported the materials unavailable in the country from our friendly neighbouring countries. We

have urged our international development partners to grant some logistic support and materials related to the election education.

7. Management of Ballot Papers' Printing

The Janak Education Material Centre has already provided white papers required for the printing of the ballot papers. Similarly, the Nepali Army has been assigned for the security of the ballot papers. The process of the ballot papers' printing has been moved ahead on March 5. The local level elections will be held inclusive and it is compulsory to include election symbol of the political parties into the ballot papers. The ballot papers will be unusually enlarged as election symbols of enough number of independent candidates will have to be included. We are trying our best to design the ballot papers in a way that the papers will be comfortable for the voters. However, different six types of the ballot papers have been designed to assure the participation of all political parties at the district level.

8. Voters' List

The Commission is all set to finalize the voters' list by April 2 and the processing of the voters' list is going on. The EC estimates that the number of the voters will be around 14 million. The election body is taking some extra time to finalize the voters' list as the address of the voters has recently changed due to the new restructuring of the local level. The update of the voters' list is proceeding which will identify and fix voters' new local level unit and ward under the new local unit.

Following the completion of the preparations for the voters' list, the printing of the voters' identity card will start. The EC will print the voters' list on its own. The EC has signed an agreement with a body which will print the voters' identity card. The printing of the identity card will be carried out on the premises of the EC headquarters under its own supervision. The EC is also conducting the review of polling centers. As per the legal provisions, those who crossed 18 years on February 20, 2017 and registered their name in the voters' list, will be allowed to enjoy their voting rights in the coming elections.

9. Voters' Identity Card

Following the success of the voters' identity card in the second CA elections in 2015, the EC is moving ahead with strategic diplomacy regarding the identity card. Besides, a new kind of voters' identity card is being printed on the premises of the Commission. The voters' identity card is compulsory for the voters as per the Voters' List Act 2073. The voters' identity card contains pantograph, micro-text, water-mark and QR code.

10. Voter Education

The Commission is sending its trained workers to the doorsteps of the Nepali citizens to educate them as per its policy to make the voter education more effective. To achieve the goal, the EC is deploying 21 thousand voter educators, stationing one educator each at every polling station. Besides, election-related information and messages will be disseminated through means of mass communication like radio, TV, print and online. The production of all kinds of materials meant for the voter education has already been started. The EC is also producing the voter education materials in seventeen different languages of the country. The Commission is confident of getting support from the media sector, political parties and candidates for the effective voter education.

11. Legal Infrastructure

The Commission has already received four acts, namely the Election Commission Act 2073, the Voters' List Act 2073, the Election (Offence and Punishment) Act 2073 and the Local Level Election Act 2073, required for the scheduled polls. The EC has also endorsed the Local Level Election Regulation 2073 and other regulations and directives are in offing.

12. Security Arrangement

The government has committed to manage all security arrangements required for the elections. The government is providing security for the officials of the Commission, all of its staffs, deployed human resources and election materials. I am confident; the government will guarantee the reliable security for all candidates, office of political parties, voters, election centers and polling stations.

13. Arrangement of Ballot Box

The EC has signed a purchase agreement for the procurement of 30 thousand more ballot boxes. The number of polling centers will be more than 21 thousands.

14. Election Supervision

The EC has come up with a policy to appeal to national supervisors for the election supervision. The election body could grant permission to the representatives from the diplomatic missions and the international supervising organizations if they are interested to study the elections.

15. Arrangement of Political parties

Altogether 113 political parties are registered at the EC. According to the Local Level Election Act 2073, the political parties representing the current Legislature-Parliament will retain their older election symbols. Other political parties will take part in the polls as independent candidates. The highest number of political parties has been registered in Kathmandu

district and the number is 47 while the political parties have shown their lowest presence in Manang district and their number is only six.

16. Enforcement of Code of Conduct

The EC has formulated a high level committee under its commissioner Sudhir Kumar Shah to monitor the implementation of the Code of Conduct across the country. Regional administrators, chief district officers and district election offices are assigned with the monitoring task at district level. The Shah-led Committee will decide on the complaints regarding the violation of the code of conduct, which could not be settled at the district level. Different monitoring teams will start screening after the publicity campaign of candidates begins. Such teams will work for stopping the violation of the code of conduct and will slap fine as well if necessary. The Commission has already enforced the code of conduct on March 1.

17. Polling Centers

The EC is trying to finalize the number of polling centers within March 23. As many as 18,438 polling centers had been fixed at the 10,013 polling stations during the second Constituent Assembly elections. As the number of voters has naturally increased this time, the figure of the polling centers will reach around 21 thousand.

18. Training and Management of Resources

Altogether 744 offices have been established at the same number of different local level units. Seventy five chief election officers and 669 election officers have also been assigned for the polls. The offices of the election officers are scheduled to be established on April 16. As many as 6,846 employees will work at the offices. Five government employees and three volunteers will be stationed at each polling centers. Altogether 105000 staffs and 63 thousand volunteers will be deployed at the 21 thousand polling centers. Extra staffers might be assigned to assist during the registration of nomination at the local units.

The EC has already imparted a chief trainer's instruction training to 30 persons to educate the voter education workers. The 30 instructors will train 350 persons at regional level. After that, those 350 trainers are scheduled to impart trainings to the twenty one thousand voter education workers. Following the planned trainings, all the voter education cadres will start reaching the doorstep of the voters to educate them from April 10.

Similarly, for the management of the election materials, 30 persons have been imparted the chief trainer's instruction training. They will conduct training for three hundred persons at regional level. Those 300 trained human resources will impart training for 1488 persons at district level.

Likewise, forty five persons will be trained as principal instructors to train the chief election officers and election officers. The 45 trained election officers will conduct training for 819 officers, including 744 chief polling officers and 75 district election officers. Those 819 trained officers will instruct around 42 thousand human resources, including polling officers and deputy polling officers.

19. Election Monitoring

High level officials will be sent from the center to conduct the monitoring of the elections at district level. Besides, district level monitoring teams will also be deployed. A Joint Election Observation Center (JEOC) will be established at the CE head quarters soon to oversee the elections. The EC is also preparing to operate a call center at the EC central office to convey information in simple and easy way. I would like to inform you that the media center came into operation from today to facilitate the flow of information and messages related to the local elections.

Honourable fiends,

20. Conducive Environment for the Elections

The Commission is intensifying its entire works in full swing to fulfill its historic task by conducting the elections on May 14. However, the EC is serious over some differences of the political parties as they are still unable to forge expected consensus, coordination and trust among themselves. That is why, I urge all political parties to focus on the election campaign by receiving mutual understanding and goodwill to make the election arrangements more easy, smooth and trouble-free.

Last but not the least; I thanked all media persons for accepting our invitation and attending the very press conference. I hope, all media persons will support in institutionalizing democracy in the country by cooperate in holding the elections through their free, fair and credible information and messages to the people. Thank You!