

[IN FOCUS: CHENNAI CENTRAL]

Sending a strong signal to parties

Three expenditure observers to keep a watch on spending in the constituency

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

While only two expenditure observers will be deployed in 38 Lok Sabha constituencies in Tamil Nadu, the number will go up to three in Chennai Central seat, where two high profile candidates – former Union Minister Dayanidhi Maran (DMK) and serial entrepreneur Sam Paul (PMK) – are in the fray. Explaining why extra surveillance is being mounted in the constituency, Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo told journalists on Thursday that the Commission considered the “sensitivity” and the “history” of the constituency while arriving at the decision.



Satyabrata Sahoo, Chief Electoral Officer of Tamil Nadu, says ‘sensitivity’ and ‘history’ of the constituency have been kept in mind while posting an additional observer. ■ FILE PHOTO

This is the fourth time since 2004 that Mr. Maran is contesting in the seat that was represented by his late father Murasoli Maran. In all, 79 observers will monitor election expenditure in the State. The Commission has appointed former IRS officer Madhu Mahajan of the 1982-batch as Special Expenditure Observer.

Ms. Mahajan has “rich experience of having worked in the Investigation Wing of Income Tax Department and has supervised many successful search and seize actions unearthing tax evasion in complicated cases.”

Veteran in the field
According to the Commission, she would be “supervising and monitoring the work being done by the

electoral machinery and ensure that stringent and effective enforcement is undertaken based on intelligence inputs and complaints received through C-VIGIL and Voter Helpline 1950 against all persons/entities trying to induce voters by distributing cash, liquor, and so on in order to vitiate the poll process.”

The reports of the election expenditure observers

are used by the Election Commission to even take extreme action such as rescinding elections, if there is evidence of mass bribery of voters.

Crucial inputs

In May 2016, when the Assembly elections were held in the State, the Commission had rescinded the elections in Aravakurichi and Thanjavur constituencies based on reports submitted by observers which pointed to evidence of bribing of voters.

In April 2017, the Commission rescinded the by-poll scheduled for Dr. Radhakrishnan Nagar Assembly constituency, citing reports from the Income Tax Department as well as the expenditure observer.

In his report, the expenditure observer, who looked into a complaint, found that 10,000 caps had been purchased from a shop, whereas only 1,000 had been accounted for under the election expenditure by one of the candidates to undervalue his expenditure.

Squads step up vigil, seize ₹13.9 crore

Guidelines have been issued to bank staff for transferring cash to ATMs, branches

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

A sum of ₹13.9 crore has been seized across the State so far by static surveillance teams and flying squads, which are strictly monitoring the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct ahead of the April 18 single-phase Lok Sabha election and bypoll for 18 Assembly constituencies in the State.

The sum was seized by officials from persons who did not possess documents to support the reason for carrying the cash.

Officials involved in election work have removed the defacement on 1,67,933 spots of public property and registered 224 cases in this regard. Similarly, defacement has been removed from over 1.36 lakh spots in private properties and 148 cases have been registered, Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo told a press conference in Chennai.

Of the 21,899 licensed arms registered in the State, 18,768 have been deposited with authorities. Besides, 63 of them have been impounded and 32 licences cancelled. Arms in the custody of the police, security agencies and



Taking no chances: Policemen, part of the flying squad of the Election Commission, have intensified checking of vehicles across Tamil Nadu. ■ BIJOY GHOSH

banking officials have not been deposited.

Preventive custody

Two persons have been taken into preventive custody and bonds obtained from 3,563 people that they would abide by the rules of the Election Commission in the conduct of elections.

A total of 597 complaints were received through the eVIGIL mobile application developed by the Election Commission and action was being taken on them, Mr. Sahoo said.

Through the ‘1950’ helpline, the Election Commission received 60,853 calls and of them, 54,789 calls

were for seeking information regarding the voter ID cards and related issues, he said. Banking officials have apprised their employees of the documents they need to carry while transporting cash to various areas and ATMs. They have been told that the Election Commission should be alerted in case of unusual funds transfer and ATM transaction and in case of any suspicious movement.

Mr. Sahoo said that candidates, who were to submit details of criminal cases pending against them to the Returning Officer, would have to submit a copy each to the District Election Officer as well as the Chief Electoral Officer.

Replied to a complaint over the visit of Congress president Rahul Gandhi to a private college in Chennai, where he addressed the students, Mr. Sahoo said since prior permission was obtained for the event, there was no violation of the model code on that account.

As for the content of Mr. Gandhi’s speech, Mr. Sahoo said information had been sought from election officials over the event.

Plaint against Minister
Asked about DMK’s complaint over the statement of Minister D. Jayakumar that if people voted for the AIADMK, they would get ₹1,500 a month in their bank account, Mr. Sahoo said that it was awaiting a report from the District Election Officer and action would follow.

To a question on bypoll to Sulur Assembly constituency in the wake of the death of AIADMK MLA R. Kanagaraj, Mr. Sahoo said as per normal practice, information would be received from the State Assembly over the death and then the Election Commission would take a decision.

No ‘Rising Sun’, MDMK wants its own symbol

Erode candidate is the party treasurer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The MDMK on Thursday rejected the DMK’s request to contest the Lok Sabha elections on its ‘Rising Sun’ symbol. Instead, MDMK general secretary Vaiko announced that his party candidate A. Ganesamurthy will contest in Erode on a symbol to be allotted by the Election Commission.

Sources said the decision to contest on an independent symbol – contrary to earlier inclination to opt for the ‘Rising Sun’ symbol – was taken as the candidate in the latter case would have to declare himself as a member of the DMK.

Not prepared

“The MDMK is not prepared to declare its treasurer as a member of the DMK,” sources explained.

The MDMK, launched in the 1990s, initially contested on the “Umbrella” sym-

bol and was subsequently allotted “Top” symbol. But failure to poll adequate votes led to it losing the official symbol.

Although he considered the possibility of contesting on the ‘Rising Sun’ symbol, the interest of the party would have forced Mr. Vaiko to reconsider his plans.

The MDMK leadership is wary of legal issues that are likely to emerge in future if its candidate contested on the symbol of another party.

Disqualification threat

“There are possibilities of disqualification [should he act independent of the DMK whip],” sources said.

In the DMK alliance, the IJK and KMDK candidates are contesting on its symbol. VCK candidate D. Ravikumar too is contesting on the ‘Rising Sun’ symbol, while his party leader Thol. Thirumavalavan is contesting on the ‘Pot’ symbol.

A sound start



A rousing reception: Artistes accorded a grand reception to DMK president M.K. Stalin during his election campaign at Musuri in Perambalur Lok Sabha constituency on Thursday where Parivendhar of the IJK is contesting. ■ M. MOORTHY

Major parties confine Dalit candidates to reserved seats

Even parties supposedly promoting the cause of oppressed sections plead that victory prospects limit their options

UDHAV NAIG
CHENNAI

Despite major parties invoking ideas of social justice for many decades in Tamil Nadu, the question over representation of Dalits adequately in public life, as much as the other dominant and upper castes, is being raised time and again.

In Tamil Nadu, well-known Dalit candidates are again being fielded only from reserved constituencies, instead of general constituencies. While DMK leader and former Union Minister A. Raja will contest from The Nilgris constituency, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi founder Thol. Thirumavalavan and party’s general secretary D. Ravikumar will contest from Chidambaram and Villupuram (both reserved) respectively.

Why has this become the norm? Stressing that the VCK had sought Chidambaram and Villupuram based on the prospects of its candidates, Mr. Ravikumar, who is the party general secretary, agreed that there was indeed a perception among parties not to field Dalit candidates from general constituencies. “Reservation guarantees representation for Dalits but that doesn’t mean that they should be confined to these constituencies. Those who want to contest in the open

category should be able to do so,” he said.

But what matters ultimately was the victory of the candidate.

“Elections are not the time to test your ideology. Only winning matters now,” said Mr. Ravikumar.

DMK draws flank

Shyam Krishnasamy, son of Puthiya Tamilagam leader Dr. Krishnasamy, has been critical of the DMK not fielding Mr. Raja from the Perambalur constituency despite winning

it thrice when it was a reserved constituency. “It is the mentality of the Dravidian party. Raja has won from Perambalur and has been a Cabinet Minister in the Centre. But he is not being fielded from his native place but from The Nilgris instead, which is a reserved constituency. If social justice is the major plank of DMK, why do they fear fielding him from a general constituency?” asked Mr. Shyam.

Explaining why Dr. Krishnasamy, who has been de-

manding that the Devendrakula Vellalar community be removed from the Scheduled Caste list, is contesting from Tenkasi, a reserved constituency, he said: “We chose Tenkasi because this is a seat that we are confident of winning.”

“PT’s political base is in Tenkasi and we contested from Tenkasi in 1996 when it was a general constituency. Tenkasi has a large number of our community votes.”

Voters polarised?

But are people so polarised that they will refuse to vote for a Dalit candidate in a general constituency? Republi-

can Party Of India leader C.K. Thamizharasan cited precedents to highlight how Dalit candidates contesting in general constituency was not new. “We have had instances such as Dalit Ezhilmalai winning from Tiruchi Lok Sabha constituency on behalf of the AIADMK and C.T. Dhandapani winning from Coimbatore constituency on a DMK ticket in the past. There are a few other examples back in the past,” he said.

He added that political parties are trying to build a consensus that Dalit candidates should contest only from reserved constituencies. “I do not accept that people won’t vote for a Dalit candidate. It is the parties that have found a way to safeguard the system,” he said.

Wondering why representation of the Dalit community beyond the quota of seats reserved for them is seen as a problem, Dalit writer Stalin Rajangam said, “There are dominant communities whose representation – in political parties and in assembly and in Parliament – exceeds their actual population. It is a kind of politics to keep the representation of Dalits under ‘acceptable’ levels so as not to upset dominant and upper castes,” he said.

He added, “Dravidian parties came to power promising social change but they haven’t been able to ensure that Dalit candidates win in general constituency.”

Naam Tamilar Katchi, a Tamil nationalist party in Tamil Nadu, has managed to field Dalit candidates in general constituencies openly and an equal number of men and women.

Makkal Needhi Maiam has fielded one Dalit candidate in a general constituency in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Need to do more

Contesting in more general seats across the country, many say that it is unfair to only hold Dravidian parties to account and demand that national parties – the BJP, the Congress and the Communist parties – should field more Dalits in general constituencies.

Tamilisai Soundararajan, BJP Tamil Nadu president, said the BJP fielded about five SC candidates in general seats in the 2016 State Assembly elections. “There is no drawback in fielding such candidates. The issue is the candidate’s strength. If they are strong in the constituency and gain the people’s mindset, there is no problem,” she said.

Tamil Nadu Congress President K S Alagiri and spokesperson Peter Alphonse said there was no issue with SC candidates being fielded in general seats.

“Ultimately it’s the strength of the candidate that matters. Parties don’t make any distinction on these lines,” Mr. Alagiri said.

POLL POURRI

Big days ahead for AIADMK

CHENNAI

Friday and Monday are going to be dates to be remembered for 20 candidates of the ruling AIADMK. The party leadership has advised the candidates to file their nominations on either of the days. While some of them including the South Chennai MP, J. Jayvaradhan are expected to file their papers with the poll authorities on Friday, some others such as Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker and Karur MP M. Thambi Durai and P.H. Manoj Pandian of Tirunelveli have decided to file their papers on Monday. ■ T. RAMAKRISHNAN



Using MCC to evade media

COIMBATORE

Officials who are not that media-friendly now have a reason to avoid reporters – the Model Code of Conduct. Citing these rules, they seem to have imposed a gag order on themselves, avoiding queries from the media irrespective of whether or not the issues raised fall under the purview of the model code. Of late, officials have been telling journalists not to call, visit or seek any details from them regarding anything till the elections are over.

V.S. PALANIAPPAN

Row over ‘Cycle’ symbol

CHENNAI

The Samajwadi Party has raised its objections to granting of ‘Cycle’ symbol to the Tamil Maanila Congress with the Chief Electoral Officer, contending that ‘Cycle’ has been the SP’s symbol since 2006. In its plea, the party alleged that the TMC obtained the symbol through “pressure from the Central government”. A party functionary said the CEO would consult the Election Commission in this regard. ■ DENNIS S. JESUDASAN

Minister at it again

MADURAI

Only two days ago, Minister ‘Dindigul’ Srinivasan was advised to refrain from making unwanted comments till the election get over. Not in a mood to take any of this, the Minister was at it again on Thursday. Instead of referring to the AICC president Rahul Gandhi as the grandson of Indira Gandhi, he said he was the grandson of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Party managers made frantic attempts to correct the faux pas, but in vain. ■ L. SRIKRISHNA

DATA BYTE

Nomination update

Total no. of nominations filed for LS constituencies **49**

Nominations filed for LS seats on Thursday			
Chennai North	4	Theni	2
Chennai South	4	Tirunelveli	2
Pollachi	4	Vellore	2
Cuddalore	3	Dharmapuri	1
Mayiladuthurai	3	Kallakurichi	1
Thanjavur	3	Krishnagiri	1
Tiruchirappalli	3	Namakkal	1
Tiruppur	3	Perambalur	1
Coimbatore	2	Salem	1
Karur	2	Tiruvannamalai	1
Madurai	2	Villupuram	1
Ramanathapuram	2		

Total no. of nominations filed for Assembly constituencies **8**

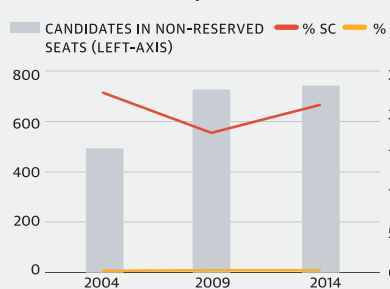
Perambur	2
Harur	2
Vilathikulam	2
Thiruvarur	1
Sattur	1

(Updated at 9 pm on March 21)
Source: Election Commission

Playing safe

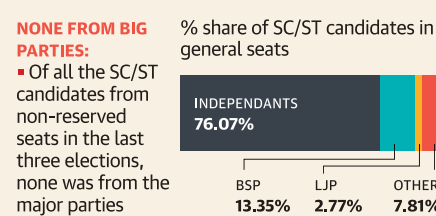
The DMK and the AIADMK have not fielded a single SC/ST candidate from non-reserved Lok Sabha seats in the last three elections

Of the 749 candidates fielded in non-reserved LS seats in the 2014 election, 156 (21%) were from the SC community while 2 (0.27%) were from the ST community



The share of SCs among non-reserved candidates was the highest in 2004. The share of STs competing from non-reserved seats has remained under 1%.

Compiled by Vignesh Radhakrishnan



76% of SC/STs who fought from non-reserved seats were independents, 13% were from the BSP. The DMK had given one such candidate a ticket

ZERO WINS
All the 397 SC/ST candidates who competed from non-reserved seats in the last three Lok Sabha elections lost their deposits

V. Yuvaraj of the DMDK, who competed from Chennai North in 2009, was the only SC/ST candidate to poll more than 10% of votes. He finished third in that election