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# Assembly polls in Maharashtra, Haryana to be held on Oct. 21

Byelections to 64 Assembly seats and Samastipur Lok Sabha seat on same day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Maharashtra and Haryana will hold Assembly elections on October 21 and the votes will be counted on October 24, the Election Commission announced on Saturday.

Byelections to 64 Assembly seats across States as well as the byelection to the Samastipur Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar would also be held on October 21, it said.

Making the announcement, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said the notification would be issued on September 27. The last date for filing of nominations would be October 4, and the nominations scrutinised the next day. The last date for withdrawal of candidature would be October 7.

The term of the Haryana Assembly, with 90 seats, ends on November 2 and that of the 288-member Maharashtra Assembly on November 9.

Mr. Arora said Election Commission officials had visited the States and found them to be prepared.

A total of 1.82 crore electors in Haryana and 8.95 crore in Maharashtra would be eligible to vote, according to the Election Commission.



As in the Lok Sabha election earlier this year, Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines would be used with every Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) so that voters could cross-check their votes with the paper trail. In the Lok Sabha election, about 22,000 VVPATs were tallied and some mechanical errors found in eight cases, all of which were too small to change the result, he said.

The seats where byelection would be held include 15 in Karnataka that were vacat-

ed by rebel JD(S) and Congress MLAs recently, leading to the BJP forming the government. With the terms of the Jharkhand and Delhi Assemblies ending in January and February respectively, the Election Commission would not be holding the elections early, Mr. Arora said.

Asked about the BJP's push for simultaneous elections, Mr. Arora said: "That debate is there, but it has not been settled at all. Unless there is a very clear consensus amongst political parties

on this issue, this cannot be taken already as a given template."

Replying to criticism during the Lok Sabha election that the Election Commission was not quick to act on complaints of violation of the model code by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said: "99% of all complaints had been settled in 48 hours."

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## 60 foreign militants infiltrated into J&K, says State police chief

'Recruitment of locals, though, is at an all-time low'

VIJAITA SINGH  
SRINAGAR

Around "60 foreign militants" have infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir in the last one month, three government officials told *The Hindu*.

Director General of Police (DGP) Dilbag Singh, however, claimed that recruitment of locals into terror groups had been at an all-time low. In the past 45 days, only two men have joined terror groups, he told *The Hindu*.

An official said the num-



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ber of foreign militants was arrived at after an assessment by multiple agencies, including the Army and the

Border Security Force (BSF).

Several instances of movement of militants in Srinagar and other areas were being viewed with utmost concern in the security establishment.

Locals threatened

SPECIAL

The senior government official said there had been incidents in Srinagar of militants in the area. The number of militants in the area has increased. PAGE 10

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Volunteers gather on the Golden Sea Beach in Puri as part of the International Coastal Cleanup Day on Saturday. •BISWARANJAN ROUT

## Police help Kashmir Valley stay connected

Local force went out of its way to enable residents to receive calls from worried

DINAKAR PERI  
NEW DELHI

Following the communications blackout after August 5, the Jammu & Kashmir police went out of their way to facilitate telephone calls for the public through designated phones, according to officials and sources.

"As calls came in, we wrote down the addresses and asked for landmarks as the names of villages are sometimes overlapping. Then people were located and brought to the station to enable them to talk. In some cases, we took phones to houses and enabled people to talk," said Baramulla DSP Javed Ahmed, speaking to



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*The Hindu* on the phone. Calls came from several countries - the U.S., the U.K., Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Australia and Austria and even from Pakistan from Kashmiri students studying there, Mr. Ahmed said.

wouldn't reveal the address," Mr. Ahmed said.

Another senior police officer, requesting anonymity, said the phone calls for the public began two days after the withdrawal of Article 370 and went on at a frenetic pace for the next 20 days. "In the initial few days, there were 10-20 phones; later, there were about 150 phones in the Valley. And soon senior officials, including the Commissioner, the Superintendent of Police and the DSP, were doing it," he said.

On average, over 100 people were calling every day, he said, and on the whole, over one lakh calls were made. The number of such calls on public phones, ho-

Recounting the challenges the security forces faced, he said people were wary that the police had come to arrest someone while inquiring for addresses.

"We had to first get friendly with them or they