Tight security in Shopian, Pulwama for polls

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A school, where a polling station had been set up, torched by the militants at Shopian on Sunday. — Excelsior/Younis Khaliq

All arrangements in place in Ladakh

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Srinagar, May 5: Amid tight security in South Kashmir's Shopian and Pulwama districts, authorities today airlifted polling staff and Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) to 24 Polling Stations of highly militancy infested Zainapora area of Shopian district while a protester and a driver of a poll staff vehicle was injured and around two dozen buses damaged as the poll parities were targeted by stone pelting protesters.

Authorities this afternoon airlifted Poll staff from District Police Lines (DPL) Shopian to 24 polling stations in sub-division Zainapora area which is said to be most sensitive area.

The poll staff along with EVMs for 24 polling stations were airlifted in helicopters from District Police Lines Shopian and dropped in sub division Zainapora today in the afternoon for security reasons.

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These arrangements were made by the administration as a precautionary measure and to prevent any law and order situation in the area.

Protesters pelted stones on vehicles carrying polling staff in many other parts of the twin districts of Pulwama and Shopian. At Palpora in Shopian district, a protester identified as Suhail Ahmad Malik received bullet injury as security forces fired at stone pelting protesters who were targeting security forces on poll duty.

In Tral area of Pulwama district which is most sensitive constituency which mostly records low turnout, at least 23 buses carrying poll staff were damaged in the stone pelting and a bus driver was also injured.

Government Middle school Dompora Keegam in district Shopian was set ablaze under mysterious circumstances last night. Officials said that there was no polling station in the school this time.

Miscreants tried to set ablaze a Panchayat Ghar at Chandpora, Rajpora in district Pulwama this evening. However, the locals raised the alarm forcing them to flee. The Panchayat Ghar suffered minor damage.

A Pathwar Khana was also set ablaze at Rajpora in district Pulwama this evening. The locals and Fire tenders doused the flames but not before it suffered major damage.

The polls in the twin districts are being held under tight security. Additional 300 companies of Central Forces are deployed for election duty in the twin districts besides already existing security. Army is also patrolling in the sensitive areas for area domination to prevent any threat to polls.

Security forces have detained around 100 suspected persons who they thought could have disturbed the poll process.

The twin districts of Pulwama and Shopian are spread over six Assembly segments — Tral, Pampore, Pulwama, Rajpora, Wachi and Shopian.

In the last leg of the three-phased elections for Anantnag constituency, the two South Kashmir districts Pulwama and Shopian are going for polls on May 6.

The Election Commission has established 695 polling stations across the districts for the smooth conduct of elections. These two districts have 522,530 electors including 271,127 males, 250,735 females, 657 service electors (646 males and 11 females) and 11 transgender voters.

Pulwama district has 351,314 electorates including 181,259 males, 169,508 females, 541 service electorates (533 male and eight females) and six transgender voters. 450 polling stations have been set up across the district.

Authorities dispatched 1900 polling personnel and Micro-Observers, along with poll material, EVMs/VVPAT machines to these polling stations of four Assembly constituencies of Pampore, Tral, Rajpora and Pulwama of the district amid tight security.

There are 17 Zonal and 47 Sector Magistrates have been appointed by district administration for smooth conduct of general election in the district.

Similarly, Shopian district has 171,216 electors including 89,868 males, 81,227 females, 116 service electors (113 male and three female) and five transgender voters. The EC has set up 245 polling stations across the district.

Authorities dispatched 245 polling parties along with Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) and other election material to the two Assembly segments of District Shopian – Wachi and Shopian. Out of these, 127 have been sent to Shopian and 118 to Wachi. Eight Model polling stations have also been established in the district.

The candidates in the fray in the constituency are Hasnain Masoodi of Jammu Kashmir National Conference, Sofi Yousuf of Bharatiya Janata Party, Ghulam Ahmad Mir of Indian National Congress, Mehbooba Mufti of People's Democratic Party, Nisar Ahmad Wani of National Panthers Party, Choudhary Zaffar Ali of People's Conference, Sanjay Kumar Dhar of Manav Adhikar Party, Surinder Singh of Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) and Imtiyaz Ahmad Rather, Ridwana Sanam, Riyaz Ahmad Bhat, Zubair Masoodi, Shams Khwaja, Ali Mohammad Wani, Ghulam Mohammad Wani, Kyasir Ahmed Sheikh, Manzoor Ahmad Khan and Mirza Sajad Hussain Beigh, all Independents.

The Anantnag and Kulgam districts of Anantnag Parliamentary constituency went to polls on April 23 and April 29 respectively. The voting timing has been fixed from 7 am to 4 pm in these districts for security reasons.

Meanwhile, the High School Qasbayar at shadimarg in Pulwama suffered minor damage this evening after it was set on fire.

Locals and firemen doused the flames.

Meanwhile, though Ladakh Parliamentary constituency is completely peaceful with no militancy, authorities haven't taken any chance and deployed adequate number of para-military and police personnel for tomorrow's voting in which 1.74 lakh electorates will decide fate of four candidates, none of whom is sitting Member of Parliament (MP).

Official sources told the Excelsior that election parties as well as security personnel have taken positions in all 559 polling stations in both Leh and Kargil districts, which comprised Ladakh Parliamentary constituency. The Lok Sabha seat is based on four Assembly seats including Leh, Nobra, Kargil and Zanskar.

Ladakh has an electoral strength of 1,74,618 voters – 86,752 males, 85,064 females, 2,799 are service voters and 3 transgender voters for whom 559 polling stations have been set up for the smooth conduct of electoral exercise.

The candidates in fray for the Ladakh Lok Sabha seat are Rigzin Spalbar of Congress, Jamyang Tsering Namgyal of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Asgar Ali Karbalaie and Sajjad Hussain – both Independents.

The voting timing for the constituency has been fixed from 7 am to 6 pm, the officials said.

Polling staff for 122 polling stations has already been dispatched that include 8 cut off polling stations of Dipling, Skyumpatta, Skyumpatta Gongma, Jingchen, Lingshet, Kartse, Nyaraks and Yulchung where the polling staff have been sent through helicopter well in advance.

Elections parties for all polling stations in Kargil district were also dispatched today from Khree Sultan Chow Sports Stadium Kargil.

The polling parties for the far flung areas of the district including Rangdum, Tashi Stongday and Pangbar were dispatched on Saturday while as the polling party for Itchu polling station was also dispatched through IAF helicopters.

Before departure for the polling stations, the polling personnel took part in the signature campaign "pledge to ensure free, fair, transparent and ethical elections".

"This time Leh district will have 49 such polling stations which have purely female polling staff," District Election Officer (DEO), Leh, Avny Lavasa said as she gave a send off to the buses carrying 172 polling parties for different destinations.

Lavasa said polling staff for rest of the 122 polling stations in the district has already been dispatched that include eight cut-off polling stations of Dipling, Skyumpatta, Skyumpatta Gongma, Jingchen, Lingshet, Kartse, Nyaraks and Yulchung. The polling staff has been sent through helicopters well in advance in these stations, she added.

Lavasa said the district election authorities have taken every necessary measures such as working out a better communication plan, provision of reserved EVMs and VVPATs, issuing of extra batteries for machines and an improved transportation plan.

Besides, all the polling officials have been imparted comprehensive hands on training about the operating and functioning procedures of EVM and VVPAT, she said.

She also mentioned that every polling station across Leh district will have ample arrangement of Assured Minimum Facility for the overall convenience of the electorates. District Election Officer (DEO), Kargil, Baseer ul Haq Choudhary said all the polling parties for the 265 polling stations in the district have been dispatched.

The polling parties for the far flung areas of the district including Rangdum, Tashi Stongday and Pangbar were dispatched on Saturday, while the polling party for Itchu polling station was dispatched through IAF helicopters on the same day, he said.

Before departure for the polling stations, the polling personnel took part in the signature campaign “pledge to ensure free, fair, transparent and ethical elections”.

The DEO while expressing satisfaction over the overall preparedness said all necessary arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the elections are conducted in a smooth, free, fair and ethical manner.

Choudhary appealed to people to enthusiastically participate in the voting process and to cast their vote without any fear.

Thupstan Chhewang of the BJP had won the 2014 election from the constituency by a wafer-thin margin of 36 votes, defeating independent candidate Ghulam Raza and two others in the contest.

Gaik polling station (Leh segment) and Washi polling station (Nubra segment) each have only seven registered voters eligible to cast their votes.

The highest number of voters — 1,301 — are eligible to exercise their franchise at Shynam polling station in Leh.

The highest polling station, Anlay Pho (Changthang), has been set up in Leh district at an altitude of 15,000 feet above the sea level.

The booth is barely 50 metres from the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The polling in the constituency will begin at 7.00 a.m and end at 6.00 p.m the officials said.

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