STATE ELECTION COMMISSION KERALA

REVIEW REPORT

2023-2024

A review on the activities of
the State Election Commission
from 01.04.2023 to 31.03.2024

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In 1992 the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments were passed by the Parliament and Part IX and IXA were added to the Constitution of India.73rd amendment gave the Panchayati Raj Institutions a Constitutional status and 74th amendment made provisions relating to Urban Local Governments and came into force in 1993. These Constitutional amendments, inter-alia, sought to create the machinery for free and fair elections to the Local Bodies through an independent State Election Commission (SEC). Accordingly, the State Election Commission is constituted under Articles 243 K and 243 ZA of the Constitution of India for the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats and the Municipalities in the State, which came into existence on 3rd December,1993. Since then the State Election Commission has been conducting the general elections and bye - elections to all Local Self Government Institutions in the state successfully and in a transparent manner. Free and fair elections are the foundation of a healthy democracy. The State Election Commission is the Constitutional body responsible for conducting and supervising elections to the local bodies in the State. The first general election under the superintendence of the State Election Commission was held in 1995 and it was followed by general elections in 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020.

1. STATE ELECTION COMMISSIONER - STATUS AND TENURE

State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor under Clause (1) of Article 243K of the Constitution of India. He holds the office for a period of 5 years or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier. He has the same status of a High Court Judge and shall not be removed from his office except in the like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of a High Court and the conditions of service of the State Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment.

Shri.A.Shajahan IAS (Rtd) was appointed as the 7th State Election Commissioner by the Governor of Kerala vide Notification G.O.(P)No.14/2021/LSGD dated 17.02.2021(S.R.O No.190/2021) and assumed charge on 31.03.2021.

2. POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF STATE ELECTION COMMISSION

The Articles 243K and 243ZA of the Constitution of India provide for the roles and responsibilities of State Election Commissions. State Election Commission has constitutional authority with quasi- legislative, quasi - executive and quasi- judicial powers. Where existing laws are absent and yet a situation has to be tackled, the State Election Commission has plenary powers under Article 243K, to issue suitable directions to perform its duties.

The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Panchayats and Municipalities are vested in the State Election Commission. In addition to this the Commission;

- Has the power to disqualify elected members in accordance with the provisions of Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 (KPR Act, 1994) and Kerala Municipality Act, 1994 (KM Act, 1994). State Election Commission, Kerala is authorized to adjudicate the matter of disqualification of a member of a local authority under the provisions of the Kerala Local Authority (Prohibition of Defection) Act, 1999.
- Has the powers of a Civil Court while trying a suit under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.
- Determines the Constituencies/ Wards reserved for SC, ST and Women in the Panchayats at each level and Municipalities.
- Determines the offices of the President/Vice President/Chairperson/Deputy Chairperson /Mayor/ Deputy Mayor reserved for SC, ST and Women, by rotation for every level of Panchayats and Municipalities, subject to the number of offices so fixed by Government.
- Determines the seats of the Chairmen of various Standing Committees reserved for Women.
- Conduct the elections to the offices of President, Vice President, Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Mayor and Deputy Mayor and to the Members of District Planning Committees and Standing Committees.
- Has the power to disqualify a person for a period of 5 years from the date of its order, if he fails to lodge an account of election expenses within the prescribed time limit and manner. The contesting candidates at an election have to submit account of election expenses, within 30 days from the date of election, to the Officer authorized by State Election Commission.
- Decides disputes on the question of resignation of Member/Councillor, President, Vice President, Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Mayor and Deputy Mayor.
- Issues directions on the conduct of meetings in local bodies to consider the Motion of No Confidence against President, Vice President, Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Chairmen of Standing Committees.
- *Controls the Officers designated for the conduct of election. Section 48A of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 and Section 104A of the Kerala Municipality Act, 1994 mandate that all Officers designated for the conduct of election shall be deemed to be on deputation to the State Election Commission for the period from the date of notification of election till the date of declaration of result of such election and such Officers shall be*

under the control, supervision and command of the State Election Commission, during the period.

3. DELIMITATION OF CONSTITUENCIES

Articles 243C and 243R of the Constitution of India mandate the State Government to make provisions with respect to composition of Panchayats and Municipalities respectively. Accordingly Government shall notify the total number of seats to be filled by direct election with reference to population of the territorial area of the Panchayat at all level and Municipality concerned and also determine the number of seats to be reserved for SC, ST and for Women. In order to divide every local body into as many Constituencies/Wards as there are seat and fix the boundaries of such Constituencies/Wards, Government shall by notification constitute a Delimitation Commission under Section 10 of Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 and Section 69 of Kerala Municipality Act, 1994.

The State Election Commission, as per the Letter No.B1-197/2022/SEC dated 24.08.2022 has requested the Government to take urgent steps to take a policy decision on the matter of constitution or re-constitution of local bodies at the earliest so as to enable the Delimitation Commission to complete the delimitation process well in advance before the forth coming General Election 2025.

4. DELIMITATION COMMISSION

As per the provisions in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 and Kerala Municipality Act, 1994 the Government may constitute a new local body or re-constitute the exiting local body before the General Election to local bodies. In this regard the Government shall constitute a Delimitation Commission consisting of the State Election Commissioner as Chairman and 4 Officers not below the rank of Secretary to Government as Members. In discharging the function, the Delimitation Commission has certain powers of a Civil Court in summoning and examining the witnesses, requiring production of documents, taking evidence on affidavit and in requiring a public record or its copy. The Delimitation Commission issue guidelines on fixing of boundaries. Every Order issued by the Delimitation Commission with regard to delimitation of constituencies shall be published in the Gazette and shall have the force of law.

5. CONDUCT OF ELECTION TO LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The first and foremost duty of the State Election Commission is the timely conduct of elections to the Panchayats and Municipalities in the State, in a free, fair and transparent manner. Kerala has a total of 1200 Local Self Government Institutions that are categorized into Grama Panchayats, Block Panchayats, District Panchayats, Municipal Councils and Municipal Corporations. The Commission conduct bye-elections to fill the casual vacancies arising in the office of the Members of Panchayat at any level/Councillors of Municipalities. Vacancies are to be filled up within six months after the occurrence of vacancies. Four bye-elections are held in the report period for filling up the vacancies of 92 Members/Councillors. A lot of planning and preparations are to be done before each

election. Following are the important activities involved in connection with the election to Local Self Government Institutions.

(a). ELECTION RELATED ACTIVITIES

- Revision of Electoral Roll
- Setting up of Polling Stations.
- Setting up of Distribution and Collection Centers.
- Appointment of Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers
- Printing of Books, Forms and Registers etc.
- Procurement of Election Materials
- Meeting with Stakeholders
- Issuing Election Notification
- Enforcement of Model Code of Conduct
- Appointment of Polling Officials
- Training for Polling Officials
- Storage of Electronic Voting Machines and Election Materials
- Setting up of Counting Halls
- Counting of Votes and Declaration of Result

(b). POST ELECTION ACTIVITIES

- Publication of Result in Gazette
- Scrutiny of Expenditure Statement submitted by the Candidates.
- Publishing list of defaulters who failed to submit expenditure statements and disqualifying them
- Disqualifying the elected members on the grounds of defection, non submission of asset declaration and non convening of Grama Sabha.
- Election of President, Vice President, Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Mayor, and Deputy Mayor
- Election of Members and Chairmen of Standing Committees.
- Election of members to District Planning Committee.

6. ELECTION AUTHORITIES

The following are the authorities prescribed for the conduct of Elections.

a) District Election Officers

b) Assistant District Election Officers

c) Electoral Registration Officers

d) Assistant Electoral Registration Officers

e) Returning Officers

f) Assistant Returning Officers

g) Presiding Officers and Polling Officers

h) Election Observers/Financial Observers

i) Sectoral Officers

7. TERM OF OFFICE OF MEMBERS/COUNCILLORS

The term of office of Members/Councillors of a local body shall be fixed as five years from the date fixed for convening the first meeting of that local body. Ordinary vacancies in the office of Members/Councillors of local body at any level shall be filled after a General Election which shall be fixed by Government to take place on such day or days within 3 months before the occurrence of vacancies. A casual vacancy in the office of a Member/Councillor shall be filled by State Election Commission within 6 months after the occurrence of the vacancy through a bye-election. (Section 149(3) of KPR Act and Section7(4) of KM Act).

8. GENERAL ELECTION 2020

The Constitution of India mandates that the election to constitute a Panchayath/Municipality shall be completed before the expiry of its duration and every local body so constituted shall continue for 5 years from the date appointed for its first meeting. For the purpose of General Election, the Government shall, by one or more notification, publish in the Gazette on such date or dates as may be recommended by State Election Commission, call upon all the constituencies or wards of local bodies in the State to elect Members/Councillors in accordance with the provisions of the KPR Act/KM Act and allied Rules. The last General Election to all local bodies except Mattannur Municipality was held on 8th, 10th and 14th December 2020 and counting was on 16th December 2020. Accordingly the first meeting of newly elected members was held on 21st December 2020.

9. GENERAL ELECTION TO MATTANNUR MUNICIPALITY-2022

The General Election to Mattannur Municipality was conducted on 20th August 2022, since the tenure of the council was upto 9th September 2022. The notification for the election was published on 26.07.2022 and counting was conducted on 22.08.2022. The newly elected Councillors took oath on 11.09.2022. The election to the post of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson was held on 15.09.2022.

The election of all Members and Chairmen of Standing Committees were completed before 30th September, 2022.

10. AUDIT OF GENERAL ELECTION 2020

Audit of accounts in connection with General Election 2020 in all districts were completed. Audit reports were furnished to the concerned District Election Officers. Audit paras pertaining to Ernakulam and Palakkad were dropped on the basis of the reply furnished from their side.

11. HANDBOOKS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

The following 13 numbers of Handbook/Pamphlet/Guidelines/Mannual are used by the Commission for the use of the stakeholders for General Election/Other Election related activities, namely :

1. Hand Book for Returning Officers
2. Hand Book for Electoral Registration Officers
3. Hand Book for Presiding Officers
4. Hand Book for District Election Officers
5. Hand Book for Police Officers
6. Hand Book on Model Code of Conduct
7. Guidelines to Returning Officers for election of Municipal Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.
8. Guidelines to Returning Officers for election of President/Vice President of Panchayats.
9. Guidelines for the Election of Chairmen and Members of Standing Committees.
10. Guidelines for reservation of wards.
11. Pamphlet for Voters, Candidates and Political parties.
12. Pamphlet on Election Symbols.
13. Manual of Electronic Voting Machines.

Now, the State Election Commission has taken steps to revise all the above documents based on the outcome of the discussion with State Level Election Experts and in-house experts of the Commission.

In addition to the above documents, the Commission has finalized the following three new Hand Books / Guide and are under process for publishing.

1.Guide for Election Related Officers.

2. Media Hand Book

3.Hand Book for Sectoral Officers.

ADMINISTRATION OF STATE ELECTION COMMISSION

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Section 12 of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 provides an independent office and staff for State Election Commission to discharge its functions, and officers are appointed by Government after consultation with Commission. The State Election Commissioner is the Head of the office of the Commission. An Officer not below the rank of Additional Secretary to Government is appointed as Secretary to the State Election Commission. He is the administrative head of the Commission. In addition to the post of Secretary, there are 3 posts of Additional Secretaries and 1 post of Administrative Officer, which are addition to cadre posts from the Administrative Secretariat. The post of Law Officer and Senior Finance Manager are filled up from the cadre of Joint Secretary/ Additional Secretary to Government, from Law and Finance Departments respectively. The two posts of Joint Secretaries are filled up from the cadre of Joint Directors of Local Self Government Department. The post of Public Relations Officer is filled up from the cadre of Information Officer in Information and Public Relations Department. The post of Private Secretary to Commissioner is filled by appointment on co-terminus basis. In addition to these, 2 posts of Section Officers are filled by appointment from the cadre of Section Officers in the Administrative Secretariat. There are a total of 66 sanctioned posts in the Commission. In each district an Assistant has been posted in the District Election Wing for carrying out the Election related activities of Local Self Government Institutions in that district.

1. FINANCE

Efforts were taken to streamline payment of advances and settlement of advances. Orders were issued as per Order No.SEC/1287/2021-A2 dated 08.04.2022for streamlining payment after a detailed study by Finance section. Prudent efforts were also made to reduce infructuous expenditure there by savings.

The budget provision and expenditure is detailed as Annexure-I.

2. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WING

The State Election Commission has set up an in house IT cell in order to catalyse the IT enabled services and activities carried out by the Commission in the different facets of the Local Bodies Election regime.

The roles and responsibilities of the IT cell are as follows:

i) Development of new modules & tools for streamlining the existing procedures in the sphere of election giving thrust to ICTs/ IoTs etc.

ii) Development of Management Information System (MIS) for easy monitoring of election related activities like Electoral Roll Enrollment, reporting of Casual Vacancies, Filing of Expenditure Statements, etc.

iii) Development of seamless two way online communication between the Commission and the Field Level Staff (Data Entry Operators, Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers etc) for enabling a less paper environment and eliminating routine stereotypic communication as well.

iv) Upkeep of the various portals/websites of the Commission ensuring enhanced user friendliness and seamless access across different devices/platforms through constant interaction with stakeholders like NIC, Kerala State IT Mission, KILA, C-DIT, Kerala Digital University etc.

v) Streamlining the existing e-office digital file processing system in consultation with NIC/IT Mission, on a continuous basis for reaping the maximum utilities made available therein.

vi) Designing and launching a frame work for digitising the old records/data and archiving them in a structured manner.

vii) Advising the Commission in house in all ICT related areas to aid the Commission to keep abreast of the latest technological advancements in the sphere of ICTs, IoTs etc.

Various software applications used by SEC are presently handled by NIC. The Commission doesn't have a special technical wing to handle System Administration, Database Administration and other activities specified in the guidelines of NIC. So, the Commission decided to hire a System and Database Architect, who have core competency in Development and Operations, from National Informatics Centre Services Incorporated (NICSI) on contract basis for a period of one year.

3. HOUSE KEEPING WING

This section comprises of Section Officer and Two Assistants. The Section is headed by the Secretary and assisted by the Additional Secretary.

1. Maintenance of Office Building and premises.

2. Solar System:-

As part of the Smart City Project, the ANERT installed a grid-connected solar power system with a capacity of 40 KWP.

3. Purchase of the following were materialized:-

i. Desktop Computers – 6

ii. Tower Server – 1

iii. Photocopier Machines – 2

iv. iPad – 1

v. Purchase of Office Furniture, Stationery, Cleaning materials, minor Electronic and Electrical equipments.

4. Periodical Servicing of Transformer, A/Cs & Generator was undertaken

5. Vehicle Management:-

Since the vehicle bearing No.KL-01-AT4298 has covered a distance of 2.13 Lakh Km and has reached the end of its 15-year lifespan, it has been decided to dismantle through MSTC, subject to the observance of existing procedures and not replaced till 31.03.2024.

6. Disposal of Unserviceable Items:-

The details of all unserviceable items and e-waste stored in various almirahs and shelves in the office of the State Election Commission were documented at regular intervals. These items were subsequently handed over to M/s Clean Kerala Company Limited.

4. RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Under Right to Information Act 2005, a total number of 63 applications were received during the period under review and a total of ₹ 600/-was collected towards application fee.

An amount of ₹ 804/- was collected as fees for issuing copies for information. Two numbers of Appeal Petitions were received during this period and disposed. Applications and Appeals received were disposed within the time limit prescribed in the Act. During the period under review, Section Officers and Superintendent were designated as SPIOs on the subjects handled by them and Senior Administrative Officer as Appellate Authority, under RTI Act.

5. LIBRARY

The library at present has a collection of 1128 books. All the details of the books are entered in the Accession Register and KOHA software for easy reference and data retrieval. Besides the staff of SEC, students from various Law Colleges are utilizing the library while doing their internship in SEC.

A Visitors Register is maintained in the Library for those visitors who are using the services of library.

The library collection includes Law books, Law journals such as Kerala Law Times, All India Reporter, Indian Law Reports, the Supreme Court Cases and the Complete Kerala High Court Cases.

The Public Relations Officer, State Election Commission is in charge of the library.

6. LEGAL CELL

The State Election Commission has set up a Legal Cell in its office in order to handle all legal matters relating to elections to Local Self Government Institutions in Kerala and all allied subjects. The Cell act as a think tank for proposing amendments to existing Acts and Rules relating to LSGI elections, drawing up proposals and analysing matters involving legal aspect.

Details of amendments to Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and Kerala Municipality Act proposed by the Commission may be seen at Annexure-II. In addition, some of the existing procedures were amended and revised instructions issued during the period. Details of such amendments to procedures are appended as Annexure-III.

7. CAMPAIGN CELL

The State Election Commission, Kerala has set up a Campaign Cell in its office for the implementation and monitoring of all campaigns and awareness programmes carried out by the State Election Commission in connection with elections to Local Self Government Institutions, Periodic Revision of Voters list etc.

The Campaign Cell is responsible for the timely dissemination of information regarding various activities of the Commission among the print and audio- visual media including social media platforms, conceptualising and implementing awareness programmes in a fruitful manner, maintaining a cordial relationship with media by providing a level playing field to all the stake holders etc.

8. TRAINING

A well organised Training Wing is functioning in SEC to co-ordinate training programmes and promote research projects.

a) TRAINING PROGRAMMES

State Election Commission is imparting three types of trainings viz.,

(i) **ELECTION TRAINING:**

During the time of General Election and bye-elections SEC conducts training to Election Officials i.e., Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers on election matters. From 01.04.2023 to 31.03.2024, 4 bye-elections were conducted. Details of election trainings conducted are given below:

Sl. No.	Date of bye-election	No. of constituencies	No. of ROs/AROs
1	30.05.2023	19	38
2	10.08.2023	17	34
3	12.12.2023	33	66
4	22.02.2024	23	46
Total Number of Trainees			**184**

(ii) **GENERAL TRAINING**: In addition to the Election Training, the SEC conducts training to the Members of LSGIs, Officials of LSGIs and Electors. SEC has designated/nominated various officers for performing its various functions. Panchayat Secretaries are acting as the Assistant Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers for the Panchayats concerned. Municipality Secretaries are designated as the Electoral Registration Officer of that Municipality. In case of Corporation, the Additional Secretary is designated as Electoral Registration Officer. They have to perform various other functions of the Commission regularly, such as reporting of casual vacancies of Members, President, Vice President, Chairman and Members of Standing Committees. Hence it is necessary to keep them trained in these matters. In this regard, the Commission decided to give a training programme to the Secretaries of all Local Self Govt. Institutions in Kerala through online mode. In addition to this, SEC has decided to impart training in collaboration with KILA for the elected representatives of Local Self Government Institutions, Election Officials and Public regarding various activities involved in election.

(iii) **TRAINING RELATED TO SUMMARY REVISION**: The State Election Commission conducted Summary Revision of the Electoral Roll in all constituencies/wards in all Local Self Govt. Institutions in the state in the year 2023. As per order no.A5/76/2023-SEC dated 11.08.2023, Commission constituted a panel of Master Trainers for giving training to Electoral Registration Officers and other Officers concerned in their district in connection with the Summary Revision of Electoral Rolls. The Commission conducted training to Master Trainers and other Officers concerned in all fourteen districts in connection with the Summary Revision of the Electoral Rolls on 09/08/2023.

b) INTERNSHIP AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

The State Election Commission is constituted under Articles 243K and 243ZA of the Constitution of India for the superintendence, direction and control of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of all elections to the three tier Panchayats and Municipalities of the state. Apart from being a constitutional functionary, the Commission also provides internship for aspiring Law students. As per Order No.A5/29/2021-SEC dated 20.04.2022 the Commission revamped the process of imparting training to Law students and also as per Order No.A5/29/2021-SEC dated 10.04.2023, the Commission reduced the duration of internship programme from 10 days to 7 days. The training is arranged in such a way that after the successful completion of the program the students can acquire the basic knowledge of various Acts and Rules related to the LSGI Elections. On the 6th day of the internship program, the interns will submit their assignments. Commission after evaluating the assignments and other works submitted by each student will issue Certificate of Internship to the students on the last day of the program.

Forty Law students of various Law Colleges in Kerala availed this opportunity from 01.04.2023 to 31.03.2024.

9. COURT

Activities of the Court are detailed below:

State Election Commission, in exercise of its powers under Section 36 read with Section 139 of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 decides questions as to the disqualification of a candidate under Section 34(2) and disqualification of elected members as provided under Section 35 of Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994.

Likewise State Election Commission, in exercise of its power under Section 92 of Kerala Municipality Act 1994 decides a question as to the disqualification of a candidate under Section 90(2) and disqualification of Councillor as provided under Section 91 of the Kerala Municipality Act. Further as per the provisions of Kerala Local Authority (Prohibition of Defection) Act, 1999 the Commission is empowered to adjudicate the question of disqualification of an elected member or a Councillor of a local authority on the ground of defection. The Commission shall have the powers of Civil Court while trying a suit under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.

Total number of sittings during the period under review are Seventy One. Total cases registered are Seventy Three and disposed are Fifty Six. (Disposal list of Cases at Annexure-IV.). Detailed list of Cases under Review Period may be seen at Annexure V.

MAJOR INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

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1. IT INITIATIVES OF STATE ELECTION COMMISSION

The State Election Commission has embarked on a comprehensive digital transformation journey aimed at enhancing efficiency, transparency and accountability in the election process. Through the implementation of various IT initiatives, the SEC is modernizing its operations and improving stakeholder engagement.

The National Informatics Centre, Kerala (NIC), a longstanding technological partner of the State Election Commission has been entrusted with the prompt development and maintenance of the Commission's website. NIC now manages several essential software applications, including the Electoral Roll Management System, Election Management, e-Trend, Poll Manager and e-Drop. Additionally, NIC has developed specialized modules, such as fully digital Candidate Expenditure Module and the Vacancy Reporting Module. As per discussions, Poll Manager and e-Drop will be redesigned and released as Version 2.0.

Current projects in the discussion phase with NIC include the Record Management System, Online Nomination Management System, Election Fund Management System (EFMS), Polling Station Rationalisation and e-Court.

The SEC has signed an MoU with the Digital University of Kerala (DUK) to implement IT interventions for the election process. Additionally, e-Learning and de-duplication projects are currently in the discussion stage, aimed at effective training for election officials and ensuring accurate voter data management.

IT initiatives implemented in SEC

(1). E-Office has been implemented to automate the entire workflow of file processing at SEC. This initiative transforms the office into a paperless and transparent environment, streamlining administrative tasks and improving overall productivity.

(2). Electoral Roll Management System (ERMS): A web-based application has been developed to automate the management of the electoral roll of SEC. This system facilitates revision of voters list and ensures that the electoral roll is accurate and up-to-date.

(3). E-DROP is a web-based solution that manages all activities related to deploying officials for election duty. By randomly assigning officials to polling stations, the system ensures the conduct of free and fair election. As this version is outdated, SEC want it to be upgraded according to the latest technologies.

(4). Poll Manager App is a comprehensive communication system intended to facilitate Officers at higher level to have an overall status of all officers working under them and to ensure effective communication and poll day status monitoring. SEC is planning to revamp the software including overall polling activities monitoring.

(5). E-TREND is a web-based application that provides real-time counting trends and quick results. This system allows direct access to information from all counting centres for the public and media.

(6). Election Expenditure System enables submission of Accounts of Election Expenses by candidates and its processing at different levels. Defaulters can be easily identified and action can be taken against them as envisaged in the Acts and Rules. Discussions are going on for its upgradation and the upgraded version is expected to be launched soon.

(7). Vacancy Reporting System enables the reporting of casual vacancies in various posts in the local bodies, including those of Heads/Deputy heads, Members/Councillors and Standing Committee Members/Chairmen. SEC is planning to upgrade the system and the upgraded version is expected to be launched soon.

(8). Nomination Management System is an integrated system that manages all nomination activities associated with the conduct of elections. Discussions are going on for its upgradation so as to enable the candidates to file nomination through the system.

(9). V-Meet has been implemented to facilitate training sessions and video conferences with stakeholders, promoting effective communication facilities with less cost.

(10). RTI Portal has been implemented and integrated with e-Office, ensuring efficient and timely processing of RTI applications.

Initiatives Under Discussion:

1. **E-Court** application is intended to automate court processes, aiming to improve speedy processing and accessibility of information from filing of a case to its disposal.
2. **De-Duplication:** A robust software system is proposed to identify and eliminate duplicate entries from the voters list, with the goal of enhancing the integrity of the electoral rolls.
3. **E-Learning** is a proposed web application that will offer customised online learning and training resources for election officials and the public, aimed at enhancing knowledge about election process.
4. **Records Management System** is intended to support electronic record-keeping and archival processes integrated with e-Office, focusing on the retention and management of important records.
5. **Election Fund Management System** is proposed as a web application aimed at establishing an efficient fund flow system and expenditure tracking network for election fund flow.
6. **Polling Station Rationalisation:** It aims at the re-arrangement of polling stations in the state.

The IT initiatives at SEC represent a significant step towards digitisation of election process, enhancing transparency, and improving the overall efficiency of the system. As these systems continue to evolve, they are expected to strengthen the election process and thereby strengthen the democracy of our nation.

2. BYE-ELECTIONS

After the General Election 2020, casual vacancies that arose due to death, resignation, disqualification, etc. of Members or Councillors are filled by conducting bye-elections. The bye-elections conducted during the period under review is attached as Annexure-VI.

Details of Constituencies/Wards in which the bye-elections held during the period may be seen in Annexure-VII.

3. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

State Election Commission have brought out a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Elections to Local Self Government Institutions (LSGI) in Kerala with the objective to encapsulate and enumerate the major activities and actions required to be initiated and implemented by the Election Authorities viz; State Government, State Election Commission, District Election Officers, Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Electoral Registration Officers of Local Bodies during General as well as bye-elections. The Standard Operating Procedure is divided into three parts Pre-Election Activities, Election Activities and Post-election Activities for easy reference of the stakeholders.

4. KILA ACTIVITIES

SEC imparts training in collaboration with KILA for the elected representatives of Local Self Government Institutions, Officials and Public regarding various activities involved in election. The training modules are being developed in such a way that the training can be imparted online or offline mode.

5. GIS BASED WARD MAPPING

The State Election Commission (SEC) of Kerala has made significant advancements in enhancing the electoral process through the utilisation of technology. The SEC initiated the preparation of a GIS-based ward mapping for Grama Panchayats and Municipalities, with technical support from the Information Kerala Mission (IKM), which is supposed to be the nodal agency for the same.

The goal is to develop specialised tools in collaboration with the Information Kerala Mission, using software applications. This initiative facilitates effective administrative management and ensures precise delineation of boundaries.

6. DISQUALIFICATION OF CANDIDATES

Every contesting candidate at an election shall within 30 days from the date of declaration of result, lodge with the authorised officer an account of his election expenses. The number of disqualified candidates during the review period is attached as Annexure-VIII.

7. ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINE (EVM)

Currently, the State Election Commission possesses 37,551 numbers of MPEVMs having 1 CU + 3 BUs + 1 DMM configuration, manufactured in 2015 (CU Model No.7523 & BU Model No.7412). These machines are insufficient for the upcoming General Election in 2025. Considering the delimitation process to be carried out, an increase in the number of Polling Stations both in the Rural & Urban areas is anticipated and based on this anticipated increase, it has tentatively been decided to purchase 7800 number of MPEVMs (1CU + 1BU) for urban areas and 6200 numbers of MPEVMs (1CU + 3 BUs) for rural areas ie, 26,400 numbers of Ballot Units and 14,000 numbers of CUs & DMMs. In addition to this, it has been decided to procure 35,000 numbers of DMMs for replacing the existing DMMs.

While conducting candidate setting in EVMs for Election to Rural Local Bodies, Posts are identified with a unique number format consisting of District Panchayat code/Block Panchayat code/Grama Panchayat code, District Panchayat /Block Panchayat /Grama Panchayat Constituency numbers and Polling Station numbers. Likewise, a unique number format for identification of Urban Constituencies for use at the time of candidate setting during election to Urban Local Bodies, is introduced.

State Election Commission, Kerala has decided to dispose of the expired Indelible Ink stored in the Commission and District Warehouses. All Districts have returned the expired ink to the State Election Commission. Accordingly 7608 phials of expired/unused/leftover indelible ink was returned to Mysore Paints and Varnishes Ltd, for the purpose of recycling or eco-friendly disposal.

The revision of Comprehensive Manual for Electronic Voting Machines is undertaken.

8. ELECTION MATERIALS PROCUREMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF WAREHOUSES

(i). Purchased power packs, indelible ink and other election related materials required for the bye-elections

(ii). EVM Warehouses maintained in all the 14 Districts. Sufficient fund provided to the Districts for the proper maintenance of Warehouses.

(iii).Procurement Plan for the election related materials prepared for the upcoming General Election, 2025.

9. PUBLICATION OF BOOKS

The following books were compiled and published by State Election Commission during the period:

i. SEC Year Book 2024
ii. Review Report 2021-23
iii. Summary Revision Report 2023
iv. Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Election

10. SUMMARY REVISION OF ELECTORAL ROLL OF LOCAL BODIES

State Election Commission is empowered under Section 22(2)(b) of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 and Section 78(2)(b) of Kerala Municipality Act, 1994 to revise summarily the existing voters list of all Local Self Government Institutions, specially except before any of the General or Bye-elections.

The above Sections 22 and 78 provides that the electoral roll for each constituency of an LSGI shall be prepared in the prescribed manner with reference to the qualifying date and shall come into force immediately upon its final publication in accordance with the rules made under the Act.

Sections 22(2)(b) and 78(2)(b) also provides that the above said electoral roll "shall be revised in any year in the prescribed manner by reference to the qualifying date if such revision has been directed by the State Election Commission".

The Electoral Rolls for Local Body Elections were last revised during the General Election on 2020 and the General Election of Mattannur Municipality on 2022. Hence the Commission decided to revise summarily voters list of all Panchayats and Municipalities in the State with the following time schedule during September-October 2023, fixing qualifying date as on 01.01.2023. This venture was the first of its kind undertaken by the State Election Commission.

Time Schedule of Summary Revision 2023: Date of publication of Draft Voters list in Local Body, Village and Taluk Office: 08.09.2023 (Friday). Last date of filing claims and objections: 23.09.2023 (Saturday, 5 pm). Date of completion of procedures on claims and objections and final updation: 10.10.2023(Tuesday). Date of final publication of Voters list: 16.10.2023(Monday).

Comprehensive training were given to the Electoral Registration Officers to familiarise with the guidelines issued by the Commission, about the activities to be done prior to the revision and regarding online processing of applications. The prime intention of this Special Summary Revision was the purification of the existing voters list which could be attained to a

large extent. Main purification activities done by the Electoral Registration Officers were Suo-moto removal of dead electors and those shifted residence from the constituency. Opportunity to enroll new voters was also given during the period. When the revision concluded 8,19,239 voters were removed from the draft roll published on 08.09.2023.

11. NEW INITIATIVES IN CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS

1.CHANGE OF SYSTEM OF DISTRIBUTION AND RECEIVING BACK OF POLLING MATERIALS

A new system of deployment of Polling Personnel, distribution and receiving back of EVMs and other Polling Materials was introduced intending hassle free conduct of Polling. In this system, polling parties will directly come to the polling stations and the EVMs and polling materials will be directly given to them and taken back through Sectoral Officers.

2. INTRODUCTION OF SINGLE ADDRESS TAG

At present 4 different types of address tags ie Address Tag CU (Urban), Address Tag CU (Rural), Address Tag BU (Urban) , Address Tag BU (Rural) are now being used for the Election purpose. In order to avoid confusion among polling officials, the existing practice of usage of 4 address tags has been dispensed with and a new single tag will be introduced for upcoming General Election in 2025.