

PAKISTAN

PAPER
TO BE READ BY
JUSTICE ® HAMID ALI MIRZA
CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER OF PAKISTAN
ON 'CHALLENGES IN MANAGEMENT OF ELECTORAL ROLLS'
IN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON 'SHARING BEST ELECTORAL
PRACTICES' TO BE HELD ON 27.01.2010 AT 10.00 AM
AT VIGYAN BHAWAN, NEW DELHI

His Excellency Mr. Navin B. Chawla
Chief Election Commissioner of India

Fellow Election Commissioners,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for the invitation to attend the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of Election Commission of India. I do hope that this visit will prove to be an enriching experience for us in so far as the sharing of best electoral practices is concerned.

2. We know that citizenship involves three kinds of human rights: civil rights, social rights and political rights, which *inter alia* include right to vote and right to contest an election. The growth and success of democratic institutions in a country depends upon the holding of free, fair and impartial elections. And an accurate and authentic Voters' Register or Electoral Roll is *sine qua non* for this purpose.

3. In Pakistan, it is constitutional responsibility of the Chief Election Commissioner to prepare electoral rolls for elections to the National/ Provincial Assemblies and Local Government Elections and to revise such rolls annually.

Under the Constitution, a person is entitled to vote if (a) he is a citizen of Pakistan (b) is not less than 18 years of age (c) his name appears on the electoral rolls and (d) he is not declared by the competent court to be of unsound mind. Almost similar qualification have been provided in the law meant for registration of voters with the addition that such person is or is deemed to be resident in the electoral area.

4. Briefly stated, the history of preparing electoral rolls in Pakistan is that after promulgation of 1956-Constitution, the then Chief Election Commissioner took up the task of preparing electoral rolls for the first time. Thereafter, Voters' List was prepared afresh under 1962 Constitution and then again the electoral rolls were prepared for General Elections to the National and Provincial Assemblies held in 1970. The existing Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was adopted in 1973 and in accordance therewith fresh electoral rolls were prepared in 1974 on the basis of joint electorate.

5. The layout and contents of the Electoral Rolls in Pakistan have been changing from time to time. Initially the electoral rolls contained serial number, name of elector, name of husband/father and occupation of the voter. In 1964 the column relating to occupation was omitted and two new columns *viz.* age and address were added. The rolls were prepared in two sections i.e. male voters and female voters in Urdu and Sindhi languages (Sindhi language for Sindh Province only). The Electoral Rolls Rules were promulgated in 1974, which provided a new format, according to which it contained serial number, name, father's/husband's name, profession, age and address. In 1978, in order to obviate possibility of fictitious entries, a new column regarding

“grandfather’s name” was added, which was later substituted with “Number of National Identity Card (NIC)”. In 1986, the column relating to number of NIC was also deleted. Until recently, the Election Commission of Pakistan has been following the old pattern of preparing the Electoral Rolls through door to door enumeration process and maintaining such Rolls by revising the same annually in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Rolls Act, 1974.

6. For General Elections, 2002, the electoral rolls containing more than 71.86 million voters were computerized with the assistance of National Database and Registration Authority (**NADRA**). Though database of all registered voters became available to the Election Commission, the target of computerization of electoral rolls, in real sense, could not be achieved. Therefore, we decided to put in place a Computerized Electoral Rolls System (**CERS**) for regular updating of the electoral rolls electronically. For this purpose, the then Chief Election Commissioner constituted Electoral Rolls Council comprising senior officers of Election Commission’s Secretariat with mandate to initiate and supervise the whole process of computerization of the Electoral Rolls from building of requisite Software till entry of voters’ data into the system. Technical assistance was provided by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (**IFES**), Pakistan.

7. A unique feature of the Computerized Electoral Rolls is that it contains the number of Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) issued by NADRA as ‘*unique identifier*’. The process of building the Computerized Electoral Rolls System was initiated in 2005, which culminated in 2007 and as a result thereof we now have Computerized Electoral Roll that contains more than 80

million registered voters. The current layout of the Electoral Rolls in Pakistan contains Serial Number, name, father's/husband's name, date of birth, CNIC number and address.

8. The Election Commission of Pakistan is still making efforts to further improve the CERS and in this respect we have recently entered into an agreement with National Database and Registration Authority for future collaboration. Under this agreement, NADRA will be asked to provide the number of each CNIC issued by it along with other particulars to the ECP electronically for registration of such persons as voters in the Computerized Electoral Rolls. We are also considering the possibility of bringing into CERS photographs of registered voters. This will pave the way for introducing Voters' Identity Card with photograph for future elections.

9. As is evident, the process of preparation of Electoral Rolls in Pakistan has passed through various phases of evolution and now we are at a stage when the Electoral Rolls have finally been computerized and they contain all necessary features which will ensure holding of free, fair and transparent elections in Pakistan according to aspirations of the nation. Obviously this requires human resource development as well as use of modern equipment and technology. I hope that the future elections in Pakistan would be more transparent and credible and would achieve more public confidence.

Thank you very much!
