

Arunachal ready for festival of democracy

# PRI, municipality polls announced

By Pradeep Kumar

**ITANAGAR, Apr 01:** Bringing an end to all speculations, state election commissioner (SEC) KD Singh today announced holding elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and maiden polls to the municipality at Itanagar and Pasighat.

"As the present term of the PRIs would end by the first week of June, it is obligatory for the SEC to hold elections before the term ends as per Article 243 E 3(a) of the Constitution of India," Singh told a press conference here today before announcing to issue notification to this end on April 16 next - with counting on May 21, subject to re-polling, if any.

State Advocate General Anil Saraf at the invitation of Speaker Wanglin Lowangdong had informed the state Assembly on March 16 that there was no constitutional provision to defer panchayat elections, except in case of natural calamities, like earthquake or flood. He had quoted Constitution provision which is explicit: "Every panchayat, unless sooner dissolved under any law for time being in force, shall continue for five years from the date



appointed for its meeting and no longer."

The exercise would mammoth as 5, 83, 409 voters (tentative) would exercise their adult franchise in 1,841 polling stations for electing members to 17 zilla parishads, 177 gram panchayats and 7,403 gram panchayats. The election machineries including all the district election officers (DEOs) are fully equipped for conducting the process effectively and smoothly, he said.

About 8% increase in voters has been recorded between 2008 and 2013, which is reasonable, he said, and expressed hope that like the 80% voters' turnout witnessed during 2008, the voters aware of their rights of adult fran-

chise would utilize it this time to strengthen the grassroots level democracy.

Moreover, the maiden elections to the Itanagar and Pasighat municipalities would also be held simultaneously, he said, adding though no one can contest from two seats in the PRI polls "but in municipality one is free to do that."

There are 30 wards involving 61,493 voters in the Itanagar municipality while there are 12 wards involving 9,683 voters in Pasighat municipality. As per the constitutional provision for 33% reservation for women, the reserved wards are: Itanagar - 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 23 & 24 and Pasighat - 1, 2, 7 & 10.

While ballot papers will be used in PRI polls, elec-

tronic voting machines will be used in the municipality polls, Singh informed.

Responding to a volley of questions, the SEC said the model code of conduct would come into force from the date of notification on April 16 which would be applicable to all stakeholders, particularly political parties including the ruling Congress.

In fact the dates were finalized in consultation with the political parties and the GoAP, which could not have been done before March considering the year-ending, and after June. Thus, the SEC was left with hardly any option to fulfill its constitutional obligation by giving the opportunity to vote which cannot be postponed as it would amount to postponing the right to vote, he reasoned.

Mithun slaughter, considered an allurements for the voters, would be banned during the poll period so that the voters are free from undemocratic practices to exercise their rights with piety while celebrating the festival of democracy, Singh added.

SEC secretary K Peyang and under-secretary Higio Talla were also present at the press conference.