

Teachers' not barred from poll duty: SEC

ITANAGAR, Apr 13: With confusion prevailing over claims and counter claims doing round in the state whether the State Election Commission (SEC) could engage teachers on panchayat and municipality elections' duties, the SEC has put all the doubts to rest.

Responding to claims by some teachers that they cannot be engaged for the May 25 polls because of their "service status" (sic) in the light of the Supreme Court's Dec 7, 2007 verdict - stating that "holding of an election is no doubt of paramount importance but for that purpose, the education of children cannot be neglected", which has been examined, SEC KD Singh said in an order today.

The apex court in its judgment has further stated that "Right to education being a fundamental



right is equally important as right to exercise franchise" and hence, balance between the two must be maintained. Thus, the SC clarified and directed "All teaching staff must only be put on duties of electoral revisions and election works on holidays and non-teaching days. They should not ordinarily be put on said duty on teaching days and within teaching hours".

Keeping this in mind, the SEC has fixed the dates of panchayat and municipality elections (April 16 to May 31) coinciding with school vacation to not hamper the academic interests of the students, the SEC clarified, adding such elections being mammoth exercise cannot be managed without the services of school teachers before out rightly rejecting the teachers' claims.

It is relevant to mention that the SEC is a constitutional authority under Article 243K 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 panchyats and municipalities. It is vested with the same authority as that of Election Commission of India.