

# SHYAM SARAN NEGI, INDEPENDENT INDIA'S FIRST VOTER, DIES

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Three days after casting his vote for the 34th time, Independent India's first voter Shyam Saran Negi died on Saturday at his home in Kalpa in Himachal Pradesh. He was 106.

Mr. Negi, who was the Election Commission's brand ambassador, voted in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly election through postal ballot on November 2. It was the last vote for the man who was 31 when India gained Independence.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, who visited Mr. Negi's residence, termed him "Himachal's pride" and saluted his "indomitable spirit and faith in democracy".

"Mr. Negi exercised his franchise continuously over more than 70 years and even discharged his duty through postal ballot on November 2 while leaving us," Mr. Kumar said.

"His commitment to his duty in this regard should set an example for the youth. A fitting tribute to him would be his for the country to exercise their franchise wholeheartedly and strengthen the foundations of the country's democracy," he added.

Mr. Kumar appealed to voters in Himachal Pradesh to cast their vote in the upcoming election on November 12 as a real tribute to Mr. Negi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge were among those who paid tribute to Mr. Negi.

Speaking at a rally in Mandi district, Mr. Modi said Mr. Negi's outlook towards democracy would inspire the youth. "Just a few days ago, Negi had cast his vote through postal ballot for the Himachal Pradesh poll. Even before his demise, he discharged his duty."

Mr. Kharge said he was pained to hear the news. "The best example of his unwavering devotion towards democracy is that he cast his vote for the 34th time on November 2. My condolences to the departed soul," Mr. Kharge said.

Condoling the death, Chief Minister Mr. Thakur said on Twitter, "I am pained to learn about the passing away of Shyam Saran Negi. Adhering to his duty, he cast his vote for the 34th time on November 2 though postal ballot. This thought will always make me emotional." *(With PTI inputs)*

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