

RECORD SEIZURE OF CASH, LIQUOR IN POLL-BOUND HIMACHAL, GUJARAT: EC

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

In readiness: Polling officials with EVMs and other equipment all set for election duty in Mandi, Himachal Pradesh. PTI-

Record seizures of cash, liquor, drugs and other contraband have been made in the run-up to the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections, the Election Commission (EC) said here on Friday.

Seizures in Himachal Pradesh, the election schedule to which was announced by the EC on October 14, valued at Rs. 50.28 crore were recorded till November 10, compared to Rs. 9.03 crore in 2017 when the State had gone to the polls, marking more than a five-fold increase.

On the other hand, Gujarat witnessed seizures of Rs. 71.88 crore within just one week following the announcement of the Assembly elections on November 3, surpassing seizures of the value of Rs. 27.21 crore made in 2017.

While cash, liquor and precious metals accounted for a significant majority, or Rs. 48.67 crore of the total contraband valued at Rs. 50.28 crore, seized in Himachal Pradesh, items worth Rs. 64.56 crore categorised as 'freebies' constituted the lion's share of the total seizures of contraband, valued at Rs. 71.88 crore in Gujarat.

Items such as sarees, dhotis, pressure cookers, blankets and other common household items meant to induce voters have historically been seen to have been seized by the law enforcement agencies prior to elections in the past.

CEC's stress

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had, during the announcement of dates for the Gujarat Assembly elections, stressed on inducement-free elections and cited the significant amount of seizures made in Himachal Pradesh. After the polls were announced to Gujarat earlier this month, the police had already seized around 1,10,000 litres of liquor valued at Rs. 3.86 crore.

This was followed by the arrest of two persons after the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) reported a massive seizure, amounting to Rs. 64 crore of toys and accessories. These were being smuggled through misdeclaration and concealment in import cargo at the Mundra Port, leading to the arrest of two persons and further investigation under way, the EC said.

For effective monitoring to curb money power in the run-up to the Gujarat elections, the EC deployed 69 Expenditure Observers what with 27 constituencies having been marked as 'Expenditure Sensitive Constituencies' while 23 Expenditure Observers had been deployed in Himachal Pradesh.

The Commission had visited Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh in September to review electoral preparedness and dedicated teams also visited various regions of the two States in October to oversee preparations for the elections. The EC, during its visit in both States, had taken

extensive reviews of enforcement agencies, district authorities and police Nodal Officers to emphasise effective monitoring of items meant for influencing voters.

In Himachal Pradesh, CEC Mr. Kumar and Election Commissioner Anup Chandra Pandey, while reviewing preparedness of districts and enforcement agencies, emphasised on a tight vigil on illegal mining businesses, liquor, suspicious cash and product with the 'potential of vitiating elections.'

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