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Traders cry foul as poll code nets over ₹ 3 cr

The Election Commission's (EC) drive to prevent increasing use of money power in elections has resulted in seizure of more than ₹ 3 crore. But the business community of the state is up in arms. In most cases, traders and retail businessmen bore the brunt of the EC initiative, they say.

Asked to seize cash over ₹ 2.5 lakh in transit without documentary evidence under the model code of conduct, flying squads have made seizures from vehicles in Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Surat and Vadodara.

While the income tax authorities are checking if the money was meant for use in political activities, various trade and business organisations and the ruling BJP allege harassment.

Requesting the EC to relax guidelines, a statement from the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industries (GCCI) said, "Diwali is getting close, so cash movement will go up, as people prefer to use cash for retail purchases".

Gujarat BJP leader Purushottam Rupala also urged the EC to ease norms so the common man, traders and businessmen are not harassed. "If any politician is caught carrying cash, the EC must take strict action, but the common man should not be penalised, because over 90% retail transactions are though cash," he said.

On Wednesday, the Rajkot police seized R5 lakh from godman Bharati Bapu, who was in the car. On Tuesday, the static surveillance teams (SST) seized R9 crore, which was being transported in a van by a bank.

Chief Electoral Officer Anita Karwal said there have been 12 cases of cash interception. The money has been handed over to the income tax department. "We will release the cash after it is accounted for," she added.

Muslim, Bihar leaders not to campaign for BJP

Delhi: BJP's prominent muslim faces and its leaders from Bihar will not campaign for the ruling party in poll-bound Gujarat.

In its list of star campaigners for Gujarat polls provided to the Election Commission, BJP has neither listed any of its muslim faces nor any leader from Bihar where it shares power with JD-U.

The BJP, which has fielded its Muslim leaders like Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Shahnawaz Hussain to speak on behalf of it on contentious issues, has decided not to field them as party campaigners despite a sizeable muslim population in the state.

PTI

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Traders want easing of cash seizure rules in poll-bound Gujarat

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Tags: Gujarat | Election Commission | business community | Assocham

Ahmedabad: The Election Commission's decision to seize cash beyond Rs 2.5 lakh in transit to check misuse of money has not gone down well with the business community in Gujarat which has planned to petition the poll panel to ease the curb.

The Commission, as part of the enforcement of the model code of conduct, had recently ordered that all cash in excess of Rs 2.5 lakh found being transported be seized until the money has been accounted for.

"We have so far intercepted Rs 1.43 crore in 12 cases across Gujarat. Out of this, Rs 1.41 crore has been returned because it was accounted money. Just Rs 200 lakh so far is unaccounted, which has been seized," said state chief election officer Anita Karwal.

However, expressing concern, Ahmedabad Jewellers' Association president Shantibhai Patel said "as the festival season is nearing, business people are bound to carry cash with them, more so, if individuals from outside the state are touring Gujarat. In this time, Rs 2.5 lakh is a very small amount."

"Consumption is already low, economic situation is worrisome and there is already a crisis of confidence. In this situation, the Commission should take into consideration the Gujarat retail business where many prefer cash transactions," said ASSOCHAM Gujarat Council chairperson Bhagyesh Soneti.

She also said ASSOCHAM was planning to submit a memorandum to Chief Election Commissioner V S Sampath in New Delhi in this regard.

Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI) has also written a letter to EC saying its action was affecting retail business in festival season.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission has created a static surveillance (SS) team for every area under a police station in each district of the state which comprises one magistrate, 3-4 policemen and a videographer for round-the-clock checking in respective areas.

However, some quarters of the business community complain about the lack of awareness among the retailers, cooperative bankers, buyers and traders.

"The Election Commission should put out advertisements in all available media to make aware the community so that they can take proper steps to avoid harassment," said a local jeweller.

But the Election Commission said "we have been advertising it properly in all major newspapers and television channels. And we are also organising meetings with different communities too".

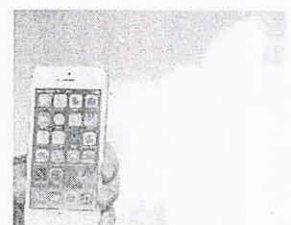
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