

EC to probe as YSRCP strikes one 'false note' too many with voters

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Seemadhra and Telangana regions recorded more than 70 per cent voting in municipal elections held on Sunday. However, that's not what made news. The elections were in the spotlight after voters of several areas in Krishna and Anantapur districts took to the streets against the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes allegedly distributed to them by political leaders, for being fake or belonging to the pre-2005 series that is set to be phased out by the RBI.

Angry residents also let it be known that each of them made Rs 2,500 per vote, but that it was Jagannathan Reddy's YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) that saddled them with the fake or unwanted currency.

As one of the worst-kept poll secrets spilled out, the Andhra Pradesh State Election Commission ordered an inquiry. "We have received some complaints of distribution of money in certain areas. We are inquiring into it," State Election Commissioner P Ramakanth Reddy said.

YSRCP leader D Somanjayelu called the allegation that party leaders distributed money a conspiracy by the TDP and Congress. "We do not resort to such things. We know that people wholeheartedly support us," he said.

The TDP had lodged a complaint against the YSRCP with the poll panel.

Elections were held Sunday for 140 municipalities and 10 municipal corporations.

Residents of several municipal areas in Gudiwada and neighbouring municipalities in Krishna district, and residents of most municipalities in Anantapur district, complained about the money allegedly given to them by YSRCP leaders to vote for its candidates.

They claimed that when they tried using the notes, shopkeepers refused to accept them saying they were fake.

An initial police inquiry revealed that while the notes were genuine, these were issued before 2005. The RBI had recently said it would start phasing out these notes, with March 31 as the deadline to exchange them. After March 31, while the notes would still be legal tender, these would have to be exchanged only at banks. With just one day left for March 31, shopkeepers refused to entertain the notes.

Incidentally, on March 3, the RBI extended its deadline for phasing out pre-2005 notes by nine months — a fact that appears to have escaped everybody.

The municipal polls in Seemandhra and Telangana have acquired importance because of general and state Assembly polls being just days away. So, besides manifestos, assurances and promises, parties have been generous with cash and gifts.

DGP B Prasada Rao said Rs 66 crore unaccounted money was seized during checking ahead of the polls.