

## **General Elections in Pakistan**

**18<sup>th</sup> February, 2008**

### **General**

1. The world has changed after 9/11. Pakistan, a front-line state in the fight against terrorism, is confronted with the twin menaces of terrorism and extremism. Despite all odds, Pakistan is committed to tread along the path of democracy and good governance because any departure from these cherished goals will slide the country in the abyss of anarchy. Pakistan's present care-taker setup is mandated to hold free, fair and transparent elections, scheduled on 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2008.

### **Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)**

2. The elections will be supervised by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), an independent and autonomous constitutional body headed by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), who is a retired judge of the Supreme Court. All four members of ECP are also sitting judges of the High Courts of the Provinces. ECP independently formulates the strategy and details for ensuring the transparency and impartiality of the election process.

3. For conduct of elections every Constituency has a Returning Officer (R.O), who exercises powers on behalf of the ECP.

4. A number of polling stations (average 250 per constituency) are established throughout the country. Each polling station has a dedicated polling staff headed by a Presiding Officer (P.O).

5. There are approximately 64,500 polling stations across the country, which are notified by the ECP and are also available on the Commission's website. Location of polling stations is widely publicized.

### **Election Process**

6. Salients are:-

- a. Announcement of the election schedule by publishing a notification inviting nominations.
- b. Grant of sufficient time for filing the nomination papers by the contesting candidates (6 days).

- c. Filing of objections by any person or authority against the candidature of the persons nominated (7 days).
- d. Scrutiny of the nomination papers (7 days).
- e. Filing of appeals against acceptance or rejection of the nomination papers; interested parties are free to approach even the High Courts and the Supreme Court.
- f. After the appeals, one day is given to the contesting candidates to withdraw their nomination papers.
- g. Polling is held 22 days after publication of the revised lists of the contesting candidates.
- h. All the deadlines are rigidly enforced and no exception or relaxation is permissible.

**Salients of Elections Rules Ensuring Fairness / Transparency of Elections**

- 7. Publication of computerized voters lists and posting of these on the Website.
- 8. Production of National identity cards (NIC) for casting votes.
- 9. Recording of the NIC number on the counterfoil of the ballot papers.
- 10. Use of special plastic seals, which once affixed cannot be opened without cutting, for locking the ballot boxes to prevent tampering.
- 11. Announcement of election results by the Presiding Officer (POs) immediately after counting and display of the results at prominent places.
- 12. International and national observers are invited to observe the electoral process.

**Additional Measures Adopted by the Present Regime**

13. To further enhance credibility of the elections, the government has adopted additional measures which would be implemented in February 2008 elections for the first time in the history of Pakistan:-

a. **Care-Taker Government**

An important amendment in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan was introduced in 2003, for setting up of caretaker Governments at the Federal and Provincial levels immediately after expiration of the terms of National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies. It is a step to ensure impartiality of the election process, which is rare elsewhere in the world. The care-taker Prime Minister and the

care-taker Chief Ministers are not eligible to contest the elections under the Constitution.

**b. No New Delimitation of the Constituencies**

To obviate chances of any misperceptions, the Government decided not to allow any new delimitation of the constituencies despite demands by the last ruling political party.

**c. Transparent Ballot Boxes.**

**d. Presence of Candidates' Polling Agents inside the Polling Booth.**

- (1) Inside each polling booth, nominated agents of all the contesting candidates are present to physically observe the balloting.
- (2) The empty ballot boxes are shown and then sealed in their presence.
- (3) Voters insert their stamped ballot papers into the boxes in the presence of these agents.
- (4) After completion of voting, all ballot boxes are emptied in their presence.
- (5) Counting of votes is also done in their presence and the compiled results are announced immediately on completion of votes counting

**e. Announcement of Unofficial Results at Every Tier**

- (1) Presiding Officers announce and display results at every Polling station before submitting it to the Returning Officers.
- (2) Returning Officer provides copy of the compiled result to each contesting candidate or his nominated agent before sending it to the Chief Election Commission. (This measure was announced recently by the Government to enhance overall transparency of the whole process).
- (3) Election Commission of Pakistan announces the Final results.