

Urgent Action Required in Gandhi Nagar Lok Sabha, Gujarat against intimidation by state machinery



shabnam hashmi <shabnamhashmi@gmail.com>

11:28 AM
(0 minutes ago)

to cec, ecsss, ecgk

Shri Rajiv Kumar
The Chief Election Commissioner
Election Commission of India
New Delhi

19/04/2024

Sir,

I want to bring to your notice serious issues which need to be urgently looked into.

Last week I got several calls from various people from the Gandhi Nagar Lok Sabha constituency about undue pressure being put on various community and political leaders by state apparatus.

I tried discussing the issue on the phone but after several rounds of telephonic conversations I realised that it was important to get first-hand information.

I went to Ahmedabad on April 14 and returned early morning on 18th April, 2024.

There are 7 assembly constituencies in the Gandhi Nagar Lok Sabha Constituency. Out of the seven assembly constituencies I visited and spoke to people from 6 assembly constituencies: Sabarmati, Sanand, Vejalpur, Kalol, Ghatlodia and Naranpura.

The people with whom I interacted include over 200 community leaders, student leaders, ordinary people, Congress and AAP members and district level leaders, some candidates fighting from other parties. I also had detailed interaction with Ms Sonal Patel the India Alliance candidate fighting on INC ticket.

I am not going to write any names here as after experiencing the atmosphere on the ground I feel that there could be further harassment of people from the state machinery, if the names were mentioned here.

A large number of people have been getting calls from PIs of different police stations (PI is in charge of local police stations), ACP, from LCB (crime branch in rural areas, small towns is called LCB), from Crime Branch in cities and some were even called by the IG Range. An ACP who was earlier PI in the same area has been posted there again on a senior post as he knows everyone on the ground including the anti-social elements, who are being also instructed to create mischief. In many

cases *mukhbirs* are approaching people and telling them that so and so (PI, LCB, ACP, IG Range) wants to meet them.

There are several levels of these interactions with the police and crime branch from cajoling to become inactive and not campaign for Congress candidate. I was told that level of threats and likely consequences, if they don't agree, depend upon the status of the person whom they have called. Some have been threatened with dire consequences of cases being filed against them or reopening of old cases of petty crime and turning them into big ones. Those with some standing in the community have been forced to file nominations as independent candidates or from other opposition parties specially to cut into the Muslim and Dalit votes.

While some were strongly told not to campaign for Congress, others were told to remain at home and eat chicken and fish (*zaroorat hogi to bhijwa doonga* – if you need I will send). Meetings were held at Karnawati Club with community leaders where crime branch, SOG officers and police were present along with a former and present BJP MLA and they were strictly told to ensure that candidates should be put up and nominations must be filed. Money is being offered openly.

Some senior leaders were told – *nishkriya ho jao, kyon panga le rahe ho, tumhari umeedwar to jeetegi nahi, sarey MLA, counsellors BJP ke hain. Amit Bhai desh ke bade neta hain, unka sapna hai poore desh men sabse zyada margin se jeetne ka, unki ichcha ko poora karna hai, unki asmita ka sawal hai.*

18 ko amit bhai ki rally hai, koi kala jhanda nahi hona chahiye kahin. Thande raho.

Many were told, *tumhara kaam karwa denge.*

In another constituency all senior community leaders were called and told that they have to work for Amit bhai. *Tumhare yahan se vote nahi nikalta hai. Is baar peti men se vote nahi nikla to yahan ka koi kaam nahi hoga, samajh lo.*

A leader who said that he will not agree to what they were telling him and that they had nothing against him was told *'jab tak ghar pahunchoge do case lag jayenge'*.

Chairmen and secretaries of various cooperative bodies including cooperative banks, milk cooperatives, APMC, Purchase Unions, GSC bank etc. were summoned and have been instructed to campaign for Amit Shah. Senior officers have instructed them to ensure that staff does the campaign.

Sonal Patel, the INC candidate's vehicle was surrounded and stopped by BJP officer bearers in Pethapur on April 8, 2024. She was threatened with dire consequences if she did not leave. This added to the fear and many supporters could not come out for the next day for electoral campaign due to fear.

I received a call today morning from Ghatlodiya. Yesterday students were called in a college and were told that they have Viva exam. Once in college they were told that everyone has to join Amit Shah's road show. When students objected they were told that they would be failed in the internal exam if they do not go for Amit Shah's road

show. Approximately 700- 800 students were forced to attend Amit Shah's Road Show.

Anti- social elements have also been called and instructed to disrupt voting on the election day and to ensure no rickshaws are available in the afternoon.

In 2019 Juhapura and many other Muslim areas had witnessed disruption as anti-social elements supported by police and BJP MLAs had disrupted polling by snatching away the election lists, throwing away the tables of volunteers outside booths and creating a ruckus so that more voters don't come out to vote. This has happened outside FD School, NK School, Bata School, Makdampura School, AI School, Sunrise School, New Age School, Sian School, Adarsh Hindi Vidyalaya among other places.

In hundreds of places in the constituency hoardings with the Ram Mandir are up with the text- Phir ek baar modi Sarkar, Modi ki guarantee, Viksit Bharat, 500 varsh baad bhaviya mandir , Shri ram mandir- Kamal ka button dabao, Bhajpa ko jitao , Gandhinagar Lok Sabha road show , 18 April 2024, Guruwar this is blatant violation of model code of conduct and election commission cannot be a mute spectator but as of now no actions has been taken to stop seeking vote using religion and religious symbols.

Congress workers are being threatened not to put up banners. Congress banners have been removed from several places.

This is absolutely reprehensible and unacceptable. The State machinery is creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation to ensure that the Home Minister can win by the biggest margin and fulfil his dream of becoming the winning candidate with maximum margins of vote.

I therefore would like to reiterate:

1. That local goons are being used to threaten voters and leaders with active encouragement of the both political leaders of the ruling party and the officers which are supposed to follow the instructions of being impartial, as issued by you.
2. That the State Machinery including the top officials are campaigning on behalf of a candidate (Amit Shah). Are they above the law and have instructions to violate their constitutional duty blatantly and with impunity.
3. That has the BJP candidate been given permission by the election commission to use religious symbols on banners and ask vote in the name of religion.
4. That is this atmosphere of fear, threats and intimidation congenial for free and fair elections, is election commission not responsible for ensuring conditions for the citizens to exercise their right to choose a candidate without fear.

These are serious allegations which people have made which reflect on the entire process of election. I urge you to urgent enquiry and take immediate steps to stop this harassment of the local voters, community and political leaders by the local state machinery.

I also urge you to ensure that extra forces are deployed in Gandhi Nagar Lok Sabha constituency to ensure that people can vote peacefully and on May 7th anti-social elements, local police and ruling party does not create a situation like they did in 2019.

Yours sincerely
Shabnam Hashmi
Human Rights Defender
Mobile: 9811807558
Founder Anhad
267A, Gulmohar Avenue
Jamia Nagar
New Delhi-110025