

JPNN| Kulgam | Dec 02, 2014|In a rerun of record polling in the first phase, a 71 per cent voter turnout was registered in the second phase



of incident-free Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir today as the electorate in the 18 seats again ignored boycott call by separatist groups. Election commission officials said the figure could go up by one to two per cent once the final tally is available. Dealing a serious blow to separatist politics, enthusiastic voters stood in serpentine queues at several polling stations waiting for their turn. The first phase of the five-phase polls for 15 seats on November 25 had witnessed a record 71.28 per cent polling. "The latest figures that we have for the second phase of polls in Jammu and Kashmir is 71 per cent. We expect these numbers to go up by 1-2 per cent further," Deputy Election Commissioner Vinod Zutshi told reporters in Delhi. Zutshi said that during the entire phase today, where 18 assembly seats in five districts went to polls, "no untoward incident" took place and the entire event was peaceful. Of the five districts, two were in the Valley and three in Jammu. "There was no incident that vitiated the poll process in the state during this phase," he said, adding that "pretty heavy" voting was reported in Reasi and Udhampur districts. Today's poll percentage, the Deputy EC said, is higher than the figure of 61.04 per cent polling during the 2014 Lok Sabha polls and 68.79 per cent recorded during the 2008 Assembly elections.

The corresponding figures for voting today in the 5 districts stood at Reasi (80 per cent), Udhampur (76 per cent), Poonch (75 per cent), Kupwara (68 per cent) and Kulgam (above 60 per cent). He said the weather was "very supportive" during the polls today and there was no snowfall. Today's phase involved an electorate of 15.35 lakh. A total of 175 candidates, including four sitting ministers and 11 other sitting MLAs were in the fray. There was a tight security cover in Kulgam and Kupwara districts following back-to-back attacks on two sarpanches by militants over the last two days in which one was killed. Of the 18 constituencies, Handwara in north Kashmir Kupwara district was in focus as separatist-turned-mainstream politician Sajad Gani Lone is making a debut in Assembly elections after unsuccessfully

contesting the Lok Sabha polls in 2009.

Although the cold weather conditions and heavy fog posed a hindrance in some areas in the early hours, voters started flocking the polling stations as the day progressed and the sun came out. Several elderly persons were among the voters. Alam Din, who is stated to be 120-year-old, voted at Salotri in Poonch district for development of his area. He was carried by his family members who covered a two-km journey on foot to enable him cast his ballot. Mohammad Rashid along with three others carried his maternal grandfather Mohammad Hussain (aged 107) from a very close border area near LoC to vote at Karmara polling station.

Undeterred by the threat of firing from across the border by Pakistani forces, sarpanch Mohammad Azam, along with 310 others, walked to the hypersensitive polling booth along LoC in Poonch district to cast his vote for "ceasefire" and "development". Azam, among the first few voters to press the button on the EVM at Salotri polling station around 8 am, walked fearlessly along the serpentine LoC foot track from his home two km away among the mountains, under the gazing eyes of Pakistani troops sitting atop observation towers.

"My security and development are very important to me and my people living along LoC in Poonch. My vote is for ceasefire to stay and above all for development," Azam told PTI. Areas along the International Border (IB) and Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu region, particularly Poonch, Jammu and Samba, have witnessed heavy firing and mortar shelling by Pakistani troops since October 1 which left 11 persons dead and nearly 100, including 18 security men, injured. Zutshi said that a total of Rs 67.03 lakh cash has been seized in the state till now (both in the first and second phases) while 254 litres of liquor and 700 grammes of heroin were recovered by EC-appointed surveillance teams during the poll period till now. There also have been five cases of paid news in the state, he said. PTI

71% voting recorded in 2nd phase despite boycott calls

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