

# Braille ballot to help visually impaired cast their vote

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**The visually impaired residents of Punjab would now be able to exercise their franchise "independently, confidently, and fearlessly", and without anybody's assistance in the upcoming Assembly polls on January 30. Ballot papers in Braille for the blind are being printed at the Chandigarh's National Institute for Blind.**

Earlier, there were apprehensions that blinded by greed, those accompanying them would put the stamp of approval on the candidate of their choice. Now, it's no more a question of blind faith for the visually impaired. In fact, on polling day, they can ensure that their vote goes to the right candidate.

Empowering the visually challenged, the Institute is handling a gigantic task of printing nearly 22,000 ballot papers to be used at nearly 19,800 polling stations across the State during polls.

"We got this project on January 18 after the withdrawal of nominations on January 16. We started working on this and will get it done by January 27 - three days before the polling day," Institute's secretary-cum-principal KR Sood told *The Pioneer*.

"We have successfully prepared around 35,000 ballot papers and stickers for electronic voting machines (EVMs) during the Parliamentary polls in 2009 for the States of Punjab, Haryana and UT of Chandigarh. We did that on time and with no snags," he said.

"Working day and night" to finish the work on time, the institute's staff is happy at the "privilege" to enable the visually impaired to exercise their franchise. "We work here day and night. It is a very time consuming and mammoth task," said Vishwajeet, head of Institute's Braille press.

For the purpose, the Institute is using an imported machine from Sweden, costing Rs 15 lakh; the 'special' Braille paper, and a specialised Braille translator software - the Duxbury. On an average, the Institute is printing 3,000-4,000 ballot papers everyday, "and with this speed, we expect to finish by January 25," Vishwajeet added.

"The Commission has sent us all the lists of nominated candidates from all constituencies, and we are feeding the data in our computer. With the help of the software,

Braille Ballot to help visually impaired cast their vote we are translating it into Braille transcript through coding procedure. After thorough proof reading, we take the final printout."

"We cannot leave even a little scope of any error because it's question of selecting our representative. So, proof reading, forms a major part, even an extra dot can make a difference. Being a blind myself, I think I can be able to point out the errors well," said the Institute's headmaster Jagannath Jayara.

Jayara added, "Now, the EVMs that would be used for polls will have engraved numbering opposite every button on the EVMs. The ballot papers will have serial numbers, the candidates' name, the party to which they belong, and their symbols. The visually impaired can read the ballot paper, prepared with raised dots and

points, and by identifying their favourite candidate, they press the button against which the names are written on the ballot paper."

Punjab Chief Electoral Officer Kusumjit Sidhu informed The Pioneer that the ballot papers will be "made available at all polling stations with the polling officers. The ballot papers will be available in English only, and would be of use for those who can read Braille".

However, those who cannot read Braille, would not be able to use the ballot paper, and will cast vote with the help of an attendant.

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