

Dalit voters' intimidation unabated

By A. M. Jigeesh in New Delhi



NATIONAL and regional parties are competing with each other when it comes to attacking and intimidating Dalit voters.

After the first two phases of the Lok Sabha polls, about 300 complaints have been filed with the Election Commission (EC) saying Dalits are being threatened not to vote, their photo ID cards forcibly taken away and booths near Dalit localities captured in various parts of the country.

Most complaints are against the BJP and the Congress, although some have also been filed against regional parties. Complaints challenging the partiality of electoral officers have also poured in from various states.

“In certain areas, the dominant people and anti-social elements possess weapons with the sole objective of intimidating the Dalits.

Supporters of certain parties force or intimidate the Dalit voters either not to vote or to vote for their candidate or party. Certain elements also cast votes on behalf of Dalit voters before their arrival at the polling booths,” said Prasad Chacko, convenor of National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW), an NGO which coordinated the complaints.

A complaint filed by the NDEW to the EC states that in Keonjhar (Orissa), Adivasi voters were pressurised to cast vote in favour of Badri Narayan Patra, the BJP candidate. Another complaint from Dhenkanal constituency states that Dalits were threatened by BJP agents with “deadly weapons” to vote in favour of their candidate Krushna Chandra Patra. A complaint against the Biju Janata Dal says the Dalits were compelled to vote in favour of its candidate Rabindra Bhui at Jagatsinghpur.

In Aurangabad in Bihar, Rajput activists of the Congress allegedly stopped Dalits on their way to the booth. In Gaya, Dalits were not allowed to vote and the booth was allegedly captured by a Rashtriya Janata Dal activist. In Maharajganj, a booth was allegedly captured by Janata Dal (United) workers.

In Rompicheral village in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, policemen allegedly beat up Dalits after they decided to vote freely.

“They were allowed to vote after the intervention of the media,” the complaint reads.