

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

NIRVACHAN SADAN, ASHOKA ROAD, NEW DELHI-110001

No. 51/8/INST/2024-EMS

Dated: 29th April, 2024

To

1. The Chief Electoral Officers of
All the States and Union Territories.
2. The Chairman-cum-Managing Director,
Bharat Electronics Limited,
Nagavara, Outer Ring Road,
Bangalore-560045.
3. The Chairman-cum-Managing Director,
Electronics Corporation of India Limited,
MCU Complex, Phase-II, IDA Cherapalli,
P.O. HCL, Hyderabad-500051, Telangana.

Reference: ECI letter No. 51/8/16/FLCU/2021-EDPS, dated 1st July, 2022.

Subject: Instructions on use of Symbol Loading Unit (SLU) and storage of SLUs after commissioning of EVMs and VVPATs -regarding.

Madam/Sir,

As per existing instructions of the Commission mentioned in the above referred letter, the existing protocols of handling and storage of Symbol Loading Unit (SLU) is as under:

“(e) Similarly, during entire commissioning period in the Assembly Constituency/district, New SLU shall be in the custody of the Returning Officer and to be kept in the Commissioning premises with proper security. After completion of commissioning process, BEL/ECIL Supervisor shall hand over all the SLUs to the District Election Officer concerned. DEO will keep the SLUs received from them in their safe custody and return the same to them or engineers authorised by the BEL/ECIL on the next day after poll i.e. P+1 Day”.

2. In pursuance of judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, dated 26th April, 2024 in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 434 of 2023, the above referred protocols of handling and storage of Symbol Loading Unit (SLU) are hereby modified. At the outset, considering the mandated storage of SLUs after commissioning of EVMs and VVPATs till the election petition period i.e. 45 days from the date of declaration of result, it is directed that the manufacturers i.e. M/s. Bharat Electronics Limited and M/s. Electronics Corporation of India Limited shall ensure the required number of Symbol Loading Units (SLUs) including their

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accessories are made available for ongoing General Elections to Lok Sabha, 2024 and simultaneous elections in a few States.

3. In supersession of the all existing Manual/Circulars/Instructions/SOPs on the matter, the Commission has directed that henceforth the following instructions w.r.t. the storage of Symbol Loading Units (SLUs) including their accessories shall be followed:

- (a) **During the commissioning period** in Assembly Constituency/Segment, all Symbol Loading Unit(s) alongwith its accessories shall be in the custody of the Returning Officer/Assistant Returning Officer, as the case may be and shall be securely stored in locker/safe/cupboard etc. under lock and key in the Commissioning premises with proper security. RO/ARO shall be responsible for safe custody of Symbol Loading Unit(s) alongwith its accessories during the commissioning period.
- (b) **After the completion of commissioning process** i.e. symbol loading process for the AC/AS, the SLU(s) used for symbol loading alongwith the accessories shall be stored in transparent container(s) (*of minimum dimensions of 10 X 8 X 3.5 inches*) by the Returning Officer/Assistant Returning Officer in the presence of candidates or their representatives.
- i. Each set of SLU alongwith its accessories used in a particular AC/AS shall be kept in a separate container. Not more than one set of SLU alongwith its accessories should be kept in a container.
 - ii. Enough number of containers (generally, 2-4 numbers per AC/AS) is to be kept ready in advance based on the requirements.)
 - iii. Reserve SLUs and their accessories, which were not used for symbol loading in VVPATs, if any, shall also be kept in such transparent containers with proper labelling as 'Reserve SLUs'. Each Reserve SLU and its accessories shall be placed in a separate container.
 - iv. Each container shall be numbered properly (SLU CONTAINER NO.1, SLU CONTAINER NO.2, and so on). A self-adhesive sticker containing Container No., Particulars of Election, PC/AC/AS number and SLU serial number shall be pasted on TOP side of the container, as shown in the below sticker format:

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SLU CONTAINER No. _____	
General/By-Elections to _____ District _____ SLU Manufacturer _____ (BEL/ECIL) No. & Name of AC/AS (with PC) _____ Reserve SLU or Used SLU: _____ Date of Completion of Commissioning _____	
Number & Name of AC/AS	Serial Number of the SLU
<i>Signature of RO/ARO</i>	

- v. All the SLU containers (both used and reserve SLUs) shall be sealed with Pink Paper Seal (both parts of the Pink Paper Seal) in a manner so that container could not be opened without breaking the paper seal. The candidates or their representatives shall be allowed to sign the seals pasted on the SLU Container.
- vi. Above processes shall be done in the presence of candidates/their representatives under videography. The video footage shall be preserved till the end of EP period.
- (c) **After sealing the SLU containers**, the same shall be **deposited with the District Election Officer** concerned on the next day of completion of commissioning. These containers shall be stored by the DEO in a separate strong room/secured room and shall be marked clearly on the door as '**SLU STORAGE ROOM**'. It is clarified that both the used SLUs and Reserve SLUs shall be stored in the SLU Storage Room. District Election Officer shall be responsible for their storage and security. The SLU Storage Room shall be under double lock system with all keys of each lock with two separate specified officers.
- (d) In exceptional case, if it is not feasible to store in separate storage room, the SLU containers may be kept in treasury/locker/secured cupboard after due approval of the respective Chief Electoral Officer of the State/UT and with intimation to the candidates or their representatives.
- (e) An '**SLU Inventory Register**' shall be maintained by the DEO listing out the AC/AS-wise, container-wise, Serial Number of the SLUs being stored. The entries of the Register shall be signed by the DEO. Signature of the candidates/their authorised representatives and Engineer-in-charge of BEL/ECIL shall also be obtained on the

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Register. Format of the Register as per **Annexure-1**. The entries pertaining to different AC/AS shall be made in separate pages of the SLU Inventory Register.

- (f) In case of **additional Commissioning**, the respective SLU container shall be taken out by the DEO from the SLU STORAGE ROOM under videography with prior intimation to the respective candidates / their representatives. Thereafter, SLU container shall be provided to the RO/ARO concerned for the additional commissioning. Necessary entries to this effect shall be made in the SLU Inventory Register and signature of the candidates/their authorised representatives and BEL/ECIL Engineer shall also be obtained.
- (g) After **completion of additional commissioning**, SLU and its accessories shall again be kept in the container and procedure mentioned in (b) to (e) above shall be followed. Necessary entries shall again be made in the SLU Inventory Register and signatures of candidates/their authorised representatives and Engineer-in-charge of BEL/ECIL shall also be obtained once again.
- (h) Photocopies of the Register shall be provided to all the candidates and BEL/ECIL Engineer in-charge with due acknowledgement.
- (i) **On the P+1 day:**
- i. **Only the Reserve SLUs** and their accessories shall be handed over to the authorised BEL/ECIL engineers in the presence of candidates/their representatives and their signatures shall be obtained in the Register. Proceeding of the same shall be made and placed in the SLU Inventory Register. It shall be ensured by the DEO that the Reserve SLUs that are handed over do not have the actual symbols of the AC/AS.
 - ii. The **used SLUs will continue to be stored** in the SLU Storage Room until the completion of counting of results.
- (j) **Opening and closing** of SLU Storage Room/Other places mentioned at (d), shall be carried out only after due invitation to candidates/their representatives. Necessary proceeding shall be drawn and placed in the SLU Inventory Register.

(k) **Completion of counting of votes:** After completion of counting of votes, the SLU containers shall be stored in the respective AC/AS-wise strong room(s) in a **steel trunk labelled** as 'SLUs USED IN AC/AS NO. ___' for safe storage and convenience, alongwith polled EVMs under the overall responsibility of the DEO.

- i. More than one sealed SLU container may be kept in the steel trunk. As far as possible, it shall be ensured that all the sealed SLU containers of a particular AC/AS are kept in one trunk.
- ii. There shall be no inter-mixing of sealed SLU containers of different AC/AS in a steel trunk.
- iii. The minimum dimension of the trunk shall be 2 X 1 X 1.5 ft.
- iv. The steel trunks having the sealed SLU containers shall be under lock and key.

(l) Action to be taken **after completion of Election Petition Period:**

- i. The Chief Electoral Officer shall immediately ascertain the EP status from the High Court concerned.
- ii. **No EP filed:** The SLUs alongwith their accessories pertaining to the AC/AS, where no EP has been filed shall be sent back to the respective manufacturers. The SLUs may be sent alongwith the non-functional EVMs-VVPATs (Commissioning to Poll) of the district, if any.
- iii. **EP filed:** Where EP has been filed, the Chief Electoral Officer shall ascertain the subject matter of the petition(s).
- iv. If EVM/VVPAT is **not the subject matter** of the petition, an application shall be filed before the Hon'ble High Court concerned to release EVMs and SLUs. Only after getting permission from the Hon'ble High Court concerned, SLUs alongwith their accessories shall also be sent back to the respective manufacturers, on release of EVMs.
- v. If EVM/VVPAT is the **subject matter** of the petition, the SLUs alongwith their accessories shall be sent back to the manufacturer only after final disposal of the Election Petition.
- vi. It is clarified that SLUs alongwith their accessories shall be sent **only to the respective manufacturers** upon completion of the applicable timeframes, i.e. SLUs shall not be sent to any other State/UT or any field units. All the protocols applicable for EVM transportation to the manufacturers shall be applicable for transportation of SLUs and its accessories to the manufacturers.

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- (m) DEOs shall make necessary entries of sending SLUs to the manufacturers in the SLU Inventory Register and also keep a copy of the acknowledgement received from the manufacturers in the Register.
- (n) The cost of transportation of the SLUs back to the manufacturers shall be borne by the States/UTs as part of the election expenditure. However, to optimise the cost of transportation, the CEOs may explore clubbing of the units from districts and sending to the manufacturers with due coordination with the manufacturers.
4. Strict compliance of the above direction of the Commission shall be ensured. The Table in **Annexure – 2** may be referred for the gist of storage conditions and responsibilities across different stages. As mandated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, **the above protocols are applicable in all cases of completion of the symbol loading process in the VVPATs undertaken on or after 01.05.2024.**

Yours faithfully,

Rakesh Kumar
(RAKESH KUMAR)
UNDER SECRETARY

SUMMARY OF SLU STORAGE CONDITIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES				
S. No.	Stage of elections /EVM use	Type of Packaging/ Safekeeping needed for SLUs & accessories	Storage area	Custodian/Overall responsibility
1.	During Commissioning	No packaging SLUs securely stored in locker/safe/cupboard etc. under lock and key.	Commissioning premises	RO/ARO
2.	Completion of Commissioning till Counting of votes	Individual sealed SLU Containers	SLU Storage Room	DEO <i>Remark: Only reserve SLUs shall be released on P+1 as per para 3(i)</i>
3.	Post-Counting	Sealed SLU containers kept in steel trunk under lock and key	AC/AS-wise strong room	DEO

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