

Government of India issues Guidelines for Positive Speech

An excerpt from C. Y. Gopinath's **The Book of Answers**

The pamphlet, handed out generously by Sub Inspector Shinde, provided a brief introduction to the new rules and some guidelines for how to speak in the days up to the elections, followed by a web address where further information could be obtained.

Guidelines for Positive Speech

Issued by the Election Commission

August 3, 2015

As part of national preparations for the 2015 elections, the Election Commission, working with the Ministry of Errors and Regrets, hereby announces guidelines for communication in English, applicable to all public meetings, radio and television broadcasts, theatre performances, blogs, and gatherings of more than three people in any public or private environment. These guidelines are intended to help create a stable environment in which open and constructive political debate conducive to nation-building is possible. The following guidelines for Positive Speech will remain in effect till March 18 or a month after the election results are announced, whichever comes later.

1. Proclaiming personal beliefs in public places using strong language is banned, as this could confuse people who lack such beliefs.
2. Using history to judge the performance of candidates is disallowed, recognizing that history is always someone's viewpoint and hence subjective. In general, use of the past tense will be treated as provocative.
3. Offering false hope or reassurance as a way to arouse people to anger is abjured. Persons found doing this may be subject to detention and penalties. In general, statements that imply that things are going to get better will be regarded as judgmental and demoralizing, since they imply that things are not as good as they could be in the present. Such uses of the future tense may be deemed provocative.
4. Negative sentiments may not be expressed or implied until the elections are over. The EC recognizes that negativity is used by politically motivated troublemakers to create an atmosphere of discontent in which the election process can be perverted or derailed.
5. It is not allowed to refer to the government or any of its ministries or senior office bearers in public speeches, as this could be prejudicial to their electoral outcomes. The press is disallowed from reporting on the proceedings of court cases and charges against government officials.
6. Aspirational words or phrases are banned. This includes words or phrases that point towards a vision, a mission, or conceptual frameworks such as freedom, independence and human rights.

7. Inflammatory or incendiary words or phrases that could be construed as instigation to action of any kind or sort are banned.

8. Words or phrases from Sanskrit and Latin are banned. It is understood that these ancient languages could be used to subvert the spirit and essence of this guidance. In fact, they would only confuse the public further.

9. The guidelines mentioned here are binding on all citizens who are not government employees and also government employees below the rank of Under Secretary. The few remaining categories of people will be exempt from these guidelines, as they are likely to be active managers of the electoral process themselves.

10. The following provisional list of Unacceptable Words is being released. The list will be updated and revised as new dangerous words are identified.

Belief, War, Rights, Corruption, Protest, Democracy, Atrocity, Rape, Government, Terror, Policy, History, Future, Ministry, Sedition, Inciting, Secession, Terror, Hope, Independence, Revolution, Rights, Violence, Should, Vision, Freedom, Riot, Evil, Bad, Faith, Power, Protest, Oppression, Poor, Attack, Terrorist.