

Voting gains momentum in Jharkhand

After a slow start, voting on the first day of five-phased Jharkhand assembly elections gained momentum by Wednesday afternoon, poll panel officials said.

According to the state election commission, the voting percentage was around 36 percent till 1 p.m. The highest voting was recorded at Sarath assembly seat with 43 percent.

Elections in 26 of the state's 81 assembly constituencies are being held amid heavy security.

Due to security reasons, the poll timings have been advanced and voting is to take place between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Police said that explosions, triggered by suspected Maoist rebels, were heard in Dhanbad district.

'Some explosion was heard in the foothills behind Nano village of Dhanbad district. We cannot say what kind of an explosion it was. The explosion was far away from the polling stations,' Jharkhand police spokesperson V.H. Deshmukh told IANS.

About 40,000 security personnel have been deployed and four helicopters have been pressed into service to ensure peaceful polling. Officials said voting started late in at least seven places due to technical problems in the electronic voting machines (EVMs).

In the first phase, 470 candidates, including 194 independents, are in the fray. Of these, 108 have criminal records and 27 are millionaires. Polling is being held at 8,176 polling stations with 13,850 EVMs.

Most of the seats are witnessing a triangular fight between the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and the Congress-Jharkhand Vikas Morcha- Prajatantrik (JVM-P) alliance.

The key candidates include four former state ministers, six former MPs and the speaker of the last assembly Aalamgir Aalam. The state unit chiefs of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata Dal-United and the Congress are also contesting in this phase.

The elections get over Dec 18 and the counting of votes will be held Dec 23.

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