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ECI studying phrases used during Maha poll campaign

MUMBAI: Controversial phrases like "vote jihad" used by some political parties during the election campaign in the recently-held Maharashtra assembly polls are under the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s scanner, an official said on Wednesday.

In an exclusive interview to *PTI*, Maharashtra Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr Kiran Kulkarni also said that more than 650 cases of poll code violation were registered during the state elections, and the enforcement agencies will make sure that these cases are taken to a logical conclusion.

When asked about 'vote jihad', he said, "The ECI is carefully analysing its implications across legal, linguistic and social domains before taking further action...We should be very cautious with terms like 'vote jihad' because they have serious repercussions."

"This is a new phrase requiring thorough study. There are le-

gal, linguistic, social and religious aspects to consider. ECI officials, including the Chief Electoral Officer and I, are analysing this and we will take an appropriate decision once all these aspects are reviewed comprehensively," he said.

When asked if such controversial phrases affected the election discourse, Kulkarni cautioned against drawing hasty conclusions.

"It's a long-term process. Words and their references need to be defined and analysed thoroughly. There is no airtight legal framework for new terminology, so we must handle such matters carefully, keeping in mind their consequences," he said.

Elections to the 288-member Maharashtra legislative assembly were held on November 20. Dr. Kiran Kulkarni said, a total of 659 cases were filed in the state for violation of election code of conduct, significantly higher than the 366 cases registered during the Lok Sabha elections held earlier this year.