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EC, home min discuss forces for J&K polls

New Delhi: Election Commission, which on Wednesday reached an agreement with the home secretary regarding extent of forces to be deployed for assembly polls in J&K, may announce the schedule any day after revised electoral rolls for the UT are published Aug 20, reports **Bharti Jain**.

"J&K administration is geared to have an elected govt sworn in Oct," a govt functionary said, indicating a Sept poll schedule. Like previous elections, polling in J&K will be spread over 4-5 phases, added another source. Home secretary Ajay Bhalla, who was in Nirvachan Sadan Wednesday to discuss security arrangements for J&K polls, is reportedly on board with EC's assessment of security scenario in J&K and the force logistics required to ensure their smooth conduct.

Sources said a high number of central forces including the CRPF and BSF will be deployed for the polls in J&K.

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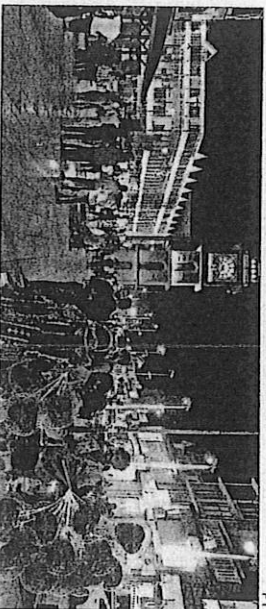
J&K poll news soon as Centre, EC agree on force deployment

Admin Ready For Democratically-Elected Govt In Oct: Functionary

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New Delhi: The Election Commission, which on Wednesday reached an agreement with the Union home secretary regarding the extent of forces to be deployed for assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir, may announce the election schedule any day after the revised electoral rolls for the Union Territory are published on August 20.

"The J&K administration is geared to have a democratically-elected government sworn in sometime in October," a senior J&K govt functionary told TOI, indicating a September assembly poll schedule. Like the previous elections, the polling in J&K will be spread over 4-5 phases and last 3-4 weeks, added another source. Home secretary Ajay Bhalla, who was in Nirva-



PI
PIRIT OF FREEDOM: Illuminated Lal Chowk glows on the eve of 78th Independence Day, in Srinagar on Wednesday

chan Sadan on Wednesday to discuss the security arrangements for J&K polls, is reportedly on board with EC's assessment of the security scenario in J&K and the force logistics required to ensure their smooth conduct. Sources said the EC, home ministry and J&K govt are all fully geared to conduct the first assembly polls in UT since 2014, overriding security concerns like the

recent uptick in terrorist activity, particularly in the Jammu region, and intelligence inputs about Pakistan-based elements' designs to disrupt the polls by activating sleeper modules with directions to target candidates and campaign activities. "There are reports about plans by terrorist outfits headquartered in Pakistan to derail polls in J&K by getting their men to carry out spectac-

ular attacks in the Kashmir region, particularly pockets of Anantnag, Kulgam and Shopian where some of their cadres and supporters are still active. In Jammu region, where foreign militants are operating in the forests, the assessment points to low risk of their spilling over to civilian settlements since they are more focused on targeting security forces. Some attempts may be made to attack far-flung civilian settlements in places like Doda but the village defence groups (VDGs) have been adequately strengthened with automatic arms and training," a J&K government officer told TOI.

He added that the J&K police and forces have plans in place to thwart and counter attempts by Pakistan-based forces to derail the exercise to install a democratically-elected govt in J&K.