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भारत निर्वाचन आयोग
ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

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NirvachanSadan,
Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001.

No.464/INST/2021/EPS

Dated: 28 April, 2021

To

The Chief Electoral Officers of
all States/UTs

Subject: General Election to Legislative Assemblies of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, 2021 and bye election in various states - Broad Guidelines for Covid-Safety During Counting of votes on 2nd May, 2021- Regarding.

Sir,

The Commission had issued Broad Guidelines for conduct of General Election/ Bye- Election during Covid-19 after on 21st August, 2020 incorporating views/suggestion of National/State Political parties. The Commission also considered the views and suggestion given by the Chief Secretaries before finalizing the broad Covid-19 guidelines.

2. After issuing the above guidelines, the Commission conducted General Elections to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar and other Bye-Elections to various State during Covid-19 period by strictly following these Guidelines in 2020.

3. Even though the spread of pandemic had reduced in the month of February 2021 Commission continued with same strict regime of Covid safety guidelines and announced the election of 5 poll going States/UT's. The Commission has already conducted polls of ongoing General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry along with Bye-Election to Various States and has also conducted 7 Phases of Election in West Bengal and 8th Phase of West Bengal Election is due on 29th April, 2021.

4. Counting of votes for all these elections is due on 02.05.2021.

5. In view of second wave of pandemic and in order to ensure a completely Covid safe arrangements during counting the Commission has

been regularly consulting the Chief Secretaries and the Chief Electoral Officers of all 5 poll going States/UT and has taken their views and safety Measures/protocol to be followed during the pandemic.

6. After considering the views and inputs from Chief Secretaries, Health Secretaries and the Chief Electoral Officers of all poll going States/UT, the Commission has directed all the poll going states/UT to adhere the following instructions during the counting process of the General Elections/Bye-Elections-

- i. DEO shall be the Nodal Officer at each Counting Centre to ensure adherence to the following the COVID-19 related norms at Counting Centres, with assistance of Nodal Health Officer.**
- ii. Compliance Certificate in respect of Counting Centre that all arrangement has been made as per extant COVID guidelines shall be obtained from the concerned Health Authorities.**
- iii. No candidates/agents will be allowed inside the counting hall without undergoing RT-PCR/RAT test or without having 2 doses of vaccination against Covid-19 and will have to produce Negative RT-PCR report or RAT report or Vaccination reports within 48 hours of start of counting. The DEO shall make arrangement of RT-PCR/RAT Test to Candidates/Counting agents before the day of Counting. List of counting agents shall be made available by the contesting candidates to the RO concerned by 1700 hours on the day three days prior to the date fixed for counting of votes. (para 15.12.2 of RO handbook)**
- iv. No public gathering outside the counting venue shall be allowed during the process of counting.**
- v. The Counting Hall should be sufficiently big to maintain Social Distancing, and should have proper ventilation, windows, exhaust fan etc. as per available protocol of SDMA.
- vi. The counting centers shall be disinfected before, during and after the counting.
- vii. Sealed outer boxes of EVM/VVPAT shall also be sanitized/disinfected.
- viii. Number of Counting tables to be allowed in a counting hall as per the size of Hall and keeping in view safety norms prescribed for Covid-19.

Hence, counting of votes of a constituency may be considered at 3-4 halls by appointing additional Assistant Returning Officers.

- ix. At the entry of hall/ room/ premises-
 - a. Thermal Scanning of all persons shall be carried out;
 - b. Sanitizer, soap and water shall be made available and every person entering in hall shall sanitize his/her hand.
- x. No one having any symptom of COVID-19 like fever, Cold etc. shall be allowed to enter in the Counting Hall.
- xi. Candidate may appoint/replace the counting agents in case report is positive.
- xii. Social distancing shall be maintained inside Counting Hall, seating arrangement of Counting Personnel/Agents etc. should be made as per extant COVID-19 guidelines of NDMA/SDMA.
- xiii. There shall be sufficient number of PPE Kit for Counting Agents/Candidates. The Counting Agents sitting arrangement shall be made in such a way that between 2 counting agents 1 agent shall be in PPE.
- xiv. The following items shall be provided to every counting official and security personnel in addition to other prescribed items:
 - a. Mask
 - b. Sanitizer
 - c. Face-Shield
 - d. Gloves
- xv. For counting of Postal Ballots, additional number of AROs may be deputed. If required, Postal Ballots may also be counted in a separate hall under the supervision of the Returning Officer/Assistant Returning officer.
- xvi. As per the government guidelines, there shall be proper arrangement of disposal of COVID related wastage viz Mask, Face Shield, PPE Kit, gloves etc.
- xvii. There shall be proper display of guidelines “Does & Don’t” at convenient places including entrance gate and inside counting hall.

The Commission vide instruction No.464/INST/2021/EPS dated 27th April, 2021 has already directed that

- i. No victory procession after the counting on 02.05.2021 shall be allowed.
- ii. Not more than two persons shall be allowed to accompany the winning candidate or his/her authorized representative receive the certificate of election from the Returning Officer.

Non-compliance of Instructions - Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures will be liable to proceeded against as per the provisions of Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC, and other legal provisions as applicable, as specified in Order No. 40-3/2020-DM-I(A) dated 29th July, 2020 of Ministry of Home Affairs. District Election Officer should bring this to the notice of all concerned.

Based on these broad guidelines, a detailed COVID-19 related comprehensive plan for counting arrangements will be prepared at the State level, taking local conditions into account. Three-layer plan will be prepared in consultation with the concerned Nodal Health Officers: AC, District, and State levels. In case of bye-elections, the plans will be prepared at the District and AC levels in consultation with respective Nodal Health Officers.

The above instructions shall be followed strictly in letter and spirit by all concerned authorities.

These instructions shall be brought to the notice of all political parties/contesting candidates immediately.

Yours faithfully,



**(SUMIT MUKHERJEE)
SR. PR. SECRETARY**