

Election Commission of India

Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001

No. ECI/PN/43/2020

Date: 16th July, 2020

PRESS NOTE

Subject: Commission decides not to extend the facility of postal ballot to electors above 65 years of age in General Assembly Elections in Bihar and by elections due in near future in view of constraints of logistics, manpower and safety protocols of Covid-19

In view of COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown guidelines have been issued in the country from time to time by National Disaster Management Authority, under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. In the guideline dated 17.05.2020, issued by Union Home Secretary and Chairperson National Executive Committee, constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, it has been specified vide para 7 that,

“Protection of vulnerable persons: Persons above 65 years of age, persons with co-morbidities, pregnant women, and children below the age of 10 years, shall stay at home, except for essential and health purposes.”


Simultaneously, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare prescribed detailed procedure of quarantine (Home/Institutional) for COVID-19 positive/suspect persons vide its instructions dated 05.04.2020 and 18.05.2020.

2. Considering this extraordinary situation, Commission had recommended extension of optional postal ballot facilities to voters above 65 years in order to minimize their vulnerability and exposure at the Polling stations and to Covid positive voters and voters under quarantine so that they are not deprived of their voting rights. On the recommendation of the Commission, Ministry of Law & Justice notified the amended rules accordingly on 19.06.2020. However, before implementing this enabling provision, due notification is issued by the Commission, under section 60(c) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 at the time of election. Before

implementing these enabling provisions, Commission continually assesses the field situation and logistics of operationalization.

3. Commission has been constantly monitoring the electoral preparedness for the coming by-elections and General elections of Assembly in Bihar, in view of this unprecedented environment. Commission has already limited the number of electors to one thousand for each polling station for ease of voting, especially for elderly and vulnerable sections of electors, in COVID-19 situations. In view of this, the State is creating additional 34,000 (approximately) polling stations (45% more), which will increase the total number of polling stations to around 1,06,000. This would entail formidable logistical challenges of mobilizing 1.8 lakh more polling personnel and other additional resources including requirement of much larger number of vehicles in the State of Bihar. Similar challenges would be there for the coming by-elections also.

4. Considering all these issues, challenges and constraints and in view of the decision to limit the number of electors at each polling station to 1000, Commission has decided not to issue the notification to extend the facility of postal ballot to the electors above 65 years of age in the coming General Elections in Bihar and by- elections due in the near future. However, facility of optional postal ballot to electors who are above 80 years of age, PwD Voters, the electors engaged in essential services and voters who are COVID-19 positive/suspect in quarantine (home/institutional) will be extended in these elections.


(PAWAN DIWAN)
UNDER SECRETARY