

**STATE ELECTION COMMISSION  
PUDUCHERRY**

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No.1-30(8)/SEC/CE/Dir./2021/ 606

Dated. 9.09.2021

**DIRECTION**

**Sub:** Civic Elections 2021 – Coverage of Election Process by Media.

Elections are an important event of mass participation in public affairs and the Commission attaches the greatest importance to the Conduct of elections with as much transparency as practicable. The following guidelines for media coverage of elections have been framed to make this possible and to provide every reasonable facility to the media to provide adequate and effective coverage of the election process however without impinging adversely on the rules for the elections and the rights of the electorate.

1. Rule 23 of the Pondicherry Municipal Councils (Conduct of Election of Councillors) Rules, 1974, and correspondingly Rule 19(A) of the Pondicherry Village and Commune Panchayat (Conduct of Election of Member of Commune Panchayat Councils and Presidents and Members of Village Panchayats) Rules, 1978, regulates the entry into polling stations of persons as decided by the Presiding Officers.
2. Similarly, Rule 51(1) of the Pondicherry Municipal Councils (Conduct of Election of Councillors) Rules, 1974, and correspondingly Rule 36 of the Pondicherry Village and Commune Panchayat (Conduct of Election of Member of Commune Panchayat Councils and Presidents and Members of Village Panchayats) Rules, 1978, regulates the entry into the places of Counting of persons as decided by the Returning Officers.
3. No one can enter into any polling station or a counting centre as a matter of right except to the extent mentioned in the above quoted rules.
4. Subject to the powers of the authorities competent to impose any restriction in pursuit of the maintenance of law and order, the permission of the Commission is not needed by any person, including media persons, for visiting and moving around in any constituency where election is being held and every person is free to observe the elections. Entry into the polling stations and counting centres is however fully regulated by the statutory provisions mentioned above.
5. In addition to the persons directly connected with poll and counting, such persons as are specifically authorised by the Commission can alone enter the polling stations and counting centres. The exclusive power of the Commission to issue entry passes to persons including media persons, also includes the power to refuse an entry pass to any person if in the Commission's opinion, there are sufficient reasons to do so.
6. The subject of laying down standard guidelines for the facilities to be made available to media persons interested in covering the process of the election conducted under superintendence, direction and control of the Commission, has engaged the attention of the Commission. After a careful consideration of all relevant factor, the following guidelines are laid down to be strictly and uniformly observed at the civic elections:

7. As soon as practicable, after the announcement of elections, the Commission will issue a letter to the Directorate of Information and Publicity for obtaining and forwarding, with specific recommendations, requests received from media persons for issue of Authority Letters for entry into polling stations and counting centres within a specified time limit. The sponsoring authorities will sponsor only names of those media persons, about whose identity as a genuine media person they are satisfied. The total number of media persons recommended for issue of authority letters will be within reasonable numbers. The deadline to receive the duly sponsored requests shall not be later than 15 days prior to the date of poll.
8. It will be for the sponsoring authorities to inform all media persons about the deadline fixed by the Commission and to ensure that their recommendations reach the Commission within the deadline.
9. Each applicants should give full particulars including her/his name, designation, news agency/ newspapers/periodical/electronic media channel which the applicant represents, and the name(s) of constituency(ies) she/he wants to cover. There will be no restriction on the number of constituencies which an applicant may like to cover. For electronic media team with more than one person, each individual member will need a separate authority letter.
10. The sponsoring authority and the Information Department should meticulously screen all the requests received and their recommendations should be within reasonable numbers keeping in mind all relevant factors especially considering the prevailing Covid pandemic situation.
11. The Commission will not entertain any requests directly from any person agency for media/news coverage.
12. The Returning Officer, the Presiding Officers and any other election related officials have absolute right and responsibility to keep persons without such authority letters away from the place of polling/counting.
13. Authority letters issued will be subject to the conditions imposed by the Commission as are mentioned on the authority letters. Any violation of such condition will automatically invalidate the authority letter.
14. As for coverage of actual polling inside the polling stations, media persons with authority letters can be allowed enter inside the polling station by the Presiding Officers after verification of such authority letters. However, they will be allowed inside in very small numbers in batches and the actual numbers will be determined taking into account the size of the room and the space available, the number of electors waiting to cast their votes and other relevant factors. The Presiding Officer will have full discretion regarding the entry of the media persons inside the polling booth taking into account the situation obtaining at the relevant time and all other relevant factors as she/he alone will be to do so on the spot. While allowing such media persons inside the polling station, the Presiding Officer may also further regulate the actual coverage by indicating a definite position beyond which they should not proceed. It is expected that in polling stations which are likely to attract large media attention, appropriate additional arrangements for security and law and order arrangements would be made by the State Police.

15. Entry inside the polling station and coverage of the events even in small numbers in batches would be regulated in such a manner that under no circumstances is the secrecy of the ballot of any voter violated even by accident. The Presiding Officer will also be free to use regulatory measures as he may feel necessary in this regard taking into account the situation at hand. It is expected that all media persons will extend necessary co-operation in this regard and under no circumstances, the process of polling will be allowed to be disturbed because of the large number of media persons present at a given time in a single booth. This will be ensured by each Presiding Officer in a suitable manner. In short, for coverage of actual polling inside the polling station, the entry of media person inside the polling booth in manageable groups will be permitted by the Presiding Officer on the basis of authority letters issued by the Commission, subject to restriction that media persons will not be allowed to go near voting compartments to take photographs/ films so that the secrecy of the vote is not violated.
16. District Magistrates / Regional Administrators shall hold press briefings at least five times during the process of election in the districts/regions in which an election is held. Comprehensive press handouts shall be distributed among the media persons at these briefings. Subject to the requirements of law and order, confidentiality, and peaceful free and fair poll, the subjects to be compulsorily included in the press handouts and in the briefings at these press meets, and their timings shall be as follows:

No.	Timing	Subject
1.	Date of Notification	i) Map of the constituency showing locations of polling stations, and routes; ii) List of recognized political parties, their office Telephone numbers; iii) Number of electors, number of women electors and like such statistical information; iv) Names, addresses and telephone numbers of statutory officers, v) Gist of important instructions issue by the Election Commission, vi) The programme of election, vii) Preparedness to hold peaceful free and fair poll, viii) Model Code of Conduct and preparedness to ensure its observance.
2.	Last day of withdrawal	i) Final list of contesting candidates, addresses as per electoral roll and the symbols allotted to them; ii) preparedness to hold peaceful, free and fair poll.
3.	End of Electioneering	i) Incidents of violation of Model Code of Conduct during the period of elections and action taken thereon, ii) Incidents of electoral offences during the period of elections and action taken thereon, iii) Action taken against errant officials, iv) Preparedness to hold peaceful free and fair poll.
4.	End of polling	i) Incidents of electoral offences and malpractice and action taken on them on the day of poll, ii) Preparedness to hold re-poll, if any. iii) Preparedness to hold peaceful free and fair counting.
5.	End of Election process	All Publishable statistical information about the elections.

17. This instruction may be brought to the notice of all concerned and be followed without any deviation.

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STATE ELECTION COMMISSIONER

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To

1. The District Election Officer, Puducherry / Karaikal.
2. The Regional Election Officer, Mahe / Yanam.
3. All Returning Officers of Municipality and Commune Panchayat.