

INTRODUCTION

Local body elections to the Panchayats and the Municipalities were to be conducted much earlier but because of various constraints like amendment of the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act/Rules and also the Arunachal Pradesh Municipal Act/Rules, it was delayed. The creation of the Itanagar Municipal Corporation and subsequent framing of a new Act and Rules by the state government has also contributed to a further delay. After the completion of the above processes, the State Election Commission had made elaborate preparations to complete the election process by May 2020. However the COVID 19 pandemic struck and the state went into lockdown from March 2020. A meeting of all stakeholders including the political parties was held on 18.3.2020 and a considered view was taken to put the election process on hold till the environment would be conducive. In fact the entire nation was in lockdown resulting in numerous rumours, fears and hectic medical activity. Normal life came to a standstill. Now after more than half a year, life is getting into the new normal of physical distancing, stress on personal hygiene and use of face masks and sanitizers and other precautions prescribed by the government. It is now the endeavour of the State Election Commission to not just conduct the already delayed local body elections at the earliest but to conduct it in such a manner that the elections are not only free, fair and transparent but also to minimize risk of possible contagion of the pandemic and is safe for all stakeholders from the health point of view.

With the above objective, the State Election Commission hereby prescribes the following guidelines to be complied with by all the stakeholders during the entire process of elections. The responsibility of enforcement of these guidelines and its compliance by all stakeholders lies with the concerned Returning Officers (ROs) who may delegate it to his AROs or designate it to an independent officer to supervise and monitor its implementation. These guidelines are in **two parts**. The **first part** is related to all government personnel deployed on election duty and the **second part** concerns guidelines to be followed by the candidates, the political parties and their representatives. It is hoped that by following these guidelines the state may usher in a vibrant and healthy democracy both in the literal and physical sense.

.....1.....

PART I

Guidelines to be followed by the Election Duty Staff during the election process

(A) General instructions about Preventive measures to be taken.

- i) All the personnel deployed on election duty must maintain a minimum distance of 2 meters in public places as far as feasible.
- ii) Use of face covers/ masks is mandatory. Use and throw disposable masks should be changed at regular intervals and properly disposed off for which a separate dustbin should be provided.
- iii) Frequent hand washing with soap (for at least 20 seconds) will be practiced at regular intervals. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers will be used (for at least 20 seconds) wherever feasible.
- iv) Hygiene related etiquettes to be strictly followed by all. This involves strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue/handkerchief/flexed elbow and while disposing off used tissues properly in dust bins.
- v) Self-monitoring of health by all and reporting of any illness at the earliest to the immediate supervisory officer will be compulsory.
- vi) Spitting in public places shall be strictly prohibited.
- vii) Installation and use of Aarogya Setu App by election related personnel will be followed.
- viii) Effective and frequent sanitization of all areas relating to conduct of election shall be maintained regularly.
- ix) The office hours, lunch hours/coffee breaks may be staggered as far as possible.
- x) Social distancing norms must be followed even at the offices of the RO / ARO both within and outside the office premises.
- xi) Specific markings may be made to manage the queue and also to ensure social distancing in the premises.

- xii) The election related officials and other staff residing in any containment zone should inform the same to his supervisory officer and should not attend the election duty till the containment zone is de-notified.
- xiii) At the time of filing nomination, RO has to ensure that not more than two persons are present in his chamber at any given point of time so as to avoid crowding.

(B) Specific preventive measures required at the Distribution, Collection and Counting Centers.

- i) All personnel on election related duties should strictly adhere to the latest advisories issued by MHA & MoH & FW, Govt. of India and State Govt. from time to time
- ii) The provision of thermal screening and hand sanitiser at the entrance will have to be made in sufficient measure depending upon the number of persons likely to be there.
- iii) Only the asymptomatic staff/visitors/candidates and their agents shall be allowed entry at the Distribution/Receiving/Counting Centres.
- iv) Separate entry and exit for the officers/staff and visitors shall be preferably maintained.
- v) There shall be provision for carrying out sanitization/disinfection within the premises of the Distribution, Collection and Counting centres, and vehicles being used for election related activities.
- vi) All employees who are at higher risk i.e. old / aged employees, pregnant staff and those who have underlying medical conditions are advised to take extra precautions.
- vii) All officers and staff / visitors to be allowed entry only if they are using face cover/mask. The face cover/mask has to be worn at all times inside the distribution, collection and counting centres.
- viii) Seating arrangement for polling personnel and counting staff at the distribution, collection and counting centres is to be made in such a way that adequate social distancing is maintained.
- ix) Large gatherings outside the distribution centre, collection centre, outside the counting centres and inside the counting halls will not be allowed. To reduce the confinement areas of a large number of people, ROs may exercise the option of holding the above centres in an open

space provided all precautions like barricading, security etc. are suitable in place. However prior intimation should be given and permission shall be taken from the State Election Commission.

- x) Proper crowd management in the parking lots and outside the premises at distribution, collection and counting centres by duly following social distancing norms has to be ensured.
- xi) A Nodal Health Officer may be designated for dealing with the election staff who may develop Covid-19 symptoms during election duty to coordinate with the Health authorities and the RO.
- xii) A Nodal Health Officer may also be attached to the State Election Commission for over all coordination/consultation at the state level.

(C) Safety measures required at the Polling Station

- i) As far as practicable, polling stations should be either large halls or open areas that allow adequate circulation of fresh air.
- ii) There should be separate entry and exit points for the voters.
- iii) Norms of social distancing by marking circles at 2 meters distance for the voters to stand in a queue outside the polling station and allowing entry of limited number of voters in the marked circles near the entrance of the polling station shall be strictly followed.
- iv) The provision of hand sanitisers at the entrance of the polling stations shall have to be made without fail. Extra masks should be available in polling stations for voters who do not come with mask.
- v) The place used for setting up the polling station and all the materials/items used shall be properly sanitized before setting it up. Proper cleaning and frequent sanitization of the workplace, particularly of the frequently touched surfaces like tables, ballot boxes/EVMs, metal strip, etc must be ensured by the polling staff on duty.
- vi) Face shield /gloves need to be provided to polling staff.

- vii) Regular supply of hand sanitisers, soap and running water in the washrooms shall be ensured.
- viii) Proper disposal of face covers / masks / gloves left over and other biomedical waste shall be ensured in consultation with the concerned Nodal Officer (Health)
- ix) Each polling station should have at least 2 COVID-19 IEC materials of a display size measuring no lesser than 4x3 feet².
- x) There is no separate provision for casting of votes for vulnerable sections of society namely ;
 1. PWD (Persons with Disability)
 2. Senior & elderly voters of the age group of 80 years and above.
 3. People who have been infected with the COVID-19 Virus during election period.

The Hon'ble State Election Commissioner, in exercise of his plenary powers under Article 243K and 243ZA of the Constitution of India, hereby provides for the following :-

- There shall be a separate queue for the above mentioned three categories of voters in addition to the existing two queues comprising of male and female voters.
- As far as practicable, this category of voters shall be given priority by the Presiding Officer and allowed to vote at the earliest so that they face minimum discomfort.
- However, all protocols regarding the SOP issued by the State Election Commission are to be strictly adhered to with no compromise.

(D) Measures to be taken on occurrence of symptoms while on duty

Despite taking the above measures, the occurrence of cases among the election related personnel cannot be ruled out. The following measures will be taken in such circumstances:

- i) When one or more staff members on poll duty is found to be suffering from symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 either in the office on election duty, the said person should be placed in a separate room or area where he is isolated from others at the workplace.
- ii) The nearest medical facility (hospital/clinic) may be immediately informed and the state or district helpline should be immediately called.
- iii) The advice of the designated public health authority may be sought for carrying out a risk assessment and for making further advice regarding management of the said case, his/her contacts and the need for carrying out disinfection of the said premises as per Government instructions, if any.
- iv) The possibility of any polling personnel falling sick while on polling duty at the polling station also can't be ruled out, therefore, the ROs are advised to keep one spare room in ready condition as an alternative polling station (preferably an adjacent room) for shifting the location of the polling within the same premises under such eventualities. All the polling personnel *leaving behind the said sick person* shall move to that room, set up the polling station and continue with the polling process there without much loss of time.

(E) Elections in containment zones.

Elections in declared containment zones, if any, shall be kept on hold until such time the situation becomes conducive for such elections. Specific orders shall be issued by the Commission keeping in abeyance/ resumption of elections to that containment zone on a case to case basis.

.....6.....

PART II

Guidelines to be followed by the Candidates and the Political Parties during the election process.

(A) General instructions about Preventive measures to be taken while attending official meetings.

- i) All the candidates and representatives of the political parties must maintain a minimum distance of 2 meters as far as feasible.
- ii) Use of face covers/ masks is mandatory. Use and throw masks should be changed at regular intervals and properly disposed off for which a separate dustbin will be made available.
- iii) Frequent hand washing with soap (for at least 20 seconds) will be practiced at regular intervals. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers will be provided at the venue.
- iv) Hygiene related etiquettes to be strictly followed by all. This involves strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue/ handkerchief/flexed elbow and disposing off used tissues properly in dust bins.
- v) Self-monitoring of health by all and reporting of any illness at the earliest to the immediate supervisory officer will be necessary.
- vi) Spitting, smoking and chewing tobacco etc in public places shall be strictly prohibited.
- vii) Installation & use of Aarogya Setu App is a must while entering in the offices of Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers, and the State Election Commission.
- viii) All concerned are advised to cooperate during the taking of body temperature with thermal scanner at the entry point.
- ix) Social distancing norms must be followed at the offices of the RO / ARO both within and outside the office premises.

- x) The entry of the candidates/political party representatives who are residing in any containment zone, to any office is strictly prohibited till the containment zone is de-notified.
- xi) At the time of filing nomination, not more than two persons will be allowed to remain present inside the office chamber of the RO at any given point of time so as to avoid crowding and they are advised to observe social distancing norms while inside the chamber.

(B) Specific preventive measures to be taken by the political parties/candidates during the election meetings, rallies, press briefings etc.

- i) Political parties and the contesting candidates should strictly adhere to the latest advisories issued by MHA & MoH & FW, Govt. of India and State Govt. from time to time.
- ii) The provision of thermal screening and hand sanitizer will have to be made in sufficient measure at the entry point depending upon the number of persons likely to be there.
- iii) Only the asymptomatic staff/visitors/candidates and their agents should be allowed to participate.
- iv) Separate entry and exit for party members and visitors shall be preferably maintained.
- v) Provision shall be made for carrying out frequent sanitization/disinfection of the interior areas, meeting and press briefing areas and the vehicles being used for election related activities.
- vi) As far as possible virtual meetings may be arranged. If not possible, open spaces having provisions for physical distancing should be encouraged.
- vii) All persons who are at higher risk i.e. old / aged employees, pregnant staff and those who have underlying medical conditions should be advised to take extra precautions and try to avoid participating in the meetings, rallies and press briefings.
- viii) Proper crowd management in the parking lots and outside the venues of the meetings, rallies culminating centres and press briefing places by duly following social distancing norms has to be ensured.

- xiii. Anybody showing Covid symptoms should be referred to the health authorities immediately.
- xiv. Drivers deployed by the candidates/political parties for electioneering related activities shall follow required do's and don'ts related to COVID-19. Proper sanitization/disinfection of vehicle steering, door handles, keys, etc. should be carried out. It shall be ensured by the service providers/ officers/ staff that drivers residing in containment zone areas are not requisitioned to drive vehicles.

(C) Safety measures required at the candidate's camps outside the Polling Station.

The places used for setting up the candidate's camp outside the polling station shall be properly sanitized before setting it up.

- i) All the persons deployed shall wear masks and maintain social etiquette.
- ii) Face shield /gloves need to be provided to persons deployed on duty.
- iii) Proper disposal of face covers / masks / gloves left over shall be ensured.

(D) Measures to be taken on occurrence of symptoms

The occurrence of symptoms among the persons including the candidates or their representatives during the election process cannot be ruled out. Following measures will be taken in such circumstances:

- i) When one or more members are found to be suffering from symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 at the meeting places/other election related venues, the said person/s should be placed in a separate room or area where he is isolated from others.
- ii) The nearest medical facility (hospital/clinic) may be immediately informed and the state or district helpline should be immediately called.
- iii) In case of any polling agent falling sick, he will not be allowed to remain present inside the polling station and may be required to be replaced by the candidate.

Miscellaneous :

(A) Non-compliance of Instructions – Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures shall be liable to be 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. Over and above a fine of Rs. 500/- shall be imposed for not wearing mask and a fine of Rs. 200/- shall be imposed for spitting in public places, as per State Notification No. Secy(Health)/SOP-11/2020/120 dated 31st August 2020.

(B) The State Epidemiologist, **Dr. L. Jampa** will be the Nodal Officer for Health Department to advise the SEC, while the District Medical Officers of the respective district will act as the District Nodal Officer (Health).
