

## ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001

**No. 52/2023/SDR/Vol.IV**

**Dated: 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2024**

To,

The Chief Electoral Officers of  
All States and Union Territories

**Subject: Guidelines on printing of postal ballot papers, their transportation and storage-regarding.**

Madam/Sir,

In continuation to the Commission's letter of even number dated 31.10.2023 and letter No. 3/4/2022/SDR/Vol.II dated 04.03.2024, I am directed to state that the following supplementary instructions related to printing of postal ballot papers, their transportation and storage are hereby issued.

**1. Printing of Postal Ballots:**

**1.1** The printing of postal ballot papers for categories other than service voters shall commence immediately after publication of list of contesting candidates in Form 7A and shall be completed within 72 hours. The District Election Officer shall plan the logistics in this regard in advance viz; finalization of printing press, safe and secure transportation of paper for printing and printed postal ballots, appointment of one Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) for each constituency for overseeing all the arrangements at the printing press as well as checking the correctness of the postal ballot during printing and storage of printed postal ballots.

**1.2** The printing of postal ballot will be done preferably at a government or semi-government press. However, in case a government/semi-government printing press is not available or does not have required capacity, a private printing press with required capacity can be selected after following due procedure; and adequate provision of security & safety of the process will be ensured as per instructions contained in Para 1.6 below.

**1.3** The candidates/their agents shall be informed, immediately after preparation of Form 7A, the plan of printing of postal ballots. The candidates can deploy their representatives, one each for each candidate, to witness the printing process, transportation and storage of printed postal ballots.

**1.4** The postal ballots shall be printed in bundles of 50 ballot papers each and assigned sequential serial numbers. It shall be ensured that the serial number of ballot paper and its counterfoil in each leaf shall be identical. Proper records shall be maintained for the ballot papers printed.

**1.5** In view of the urgency of the matter, the Chief Electoral Officer/District Election Officer shall ensure uninterrupted power supply and proper security to the printing press during the printing of postal ballots. DGP/SP shall provide proper security during printing at the printing press premises and transportation of printed postal ballots.

**1.6** The District Election Officer shall depute an Assistant Returning Officer (Printing), assisted by adequate supporting staff for printing of ballot papers. They shall be suitably briefed about the sensitivity and importance of the work. Accurate and timely printing of postal ballot should be ensured by the Superintendent/Incharge of printing press and the Returning Officer.

**1.7** For printing of postal ballots, paper of required specifications shall be procured centrally from government press in sufficient quantity and be distributed among the District Election Officers with proper account. In case procurement of paper for printing of postal ballot paper from government press is not feasible or government press does not exist in the State/UT the paper of the standard specification may be procured from a semi-government or private press/agency following due procedure. District will be printing postal ballots on the same paper. The blank paper should be kept in a separate room. The key of the room should remain with the responsible person nominated by the Superintendent/Incharge of printing press. The paper will be issued on specific job cards in exact number of sheets and not in terms of reams. The register has to be maintained by the Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) and nominated official in the printing press. In the printing hall, there should be no paper other than the paper earmarked for printing of postal ballots.

**1.8** The Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) will check that the sufficient quantity of paper, “type high-numbering machines”, CDs/electronic storage device containing soft form of election symbols supplied by the firm/ company authorized by the Election Commission and other necessary material is available with the printing press. He will ensure that services of responsible press employees are utilized in checking each individual postal ballot particularly that –

- (i) Each bundle contains 50 postal ballots in consecutive serial number and no ballot paper is missing,
- (ii) The particulars of each candidate, photograph and election symbol are correctly printed,

(iii) The names of contesting candidates are in the same serial order and in the manner as provided in Form 7A,

(iv) NOTA option is also correctly printed.

**1.9** The serial number of postal ballots will be printed in 6 digits or 7 digits, as may be convenient through “type high-numbering machines”. Serial number shall start from 100001/1000001 and not from 000001 as sometimes the figure ‘0’ does not appear in full during printing. By deputing checker at machines, skipping or jumping of numbering machines can be checked simultaneously. Numbering of all postal ballots of a constituency should be done through one type of numbering machine only.

## **2. Checking of printed postal ballot-**

**2.1** As soon as the postal ballots are printed, cut into size and ready for checking, the checking parties authorized by the Returning Officer will check the postal ballots before packing. The Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) should also do random checking of the finally packed bundles of postal ballots.

**2.2** When the packing of printed postal ballots is finally done, the Superintendent/Incharge of press will handover such packets to the Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) under proper receipt.

## **3. Disposal of surplus and waste postal ballot papers at printing press-**

**3.1** The surplus and waste ballot papers at the printing press will be shredded and made into the pulp in the presence of the Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) and Superintendent/Incharge of printing press and both will jointly sign a certificate for that purpose and make an entry in the register. The register should contain account of every single sheet of paper consumed or wasted in the printing. The register for each constituency shall be submitted to the District Election Officer.

**3.2** The District Election Officer will submit to the Chief Electoral Officer the account containing the particulars of paper utilized i.e. the papers consumed in printing, disposed of as waste and the remaining stock of the paper left in balance, in his district.

## **4. Transportation and storage of the printed postal ballot papers-**

**4.1** The Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) will take delivery of the printed postal ballots from the printing press and the same will be transported in the vehicles under police guard. The representatives of the candidates may also be allowed to join the team to witness transporting of

printed postal ballot from printing press to the designated place of storage. The Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) or any other officer, as the case may be authorized by the Returning Officer will receive the packets of printed postal ballots in the direct supervision of the Returning Officer. After making proper entry in the register maintained for the purpose, these printed postal ballots shall be kept in steel trunk(s) of appropriate size(s) with double lock and key on them. This steel trunk(s) shall be stored in a separate room under the direct supervision of the Returning Officer. One of the keys of the trunk containing printed postal ballot papers shall be with Returning Officer and the other with the Assistant Returning Officer (Printing) assigned for this task. The room meant for keeping these printed postal ballots should be in the same building/premises where Returning Officer is located. CCTV, up-to-date firefighting equipment and proper security shall be deployed for safety and security of the printed postal ballot.

**4.2** A log book shall be maintained to record the proceedings of each occasion of opening and closing of the room where such printed postal ballot papers are stored. Signature of Returning Officer and other officials entrusted with the task shall be obtained on each occasion.

## **5. Colors of postal ballot paper and envelopes-**

**5.1** The color of postal ballot papers and envelopes for voters other than Service Voters shall be as follows: -

- (i) White color for Lok Sabha election, whether general or bye-election;
- (ii) Pink color for Vidhan Sabha election, whether general or bye-election

**5.2** The postal ballot papers and envelopes for Service Voters shall be of white color in all types of election.

**5.3** In case of simultaneous elections also, the color of postal ballot paper and the envelopes will remain the same as prescribed above.

## **6. Custody of postal ballot papers after counting-**

**6.1** As per rule 92(2) of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, the District Election Officer concerned shall be responsible for the safe custody of postal ballot papers used at an election, along with voting machines and packets containing Form 17A and other election papers listed under the said rule.

**6.2** In case of multi - district constituency following shall be the custodian of Postal Ballots post counting in terms of Rule 92 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961: -

| Election (General/Bye) | Custodian                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Parliamentary Election | District Election Officer who is Returning Officer of the Parliamentary Constituency or District Election Officer in whose division Returning Officer's Headquarters is located. |
| Assembly Election      | District Election Officer in whose jurisdiction Returning Officer's Headquarters is located.                                                                                     |

**6.3** Further, rule 93(1) of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 provides that the postal ballot papers while in custody of the District Election Officer shall not be inspected by or produced before, any person or authority except under the order of a competent court.

7. The above directions should be brought to notice of all the District Election Officers, Returning Officers and all other election related authorities/officers for their information and strict compliance.

Yours faithfully,



(S.B. JOSHI)

PRINCIPAL SECRETARY