

**PUBLIC (ELEC.VII) DEPT**

**Press release**

The instructions of the Commission regarding the facilities to be provided to Media persons for coverage of counting process to be held on 23.05.2019 for General Elections to Lok Sabha, 2019:

**For Counting - Legal Provisions:**

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 Election 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.

**Entry Procedure:**

(i) The Returning Officer and other election related officers have absolute right and responsibility to keep persons without such authority letters away from the place of polling and counting.

(ii) The premises where the counting takes place, is fully under the control of the Election Commission of India. Entry into any such place of counting of any media person shall be allowed only on the basis of valid entry pass issued by the Commission alone and not by any other authority. Entry passes issued by any other authority to any media persons for covering Parliamentary/ Assembly proceedings etc. do not entitle them to enter the places of counting during elections.

**Media Room inside the counting centre:**

(i) It may be clearly stated that Media persons with valid passes issued by the Election Commission of India, inside the counting premises will be allowed to sit in a separate room known as the media room, and not in the actual counting hall itself. This room/hall will be near the counting hall.

(ii) Entry of Media persons into the counting hall will be regulated. They will be taken inside the counting hall in small batches at regular intervals by an

official/officials designated for this purpose by the officers in charge of counting, in advance. There should be sufficient number of officials in the media room, throughout the process of counting.

(iii) The media rooms in the counting centres should have the required personnel and infrastructural facilities like telephone with ISD/STD, Fax Machines, necessary furniture and other basic facilities like drinking water etc. These may be provided by the concerned Government who shall be free to decide the charge if any, to be levied for various facilities. No special arrangements need be made to answer queries telephonically.

(iv) For this purpose it is necessary for each RO to interact with the Divisional Managers of the Department of Telecommunications in advance and arrange for such PCO/STD booths to be set up at the counting centres. This can be in the media room itself or in a separate room adjoining the media room. Alternatively this can be set up in a veranda or in the open space close to the counting hall in any temporary structure. The availability of such facilities should be known to the media persons in advance.

**Procedure for coverage inside the counting hall:**

(i) As for the coverage of the actual counting inside the counting hall, media persons with authority letters can be allowed to enter the counting hall by the Returning Officer after verification of their authority letters. However they will be allowed inside the counting hall in very small numbers and in batches and the actual numbers will be determined taking into account the size of the counting hall, the space available and other relevant factors. The Returning officer and other election related officers will have full discretion regarding the entry of the media persons inside the counting hall, taking into account the situation obtaining at the relevant time and all other relevant factors as he alone will be able to do so on the spot. While allowing such media persons inside the counting hall the R.O. may also further regulate the actual coverage by indicating a definite position (by means of a line or string) beyond which they should not proceed.

(ii) It is repeated that media persons will be escorted in small batches inside the counting hall by officials designated for the purpose by the officers in charge of counting in advance; and these officials who escort the media persons will remain with the media persons throughout their stay in the counting hall

and will escort them out after their coverage to the media room. It is therefore important that adequate numbers of officials are available for this purpose.

(iii) It may also be noted that no static (fixed) camera- still or video of the media is allowed inside any counting hall. No Camera stand should therefore be allowed to be taken inside counting halls. Further, while taking audio visual coverage of the counting process with camera carried in hand or on shoulders, under no circumstances, the actual votes recorded on individual ballot papers, or the actual votes polled in each EVM, is to be photographed or covered by audio visual coverage, even by accident.

(iv) It is expected that in counting centres, which are likely to attract large media attention, appropriate additional arrangements for security and law and order would have been made (by the concerned authorities). Under no circumstances, in whatever manner would the actual counting process be disrupted or hindered by the presence of Media persons inside the counting centre.

(v) The Returning 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. This will be ensured by each Returning Officer in a suitable manner.

(vi) The holders of the authority letters while covering the counting process can and should be allowed to come out of the counting hall(s) if they so desire, during the counting. They should be allowed to reenter on the basis of the very same authority letter. All entry at all times however is subject to the overall requirement of maintenance of law and order, proper decorum and conduct of peaceful counting. Substitution of media personnel should be allowed only when the substitute also carries a valid authority letter in his/her name.

(vii) No one can be given any special facilities of access etc. Any CEO or any one else who gives or permits extra facilities in violation of the directions of the Commission to Central Govt. or State Govt. media or to foreign press and media or members of any state Department connected with information and publicity, by whatever name known, will do so at his own risk and will face the consequences thereof.

**Adequate publicity:**

(i) Adequate publicity regarding the facilities for media should be made in advance so that there is absolute clarity in the matter and all concerned are aware.

(ii) The DEOs/ Returning Officers are accordingly required to review these arrangements in advance and work out the complete details and allocate necessary resources in terms of personnel and facilities. They should personally supervise these arrangements in counting centre where they are present and identify a senior officer of the District to do so in the other counting centre in their charge.

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