

## COUNTING GUIDELINES FOR THREE TIER PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS

### I. Counting Venue

- (a) It is expected that the counting venue in each Block has already been identified. Such venue shall be a secured place with relatively easy accessibility. The main building should have a large front space for parking vehicles and also for a large number of people waiting. The entire premises should preferably be surrounded by a compound wall so that security arrangements may be made satisfactorily. Arrangements for drinking water and toilet facilities are necessary on the site. Counting Centre & RC at same venue
- (b) Counting centre should preferably be used as a distribution centre and reception centre as well. However, if for some compelling reasons, distribution centre is located somewhere else, the reception centre and the counting centre should be at the same place. Preferably on same building as DC
- (c) The buildings where counting shall be held should have a few large and small rooms for use as counting halls and strong room or rooms for storing the polled ballot boxes. The counting halls should preferably have passage for easy entry and exit for a large number of people without disturbing other activities in the counting process like taking polled boxes from strong room to the counting hall. Venue Infrastructure
- (d) Polled ballot boxes alongwith Ballot Paper Account, Paper Seal Account, Presiding Officer's Declarations, and any other paper that may be considered necessary shall be kept in the strong room or rooms. Other papers that may be required for post poll scrutiny may be kept in a separate strong room. In a centre there may be one to three strong rooms for polled ballot boxes depending on availability, suitability from security angle, closeness to counting hall and other factors. If all boxes are kept in one room, the sequential arrangement shall be such that boxes may be brought out easily in the order of Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad constituencies. If polled boxes of more than one tier are kept in one room, they may be kept in same sequential order so that there is no mix up. Clear record of boxes kept in any strong room shall be maintained. Strong Room(s)
- (e) After polled boxes and other records are put inside, strong room(s) shall remain under lock & key and sealed by the Returning Officer who will also invite the candidates or their election agents present to put their seals. The room/ rooms shall also be under constant vigil of the security guard who will maintain a log-book for noting the time and reason for opening and closing of the strong room. If it is necessary for the Returning Officer to open the room (like putting polled boxes after re-poll if any, on such dates as may be fixed by the Commission), the candidates shall be given advance intimation and the doors shall be opened and closed in presence of such candidates who may remain present and they should be invited

to put their seals again on the closed lock.

- (f) The Panchayat Returning Officer (RO) shall put one competent officer in charge of the strong room. If there are more rooms than one, more officers may be given the charge. He shall place the boxes and records in proper order and monitor the movement of boxes from strong room to the counting hall to ensure that no wrong box goes to any counting table. A log book is to be maintained for each of the strong rooms and records of each opening and closing of the strong rooms and every time anything is kept inside or taken out of the said rooms shall have to be recorded in the said log books. Officer in-Charge, Strong Room
- (g) Care should be taken to post security guards and the fire brigade (or other arrangements for extinguishing fire) as precaution against any mishap. A medical team should also be set up. Security, Fire Fighting Arrangements & Medical Team

## II. Security arrangements at counting venue prior to counting

- (a) The counting venue shall come under round the clock surveillance of the security staff with effect from the night before the date of counting. No one shall be allowed to enter the premises before the counting day except without express permission of the Returning Officer under pressing circumstances. Night before
- (b) The candidates have been allowed, under the provisions of the Act, to follow the vehicle which will carry the polled ballot boxes and other materials from polling station to the Reception-centre-cum-counting –venue. The candidates have also been allowed to keep regular watch over the sealed doors of the strong room either by himself or his election agent or through one or more counting agent specially appointed for the purpose. It is stated that not more than one person on behalf of one candidate shall be allowed to stay at any point of time. However, if they so desire, the candidates or the agents may be allowed to have a look at the sealed door from a little distance without touching the door or the lock to find whether the seal is unbroken, at an interval of every two hours. Unless there is a suitable structure within the premises but outside the main building, a small temporary covered structure with a few pieces of furniture (a table & chairs) for the candidates and /or their agents may be erected. Facilities for candidates for watching transit & storage of polled ballot boxes
- (c) The counting halls shall be opened and the seal on the locks of the strong room or rooms shall be broken about one and half hours before the counting starts. The candidates shall be intimated to remain present at the appointed hour. The seals of the locks shall be broken and the doors opened by the Returning Officer in presence of the candidates attending at the appointed hour. Opening of Strong Room before counting
- (d) Entries to the counting premises shall be regulated by the security personnel under the direction of the Returning Officer. Anyone entering or leaving the premises shall be required to display Restrictions for entry

or show his card to the security personnel on duty. No one shall be allowed to enter the premises until a little before the appointed time. No one shall also be allowed to loiter in the counting hall or on the ground of the premises who has no business or whose business has been over. Any unusual gathering in or around the premises or just outside the gate should not be allowed.

### III. Counting Hall

- (a) Counting halls or rooms shall be situated as near to the strong room as possible and under the same roof with the strong room. If anywhere the counting hall(s) and the strong room do not share the same roof; a temporary, well-protected covered passageway may be erected for movement of polled ballot boxes. Easy and quick movement of polled ballot boxes from the strong room to the counting hall is essential and should be ensured. Location of counting hall(s) vis-à-vis strong room
- (b) A counting hall shall generally have not more than 20 (twenty) counting tables in addition to the table for the Returning Officer. Additional counting tables, if considered necessary, may be placed in the hall after obtaining prior approval of the Commission. At any counting table, there shall be sitting arrangement for (i) one Counting Officer and (ii) 2 (two) Counting Assistants. In addition, a little away from the table – at a viewing distance but beyond reach – by the side of wall, there shall be sitting arrangement for one Counting Agent for each contesting candidate, Election Agent or candidate (one person at any point of time). Number of tables in a hall may be determined taking into consideration the aforesaid sitting accommodation, size of the room, ventilation and other factors involved. Counting Hall tables arrangement
- The Table of the Returning Officer, preferably on a raised platform, shall be chaired by the Returning Officer or an Assistant Returning Officer authorized by the Returning Officer. He shall be provided two or three Assistants (of whom one will be a tabulator) and Group D employees.
- (c) There is no limitation imposed on the number of counting halls in a venue. Such number shall primarily depend on the number of rooms/ halls available as also the Counting Officer and Counting assistants. No. of Counting Halls
- (d) Efforts should, however, be made to set up such number of counting tables in all the halls taken together as may make counting relating to each tier completed in two rounds. This means that the number of tables in a given counting venue shall be at least half of the number of polling stations in the block. A Returning Officer may however complete counting in less than 2 rounds by increasing the number of halls. Rounds
- (e) However, situation as obtained in some of the counting centres may not permit completion of counting of one tier in two rounds. In such cases, arrangements shall be made to complete the counting

