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No Postal Ballots for Above 65 in Bihar

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Why in News

Recently, the **Election Commission of India** (ECI) has **decided against extending postal ballots to electors above 65 years of age** in the upcoming Bihar Assembly elections due to logistical challenges.

Key Points

- **Background:**

- Earlier in June 2020, the Law Ministry, on the **recommendation of ECI**, had extended the postal ballot facility to electors over 65 years (being most vulnerable to Covid-19), **Covid-19** patients and those suspected to have it by notifying a change to the **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**.
- Earlier, postal ballots were **extended to Persons with Disabilities (PwD) and electors over 80 years** in November 2019 ahead of the Jharkhand and Delhi elections.

- **Working Mechanism:**

- The postal ballot facility for electors above 65 years is different from the conventional postal service.
 - Usually, **ballot papers are distributed electronically** to electors and **are returned to the election officers via post**.
- For above 65 and Covid-19 patients, it works as a **polling station on the move**, with the polling staff visiting the homes of such electors, having them fill out their ballots, sealing them in envelopes and taking it back.
 - It was done to **minimize vulnerability and exposure** at the polling stations for above 65 and to **not deprive** the Covid-19 patients and people under quarantine **of their voting rights**.

- **Challenges:**

- After reviewing the preparations for the Bihar polls, the ECI has made this decision keeping in mind the **logistical, staff and safety protocol** related constraints.
- For collecting votes of so many electors, **additional staff and security will be required** and would not be possible to arrange the facility for about 72 lakh electors, about 10% of the total 7.19 crore electors in the state.
- State authorities are already preparing 34,000 additional polling stations in order to **limit electors to 1,000 at each location**. It also **requires additional polling personnel** which is an administrative challenge in itself.

Postal Ballots System

- Ballot papers are distributed electronically to electors and are returned to the election officers via post.
- Currently, **only the following voters** are allowed to cast their votes through postal ballot:
 - **Service voters** (armed forces, the armed police force of a state and government servants posted abroad).
 - **Voters on election duty.**
 - Voters **above 80 years of age or Persons with Disabilities (PwD)**.
 - Voters **under preventive detention.**
- The exception to the above-mentioned category of voters is provided under Section 60 of the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**.

Source: TH