



Postal Ballot Cover Extension

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The Election Commission Of India has asked the Union Law Ministry to expand the ambit of **postal ballots**.

- The move seeks to extend the postal ballot cover to voters on duty which includes voters in the aviation sector, the shipping sector, trains, fire services, medical services, traffic, long-distance road transport corporation buses, the aged, the physically challenged, and the journalists covering elections.
- This will require an amendment to the **Representation of the People's Act, 1951 (RP Act)**, and the **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**.

Representation of the People Act, 1951

This act provides for the **actual conduct of elections in India**. It deals with the following matters :

- Details like Qualification and Disqualification of members of both the Houses of Parliament and the State Legislatures,
- Administrative machinery for conducting elections,
- Registration of Political parties,
- Conduct of Elections,
- Election Disputes,
- Corrupt practices & Electoral offences, &
- By-elections.

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**, and
 - Voters under **preventive detention**.
- The exception to the above-mentioned category of voters is provided under Section 60 of the RP Act, 1951.

Way Forward

- The recent approval by the government to allow **registered NRI voters to appoint proxies** so as to cast a vote on their behalf is a welcome step.
- In order to ensure that the process of issuing of postal ballot happens in a controlled environment, the **Election Commission** has intended to provide the facility in specific centres on specific days, duly supervised by elections officials.

This will help to eliminate the chances of undue influence and interference in the casting of the vote through postal ballot.
- In the case of the aged and physically-challenged voters, the postal ballot papers can be delivered to them at home and collected back then and there, in a controlled, safe and secure environment.
- In a true democracy, it is necessary to explore all avenues that can enable the exercise of the franchise to all eligible voters.

Source: IE