

In this file photo, Missionaries of Charity nuns pray at the tomb of their founder Mother Teresa in Kolkata, India. (AFP/Getty Images/Dibyangshu Sarkar)

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Some 55 nuns from the Missionaries of Charity (MC) congregation were able to cast their votes during the West Bengal state assembly polls in eastern India after they challenged their removal from the electoral roll.

The nuns from the congregation founded by St. Teresa of Kolkata voted in the second round of the election on April 29 after the Election Commission of India (ECI) restored their names after scrutiny, said a nun from the order's headquarters in the West Bengal state capital Kolkata (formerly Calcutta).

All the nuns are voters in the Chowringhee constituency in Kolkata, and 35 of them registered their Mother House as their permanent address, The Times of India reported, quoting an unnamed nun.

Their names were included in the supplementary voter list published on April 28.

The nuns, most of them born outside the state, noticed their names were missing in the voter list published on Feb. 28. They approached a judicial tribunal to challenge the removal of their names under the ECI's controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voter list.

The revision was announced in October last year and implemented in several poll-bound states.

The SIR saw about 9.1 million names removed in West Bengal alone, out of about 76 million registered voters. While some had their names restored, the majority were struck off from the list.

The commission defended the SIR as a logical exercise to remove duplicate, deceased, or ineligible voters from the voter list.

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However, major political parties, including West Bengal's ruling All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC) leader Mamta Banerjee, called it "a voter purge" and "political conspiracy" to secure victory for the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Media reports showed that minority Muslims, who make up about 27 percent of the electorate and are considered supporters of Banerjee's party, had the largest share of deletions under the SIR.

The MC sources say the tribunal called 120 nuns for a hearing before the first round of voting on April 23. While some nuns were cleared, others were left pending

because they failed to provide the necessary documents, such as birth certificates and parental certificates.

The nuns were allowed to reclaim their place on the voter list after weeks of uncertainty, according to Farrell Shah, director of Social Communications for the Archdiocese of Calcutta, based in the state capital.

"It is a great relief not only for the MC nuns but also for many Christians across the state who had been struggling to get their names back on the voter list," Shah told UCA News on April 29.

A Christian activist who spoke on condition of anonymity termed the SIR anti-minority.

"The revision appeared to be carried out in a way that prevented many, especially from minority groups, from voting," the activist said.

He also slammed the hasty process, presumably at the behest of the BJP, which has been in power in the federal government since 2014.

"If the Election Commission had conducted this exercise well in advance, people would have had enough time to gather the necessary documents. The timing raises serious questions," he said.

The results of the 294-seat state assembly election are expected on May 4.