



Too little

Too late:

1. The Election Commission of India's decision to restrict campaigning for the remaining two phases of the West Bengal Assembly election is an instance of wisdom dawning late.
2. Nevertheless, it will help limit the public health damage to what was already caused by an unreasonably extended election cycle in the State during the pandemic.
3. After the Calcutta High Court sought an action taken report on what measures it was adopted in the context of the spreading pandemic, the Election Commission has ordered the cancellation of all rallies and roadshows.
4. Only meetings that are attended by no more than 500 people will be allowed now. In its order, the Election Commission noted "with anguish" that parties and candidates were not adhering to safety protocols.
5. Daily campaign hours had already been cut and campaigning was to stop 72 hours prior to polling, instead of 48 hours, as per an earlier directive.
6. The State is recording high numbers of infection. Bengal's health infrastructure is not robust to deal with a heavy surge. All parties organised rallies amid the pandemic. In the face of the Election Commission's refusal to do so, the Congress, the Trinamool Congress and the Left had discontinued big rallies.

The unusual and unreasonable schedule of the Bengal election during the pandemic was unwise and avoidable. The Election Commission's corrective measures at the last moment can only be of limited help. The lack of foresight while drawing up the schedule and monitoring the campaign bordered on complicity in the surge of new infections.