

**Holding polls during COVID-19 pandemic**

# **PAFFREL urges legalising health guidelines**

The People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) has directed a letter to the Minister of Health regarding the gazetting and legalising of health guidelines issued by the Director General of Health Services regarding holding the election during the COVID-19 pandemic without endangering the lives of the people.

The Ministry of Health has introduced a series of related guidelines on holding the upcoming Parliamentary Election scheduled to be held on 5 August.

Thereafter, many parties involved in the election process as well as the health institutions were of the view that issuing guidelines alone would not be adequate. Although it has been

announced on various dates that the relevant health guidelines will be gazetted, so far those health guidelines have not been made a legal provision. A COVID-19 infected person who was in contact with the community was identified on 9 July, but they were unable to make a proper guess about the area she was travelling to and who she was associating with. It is our belief that since the election campaign is taking place in such a problematic environment, there is a need to pay close attention to health guidelines.

It should be the primary responsibility of the candidates as well as the leaders of political parties to campaign in a way that the public is not endangered even if

the health guidelines are not gazetted. Unfortunately, in the recent past, our observers throughout the island have reported that party leaders as well as candidates are engaged in election propaganda activities without paying attention to health guidelines. We emphasise that it is the responsibility of the candidates to ensure the safety of the public at all times,' the letter added.

PAFFREL urged the Minister to take prompt steps to make a legal provision by gazetting the health guidelines under the powers vested under the Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Ordinance relating to the electoral process to safeguard the lives of the people.