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'EC must clear the air on surge in electors'

A more broad-based selection panel for CEC will create greater confidence, says former EC Ashok Lavasa

FORMER Election Commissioner (EC) Ashok Lavasa speaks to Preetha Nair about the current controversy on Epic duplication and says the only document available to weed it out is the unique identification number. Excerpts:

What's the view on the row over duplicate Election Photo Identity cards?

We have to look at it from two different points of view. The complaint that has been filed concerns people having the same Epic number, that is, more than one person having the same Epic number. The Election Commission has also acknowledged that the problem exists and is trying to resolve it. It is a welcome sign, and the issue should not be politicised.

The other issue is de-duplication, which the EC has been attempting for a long time. One problem is one person having one Epic number registering himself in more than one place, and the other is two people having the same Epic number. We need to believe what the CEC has said - that they will try to ensure that every voter has a unique Epic number.

ECI said it's a legacy issue. How can it be addressed?
The ECI is right. Earlier, the electoral registration system was with the state chief electoral officers and district electoral officers. Now, the electoral roll database of states and UTs has been shifted to the integrated ERONET platform.

ERONET requires every state to have a different series. However, regarding the de-duplication issue, the EC has to devise

a mechanism to identify which elector is registering at more than one place.

The ECI is set to link the voter ID card with Aadhaar. This is at variance with its earlier position that linkage could be optional.

The only document available to weed out the duplication of voter cards is the unique identification number (UID). So, if you link Aadhaar with the electoral roll that is the only possible way to assign any uniqueness to the voter list or the Epic unless some other viable technical methodology is found.

Many have raised concerns about privacy infringement, voter profiling, etc.

The Aadhaar Act does not make having an Aadhaar mandatory. The EC has held, and in my view, the right to vote is not dependent on having an Aadhaar. That should be separated. As far as the Aadhaar is concerned, it can be used for administrative purposes to de-duplicate. That doesn't mean you can deny somebody the right to be included in the electoral list if they are eligible.

Shouldn't it be optional?

If you make it optional, it cannot be used as a screening mechanism. The debate should be on how to de-duplicate. As far as the present system is concerned, this is the only way because Aadhaar has biometrics.

We need to ask ourselves a question: What harm can be caused to a voter if it is identified that she is the unique person registered on the electoral roll? The privacy of her Aadhaar can still be protected as



provided for in the law.

Opposition parties flagged concerns on the alleged surge in electors during the Assembly polls in Maharashtra and Delhi. How will one explain the surge?

Identifying the voter's uniqueness is an answer to that problem because one person is not supposed to have more than one Aadhaar. Regarding the surge in the number of electors, the EC must explain why the number of electors registered increased abnormally. That is one part of the story.

The question is how to de-duplicate them if these people were already enrolled in another place and were also enrolled here. The EC is already in consultation with political parties and technical departments. So they have to come up with a solution because there are already 98 crore registered voters. We don't know how many people

could be registered in more than one place: the same person registered in more than one place. In my view, Aadhaar is the only document that can be used for de-duplication.

The Opposition has been alleging of manipulation of EVMs. Are they susceptible to it?

These are two different questions - whether EVMs have been manipulated and if they can be manipulated.

Since these matters are in court, the EC will come up with its explanation and let the courts decide. There have been over 40 cases in the courts on this. The court has given neither an opinion nor judgment against the EVMs or suggestions that EVMs are manipulated.

On the question of whether the EVMs can be manipulated in the future, I feel that the EC, along with the stakeholders, must continuously review the

systems to plug any loopholes.

The Opposition wants 100% verification of VVPAT slips. Let the EC talk to the stakeholders, and if they think this will create confidence, then they can go for 100% counting of slips in one or two random assembly constituencies. The courts have increased VVPAT verification to five random EVMs in each Assembly segment, and no discrepancy has been found so far. The electoral process is about building confidence.

How can the trust deficit between the EC and the Opposition be bridged?
It's about engaging with the stakeholders, taking their concerns seriously, and respond. Transparency will create more confidence.

CEC and ECs appointment under the new law is being contested by the Opposition. A more broad-based selection panel will create greater confidence.

Your view on 'One Nation, One Election'
It is essential to consider whether the administrative gains or the management efficiency through simultaneous elections is beneficial. I don't see how an election in Kerala or Nagaland affects any other state.

The provisions in the draft bill say that in the event of a government falling in the middle of its tenure, there will be a new election, but it will be for a curtailed period. If they are still not ruling out the possibility of elections taking place, it's of no advantage.



D.T. NEXT

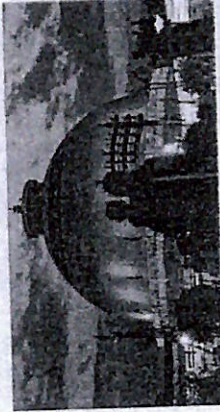
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How Ambedkar brought EC to life a day before proclamation of India as a Republic

NEW DELHI: Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, considered the key architect of the Indian Constitution, is also credited with the creation of the Election Commission.

An amendment brought by him in the Constituent Assembly led to the establishment of the Election Commission, an independent body mandated to hold elections to the offices of President and Vice President, Rajya Sabha and state assembly, Lok Sabha and state legislative council polls.

Certain provisions of the Constitution, including the one related to the EC, came into force immediately after it was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949. The rest of the provisions came into force on



Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur illuminated in pleasant blue to mark the 135th birth anniversary of Ambedkar on Sunday

January 26, 1950
The EC came into being on January 28, 1950, a day before India became a Republic.
Before Ambedkar brought the amendment, draft Article 289 proposed separate election commissions for the Centre and the states, scholarly articles and Constituent Assembly debates

suggest.
But Ambedkar proposed a more centralised body to be headed by a chief election commissioner to be appointed by the President.

Draft Article 289 proposed one commission to hold elections to the central legislature, both the Upper and Lower Houses (which later came to be known as Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha).

It also proposed separate commissions for each state or province. These commissions were to be appointed by respective state governments.

The new Article 324 proposed by Ambedkar before the Constituent Assembly made the poll machinery centralised by having a singular poll authority for holding state and national elections.
Regional commissioners were

proposed to help the EC function across India. During the first Lok Sabha elections in 1951, regional commissioners were appointed for six months in Bombay and Madras. After that, there was no such deployment.

State chief electoral officers now work as the EC's limbs in respective states and union territories. Article 324 gives the EC "plenary powers" to conduct elections and prepare electoral rolls.

The EC has exercised its constitutional powers to deal with issues where election laws and rules are silent.

The Supreme Court has on various occasions upheld these powers. The Article 324 is a vast reservoir of powers for the poll panel.



தேர்தல் அதிகாரியை returning officer என்றழைப்பது ஏன்?

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Are you stalking me? என்று ஒரு பெண் கேட்டால் 'தேர்தல் பின்தொடர்ந்து சென்றிருக்கிறாயா' என்பது அந்தஸ்தா?

Stalking என்பது (பெண்ணை, ஆணை) பலகாலம் ஒருவரைப் பின்தொடர்வது. அதுவும் சம்பந்தப் பட்டவருக்கு அச்சம் அல்லது வெறுப்பு ஏற்படும் வகையில் பின்தொடர்வது. இதை 'ஸ்டாக்' என உச்சரிக்க வேண்டும்.

தேர்தல் உங்கள் வீட்டுக்கு வந்து இருப்பேன் என்பதை ஆங்கிலத்தில் எப்படிச் சொல்வது?

"I might have come to your house yesterday."

Happy returns of the day, Income tax returns விளக்கங்களைத் தொடர்ந்து வேறொரு வாராக இருக்கிறதே சந்தேகம் எழுத்திருக்கிறது. தேர்தல் அதிகாரியை returning officer என்றழைப்பது ஏன்?

ஒரு Returning Officer தேர்தலை மேற்பார்வையிடுவார். தேர்தல் முடிவுகளை அறிவித்து அதிகார பூர்வமாக உறுதி செய்வார். His 'returns' the result. அதாவது தேர்தல் முடிவை மக்களுக்கு 'இருப்பி' அளிக்கிறார். அவர்களுக்கு ஒட்டுமொத்த முடிவு என்ன என்பதை வாக்களித்த அவர்களுக்கு அறிவிக்கிறார்.

Thesaurus என்பதில் ஒரு வார்த்தையின் சம வார்த்தைகள் என்ன என்பதைக் குறிப்பிட்டுக் கொடுக்கிறார்கள். அப்படியானால் அந்த வார்த்தைக்குப் பதிலாக அதற்கு சமமாக உள்ள எந்த வார்த்தையையும் பயன்படுத்தலாம் அல்லவா?

மேலோட்டமாக அப்படிச் சொல்ல வந்தால், ஆனால், பயன்பாட்டில் நடமாடாத வேறுபாடு இருக்கலாம். Happy என்பதன் ஒரு synonym

delighted. என்றாலும் delighted என்பது ஒரு தரில் கலந்த மகிழ்ச்சியை உணர்த்துகிறது. Anger, Furious ஆகியவை synonyms. ஆனால் furious என்பது அதிகப்படி கோபத்தை உணர்த்துகிறது.

Normal என்ற சொல்லின் சம வார்த்தையாக average என்பதும் அளிக்கப்பட்டிருக்கும். ஓர் அறையில் 10 நோயாளிகள் இருந்தால் அவர்களின் average வெப்பநிலை 100 டிகிரி .பாரன்ஹீட் என்பதைத் தாண்டியும் இருக்கலாம். ஆனால், normal temperature என்பது 98.6 தான்.

நான் ஒன்றும் அழைக்க என்னைக்கூட என்பதை ஆங்கிலத்தில் எப்படிச் சொல்வது?

I am not yearning for it. Yearn என்பது அடைய முடியாத அல்லது அடைவதற்கு மிகக் கடினமாக இருக்கும் ஒன்றைக்காக நீவிரமாக ஆசைப்படுவது அல்லது ஏகப்படுவது. Artists yearn for recognition of their talents.

Hippocrates என்பவரை நவீன மருத்துவ உலகின் தந்தை என்கிறார்கள். Hypocrite என்பதற்கும் இந்தப் பெயருக்கும் ஏதாவது தொடர்பு உண்டா?

இரண்டின் அடிப்படையும் வேறு வேறு. Hypocrites என்ற கிரேக்கச் சொல்லிலிருந்து பிறந்த வார்த்தை hypocrite. கிரேக்க மொழியில் இதன் பொருள் ஒரு நபர், காலப்போக்கில் வெளிவேடம் போடுபவர்களை (உள்ளே ஒருமாதிரியும் வெளியே வேறு மாதிரியும் நடந்து கொள் பவர்களை) hypocrite என்று கூறத் தொடங்கிவிட்டோம்.

Hippocrates என்பது வார்த்தை hippos, kratos ஆகிய இரு கிரேக்கச் சொற்களின் இணைப்பு. Hippos என்றால் குதிரை. Kratos என்றால் சக்தி. நாயகனைப்பக் குறிக்கும் hippopotamus என்பது hippos (குதிரை), potamos (ஆறு) ஆகியவற்றின் இணைப்பு. நதிக்குதிரை.

உட்டுவைகள்: ஆங்கிலம் அறிவோமே உள்விட்ட நூல்கள் ஆகியன.