

Dated: 19.01.2025

India Inc donations via electoral trusts surged after bonds nixed

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New Delhi: Prudent Electoral Trust, the leading contributor to political parties through the 'electoral trust' route, was flooded with corporate donations following the scrapping of the electoral bonds scheme by the Supreme Court on Feb 15, 2024: three-fourths of its ₹1075.7 crore donations in 2023-24 came between Feb 16 and March 31, 2024.

According to Prudent's contribution report for the last financial year, now uploaded on the Election Commission website, donations received by it for distribution to political parties nearly tripled to ₹1075.7 crore from ₹363 crore in 2022-23. While it is not unusual for

TOP TRUST GAVE LION'S SHARE TO BJP

> Any company registered under Sec 25 of Companies Act can seek approval to form an **electoral trust**. Any citizen of India, firm or association can donate to the trust

> While electoral bonds maintain anonymity, trusts declare each contribution with **name of donor**

> Which contribution went to **which political party** is not revealed

Of ₹1075.7cr Received By Prudent Trust, Leading Contributor

BJP got ₹723.8

Cong ₹156.4

BRS ₹85

YSR Cong ₹72.5

TDP ₹33 (All figures in ₹cr)

Janasena ₹5

political donations to rise ahead of general elections, what is interesting is that while contributions of ₹278.6 crore came in between April 1, 2023, and Feb 15, 2024, the period between Feb 16, 2024, and March 31, 2024, saw these surge to ₹797.1 crore.

This, in all probability, points to a diversion of cor-

porate donations to the electoral trusts route from the bonds route, closed after the SC clampdown.

The number of Prudent's corporate donors too surged to 83 in 2023-24 from around 22 in the previous financial year.

► DMK got ₹5cr, P 13

DMK got ₹5cr from Triumph Electoral Trust

► From P 1

Among the key corporates which contributed to Prudent in 2023-24 were Arcelor group and DLF Ltd (₹100 crore each); Maatha Projects LLP (₹75 crore); Maruti Suzuki and CESC Ltd (₹60 crore each); Hetero Group (₹55 crore); TVS Group and Apollo Tyres (₹50 crore each); Cipla (₹35.2 crore); and GMR group (₹26 crore).

Megha Engineering and Infrastructure, the second

biggest bond buyer, also contributed ₹25 crore to Prudent, though this was well before the bonds were scrapped.

Unlike the electoral bonds scheme, which allowed corporates and individuals to make donations while maintaining anonymity, electoral trusts are required to declare each individual contribution received along with the name of the donor. Also, it must declare each contribution disbursed to the political parties while also naming the party.

What is however not revealed here is which corporate contributed how much to an individual party.

As per contribution reports of various electoral trusts for 2023-24 now available on EC website, only four trusts have declared contributions — Prudent (₹1,075.7 crore), Triumph Electoral Trust (₹132.5 crore), Jaybharath Electoral Trust (₹9 crore), Paribartan Electoral Trust (₹1 crore) and Einzigtig Electoral Trust (₹17.25

lakh). The ₹1075.7 crore contributions received by Prudent were distributed among six parties, with BJP receiving the lion's share at ₹723.8 crore, Congress ₹156.4 crore, BRS ₹85 crore, YSR Congress party ₹72.5 crore, TDP ₹33 crore and Janasena Party ₹5 crore.

Triumph contributed ₹127.5 crore to BJP and ₹5 crore to DMK. Jaybharath trust donated ₹5 crore to BJP, ₹3 crore to DMK and ₹1 crore to AIADMK.

Constitution at 75: Why the debates shouldn't stop

BY INVITATION

GAUTAM BHATIA



Jan 26, 2025 is the 75th birthday of the Indian Constitution. When you consider the fact that the average lifespan of a constitution is 19 years, the Indian Constitution has already survived four times longer than the global average. It has not met the fate of many others — especially post-colonial constitutions — that have either been replaced on the point of a gun, or been turned into the playthings of authoritarian rulers, which has eventually led to their replacement once that ruler is finally removed. Indeed, the centrality of the Indian Constitution to the 2024 general election, in which all parties across the political spectrum competed with each other to pledge allegiance to the document, suggests that the Constitution will remain the governing framework of the Indian polity for the foreseeable future.

This achievement stands out all the more when we consider the circumstances under which the Constitution was framed. The Constituent Assembly deliberated for three years — between 1947 to 1950 — to craft the document. During this time, the country was partitioned amidst horrendous violence, followed by a border war. At the same time, work was on to integrate 500+ princely states into the Indian Union. The framers, thus, were faced with the immediate, existential task of ensuring that the new nation held together. Besides this, years of colonial rule had left India deindustrialised, and with very serious problems of poverty and illiteracy. In the teeth of these issues, the constitutional framers nonetheless decided to frame a democratic Constitution, where the entire adult population would be enfranchised in one stroke. This was a remarkable leap of faith, which has been vindicated by the fact that, barring the brief period of Indira Gandhi's Emergency, India has experienced an uninterrupted period of democracy since Independence.

As we look back upon the last 75 years, these are undoubtedly causes for celebration. This celebration, however, must not be uncritical. Faced with the problems described above, the framers of the Constitution made a series of structural and design choices in response. In short, they framed a heavily centralising Constitution, where significant power was located within the union executive.

Thus, while the Constitution established parliamentary democracy, the Parliament that it created was weak by design, and not intended to serve as a significant check upon the executive (It was further weakened through the introduction of the Xth Schedule). It established federalism, but it created relatively weak states, that were, in key domains, financially and administratively subordinate to the union. It set out a charter of fundamental rights, but left wide-open restriction clauses for the State, and even went so far as to codify administrative detention within the bill of rights. While the Constitution established a number of commissions ostensibly designed to secure public accountability — such

TABLEAU OF PROMISES / RK LAXMAN

January 1955



as the Election Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General — it granted appointment powers over those commissions to the executive. And while it was framed in the name of the People, the People themselves — as collective actors — had no role within the Constitution, beyond the ringing words of the Preamble. In short, the Indian Constitution was a document that conferred great power upon the executive, and trusted it to wield that power well, instead of putting structural constraints upon it.

One may debate the merits of these choices, and argue that the circumstances at the time left the framers with no meaningful options other than creating a central executive, and vesting it with wide-ranging powers. A Constitution, however, is not framed for an immediate moment, or even for a generation, but for many generations to come; and centralising power, once vested, has a habit of entrenching itself even after the necessity for such power has long gone. In the seven decades of its working, the Constitution's existing skew towards the union executive has been further magnified and amplified through a combination of State action and judicial interpretation. This has come at the cost of other pillars (parliament, the states and other independent institutions), and the possibility of internal structures of accountability within the Constitution, whose task is to constrain the concentration of power, and check the possibilities of its abuse.

Indeed, Indira Gandhi's Emergency was notable not because it suspended or sought to act outside the Constitution, but because it was imposed — and conducted — through existing constitutional mechanisms. It is particularly noteworthy that not all of these amendments were reversed by the Janata govt after Indira Gandhi's defeat. Some of those still exist. More recently, some of the most sweeping centralising moves of the ruling BJP — such as the abrogation of Article 370 — were done using mechanisms internal to the Constitution, and validated by the Supreme Court through the use of explicitly centralising logic.

The completion of 75 years, therefore, should also present us with an opportunity for engaging with a fundamental debate about the Constitution's structure and design: is a top-heavy, centralising Constitution still the appropriate vehicle to govern a country as diverse, plural, and heterogeneous as India? Would a more dispersed and distributed set of power structures quell the kind of abuse that we have frequently witnessed in our history, and help deepen our democracy? These — and these kinds of — debates are, I would argue, the debates we must now have when we think about the Constitution. ■

Bhatia is a Delhi-based advocate and author of the forthcoming book, 'The Indian Constitution: Conversations with Power'

Dated: 19.01.2005



C. Babu Jayakumar

Just spanning

Will this be a lacklustre by-election?

From all indications, the by-elections to the Erode East Assembly constituency on February 5 could turn out to be a lacklustre event devoid of all the usual thrills, runs and hype that come with such hustings. Of course politics, per se, has not lost its sheen in the State. But this by-election is poised to be a low profile, insignificant event mainly because there is no worthy contest to write home about. Apart from the ruling DMK, the only other political party in the fray is the Naam Tamilar Katchi of the (NTK) that would not only make the political bout insipid but also ignorable. That, in

fact, is not in tune with the political culture of the State, where by-elections have etched their own mark in history.

Take for example, mention the word Thirumangalam by-election and a plethora of vignettes are likely to tumble out of memory. Similarly, going further down memory lane to 1973, one can reach the recesses where the details of the historic Dindigul by-election will be engraved. Dindigul by-election was the first electoral outing of the then nascent AIADMK, under the leadership of M. G. Ramachandran (MGR). Legend has it that MGR's

nominee for the elections, Maya Thevar, was the one who negotiated with the Election Commission then for the 'Two Leaves symbol' that went on to become the endearing emblem of the party, finding its pride of place even in later day movies of MGR. Also there is a story of how Communist leader N Sankararaj had withdrawn from the electoral race to enable MGR's nominee win.

Well, Erode East 2.0 will in no way be remembered like so many such by-elections until and otherwise NTK founder Seeman decides to do something about it. To put it otherwise Erode East 2.0 will not be even as patch on Erode East 1.0, which for the first time gave rise to the allegation from the opposition camp that voters were being herded in enclosures to ensure that they did not meet the rival candidates or their supporters. Of course, for Erode East 2.0 there

seemed to be no such plans of herding voters, who enjoyed life in the enclosures sitting, relaxing, watching movies and even stealing a sista if they wished besides helping themselves to delicious food without having to listen to the harangue of opposition party campaigners.

So, what does this by-election have in store for the common man? Or to those outside the constituency. Maybe people living there have the privilege of watching the jam-boree unfolding before them with campaigners from outside buzzing around in vehicles catching up with voters, speaking from atop vehicles, dining in the local restaurants and crowding the place and dispelling its quietude. But for outsiders dependent on the telecast of the visuals from the spot by news outlets and social media channels unless it was substantial drama or at least ear-split-

ting unpalatable cacophony, nothing would be taken note by the telecasters.

It is on that aspect that Erode East 2.0 could be a hit. For Seeman can provide drama, both visual and auditory. His gestures, particularly the expression of anger and the delectable outbursts of delight through loud laughter, and also his vocal attacks on others and questions that evoke no answers never fail to entertain people. But the question is how much would those vignettes be relayed to people living outside the constituency through mass media. Even the print media rarely captures such moments to enable people to enjoy them. So, there might not be much to look forward to in terms of drama, too, until Seeman decides to hit below the belt.

Of course, Seeman's delightful tales of adventure in the Sri Lankan bat-

tleground of the past and his flouting of apparent kinship with leaders of the past - 'my great grandfather, or grandaunt or something like that' - for no apparent reason might entertain the people of Erode East to some extent but what could really be awesome would be his diatribes and imaginary allegations. Who could be targets of his attacks in the by-election arena is to be watched but his landing there to start the campaign in a day or two is for sure. His candidate M K Seethalakshmi, holding PG and MPHil degrees and having experience in teaching, has vouched for it already.

Seethalakshmi, in the electoral battle, will be meeting a local candidate of the DMK, V C Chandrakumar, who had already won the seat in the past as a candidate of the DMK when Captain Vijayakanth was around. That means that Chandrakumar is known

to people and is now contesting as a candidate of the ruling party, whose ally, the Congress, has been holding the seat. But such facts might be irrelevant to a leader like Seeman when he launches an onslaught against him or his party. And that alone could provide memorable takeaways from the campaign trail there. So let's look forward to that entertainment.

Beyond that, as we know, Seeman is now on another heady trip. Abusing Dravidar Periyar E V Ramasamy. Whether he will continue doing it in Erode East is to be seen. If he does it, that might provide more takeaways for election watchers because Erode is Periyar's hometown and the Congress candidates, who had won the seat earlier, are his great grandnephew and grandnephew, whose family now supports the DMK candidate.

Dated: 19. 01. 2025

55 remain in bypoll fray after scrutiny

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JAN 18:

Scrutiny of nominations for the by-election to the Erode East Assembly constituency on Saturday did not upset the political applecart as DMK's V.C. Chandrakumar and Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) nominee M.K. Seethalakshmi would remain in the fray along with a score of independents. The nominations of 55 candidates were accepted after the scrutiny which rejected those of three.

While the DMK has already started its campaign,

■ P8

55 remain in bypoll fray after scrutiny

FROM PG1

highlighting the ruling party's achievements, and Mr Chandrakumar had even visited many wards in the constituency, NTK chief coordinator Seeman is expected to launch his high wattage electioneering on Monday. The DMK, stressing on its social justice plank, has explained through a statement that the 3 per cent internal reservation for Arunthathiyars within the 18 per cent quota for Scheduled Castes, introduced during the party's tenure in 2008, had helped the people of the community in gaining admission to professional courses, including medicine. The Bill providing the 3 per cent exclusive reservation for Arunthathiyars was moved in the Assembly by the present Chief Minister M.K. Stalin the statement said and giving detailed statistics of the benefits. Erode East constituency has a sizable population of Arunthathiyars. Since the DMK's campaigners are more into door-to-door visits to explain the state government's welfare schemes, their work is rather low key. It is expected to pick up momentum only after the NTK begins its campaign.

ஈரோடு கிழக்கு தொகுதி இடைத்தேர்தல் திமுக, நாதக வேட்பாளர் உட்பட 55 பேரின் மனுக்கள் ஏற்பு

■ ஈரோடு

ஈரோடு கிழக்கு தொகுதி இடைத்தேர்தலில் போட்டியிட 65 மனுக்கள் தாக்கல் செய்யப்பட்ட நிலையில், திமுக, நாம் தமிழர் கட்சி வேட்பாளர்கள் உட்பட 55 பேரின் வேட்புமனுக்கள் ஏற்கப்பட்டன.

ஈரோடு கிழக்கு சட்டப்பேரவை தொகுதி இடைத்தேர்தல் பிப்ரவரி 5-ம் தேதி நடைபெற உள்ளது. இதற்கான வேட்புமனு தாக்கல் கடந்த 10-ம் தேதி தொடங்கி கடந்த 17-ம் தேதி வரை நடைபெற்றது. இதில், விடுமுறை நீங்கலாக 10, 13, 17-ம் தேதிகளில் வேட்புமனுக்கள் தாக்கல் செய்யப்பட்டன. திமுக வேட்பாளர் சந்திரகுமார், நாம் தமிழர் கட்சி வேட்பாளர் சீதாலட்சுமி மற்றும் சுயேச்சை வேட்பாளர்கள் நிறைவு நாளான 17-ம் தேதி மனுதாக்கல் செய்தனர்.

மொத்தமாக 58 வேட்பாளர்கள் 65 வேட்புமனுக்களை தாக்கல் செய்திருந்தனர். இதில், திமுக வேட்பாளர் சந்திரகுமார் 4 மனுக்கள், நாம் தமிழர் கட்சி வேட்பாளர் சீதாலட்சுமி 3 மனுக்கள் தாக்கல் செய்திருந்தனர்.

இந்நிலையில், ஈரோடு மாநகராட்சி அலுவலகத்தில் வேட்புமனுக்கள் மீதான பரிசீலனை நேற்று நடந்தது. இதைபொட்டி, வேட்பாளர்கள், அவர்களது பிரதிநிதிகள் குவிந்திருந்தனர். ஈரோடு கிழக்கு தொகுதி தேர்தல் நடத்தும் அலுவலர் மணீஷ், பொது பார்வையாளர் அஜய்குமார் குப்தா ஆகியோர் தலைமையில் மனுக்கள் பரிசீலனை நடைபெற்றது. இதில், திமுக வேட்பாளர் சந்திரகுமார், நாம் தமிழர் வேட்பாளர் சீதாலட்சுமி உட்பட 55 பேரின் மனுக்கள் ஏற்கப்பட்டன. 3 பேரின் மனுக்கள் தள்ளுபடி செய்யப்பட்டதாக மணீஷ் தெரிவித்தார்.

மனுக்களை திரும்ப பெற நாளை (ஜன.20) கடைசி நாள். அன்று மாலை இறுதி வேட்பாளர் பட்டியல் வெளியிடப்படும். சின்னமும் ஒதுக்கப்படும். ஒரே சின்னத்தை பலர் கேட்டால், குலுக்கல் முறையில் ஒதுக்கப்படும் என்று அதிகாரிகள் தெரிவித்தனர்.

DAILY THANTHI

Dated: 19.01.2025

ஈரோடு கிழக்கு தொகுதி இடைத்தேர்தல்:

தி.மு.க., நாம் தமிழர் கட்சி உள்பட 55 வேட்பாளர்கள் மனுக்கள் ஏற்பு

3 பேரின் மனுக்கள் தள்ளுபடி

ஈரோடு, ஜன.19-
ஈரோடு கிழக்கு தொகுதி
இடைத்தேர்தலில் போட்
டியிட்டி.மு.க., நாம் தமிழர்
கட்சி வேட்பாளர்கள் உள்
பட 55 பேர் வேட்புமனுக்
கள் ஏற்றுக்கொள்ளப்பட்
டன. 3 பேரின் மனுக்கள்
தள்ளுபடி செய்யப்பட்
டன.

ஈரோடு இடைத்தேர்தல்

ஈரோடு கிழக்கு தொகுதி
இடைத்தேர்தல் அடுத்தமாதம்
(பிப்ரவரி) 5-ந்தேதி நடைபெறு
கிறது. இதற்கான வேட்புமனு
தாக்கல் கடந்த 10-ந் தேதி
தொடங்கி நேற்று முன்தினம்
வரை நடைபெற்றது. 58 வேட்
பாளர்கள் மொத்தம் 65 வேட்
புமனுக்களை தாக்கல் செய்த
னர். இதில் தி.மு.க.வேட்பாளர்
வி.சி.சந்திரகுமார் 4 மனுக்
களும், நாம் தமிழர் கட்சி வேட்
பாளர் சீதாலட்சுமி 3 மனுக்

களும் தாக்கல் செய்திருந்தனர்.
வேட்புமனுவில் தி.மு.க. வேட்
பாளர் வி.சி.சந்திரகுமாரின்
சொத்து மதிப்பு ரூ.2 கோடியே
56 லட்சம் என குறிப்பிடப்
பட்டு இருந்தது.

3 வேட்பாளர்களின் மனுக்கள் தள்ளுபடி

இந்த நிலையில் நேற்று வேட்
புமனுக்கள் மீதான பரிசீலனை
ஈரோடு மாநகராட்சி அலுவல
கத்தில் நடந்தது. ஈரோடு
கிழக்கு தொகுதி தேர்தல் நடத்
தும் அலுவலரும், மாநகராட்சி
ஆணையாளருமான மனிஷ்,
கிழக்கு தொகுதி பொது பார்
வையாளர் அஜய்குமார் குப்தா
ஆகியோர் தலைமையில் வேட்
புமனுக்கள் பரிசீலனை செய்
யப்பட்டன.

தி.மு.க. மற்றும் நாம் தமிழர்
கட்சி வேட்பாளர்கள் உள்பட
மொத்தம் 55 பேரின் வேட்பும
னுக்கள் ஏற்றுக்கொள்ளப்பட்

டன. உரிய ஆவணங்கள் சமர்ப்
பிக்காததால் 3 வேட்பாளர்க
ளின் மனுக்கள் தள்ளுபடி
செய்யப்பட்டன.

இறுதி வேட்பாளர் பட்டியல் நாளை (திங்கட்கிழமை)

வேட்புமனுக்கள் வரபஸ் பெற
கடைசி நாளாகும். அன்று
மாலை இறுதி வேட்பாளர் பட்
டியல், சின்னத்துடன் ஒதுக்கீடு
செய்யப்பட்டு வெளியிடப்
படும்.

DINAMALAR

Dated: 19.01.2025

**ஈரோட்டில்
நாளை இறுதி
வேட்பாளர் படடியல்**

ஈரோடு, ஜன. 19-
ஈரோடு கிழக்கு
தொகுதி இடைத்
தேர்தலில், 55 வேட்
பாளர்களின் மனுக்கள்
ஏற்கப்பட்டன.

இதுகுறித்து தேர்தல்
நடத்தும் அலுவலர்
மணீஷ் கூறியதாவது:
ஈரோடு கிழக்கில்
தாக்கலான வேட்பு
மனுக்கள், நேற்று
பரிசீலனை செய்யப்
பட்டன. அதில், 55
பேரின் மனுக்கள் ஏற்
கப்பட்டன. நாளை
மனுக்களை வாபஸ்
பெறலாம்.

அதன்பின், வேட்
பாளர்களுக்கு சின்னம்
ஒதுக்கீடு செய்யப்
பட்டு, இறுதி வேட்பா
ளர் பட்டியல் வெளி
யிடப்படும்.

நாம் தமிழர் கட்சி சார்
பில், தேர்தல் ஆணை
யத்திடம் 'மைக்' சின்
னம் ஒதுக்கும்படி
கேட்டுள்ளனர். தேர்
தல் ஆணையத்துக்கு,
இதுபற்றி கடிதம்
அனுப்பியுள்ளோம்.

வரும் 20ல் என்ன
சின்னம் ஒதுக்கலாம்,
அதை எப்படி
ஒதுக்குவது என்பது
குறித்து தெளிவாக
தெரிவிப்பர்.

அதன் அடிப்
படையில், நாம் தமிழர்
கட்சிக்கு சின்னம்
ஒதுக்கப்படும்.

இவ்வாறு அவர்
கூறினார்.