

RAJYA SABHA

*SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE

(Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

Monday, December 15, 2025/ Agrahayana 24, 1947 (Saka)

DISCUSSION ON THE ELECTION REFORMS - *Contd.*

DR. M. THAMBIDURAI, continuing his unfinished speech dated 11.12.2025, said: I reaffirm that the AIADMK has full faith in the Election Commission, as clean electoral rolls and transparent processes strengthen democracy. Election campaigning is a vital part of the electoral process, and political parties must be given a fair opportunity to reach voters. In Tamil Nadu, however, the absence of duly formulated Standard Operating Procedures for public meetings, despite directions from the Supreme Court and the Madras High Court, has caused serious difficulties for opposition parties. I express concern over misleading claims regarding the removal of 85 lakh voters from the electoral rolls, which unfairly cast aspersions on the Election Commission. Incidents such as those reported during the Erode by-election raise serious questions of undue influence and denial of campaigning rights. I urge that elections in Tamil Nadu be conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner without misuse of power by the ruling party.

SHRI YERRAM VENKATA SUBBA REDDY: Electoral reforms must be continuous and meaningful, undertaken at both the State and national levels, to truly protect and strengthen democracy. Drawing from the 2024 General Elections in Andhra Pradesh, I place certain factual concerns before the House without casting aspersions on any party. I highlight serious discrepancies between votes polled and votes counted as reflected in Forms 17C and 20 across all parliamentary constituencies in the State, and mismatches in voter data recorded in Form 17A during simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Such deviations raise procedural and legal concerns and warrant a thorough inquiry by the Election Commission. I urge greater transparency through public disclosure of election records, enforcement of verification mechanisms, enhanced webcasting, and a re-examination of the continued use of EVMs, so as to ensure fairness, clarity, and public trust in the electoral process.

SHRI SANJAY YADAV: We proudly call India the world's largest democracy, but the true measure of a democracy is not merely the number of voters; it lies in the fairness and transparency of the electoral process and the trust of the people. Unfortunately, serious doubts have arisen regarding our electoral system today. Since 1952, special intensive revisions have been conducted several times, but never before have we witnessed such levels of mistrust, confusion, and lack of transparency. In the recent Assembly elections, abnormal increases in voting were observed—despite a reduction in the number of voters in states like Maharashtra and Bihar, the overall voting percentage rose unexpectedly by 12 to 15 per cent, while the number of polling booths was increased. In Bihar, the large-scale revision carried out within just 35 days, the difficult conditions in flood-affected areas, and yet a 15.6 per cent rise in voting even after the deletion of 6.5 million names, raise serious questions. Such wide variations in voting behaviour across states despite similar schemes, and a massive swing in favour of a single party, call for deep introspection into the fairness of the electoral process. Therefore, Sir, this is the time to sincerely deliberate on electoral reforms so as to strengthen public trust in our democracy. When we talk about electoral reforms, this issue is also an integral part of that very process. In Bihar, our alliance had a clear lead in the postal ballot voting, but the irregularities that emerged in the subsequent process have raised serious questions. Electoral reforms should be

such that both the ruling side and the opposition are satisfied, and above all, public trust is strengthened, because today voters feel that there is some kind of manipulation with their votes. It is the responsibility of the Election Commission to provide timely and clear answers to every doubt and question, but when responses are delayed or avoided, mistrust grows. The institution on which the least questions should be raised is today facing the maximum scrutiny, which is extremely dangerous for democracy. The Election Commission should not become a private extension of any government or party, but must act as an impartial referee. We need electoral reforms, not vote management; not selective and incorrect revision, but transparent and intensive revision. The purpose of reform should be to strengthen democracy, not to win elections by removing voters. Addressing public apprehensions, questions raised over electronic voting machines, and the issue of double standards is the most urgent need of the time. No technology is infallible, and when even the world's most secure systems can be hacked, it is not logically sound to consider voting machines to be completely impregnable. Questioning voting machines does not weaken democracy; rather, it strengthens it, because the real issue is not the machine but the trust of the people. If a voter says that they do not trust the voting machine, or that their name is being deleted from the electoral roll despite having all valid documents, they cannot be treated as a criminal. Democracy does not function through machines, but through a fair process and a transparent system. When the vote is visible on paper, why should there not be complete paper-based verification during counting; five per cent verification does not inspire confidence, only one hundred per cent verification does. Democracy cannot survive without transparency, and if we remain silent, the machine will win, but if we speak up, democracy will prevail. The voter is greater than the machine, because machines are created by humans, not the other way around. People want elections, not selections. Many developed democracies, in the name of transparency, have rejected electronic voting and continue to use paper ballots even today. Electoral reform is not merely a technical exercise; it is the soul of democracy, and such reforms are essential that strengthen the Election Commission, make political parties accountable, and restore the voter's trust to the centre of the democratic process.

SHRI H.D. DEVEGOWDA: I speak from long personal experience, having worked as a Congress Party worker during the elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962, when Pandit Nehru was the Prime Minister. After his demise in 1964, the nation was led by another great leader, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, though only for a brief period. Thereafter, Indira Gandhi assumed office as Prime Minister. During the period of Madam Indira Gandhi, when the Congress won more than 316–318 seats repeatedly, I never raised objections to the electoral process, even when Parliament and Assembly elections were bifurcated and I was in the Opposition. I fought elections with humility, accepted defeat when it came, and never accused the Congress of manipulating the voters' list, despite winning and losing several times—having been defeated once in the Assembly, winning it seven times, winning Parliament four times and losing three times. Having led parties like the Janata Dal and being part of earlier formations such as the Samata Party and Janata Party, I have witnessed elections since 1952 and never resorted to allegations like “vote theft,” only pointing, at most, to issues of voter list manipulation. I came to the Lok Sabha in 1991 as the sole Janata Dal Member, later returned to Karnataka in 1994 to serve as Chief Minister, and despite political setbacks, I have always respected the democratic verdict and the electoral process.

I recall that after the Congress lost the election in May 1996, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution to support a non-BJP Government if secular parties came together. This led to the formation of a 13-party coalition, in which the Left parties, the DMK, the Moopanar Congress and others played a significant role. Although I had a clear mandate to govern Karnataka, circumstances compelled me to accept the responsibility of leading the coalition, and I took oath as Prime Minister on 1 June 1996, serving for about ten months. I narrate this to emphasize that concerns about electoral processes are not new. Even during Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's time, issues such as the addition of 18,000 votes in Kerala were officially examined, showing that lapses were acknowledged and verified through institutional mechanisms. In later years too, electoral roll errors, including those in Bihar, were reviewed and corrected by the Election Commission. Therefore, allegations of large-scale manipulation against the Prime Minister are unfounded when constitutional institutions like the Election Commission and the Supreme Court exist. Under Narendra Modi's leadership, stable governments were formed in 2014 and 2019, and despite having a majority, he chose to lead an inclusive coalition. In 2024 as well, a coalition government was formed. I have openly extended my

support to the NDA. Our democratic system, built by Dr. Ambedkar and other constitutional forefathers, is strong and resilient. Repeated slogans like “Vote Chori” only weaken public trust and create unnecessary suspicion among voters, rather than strengthening democracy.

SHRI K.R. SURESH REDDY: After the Vande Mataram debate, I warmly welcome the House taking up electoral reforms, because discussing the health of our democracy is both timely and reassuring. Our democratic system is not a gift received easily; it is a legacy forged through the sacrifices of our freedom fighters, and the Constitution guarantees that every citizen remains the true master of this Republic. Drawing from Telangana’s experience, I have personally witnessed the immense power of the ballot during the long struggle for statehood. Under the leadership of KCR ji, people from all sections—women, farmers, students, employees and youth—participated in sustained movements and dharnas. Yet, it was ultimately the power of the vote that awakened the conscience of the Government of India. To clearly demonstrate the will of the people, KCR ji resigned twice as a Member of Parliament from different regions of Telangana, even when he was not in power, thereby proving his faith in democracy and inspiring others to follow. This experience strengthens our belief that every eligible citizen must be enrolled and protected as a voter.

While we strongly support electoral reforms, voter lists must be accurate, inclusive and transparent in a diverse country like ours. Re-verification should never become a tool for exclusion, and migrants, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, the urban poor and those with limited documentation must not lose their voting rights. In an era of digital governance and services like MeeSeva, restoring the name of an eligible voter should be simple and efficient. At the same time, we must seriously address the low voter turnout, especially among urban citizens and the middle class, despite their significant contribution as taxpayers. Voting should be seen not only as a right but also as a civic responsibility, and the voter must continue to be respected even after elections. Anti-defection has emerged as a major challenge to democracy, and I suggest a dedicated parliamentary committee to monitor and curb it effectively. Regarding EVMs and ballot papers, I have seen shortcomings in both systems, and the Election Commission must ensure that no citizen is prevented from voting in any area. Finally, on ‘One Nation, One Election’, though regional parties may have concerns, I support the idea, firmly believing, as KCR ji has stated, that voters can differentiate between national and regional choices and that frequent elections at the grassroots do not serve the long-term health of our democracy.

***DR. JOHN BRITTAS:** I raise a fundamental question before this House: is the Government of India focused on governance, or is it running the country in perpetual election mode? This doubt exists not only among political parties but also in the minds of the people. I quote a former Chief Election Commissioner who clearly identified money power, muscle power, misinformation and Model Code of Conduct violations as the biggest threats to free and fair elections. I wish to highlight the issue of political and corporate collusion, even if it is uncomfortable. In 2014, the Delhi High Court ruled that both BJP and Congress had violated the FCRA and were liable for punishment, yet both parties colluded to amend the law retrospectively from 1976. I strongly oppose electoral bonds, which in my view represent the darkest chapter of Indian democracy, marked by quid pro quo between corporates and the ruling party. I cited instances where companies donating massive sums to the BJP later received large government contracts or relief after ED and CBI actions. This culture of big money, especially visible in the Northeast where donations are linked to government tenders, is corroding democracy and public trust. I raise a fundamental question before the House and the country: is the Government of India focused on governance, or is it engaged in a permanent election campaign?

The so-called SIR process has created widespread suspicion among people and political parties, and I believe it represents political engineering rather than genuine electoral reform. What we are witnessing is the misuse of money power, muscle power, misinformation, and violations of the Model Code of Conduct—concerns that have been highlighted even by former Chief Election Commissioners. I point out that both the BJP and the Congress have, in the past, colluded to amend laws like the FCRA to protect themselves, even giving retrospective effect for decades. This exposes how deeply corporate influence has penetrated our electoral system. I strongly reiterate my party’s

* Spoke in Malayalam also.

opposition to electoral bonds, which I consider the darkest and most unholy chapter in Indian democracy, marked by quid pro quo arrangements between corporates and the ruling party, raids by investigative agencies, and policy favours in return for massive donations. I emphasize that institutions matter. Along with the Election Commission, the media plays a decisive role in ensuring free and fair elections. If the media were truly independent, electoral outcomes would have been very different. A meaningful democracy demands an independent and neutral Election Commission, free from executive influence. I also reiterate my party's demand for proportional representation for a percentage of seats, as practiced in countries like Germany, to make representation fairer and more inclusive. I stress that democracy does not end with voting; the people's mandate must be respected even after elections. Horse-trading, mass defections, and the misuse of resources undermine electoral purity and public trust. The scale of election expenditure has become alarming and is spreading like a virus, which is why I strongly advocate state funding of elections. In conclusion, I urge that we look at electoral reforms in a comprehensive manner. We must clean the system end to end, restore the sanctity of elections, ensure a neutral umpire, curb the influence of money, and respect the mandate of the people. Only then can faith in our democratic process be truly restored.

SHRI SANJAY KUMAR JHA: In my view, electoral reforms remain incomplete unless the electoral rolls are completely clean and transparent. I come from Bihar and have closely witnessed the grim reality of booth capturing there. In the past, elections were influenced in such a violent and organized manner that the poor, Dalits, and backward classes could not even reach the polling booths. Criminals, weapons, and violence were openly used to win elections. I would also like to state that before 2005, there was hardly any election in Bihar that did not witness large-scale violence. It was only when T. N. Seshan and later the Election Commission enforced strict measures and voting through Electronic EVM was introduced that Bihar witnessed truly free and fair elections for the first time. It was then that people experienced voting without fear, standing in queues from morning till evening, which was a real victory for democracy. I would like to clearly state that people in Bihar began voting in an orderly manner by standing in proper queues only after 2005. With reference to the current allegations of "vote theft," I would like to recall the February 2005 Bihar Assembly election, where not just votes but the entire popular mandate was stolen. Despite a hung Assembly, a Cabinet meeting was convened at midnight and, through extraordinary measures, President's Rule was imposed in Bihar, even before any MLA could take oath. There is a clear judgment of the Supreme Court on this matter, and the then President, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, also mentioned this episode in his autobiography. I would also like to point out that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is not a new process. It was carried out in Bihar in 2003 as well, with the participation of all political parties, and was completed transparently within 30 days. Neither at that time nor in the recent elections did any voter claim that his or her name was missing from the electoral roll. I further emphasize that the 2025 Bihar elections were conducted peacefully in two phases, without any violence or re-polling, even though Bihar was once known for electoral violence. The allegation of "vote theft" is completely baseless. Finally, I stress the need for responsibility in making electoral promises and, based on Bihar's experience, state that the voter lists were purified by removing the names of deceased persons, migrants, and duplicate entries. Our party is a strong supporter of EVMs, and it is my firm view that EVMs should never be removed.

PROF. RAM GOPAL YADAV: I am speaking only about electoral reforms and expect the Government to make the necessary amendments to the Representation of the People Act so that there is no doubt in the minds of the people regarding the electoral process. My first suggestion is that the change made in the appointment process of the Election Commission has created mistrust among the public about its impartiality. Therefore, I demand that the earlier system—under which the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India were part of the selection process—should be restored. I also emphasize that the appointment of officers and staff connected with elections, especially Booth Level Officers, must be carried out in a completely impartial and transparent manner through a random system. If the administrative machinery is not impartial, free and fair elections cannot be ensured. I would further like to state that the procedures related to the security of ballot papers and EVMs should be as strict and transparent as they were during the tenure of T. N. Seshan. Incorrect practices, such as keeping unused EVMs within the premises of strong rooms, create suspicion in the minds of the public and must be stopped. In addition, I suggest that the power to transfer district-level officers a few months before elections

should vest with the Election Commission, so that elections remain free from governmental influence. Finally, I would like to say that when a large section of the public expresses distrust in EVMs, democracy demands that public opinion be respected and serious consideration be given to conducting elections through ballot papers once again.

SHRI GURVINDER SINGH OBEROI: I am expressing my strong opposition to the so-called SIR electoral reforms, because what is being projected as reform is actually an attempt to restructure democracy to suit those in power. I believe these changes are being pushed without any national debate, without an expert commission, and through a hurried process, which makes their intent deeply questionable. If implemented, these reforms will dangerously weaken the Election Commission, centralize authority, and place it under indirect executive influence, while also disadvantaging small and regional parties like ours. I am deeply concerned that rapid digitisation without independent audits opens the door to manipulation, surveillance, and targeting, thereby eroding public trust. Electoral reforms imposed without consensus do not strengthen democracy; they damage the confidence of the people in the very system that elects governments. I fear that institutions which were once respected and processes that were sacrosanct are now being compromised, and that manipulation of electoral rolls amounts to manipulation of democracy itself. I firmly state that history will judge who stood with the Constitution and who stood against it. Our Constitution was designed to treat every citizen equally, and it is our responsibility to protect that vision. I also reiterate my party's clear stand against the unilateral abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A, which was done without the consent of the people of Jammu and Kashmir or an elected Assembly, thereby undermining democratic legitimacy. I assert that democracy cannot exist without consent or representation. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have not surrendered their rights; they have been denied the opportunity to exercise them. Therefore, I demand the immediate restoration of full statehood, as anything less is unacceptable in a democratic Republic.

SHRI MILIND MURLI DEORA: I am pleased that the discussion has moved beyond the issue of the SIR to the broader agenda of electoral reforms. The debate has made it clear that there are varying opinions on how to further strengthen democracy, yet it remains true that, despite some shortcomings, India is the world's largest and most vibrant democracy, where there is a peaceful transfer of power every five years—something that is not guaranteed even in many developed countries today. The efficiency of the Election Commission is directly linked to the activism and responsibility of political parties. Legally, the revision of the electoral roll is the job of the Election Commission, but in practice, political parties also play a role—we register voters, verify names, and ensure that our supporters are not left out. I have personally observed in my South Mumbai constituency that the names of deceased voters are still on the list, which clearly shows that the revision of the electoral roll is not being done in favor of any one party. At the same time, it is also a matter of serious concern that many anti-social elements have managed to get their names included in the electoral rolls, a matter that the entire House should consider seriously.

Recent events, such as the fact that the accused in the Mumbai attacks was an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant, remind us that instability in neighbouring countries poses a threat not only to national security but also to the integrity of the electoral process. The effectiveness of the Election Commission is directly linked to the organizational strength of political parties. Every party has the right to appoint polling agents and counting agents who monitor irregularities at polling booths and during vote counting. If a party is not organized at the booth level, it would be unfair to penalize the better-organized parties. The claim of widespread voter disenfranchisement in a politically aware and sensitive state like Bihar seems implausible, especially since there was no violence or repolling. International observers also declared the Bihar elections free and fair. Finally, it is essential that parties remain democratic, welfare schemes should be linked to entrepreneurship, a new transparent model for political funding should be created, and the 15 million non-resident Indians should also be granted the right to vote. I believe that the SIR is a timely and necessary process, and if implemented transparently, it will further strengthen democracy.

SHRI SAMIK BHATTACHARYA: I hail from West Bengal, and I believe that illegal infiltration across the more than 2200-kilometer-long border with Bangladesh cannot be stopped by any single agency alone. It requires the joint efforts of the state and central governments, public awareness, and political consensus. I would also like to remind everyone that senior leaders like Jyoti

Basu himself have, at different times, described infiltration as a serious problem. He initially called it an international trend, but later explicitly acknowledged that illegal infiltration was affecting the economy of West Bengal and the country, and that the infiltrators should be sent back. The contradictory stance of leaders from the same ideology today reflects a political opportunism. I would also like to mention that Leftist leaders themselves have admitted in Parliament that the number of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants runs into millions. In my opinion, this issue needs to be viewed seriously, rising above politics, from the perspective of national interest and social balance.

On September 30, 2005, the then Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, himself stated that India is against any kind of illegal infiltration and that it should not be encouraged. I would also like to remind you that on August 4, 2005, Mamata Banerjee had strongly protested in Parliament against the issue of Bangladeshi infiltrators in the West Bengal voter list, and we had shown solidarity with her at that time. I want to say that the concern we are reiterating today is the same as the situation in West Bengal—that the state should be freed from infiltrators. It has publicly come to light that there are serious discrepancies in the voter records of millions of voters, such as inconsistent age differences between father and son. This raises questions about the credibility of the voter list. I believe that the Election Commission is a constitutional body, and ensuring the accuracy of voter lists is essential for strengthening democracy.

SIR process is underway and must be accepted. SIR being conducted in 12 states today, so why is there an uproar only in West Bengal? That in itself is a question. If there are clear errors in the voter list, such as discrepancies in family details or age, then these must be corrected—protesting against this is incomprehensible. I also want to say that the words and concepts being debated today were not coined by any single party, but were first used by Leftist leaders. Even Congress leaders themselves have spoken about vote rigging and irregularities in Bengal. I want to give examples from several areas of West Bengal to show that illegal encroachments, environmental destruction, and encroachment on institutional land are in the public domain, yet no administrative action is being taken. I believe that some political parties are not only attacking democracy but are also openly attacking the Election Commission, the media, and other institutions, which is extremely worrying. The Election Commission is conducting a constitutional process, and the Supreme Court has also clarified its position on the matter. Despite this, some people are continuously spreading confusion regarding the SIR, even though the reality is that no widespread complaints were filed anywhere after the elections. In West Bengal, the situation is such that even opposition leaders have been subjected to violence. I have seen several instances where there are serious discrepancies in the voter list, which need to be rectified. Despite this, it is being said that the SIR will not be allowed in Bengal, even though the forms are being filled out. This contradiction is clearly evident. The demographic balance has been disturbed in the border districts, and this problem is not limited to Bengal alone, but is spreading to Jharkhand, Bihar, Seemanchal, and Purvanchal. Law and order is a state subject, and the Election Commission is doing its job, but violence, fear, and false accusations are being made in the name of the SIR, which are unacceptable. Finally, I want to state clearly that India belongs only to Indians. We cannot accept any kind of silent demographic infiltration, and everyone should think seriously about this.

SHRI DIGVIJAYA SINGH: The Government did not provide clear answers to any of the concrete suggestions put forward by the opposition. It was not explained what the objection is to the demand for a digital, machine-readable, and transparent voter roll. I would also like to point out that no answers were given to questions related to the transparent audit of the EVM architecture, the issue of the same person voting or casting votes in different states, the appointment process of Election Commission members, their immunity, and the CCTV footage. It was even acknowledged that the Election Commission had not received any formal suggestions or proposals on electoral reforms from any political party between 2014 and 2025. The Citizens' Commission on Elections, headed by Justice Lokur, submitted 21 petitions to the Election Commission, but not even a single acknowledgement was issued. We object to the fact that the Hon'ble Election Commission misled the Hon'ble Home Minister into making incorrect statements. Since 2014, all our constitutional institutions have been increasingly staffed with people belonging to a particular ideology, whether they are competent or incompetent. For any successful democratic system, it is essential to have free and fair elections, and for that, a foolproof voters' list is necessary—there should be no objection to

this. Article 324 also states that it is the responsibility of the Election Commission to ensure that every citizen's vote is included in the electoral roll. Until now, the Booth Level Officer used to come to our homes and add our names. Now, where has this SIR come from? We are being asked questions about citizenship, about our fathers and grandfathers—whether their names were in the voters' list or not. Is this a process of determining citizenship, or of preparing the voters' list? An RTI application was filed asking whether any order exists on file for conducting SIR-2025 across the states. In response, the CPO, who is an officer of the Election Commission, replied that there is no such order on file for conducting SIR-2025.

Now, the issue of vote theft is evident. It is a matter of serious concern that one person's name appears in three or four places, and in some cases even in 25–50 places. But when this came to light, instead of taking cognizance, the Election Commission stopped using the de-duplication software altogether. If this is not bias, then what is it? After the announcement of elections, the voters' list is given to the candidates, but on the day of polling, the presiding officer is given a different list. Why have you allowed the authority to add and delete names during this period? In my suggestion, the voters' list should be frozen on the very day the Model Code of Conduct comes into force. In every speech, references are made to Muslims, cremation grounds, graveyards, India and Pakistan—does this not fall under the Model Code of Conduct? Is this not a violation of Sections 123 and 125 of the Representation of the People Act? In Rajasthan, votes are being sought in the name of the Pulwama martyrs, yet no notices were issued to them. Is this not bias? The Direct Benefit Transfer scheme also needs consideration. During elections—in Telangana and Tamil Nadu, the Election Commission stopped it—but in Bihar, they went so far as to distribute amounts like ₹10 lakh to certain people, and ₹10 lakh to others, continuing this till every polling day. Similarly, look at the condition of the Anti-Defection Law. Governments have been formed by breaking our legislators, but the Anti-Defection Law was not applied. My suggestion is that anyone who defects from a party should be barred from contesting elections for six years. “One Nation, One Election” is an insult to our federal structure. “Unity in diversity” is India's strength, and through “One Nation, One Election,” you are going to destroy it. I also want to speak about delimitation. Delimitation should not be done on the basis of population alone; rather, it should be carried out by maintaining the existing ratio of seats between South India and North India.

♦**SHRI RITABRATA BANERJEE:** I first want to present some realities of 'Ground Zero' before the House. Some are panicked, some are ill, some are dead. From November 4th to November 11th, these three words have been affixed before or after their names. They are, meaning the Booth Level Officers (BLOs). In the atmosphere of the special intensive revision of the voter list, since November 4th, those who are at the centre of the discussion. From the start of the enumeration or counting phase, BLOs are facing various problems. How to complete a massive task smoothly in a short time—that is the main question. In West Bengal, so far four BLOs have died, incidents of suicide have occurred. These are institutional murders. According to the Commission, "*BLOs are the friend, philosopher, and guide of the local people.*" But those very friends, philosophers, and guides of the people are today terrified, panicked, alarmed, and dead due to work pressure. Was this hurried rollout a policy failure? If the true intent of this is to remove illegal immigrant voters from the voter roll, why is Bengal the only border state under scrutiny? What about Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram? Only Bengal has been targeted.

DR. SANDEEP KUMAR PATHAK: The most important issue is money. These days, so much money is required to contest elections that an ordinary person or an average citizen cannot even think of standing for elections. Under the electoral bonds system, donations are flowing in from all directions, and political parties have accumulated such enormous wealth that if any small party enters politics in this country to bring about systemic change, its chances become extremely limited. The voters' list is such a critical matter that even a 1 per cent discrepancy in it can lead to major distortions in the overall election results. The SIR conducted in Bihar is different from other SIRs. All other SIRs were carried out through electoral roll upgradation—meaning the existing electoral roll

♦Spoke in Bengali.

was taken as the base and deficiencies in it were upgraded or corrected. But this time, a form was issued, which had to be filled and submitted. This process is not like the earlier one; it is an entirely different process. The first question in this regard is: although 30 days were given, is it really possible to carry out such a massive exercise within 30 days? One of your main objectives was to identify and remove people of foreign origin who have come here, but among the documents you have enlisted, how many people in this country actually possess passports? The third important aspect is citizenship itself. You are neither able to establish citizenship nor able to properly correct the electoral rolls. The next important issue is impartiality. If the Election Commission as a body is not impartial, and if the stakeholders do not have faith in the system, then no matter how much progress we claim to make, it can never truly be transparent. During the Bihar elections, amounts of ₹10,000 each were transferred into the bank accounts of mothers, sisters, and women. Does this fall within the rules during the election process?

I want to say with full responsibility and seriousness that the country has elected us to govern. The elections were not conducted according to the Election Commission's guidelines. Therefore, it is your moral responsibility to keep them independent. If these institutions do not remain independent, the possibility of your vision of a developed India will be completely negated.

SHRIMATI SULATA DEO: Elections were held in Odisha in 2024. More votes were counted in 79 parliamentary constituencies across India, and fewer votes were counted in some places. In Odisha's 18 Lok Sabha seats, more votes were counted – from 11.5 percent to 12 percent. This is nothing but vote rigging. I would like to say one more thing. Odisha is a state that suffers from natural disasters. The criteria you have set for the SIR include birth certificates, school certificates, etc. Where will they get all this from? In Odisha, all the certificates were destroyed in the floods and the 1999 cyclone. Now where will they get all this from? Also, we should think about transgender people. They don't study, nor do they have birth certificates. What will they do in such a situation? Why doesn't the Election Commission of India accept Aadhaar? I believe that not a single person should be left out of the SIR. This should not be done to cut the votes of the opposition. The ECI has the responsibility to protect the vote of every citizen of India. Dr. Ambedkar said that all Indian citizens have the right to vote. Everyone should vote. Not a single voter should be left out. But there has been rigging in Odisha, votes have been stolen. These people rig the EVMs and also violate the code of conduct. I demand that voting should be done through paper ballots; only then will the truth be revealed.

SHRI SAJJAD AHMAD KICHLOO: Our country is a democratic country, and it is respected throughout the world because impartial elections were held here. The Election Commission of India used to provide good governments, and those governments worked well for the people. We have had excellent Election Commissioners, during whose tenure significant reforms were implemented. As far as Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly elections were held after 10 years, and the Rajya Sabha election was held a year later. This shows how serious this government is about Jammu and Kashmir. There is talk of the SIR here. I say that in this secular country, there should be no discussion on the SIR at all. If the Election Commission were impartial, then the people of the entire country would not be pointing fingers at it today. We said that injustice was being done, that Jammu was being merged with Kashmir, but no commission in the country listened to us. As a result, when elections were held afterward, the BJP dominated in Jammu, but was rejected in the Kashmir Valley. Whenever the Prime Minister has visited Jammu and Kashmir, he has always said that he wants to reduce the distance between the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi. But today there is an elected government there, yet that government is not being heard. Tell me, how can these distances be bridged? They have promised us that the state of Jammu and Kashmir will be restored after the elections. I want to appeal once again that our state should be restored as soon as possible.

DR. KAVITA PATIDAR: These electoral reforms are not just a process, but a clarion call for purification by removing impurities through electoral reforms in the great sacrifice of democracy in this country. Even then, if the opposition is opposing it, I find it laughable. Speaking on electoral reforms, Digvijay Singhji said that 'one nation, one election' is not right. I want to ask him, if it is not right today, then were the simultaneous elections held in 1957, 1962, and 1967 also wrong? No only that they forcibly imposed an emergency on this country and amended the Constitution with the 39th

Amendment so that their election could not be challenged. They are talking about right and wrong. Those who murdered democracy are now crying foul about EVMs. They say the EVM machines are faulty. It's not the EVMs that are faulty, but their intentions. Our Constitution has given the Election Commission the right to electoral reforms, and this has been done from time to time. What are the citizens of this country afraid of? There has been an unprecedented increase in population in the border districts of West Bengal. And they are worried about those votes being removed from the voter list. They are more concerned about those infiltrators on whose strength they are trying to further their political agenda. When they win, the EVM machines are fine, and when we win, the EVM machines are faulty. In 2004, when the elections were held using EVM machines, the Congress government was formed. At that time, they didn't question the EVM machines, but they are doing so now. But let me tell you, 140 crore people trust Modi ji, their mandate is with him, and they support his leadership. Go to West Bengal, ask the people there, and you will understand what vote rigging means. Today, the people of this country have voted for us because of our good governance, our pro-poor policies, our schemes, and the decisions we have taken in the interest of the country, whether we talk about Mission Sindoor, the surgical strikes, or eliminating terrorism.

Discussion not concluded.

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****Supplement covering rest of the proceedings is being issued separately.