

SC upholds SIR, says it is EC's constitutional duty

Court says EC can verify citizenship for inclusion or exclusion from voter list; it asks poll body to refer names of Bihar electors purged from rolls to Centre for adjudication under Citizenship Act

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

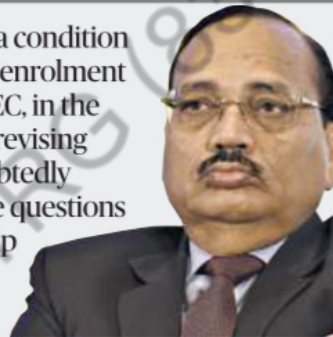
The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls as an exercise done by the Election Commission (EC) in furtherance of its constitutional obligation to conduct free and fair elections.

“SIR bears a direct nexus to the constitutional goal of a free and fair election. Free and fair elections do not rest merely upon the mechanics of polling. They equally depend upon the integrity, accuracy, and purity of the electoral roll which forms the foundation of the democratic process,” a Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said.



Citizenship is a condition precedent for enrolment [in electoral rolls]. The EC, in the course of preparing or revising electoral rolls, is undoubtedly empowered to examine questions bearing upon citizenship

SURYA KANT
Chief Justice of India



The judgment affirming the constitutionality of the Bihar SIR will have an impact on further rounds of the exercise.

The court dismissed the view of the petitioners that the SIR was a backdoor attempt to conduct citizenship screening in the name of “purifying” the electoral roll of “aliens”. The EC was well within its authority to verify citizenship to the limited extent of determin-

ing inclusion or exclusion from the electoral roll, it said. “Citizenship is a condition precedent for enrolment. The EC, in the course of preparing or revising electoral rolls, is undoubtedly empowered to examine questions bearing upon citizenship,” Chief Justice Kant, who authored the 124-page judgment, observed.

The court directed the poll body to refer, within

Respectfully disagree: Cong.

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday said it “respectfully disagreed” with the Supreme Court order upholding the legality of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. » PAGE 12

the next four weeks, the names of electors who were part of the 2003 electoral roll but were purged in the Bihar SIR on the grounds of being non-citizens, to the Centre for adjudication by a competent authority under the Citizenship Act.

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SC upholds SIR, says it is EC's constitutional duty

The authority must decide their cases before the next Vidhan Sabha or local body elections. Their names should be restored to the rolls if they are found to be citizens.

The second phase of the SIR, covering 51 crore voters in 12 States and Union Territories, including West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, had commenced even as the challenge to the exercise in Bihar, was pending in the Supreme Court.

The Bench also directed that persons domiciled in Bihar, whose names may have been wrongly deleted on the grounds of absence, death, duplication or shifting, could challenge the EC's decision before the courts. The final Bihar electoral roll published on September 30 last year contained 7.42 crore electors, compared with 7.89 crore when the SIR was notified on June 24, 2025.

The court said the SIR did not supplant the Representation of the People Act (RP Act) or the Registration of Electors Rules of 1960. Rather, it breathed life into the constitutional mandate of Article 324 (EC's power to conduct and supervise elections).

Cogent justifications

The court said the EC had "cogent justifications" to conduct the SIR, namely the passage of more than two decades since the last intensive revision, large-scale additions and deletions over that period, rapid urbanisation, migration, and the resulting possibility of repeated or defective entries. The court said the electoral roll was not a static document and must evolve in response to changes in population, residence, and eligibility.

It rejected the petitioners' argument that the SIR did not have an empirical foundation. Chief Justice Kant justified that large-scale migration, non-reporting of deaths, and duplication of entries were matters of "common administrative experience". The Bench said the EC's supervisory authority under Article 324 was a "continuous wellspring of power" encompassing every facet and stage of the electoral machinery to ensure the sanctity of the democratic process.

The court refused to believe that the SIR caused suffering. It said appropriate safeguards were in place or introduced to mitigate hardship and arbitrary exclusion.

Cong. 'respectfully disagrees' with Supreme Court on SIR

The top court's judgment 'raises more questions than it answers,' the Opposition party says; legal sanction may grant *prima facie* legitimacy, but it 'cannot cure malice in implementation,' it adds

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday said it "respectfully disagreed" with the Supreme Court order upholding the legality of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, asserting that the judgement "raised more questions than it answered".

"The Supreme Court has given a finding on law. We can respectfully disagree with the verdict," Congress communication chief Jairam Ramesh said in a statement posted on X.

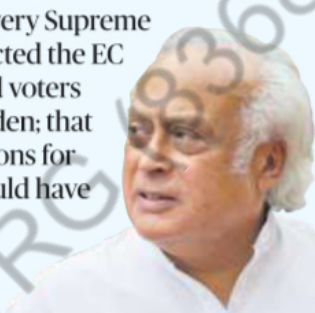
He alleged that the Narendra Modi government has been facing an "unprecedented wave of anger for its governance failures" and the SIR has become an exercise in exclusion.

"...unable to face the electorate in a fair contest, it has now opted to manipulate the lists of who can



Was it not this very Supreme Court that directed the EC to publish lists of deleted voters they wished to keep hidden; that made them publish reasons for deletion which they should have done in the first place

JAIRAM RAMESH
Congress leader



and cannot vote to skew the balance in its favour. Broadly speaking, this is what the SIR is for," Mr. Ramesh said.

'Selective deletions'

He claimed that voters in Bihar and West Bengal were selectively deleted *en masse* and then made to face an appeals process "that is arbitrary and ultimately meaningless".

Mr. Ramesh said the Election Commission (EC) was in such haste that the Supreme Court itself had to put "guardrails".

"Was it not this very Supreme Court that directed the EC to publish lists of deleted voters they wished to keep hidden; that made them publish reasons for deletion which they should have done in the first place; and that mandated Aadhaar be accepted when the EC tried to refuse," he asked.

Mr. Ramesh alleged that the SIR process was "rife with infirmities and based on mala fide" and added that legal sanction may confer *prima facie* legitimacy, but it "cannot cure mal-

ice in implementation".

Addressing a press conference, Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member Abhishek Singhvi said the top court had itself underlined "gaps, omissions, errors and deficiencies" in the EC's handling of the exercise, which later required judicial intervention and petitions from political parties and civil society groups.

He pointed out that the court had observed that citizenship could be determined only by the competent authority, primarily the Ministry of Home Affairs, and not by the EC. He questioned whether the court should have taken stronger note of the fact that voters were excluded on citizenship-related grounds.

He also criticised the timeline for the exercise, describing it as an "excessively constricted and telescoped time period".

Court order hands EC a clean chit. But SIR's deleted still await justice



ASHOK LAVASA

THE MUCH-awaited Supreme Court (SC) order on the constitutionality of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls (ER) undertaken by the Election Commission of India (ECI) is out, causing exultation and dismay in rival camps. I wonder if it surprised anyone.

The SC first heard this petition on July 10 last year, soon after the ECI initiated the SIR process on June 24, 2025 in Bihar. That the SC allowed the process to be completed in Bihar with an extremely tight deadline in view of the imminent assembly elections, and thereafter in 12 other states/UTs, was a reasonable indication of the way it perceived the legality of the exercise. It tinkered with the process, and raised inconvenient questions during the hearing, gladdening the hearts of the petitioners temporarily. But then it also said it would not allow anyone to obstruct the process. In fact, the SC enabled the ECI to continue the exercise in the face of alleged "non-cooperation" in West Bengal by appointing judicial officers and appellate tribunals to adjudicate and hear appeals. To now expect the SC to negate the exercise by delegitimising it was naive.

Before we look at the order and its implications, it must be understood that this SC order doesn't consider issues such as logical discrepancies or the inability of the 27 lakh deleted voters in phase two of the SIR to avail of the appellate process. It examines the ECI's

constitutional authority in conducting the SIR, the procedure followed, the documents prescribed for eligibility, and the scope of its enquiry into citizenship. It framed the following issues for consideration.

One, whether the ECI has the power to conduct the impugned SIR. Two, whether the SIR is founded on a legitimate purpose, and whether the measures adopted are proportionate to the object sought to be achieved. Three, whether the procedure adopted is contrary to, or in violation of, the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Four, whether, in the exercise of its constitutional mandate of preparation and maintenance of ERs, the ECI is empowered to scrutinise the citizenship status of persons seeking inclusion or continuation in the ER.

The SC sees the SIR standing at the "intersection of two constitutional concerns" of "including all eligible citizens and that the ER "must reflect the true composition of the political community". It is satisfied that in its object and design, the SIR "bears a direct nexus to the constitutional goal of a free and fair election" as that depends on the "integrity, accuracy and purity" of the ER, which forms the "foundation of the democratic process". The SC is convinced that the "the material on record indicates that the scale of the problem" identified by the ECI was "systemic in nature, arising from cumulative inaccuracies over an extended period", needing a comprehensive SIR because "such a problem does not readily admit of piecemeal solutions".

The ECI now owes it to the people to share this "material on record" that prompted the exercise, and present a complete report card

on the health of the ERs following the SIR on the parameters of "integrity, accuracy and purity" and in comparison with the ERs prepared under its own supervision earlier.

The SC finds the process and methodology followed by the ECI for the SIR "optimal" and observes that it is "not open to this Court to supplant its own judgment in matters that concern the implementation of an exercise" for which the ECI is endowed with "institutional expertise". At the same time, it finds that "the process, as initially designed, did raise legitimate concerns regarding documentation, transparency, and access". The SC puts itself on the back for addressing these concerns through "a series of judicial interventions, which progressively infused the process with safeguards", such as asking the ECI to treat the Aadhaar card as an additional 12th document of identity, and directing it to publish the list of 65 lakh electors excluded from Bihar's draft roll, along with the reasons for such exclusion. In paragraph 95, the SC says, "the post-exercise data placed on record does not disclose a level of disenfranchisement so widespread or systemic as to indicate a constitutional infirmity in the design of the exercise". I wonder if the SC took into account the more than 27 lakh electors excluded in West Bengal.

The SC gives a clean chit to the ECI on all counts, holding the SIR not to be in "direct conflict with the RP Act and the 1960 Rules". Instead, it states that the exercise is "undertaken to advance the very objective which Part XV of the Constitution is designed to protect". It finds that the exercise "satisfies the requirements of proportionality" with "sufficient procedural safeguards to prevent arbitrary exclusion". The SC holds that inclusion in the

The SC finds the process and methodology followed by the ECI 'optimal' and observes that it is "not open to this Court to supplant its own judgment in matters that concern the implementation of an exercise"

electoral roll may have "a presumption of validity, such presumption is rebuttable" and doesn't impose an embargo on the powers of the Commission to undertake the SIR and finds the resultant deletions not "contrary to the 1960 Rules".

Even though the SC suggested the inclusion of Aadhaar, it validates the ECI's documentation regime without commenting or whether those documents were sufficient for the ECI to be satisfied about the citizenship of electors. Even on the question of citizenship, which was the most contentious part of the SIR, the SC states that the ECI is "empowered, in the exercise of its constitutional mandate, to undertake a limited enquiry into citizenship for the purpose of satisfying itself as to eligibility for inclusion in the electoral roll". However, it holds that "such an enquiry does not amount to a determination of citizenship in the strict sense". While it affects the individual's entitlement to be included in the electoral roll it doesn't "divest the individual of claims of citizenship, nor does it foreclose a determination of that question by the Competent Authority under the Citizenship Act".

While excluding such persons from the ER, it is incumbent upon the ECI to refer them to the competent authority under the Citizenship Act, 1955 "for adjudication in accordance with law". It becomes essential for the ECI to now disclose the number of such "ineligible" persons discovered through the SIR and refer them within four weeks to the competent authority for adjudicating their citizenship "before the next Parliamentary, Assembly, Local Body elections, whichever is earlier".

The SC order delivers a knockout punch that favours the ECI.

The writer is a former election commissioner

AMCA fighter project moves ahead as Centre issues RFP to shortlisted firms

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Defence on Wednesday issued the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the indigenous fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme to three shortlisted bidders, marking a major step forward in India's push for self-reliance in advanced combat aviation.

The shortlisted entities include the Larsen and Toubro-Bharat Electronics Limited combine, Tata Advanced Systems, and the Bharat Forge-BEML consortium. A top official in the Ministry of Defence confirmed the development to *The Hindu*. "It is a huge step towards the Make in India initiative of the Centre to develop an indigenous fifth-generation



Next-gen project: An Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft fighter jet designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency. K. MURALI KUMAR

fighter jet," the official said.

Interestingly, the State-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. has been kept out of the process, sources said.

After the shortlisted companies submit their responses to the RFP, the selection process is likely to be completed within four to five months based on technical and commercial evaluations.

Under the programme, the government plans to build five prototypes of the AMCA, a stealth fighter aircraft being developed to meet the Indian Air Force's long-term operational requirements.

The selected private defence entity will work in partnership with the Aeronautical Development Agency, functioning under the Ministry of Defence,

for the development of the prototypes.

The AMCA programme is considered one of India's most ambitious indigenous aerospace projects aimed at developing a fifth-generation stealth combat aircraft with advanced avionics, supercruise capability, and reduced radar signature.

On May 15, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu laid the foundation stone for the ₹15,803-crore AMCA infrastructure project in Andhra Pradesh's Sri Sathya Sai district.

Last year, the Defence Minister approved the AMCA Programme Execution Model, under which the Aeronautical Development Agency will execute the project through industry partnership.

Demolish all illegal structures within 15 km of IB: Shah

Hamza Khan
Jaipur, May 27

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday directed the authorities to strictly enforce a zero-tolerance policy against illegal structures within 15 kilometres of the International Border and demolish them, officials said.

Shah issued the directions while chairing a high-level security review meeting in Bikaner to comprehensively assess security-related issues concerning the border districts along the Indo-Pakistan Border (IPB).

It was attended by Rajasthan CM Bhajan Lal Sharma, senior state government officials, and District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police of five border districts – Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Sri Ganganagar, and Phalodi. It was also decided to formulate a 360-degree security framework for every border district with the idea that an integrated approach “will actively involve local citizens, the state government machinery, and all



Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Rajasthan CM Bhajan Lal Sharma during a review meet on border security in Bikaner. PTI

concerned security agencies to ensure comprehensive and robust border management.”

Shah also emphasised a co-ordinated border management strategy involving the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), and the state government to effectively address infiltration, narcotics smuggling, encroachment, terror financing, and other trans-border crimes.

He directed District Magistrates to assume enhanced responsibilities, including ensur-

ing full legal and financial compliance by all banks, verifying major business establishments, scrutinising their funding sources, tracking mule accounts and shell companies, identifying fake Aadhaar cards, and preventing smuggling.

The instructions came a day after Shah said in Bikaner that anti-drone systems will be deployed along the International Border in the next six months, in view of cross-border smuggling, underlining the need to view BSF’s traditional role “from a new dimension.”

Oil firms absorbing ₹550 cr. daily losses amid disruptions

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Public-sector oil-marketing companies (OMCs) are absorbing losses of nearly ₹550 crore from the sale of diesel, petrol and LPG, by not passing on the full impact of rising international crude prices to retail consumers, the government said on Wednesday.

The issue figured prominently during the sixth meeting of the Informal Group of Ministers (IGoM) on West Asia, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at Kartayya Bhawan-2 in New Delhi.

The government said OMCs were absorbing losses to protect retail consumers from the volatility in global energy markets.

Further, authorities also flagged concerns over industrial users allegedly diverting purchases to retail outlets to take advantage of the protected fuel prices.

Officials noted instances of black marketing by some dealers, prompting intensified enforcement measures by the Ministry, oil companies and State Governments.

Further, according to the government, private OMCs have observed an approximately 38% decline in sale of diesel in the ongoing month - from both retail and bulk consumers - owing to their higher prices.

Thus, the demand has shifted to public-sector OMCs having comparatively lower prices.

'DRC facing catastrophic collision of Ebola and war'

Agence France-Presse

GENEVA

The World Health Organization chief warned on Wednesday that conflict raging in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo was dramatically complicating efforts to rein in a deadly Ebola outbreak and urged an immediate ceasefire.

"Eastern DRC now faces a catastrophic collision of disease and conflict with the Ebola outbreak in Ituri province outpacing the response," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

The WHO has recorded 10 confirmed Ebola deaths and 220 suspected deaths in DRC since mid-May, while also recording a further 900 suspected cases since Kinshasa declared



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

the outbreak on May 15.

The United Nations' health agency said the true spread of the virus was probably much wider. Experts have said it was probably circulating for some time.

Mr. Tedros stressed that the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola that is spreading in the DRC had "no approved vaccine nor treatment".

"Stopping this Ebola transmission depends en-

tirely on humanitarian access," he said.

But insecurity is a huge obstacle in eastern DRC, which has been plagued for three decades by conflict involving a litany of armed groups.

State services in rural areas of Ituri province have been largely absent for decades.

Mr. Tedros lamented that clashes were "driving mass displacement, pushing exposed contacts into overcrowded camps and severing critical containment corridors".

"Frontline workers are risking everything, while attacks on health facilities make tracking cases and their contacts nearly impossible," he warned.

"We plea to prioritise human survival above everything else."

Quad says ports for Fiji; Ditoka says no specific project yet, talks ongoing

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

A day after the 11th Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting here declared that the grouping would build port infrastructure in the Pacific island of Fiji. Fijian Foreign Minister Sakiasi Ditoka said that no relevant port project has been "agreed" at the moment, though Fiji is in talks with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact of the United States regarding port infrastructure. In response to questions from *The Hindu*, Mr. Ditoka said in a written response that Fiji's approach to developing its infrastructure is driven by plans to create better facilities that will support its

commercial ambitions.

"No specific port project has been identified or agreed at this stage. The process is at the Root Cause Analysis phase, which will then move into Concept Notes and, subject to agreement, potentially to more detailed feasibility and design work," said Mr. Ditoka, indicating that the declaration of a port project made here by Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong as well as U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio requires considerable paperwork before it can materialise.

The announcement on Fijian port development by the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting has drawn attention to the broad-spec-



Sakiasi Ditoka

trum relations that China has built with several southwest Pacific island nations, most importantly Fiji, which will mark fifty-one years of diplomatic relations with China this year. China's ambassador to Fiji, Zhou Jian, said in 2025 that his country had emerged as the third-largest trading partner for Fi-

ji. The government of Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka has broadened conversation on Chinese investments in infrastructure across Fiji's major islands, and China has developed at least twenty projects in Fiji in the recent past. Fiji has maintained the "One-China" policy, which has helped further ties with Beijing.

On March 2, the U.S. Department of State announced that Fiji was set to receive a grant of \$12 million from the MCC for feasibility studies of projects before further consideration. Referring to that, Foreign Minister Ditoka said, "The focus areas identified are ports and the business regulatory environment."

Hong Kong overtakes Switzerland as world's top cross-border wealth hub on China ties: BCG

Reuters

Zurich, May 27

HONG KONG has overtaken Switzerland as the top global booking centre for cross-border wealth, a first that is unlikely to be reversed as hubs in Asia grow faster than the European safe-haven, Boston Consulting Group (BCG) said Wednesday.

Wealth from China and an IPO boom in 2025 helped Hong Kong rise to a \$2.95 trillion offshore behemoth for the world's rich, narrowly surpassing Switzerland's \$2.94 trillion in cross-

border wealth, as per BCG's 2026 Global Wealth Report.

"Hong Kong is cementing its role as China's gateway to global markets, though that same concentration ties its trajectory tightly to economic and regulatory developments on the mainland," the authors said.

Both Hong Kong and Singapore are projected to continue growing as cross-border booking centres at around 9% annually through 2030, compared to an expected 6% average in Switzerland over the same period.

Cross-border wealth glo-

bally grew 8.4% to \$15.7 trillion last year, driven by strong markets and demand for geographical diversification, and it flowed overwhelmingly to the world's top 10 booking centres, further boosting concentration, it added.

Despite slower growth rates, Switzerland's diversification may prove an advantage as it draws clients from all regions, while Asian hubs largely depend on growth in China, BCG added.

"Geopolitical uncertainty reaffirms Switzerland's role as a core global booking centre, at-

tracting flight-to-safety flows from more volatile regions such as the Middle East," BCG said. Wealthy individuals have been looking to shift assets from the Gulf region to Switzerland in the wake of the ongoing conflict, bankers and financial advisers have told *Reuters*.

"What ultimately matters is client proximity," said Michael Kahlich, the report's co-author, adding that two hubs are forming globally — Singapore and Hong Kong for Asia, and Switzerland, the UK, and the US for the West.