

**Be so good they
can't ignore you.**

— Steve Martin

Important Issues of the Day

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7 AAP Rajya Sabha MPs quit party, set to merge with BJP

Devesh K. Pandey

NEW DELHI

In a massive setback to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), seven of its 10 Rajya Sabha members on Friday broke away and are set to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), marking a significant political realignment in the Upper House. The AAP accused the BJP of running “Operation Lotus” to break and poach MPs.

MPs Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak, and Ashok Kumar Mittal met BJP president Nitin Nabin at the party’s headquarters in the evening. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance currently has a strength of 141 in the Upper House.

At a press conference, Mr. Chadha said that more than two-thirds of the AAP



Fresh ties: Rajya Sabha MPs Sandeep Pathak, Ashok Mittal, and Raghav Chadha calling on BJP national president Nitin Nabin (centre) at the party headquarters in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

MPs had quit the party and would merge with the BJP by exercising the provisions of the Constitution. “Seven MPs have signed the document, which was submitted to the Honourable Chairman of the Rajya Sabha,” he said.

Mr. Chadha said the sig-

natories included former cricketer Harbhajan Singh, Rajendra Gupta, Vikramjit Singh Sahney, and Swati Maliwal.

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RELATED REPORTS ON

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- **Anti-Defection Law, introduced by the 52nd Amendment in 1985, adding the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution.**
- **It aimed to stop political defections for personal gain. It applies to both Parliament and State Assemblies.**
- **Grounds for Disqualification: Voluntarily give up party membership (can be inferred from conduct, not just resignation).**
- **Voting or abstaining from voting against the party whip can lead to disqualification.**
- **A legislator can further be disqualified if he is an independently elected member and joins a political party.**
- **A nominated member is disqualified if they join a political party after six months of becoming a legislator.**

- **Exceptions to Disqualification: A party can merge with another if two-thirds of its legislators agree, with no disqualification for those who merge or stay.**
- **No disqualification for Speaker/Chairman/Deputy Chairman resigning from the party to remain neutral.**
- **Role of the Presiding Officer: Disqualification cases are decided by the Speaker/Chairman.**
- **The decision is subject to judicial review, courts can intervene only after the decision is made.**

Q. Which one of the following Schedules of the Constitution of India contains provisions regarding anti-defection? (2014)

- (a) Second Schedule**
- (b) Fifth Schedule**
- (c) Eighth Schedule**
- (d) Tenth Schedule**

India among countries where Meta 'automatically' blocks flagged content

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

India is now among a set of "limited countries" where Facebook and Instagram "automatically restrict content, at scale and based on local law requirements," a company source told *The Hindu*.

Meta, the parent firm of both social media platforms, has complied with censorship orders on a large scale in recent weeks, as the firm has been hit with a barrage of takedown notices from State police authorities as well as the Union government. Precise numbers of local law-

Limited access

Meta has complied with censorship orders after a barrage of takedown notices from the Centre and State police



■ India is now among a set of "limited countries" where Facebook and Instagram 'automatically restrict content, at scale, based on local law requirements'

■ The Sahyog portal works as a centralised platform for issuing takedown orders to internet intermediaries, including social media platforms

■ The portal operates under section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, which has provisions to take away 'safe harbour' for platforms for non-compliance with notices

related takedowns on the platforms will only be published by the firm in the second half of 2026.

The Sahyog portal,

which provides a web link for authorised police officials to send takedown notices to social media platforms, operates under

Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, under which social media platforms could lose "safe harbour" for content posted by users, and end up in court alongside the people whose content has been targeted by authorities.

Meta did not provide written responses to questions from *The Hindu*. The firm's receptivity to non-binding takedown notices appears to have increased since the IT Ministry in February reduced timelines from 36 hours to three hours.

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» **PAGE 10**

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- **The Sahyog portal**, which provides a web link for authorised police officials to send takedown notices to social media platforms, operates under **Section 79(3)(b)** of the Information Technology Act, under which social media platforms could lose “safe harbour” for content posted by users, and end up in court alongside the people whose content has been targeted by authorities.

Section 69 of the IT Act:

- **It confers on the Central and State governments the power to issue directions “to intercept, monitor or decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource”.**
- **The grounds on which these powers may be exercised are:**
- **In the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, the security of the state.**
- **Friendly relations with foreign states.**
- **Public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to these.**
- **For investigating any offence.**

- **Safe Harbour Rules: Social media platforms are not held legally liable for user-generated content, as long as they act to remove or address flagged objectionable content, thus supporting free speech and ensuring platforms are not responsible for preemptive content control.**
- **United States: Safe harbour protection is provided under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which shields platforms from being held liable for user content.**
- **India: Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 offers similar protection.**

Oppn. moves fresh notice in RS seeking CEC's removal

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Opposition parties moved a fresh notice in the Rajya Sabha on Friday seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, accusing him of acting in a partisan manner.

The 13-page notice was signed by 73 Opposition members of the Upper House. If the Rajya Sabha Chairman accepts the notice, he will order a probe.

**DETAILS ON
» PAGE 11**

- **The CEC can be removed only in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge, and service conditions cannot be altered to his disadvantage after appointment.**
- **Other Election Commissioners or Regional Commissioners can be removed only on the recommendation of the CEC.**
- **Grounds for Removal: The Constitution limits the grounds for the removal of a Supreme Court Judge (and by extension, the CEC) to only two specific charges: "proved misbehaviour or incapacity."**
- **The removal of the CEC follows a quasi-judicial procedure similar to that for removing a Supreme Court judge, governed by the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968.**

- **Initiation of the Removal Motion:** A removal motion stating the grounds for removal can be introduced in either House of Parliament.
- It must be signed by 100 members in the Lok Sabha or 50 members in the Rajya Sabha.
- The signed motion is then submitted to the Presiding Officer of the respective House (the Speaker in the Lok Sabha or the Chairman in the Rajya Sabha).
- **Admission & Investigation:** The Speaker/Chairman may admit or refuse the motion.
- If admitted, a three-member committee (SC judge, HC Chief Justice, distinguished jurist) is formed to investigate charges.

- **Voting in Parliament:** To pass, the motion must be supported by a Special Majority in both Houses of Parliament during the same session.
- A Special Majority means a majority of the total membership of that House, and a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting.
- **Presidential Order for Removal:** If the motion successfully passes both Houses, a formal address is presented to the President of India.

Fire and sound

Safe alternatives to conventional pyrotechnics are essential

Safety is often sacrificed at the altar of faith. On April 21, a series of powerful explosions tore through a makeshift fireworks assembly unit at Mundathikode on the outskirts of Kerala's Thrissur city, causing death and devastation. Unofficial estimates put the death toll at 15; the blasts left over 24 injured, many grievously, and damaged some 50 houses in the vicinity. An unspecified number of workers were handling firecrackers stocked across multiple sheds for a customary sample fireworks display ahead of the annual Thrissur Pooram, culminating in a competitive fireworks display organised by the Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu temple authorities. The State and Centre announced compensation for victims' families and declared it a State-specific disaster to speed up relief. Multiple inquiries, including a judicial commission led by a former High Court judge, were launched to unearth any safety violations and regulatory lapses. A scaled-down version of the Pooram pageantry will be held on April 26 in view of 'public sentiments'.

The blasts, following a similar explosion at a Virudhunagar fireworks factory in Tamil Nadu, have once again exposed gaps in enforcing safety and licensing norms in India's pyrotechnic industry. Evidently, the stringent regulatory measures stipulated by the Judicial Commission after the 2016 Puttingal temple fireworks accident – covering licensing, materials, layout, and conduct of

ing licensing, materials, layout, and conduct of displays – have been progressively sidelined during Kerala's summer festival season. Eyewitness accounts at Mundathikode suggest woefully inadequate compliance with safety norms. Explosive experts have hinted at the absence of a safe distance between sheds storing gunpowder and abrasion-sensitive chemicals, the stockpiling of excess quantities of flash powder, the lack of safety gear and firefighting equipment, the employment of untrained workers, the likely use of banned chemicals, and lax enforcement – all together forming the perfect recipe for disaster. Religious festivals such as the Thrissur Pooram have lately been entangled in vote-bank politics, dissuading the authorities from enforcing safety measures around hazardous activities such as fireworks displays and elephant parades. 'Loudness' often defines the success of competitive fireworks displays, and attempts to do away with high-decibel fireworks citing the safety of patients, pregnant women, and infants find no popular support. The Mundathikode tragedy is a sobering reminder of the human cost of high-risk festivities, and should hasten the adoption of safer modern alternatives to conventional pyrotechnics, such as cold spark technology.

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Incremental change

Emissions can be significantly curbed only through electrification

In mid-April, news broke that India's auto-makers had unanimously agreed to a new fuel efficiency and emissions reduction target proposed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), the sector's standards-setting body. This follows a controversy late last year, driven largely by differences between Maruti Suzuki – which commands an overwhelming share of the small-car segment – and other manufacturers. The earlier proposal had effectively created a carve-out for small cars, a segment that accounts for about 14%-15% of passenger vehicle sales, delaying the shift to cleaner fuels and technologies. Larger carmakers, meanwhile, were required to meet more stringent targets, putting them at a relative disadvantage in terms of pricing and investment. While this triggered a relook at the proposed emissions norms, what has emerged is only marginally better. In fact, some provisions appear counterproductive to reducing emissions and decarbonising the transport sector – India's third-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. At first glance, the headline reduction in Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) targets – from about 113 grams of CO₂ per kilometre under CAFE-II to 77 g/km by 2031-32 under CAFE-III – appears ambitious. The new cycle is proposed to run from April 2027 to March 2032. However, the framework's flexible design may weaken compliance and slow the urgent transition to cleaner technologies, especially electrification.

Technologies, especially electrification.

To be sure, the explicit carve-out for small cars has been removed, but it has been replaced by several alternative compliance pathways. These include credits for higher ethanol blending (from E20 to E85-compatible vehicles) and for incremental efficiency technologies such as start-stop systems, regenerative braking, and tyre pressure monitoring systems. While useful, these are marginal improvements that allow manufacturers to meet targets without a structural shift to electric mobility. The BEE has also proposed super-credits, where certain technologies count multiple times towards compliance – for instance, a battery electric vehicle could count as three vehicles. Combined with credit banking and trading, this creates a system in which manufacturers with an early technological lead can accumulate surplus credits and sell them to laggards. Further, compliance is to be assessed over three-year blocks rather than annually, allowing manufacturers to average performance over time. This reduces immediate pressure and weakens the signalling effect that regulations are meant to provide. At a time of fossil fuel volatility, this policy appears too weak to drive meaningful change in a sector that is central to climate mitigation, India's energy security, and macroeconomic stability. Without sharper incentives, CAFE-III risks becoming a framework that manages emissions on paper rather than transforming them in practice.

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The crisis of urban electoral disenfranchisement

The framer of the Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, while presenting the Constitution, stated: “From one person, one vote, it should lead to one person, one economic unit.” However, this spirit has not materialised and the divide amongst people has widened.

In the growing marginalisation of large sections of the population, including the poor, migrants, and ethnic, social, and religious minorities, the first stepping stone in this set of structural tools is the right to adult franchise.

Universal adult urban franchise

It may sound uncomfortable, but the fact of the matter is that over the last few decades, the urban population has been subject to systematic disenfranchisement.

The debate over the recent Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in contemporary times serves to reinforce and further substantiate the marginalisation and continuing disenfranchisement of urban voters.



Tikender Singh Panwar

Author, urban practitioner, former Deputy Mayor, Shimla, and Member, Kerala Urban Commission

Electoral system ‘reforms’ risk undermining universal adult franchise in India’s cities

Former Chief Election Commissioner of India, T.N. Seshan held that “an address did not mean a luxury home, but merely a place where the person resided, even if that was under a tree or on the pavement, ensuring they had the right to vote”. The journey of the right to adult franchise has unfortunately reached a point where people are being omitted from the voter list through various exclusionary processes and bureaucratic hurdles.

In urban India, the population under 18 years of age is approximately in the mean of 28%. If this percentage is added to the figures in the table, it shows that a huge number of people are excluded from the list of eligible voters. Most of those living in slums and informal settlements are also among the disenfranchised. It is no great surprise that, according to the World Bank, around 40% of India’s urban population currently lives in slums.

Another major challenge to the right to adult franchise is the compromised secrecy of the electoral process. In the current electronic voting machine system, the booth-wise revelation of votes poses a serious challenge to the confidential nature of the franchise. In small towns, a booth comprises only a few hundred votes, and the voting patterns of different demographic groups can be easily inferred by the system and political parties.

The exclusion of the urban poor

Why will SIR hit the urban poor the most? Dalits, marginalised sections, and ethnic and religious minorities, apart from the economically poor and unorganised sector workers, were among the groups with the highest rates of deletion in urban India – a process that is still ongoing. This represents a dual burden for these sections: on one hand, they are unable to get themselves registered as voters, and on the other, those who were already registered are now facing a high incidence of deletions.

Let us take the example of a few cities where the largest deletions have taken place. Patna in Bihar recorded very high deletions, with 16.5 lakh names removed from the draft rolls. Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh saw deletions of around 36.67%, driven by the high mobility of its urban and unorganised workforce. Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh witnessed 30.88% voter deletions after the SIR. Purnia in Bihar saw 2.73 lakh voters deleted from the rolls. Kanpur, the well-known industrial town in Uttar Pradesh, witnessed 25.62% of names marked for removal, mainly among unorganised sector workers. In Kolkata, in one particular locality, Gulshan Colony, 90% of voters were found missing. In Mumbai, under the 2025 SIR, it is estimated that 14 lakh names were deleted, and around 50% of residents living in informal housing were registered.

It is very evident that the SIR process of enumeration is highly exclusive and bureaucratic controlled. Instead of promoting maximum outreach, this process appears to dissuade the urban poor from even registering as voters. In a country such as India, where migration is one of the defining features of urbanisation, producing evidence of voter registration from 2002/2005 poses a significant challenge.

Selective filtration

The struggle for the urban right to adult franchise is a long one; however, with SIR, it has taken two steps back. SIR is not just an administrative exercise but a systematic attack on the democratic base. Its reliance on rigid documentation, and proof of stable residence, which is a matter of considerable concern in urban India, leads to the large-scale deletion of working-class populations. There is a selective filtration of the electorate, where those who do not suit the ruling dispensation or are perceived as a potential threat to capital investment are excluded.

Demography and urban voter mismatch

S. NO.	NAME OF CITY	POPULATION (IN LAKH)		ELECTORS IN 2026
		2011	2026	
1	Shimla	1.69	2.52	55,385 (21% voters)
2	Chandigarh	10.54	12.93	6,33,475 (48.9% voters)
3	Delhi (NCT)	110.07	226.74	145 lakh (63% voters)
4	Chennai	46.46	69.99	28.30 lakh (40% voters)
5	Bengaluru	84.4	128	85 lakh (66.4% voters)
6	Kolkata	44.97	67.7	36.5 lakh (53.9% voters)
7	Guwahati	9.62	14	9.2 lakh (65% voters)
8	Bhopal	17.9	27	5.39 lakh (20% voters)
9	Patna	16.8	30	12.7 lakh (42% voters)
10	Lucknow	28.15	42	28 lakh (66% voters)

- **It may sound uncomfortable, but the fact of the matter is that over the last few decades, the urban population has been subject to systematic disenfranchisement.**
- **The debate over the recent Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in contemporary times serves to reinforce and further substantiate the marginalisation and continuing disenfranchisement of urban voters.**
- **In urban India, the population under 18 years of age is approximately in the mean of 28%.**
- **If this percentage is added to the figures in the table, it shows that a huge number of people are excluded from the list of eligible voters. Most of those living in slums and informal settlements are also among the disenfranchised. It is no great surprise that, according to the World Bank, around 40% of India's urban population currently lives in slums.**
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- **It is very evident that the SIR process of enumeration is highly exclusive and bureaucratic controlled. Instead of promoting maximum outreach, this process appears to dissuade the urban poor from even registering as voters.**
- **In a country such as India, where migration is one of the defining features of urbanisation, producing evidence of voter registration from 2002/2005 poses a significant challenge.**

- **Universal adult suffrage** – It refers to the right of all adult citizens to vote, regardless of their social status, wealth, education, or other factors.
- It is also called as **Universal Adult Franchise**.
- **Importance** – It is a cornerstone of democracy, ensuring that all citizens have a voice in choosing their representatives.
- **Adoption in India** – It is adopted at the time of adoption of the present-day constitution i.e. January 26, 1950.
- **Constitutional provision** - Article 326 of the Constitution provides that the elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage.

- **“Not everything that is technologically possible is ethically desirable.” Examine.**
- **"जो कुछ तकनीकी रूप से संभव है, वह नैतिक रूप से वांछनीय नहीं होता। परीक्षण कीजिए।"**
- **The pursuit of perfection often becomes the enemy of progress.**
- **पूर्णता की खोज अक्सर प्रगति की शत्रु बन जाती है।**
- **Forests precede civilizations and deserts follow them.**
- **वन सभ्यताओं से पहले आते हैं और मरुस्थल उनके बाद।**

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