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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SC Backs EVM's, Rules Out Revival Of Paper Ballots

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court of India upheld the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) over paper ballots, rejecting pleas for paper ballot revival and increased verification. Concerns over blind distrust and electoral integrity were addressed, with suggestions for enhanced EVM security measures and candidate-requested verifications.

Supreme Court Upholds EVMs:

- Rejects plea to revive paper ballots citing documented weaknesses and logistical challenges.
- Recognizes significant advantages of EVMs, upholding their use in elections.

Addressing Blind Distrust:

- Warns against blind distrust, emphasizing the need for evidence-based critique.
- Justice Sanjiv Khanna highlights the importance of maintaining citizen participation and confidence in elections.

Verifiability Measures:

- Declines plea for VVPAT slips to be given to voters or for 100% cross-verification.
- Only 5% of EVM-VVPAT counts to be randomly verified in any constituency.
- Suggests exploring electronic methods for counting VVPAT slips, considering manual counting's limitations.

Enhanced Security Measures:

- Orders Symbol Loading Units to be sealed after loading symbols into VVPATs.
- Allows verification of 5% of EVMs' burnt memory upon written request from second or third-place candidates.
- Expenses for verification to be borne by applicants, refundable if tampering is found.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Phase II Of Lok Sabha Polls Records 61% Voter Turnout

CONTEXT: The second phase of the Lok Sabha elections in 88 constituencies across 13 states saw a turnout of nearly 61%, with incidents ranging from peaceful polling to sporadic disturbances and complaints, including cases of violence, vandalism of voting equipment, and electoral malpractice.



Lok Sabha Election Phase 2 Overview:

- Voting conducted across 88 constituencies in 13 states, marked by largely peaceful conditions.
- Voter turnout reported at approximately 61%, contrasting with 69.44% in the same phase during the 2019 elections.

Regional Breakdown:

- States like Kerala (70.35%) and Karnataka (69.23%) saw notable participation, while Uttar Pradesh recorded the lowest turnout at 54.85%.
- Tripura recorded the highest turnout at 79.66%.

Prominent Leaders and Constituencies:

- Key figures such as BJP's Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Congress's Rahul Gandhi contested in this phase.
- Various constituencies, including all seats in Kerala and some in Karnataka, witnessed significant electoral activity.

Incidents and Challenges:

- Instances of violence, including the vandalization of voting equipment in Manipur and Bihar.
- Notable disruptions reported in Ukhrul and Senapati, prompting preventive measures.

State-Specific Events:

- Rajasthan reported a turnout of 64.07%, with peaceful polling in Maharashtra and some disturbances in West Bengal.
- Incidents of violence and malpractice reported in Kerala and Karnataka, including vandalism and allegations of religious solicitation.


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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Trust In Machines

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court's reaffirmation of trust in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and rejection of demands for extensive verification underscores ongoing debates over electoral integrity and the role of technology in ensuring transparent voting processes in India.



Supreme Court's Reaffirmation:

- Supreme Court maintains trust in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), finding no evidence to doubt their integrity.
- Rejects demand for 100% verification of paper trail, citing lack of irremediable flaws in current verification system.

Support for Electoral Process Integrity:

- Court's decision echoes faith in electoral process integrity, particularly after introduction of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).
- Dismisses proposal to revert to paper ballots, emphasizing gains from eliminating vulnerabilities associated with paper-based voting.

Past Judicial Stances:

- Previous refusals to interfere with existing system, including rejection of 50% and 100% verification demands.
- Court reviews administrative and technical safeguards, finding no impairments to trust in the electoral system.

Addressing Apprehensions:

- Directives include securing symbol loading units post-election and allowing verification of micro-controllers in 5% of EVMs for tampering detection.
- Upholding the importance of a paper trail, court favors increasing VVPAT verification stations to enhance transparency.

Technological Solutions:

- Suggestions for technological advancements like machine counting of VVPAT slips and barcoding of symbols for future ease of counting.
- Emphasis on technological advancement to ensure suspicion-proof processes.

Mistrust in Electoral Oversight:

- Apprehensions and suspicions of manipulation highlight growing mistrust in the Election Commission's impartiality.
- Distinguishing between voter confidence in voting systems and the need for the election watchdog's perceived impartiality.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Sounding The Gavel On Curative Jurisdiction

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court of India's recent reaffirmation of trust in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and rejection of demands for extensive verification of paper trails underscores the judiciary's confidence in the electoral process, despite lingering apprehensions and suggestions for technological enhancements to ensure transparency and impartiality.

Introduction of Curative Jurisdiction:

- In 2002, the Supreme Court of India gained the power of "Curative Jurisdiction," allowing it to correct judgments post-finalization, distinct from the regular review process.

Role of the Supreme Court:

- Beyond being the highest court of appeal, the Supreme Court holds advisory jurisdiction and authority over the appointment and transfer of judges.
- It plays a constitutional role in declaring and shaping laws, reflecting societal changes and advancements in human knowledge.

Distinctiveness of Curative Jurisdiction:

- Unlike regular review processes, Curative Jurisdiction entails a reversal of the Court's own verdicts, going beyond mere adjustments in legal interpretation.
- It allows for rectifying errors beyond the scope of typical judicial review, demonstrating the Court's capacity for self-correction.

Case Study: Delhi Metro Rail Judgment:

- Analysis of a curative petition in Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd. vs. Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt Ltd sheds light on the potential drawbacks of curative jurisdiction.
- The Court's intervention in setting aside an arbitral award raises concerns over increased interference in arbitration matters.

Exercise of Curative Jurisdiction:

- Supreme Court's interference in the Delhi Metro Rail case was based on grounds of perceived misinterpretation of contractual clauses and disregarding vital evidence.
- This represents a departure from the Court's previous stance of minimal interference in arbitral awards, indicating a shift in its approach.

Challenges and Criticisms:

- The exercise of Curative Jurisdiction raises questions about the consistency and predictability of legal decisions.
- While correcting mistakes is essential, the Supreme Court's role as the final interpreter of law necessitates a broader perspective beyond individual cases.
- The Court's oscillation based on changing trends risks undermining its perceived constancy and gravitas as the apex judicial authority.

Conclusion:

- The Supreme Court's utilization of Curative Jurisdiction underscores the delicate balance between correcting errors and maintaining institutional integrity.
- Striking a balance between judicial oversight and minimal interference is crucial for upholding the Court's credibility and the rule of law.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Entering Symbols In VVPAT Units Cannot Be Equated With Uploading Software, Says Court

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court clarified that the process of entering symbols into Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) units, distinct from uploading software, is safeguarded against malicious interference, addressing concerns raised by petitioners regarding the integrity of the electoral process.



Clarification on VVPAT Symbol Loading Process:

- The Supreme Court emphasized that entering serial numbers and candidate symbols into VVPAT units via bitmap files does not equate to uploading software, allaying concerns of potential tampering.

Addressing Apprehensions:

- Petitioners expressed fears of malicious software being introduced alongside symbols in VVPAT units, raising doubts about the integrity of elections.

Court's Observations:

- Justice Sanjiv Khanna asserted that the symbol loading process does not modify the firmware already in VVPAT memory, which remains neutral towards candidates and political parties.

Process Overview:

- A laptop/PC equipped with a symbol loading application generates a bitmap file containing serial numbers, candidate names, and symbols, which is then loaded onto VVPAT units using symbol loading units prior to polling.

Transparency in Process:

- The symbol loading process involves authorized engineers and District Election Officers, conducted in the presence of candidates or their representatives, with a monitor/TV screen displaying the process.

Functioning of Control Unit:

- The control unit tallies total votes cast based on button presses on the ballot unit, remaining impartial to political affiliations and only recognizing button inputs.

CONCLUSION: Secure and Transparent VVPAT Process Upheld by Court.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Not Possible To Pre-Programme EVMS: Court

CONTEXT: In its recent ruling, the Supreme Court of India affirmed the integrity of electronic voting machines (EVMs) over paper ballots, highlighting their effectiveness in curbing electoral malpractices like booth-capturing. The court emphasized the impossibility of pre-programming EVMs for fraudulent purposes and underscored the numerous advantages of EVMs, including enhanced security, reduced invalid votes, and streamlined administrative processes.

SUPREME COURT'S ASSERTION ON EVM INTEGRITY:

- The Supreme Court dismissed the notion of reverting to paper ballots, highlighting the risk of reviving past electoral malpractices like booth-capturing.
- Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta emphasized that it is impossible to pre-program electronic voting machines (EVMs) for fraudulent purposes.

EVMs' Role in Combating Booth-Capturing:

- EVMs restrict the rate of vote casting to four votes per minute, effectively thwarting booth-capturing as per Section 135A of the Representation of the People Act.
- This restriction ensures a longer duration for voting, which helps in detecting and preventing the insertion of bogus votes.

Advantages of EVMs Over Paper Ballots:

- Unlike paper ballots, EVMs allow voting by pressing a button, reducing the occurrence of invalid votes.
- EVMs contribute to environmental sustainability by reducing paper usage and offer logistical advantages.
- They expedite the counting process, minimize errors, and provide administrative convenience.

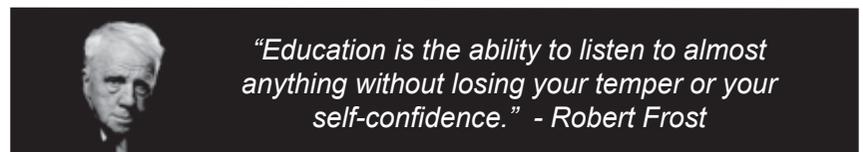
Control and Security Measures:

- Election officials maintain complete control over the polling process, ensuring its integrity.
- The 'CLOSE' button on the EVM's control unit prevents further voting, while the 'TOTAL' button displays the total number of votes cast without revealing candidate-wise results.

Programming of EVM Micro-controllers:

- EVM micro-controllers are programmed during the manufacturing stage, remaining impartial to political parties and candidates.
- The original programming is agnostic and cannot be altered during elections, making it impossible to pre-program EVMs in a fraudulent manner.

CONCLUSION: The Supreme Court's recent ruling solidifies trust in EVMs, affirming their pivotal role in safeguarding electoral integrity. With robust security measures and inherent limitations against manipulation, EVMs continue to uphold the sanctity of the democratic process.



"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." - Robert Frost

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SC Seeks EC Reply On Petition For Fresh Poll If Nota Gets Most Votes

CONTEXT: In response to a plea, the Supreme Court has asked the Election Commission to address concerns regarding constituencies where "None of the Above" (NOTA) receives a majority of votes, advocating for uniform rules across states regarding the treatment of NOTA in elections.

PLEA FOR FRESH ELECTIONS WHERE NOTA WINS MAJORITY VOTES:

- The Supreme Court directed the Election Commission (EC) to respond to a plea requesting new elections in constituencies where "None of the Above" (NOTA) garners the majority of votes.

PETITION FOR RULES ON CANDIDATE DISQUALIFICATION:

- The petition urged the court to instruct the EC to establish regulations stipulating that candidates receiving fewer votes than NOTA should be barred from contesting elections for five years.

INTRODUCTION OF NOTA:

- NOTA was introduced by the EC and various State Election Commissions in November 2013.

ADOPTION OF NOTA AS A "FICTIONAL ELECTORAL CANDIDATE":

- Starting from 2018, states like Maharashtra, Haryana, Delhi, and Puducherry began treating NOTA as a "fictional electoral candidate."

MANDATORY REPOLL IF NOTA WINS:

- State Election Commissions declared that if NOTA emerged as the winner, a mandatory repoll would be conducted, emphasizing that declaring the second-highest candidate as the winner would undermine the purpose of NOTA.

CALL FOR UNIFORM APPLICATION OF RULES:

- The petition advocated for uniform application of these rules across all states in the country.

CONCLUSION: The Supreme Court's inquiry into NOTA's impact underscores the need for consistent regulations nationwide, ensuring fairness and integrity in electoral processes.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Study Says Solar Radiation Available For Producing Power Falling In India

CONTEXT: An analysis by scientists at the India Meteorological Department reveals an alarming decrease in the quantity of economically convertible solar radiation in various Indian locations, attributed to factors like increased aerosol load and clouding.



DECREASING TREND IN SOLAR RADIATION:

- An analysis by scientists at the India Meteorological Department reveals a concerning decline in economically convertible solar radiation in various Indian locations.
- Published in the in-house journal Mausam, the study highlights an "alarming decreasing trend" in solar radiation availability.
- Factors contributing to this trend include increased aerosol load and clouding, which deflect sunlight away from the ground.

IMPACT ON SOLAR PANEL EFFICIENCY:

- The efficiency of solar panels is significantly influenced by the amount of sunlight they receive.
- Installing more efficient solar panels is suggested as a potential solution to counteract the decreasing trend in solar radiation.

SPV POTENTIAL DECLINE:

- The study analyzed radiation trends at 45 in-house stations, finding a general decline in solar photovoltaic (SPV) potential.
- Locations experiencing this decline include Ahmedabad, Chennai, Goa, Jodhpur, Kolkata, Mumbai, Nagpur, New Delhi, Pune, Shillong, Thiruvananthapuram, and Vishakhapatnam.

IMPACT ON INDIA'S SOLAR CAPACITY:

- India's largest solar parks, mainly in Gujarat and Rajasthan, are also affected by the decreasing SPV potential.
- Currently, India's installed solar power capacity stands at approximately 81 GW, accounting for about 17% of the total installed electricity.

GOALS AND CHALLENGES:

- India aims to source about 500 GW of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, with at least 280 GW from solar power.
- However, the country faces challenges in achieving this target,

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with recent annual solar capacity additions falling short due to factors like the COVID-19 pandemic.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced initiatives to fund rooftop solar installations in at least one crore houses across the country.

VARIATIONS IN SOLAR RADIATION:

- While aerosols' role in blocking sunlight has been known since the 1980s, studies indicate variations in solar radiation over time and location.
- Global solar radiation trends have shown fluctuations, with a reversal in trends after 2001, although the exact causes remain unclear.

CONCLUSION: The analysis underscores the pressing need for addressing the declining trend in solar radiation availability, highlighting its impact on India's solar power capacity and the country's renewable energy goals. While government initiatives aim to mitigate these challenges, further research and action are essential to ensure sustainable and reliable solar energy generation in India.

success, seeking common ground, and honoring commitments.

Willingness for Mutual Prosperity:

- President Xi expresses China's desire to see a prosperous U.S. and encourages the U.S. to view China's development positively, emphasizing mutual prosperity.

Cooperation and Competition:

- China emphasizes cooperation as a two-way street and expresses readiness for healthy competition focused on progress, not a zero-sum game. China opposes the creation of small blocs by the U.S.

Stabilizing Relations:

- President Xi underscores the need for continued active efforts to stabilize and improve China-U.S. relations, following through on the San Francisco vision for mutual stability and progress.

CONCLUSION: President Xi Jinping's call for partnership between China and the United States underscores the importance of fostering cooperation, mutual prosperity, and stability in bilateral relations, urging both nations to prioritize common ground over rivalry for the benefit of global stability and progress.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

China And U.S. Should Be Partners Rather Than Rivals, Xi Tells Blinken

CONTEXT: Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasizes partnership over rivalry with the United States during a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Beijing, stressing cooperation, mutual success, and avoiding harm to each other.



CHINA-U.S. RELATIONS: PROMOTING PARTNERSHIP OVER RIVALRY

Meeting in Beijing:

- Chinese President Xi Jinping met U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Beijing, advocating for partnership between China and the U.S. rather than rivalry.

Lessons from Diplomatic Relations:

- President Xi reflects on the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations, emphasizing the importance of partnership, mutual



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