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SC opposes use of SIR data for non-poll tasks

The top court issues notice to the Election Commission and Bengal government after Congress leader's petition says the State is denying welfare benefits to people excluded from electoral rolls

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court stated on Friday that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is only linked to elections as a petition said the West Bengal government is using SIR data to delete names from schemes ensuring food security, women's welfare and Backward Caste certifications.

Justice Joyimalya Bagchi, one of the three judges on the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said the Supreme Court, in its May 27 judgment in the Bihar SIR case, had made it very clear that the SIR outcome cannot be used for any other purpose, least of all to conclusively determine citizenship.

"The Election Commis-

Key concerns

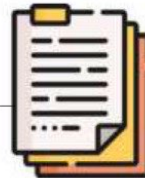
Petition raises issues on Bengal government's use of SIR data

1 Deletion from electoral rolls has led to serious civil consequences

2 SIR data is being linked with PDS and other government schemes

3 Only 38,000 of 34 lakh appeals have been heard so far; at present rate, the appellate process is likely to take nearly 21 years to complete

4 Absence of publicly available guidelines on filing of documents, conduct of hearings and entitlement of excluded electors to file appeals



sion has a corresponding duty to refer the matter to the government for adjudication under the Citizenship Act... Until and unless that is done, for all other purposes, the status must go on. The EC is not a constitutional authority regarding Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12 [dealing with citizenship rights] of the Constitution," Justice Bagchi

observed. The court issued notice to the EC, West Bengal government, and the Chief Electoral Officer of the State on a petition filed by Congress leader Prasenjit Bose that deletion from electoral roll has resulted in serious civil consequences extending beyond the right to vote.

Mr. Bose, represented by senior advocate Gopal

Sankaranarayanan and advocate Neha Rathi, drew the court's attention to three orders passed by the West Bengal government. The petition said the State issued a notification on May 19 that purged voters must not remain beneficiaries of the Annapurna scheme for cash transfer to women unless they had filed appeals before the SIR tribunal.

On June 4, the State directed the deletion of beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS) on the basis of the outcome of the SIR. On May 14, it issued an order calling for authorities to re-verify and cancel caste certificates of names deleted from the SIR list.

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1. Context (GS II – Polity: Election Commission & Electoral Reforms)

- * The Supreme Court issued notice to the Election Commission, the West Bengal Government and the Chief Electoral Officer on a plea alleging that Special Intensive Revision (SIR) data was being used to deny welfare benefits.
- * The Court observed that SIR is meant only for electoral roll revision and not for non-electoral purposes.

2. Basics

- I. **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)**: A comprehensive revision of electoral rolls undertaken by the Election Commission to ensure only eligible voters are enrolled.
- II. **Constitutional Provisions**: Article 324 (powers of the Election Commission) and Article 326 (elections based on adult suffrage).
- III. **Parliamentary Law**: Representation of the People Act, 1950—Sections 21, 22 and 23 deal with preparation, revision, correction and inclusion of names in electoral rolls.

3. Supreme Court's Recent Directions

- I. SIR is strictly an electoral exercise and cannot be used for administrative or welfare purposes.
- II. Deletion of a name from the electoral roll does not automatically result in loss of Indian citizenship.
- III. The Election Commission cannot determine citizenship; only the competent authority under the Citizenship Act, 1955 can do so.
- IV. SIR data cannot be used to deny ration cards, welfare schemes or other civil entitlements.

India's Parliament must not stage its Cadaver Synod

In January 897 CE, Rome witnessed the strangest trial in the history of the Church. Pope Stephen VI ordered the corpse of his predecessor, Pope Formosus, dug up from its grave. Formosus had been dead for about nine months. His body was dressed in papal vestments and propped upon a throne in the Lateran basilica. A trembling deacon stood beside the corpse and answered questions on its behalf. The dead pope was charged with perjury and with violating canon law. He was, unsurprisingly, found guilty. His election was declared void. His acts were annulled. The three fingers of his right hand, the fingers of consecration, were hacked off. The body was then flung into the Tiber.

History remembers this spectacle as the Cadaver Synod. It settled nothing. It disgusted Rome, provoked an insurrection, and Stephen VI himself was imprisoned and strangled within months. Successor popes reburied Formosus with honour and burned the record of the trial. The lesson has endured for centuries. A tribunal that sits in judgment over someone who no longer holds the office it can take away does not do justice. It performs theatre, and the theatre degrades the tribunal more than the accused.

An impossible impeachment

India's Parliament now stands at the edge of its own Cadaver Synod. The Lok Sabha Speaker has announced that the report of the inquiry committee constituted under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, into allegations against Justice Yashwant Varma will be tabled when Parliament reconvenes on July 20. The report was submitted on May 18, 2026. The difficulty is stark. Justice Varma resigned on April 9, with immediate effect, giving up his official residence, vehicles and amenities. His judicial salary has ceased. He has revived his enrolment with the Bar Council and may resume practice as an advocate. Whatever the Allahabad High Court website may say, the man is no longer a judge in any sense that the Constitution recognises. The question before Parliament is whether it should proceed against a judicial corpse.

Begin with first principles. The Constitution treats the conduct of judges as a subject beyond ordinary parliamentary debate. Article 121 forbids any discussion in Parliament of the conduct of a Supreme Court or High Court judge in the discharge of his duties, except upon a motion for an address praying for his removal. The bar is deliberate. The framers knew that a legislature free to debate judicial conduct at will would soon



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hold judges hostage to majorities. So they permitted one exception – and one alone. Parliament may discuss a judge's conduct only when it is actually engaged in the solemn business of removing him. The discussion is incidental to removal. It has no independent existence.

Removal, in turn, presupposes an office to be vacated. Article 124(4), applied to High Court judges through Article 217(b)(b), speaks of a judge being "removed from his office." The Judges (Inquiry) Act creates elaborate machinery, a motion, an inquiry committee, a report, an address to the President, all directed to a single constitutional consequence. The Act knows no lesser penalty. It cannot censure, fine or disqualify. It can only remove. Once the judge has already left, the machinery grinds on with nothing to grip.

A judge is a constitutional functionary

Has Justice Varma left? The Supreme Court answered that question nearly half a century ago. In *Union Of India vs Shri Gopal Chandra Misra And Ors.* (1978), a Constitution Bench held that a High Court judge's resignation under the proviso to Article 217 is a unilateral constitutional act. It requires no acceptance by the President or anyone else. A judge who resigns with immediate effect severs the constitutional link at the moment of his own choosing. A judge is not a government servant whose resignation lies on some desk awaiting orders. He is a constitutional functionary who holds office by the Constitution and may relinquish it by the Constitution. Justice Varma's letter said "with immediate effect". The link snapped on April 9. That his name lingers on a website is an administrative carryover, not a statement of law.

Precedent points the same way. Justice P.D. Dinakaran resigned in 2011 while impeachment proceedings were pending; the inquiry committee was dissolved, and no report reached Parliament. When Justice Soumitra Sen resigned (2011) after the Rajya Sabha had actually adopted the removal motion, the proceedings simply ended. Parliament thereafter never took the matter up. In both cases, the institution understood that resignation extinguishes the removal jurisdiction. The Varma committee, unusually, continued its work after his resignation and submitted a sealed report after his resignation. Tabling that report as a formal record may perhaps be defended as closure of the file, but even that is strictly not necessary. The

Speaker can just inform Parliament that such a report has been received, but no further action is deemed necessary. Before Parliament proceeds further, members must demand that it be advised by the Attorney General, who must be summoned to the House. Anything beyond tabling would take Parliament into realms that no legislature has gone before.

Consider what that territory looks like. If Parliament can proceed to debate and vote upon the removal of a man who is no longer a judge, then the resignation of the judge is no barrier. Neither, logically, is retirement. Nor, indeed, is death. Every safeguard in Article 121 rests on the premise that the discussion serves a live removal. Remove that premise, and a future Parliament could constitute committees against judges who retired a decade earlier, or whose judgments displeased a later majority. It could posthumously arraign a Chief Justice for a verdict delivered in another political era. The special majority requirement would remain, but special majorities have been mustered before and will be again. Judicial independence does not depend on judges being brave on the day of judgment alone. It depends on their knowing that no legislature will hold a synod over their record after they have gone.

Close the file

None of this means that Justice Varma escapes accountability. Impeachment is not punishment. It is the removal of an unfit occupant from a constitutional office, and that purpose stands fully achieved. The office is vacant. If the burnt currency notes found at his residence disclose an offence, the criminal law applies to former judges exactly as it applies to the rest of us. Investigation, prosecution and trial remain open, and are indeed the proper forum for questions of guilt. His pension and terminal benefits raise separate statutory questions that the government may lawfully examine. What Parliament cannot do is dress the corpse in robes and conduct a trial that can end only in removing a man from an office he does not hold.

Rome eventually understood this. Pope Theodore II reinstated the ordinations of Formosus and reburied him with honour in St. Peter's Basilica. Pope John IX condemned the synod and burned its acts. The Church survived Formosus. It nearly did not survive the trial of his corpse. Parliament should table the report, note it, and close the file. Let us not dig up old corpses just for the stink.

Parliament must avoid a purposeless exercise over the Justice Yashwant Varma report

1. Context (GS II – Parliament, Judiciary & Separation of Powers)

* **Core Argument:** Parliament should not continue impeachment proceedings against former Justice Yashwant Varma after his resignation, as impeachment is meant only to remove a sitting judge, not to examine the conduct of someone who no longer holds office.

2. Basics

I. Constitutional Provisions

- * Article 121 – Parliament cannot discuss the conduct of a Supreme Court or High Court judge except on a motion for removal.
- * Article 124(4) – Removal of a Supreme Court judge.
- * Article 124(5) – Parliament may regulate the removal procedure by law.
- * Article 217(1)(b) – A High Court judge may resign by writing to the President.

II. Parliamentary Law

- * Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 – Prescribes the procedure for investigation and removal of judges.

III. Purpose of Impeachment

- * It is not a punishment; its sole objective is to remove a sitting judge on grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

3. Editorial's Key Arguments

- I. Resignation ends the constitutional process of removal, making impeachment infructuous.
- II. Parliament should avoid debating the conduct of a person who is no longer a judge.
- III. Any criminal misconduct, if disclosed, should be dealt with under ordinary criminal law, not through impeachment.
- IV. Continuing impeachment after resignation may undermine judicial independence and set an undesirable constitutional precedent.

Govt. unveils scheme for settlement of provident fund cases

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has launched "Vishwas 2026", a one-time dispute resolution initiative, effective from June 29.

In a statement here on Friday, the Union Labour Ministry said the scheme would facilitate amicable settlement of disputes relating to levy of damages or penalty on employers under Section 14B of the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 and Section 128 of the Code on Social Security, 2020. "The Scheme provides employers with an opportunity to settle eligible cases through a transparent, fully digital and time-bound process," the Ministry said. The government had notified the scheme as part of

the EPF Scheme, 2026. "It will remain operational for a period of six months from the date of notification," it added.

The Ministry said the objective of the scheme was to promote voluntary compliance, reduce litigation, and enable speedy resolution of long-pending disputes relating to penalty/damages while safeguarding the interests of employees.

Under the scheme, damages or penalty for defaults prior to June 14, 2024 would be recalculated at 0.25% per month for defaults up to two months, 0.50% per month for defaults from two to less than four months, and 1% per month for defaults exceeding four months. "These rates are intended to encourage employers to resolve pending disputes expeditiously," it added.

1. **Context (GS II – Welfare Schemes & Labour Reforms)**

* The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has launched Vishwas 2026, a one-time dispute resolution scheme to facilitate faster settlement of pending provident fund penalty and damages cases and promote voluntary compliance.

2. **Vishwas 2026 Scheme**

I. A one-time dispute resolution scheme notified under the EPF Scheme, 2026.

II. Covers disputes relating to damages and penalties under Section 14B of the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 and Section 128 of the Code on Social Security, 2020.

III. Applicable to defaults committed before 14 June 2024 and will remain operational for six months from the date of notification.

IV. Seeks to reduce litigation, ensure speedy settlement of disputes and encourage voluntary compliance through a fully digital and time-bound process.

3. **Basics: Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)**

I. EPFO is a **statutory body under the Ministry of Labour and Employment**.

II. It administers the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.

III. It manages major social security schemes, including the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), and Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) Scheme.

IV. It provides retirement savings, pension and social security benefits to organised sector employees.

Xi pitches China as leader of new global AI order, challenges dominance of US



Chinese President Xi Jinping waves as he arrives at the opening ceremony of the World AI Conference in Shanghai, Friday. REUTERS

Reuters

Shanghai, Beijing, July 17

CHINESE PRESIDENT Xi Jinping on Friday cast Beijing as the champion of a new global AI order, using China's premier tech conference to promote open-source technology and challenge US influence over the rules governing the fast-moving sector.

In a speech to the opening ceremony of the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai, Xi urged countries to seize the "historic opportunity" of open-source AI, and pledged to help developing nations build AI capabilities, warning against the emergence of "new historical injustices" from unequal access to the technology.

The remarks amounted to Xi's clearest articulation yet of China's ambition to shape global AI governance, framing its open-source models as a global public good and positioning Beijing as an alternative to Washington at a pivotal moment in the race for technological leadership.

Comparing AI's significance to the invention of the steam engine and electricity, Xi outlined a vision in which China shares AI technology and expertise with countries across the Global South, while leading global efforts to create standards governing the emerging technology.

The speech pitched China's AI coalition as a rival to the U.S.-led "Pax Silica" international initiative to secure global AI and critical mineral supply chains, though Xi avoided naming

Washington.

Chinese state media has increasingly portrayed Beijing's AI strategy as a response to what it calls a U.S.-led attempt to erect an "AI Iron Curtain."

In a commentary published on Thursday, Yuyuan Tiantian, a prominent social media account affiliated with state broadcaster CCTV, said China was seeking to build "another order" by "pooling the strength of all humanity and all countries to build an open-source, all-factor AI ecosystem."

The WAIC conference underlined the shifting AI landscape, with Chinese open-weight AI models making rapid gains against proprietary systems from U.S. companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic.

Beijing-based startup Moonshot AI on Friday unveiled Kimi K3, which it described as the world's largest open AI model by parameter count, a month after the U.S. government abruptly pulled Anthropic's frontier-class AI models due to security concerns.

Reuters reported earlier this month that Beijing is weighing restrictions on overseas access to some of China's leading AI models, highlighting the growing tension between its promotion of open-source AI and an increasingly stringent national security agenda.

Xi also called for AI systems to remain under human control and urged countries to establish early-warning and emergency-response mechanisms to manage AI risks, in his clearest remarks to date on AI safety.

1. Context (GS II – International Relations | GS III – Artificial Intelligence)

*** At the [World Artificial Intelligence Conference \(WAIC\)](#), President Xi Jinping projected China as a leader of a new global AI order by promoting open-source AI and expanding AI cooperation with the Global South.**

2. China's Long-term Global South AI Governance Initiative

- I. Promote open-source AI as a global public good to reduce dependence on proprietary AI models.**
- II. Build AI capacity in developing countries through technology transfer, training and infrastructure support.**
- III. Ensure greater participation of the Global South in framing international AI rules and standards.**
- IV. Bridge the AI and digital divide by improving equitable access to AI technologies.**
- V. Establish global AI safety mechanisms while keeping AI under human control.**
- VI. Position China as the leading AI partner for the Global South and an alternative to the U.S.-led AI governance model.**

IRAN ATTACKS US ALLIES, DAMAGES POWER AND WATER DESALINATION PLANT IN KUWAIT

Bridges hit, Chabahar port tower falls as US escalates Iran offensive

Associated Press

Dubai, July 17

THE UNITED States expanded its airstrike campaign against Iran early Friday by hitting more bridges, energy sites and collapsing a tower at a key Iranian port, backing up US President Donald Trump's threats to start striking infrastructure to pressure Tehran to ease its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran launched missile attacks against US-allied nations in the West Asia, including Qatar, a mediator in the war, and Kuwait, where a power and water desalination plant — vital infrastructure in the desert nation — was damaged.

The interim ceasefire agreed to last month has collapsed, and the region has endured days of back-and-forth attacks by the US and Iran as they battle for control of the strait.

Iranian officials say recent US strikes have killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds of others, with new casualties reported in Friday's strikes.

The US airstrikes hit bridges overnight into Friday in Iran's southern Hormozgan province, killing at least seven people, Iranian state television reported. The attacks hit Ban-



The damaged portion of a bridge in Bandar Khamir, Hormozgan province of Iran, Friday, REUTERS

dar Khamir, a city on Iran's coast on the Strait of Hormuz.

The highway and railway bridge strikes appeared aimed at cutting off Bandar Abbas, Iran's main port, from roads leading into the Islamic Republic's central region onward to Tehran, the capital.

While other routes still are open, the US strikes could expand further, potentially disrupting both the movement of military materiel and goods

needed for Iran's 90 million people. Iran also acknowledged "attacks on power infrastructure" during the US airstrike campaign for the first time Friday when its Energy Ministry issued a call for people to use less power in southern provinces.

The US military's Central Command said it hit dozens of targets in its latest airstrikes, which concluded at dawn Friday, the sixth night in a row of American attacks.

The strikes also collapsed a tower at Iran's Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman, a key trade route for landlocked, neighbouring Afghanistan, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Chabahar port, which Iran had been running with support from India, has been a repeated target of American airstrikes.

Iran described the tower as overseeing commercial traffic into the port. However, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary

Guard also operates at ports across the country. As of 6 am Friday, the US strikes had killed at least 38 people and wounded more than 400 in Iran, Health Ministry spokesperson Hossein Kermanpour said.

On Friday, Qatar twice warned the public to take shelter as a barrage of Iranian missiles targeted the nation. People heard explosions overhead as air defences fired to intercept the missiles. Qatar's Interior Ministry said falling debris wounded a child.

Iran also targeted Bahrain and Kuwait early Friday. In Kuwait, authorities said Iran attacked a power and water desalination plant, causing widespread damage to the station. About 90 per cent of the country's drinking water comes from desalination.

Kuwait said it extinguished the blaze and was working to assess the damage and get the station working again.

Jordan's military said it intercepted three incoming missiles Friday morning launched by Iran. Explosions also could be heard Friday morning in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region as air defences targeted incoming fire.

Chabahar Port: Key to India's Central Asia and Europe Trade Links





1. Context (GS II – International Relations: West Asia | GS III – Infrastructure & Energy Security)

* The U.S. intensified airstrikes on Iran, targeting key transport and energy infrastructure, while Iran retaliated by attacking U.S. allies in West Asia, escalating the regional conflict.

2. Major Infrastructure Destroyed

- I. Road and railway bridges in **Iran's Hormozgan Province** were struck, disrupting connectivity to **Bandar Abbas, Iran's largest port**.
- II. Power infrastructure was targeted, prompting Iran to appeal for reduced electricity consumption.
- III. The commercial traffic control tower at **Chabahar Port** collapsed due to the strikes, disrupting port operations.
- IV. Iran launched retaliatory missile attacks on Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan, damaging a power and water desalination plant in Kuwait.

3. Chabahar Port: Importance

- I. Located on the Gulf of Oman, outside the Strait of Hormuz.
- II. Provides India with direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.
- III. A **key component of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** and India's regional connectivity strategy.
- IV. The attack raises concerns over regional trade, energy security and India's strategic interests in West Asia.



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