

# Services row: SC to consider listing plea of Delhi govt against central law

## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday told the Delhi government that it would consider listing its plea challenging the central government's law establishing pre-eminence of the lieutenant governor over the elected dispensation in controlling services in the national capital.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices JB Paridivala and Manoj Misra was urged by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the AAP government, that the whole administration has come to a standstill and the matter needed to be heard.

The CJI said presently a nine-judge bench matter is going on and he will consider the submission.

Presently, the nine-judge bench headed by the CJI is hearing petitions raising a vexed legal question whether private properties can be considered "material resources of the community" under Article 39(b) of the Constitution, which is a part of the Directive Principles of State Policy.

Earlier on February 9, the



Delhi government had mentioned the plea for urgent listing before the five-judge Constitution bench. On September 27 last year, the top court had ordered that a common compilation of submissions be filed by both the parties in the petition by the Delhi government.

Prior to this, the CJI-led bench had permitted the Delhi government to amend its petition challenging the central government's ordinance establishing pre-eminence of the lieutenant governor over the elected dispensation in controlling services.

Amending the petition became necessary after the ordinance was replaced by a

law. It had taken note of the submissions of Singhvi that earlier the challenge was directed against the ordinance which later became a law after it was cleared by the two Houses of Parliament and got presidential assent.

Parliament cleared the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill 2023, also known as the Delhi Services Bill, that gave the lieutenant governor sweeping control over service matters. After the president gave her assent, the bill became a law.

The top court had earlier referred to a five-judge

Constitution bench the Delhi government's plea challenging the Centre's May 19 ordinance which took away the control over services from the city dispensation and set off a fresh tussle between the two power centres.

The Centre had on May 19 last year promulgated the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023 to create an authority for transfer and posting of Group-A officers in Delhi.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government termed it a "deception" with the Supreme Court verdict on control of services. The matter is still pending in the Supreme Court.

Before the ordinance was promulgated, a five-judge Constitution bench headed by the Chief Justice, in a unanimous verdict, had sought to put an end to the eight-year-old dispute between the Centre and the Delhi government triggered by a 2015 home ministry notification asserting its control over services, holding the National Capital Territory administration is unlike other union territories and

has been accorded a 'sui generis' (unique) status by the Constitution.

The apex court, in the judgment, had asserted an elected government needs to have control over bureaucrats, failing which the principle of collective responsibility will be adversely affected.

Now, the new law has envisaged a National Capital Civil Service Authority for transfer, posting and disciplinary proceedings against Group-A officers from the Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli (Civil) Services (DANICS) cadre.

The chief minister is one of the three members of the authority, while the other two are bureaucrats. The decisions by the authority are to be taken by a majority and, in the event of a dispute, the matter will be referred to the lieutenant governor whose decision will be final.

Transfer and posting of all officers of the Delhi government were under the executive control of the lieutenant governor before the top court verdict of May 11 last year.

# No violation of model code in Ajit Pawar's 'funds for votes' remarks: Poll officials

## STATE TIMES NEWS

PUNE: The returning officer of Baramati Lok Sabha constituency has filed a report stating that there was no prima facie evidence of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar violating the Model Code of Conduct through his "funds for votes" remarks.

The Sharad Pawar-led NCP(SP) had filed a complaint against Ajit Pawar with the Election Commission of India alleging the violation of the Model Code of Conduct and the Representation of the People Act.

At a poll rally at Indapur in Baramati constituency, Ajit Pawar recently said, "...As far as funds are concerned, we will cooperate to give you as much as you want, but at the same time, the EVM button needs to be pressed in abundance. If the EVM button is pressed in abundance, I will also feel good allocating funds, or else, I will have to restrict myself."

Pawar holds the finance portfolio in the state.

The remarks had drawn criticism from the opposition, with NCP (SP) moving EC seeking action against Ajit



Pawar, who heads the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

Kavita Dwivedi, returning officer of Baramati, said they launched a probe after receiving the complaint and sought Ajit Pawar's response.

Dwivedi confirmed that she has submitted a report to the Chief Election Officer stating that she had gone through the video of Ajit Pawar's speech and there was no violation of the Model Code of Conduct.

"The remarks in the video do not mention the name of a particular candidate for whom votes have been sought. He is heard saying that press the buttons of 'our' machine so that he can allocate the funds. Here the word machine is universal and he is not talking about a particular candidate or his

candidate or party," said Dwivedi.

Speaking to PTI, Pune Collector Suhase Diwase, who is also the District Election Officer, said that the Baramati returning officer in her report had stated that there was no violation of the Model Code of Conduct in this case.

He added that the report was submitted to the Chief Election Officer two days ago.

Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra, an NCP candidate, is locked in a high-profile electoral battle in the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency with her sister-in-law and sitting MP Supriya Sule.

Sharad Pawar's daughter Sule has been nominated by the NCP (SP). Baramati will go to polls in the third phase of the general elections on May 7.

While the NCP is a part of the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance, which also comprises the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, in Maharashtra, NCP (SP) belongs to the opposition coalition Maha Vikas Aghadi. The Congress and Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) are the other constituents of MVA.

# Introduced nearly 11 years ago to enhance transparency, VVPATs back in focus after SC verdict

## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court's decision on Friday rejecting pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) has brought the focus back on the paper trail machines.

To enhance transparency and verifiability in the poll process, the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 were amended in 2013 to introduce the use of VVPAT machines. They were first used in the by-election to the Noksen assembly seat in Nagaland.

At least one ballot unit, one control unit and one VVPAT make up an EVM.

The tentative cost of an EVM comprised Rs 7,900 per ballot unit, Rs 9,800 per control unit and Rs 16,000 per VVPAT.

Since 2019, VVPAT slips from five randomly selected polling stations per assembly constituency (or segment in the case of Lok Sabha seats) are matched with the EVM count for greater transparency. According to EC, so far there has hardly been a mismatch.

As an elector votes for a candidate on the ballot unit, he or she can see a slip with the candidate's party symbol on a small window on the VVPAT unit for seven seconds. The slip then drops into a basket.

As India follows the principle of secret ballot, the voter cannot carry the VVPAT slip home.

The top court on Friday rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a VVPAT.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta delivered two concurring verdicts and dismissed all the pleas in the matter, including those seeking to go back to ballot papers in elections.

The court issued two directives.

Pronouncing his verdict, Justice Khanna directed the Election Commission to seal and store units used to load symbols for 45 days in strong rooms after the symbols have been loaded to the EVMs.

The EVMs used in voting -- called polled EVMs -- and VVPAT slips are kept in strong rooms for 45 days.

Since anyone can file an election petition in a high court challenging an election within 45 days of results, the EVMs and slips are stored for 45 days in case a court calls for election records while entertaining the petition.

The apex court also allowed engineers of the EVM manufacturers to verify the microcontroller of the machines after the declaration of the results at the request of candidates who stood second and third.

Request for the verification of the microcontroller can be made within seven days of declaration of the results after payment of fees, the court said.

"If EVM is found tampered during verification, fees paid by the candidates will be refunded," it said.

The VVPAT, the ballot unit and the control unit are manufactured by two PSUs -- Electronics Corporation of India Ltd and the Bharat Electronics Ltd.

# SBI Card launches SBI Card MILES for Travel Enthusiasts

## STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: SBI Card, India's largest pure-play credit card issuer, has launched three variants of its first travel-focused credit card, 'SBI Card MILES', in Mumbai today. The card is aimed at bringing holistic travel benefits to travellers of all kinds - travel aspirers to frequent fliers to travel aficionados.

SBI Card MILES offers compelling features that include conversion of Travel Credits to Air Miles and Hotel Points, accelerated rewards on EVERY travel booking, and airport lounge access among others.

Empowering cardholders with absolute choice of redemption, the card partners over 20 airline and hotel brands including Air Vistara, Air India, Spicejet, Air France-KLM, Etihad Airways, Air Canada, Thai Airways, Qantas Airways, ITC Hotels, IHG Hotels & Resorts, and Accor among others.

According to Dinesh Kumar Khara, Chairman, State Bank of India, "The strong economic growth and robust consumption landscape has accentuated India's position in the world. Even in travel sector, today, India is considered amongst the key source markets for outbound travel in many countries including those in Asia and Europe. I congratulate SBI Card on the launch of SBI Card MILES, a strong product that will redefine the travel experience for Indian consumers."

It is evident that Indians are increasingly becoming open to more and varied travel experiences. The three variants, SBI Card MILES ELITE, SBI Card MILES PRIME, and SBI Card MILES, have been designed to elevate these experiences through curated travel benefits. Cardholders can earn up



to 6 Travel Credits on every INR 200 travel spend and up to 2 Travel Credits on spending INR 200 on other categories. The offerings under 'SBI Card MILES' bouquet enable cardholders to carry out an easy and seamless Travel Credits redemption across multiple renowned flights and hotel partners. One can convert these Travel Credits into Air Miles/Hotel Points of respective partners or directly use them to book air tickets and hotel accommodations by visiting SBI Card mobile app or website <https://www.sbicard.com/>. Alternatively, one can redeem them on SBI Card's Rewards Catalogue as well.

Speaking at the launch Mr. Abhijit Chakravorty, MD & CEO, SBI Card said, "Our customer-centric approach has always driven us to design innovative products, solutions, and services that address the evolving and diverse lifestyle needs and offer customers an extremely rewarding experience. Indian travellers are large global spenders and naturally, with increased and more robust travel plans, consumers are looking for curated benefits to enhance their travel experiences. SBI Card MILES is our endeavour to offer our customers the best of all the travel benefits. The card has been designed to become one true travel partner for the cardholders. We are sure that our cardholders will enjoy the exclusive benefits offered by our travel-centric core card."

SBI Card MILES ELITE comes with multiple and varied spends milestone benefits. These include up to 5000 Travel Credits on reaching spends of INR 1 lakh in 60 days of enrollment; up to 20,000 Travel Credits on spends milestone of INR 12 lakh; and spends-based fee reversal on reaching spends

milestone of INR 15 lakh. With airport lounge access being an important part of the overall travel experience, SBI Card MILES ELITE offers Priority Pass membership. Using the card, cardholders will be able to enjoy up to 8 complimentary domestic lounge visits and up to 6 international airport lounge visits in a year. What's more, the card also enables users to earn additional domestic lounge access. Every time a cardholder achieves the cumulative spends of INR 1 lakh, cardholders will receive 1 gift voucher for lounge access that can be used by either the cardholder or the guest.

Importantly, SBI Card Miles Elite cardholders will also enjoy a low foreign transaction mark up of 1.99% and travel insurance cover. The card will be available on Mastercard and RuPay network. The joining and annual fees of SBI Card Miles Elite is INR 4,999 plus applicable taxes while SBI Card Miles Prime and SBI Card Miles have a fee of INR 2,999 and INR 1,499 plus applicable taxes respectively.

# 39 file nominations for 4 Odisha LS seats, 266 for 28 assembly segments

## STATE TIMES NEWS

BHUBANESWAR: Thirty-nine candidates have filed nominations for four Lok Sabha seats and 266 nominees submitted papers for 28 assembly segments in Odisha for elections to be held on May 13.

In the first round of simultaneous elections in the state, the polling will take place in Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Koraput and Berhampur Lok Sabha constituencies and the 28 assembly segments under the jurisdiction of these parliamentary seats.

"Thirty-nine candidates have filed 75 nominations for the four Lok Sabha constituencies and 266 others submitted 483 papers for the 28 assembly segments in the first phase of elections in the state on May 13. A candidate submits multiple



nomination papers," an election official said. The Berhampur Lok Sabha seat has witnessed the highest number of nominations at 24, he said.

A maximum of 30 nomination papers have been filed in the Berhampur assembly seg-

ment, while only five such documents filed for Jharigaon under the Nabarangpur Lok Sabha constituency.

Serutiny of papers would be held on Friday, while the last date for withdrawal of nominations is April 29, an ECI notification said.

The Odisha government has declared holidays for its employees on polling days.

Besides May 13, polling for Lok Sabha and assembly seats in the state will be held on May 20, May 25 and June 1.

# ATS arrests six with country-made weapons in Gujarat

## STATE TIMES NEWS

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested an arms supplier from Madhya Pradesh and five others with 25 country-made pistols and 90 cartridges, an official said on Friday.

The action has come weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha election in the state scheduled to take place on May 7.

A preliminary probe has revealed the key accused, Shivam aka Shiva Damor (26), a native of Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district, allegedly procured illegal firearms and sold them to his contacts in Gujarat on commission, the ATS stated in a release.



The ATS recently received a tip-off that Damor would come to Narol bridge in Ahmedabad city on April 25 to deliver firearms and ammunition to one Manoj Chauhan, a resident of Chotila town in

Surendranagar district, it said. ATS teams laid a trap, apprehended the duo, and recovered five pistols and 20 cartridges from Damor, the release said. During interrogation, Damor admitted that he had sold

illegal firearms on commission to interested parties in Gujarat in the last three months, it stated.

According to the ATS, he allegedly travelled to different parts of Gujarat once every four to five days and met people who were interested in buying illegal guns. Based on the information provided by Damor, ATS teams conducted raids in Amreli, Rajkot and Surendranagar districts, apprehending four persons with 20 pistols and 70 cartridges they had purchased from Damor.

The six accused were booked under the Arms Act, and a probe is on to find out the involvement of others in the illegal arms supply, the release said.

# Maruti Suzuki Q4 net profit rises 47.8 pc to Rs 3,877.8 cr



## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The country's largest car maker Maruti Suzuki India on Friday reported a 47.8 per cent rise in net profit for the March quarter of FY24 to Rs 3,877.8 crore, on account of higher sales volume and favourable commodity prices.

The auto major had reported a net profit of Rs

2,623.6 crore in the year-ago period, Maruti Suzuki India said in a regulatory filing.

"For the first time, the company surpassed annual total sales milestone of 2 million units in FY24. The company continued to be the top exporter for the third consecutive year, now contributing 41.8 per cent of total passenger vehicle exports from India," the company stated.

Maruti Suzuki shares were trading at Rs 12,687.05 apiece at the day's close, down 1.7 per cent from its previous close on the BSE.

# Democracy all about striving to build harmony, trust among all its pillars: Justice Datta

## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Democracy is all about striving to build harmony and trust among all its pillars through open dialogue, transparency in processes and continuous improvement of the system by active participation in democratic practices, Supreme Court judge Dipankar Datta said on Friday.

Justice Datta, who was part of the apex court bench which rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), said regressive measures to

revert to paper ballots or any alternative to the EVMs that does not adequately safeguard the interests of Indian citizens have to be eschewed.

Penning his views in a separate judgement while concurring with the opinion of Justice Sanjiv Khanna, who was heading the bench, Justice Datta said the issue of doubting the efficacy of the electronic voting machines (EVMs) has been previously raised before the top court and it is imperative that such issue is concluded definitively now.

"Going forward, unless substantial evidence is pre-

sented against the EVMs, the current system will have to persist with enhancements," he said.

Justice Datta observed that while maintaining a balanced perspective is crucial in evaluating systems or institutions, "blindly distrusting any aspect of the system can breed unwarranted scepticism and impede progress". He said a critical yet constructive approach, guided by evidence and reason, should be followed to make room for meaningful improvements and to ensure the system's credibility and effectiveness

"Be it the citizens, the judiciary, the elected representatives, or even the electoral machinery, democracy is all about striving to build harmony and trust between all its pillars through open dialogue, transparency in processes, and continuous improvement of the system by active participation in democratic practices," he said. Justice Datta said our approach should be guided by evidence and reason to allow space for meaningful improvements.

"By nurturing a culture of trust and collaboration, we can strengthen the foundations of our democ-

ocracy and ensure that the voices and choices of all citizens are valued and respected. With each pillar fortified, our democracy stands robust and resilient," he said.

"I conclude with the hope and trust that the system in vogue shall not fail the electorate and the mandate of the voting public shall be truly reflected in the votes cast and counted," Justice Datta observed.

The top court pronounced its verdict on a batch of petitions, including the one filed by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms,

which also sought a direction to return to the paper ballot system in elections.

The petitions before the apex court had claimed the polling devices can be tinkered with to manipulate the results.

The NGO had sought reversal of the poll panel's 2017 decision to replace the transparent glass on VVPAT machines with an opaque glass through which a voter can see the slip only when the light is on for seven seconds.

The seven-phase Lok Sabha polls began on April 19 and will conclude with the announcement of results on June 4.