

POLITICS OR FRAUD?

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From monarchy to democracy world achieved human rights, from voters to leaders countries elected their representatives, and from palaces to Parliament we built the temple of democracy.

In a democratic country, the biggest right of a citizen is without any doubt right to vote and choose a leader to make the leader sit on the prestigious position of the country from where the country can be governed and citizen can get their rights. But what if the 'election' about what we are talking about is rigged? From Palestine's election in 2021 to Bangladesh's and Pakistan's elections people are witnessing back-to-back issues of unfair and unjust elections and their results.

India in 2024 is at an important phase as Lok Sabha election and it is directly or indirectly associated with the hopes and aspirations of many. India is leading to a stronger strand in the international sphere in 2024 and the upcoming years. Being in this phase and looking after the nations of the world, the Parliamentary general election of India is drawing the attention of many players on the ground.

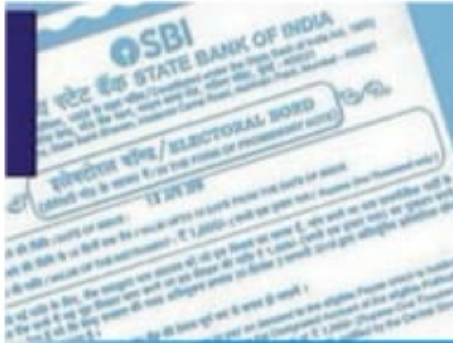


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LOOKING ACROSS WORLD

Recently held elections in Pakistan, we saw several unrests and rigs in the election. The strangest thing was that the number of total valid votes was greater than the total number of votes cast!!! Most of the votes were rejected. Different parties and individually contested leaders were declaring their victory before the results and the army was





the main lead acting differently. All these showed a great danger to fair elections in Pakistan and this unfair election even affected the Karachi stock index and the economic condition of Pakistan.

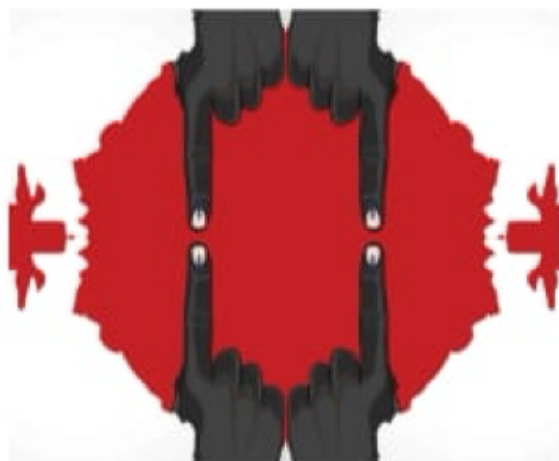
India's neighboring country 'Bangladesh' conducted an election in January. As we always see the election in Bangladesh remains in dispute for the issue of fair election conduction. Either we look at Mujib's victory in 1973 or elections held under Ziaur in 1979, HM Ershad in 1986 and 1988 those held in 1996, 2014, and 2018. The election in Bangladesh held in 2024 saw

severe unrest before the election.

The opposition of the Awami League decided to boycott the election because of unfair elections. They wanted the registration of the Prime Minister 'Sheikh Hasina' and they wanted the election to be conducted under 'Neutral Care Taker' for free and fair election. These protests and unrest all acted as a danger to free elections.

We must not forget what happened in Palestine! The postponed Legislative Assembly election because of several domestic issues and neighboring interruptions has led to huge repercussions. There were also questions on the holding of free and fair elections.

Coming back to India, Mayor election held in Chandigarh on January 2024 has created a controversy and again a question on election and democracy. After the rejection of 8 votes out of 20 of the coalition party of Aam Aadmi Party and Congress and the winning of BJP with 16 votes lead to protests by AAP and Congress on the ground of dishonesty. The controversy of presiding officer was took up by Supreme Court and the Chief Justice of India D.Y Chandrachud said this as defacement of ballot paper. The issue was also stated by Supreme Court as 'Murder of democracy' and 'mockery of democracy.'



2024 INDIA: DEALING WITH THE ASPIRATIONS

The 18th Lok Sabha election which is going to be conducted in 2024 has excited not only Indians but the entire world. India is on its way to self-reliant India or *Viswaguru* or achieving the motive of *Viksit Bharat@2047*. The political strand of India in international spheres is incredible. Following all these the internal Political scenario of India matters the most.

Election in India is a major political event. Part XV of the Constitution deeply deals with the elections. The Election Commission of India is a constitutional authority that looks after the process and proceedings of the election in India. Many times India too faced the questions raised by different political parties about the fairness of election conduction. Although many countries remain confident about the fairness of elections in India.

Scenarios from fraud in EVMs, fake votes, missing voter's names on the list, lure voter practices to money and muscle powers, and freebies have threatened election neutrality.

Another part that plays a vital role in maintaining the public's trust in free and fair elections is 'election security.' Security of election

infrastructure like local government bodies, election officials, voting tools, etc. becomes important when we talk about fair elections. This election security helps in reducing the risk of cyber crimes. The database of voters contains all their confidential details which need to be protected because of various security reasons. Lack of cyber security during elections also gives rise to organized crimes which may involve spreading misinformation about election, disruption of voter's list, international terrorism risk, etc. To reduce the risk of cybercrime, cyber security skills need to be enhanced along with it government and electoral bodies of countries need to enhance their IT system with an increase in vigilance.

Does India need Electoral Bonds?

On 15th February 2024, the Supreme Court declared electoral bonds unconstitutional. Supreme Court ruled that the electoral bond scheme violates the Right To Information under Article 19(1)(a).

Electoral Bonds are promissory notes that can be purchased by anyone from the State Bank of India for funding any political party. These bonds are free of taxes and the main motive to implement the bond scheme was to maintain the transparency in political funding. With the implementation of this scheme, the Ministry of Finance ensured that it would cleanse the system of political funding and some changes in the Companies Act, Income Tax

Act, Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, and Reserve Bank of India Act were made. But the Supreme Court in its judgement stated that the amendments in the Companies Act, Income Tax Act, and Representation of People Act violets civil rights.

Many political parties and individuals earlier in 2017 objected to the transparency of Electoral bonds stating it might lead to an increase in black money and corruption. It was also pointed out that it also might lead to money laundering. Even with the eradication of Electoral Bonds, there would not be much difference in political party financing. The first petition against the electoral bond scheme was filed in 2017 and then again a bench was constituted in 2019. In 2021, ADR extended its will to impose a ban on the Bond scheme. Finally, on 15th February 2024, the Electoral Bond was unconstitutionlised by a bench of five judges headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y Chandrachud.

First Past the Post System :

India follows the First Past the Post System and it is working effectively in India but reforms are needed. It promoted Universal Adult Franchise and Multi-Party System in India. We saw a rise in political corruption over a while. Cases like Political Defection, and coalition politics need to be settled. Although it gives a clear choice to the voters between different parties but smaller parties, minority representation suffers from unfairness.

Need for reforms :

The new generation and modern India have their new demands and with this change in generations, some reforms are needed to cope with it, either in the field of election or politics.

The Law Commission of India has recommended reforms in Report No. 255 to the Union Law and Justice Ministry.

The report suggested reforms in Elections Finance which included limits for the candidates, electoral bonds, etc. Amendments in the 10th schedule of the Constitution for proper measures regarding anti- Defection were also suggested. Reforms on compulsory voting, opinion polls, proportional representation, Regulation of Political Parties, and inner-party democracy. The Commission also recommended amendment of Section 33(7) of RPA, reforms in preparation and use of common electoral Rolls. Several other reforms have also been suggested. The government has also realized the need for reform in the electoral system and this could be done with proper discussions.

CONCLUSION

The world with varying countries and with their varying procedures of electing and governing more than half of the world's nations has to have a democratic form of government. Almost every democratic nation has its own form of elections, but the sole purpose of all forms of elections is to choose the leader with a majority. Recent challenges to free and fair elections which we are witnessing are a danger not only for elections but also for democracy. Democracy is about voting and it's about a majority vote. And it's time that we started exercising the Democratic process" - Debbie Stabenow. From a weak nation to a stronger one all are dealing with the same. Preservation of voting rights became a main challenge for democratic nations. The 2024 election in India is taking its shape from months ago. It should be the main motive of every democratic country to look after their election system and preserve their citizen's rights.

India in the coming years taking its ground for development in every sphere. The election of 2024 no doubt is the hope and despair of many either privileged or underprivileged. From domestic to International modern polity is looking for it. Thus, 2024: A Year of Hope, Despair and Polity.