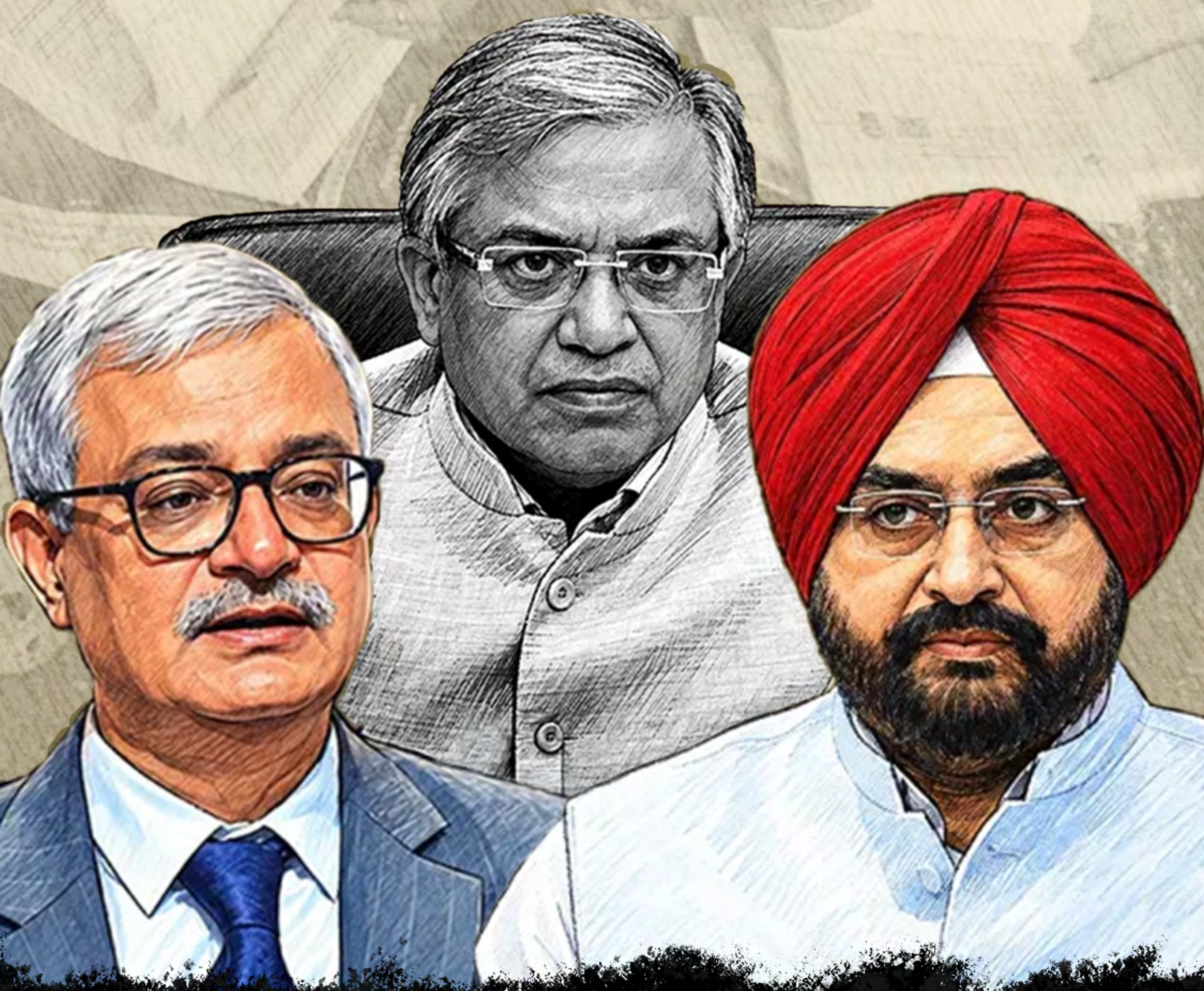


PLUS +



RUPTURE INSIDE ELECTION COMMISSION

— AN EXPRESS INVESTIGATION —

A SPECIAL HANDBOOK



Dear Reader,

Behind every argument about the Special Intensive Revision sits a simpler question: how does a name get onto the voters' list, and who decides?

The law gives that responsibility to an officer in each constituency. Thousands of them, one list at a time. That, the Election Commission has always said, is why the roll can't be rigged.

In this special issue of the Indian Express Plus magazine, we look at that answer from inside the Commission. Two of its three members, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, objected on record 14 times in ten months to decisions they said were taken without them. We follow those objections to the form every new voter fills, to the software that now holds every roll, to the tribunals in West Bengal, and to Goa, where 97 voters cleared by their own officers never got back on the list. And we record the Commission's two responses, three days apart.

We hope you enjoy reading this special issue.

*Ritika Chopra
Resident Editor (Mumbai)*

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14 times in 10 months, two Election Commissioners objected on record to poll panel steps

Ritika Chopra

The Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which began in Bihar in June 2025, an otherwise routine clean-up of the rolls, has struck more than 13 crore names off the draft voter rolls in 30 States and Union Territories. This has put the Election Commission at the centre of intense public debate over its role in deciding who gets to vote – and who doesn't.

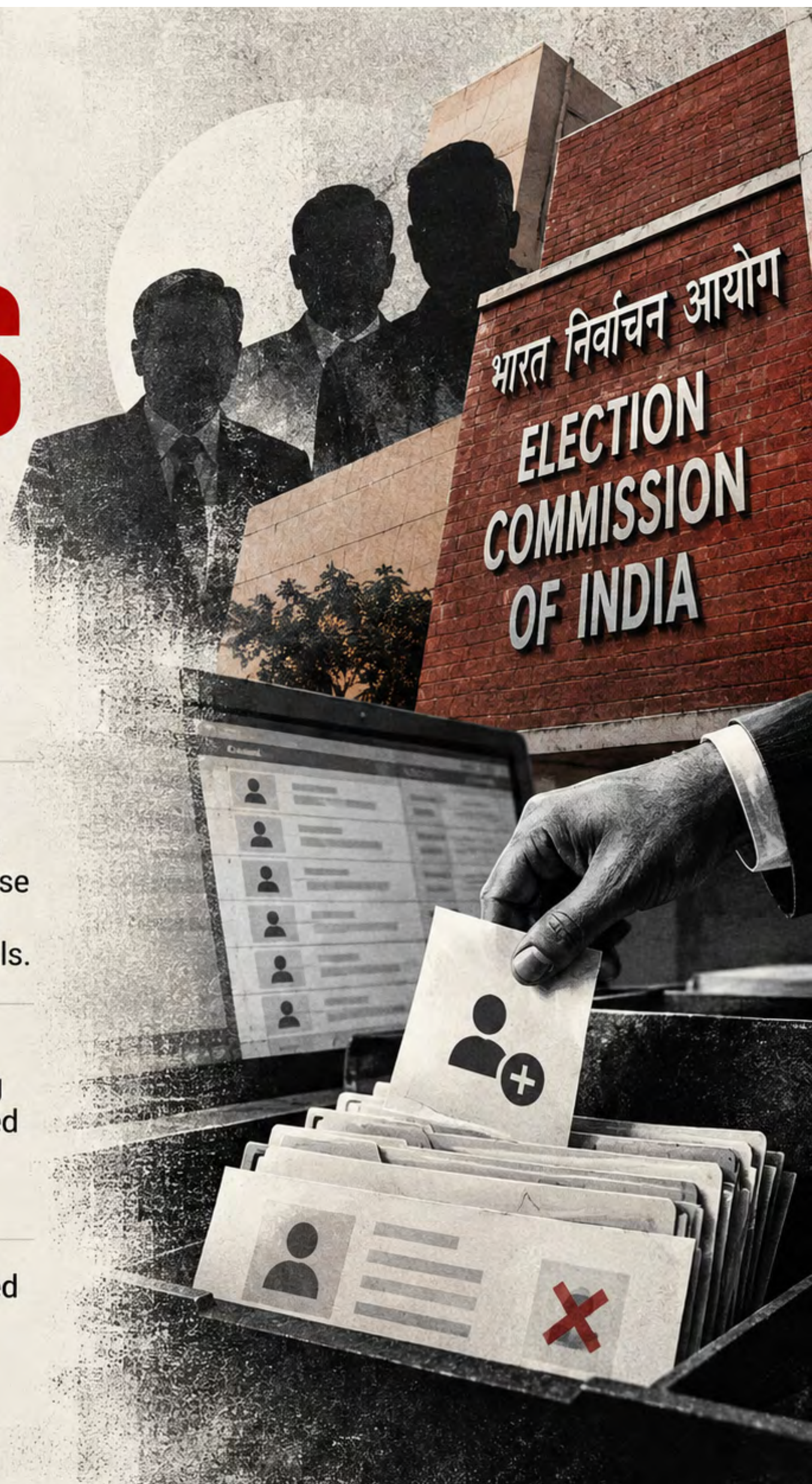
An investigation by The Indian Express reveals that questions were raised on



these very issues within the three-member Election Commission (EC) itself, time and again through much of this same period. By two of the three Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, no less.

WHY THIS MATTERS

-  2 out of 3 Election Commissioners complained about being kept in the dark about various steps, including adding new voters, and deleting names.
-  They called steps on new voters 'unauthorised, illegal'; warned against voter database access being 'centralised' in Delhi, bypassing state officials.
-  On concerns over integrity of voter software, dissenting Commissioners even knocked on the Cabinet Secretary's door.
-  This marks an unprecedented rupture inside the Election Commission and reveals a cloud over its conduct.



The national rollout of the SIR has been under the supervision of all three Commissioners. But Sandhu and Joshi have formally objected, on record, at least 14 times over the last 10 months –



four times on a single day – to decisions taken and orders issued, they say, without their knowledge. The stakes couldn't be higher.

MEET THE TWO ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

SUKHBIR SINGH SANDHU



HE JOINED as Election Commissioner on March 15, 2024. A 1988-batch IAS officer of the Uttarakhand cadre, he served as Chief Secretary of Uttarakhand from July 2021 to January 2024. Prior to that, from 2019 to 2021, he was Chairman of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). In February 2024, he briefly served as Secretary to the Lokpal. He also served as Collector of Haridwar, Gautam Buddha Nagar (NOIDA) and Udham Singh Nagar districts. He was Principal Secretary to four Chief Ministers across three political parties between 2007 and 2014.

Sandhu completed his MBBS from Government Medical College, Amritsar, and has a Master's in History from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. He is also a Law graduate.

VIVEK JOSHI

HE JOINED as an Election Commissioner on February 19, 2025. A 1989-batch IAS officer of the Haryana cadre, he served as Chief Secretary of Haryana. He has also served in the Ministries of Textiles, Women and Child Development, and Finance. In Haryana, he was Deputy Commissioner of Jind, Hisar and Panchkula, and Divisional Commissioner of Ambala. He has been a board member of the Reserve Bank of India and the State Bank of India.

Joshi has a PhD in International Economics from the Graduate Institute, Geneva, and a B.E. in Mechanical Engineering (1987) from Roorkee University, now known as IIT Roorkee.



— DEEPAK TENGURIYA



For, the objections relate to the core of the Election Commission's mandate: new voter registration, deletion and restoration of voters in the rolls; filing of appeals against orders restoring voters in the SIR process; and the custody, and security, of the entire electoral roll itself. All objections related to these were copied to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, too. Some were sent to Deputy Election Commissioners under their watch.

In one such written objection, Sandhu complains that the EC acted against the written advice of two Commissioners and claims its action was “unauthorised and illegal.” Most recently, in a radical departure from the norm, Joshi and Sandhu wrote separately to the Cabinet Secretary complaining about changes in work allocation that, in effect, removed a layer of oversight of the IT backbone for the electoral rolls. They made it clear: these changes had been done without their knowledge and they struck them down.



It was after this, on September 9, that the CEC and the two ECs met, their first full meeting in four months.

The Indian Express has seen each of these exchanges, and interviewed a range of officials in New Delhi, Kolkata, Goa and Mumbai, to reconstruct the extent of the disquiet within, unprecedented in scale and significance within the constitutional authority that is entrusted with the free and fair conduct of the nation's elections.

More so, because all three were handpicked by the NDA government and appointed under the 2023 Act by a selection panel of the Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and the Leader of Opposition. The Opposition member, Congress's Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, recorded a dissent over the appointment process when Sandhu and Gyanesh Kumar were named Election Commissioners in March 2024. LoP Rahul Gandhi, too, recorded his dissent when Kumar was elevated to CEC and Joshi was appointed in February 2025.



TEN MONTHS, 14 NOTES: THE OBJECTIONS ON RECORD

Five of the 14 notes by ECs Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi were copied to Chief Election Commissioner

- 1 OCT 28, 2025 — SANDHU:**
Letters, orders in ECI's name without Commission's approval.
- 2 APR 16, 2026 — SANDHU:**
Getting to know about new IT modules, portals from media.
- 3 APR 16 — SANDHU:**
Official communications issued without Commission's approval.
- 4 APR 16 — JOSHI:**
For over a year, got no agenda before, minutes after, Commission's meetings.
- 5 APR 16 — JOSHI:**
Officers on foreign trips without Commission's approval.
- 6 APR 24 — JOSHI:**
Reiterates no official communications without Commission's approval.
- 7 MAY 16 — JOSHI:**
Don't change Form 6 (new voter) without Govt approval; Sandhu agrees on May 19.
- 8 MAY 29 — JOSHI:**
Warns electoral roll database is being centralised, needs audit; Sandhu endorses on July 13.
- 9 JUL 29 — JOSHI TO CABINET SECRETARY:**
Official redistributing work without knowledge.
- 10 JUL 29 — SANDHU TO CABINET SECRETARY:**
Reiterates work roster issue, seeks action against official.
- 11 JUL 30:**
Joshi and Sandhu strike down new allocation order.
- 12 AUG 12 — SANDHU:**
Who authorised appeals on EC's behalf were West Bengal's tribunals?
- 13 AUG 13 — SANDHU:**
Form-6 change is 'unauthorised and illegal'.
- 14 AUG 14 — SANDHU:**
Field officers can't access ECI Net system. DG(IT) has no power to restrict.



On September 21, The Indian Express sent a questionnaire to the Commission on the issues flagged by the two Election Commissioners, asking what was done to address their concerns. There was no response. Both the ECs were also sent emails on September 21, asking them whether their concerns were addressed. Both the emails also sought responses on whether these issues were flagged during the September 9 meeting. Both emails were followed up by phone calls on September 21 and 22. There was no response.

1. Who's a “new voter”, why was Form-6 changed?

In July this year, as first reported by The Indian Express, a form that every adult citizen has to fill to become a voter started asking a question it never did earlier. Linking the application to the SIR, it asked if the new voter or their parents/ grandparents “exist” in the “electoral roll of last SIR.” Applicants could not proceed without answering it. This despite the fact that in May, Joshi

had warned on file that Form 6 could not be changed in this manner without the government amending the rules, and Sandhu had agreed. The change was made anyway.

After The Indian Express first reported this change in July, Sandhu put on record on August 13 that it was “unauthorised and illegal” and “must be removed immediately”. Until Monday morning, that question was still there.

2. Who should have access to the electoral roll?

The Commission’s strongest defence against every political allegation on electoral roll rigging has been that the roll preparation is decentralised. Each constituency’s voters’ list is prepared and controlled by its Electoral Registration Officer, a statutory authority on the ground. Usually, the ERO is the Sub-Divisional Magistrate. This list sits on a software, ERONet, and its successor ECINet. Over the past year, the two Commissioners have repeatedly

questioned whether EROs' access to this list is now being restricted.

This was what Joshi red-flagged in May this year — the SIR was gathering pace across states — as “gradual centralisation of the electoral roll database” and proposed an audit to certify that “no one, except the concerned statutory authorities, has credentials to make any change in the (voter) database.”

In August, Sandhu reiterated this. He recorded that state-level election officials were reporting they “don’t have proper and complete access” to the ERONet portal, the digital system through which they maintain the electoral roll. He flagged that the Election Commission’s Director General of IT Seema Khanna “doesn’t have any legal authority to restrict proper and complete access and freedom to operate, as given by law, to the statutory authorities.”

The defence the Election Commission



has relied on for decades, the two ECs were saying, is being dismantled from inside its own IT division.

3. West Bengal: who authorised the appeals?

The SIR was the most deeply contested in West Bengal. There was no evidence of its role in the election outcome. Of the 294 seats that went to polls, in 49, the SIR deletions exceeded the victory margin. But in these, the spoils were almost evenly shared — 26 were won by BJP and 21 by TMC. But the manner in which names were struck off prompted the Supreme Court, in February 2026, to take the last leg of the SIR out of the Commission's hands and get judicial officers to decide on the plight of 60 lakh voters flagged for “logical discrepancies.” Of these, 27 lakh electors were subsequently deleted by the Commission. The court then ordered tribunals of retired High Court judges to hear appeals against those decisions.

Last week, the Commission told the



court that there were 38 lakh appeals pending before the tribunals: 22.21 lakh filed by deleted voters seeking to be restored. The other 16.10 lakh were filed against voters the judicial officers had included, seeking their deletion. The Commission did not say who filed those. This was the issue flagged by Sandhu — about the Commission appealing against voters whom judicial officers had included.

In August, he wrote to Commission officials asking, “Who was authorised to file these appeals on behalf of ECI, and by whom?” and “Who actually filed these appeals on behalf of ECI?” He recorded that neither he nor Joshi nor the current Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal had been informed about the basis or process of filing the appeals.

4. Goa: why did the software reject eligible voters?

The same centralisation, which Joshi and Sandhu had flagged repeatedly, ended up disenfranchising potential voters



in Goa. On January 29, the Supreme Court ordered that voters flagged for “logical discrepancies” during the SIR be allowed to submit documents and be heard before the final roll was published. A “logical discrepancy” is a mismatch the software throws up when it tries to link a voter to a parent or relative on an older roll: a name that doesn’t match, an age gap that doesn’t add up.

Goa’s EROs heard these cases. On the documents produced, they found 97 voters eligible for the final roll. The software had no way to record that decision.

Between February 11 and 17, the office of Goa’s Chief Electoral Officer wrote eight times to Gyanesh Bharti, the Senior Deputy Election Commissioner in charge of the state, copying Director General of IT Seema Khanna every time, asking for the rollback option that would let EROs reverse the earlier deletions as the Supreme Court had directed. The requests went unanswered as the deadline for publication of the final

electoral roll approached. The provision was not enabled in time. The 97 were left off the final voters' roll in Goa. Ninety seven voters is a small number, however this goes far beyond 97 — it is the Election Commission of India's job to ensure that every valid vote gets counted.

Objections within: what the law requires

The Commission is a constitutional body under Article 324, made up of the Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners who are equal in rank. The CEC is first among equals. He does not have the power to decide alone.

Under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, all business of the Commission, says Section 18, “shall, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously”. If the CEC and the Election Commissioners “differ in opinion on any matter”, the

matter “shall be decided according to the opinion of the majority.” The same section allows the Commission to settle its own procedure and the division of its work, but only “by unanimous decision”. Indeed, both Commissioners invoked these provisions in their notes to remind the Commission’s officers how it is meant to work. On April 16, Sandhu told the Commission’s senior officers that “many communications go out in the name of the ECI but they do not have the approval of the Commission”, and that from then on every communication must have it, “as per the provisions of 2023 Act”.

Eight days later, Joshi told the same officers that “several communications are disseminated in the name of the ECI without the requisite approval of ‘the Commission’,” and that all future communications must have that approval, “in accordance with the provisions of Article 324 of the Constitution” and the Act.



What Election Commission rift **reveals**

Ritika Chopra

There has been dissent within the Election Commission earlier but never before have two Election Commissioners put on record objections that touch the heart of the electoral process itself: new voters, deleting names, the IT system that secures the entire voters' list.

1. Concentration of powers: You may be legally entitled to vote but now you may hit the “system hurdle”. Your Electoral Registration Officer may not be able to ensure your right. That’s what happened in Goa where 97 people met

the ERO's requirements. They produced their documents, the ERO found them eligible but the software, controlled from EC headquarters in Delhi, didn't allow the ERO's decisions to be recorded. A voter can be eligible, prove it, be found eligible by the officer the law appoints, and still not be on the roll when the day comes, because the roll is a centrally controlled system that cut the ERO out.

2. SIR shadow over next generation:

The change to Form-6 to which the ECs have objected asks new voters to mention if their parents, grandparents are on the roll of the last SIR. A parent's deletion, in a deeply contested SIR, and what course it takes — appeal or adjudication — will now hang over their child. A critical form that decides who a new voter is was changed without the Government amending the rules as the law requires.

3. Erosion of safeguards:

Decentralisation within the EC was itself its strongest safeguard. For decades, the Commission has answered charges

of rigging the electoral roll with the same basic argument: no one person or team controls the list. Thousands of statutory officers do, constituency by constituency. That safeguard, the two ECs have complained, is weakened when control over the digital system is centralised. A team in Delhi can now stall, override or cancel what ground-level officials do.

4. Checks and balances crumble: The ECI is a three-member constitutional body. Its law provides that business should, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously and, where members differ, by majority. Yet Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi repeatedly recorded that they had not been consulted or informed about decisions taken in the Commission's name.

5. Violating the EC's mandate: There has been dissent within the Commission earlier but this one is very different. In January 2009, CEC N Gopalaswami, who was appointed as an EC by the

Vajpayee government and later became the CEC, wrote to the President recommending that EC Navin Chawla be removed alleging partisan conduct. The Manmohan Singh government rejected the recommendation on March 1, 2009, and Chawla succeeded Gopalaswami as CEC that April.

In May 2019, days before the last phase of the Lok Sabha election, Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa wrote to CEC Sunil Arora that he would stop attending Commission meetings on Model Code of Conduct complaints until his minority decisions are recorded in the final orders. He had disagreed with the majority's clean chits to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then BJP president Amit Shah. Arora said the three members were “not expected to be templates or clones of each other”.

On May 21, 2019, the full Commission met and decided, 2-1, that dissents would be recorded in the file but not in the orders. Lavasa left EC the following year, before his turn as CEC, for the

Asian Development Bank.

Both Arora and Lavasa were appointed by the NDA governments.

In both the Chawla and the Lavasa cases, the dissent was around a specific issue flagged by an individual.

This time, however, two Commissioners who make up the majority are not dissenting on decisions they have been overruled on. They are putting on record that decisions were taken, orders issued and cases filed and they are in the dark. Clearly, the Commission, that the 2023 Act requires to act “as far as possible, unanimously”, has not.



Election Commissioners objected to **Form 6 change**

Ritika Chopra

The change is “illegal,” “unauthorised,” it needs to be sent to the Government...it must be removed immediately so that young, first-time voters are not harassed. The warning by the two Election Commissioners couldn’t have been clearer — and yet it was ignored.

The change brought questions related to SIR into Form 6, the form new voters have to fill. It asked applicants to choose one of three statements: whether their name appeared in electoral roll



during the last SIR held in the early 2000s, whether the name of a parent or grandparent appeared in that roll, or whether neither their name nor that of their parents appeared in it.

The section itself was not marked mandatory, but applicants could not proceed to submit the form without answering it.

Internal records investigated by The Indian Express show this declaration was added despite two of the Commission's three members recording in May that it could not be done without amending the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, notified by the Centre after consultation with the Election Commission.

2 Commissioners, 1 warning

On May 16, responding to the proposal to change Form 6 through the SIR framework, Election Commissioner Vivek Joshi recorded his objections. The SIR, he noted, was being

conducted under Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 — the provision that lets the Commission order a special revision of the roll — “as one time measure and exception”.

The forms prescribed for the SIR were specific to that exercise and were non-statutory, or not part of law, he wrote. Form 6 and Form 8 (for making changes and corrections): they are “prescribed statutorily” and “cannot be altered without making amendments in the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960”. Joshi specifically rejected the idea that a sentence in an SIR order or guideline could change a form fixed by law.

His conclusion was that the “best and legally sustainable course of action” would be to send the proposal to the Government for changes to the rules. He also proposed that a draft of the changes to Form 6 and Form 8 be put before the Commission immediately. On May 19, his colleague on the panel Sukhbir Singh Sandhu concurred with Joshi on file.

On July 12, The Indian Express first reported on the new declaration in Form 6 on the Commission's ECINet portal. On August 13, referring to The Indian Express report, Sandhu wrote to the Deputy Election Commissioner and the Director General in charge of IT, with Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and Joshi copied on the note.

Sandhu recalled Joshi's May 16 note, with which he had agreed, that Form 6 was a statutory form embedded in the rules and could not be changed without approval from the competent authority — meaning, the Government.

“In spite of these very clear views expressed by two Election Commissioners,” Sandhu wrote, the “unauthorised/ illegal changes in Form-6 on the portal” had not been removed and the original form had not been restored. The changes “must be removed immediately so that young and would-be first time voters, who are otherwise eligible, can register themselves as voters as per law, without

any harassment”, he wrote.

What the addition means

The right to vote belongs to the individual: a person qualifies by age, citizenship and residence, not by whether their parents made it through the last revision. And, in a deeply contested SIR where over 13 crore people have already been dropped from the list, inserting such a question puts a shadow on their children as well.

Indeed, the new question on Form 6 mattered most to new voters whose parents or grandparents did not figure in the rolls prepared after the last SIR. An 18-year-old in such a family could not truthfully choose either of the first two options, and the form did not explain what would happen if they chose the third.

It also assumes significance because there is already a clear route for changing Form 6. In 2021, Parliament amended the Representation of



the People Act, 1950 to allow the Commission to collect Aadhaar numbers from voters.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 

01 Two Election Commissioners labelled changes to Form 6 **“illegal” and “unauthorised,”** warning of voter harassment.
- 

02 Form 6 was altered to ask new voters about their **parents’ or grandparents’ appearance** in the 2000 electoral roll.
- 

03 While marked **non-mandatory**, the form **could not be submitted** without answering this specific declaration.
- 

04 ECs Joshi and Sandhu argued in May that statutory forms **cannot be altered without amending the 1960 Rules.**
- 

05 The Commission was advised to **seek Government approval** for rule changes, but the illegal form remained online.
- 

06 The change **disproportionately impacts new voters** whose families were dropped during the 2000 SIR process.
- 

07 Past amendments, such as **Aadhaar collection**, followed legal procedure via Law Ministry notification.
- 

08 Commissioner Sandhu demanded **immediate removal** of the unauthorised changes to prevent voter disenfranchisement.

That change to Form 6 was not made by the Commission itself: on June 17, 2022, the Law Ministry’s Legislative Department notified the corresponding changes to the Registration of Electors Rules and Form 6. It was against this legal framework that the proposed SIR-linked change to Form 6 came before the Commission this year.



Election Commissioners knocked on Cabinet Secretary's door over voter software integrity

Ritika Chopra and Damini Nath

The promise was sweeping.

On January 22, the Election Commission of India (ECI) launched ECINet, the tech backbone for almost a billion voters, bringing more than 40 of its apps and portals under one roof. It was built in strict accordance with the law, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said. It would “enhance transparency, credibility and public trust”, said Seema Khanna, the Director General of IT in the Commission.

Within months, this very platform the CEC and his DG(IT) had called lawful and trustworthy was unravelling — state officers, prescribed by law to add or delete names and update records, were finding themselves shut out of the system, their access restricted by Khanna’s team in New Delhi.

This was a potential blow to the integrity of the elections itself.

It prompted the two Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi to raise red flags about the “gradual centralisation of the electoral roll database” and warn that ECINet was restricting the powers of officers on the ground who were responsible for preparing and finalising the roll.

On three occasions, they copied their notes to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

When a new officer was put in charge of the EC’s administration division in Delhi and issued a work allocation order that

threatened to further concentrate these powers, the two ECs separately wrote to the country's top bureaucrat, Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan.

In effect, the two ECs were flagging a violation of the law.

The Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, assign responsibility for the electoral roll to the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), one for each Assembly seat. An ERO is usually the sub-divisional magistrate or an officer of equivalent rank in the district administration. The ERO prepares the voters' list, hears claims and objections and decides which names will stay — and which get deleted.

This is a deliberately decentralised system. For decades, the ECI has leaned on that design to answer political allegations of mass manipulation of electoral rolls. No single person is supposed to control the voters' list.

On paper, the ERO still decides every name on the list. In practice, for at least the past 10 months, this has been tested in state after state. There are many cases where the ERO has not been able to do what the software allows: add a name, delete one, reverse a decision or process an appeal. What the software allows is controlled centrally by Khanna's division in New Delhi.

Over ten months, from November to August, the two Commissioners said so repeatedly and in writing:

November 4, 2025: The concerns did not begin with ECINet. Its predecessor, ERONet, the roll-management system that ECINet has since subsumed, was already being used to manage the electoral roll, while new modules were being rolled out for the Special Intensive Revision. By November 2025, months before ECINet was launched, there were already warnings inside the Commission that the IT system (ERONet then) must not restrict the statutory powers of EROs.

On November 4, 2025, acting on Sandhu’s directions, Deputy Election Commissioner Sanjay Kumar wrote to Khanna and senior Commission officers that “statutory functions of ERO, DEO and CEO (were) to be strictly exercised by them and no one else” and that “IT systems must be in strict compliance with the law, without any exception.”

January 2, 2026: With the SIR underway in 12 states and UTs, and the IT division putting EROs onto a new module for issuing notices and holding hearings, Sanjay Kumar wrote to Khanna, asking her to “ensure that IT system is made in a manner that ERO’s discretion to act in any manner is not restricted”. Twenty days later, the Commission launched ECINet.

April 16: Sandhu recorded that the IT division “has developed many new modules and portals in the last few months” without any being brought to his knowledge or presented to the Commission. “I have come to know about new developments from media

only,” he wrote. He asked that Khanna be directed to keep all members of the Commission briefed and obtain “all necessary approvals” before undertaking any activity.

May 29: Joshi wrote to the CEC, Sandhu and Sanjay Kumar of “the gradual centralisation of the electoral roll database” and proposed an audit, with an outside expert from the IITs, to certify that “no one, except the concerned statutory authorities, has credentials to make any change in the (voter) database”.

Joshi proposed two checks. One committee would periodically review the systems and certify that only the statutory authorities had the credentials to change the voter database. A second committee would check whether ECINet complied with the law and ensure that any policy or procedural changes to ERONet and ECINet were brought before the Commission. The aim, Joshi wrote, was to create an “internal auditing mechanism” that could also help the

Commission answer the allegations against it that centralisation had invited.

July 13: Sandhu endorsed the proposal, writing that it would “improve the system” and should be put before the Commission. A month later, on August 14, Sandhu recorded the outcome. “Any action taken on these two notes of two Election Commissioners is not known to the undersigned.”

July 28: The tensions within ECI over the functioning of the IT division came to a head in late July, when an established layer of oversight over the IT division was removed.

Until then, senior IAS officer Sanjay Kumar, who was serving as Deputy Election Commissioner in New Delhi, was responsible for overseeing the IT division’s work and routing its files to the three-member Commission.

On July 28, Maneesh Garg, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner in

the ECI, was given additional charge of administration while the regular officer was on leave. Within hours, Garg changed the work allocation without consulting the Commission, removing Sanjay Kumar from the oversight of DG IT.

For Sandhu and Joshi, that chain was the oversight they had been asking for. It was through it that they had sought briefings on the IT division's work and proposed an audit of the system. Garg's order removed it.

July 29: In a move without precedent, the two Commissioners each wrote separately to the Cabinet Secretary reporting the above order and calling it a “clear violation” of the law that governs the Commission and asking for “appropriate action” against Garg.

July 30: A day after writing to the Cabinet Secretary, Sandhu and Joshi jointly set Garg's order aside. They said the changes he made were “without any reason and justification”. They



directed the previous work allocation to continue until the Commission reached a consensus on any change. The note went to Garg and was also copied to the CEC.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 01



ECINet, launched as a tech backbone for voters, is facing allegations of **centralising electoral roll control**.
- 02



Election Commissioners **Sukhbir Singh Sandhu** and **Vivek Joshi** warn that ECINet undermines statutory officer powers.
- 03



The Representation of the People Act requires **decentralised electoral roll management**, which ECINet reportedly violates.
- 04



The ECs allege the DG(IT) division is **restricting access for EROs**, effectively centralising control in New Delhi.
- 05



Commissioners repeatedly flagged concerns about **software modules developed without approval** since November 2025.
- 06



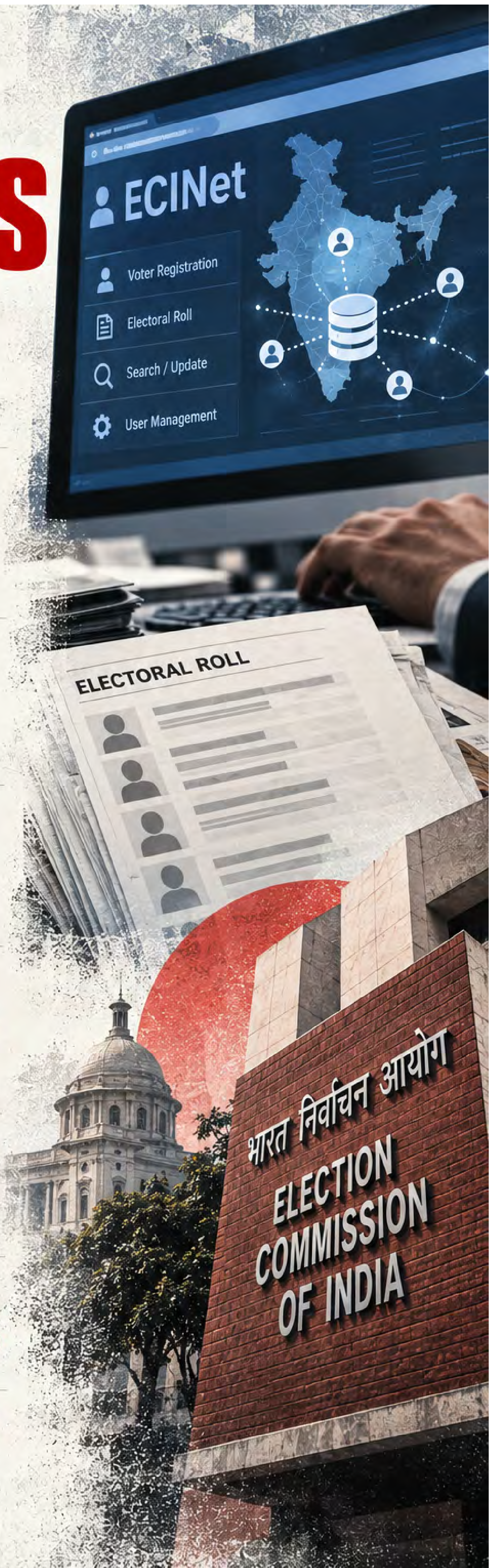
Proposals for an **independent audit by IIT experts** to ensure legal compliance were ignored by the CEC.
- 07



In an unprecedented move, the ECs **reported an internal administrative order violation to the Cabinet Secretary**.
- 08



Sandhu and Joshi **overruled a July 28 order** that reduced oversight of the IT division, calling it unjustified.



August 14: Sandhu then put on record his most detailed concern about the IT system and the electoral roll. CEOs, DEOs and EROs are the statutory authorities responsible for the electoral roll, he wrote. But many had told him they did not have “proper and complete access” to ERONet and were therefore unable to perform their statutory duties properly. Their powers, he said, had been “curtailed by centralised control of ERONet at DG(IT) level”.

“It is strange,” Sandhu wrote, that responsibility for the electoral roll lay with these statutory authorities while “access control has been centralised by DG(IT)”. The DG(IT), he wrote, “doesn’t have any legal authority to restrict proper and complete access and freedom to operate, as given by law”.

Sandhu directed full access “be given immediately”. He also asked the DG (IT) to certify, based on confirmations from all CEOs, that statutory authorities across states and Union Territories had full access to ERONet and could perform their duties without restrictions.



‘Differing views’ part of ‘decision-making’, says EC, does not address concerns two ECs red-flagged

Ritika Chopra

RESPONDING to The Indian Express investigation that two of its three Commissioners had objected on record at least 14 times in 10 months to decisions taken without their knowledge and glaring gaps in processes, the Election Commission of India (ECI) acknowledged these notes but described them as part of the panel’s “decision-making process”. However, it did not respond to any of the concerns raised by the two Commissioners, nor did it state

whether or how these concerns had been addressed.

“Differing views and observations are a normal part of deliberation in any institution,” the Commission said in a press note signed by Deputy Director P Pawan. “They are a part of the decision-making process before a final decision is taken.” The “written notes, observations, technical suggestions and internal checks-and-balances” by its members, it said, were “standard, ongoing practices”, and “the suggestions given by the Commissioners were for further improving the electoral processes”.

In recent months, the note said, the Commission “has taken numerous decisions, issued instructions, introduced around 40 new initiatives and undertaken many electoral reforms including the conduct of Electoral roll revision (including SIR) across the country. All these decisions are an outcome of the unanimous decisions of the full Commission in the past one year.”



It said that highlighting “certain specific internal notes/observations spread over the period of 10 months while overlooking the much larger body of approvals, decisions, instructions and initiatives give only one part of the picture”.

It added that “not only the three Commissioners, but every officer of the Commission is fully authorized to give his suggestions to the Commission for improving the electoral system.”

However, the statement did not say who approved the controversial change to Form 6, why was no action taken even after the Commissioners had warned that it was “illegal. Or, who authorised the lakhs of appeals filed on behalf of the ECI against restored voters in West Bengal, why the two Commissioners’ proposal for an audit of ECINet went unanswered, or why the full Commission did not meet between May and August.

Incidentally, it did not respond to the questionnaire sent by The Indian



Express on September 21.

On the electoral-roll software, the Commission said its digital platforms “operate under strict data security protocols to prevent unauthorized tampering” and that Electoral Registration Officers and District Election Officers “function as per statutory powers for registration and deletion under law”.

Election Commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu’s August 14 note, however, recorded that officers were reporting they “don’t have proper and complete access to the ERONet portal,” and that the Director General of IT “doesn’t have any legal authority to restrict” them.

The Commission’s assertion that decisions were unanimous leaves unanswered how the objections recorded by the two Commissioners fit into that process.

One example is Form 6. On May 16, Election Commissioner Vivek Joshi

recorded on file that the form “cannot be altered without making amendments in the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960” and advised sending the proposal to the Government. Sandhu concurred on May 19.

In July, the SIR declaration appeared on the online form anyway. Sandhu learnt of it from The Indian Express’s July 12 report. On August 13, he wrote that the change had been made “in spite of these very clear views expressed by two Election Commissioners,” called it “unauthorised/illegal” and directed that it “must be removed immediately”. As of Tuesday, the question remained on the form.

A second example is the work-allocation order of July 28. It was issued within hours of a Senior Deputy Election Commissioner being given temporary charge of the Administration Division and changed, in the two Commissioners’ words, the allocation “especially with regard to IT/ICT”.

Joshi wrote that it was issued “without discussing or informing the revised allocation of work with the Commission or the undersigned”. When he asked for the file, he wrote, “it was not provided”.

On July 29, both Commissioners wrote separately to the Cabinet Secretary, calling the order a “clear violation of Section 18(1) and 18(2)” of the 2023 Act and seeking action against the officer. On July 30, they jointly set aside the new allocation.

The Commission’s press note does not mention the order, the two letters to the Cabinet Secretary or the subsequent reversal.

The Express investigation, was based on internal notes and letters from October 2025 to August 2026 in which Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi recorded that a statutory voter registration form was changed against their written advice, that control of the electoral roll software had been centralised in the Commission’s IT



division over their objections, that lakhs of appeals had been filed in West Bengal without their knowledge of who authorised them, and that a work-allocation order had been issued without the Commission's approval, prompting both to write to the Cabinet Secretary. Their most serious notes were copied to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.



8 emails in 7 days, but valid Goa voters still left out

Ritika Chopra

Ninety-seven voters may not matter in the world's largest democracy of over 900 million voters, but this story from Goa has national significance.

The Indian Express reported that two Election Commissioners in the three-member Election Commission of India objected on record 14 times in 10 months to steps taken by the ECI under Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar — from keeping them in the dark to adding new voters and deleting names.

What the two Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, primarily warned against — the centralisation of ECINet and cutting out state ground-level officials — has played out in Goa, and its trail is recorded.

On February 17, four days before Goa was due to publish its final electoral roll under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), the state's Chief Electoral Officer wrote to the ECI in Delhi. This was his eighth time in seven days. Attached was a list of 97 voters whom Goa's own Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) had heard, examined and found eligible under a process laid down by the Supreme Court.

The earlier decisions to strike them off “have to be reversed,” the email said. But the EROs could not reverse those decisions through the software (ECINet). Reason: the permission to do so was controlled from Delhi.

The next day, the Commission's own Deputy Election Commissioner wrote to the Director General of IT, Seema



Khanna, “IT system cannot block necessary action as per the directions of SC. Please facilitate the desired action to publish... as per the decision taken by EROS/AEROs and conveyed to you in these emails.”

On February 21, the final roll was published. The Indian Express checked all 97 names against it. Until September 20, all 97 are still missing.

When asked why several voters remained missing from the final SIR roll despite being found eligible, Goa Chief Electoral Officer Sanjay Goel told The Indian Express, “We apprised the ECI about the cases to be included wherein voters were flagged for logical discrepancies.”

He added, “The call (to not include) was theirs. But there has to be some mechanism (in ECINET) to re-include voters at the ERO level.”

Proof of the pudding

The 97 are a case study in what the two Election Commissioners have spent the

past year warning about.

By law, the electoral roll of each Assembly constituency is prepared by its ERO, usually the sub-divisional magistrate, who hears every claim and objection and decides every name. Since January, every electoral roll in the country has sat on ECINet, the platform the Commission launched to bring its systems together, and its roll-management module, ERONet. What an ERO can do on it is decided by permissions set in the Commission's IT division in Delhi.

An investigation by The Indian Express into the working of the Election Commission over the past year has found that Election Commissioners Sandhu and Joshi recorded, in notes from November to August, that the centralised control of the software was taking the roll out of the EROs' hands, where the law puts it. Joshi wrote in May of "the gradual centralisation" of the electoral roll database.

Sandhu wrote in August that EROs,



DEOs and CEOs “don’t have proper and complete access to the ERONet portal”, and that “DG(IT) doesn’t have any legal authority to restrict proper and complete access and freedom to operate, as given by law, to the statutory authorities”.

When ERO’s decision doesn’t count

The Election Commission’s answer to every allegation of a rigged roll has been that no one person can touch it: thousands of EROs prepare it, constituency by constituency. Goa shows what happens when that stops being true.

In Goa, the ERO heard the voter, saw the document and decided in their favour, and it made no difference, because the system that records the roll answers to a division in Delhi, and the division did not act even when the Commission’s own Deputy Election Commissioner told it to.

The Indian Express sent a questionnaire

to Seema Khanna, who heads the division as EC's DG IT, asking why the rollback facility was not enabled for Goa before the final roll. There was no response.

What the SC ordered, and what Goa did

A “logical discrepancy” is not a finding that someone is not a voter.

It is a mismatch the Election Commission's software throws up when it tries to link an elector to a parent or grandparent on the roll from the last SIR, such as a parent's name that doesn't match, an age gap between parent and child of under 15 or over 50 years, an age that doesn't progress correctly between the old roll and new, or a case where the elector submitted no document, or only Aadhaar.

On January 29, in the SIR batch of petitions, a Supreme Court bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi ordered that

the names of those flagged for logical discrepancies be displayed at gram panchayat bhavans, public places, taluka and sub-division offices and urban ward offices, with “the brief reason of discrepancy” — and that those affected be allowed ten days to submit documents or objections and be heard.

The order was about Tamil Nadu, but the court said it expected the Election Commission to “ensure compliance with these procedural directions in all the States wherever the SIR process is ongoing”. On January 31, the Commission issued a letter to implement it.

Goa did. The lists went up. According to the CEO’s emails, 649 electors came forward with documents or objections. EROs and Assistant EROs examined them. In 97 cases they concluded that the elector had, in the CEO’s words, “become eligible to be included in the final Electoral Roll”, and that the earlier decision “has to be reversed”.

Seven days, eight pleas, no answer

The problem was that the decision to flag them had already been entered on ECINet, and the system had no rollback option that would let the EROs reverse it. Requests for the same had been coming from the field since January 22.

One Nation,
One Election
Commission,
please.



Business as usual by E P Unny

On February 11, Goa Electronics Limited, the state agency that supports

the CEO's office on the software, wrote to the CEO and to Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), the Commission's vendor, that "the required rollback/reversion functionality, including the document re-upload option, has still not been provided in the system", despite "multiple emails" from DEOs, EROs and AEROs and the matter having been "communicated to the concerned officials of ECI and TCS". It maintained a spreadsheet of every request.

The CEO forwarded it to Delhi the same day, to the Senior Deputy Election Commissioner in charge of Goa, Gyanesh Bharti, with Khanna copied.

Every email that followed went the same way. No reply is on record, and none was acted on.

February 13: "response to any of the emails and letters sent from officer of the Chief Electoral Officer, Goa... is still awaited." Of the electors who had come forward after the (logical discrepancy) lists went up, "there are 97 cases, in which the roll back option



is required, as the decision taken earlier has to be reversed in view of documents/objections received from the concerned electors”.

February 14 (2 emails, at 12.52pm and 6.11pm): “It is once again requested to kindly make available the provision for Roll back/revert back along with the document re-upload facility at the earliest.”

February 14 (by letter): Goel wrote formally to Senior DEC Gyanesh Bharti (in charge of Goa) copying Khanna: “no response has been received” to the emails of the previous two days.

February 15: “The Roll back option is urgently required... The matter is most urgent and requires immediate necessary action to be taken by the concerned ERO/AERO officers to facilitate timely compliance of the Hon’ble Supreme Court’s Order...”

February 16: “response to any of the emails and letters sent from office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Goa, with



respect to the above cited subject is still awaited.”

February 17: The list of 97 logical discrepancy cases, “in which the decisions taken by the ERO/AERO earlier... have to be reversed as the concerned electors have become eligible to be included in the final Electoral Roll... it is requested that necessary action may be taken to include these electors in the Final Electoral Roll of SIR 2026.”

February 18: Sanjay Kumar, the Deputy Election Commissioner who holds the electoral roll charge in Delhi, to Khanna: “EROs/AEROs have powers u/s 21/21A to take corrective action. In any case, IT system cannot block necessary action as per the directions of SC. please facilitate the desired action to publish ER as per the decision taken by EROs/AEROs and conveyed to you in these emails.”

February 21: The final roll was published. The 97 were not on it.

Who are the 97, why it's a big deal for them

Sixty-five of the 97 are from Taleigao, the seat that was held by the BJP's Jennifer Monserrate, who passed away in July this year. The rest are from St Cruz, Cumbarjua, Priol, Margao, Benaulim and Velim assembly seats.

For a Goan, being off the roll costs more than a vote. Several state schemes use the electoral roll to establish eligibility. The Goa Mediclaim Scheme, which funds super-speciality treatment not available in government hospitals (dialysis, angioplasty, open-heart surgery, transplants, chemotherapy, cochlear implants) is open only to voters of the state.

When the names did not go in, the electoral officers on the ground told these voters to apply afresh on Form 6, the form for new voters.



EC's nine new decisions: What changes and what doesn't

Ritika Chopra

Three days ago, the Election Commission of India had a straightforward answer to The Indian Express investigation into how the three-member body was functioning.

Two of its members had recorded objections at least 14 times to decisions touching the core of the Commission's mandate: who gets registered as a voter, who gets deleted and restored, who appeals against those restorations, and who controls the systems through which the electoral roll is maintained.



The Commission called those notes “suggestions” and “inputs”, part of normal deliberation.

The important decisions of the past year, it insisted, had the “unanimous” approval of the full Commission.

On September 26, the Commission met again. What followed was striking. In a four-page note issued after the meeting, it announced nine decisions that addressed, point by point, several of the concerns recorded by the two Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi.

What are the Election Commission’s new decisions?

Agendas will now be circulated before every Commission meeting and minutes issued afterwards. Officers’ foreign trips will need Commission approval. New IT modules and portals will go through a committee of officers before being placed before the Commission. The ECINet will be reviewed by a committee

headed by a senior Deputy Election Commissioner and will include an independent expert from an IIT or IIIT. If field officers need more flexibility in the system, it will be provided. And directions issued by Commissioners to officers will be “meticulously complied with”.

These decisions map, almost item for item, onto the concerns the two Commissioners had put on file over 10 months: that agendas were not circulated and minutes not issued, that officers went abroad without the Commission’s approval, that new IT modules were built without its knowledge, that the electoral-roll database needed an audit by an independent expert, that field officers lacked “proper and complete access” to ERONet, and that an administrative order had altered the allocation of work around the IT division without them.

In Goa, where The Indian Express found 97 voters cleared by local officers still missing from the final roll, the



Commission says 81 have now filled Form 6 and the CEO has been directed to facilitate their inclusion.

This sharp turn signals how deep the disquiet inside the Commission had become, and how far it had travelled outside, with Opposition parties demanding that polls on SIR rolls be cancelled.

What happens to Form 6?

But the concessions have limits, and Form 6 is where they show. The note reads like a concession there and isn't one. It says the form prescribed under the Registration of Electors Rules will apply outside the SIR period, which was the substance of Joshi's May objection.

But the objection was about the online form on ECINet, where a question on the applicant's parents was inserted between sections J and K, and which would not let an applicant proceed without answering it. The note does not mention the online form, or the

question, or say whether it has been removed.

It says the Supreme Court “upheld” the declaration, which the court’s May 27 order on the SIR does not appear to do in terms. And it does not say who put the question there in July, or why it stayed after Sandhu called it “unauthorised/illegal” on August 13.

Other unanswered questions

Other questions go unanswered too.

The note says nothing about the central one from West Bengal: Who authorised the appeals filed against voters whose inclusion had been ordered by judicial officers, were they filed on behalf of ECI, and if yes, who authorised them?

It does not explain why Goa’s requested software facility to restore voter names was never enabled.

And it does not say whether DG (IT) Seema Khanna, whose functioning was



a point of contention and Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Maneesh Garg, against whom both Commissioners sought action, stay.

And it leaves the biggest question open: what the new normal inside the Commission looks like. Whether Gyanesh Kumar now takes Sandhu and Joshi along before decisions are made, and whether the two, having put their objections on record, will have more say at the table, remains to be seen.





After 13 crore names dropped from draft rolls, **EC orders 'left out' voter drive**

Vallabh Ozarkar and Ritika Chopra

Under fire over the scale of deletions from voters' lists in the nationwide Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has directed the 20 states and Union Territories where the exercise has been completed to run a "special drive" to enrol voters "left out" of the rolls, The Indian Express has learnt.

The instruction was conveyed in writing on September 29 and repeated at a video

conference with all state Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs).

It comes as the Commission faces intense scrutiny over the 13 crore names struck off draft rolls in 30 states and Union Territories, and a week after an investigation by The Indian Express (September 23) showed that the question of who makes it onto the voters' list and who is left out was being raised inside the Commission itself.

The investigation revealed that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi had objected on record 14 times in 10 months to decisions taken in the Commission's name without their knowledge, including the change to Form 6 (the form new voters fill) and the centralised control of ECINet, the software on which the electoral rolls were prepared during the SIR and on which every electoral roll now sits.

The September 29 letter from the Election Commission's Secretary to all CEOs states: "In State/UTs where SIR

has already been completed, a special drive shall be undertaken by the Chief Electoral Officer, District Election Officers and EROs for the enrolment of left out and young/first time eligible electors under the process of continuous updation.”

That drive will run on a Form 6 without the question added to it in July. The online form had begun asking applicants whether they, or their parents, were on the voters’ list after the last SIR, and would not let them submit without an answer, which left an 18-year-old whose parents had been deleted with no truthful way through. Only the government can change the form, by amending the rules; it hadn’t. Both Commissioners had said so in May, and Sandhu in August called the change “unauthorised/illegal”. The September 29 letter now confines the declaration to “SIR phase only”. In the 20 states where the SIR is over, first-time voters and the “left out” will fill the plain statutory form.

At the Commission's video conference with all state CEOs, the instruction went further, according to officers who attended. The Deputy Election Commissioner present told CEOs to compare the pre-SIR roll with the post-SIR roll, draw up the list of those deleted, and identify any who may have been left out.

“It has been told to visit the houses, in cases especially if the voters are not mapped elsewhere or were not duplicate or not deceased and get their Form 6 filled up,” one of the officers said. The CEOs have been asked to seek assistance of political parties (or booth-level agents of political parties) for this exercise.

All CEOs have been asked to bring people back, if left out unjustly, via Form 6, the form for new voters. It is the same route Goa's Chief Electoral Officer has to use to re-enrol the 97 voters left out of the state's final roll on February 21 despite being found eligible by its own EROs. As The Indian Express reported on

September 24, the 97 had been deleted at the draft stage, produced documents, and were cleared by the EROs, who then found that ECINet had no option to reverse the deletion. The CEO's eight communications to the Commission over seven days, each copied to DG (IT) Seema Khanna, went unanswered, and the final roll was published without them.

That was the concern Sandhu had put on record on August 14. By law, he wrote, “all the responsibilities regarding Electoral Roll lie on EROS, DEOs and CEOs,” yet “the access control has been centralised by DG (IT),” and the DG (IT) “doesn't have any legal authority to restrict proper and complete access and freedom to operate, as given by law, to the statutory authorities”.

In May, Joshi had called it “the gradual centralisation of the electoral roll database” and asked for an audit. Neither note was answered until the Commission's meeting of September 26.



The September 29 letter came three days after that meeting, the Commission’s second full sitting since April, which announced that voters served notices for being “unmapped” or for “logical discrepancies” need not appear for hearings, that a committee with an independent IIT/IIIT expert would review ECINet, and that “any further flexibility” field officers needed “will be made operational” in the software.

The letter conveys the hearing change to the states, and is copied to the DG (IT) “for making necessary changes in ECINet”. It also settles a matter the two Commissioners had raised: the declaration attached to Form 6 “will be used during SIR phase only,” and outside the SIR, “the Forms applicable as per the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 will be used”.

Maharashtra: No hasty deletions

Following the ECI’s meeting with all state CEOs, Maharashtra, currently

the largest state where the SIR is still under way, has instructed its Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) not to exclude any voter in haste.

A note sent by the Chief Electoral Officer's office to officials handling Mumbai City and Mumbai Suburban states: "Before taking a decision to exclude the name of the said voter from the electoral roll, sufficient opportunity should be given to the concerned voter to submit the necessary documents, a hearing should be held and the necessary order should be passed."

It states that "an eligible voter should not remain excluded from the electoral roll and there should be no obstruction to the voter's right to vote". Officials have been told not to take a negative decision in haste and to ensure "complete scrutiny at the ERO level".

The note implements the Commission's September 26 decision that voters served notices for being "unmapped" or for "logical discrepancies" need

not appear for hearings in person. Booth Level Officers, the first interface between citizens and the Commission, will collect documents at the homes of voters who have been served notices and upload them for the ERO to decide; those already sent hearing notices are to be told by phone or WhatsApp that they need not come.

Special camps are scheduled on October 3, 4, 10 and 11. The note adds a safeguard for cases the BLO's visit doesn't settle: another chance to produce documents, then a hearing and an order, before any name comes off.

Maharashtra's draft roll flagged 1.22 crore records for verification: 62.48 lakh for discrepancies in relatives' details, 59.75 lakh that could not be mapped to a relative in the previous roll. The "necessary changes" to ECINet and the BLO App, the note says, are still being made at the Commission level.





T N Seshan, N Gopalaswami, Ashok Lavasa: **When EC members differed**

Damini Nath

The functioning of the three-member Election Commission of India is under scrutiny this week, after an investigation by The Indian Express published on September 23 revealed that two Election Commissioners had placed their objections on record at least 14 times in 10 months. The Election Commission has responded by saying that the decisions taken by the Commission have been unanimous, saying that “observations” were a part of the deliberative process.



How does the Election Commission take decisions?

The Election Commission derives its powers from Article 324 of the Constitution, which provides for a Commission for the “superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State and of elections to the offices of President and Vice-President...”

It further says that the commission will consist of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and “such number of other Election Commissioners” that the President may appoint, subject to provisions of law. The CEC “shall act as the Chairman of the Election Commission”.

How the Election Commission is supposed to arrive at decisions is laid out in the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service

and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

Section 17 of the Act says that the “business of the Election Commission shall be transacted in accordance with the provisions of this Act.”

“The Election Commission may, by unanimous decision, regulate the procedure for transaction of its business and also allocation of its business amongst the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners. All business of the Election Commission shall, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously, and if the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners differ in opinion on any matter, such matter shall be decided according to the opinion of the majority,” Section 18 of the Act says.

Since the Election Commission currently has three members, if the decisions are not unanimous, two of the three members can decide the matter. While the Chief Election Commissioner chairs



the poll panel, all three members — the CEC and the two ECs — all have one vote.

Have there been differences of opinion and dissent in the commission in the past?

Ever since the Election Commission was permanently expanded from a single-member body to a three-member commission in 1993, differences between the individuals who occupy the posts have emerged.

Then Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan and Election Commissioners M S Gill and G V G Krishnamurthy were known to have clashed. In fact, Seshan had challenged the appointment of the two ECs in the Supreme Court, which upheld the appointment and ruled that the three members would have equal status.

The Supreme Court judgment in T.N Seshan vs. Union of India in 1995 made it clear that the three members would have an equal say in decision-making.



In January 2009, then CEC N Gopalaswami had written to the President seeking the removal of Election Commissioner Navin Chawla, citing a “lack of political neutrality”. With no such action from Rashtrapati Bhavan, Chawla eventually was appointed CEC.

Election Commission officials say that differing opinions on matters before the commission, whether it is the conduct of elections or administrative matters, are a routine occurrence. However, when it comes to finally taking a decision, the commission takes a call unanimously or by majority. The Commission generally meets once or twice a week to discuss pending matters, officials say.

In case an Election Commissioner disagrees with the majority view, he or she can record a dissent note on the file.

Former Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa had done exactly that in 2019, when he disagreed with the majority view of giving Prime Minister Narendra

Modi and then BJP chief Amit Shah a clean chit on complaints of Model Code of Conduct violations before the commission.

Lavasa had also objected that his dissent notes were not being recorded in the final orders passed by the commission. Lavasa, who was likely to take over as Chief Election Commissioner on the basis of seniority, opted to resign from the Commission in 2020.

Before the Election Commission issued its order starting the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls on June 24, 2025, Election Commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu had observed on the draft order that the exercise should not lead to harassment to voters and citizens.

“Care should be taken that genuine voters/citizens, particularly old, sick, PwD (persons with disabilities), poor and other vulnerable groups do not feel harassed and are facilitated,” Sandhu had written. However, this, EC sources said, was an observation, and eventually

the SIR order was unanimous.

Since then, as The Indian Express has reported, ECs Sandhu and Vivek Joshi have recorded their objections on files several times, whether it relates to the functioning of the poll commission's IT infrastructure or the insertion of a new declaration in the voter enrolment form (Form 6).

What has the Election Commission said on the matter?

In a press statement on September 23, the Election Commission sought to differentiate between observations, which it said were standard and a part of the internal checks and balances, and decisions of the Commission.

“Any operational queries or inputs raised by Commission members during draft stages are part of standard administrative practice aimed at safeguarding voter rights. The suggestions given by the Commissioners

were for further improving the electoral processes. Differing views and observations are a normal part of deliberation in any institution. They are a part of the decision-making process before a final decision is taken. Not only the three Commissioners, but every officer of the Commission is fully authorized to give his suggestions to the Commission for improving the electoral system,” the poll panel said.

The Election Commission has said that all decisions taken in recent months have been the outcome of “unanimous decisions”. It cited the recent elections in Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Assam and West Bengal, saying that these polls required “wide-ranging administrative and operational machinery and many Commission approvals and instructions.”

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