

'One Nation, One Election' proposal is 'unconstitutional': Chidambaram to parliament panel

NEW DELHI, AUG 24: Former Union minister P Chidambaram on Monday strongly opposed the proposed move to hold simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies before a joint committee of Parliament, decrying the initiative as "monstrous" and "unconstitutional."

The former home and finance minister also said that the proposal to hold nationwide polls under "One Nation, One Election" is a "mindless" exercise.

Sources said Chidambaram submitted his opinion while appearing before the joint committee of Parliament on the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which aim to synchronise Lok Sabha and state assembly polls.

The committee is headed by BJP member PP Chaudhary.

The senior Congress leader contended that the bills on simultaneous polls are "unconstitutional". He argued that since any legislature is elected for a five-year term, curtailing its tenure directly violates the basic structure of the Constitution, sources aware of the deliberations said.

The senior Congress leader also said that his conscience does not allow him to support the bills and stressed that the government does not have the number (two-thirds majority) to pass the legislation, sources said.

TMC's Sagarika Ghosh, a member of the panel, also opposed the bill, claiming it would give "unbridled" power to the Election Com-



P. Chidambaram

mission.

When asked about Chidambaram's submission, Chaudhary said the former Union minister gave good inputs but he may have a different view as he represents a particular party.

"The committee has been tasked by Parliament to examine and make recommendations. We sought Chidambaram's views as part of this examination process, and the committee will examine them before making its recommendations," he said.

Chaudhary also asserted that the move to hold simultaneous elections is not against the basic structure of the Constitution.

A group of about 10 Padma awardees, including Tarlochan Singh, Navin Khanna, Meenakshi Jain and Niru Kumar, also appeared separately before the panel. While a section supported the initiative of simultaneous polls, others opposed it, saying it may bring "chaos" in the country.

On the submissions of the Padma awardees, Chaudhary said they have extensive

experience, acting as representatives of civil society, and they provided the committee with significant input.

"Considering their wide range of experiences, I believe the committee gained rich information and excellent suggestions from them. Their views on 'One Nation, One Election' are very important.

"The Padma awardees generally feel that simultaneous polls are in the national interest, provided sufficient safeguards are in place and that the committee should work towards this goal," he said, adding there is a broad desire for the implementation of the 'One Nation, One Election' process.

The bills were introduced in Lok Sabha in December 2024, following which they were referred to the joint committee for examination.

The bills were formulated after a high-level panel, headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind, recommended holding of Lok Sabha, state assembly and local body elections simultaneously in a phased manner. Union Home Minister Amit

Shah was also a member of the high-level panel headed by Kovind.

Following the adoption of the Constitution, elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies were conducted simultaneously from 1951 to 1967.

The first general elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1951-52, a practice that continued for three subsequent general elections in 1957, 1962, and 1967.

However, this cycle of synchronised elections was disrupted in 1968 and 1969 due to the premature dissolution of some state legislative assemblies.

The Fourth Lok Sabha was also dissolved prematurely in 1970, with fresh elections held in 1971. Unlike the First, Second, and Third Lok Sabha, which completed their full five-year terms, the Fifth Lok Sabha's term was extended until 1977 under Article 352 because of the declaration of Emergency.

Since then, only a few Lok Sabha terms have lasted the full five years, such as the Eighth, Tenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth. Others, including the Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth, were dissolved early.

State Assemblies have faced similar disruptions over the years. Premature dissolutions and term extensions have become a recurring challenge.

These developments have firmly disrupted the cycle of simultaneous elections, leading to the current pattern of staggered electoral schedules across the country. (Agencies)

Reservation a constitutional right, no power can abolish it: Chirag Paswan

NEW DELHI, AUG 24: Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) chief and Union Minister Chirag Paswan on Monday said caste-based reservation cannot be scrapped as it is a constitutional right, even as the Opposition alleged that the ruling party was seeking to amend the Constitution to end quotas.

"These people see politics in everything. After all, aren't the Sangh, the BJP, and our party all part of the NDA? Is reservation something that can be abolished just because someone says so? It is a constitutional right," Paswan told reporters on the sidelines of a national conclave here.

Reservation, he said, is not "charity handed out to anyone" but a constitutional right that "no power on earth can ever abolish". Those who speak of scrapping it under the garb of "review" or "reform", he added, "likely do not even understand why reservation is necessary."

Referring to the treatment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Paswan said people still casually



question why they need reservation, even as caste-based discrimination continues in society. He cited the recent controversy over Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, asking pointedly whether the stage was "purified" after he left it.

He also pointed to instances where Dalit grooms are stopped from taking out wedding processions, and where temple premises are washed with "Gangajal" after visits by prominent leaders, as evidence that untoucha-

bility persists. "This is the very Scheduled Caste community that was a victim of untouchability. The 'Scheduled Castes' in the Constitution were listed as such precisely because of untouchability -- they were forced to live outside the village. Let alone touching them, even seeing them was considered a sin. Does this discrimination not still exist today?" he said.

Paswan said this was precisely why he opposed the concept of a "creamy layer"

within reservation. "Today, at least we are united and able to voice our concerns. But the moment sub-classification and the 'creamy layer' come into the discussion, our collective strength will begin to diminish. And as our strength wanes, those who want reservation abolished will gain momentum," he said.

He said the Scheduled Tribes were communities with distinct attire, lifestyles and dialects that were designated as "Scheduled", while the Backward Classes were those who lacked opportunities and received support through the reservation system. He also noted that the Modi government had introduced 10 per cent reservation for economically weaker sections among the upper castes. "This system was established based on the vision of Babasaheb (B R Ambedkar), and no power on earth will be allowed to undermine it. As long as I, Ram Vilas Paswan's son, am part of this government, I will not let this system be compromised," he said. (PTI)

'Fix Schools, Not Lavish Homes': CJP On Upkeep Expenditure Of Union Ministers' Bungalows

NEW DELHI, AUG 24: The record Rs 92.35 crore bill spent for the upkeep of Union ministers' official residences last financial year could have paid for 10 new government schools, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) has said, accusing the Centre of misplaced priorities.

"Stop fixing your lavish homes, and fix the schools!" CJP said in an X post, reacting to a PTI report on the rising expenditure on colonial-era bungalows occupied by ministers.

"Rs 92 crore = 10 new world-class government schools. The money is available, the intent to use it for government schools is missing," the CJP post read.

Founded by Abhijeet

Dipke in May as a satirical response to Chief Justice of India Surya Kant's "cockroach" remark, the CJP has since emerged as a broader youth movement centred around issues such as unemployment and examination irregularities. Its latest campaign has focused on the state of government schools.

According to information PTI obtained through an RTI query, expenditure on renovation, furnishing and repair of the official residences of Union ministers in Delhi rose from Rs 27.47 crore in 2014-15 to a record Rs 92.35 crore in 2023-24.

Central Public Works Department (CPWD), which maintains the residences, spent a cumulative Rs

547.68 crore on such works over the 12 years from 2014-15 to 2023-24.

The expenditure has risen sharply in recent years. It averaged Rs 26.78 crore annually between 2014-15 and 2018-19, nearly doubled to around Rs 50 crore between 2019-20 and 2023-24, and subsequently climbed to Rs 71.98 crore in 2024-25 and Rs 92.35 crore last year.

Officials have attributed the increased bill to the cost of maintaining the ageing bungalows, many of which are 80 to 100 years old and suffer from problems such as seepage, termite infestation, and ageing electrical and plumbing systems.

AAP leader and former Delhi minister Somnath

Bharti, meanwhile, sought to contrast the expenditure with the controversy over the construction and renovation of the official residence occupied by Arvind Kejriwal as chief minister.

"Why doesn't the Godi media debate this 92 crore splurge on repair of houses of ministers in Modi govt who left no stone unturned to criticise Kejriwal govt for constructing a CM house?" Bharti wrote on X.

The BJP had made the expenditure on Kejriwal's former Civil Lines official residence a major political issue, repeatedly accusing the previous AAP government of extravagance and referring to the property as a "sheesh mahal". (Agencies)

SC To Hear Plea Challenging FIR Against Journalist Who Reported On Ram Temple Donation Row

NEW DELHI, AUG 24: The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on Tuesday a plea of a journalist, who flagged alleged irregularities in the handling of donations at Ayodhya's Ram temple, challenging an FIR lodged against him by the Ghaziabad police in an alleged road rage case.

The fresh plea was mentioned before a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joydalya Bagchi and V Mohana which agreed to list for hearing the plea of journalist Abhishek Upadhyay on Tuesday.

"Multiple FIRs have been filed against him and now an FIR under the stringent provisions of the SC/ST Act has also been filed. The police raided his house on August 20. Yesterday also, the police came at 5 o'clock. I have filed my writ petition. I request that it may be listed today or tomorrow, whatever is possible," his counsel said.

The CJI then agreed to list

the matter for hearing on Tuesday subject to curing of defects in the petition.

The plea by Upadhyay claimed that the FIR is based on concocted allegations against him and is an attempt to harass him for his independent journalistic works.

In the plea, he has contended that the FIR copy has not been supplied to him and that the police were forcing nearby shopkeepers to delete the CCTV visuals of the relevant time.

Upadhyay sought quashing of the FIR, or in the alternative, its investigation be transferred to an independent agency other than the Uttar Pradesh Police.

"The petitioner apprehends imminent arrest and further physical harm and states that, in view of the aforesaid sequence, he is not in a position to safely approach the high court of Judicature at Allahabad.

"He apprehends that he

may be arrested or subjected to physical harm by planted goons of the state machinery in the State of Uttar Pradesh before he can obtain effective judicial protection," the plea said.

"He is, therefore, seeking quashing of the impugned FIR and in alternative ready and willing to join the investigation and cooperate with the investigating agency in accordance with law with a request that present FIR as well as other FIRs filed against him because of his reporting on the Ram Janam Bhoomi donation theft issue may please be directed to be investigated by Delhi Police or Central Bureau of Investigation," his plea said.

The FIR has been lodged against Upadhyay in Ghaziabad over an alleged road rage incident, which he has claimed was planted in connection with his reporting on alleged corruption in Uttar Pradesh. Upadhyay, who runs a YouTube channel,

claimed a police team reached his residence late on August 20 and told him that a case had been registered at Indirapuram police station following allegations of road rage and abusive behaviour.

According to Upadhyay, the alleged incident took place on August 18 near Shipra Mall in Ghaziabad, when a motorcyclist allegedly touched his car. He said the man subsequently called the police emergency helpline 112 and an FIR was registered later.

He alleged that the police team had come to his residence possibly to arrest him and he requested Ghaziabad police to release CCTV footage of the alleged incident.

According to his plea, Upadhyay has previously reported on alleged irregularities involving donations to the Ram temple in Ayodhya and alleged corruption in the Uttar Pradesh government. (Agencies)

Bangladesh tribunal orders 3 journalists held until trial in 2024 uprising case

DHAKA, AUG 24: A special tribunal in Bangladesh's capital on Monday asked authorities to keep three journalists jailed until their trial in a case involving a mass uprising that ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina from office in 2024, lawyers said.

During the student-led uprising, hundreds of people were killed, and Hasina was later sentenced to death on charges of crimes against humanity. She fled to India two years ago and was tried in absentia.

The tribunal asked that Mozammel Babu, editor-in-chief of private Ekattor Television, its principal correspondent Farzana Rupa and Shyamal Dutta, editor of daily Bhorer Kagoj and former general secretary of the National Press Club in Dhaka, remain jailed.

After they appeared before the tribunal on Monday, the judge fixed October 25 for the next court proceedings and asked the investigators



to submit their findings against the journalists.

Global human rights groups have criticised the jailing of the journalists and the denial of bail, asking the government to drop the charges against them and stop criminalising news reporting. Regional news updates

Prosecutors allege the three journalists incited the suppression of student demonstrators during the uprising. They say that the journalists asked Hasina provocative questions at a

press conference on July 14, 2024 that led her to make disparaging remarks about the demonstrators before launching a bloody crackdown on the protesters leading to hundreds of deaths.

The three journalists have been in custody for years following Hasina's ouster as they face various charges including murder involving the uprising in July-August 2024. They were arrested during an interim government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus who handed over

power in February to a new government.

The families of the journalists complained that they were held illegally.

"Launching a crimes-against-humanity case against journalists Shyamal Dutta, Mozammel Babu, and Farzana Rupa for simply asking questions at a press conference is outrageous and deeply troubling," Kunal Majumder, CPJ's Asia-Pacific Program Coordinator, said in a statement earlier this month.

He added that "editorial decisions may be partisan or ethically questionable, but they cannot be criminalised. Criminalising editorial judgment sets a dangerous precedent and undermines Bangladesh's reputation as a democracy. Authorities must immediately release the three journalists and drop the charges." Hasina has been in India since August 5, 2024 but recently she said she would return to the country in December. (AP)

Modi Govt Strangling, Emasculating ISRO: Congress



Ajit Purohit

NEW DELHI, AUG 24: The Congress on Monday accused the Modi government of "strangling and emasculating" ISRO and slammed it for pursuing an "aggressive privatisation agenda" for the space programme.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said there have been news reports in the past couple of days on ISRO's future role in our country's space programme.

"This has raised legitimate concerns given its capacities, capabilities, and competencies built up so methodically

and painstakingly over the past six decades thanks to the vision, dedication, and leadership of Vikram Sarabhai, Satish Dhawan, Brahm Prakash, UR Rao, APJ Abdul Kalam, and so many other distinguished scientists and technologists," Ramesh said on X.

ISRO was founded in 1969, with Vikram Sarabhai playing a key role in its establishment and serving as its first chairman.

Ramesh alleged that the government was pursuing an "aggressive privatisation agenda" in the space programme, similar to what it had done in the nuclear energy sector.

"The motivation is clearly coming from the PM (Narendra Modi) and his PMO itself. ISRO's presence in rocket development and

manufacture is to be severely limited and much of its satellite-related assets are to be transferred lock, stock, and barrel to private companies," Ramesh said.

He also claimed that the second spacecraft being developed in Tamil Nadu with an investment of around Rs 1,000 crore would be handed over to a private company.

"Given the winds of change, the future of the historic Sriharikota spaceport in Andhra Pradesh is itself anybody's guess," he said.

Ramesh said ISRO had made the country "enormously proud" and noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had himself highlighted its achievements on several occasions.

"Space startups certainly deserve encouragement and support. But why should

ISRO, which has for long had productive partnerships with the private sector, now be strangled and emasculated? Already, in the past few months 100-120 key ISRO professionals have quit, perhaps seeing the writing on the wall," Ramesh claimed.

In an apparent reference to former ISRO chairman G Madhavan Nair, Ramesh said an ex-ISRO chief who joined the BJP in October 2018 after being inspired by Modi had also expressed serious concerns over the new privatisation push.

Japanese lawmakers travel to Beijing, seeking to mend ties after Takaichi's Taiwan remark fallout

TOKYO, Aug 24: A cross-party group of Japanese lawmakers, including one from Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's governing party, headed to Beijing on Monday to meet with Chinese officials for the first time since ties between the two Asian rivals deteriorated after Takaichi's comment on Taiwan angered China.

Japan seeks a chance to mend its strained ties with China as tensions have spilled over into the economy.

The group, which includes Gaku Hashimoto, a lawmaker of Takaichi's governing Liberal Democratic Party and a former health and welfare vice minister, and a lawmaker each from two opposition parties Komeito and the

Centrist Reform Alliance, is to meet with Chinese Communist Party officials during their visit through Thursday.

"Communication has been severed in all areas and we are beginning to see their impact in many areas," Shinichi Isa, a top spokesperson for the CRA party, told reporters before leaving Tokyo's Haneda airport.