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A Tectonic Shift in Thinking to Build Seismic Resilience

Context:

- A 4.4 magnitude earthquake struck Delhi recently, with its epicentre 20 km southwest of the city at a shallow depth of 5 km.
- While it caused no major damage, it exposed the vulnerability of Delhi's infrastructure — over 80% of buildings, especially pre-2000 constructions, do not comply with seismic safety codes.
- This incident adds to a series of earthquakes across Asia since March 2025, including a severe 7.7 magnitude quake in Myanmar and Thailand, tremors in Tibet and Greece, and ongoing activity along the India-Myanmar border.
- Given India's location on a highly active tectonic plate, this article highlights the urgent need to strengthen seismic resilience.

India's Seismic Vulnerability and the Danger of Being Unprepared

- India faces a serious earthquake risk because its tectonic plate keeps moving northwards, colliding with the Eurasian Plate at a rate of 4–5 cm per year.
- This movement forms the Himalayas and makes the region prone to a major earthquake of magnitude 8 or more, which could affect over 300 million people across northern India, Nepal, and Bhutan.
- **Delhi's Vulnerabilities**
 - **Delhi, located in Seismic Zone IV (high risk),** is especially vulnerable.
 - The city's ground acceleration factor is 0.24g, making it prone to strong tremors.
 - Many of Delhi's buildings, including more than 5,000 high-rises, do not meet safety standards under the IS 1893:2016 Code, which requires earthquake-resistant features like ductile detailing and shear walls.
 - The July 2025 tremors in Delhi, though moderate, showed how unprepared the city's 33.5 million residents are for a major earthquake.
- **Risk Not Limited to Delhi**
 - Seismic risk is not limited to Delhi. India's seismic zones cover large areas, from Zone II to Zone V.
 - The **northeast states — Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram — fall in Zone V**, the highest-risk category with a peak ground acceleration of 0.36g or more.
 - These areas have recently felt the impact of earthquakes in nearby Myanmar, such as the 7.7 magnitude quake in March 2025 and a 5.2 magnitude quake in May 2025.

- The **Andaman and Nicobar Islands, also in Zone V**, face both earthquake and tsunami threats, as seen during the 2004 tsunami.
- Even Sikkim felt tremors from a 5.7 magnitude quake in Tibet on May 12, 2025.

Urban Growth Increases Earthquake Risks: Why India Must Act Now

- Delhi's fast-paced urbanisation is making its earthquake risk even worse. Many older buildings in areas like East Delhi stand on weak, liquefaction-prone soil.
- Poorly designed high-rise buildings add to the danger during strong tremors.
- While the IndiaQuake app by the **National Center for Seismology (NCS)** can provide early warnings, public awareness and strict enforcement of building safety rules are still lacking.
- The Himalayan region, especially the gap between past major earthquakes like the Kangra quake in 1905 and the Nepal quake in 2015, is overdue for a big event.
- If it strikes, cities like Delhi could suffer massive damage.

Ways to Increase India's Preparedness

- To prepare, India must strictly enforce seismic safety standards, especially in high-risk zones.
- In Delhi, retrofitting older buildings with steel jacketing and using deep pile foundations can help reduce collapse risk. In Guwahati, located in Zone V, strict following of the **IS 1893:2016 code** is necessary.
- Builders must avoid constructing on floodplains to prevent soil liquefaction, and critical buildings should use base isolation techniques. In Bhuj, more retrofitting and community disaster response teams are needed.
- The Delhi Development Authority should speed up safety checks on buildings.
- At the same time, the NCS should expand its early warning systems to cover villages in Zone V areas.
- Strong rules and community readiness can make India's growing cities safer from future earthquakes.

Building Earthquake Resilience: Global lessons

- Global experiences highlight valuable lessons for India. Bangkok's use of high-strength concrete and ductile detailing shows how strict building codes reduce earthquake damage.
- In contrast, Myanmar's 2025 quake losses due to unreinforced masonry stress the danger of neglect.
- India faces higher seismic risks, especially in Zone V areas like the Northeast and Kutch, where local soil conditions require tailored solutions. Experts estimate India needs ₹50,000 crore annually for retrofitting vulnerable structures.

Conclusion

- With increasing seismic activity both regionally and globally, India must not delay action.
- The government should enforce building codes more strictly, invest in resilient infrastructure, and promote public education on earthquake safety.
- People need to know how to prepare emergency kits, follow safe building norms, and plan evacuations.
- A national dialogue is essential to push for urgent action before the next major quake.

Bihar's Higher Education Crisis - Flawed Fixes and the Need for Structural Reform

Context

- The article critiques the **use of a lottery system for appointing college principals** in Patna University, arguing that it is **an arbitrary solution to a deep-rooted crisis** in Bihar's higher education sector.
- It highlights the **consequences of nepotism, caste-based favoritism, political patronage, and administrative apathy.**

The Crisis in Bihar's Higher Education

- **Arbitrary appointments and the lottery system:**
 - The lottery-based selection of college principals in Patna University is a superficial and flawed remedy, akin to **"fixing a broken bone with a band-aid."**
 - **Examples cited include mismatched appointments:**
 - Chemistry professor heading an arts college.
 - History professor leading a science college.
 - Male professor appointed as principal of a women's college.
- **Quality and capacity crisis:**
 - **Irregularities and recruitment delays** have eroded trust in the system.
 - **The student-teacher ratio** is alarmingly high (around 1:50 [one teacher for 50 students], and in some postgraduate departments in state-run colleges, it is 1:200-350).
 - **Infrastructure collapse:** For example, the state-run institutes like the BN Mandal University in Madhepura, where several departments from the social sciences and natural sciences streams reportedly share the same room.

Broader Impact on Society and Youth:

- **Education as a 'Ladder Out of Poverty':**
 - In a state like Bihar, education and migration are vital tools to escape poverty.
 - The collapse of higher education institutions affects **human capital formation and state development.**
- **Rise of coaching centres and parallel ecosystem:**
 - Youth from across Bihar flock to coaching hubs in Patna due to institutional failure.
 - There is **over-reliance on informal education providers, deepening inequalities.**
- **Politicisation of appointments:**
 - Prominent political parties of Bihar use recruitments as **patronage tools.**
 - The labharthi (beneficiary) mindset dominates governance, **diluting citizens' rights-based expectations from public institutions.**

Way Forward - Structural Reforms and Transparent Systems:

- **Learnings from other states:**

- **Tamil Nadu:** Has a Teacher Recruitment Board for higher education appointments.
- **Maharashtra:** Framing a policy that gives **80% weightage** to academic quality, research and teaching and **20% weightage** to on-camera interviews to bring more transparency to the recruitment process.

- **Institutional reforms needed in Bihar:**

- Specialised selection panels.
- Independent oversight bodies.
- Public appointment records.
- Rotational leadership.
- **A merit-based, transparent, and accountable system — not randomisation.**

Bihar's Higher Education Crisis - Flawed Fixes and the Need for Structural Reform FAQs

Q1. How does the lottery system for appointing college principals reflect the administrative crisis in Bihar's higher education?

Ans. The lottery system exposes the lack of institutional mechanisms, transparency, and meritocracy, reflecting deeper governance failures in Bihar's higher education sector.

Q2. What are the implications of politicisation and patronage in public sector recruitment on the quality of higher education in Bihar?

Ans. Political interference and favoritism compromise merit-based selection, leading to mismatched appointments and further deterioration in educational standards and student outcomes.

Q3. How the failure of state-run educational institutions in Bihar has contributed to the rise of coaching centres and educational migration?

Ans. The poor quality of infrastructure, high student-teacher ratios, and recruitment delays have pushed students towards private coaching hubs, exacerbating regional disparities and out-migration.

Q4. What is the approach to teacher recruitment in higher education undertaken by states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra?

Ans. While Bihar relies on ad-hoc or randomised methods, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra focus on structured recruitment boards, academic merit, and transparency to ensure quality and fairness.

Q5. What structural reforms can restore credibility in the recruitment and functioning of higher education institutions in Bihar?

Ans. Reforms must include independent recruitment boards, performance-linked selection criteria, oversight mechanisms, public accountability, and merit-based leadership appointments.

Source: **IE**

Fencing Out the Voter in Bihar's Poll Roll Preparation

Context

- What does it mean to live in a democracy **if one's name disappears from the electoral roll**? In Bihar today, this question carries urgent significance.
- **Millions of citizens face an imminent threat of disenfranchisement** due to the onerous and arbitrary burdens imposed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) through its ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR).
- **Announced in June 2025**, ahead of the State elections, **this exercise has created deep uncertainty regarding the right to vote**, a cornerstone of democratic participation.

The Purpose and Process of Revision and Its Troubling Classifications and Arbitrary Rules

- **The Purpose and Process of Revision**
 - Periodic updates of electoral rolls are **essential to maintaining the integrity of democratic elections**.
 - **Such revisions ensure that only eligible voters are included**, while ineligible names are removed.
 - However, **the current SIR in Bihar is being carried out in a manner that is opaque**, hurried, and potentially unconstitutional.
 - With the draft electoral roll scheduled for release on August 1, **the compressed timeline raises doubts about whether this sweeping revision can adhere to constitutional standards of fairness and legality**.
- **Troubling Classifications and Arbitrary Rules**
 - A **major concern lies in the classifications** introduced by the ECI.
 - The June 24 notification lists 11 acceptable forms of documentary proof, such as passports and caste certificates, while **excluding widely held documents like Aadhaar, ration cards, driving licences**, and even the ECI's own Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC).
 - This **omission defies logic and introduces arbitrariness** into the process.
 - Furthermore, **the SIR differentiates between voters included during the 2003 intensive revision** and those added later, requiring the latter to re-establish eligibility with fresh documentation.
 - The **ECI has not explained why past inclusions, verified through official processes, now require re-verification**.
 - If previous entries were flawed, the responsibility lies with the state, not the voter.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- The **ECI's authority flows from Article 324** of the Constitution, which grants it control over electoral roll preparation, and **Article 326, which guarantees adult suffrage for all citizens above 18 years.**
- The **Representation of the People Act, 1950**, allows for special revisions when necessary.
- However, **these powers are not unlimited**, they must operate within constitutional boundaries of legality, proportionality, and rights protection.
- The **Supreme Court has consistently held that free and fair elections form the bedrock** of India's constitutional order.
- While **the right to vote is statutory, it is integral to equality and political participation.**
- Therefore, **any revision process must adhere to standards of fairness, transparency, and non-discrimination.**
- **A system that imposes unreasonable burdens on voters or excludes them** based on vague and inconsistent criteria **violates these constitutional guarantees.**

Tests of Equality and Fairness

- Under **Article 14, any state classification must meet two conditions:** an intelligible differentia distinguishing one group from another and a rational nexus with the objective sought.
- The **SIR fails this test on two counts:**
 - The **division** between pre-2003 and post-2003 voters, lacks a clear connection to electoral integrity.
 - The arbitrary **exclusion** of EPIC cards while accepting school certificates defies reason and fairness.
- **If names are omitted from the August 1 draft roll, affected voters will have only 30 days to submit additional documents**, a burden that will fall hardest on the poor and marginalised, many of whom may not even be aware of their deletion.

Judicial Scrutiny and Urgent Action

- On July 10, **the Supreme Court expressed concern over the exclusion of commonly held identity documents** and urged the ECI to consider Aadhaar, EPIC, and ration cards.
- However, **ambiguity in the Court's language leaves uncertainty** about whether these documents must be accepted or merely reviewed.
- This lack of clarity risks creating a **fait accompli**, with voters scrambling after the damage is done.
- The **Court must act swiftly to preserve the status quo** and ensure the revision does not become irreversible.
- Given that the **issues are primarily legal and documentary, an expedited final hearing is essential.**

Conclusion

- The **SIR in Bihar exemplifies how technical exercises can have profound democratic consequences.**
- **The ECI's approach**, marked by opacity, arbitrary classifications, and disproportionate burdens, **risks disenfranchising the very citizens democracy exists to empower.**

- The **Supreme Court must act decisively to reaffirm that in India's constitutional order, the right to vote is not a privilege hedged by bureaucratic hurdles** but a fundamental democratic guarantee rooted in equality and fairness.

Fencing Out the Voter in Bihar's Poll Roll Preparation FAQs

Q1. What is the main issue highlighted in Bihar?

Ans. The main issue in Bihar is the risk of large-scale disenfranchisement due to the ongoing voter roll revisions.

Q2. Who is conducting the Special Intensive Revision?

Ans. The Special Intensive Revision is being conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Q3. Why are citizens at risk of losing voting rights?

Ans. Citizens are at risk of losing their voting rights because they may fail to meet the shifting and arbitrary verification requirements set by the ECI.

Q4. When was the revision announced?

Ans. The voter roll revision was announced in June 2025.

Q5. Why is this significant for democracy?

Ans. This situation is significant for democracy because it threatens the fundamental right to vote, which is essential for democratic participation.

Source : **The Hindu**

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