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Judicial Drift in the Special Intensive Revision Hearings

Context

- The controversy surrounding the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls raises a profound **constitutional** question about democracy, voting rights, and institutional responsibility.
- It concerns the **Supreme Court's** approach: instead of deciding the legality of the exercise, the Court has permitted its continuation while issuing operational directions.
- Such conduct risks allowing a potentially unlawful process to become irreversible, thereby converting judicial review into retrospective validation.
- At stake is the distinction between adjudication and supervision. In a constitutional democracy, courts determine legality; they do not manage governance.

Judicial Role vs Administrative Role

- Courts exist to enforce **judicial review**, ensuring that executive and statutory actions comply with constitutional norms.

- However, operational guidance on identification documents, procedure, and implementation indicates a shift toward administrative oversight.
- This transformation moves the Court away from its essential function and risks reducing the judiciary to a supervisory body rather than a guardian of rights.
- Delay compounds the problem. When implementation proceeds during prolonged hearings, a **fait accompli** emerges: reversal becomes practically impossible.
- Consequently, legal scrutiny loses practical effect, undermining the **rule of law** and weakening institutional **legitimacy**.

Constitutional Question: Power of the Election Commission

- The **Representation of the People Act** authorizes targeted revision for specific constituencies and recorded reasons.
- A nationwide or state-wide exercise, however, extends beyond localized correction and becomes a broad verification mechanism.
- This expansion effectively transforms a limited statutory power into general authority.
- The **Election Commission** therefore appears to operate beyond intended limits, raising concerns about separation of powers and statutory interpretation.
- The revision process begins resembling a citizenship determination exercise rather than electoral maintenance.

Presumption of Citizenship vs Presumption of Suspicion

- Democratic systems rest upon a presumption of citizenship. Individuals are treated as lawful members of the polity unless specific evidence suggests otherwise.
- The SIR reverses this assumption by requiring all voters to establish eligibility.
- Instead of individualized notice and evidence-based suspicion, mass verification imposes a universal burden.
- This inversion alters the relationship between the **State** and the **individual**. Rights shift from inherent entitlements to conditional approvals, challenging the foundations of **citizenship** and political **participation**.

Implications of Large-Scale Verification

- **Risk of Disenfranchisement**
 - Large-scale verification carries consequences for **voter rolls**. Reports of deletions and objection procedures create a risk of widespread exclusion.
 - Voting represents the primary mechanism of democratic expression, and removal from electoral lists undermines representative governance.
 - Such exclusions constitute **disenfranchisement**, not merely clerical correction.
 - Electoral participation defines democratic legitimacy; therefore, any process producing arbitrary exclusion affects democratic stability and the protection of **fundamental rights**.

- **Social Inequality and Documentation**

- Documentation requirements operate unevenly in a society marked by inequality. Access to records varies across **poverty, gender, caste, and marginalized**
- Administrative neutrality may therefore produce unequal outcomes.
- A documentation-heavy process disproportionately burdens vulnerable populations. Constitutional equality requires attention to material realities, not merely formal uniformity.
- Policies that intensify inequality conflict with principles of substantive **equality** and social justice.

Larger Democratic Concern

- The broader issue concerns the transformation of governance priorities. Administrative efficiency risks overshadowing individual dignity.
- When individuals must repeatedly justify belonging, the balance shifts toward bureaucratic authority.
- The absence of a definitive ruling allows uncertainty to persist.
- Without clear constitutional limits, procedural mechanisms may evolve into tools of exclusion.
- The matter therefore implicates democratic structure itself rather than only election management.

Conclusion

- The Special Intensive Revision raises **fundamental questions about citizenship**, institutional responsibility, and democratic participation.
- A **constitutional democracy** depends upon secure rights and meaningful participation.
- Only definitive **constitutional scrutiny** can ensure that electoral verification strengthens democracy rather than restricts it.

Judicial Drift in the Special Intensive Revision Hearings FAQs

Q1. What is the main constitutional concern raised by the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)?

Ans. The main concern is that the SIR may undermine citizens' voting rights and alter the constitutional relationship between the State and individuals.

Q2. Why is the Supreme Court's role being questioned?

Ans. The Court is being questioned because it has supervised the process administratively without first deciding its constitutional validity.

Q3. How does the SIR affect the presumption of citizenship?

Ans. The SIR shifts the burden onto citizens by requiring everyone to prove their eligibility instead of presuming they are lawful voters.

Q4. What risk does the SIR create for democratic participation?

Ans. The SIR may lead to disenfranchisement if eligible voters are removed from electoral rolls.

Q5. Why do documentation requirements create inequality?

Ans. Documentation requirements disadvantage poorer and marginalized groups who often lack access to official records.

Source: **The Hindu**

Civil Services Reforms - Performance Scorecards for Union Secretaries

Context

- According to a report (of The Indian Express), the Cabinet Secretariat has introduced performance scorecards for Union Secretaries.
- This marks a significant **shift** in the **evaluation** framework of senior civil servants at the Centre, forming an important theme of the Civil Services reforms.

Performance Scorecards for Union Secretaries

- **What the scorecard measures**

- The performance scorecards **assess** secretaries on around a dozen quantifiable parameters, including
 - - Output delivery
 - Negative marking for lapses
 - A limited discretionary component retained by the Cabinet Secretary
- **Quantifiable administrative output**
 - Timely implementation of responsibilities (file disposal rates, reduction of pendency), budgetary discipline (expenditure control), measurable project delivery, etc.
- **Corporate-style KPIs**
 - The framework resembles Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used in the corporate sector, privileging speed, efficiency, target-based delivery, and compliance.

- **What the scorecard omits**

- Around 100 secretaries serve in the Government of India (about 80 from the IAS; others from IFS, central services, engineering, scientific and economic services).
- Their role goes far beyond file clearance. Therefore, the more striking issue is what it does not measure.
- **Missing dimensions**

- Policy formulation and strategic advice.
- Ensuring proposals are administratively workable, fiscally sustainable, and politically viable.
- Anticipating unintended consequences.
- Institutional continuity and memory.
- Critical evaluation and dissent.
- These dimensions are the **hallmarks** of a permanent civil service in a parliamentary system, yet they remain outside the measurable framework.

- **A reform or reductionism**

- While this signals a push toward efficiency and measurable accountability, the reform raises **deeper** constitutional and institutional **concerns** about the role of the permanent civil service in a parliamentary democracy.

Constitutional and Institutional Perspective

- Under **Article 312** of the Indian Constitution, Parliament created the All-India Services (IAS, IPS, IFoS) not as delivery agents, but as –
 - Instruments of national integration
 - Impartial and politically neutral administrators
 - Custodians of federal balance
 - Institutional memory of governance
- The shift toward output-based scoring **risks redefining** them as mere implementation managers rather than policy stewards.

Key Concerns and Challenges

- **Erosion of institutional memory**

- Treating every initiative as a standalone project undermines long-term policy continuity, learning from administrative experience, and adaptive governance.
- In parliamentary systems, **durable policies** survive because bureaucracies refine them over time.

- **Marginalisation of policy advice**

- If policy design increasingly shifts to external advisory bodies, political units, and think tanks, then secretaries may –
 - Retreat from offering critical counsel
 - Focus only on meeting deadlines
 - Avoid questioning flawed proposals
- This weakens the **foundational** principle of an independent civil service.

- **Speed over scrutiny**

- A system that rewards compliance over counsel, speed over scrutiny, may discourage honest dissent, preventive bureaucratic intervention, and early identification of flawed schemes.
- In a healthy administrative system, bureaucrats modify, defer, quietly abandon impractical proposals before public embarrassment or policy failure occurs.

- **Devaluation of the higher civil service**

- Reducing secretaries to KPI managers risks undermining the UPSC-based meritocratic recruitment system, dismissing years of training in policy judgement, and weakening the prestige and autonomy of the higher bureaucracy.
- Ultimately, this could damage the edifice of governance itself.

- **Accountability vs over-simplification**

- Accountability is essential. However, institutional accountability mechanisms already exist.
- **For example**, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and Estimates Committee.
- Performance evaluation should complement—not replace—the deeper constitutional framework of oversight.

Broader Governance Implications

- This issue touches multiple themes of civil services reforms, like
 - Politico-administrative relations
 - Neutrality and permanence of bureaucracy
 - Corporate management techniques in public administration
 - Federal structure and national integration
 - **Role of dissent** in governance
- It also links to debates around mission-mode governance, lateral entry, centralisation of policymaking, and technocratic vs constitutional models of administration.

Way Forward - A Balanced Reform Approach is Needed

- **Broaden evaluation parameters:** Include quality of policy advice, long-term impact assessment, innovation in governance, inter-ministerial coordination, and crisis anticipation and mitigation.
- **Protect space for dissent:** Institutionalise recorded policy notes, structured internal review mechanisms, and encouragement of reasoned disagreement.
- **Blend quantitative and qualitative assessment:** Evaluation should combine measurable output indicators, peer review, ministerial feedback, and independent expert assessment
- **Reaffirm Constitutional role of Civil Services:** Reforms must align with Article 312, parliamentary accountability, federal integrity, and political neutrality. Efficiency cannot come at the cost of judgement.

Conclusion

- Systems do not fail because they are slow; they fail when judgement, institutional memory, and principled dissent are sidelined.
- The challenge is not to choose between accountability and autonomy, but to design a framework of Civil Services reforms where both reinforce each other.

Civil Services Reforms FAQs

Q1. What are the implications of introducing performance scorecards for Union Secretaries?

Ans. While enhancing measurable accountability, performance scorecards risk reducing the permanent civil service to delivery managers.

Q2. How does the corporate-style KPI model differ from the constitutional vision of the All-India Services?

Ans. Unlike corporate KPIs focused on speed and output, Article 312 envisions All-India Services as impartial policy stewards.

Q3. How excessive emphasis on quantifiable performance indicators may affect bureaucratic dissent?

Ans. They may discourage critical scrutiny and dissent, weakening the preventive and advisory role of the higher bureaucracy.

Q4. Whether performance scorecards strengthen or weaken institutional accountability in Indian governance?

Ans. They may strengthen administrative efficiency but cannot substitute constitutional accountability mechanisms like the CAG, CVC.

Q5. Why is it said that “Systems do not fail for want of speed but for want of judgement”?

Ans. Civil services reforms must balance efficiency with institutional memory to preserve the integrity of parliamentary governance.

Source: IE

The CPI Base Revision Exercise Measures a Slice of Life

Context

- Inflation, one of the most closely monitored macroeconomic indicators, directly affects household expenses and daily living.
- The **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** measures this impact by tracking changes in the prices of goods and services commonly consumed by households.
- In essence, CPI reflects the rising or falling cost of essentials—such as food, rent, and fuel—making it a practical indicator of how inflation shapes everyday life.
- **This article highlights** the significance of India’s Consumer Price Index (CPI) base revision to 2024, explaining how updated consumption patterns, modern data systems, and improved methodology ensure that inflation measurement remains aligned with changing household realities and policy needs.

CPI Base Revision 2024: Reflecting India's Changing Consumption Patterns

• Why CPI Is More Than Just a Number

- Though expressed as a single figure, the CPI represents household realities.
- It guides income adjustments, social security benefits, and helps the Reserve Bank of India frame monetary policy, including interest rate decisions.
- When CPI accurately reflects consumption patterns, policy responses better match ground realities.

• Need for Base Year Revision

- Since the last base year (2012), India's economy has undergone major changes:
 - Rapid urbanisation
 - Expansion of the services sector
 - Growth of digital platforms
 - Diversification in household spending
- To capture these shifts, India is updating the CPI base year to 2024.

• Updated Consumption Basket and Weightage

- The CPI 2024 series is based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023-24.
- Key changes include:
 - Higher weight for items with increased household spending
 - Reduced weight for items with declining expenditure share
 - Inclusion of emerging trends, particularly rising service consumption
- This ensures inflation measurement reflects actual spending behaviour.
- The revised CPI methodology aligns more closely with **international standards** while retaining India-specific features. This improves global comparability without compromising domestic relevance.

• Modernised Data Collection

- The 2024 revision upgrades data collection methods:
 - Traditional market surveys continue for essentials
 - Online price tracking introduced for telecom services, airfares, and other services
- This modernised approach better reflects evolving consumer habits.

A Wider and More Reliable CPI Database

• Technology-Driven Data Collection

- The new CPI series adopts computer-assisted price collection, reducing manual errors and enabling real-time validation.

- This improves the quality and timeliness of data—crucial for decisions affecting loan rates, savings returns, and household budgets.

- **Greater Use of Official and Administrative Data**

- The updated base year integrates more official data sources, including:
 - Rail fares and postal charges
 - Fuel prices
 - Public Distribution System (PDS) items
- By combining survey data, administrative records, and digital price sources, the CPI reduces bias and enhances accuracy compared to earlier market-only surveys.

- **Institutional Coordination and Expert Oversight**

- The base revision required large-scale coordination across field offices, statistical divisions, and expert bodies.
- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) consulted national and international experts to ensure methodological soundness, transparency, and clarity.

- **Continuity with Improvement**

- Despite updated weights, basket composition, and data sources, the CPI retains its core objective—measuring inflation from a household perspective.
- This continuity ensures long-term comparability while enhancing accuracy and policy relevance.

CPI in Context: Measuring Inflation Through Lived Experience

- The Consumer Price Index (CPI) reflects more than economic data—it captures the everyday realities of millions of households.
- By tracing how price changes affect daily life, it informs crucial policy decisions.
- Through the ongoing base revision, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has ensured that the CPI remains accurate, current, and comparable over time, preserving its role as a reliable mirror of India's economic experience.

The CPI Base Revision Exercise Measures a Slice of Life FAQs

Q1. Why is the CPI important for ordinary households?

Ans. The CPI measures changes in prices of commonly consumed goods and services, reflecting how inflation affects daily expenses like food, rent, and fuel.

Q2. Why was the CPI base year updated from 2012 to 2024?

Ans. Rapid urbanisation, expansion of services, digital shopping growth, and diversified spending patterns required updating the base year to reflect current consumption realities.

Q3. How has the CPI consumption basket changed in the 2024 revision?

Ans. Items with higher household spending received greater weight, declining items received less weight, and service-sector expenditure gained prominence.

Q4. What methodological improvements were introduced in CPI 2024?

Ans. The revision includes computer-assisted price collection, online price tracking, and integration of administrative data sources, improving accuracy and timeliness.

Q5. How does CPI influence macroeconomic policy?

Ans. CPI-based inflation guides the Reserve Bank of India in setting interest rates and shaping monetary policy to balance growth and price stability.

Source: TH

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