Matching EVM Results with VVPAT

Why in news?

Representatives from major opposition parties demanded that 50% of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) results be matched with VVPAT in Lok Sabha Elections.

What is a VVPAT?

- Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is a printed slip that contains a candidate's serial number, name of the candidate and the corresponding symbol.
- When a voter presses the button on the EVM against the chosen candidate, a printed slip is displayed for 7 seconds in the VVPAT machine.
- It is then automatically cut and delivered to a sealed ballot compartment.

What are the demands and proposals?

- The parties cited that there were reports of mismatch between votes polled and votes counted (as per the ECI records) in Madhya Pradesh and Telangana.
- The Election Commission (EC) was thus approached to ensure that 50% EVM results are crosschecked and matched with VVPATs.
- Currently, VVPAT slips are counted in one randomly selected booth of each constituency.
- It is now demanded that mandatory counting of paper trail from VVPAT should be carried out in each polling station in certain constituencies.
- This is in case if after counting from the EVM, it is found that there is a difference of less than 5% between votes cast in favour of the winning candidate and votes cast in favour of second position securing candidate.
- If there was any difference in counting of votes between EVM and VVPAT, the result in counting from VVPAT would prevail.
- The commission assured the political parties that issues raised by them would be deliberated and examined upon.

Is it a welcome proposal?

- Despite the concerns with EVMs, returning to paper ballots will be a regressive step.
- Moreover, the Electronic Voting Machine process is a major improvement

over paper-based voting.
- There has been no evidence of EVM-tampering as claimed by some parties.
- The administrative and technical safeguards instituted by the ECI and EVM manufacturers have been held credible.
- Despite this, the ECI had fast-tracked the implementation of the VVPAT, an adjunct to the EVM.
- So the demand is largely welcome, but there are other simpler methods than a polling station-wise verification.

What could be done?

- A scientifically and randomly chosen sample of booths is a reasonable enough verification process, instead of the opposition's proposal.
- A robust sampling technique can be adopted, involving the counting of more than a single booth.
- It should factor in the average size of the electorate in any constituency and voter turnout.
- The issue of machine glitches in the VVPAT system should also be addressed.
- Glitches in the VVPAT machines are largely due to winding issues in the print unit, which are sensitive to extreme weather.
- Some hardware-related changes could help here to improve its functioning.

Source: The Hindu

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