

BILL TO LINK VOTER ID WITH AADHAAR CARDS PASSED BY THE LOK SABHA

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

The opposition leaders say linking Aadhaar to electoral rolls will lead 'mass disenfranchisement'

NEW DELHI : The Lok Sabha on Monday passed the contentious Election Laws (Amendment) bill by voice vote, barely hours after it was introduced by Union law minister Kiren Rijju in the lower house of Parliament amid protests from the Opposition.

The bill proposes to voluntarily link electoral rolls to Aadhaar numbers and make the language of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, gender neutral. The opposition leaders say linking Aadhaar to electoral rolls will lead "mass disenfranchisement".

While introducing the bill, the law minister said it will help curb bogus voting and slammed the Opposition for not understanding the proposed law. "They are opposing it unnecessarily," Rijju said. He also cited the findings of the standing committee on the law to justify the Centre's decision. "Appropriate actions for the purpose of linking Aadhaar card number with voter I-card to purify the electoral roll which is in larger interest of democratic polity," the committee had said.

The recommendation was part of a report on demands for grants (2020-21) of the ministry of law and justice tabled in Parliament.

Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, senior Congress member of Parliament (MP) and the Leader of Opposition, said the bill should be referred to a standing committee for deliberation. "Linking of Aadhaar numbers with the voter ids will lead to mass disenfranchisement," Chowdhury said.

Electoral reform is an ongoing and continuous process. The central government has been receiving proposals for electoral reforms from various quarters, from time to time, including the Election Commission of India," the government said in the objectives section of the bill.

"Based on the proposals taken up by the Election Commission, it is proposed to amend the provisions of the RP Act, 1950, and the RP Act, 1951. Accordingly, a bill, namely, the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021, has been proposed."

The bill proposes an amendment of section 23 of the RP Act, 1950, allowing the linking of electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem to "curb the menace of multiple enrollment of the same person in different places".

Linking of Aadhaar numbers to voter IDs has been a particularly contentious provision that has been opposed by civil society and opposition parties. The bill, however, makes a provision that no application for inclusion of name in the electoral roll "shall be denied and no entries in the electoral roll shall be deleted for inability of an individual to furnish or intimate Aadhaar number due to such sufficient cause as may be prescribed, provided that such individual may be allowed to furnish such other alternative documents as may be prescribed".

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