Checks and balance

Posted at: 07/02/2019

Seeking a count of 50% of VVPAT slips is too much; the focus should be on ending glitches

- In a significant and welcome change from their earlier demand for a return to paper ballots, representatives of a large section of the mainstream Opposition parties met the Election Commission (ECI) to demand changes to the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail counting process during the general elections.
- Returning to paper ballots will be regressive.
- The Electronic Voting Machine process, despite the plethora of grievances about its functioning from the Opposition parties, is a major improvement over paper-based voting.
- There has been no evidence of EVM-tampering as claimed by some parties, and administrative and technical safeguards instituted by the ECI and EVM manufacturers have held steady since the introduction of the EVM.
- Despite this, the ECI had fast-tracked the implementation of the VVPAT, an adjunct to the EVM that allows for a paper trail for voting and later verification of the electronically registered mandate in the ballot unit of the EVM.
- ECI safeguards are robust enough to prevent this, but VVPAT recounts could eliminate any remaining doubt about possible "insider fraud" by errant officials or manufacturers.
- While the demand to count half of all the slips is an over-reaction, as a scientifically and randomly chosen sample of booths is a reasonable enough verification for the process, there remains the question whether counting one booth per constituency is a statistically significant sample to rule out errors.
- A more robust sampling technique that factors in the average size of the electorate in any constituency for each State and voter turnout, involving the counting of more than a single booth in some States, may be a better method.