

Alleged Disappearance of VVPAT Machine Sparks Concerns Ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha Polls in the state



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Shajid Khan 29 March 2024 18644 views

Udalguri: With the 2024 Lok Sabha elections looming, Assam finds itself embroiled in a controversy following the alleged disappearance of a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machine in Bhergaon of Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha seat.

The incident, which has raised questions about the efficacy of security measures implemented by election officials, comes just ahead of the first phase of polling scheduled for April 19. Assam is set to witness voting in three phases for a total of 14 Lok Sabha seats.

According to reports, during the segregation of machines assembly segment wise after the initial randomization process, one VVPAT machine bearing the unique ID EVTEB96784 was discovered to be missing. This discovery prompted the Chief Electoral Officer of Assam to initiate a preliminary inquiry, with the Joint Chief Electoral Officer tasked with conducting investigations.

Despite assurances of stringent security measures, including double locks on the strong room housing the machines, 24x7 CCTV coverage, and armed security, concerns persist regarding the apparent lapse in protocol leading to the disappearance.

In response to the allegations, the Chief Electoral Officer of Assam stated, "Due to stringent storage and security protocol with the participation of the political parties at every stage, there is no question of any missing unit. The missing VVPAT may have been inadvertently shifted to ECIL factory along with FLC non-functional units shifted after FLC completion."

Assurances were made that the matter has been taken up with the Electronic Corporation of India Limited (ECIL), which supplied the election equipment, including ballot units and VVPAT machines.

Amidst the controversy, the Chief Electoral Officer reiterated that strict action would be taken against any dereliction of duty found on the part of concerned district officials.

As the investigation unfolds, the incident casts a shadow over the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, particularly in the Darrang-Udalguri parliamentary seat where elections are scheduled for April 26, coinciding with polling in Diphu, Karimganj, Silchar, and Nagaon Lok Sabha seats under the second phase.

Shajid Khan

Recipient of The Annual Colosseum Awards 2014 & 2015 (by The Assam Tribune group), Shajid Khan is an Independent journalist based in Assam. He has contributed numerous political, socio-political stories for bountiful national,international as well as Assam based publications including The New York Times,Firstpost,The Telegraph. He also pens down analytic commentary on print and web based publications.

BY SHAJID KHAN

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