



## Population change and the democratic structure

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THE completion of the 2001 Census should, under the Constitution, have triggered an adjustment in the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha between the different states. This provision (Article 81-3), included from the first drafts in the constitutional convention, was intended to maintain the representative nature of the Lok Sabha, reflecting its status as the House of the People. However, the Constitution (91st Amendment) Bill, recently passed by Parliament, seeks to prevent such a redistribution, undermining the principle of one-person, one-vote, one-value that is at the heart of democratic practice.

This paper examines how the allocation of seats to the different states should have changed, given the most up to date population figures, and examines the reasons why the government has sought to intervene in the constitutional process in such a drastic way, as well as looking at the broader constitutional context of such an intervention.<sup>1</sup>

The provisional population figures released by the Census of India show that the population has increased by 21% since 1991, but that there are, as usual, big differences in the population growth in different states (Table 1). The lowest population growth occurs in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, whereas the highest population growth has happened in some of the smaller states and union territories – Nagaland, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu – and urban centres, such as Delhi and Chandigarh. Of the larger states – Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh all saw above average growth in population.

Table 2 shows the proportionate allocation of seats between states, calculated according to the provisional population figures in the Census 2001.<sup>2</sup> For the states and union territories with populations less than six million seats are not allocated proportionately,<sup>3</sup> and so these have been excluded from the exercise. This means that Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, and all the union territories except Delhi, are assumed to simply retain the same number of seats as they currently return to the Lok Sabha (19 in total). Assuming the total number of elected MPs returned remains at 543, this leaves 524 Lok Sabha seats to be allocated between 20 states and the union territory of Delhi, which have a combined population of 1,010,603,961 (some 98.4% of the total population of India).

The figures show that the large northern states are under-represented in the current Lok Sabha, whereas the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu are over-represented by a total of 14 seats. The most under-represented state is Uttar Pradesh, which should receive 87 seats rather than the 80 it currently returns. Uttar Pradesh has suffered from the allocation of five of its previous 85 seats to Uttaranchal, which should have only received four according to its population. Delhi, despite seeing its population increase by some 239% since

the last allocation of seats in the 1970s, is not under-represented since it was allocated more seats than it deserved in terms of its population by the Third Delimitation Commission.

**T**he failure to carry out redistribution after the 2001 Census will mean that there are large discrepancies between the constituency sizes in different states. The average constituency population in Uttar Pradesh will be nearly 500,000 more than that in Kerala. If, as the amendment to the Constitution suggests, the next redistribution is postponed until after 2026, which in practice would mean after the 2031 Census, the discrepancy between constituency sizes in the North and the South would be even greater. Given the same state-wise growth rates in population, the average constituency size in Uttar Pradesh would be over twice that in Kerala. This has important implications for the democratic basis of national elections. An elector in the South will have far more influence in Lok Sabha elections relative to a voter in the North, and MPs from the North will have vastly more constituents to deal with.

So why is the government taking action to prevent the constitutional mechanism designed to maintain the balance between the representation of the different states from working? The 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' released with the Constitutional Amendment Bill states that: 'Keeping in view the progress of family planning programmes in different parts of the country, the government, as part of the National Population Policy strategy, recently decided to extend the current freeze on undertaking fresh delimitation up to the year 2026 as a motivational measure to enable the state governments to pursue the agenda for population stabilization.'

In a similar vein, Rami Chhabra, who helped draw up the NPP, has argued that had a delimitation taken place on the basis of the 2001 census, 'The vast majority of the new seats would have accrued to the very states that had failed to curb population growth rates and improve their population's well-being, thus further tilting the balance of power in favour of those who had been derelict in their duties' (Chhabra 2000: 34).<sup>4</sup>

These reasons are a faint echo of the bluster surrounding the first postponement of delimitation, brought in during the Emergency. The excesses of the National Population Policy of 1976 were used not only to inflict forced sterilization and exploitation, but as a reason for bending the Constitution to the whims of Sanjay Gandhi.<sup>5</sup> Amongst the measures introduced under the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution was the postponement of any change in constituency boundaries until after the 2001 Census. It is this postponement that has led to the huge current discrepancies in constituency sizes,<sup>6</sup> but instead of allowing the delimitation process to resume after this rude interruption, the government, with the consent of the Congress opposition, has sought to prolong it, and the same old excuses have been used to justify their actions.

In a seminal article Alka Malwade Basu describes the 'politicization of fertility', whereby the goal of reducing population growth has become a convenient hook on which to hang various other loosely connected issues and hobby-horses (Basu 1997). The idea of reducing population growth has such positive associations amongst the policy-making community, and the fear of a rapidly increasing population (particularly of the poor, the uneducated, and 'outsiders') engenders such hostility, that the issue has become one which is used indiscriminately to support disparate causes, often with a spurious connection to the actual question of population growth.

**T**his widespread clamour can also be seen to distract from the very important

work that relates to population change, and which does so whilst recognizing the complexity of the determinants of fertility and fertility decline. Similarly, too much focus on the goal of reducing aggregate fertility rates can distract from other important issues, such as improving life expectations and reducing child mortality rates.

**S**tudies looking at the issue of population growth have shown that there are diverse causal factors behind population change; as Basu comments, ‘there can be no grand explanation for high fertility, nor a grand theory of fertility decline’ (Basu 1997: 5). Whilst a detailed study of the morality, fertility and gender bias throughout India carried out by Mamta Murthi, Anne-Catherine Guio and Jean Dreze (1995), did highlight a number of key factors which were influences, notably the role of women’s agency and empowerment, their study still found that there were significant differences between different regions of the country which persisted when other variables were controlled for. This is not to argue that state governments cannot promote programmes which influence population growth, but to reiterate that the determinants of population growth are complex and inter-connected with many other social, economic and historical factors. To suggest that Lok Sabha seats should be allocated on the basis of a state’s ability to control population growth is verging on the ridiculous.

The connection between the implementation of family planning strategy and the allocation of seats to the national Parliament is far too tenuous to be taken other than as a smoke-screen for more meaningful political considerations. To deny a person an equal voice in the democratic process because they happen to be living in a state that has had a high population growth rate is clearly indefensible. Such reasoning takes no account of migration between states, which may be just as significant a cause of population fluctuations than birth rate.

**T**he populations of Delhi and Chandigarh have both risen by around double the national rate, but much of the change is due to shifts in population from the countryside to the cities, rather than having anything to do with their contribution to the National Population Policy. Similarly, changes in population patterns in the North Eastern states may be a consequence of inter-state migration, changing attitudes towards participation with the census, or reduced mortality rates.

Furthermore, there is no coherent rationale for fixing the base line for the ‘correct’ population balance at 1971 levels. If the idea were really to encourage best practice in the future the policy should be to peg the levels at the rate they are now, as given by the 2001 census. As it is, voters in states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are being punished for high population growth rates over the last 30 years which they can hardly be held responsible for, and which they can do nothing about now.

The real motivation behind the change in the Constitution is the balance of political power between the regions, and, in particular, between the North and the South. As K.C. Sivaramakrishnan notes, ‘the real fear is not about population control but political control’ (Sivaramakrishnan 2000: 3093). The concern is not without foundation, for whilst the politics of the last 15 years have seen a power shift towards the state governments, this has largely been a consequence of the growth of an ‘electoral federalism’, rather than a reflection of changes in the structure of political institutions.

**T**his electoral federalism is characterized by the reduced influence of national politics and national parties over state-wise voting patterns, and the increasing success of regional parties and more autonomous state units of national parties. Whilst the Supreme Court’s increasing judicial activism has played a part in this

process, and the role of the central government has been somewhat inhibited by the liberalization process, the structure of politics has remained relatively unchanged. Balveer Arora has pointed out that federalism is as much about power sharing as discrete regional units having governmental autonomy.

Under the current system of electoral federalism the mechanisms of power sharing have largely been negotiated through bilateral contacts between state and central governments and, increasingly importantly, through the development of electoral alliances and coalition politics. Whereas regional parties such as the AIADMK were previously content to trade assistance to the Congress Party in Lok Sabha elections for control over the state assembly, there is now a much greater role for regional parties at the Centre, and a direct influence over the Centre.

The weakness of the system of electoral federalism stems from the fact that there is, or is perceived to be, a high level of instability, arising from the uncertain nature of electoral outcomes. The balance of power under this system of electoral federalism is determined both by success at the state level in both Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections, and the two are not always compatible. In part, this is a consequence of the general volatility of voting in electoral outcomes, partly due to worries about the effects of incumbency at either national or state levels.

The manoeuvring of parties before the recent state assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal shows how leaders tried to balance state-wise success with control over seat sharing agreements and the ability to distance ones party from responsibility for particular decisions.

**M**ore fundamentally, there is a recognition that regional power depends on an ability to affect the balance of power. If, during the 1999 Lok Sabha election, the BJP had not performed so badly in Uttar Pradesh, it would not now be so dependent on smaller coalition partners to maintain its majority, and it would have been able to take a much stronger line over the concessions given to each of its alliance partners. Whilst Jayalalitha may have overplayed her position as the pivotal coalition partner after the 1998 Lok Sabha election, she showed that in a finely balanced Parliament one party could bring the government down.

It is quite possible that the system of electoral federalism is actually far more robust than suggested here; that the system has forged strong links between state and national politics which can sustain the development of political programmes to the mutual benefit of national and regional parties. However, the fear that the system is unstable is evidently a fear amongst the ruling classes, shown both by the woeful complaints and ill-conceived remedies of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, and the decision to push through the 91st Amendment Bill.

**T**he driving force behind the decision to further postpone any state-wise reallocation of seats appears to be a fear that it will trigger unrest amongst those regions which are set to have their level of representation reduced. If the government had not decided to press this constitutional amendment through Parliament the process for a full redistribution of seats would now be slowly swinging into action. The effect of a reallocation of seats between states would lead to relatively fewer seats in the South, reflecting their lower growth in population. However, the difference would probably not be as great as some people fear.

At present the four southern states return 129 seats to the Lok Sabha, 23.8% of the total. If there were a fair redistribution, and the overall size of the Lok Sabha were kept as it currently is, the total would fall to 115, or 21.2% of the total. If the

redistribution were not having to adjust for 30 years population change, the adjustment would have been even smaller.

The postponement of delimitation in the 1970s has meant that the current readjustment is much larger than would have occurred if decennial adjustments, as laid down in the Constitution, had been implemented. Furthermore, by delaying redistribution by a further 30 years, to after the 2031 Census, the problem will be further bottled up, and the discrepancies will become even wider. A short term fix is only building larger problems which will have to be tackled at some point.

Any redistribution of seats would have political costs and benefits, and the assessment of the major parties has clearly been that the costs would outweigh the benefits. An example of the politicization of delimitation in the run up to the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections comes from Murasoli Maran, a DMK leader who was reported 'taking a dig at the Congress (I)' by suggesting 'they had opposed a Bill in Parliament to freeze the existing number of Lok Sabha seats for another 25 years to ensure that states like Tamil Nadu that did well in family planning did not suffer in any delimitation exercise. I hope Congressmen... will not pour mud on their own heads,' he said (*The Hindu* 12/2/2001). However, parties based in the northern states, which lose out from the failure to reallocate seats to reflect the growing population, have a clear incentive to oppose the constitutional amendment. Simulations of the effect of redistribution on the 1998 and 1999 elections suggest that parties with a strong presence in the North, such as the BJP, the Samajwadi Party, and the BSP, would have gained seats (see McMillan 2000: 1274-5).

**W**hat else could the government have done? One solution would have simply been to have done nothing, in which case the constitutional mechanism for reallocating seats after each census would have been re-activated after its Sanjay Gandhi imposed inactivity. Whether the issue of delimitation would have really become matter of widespread dissent is questionable; whilst the issue impacts directly on the livelihoods of sitting MPs, and so is dear to the heart of all active politicians, it has little wider resonance. The three previous Delimitation Commissions managed to carry out their business without any great dissent amongst the general public.

A second solution would be to simply increase the size of the Lok Sabha. This would require a constitutional amendment, since Article 81 sets a limit on the number of seats elected by the states and union territories, but allowing the Lok Sabha to increase in size would enable the balance of representation and population to be maintained without reducing the number of MPs returned by any particular state. This has been the practice with every previous delimitation, when readjustment has been accomplished by creating new seats, rather than shifting round existing seats.

Table 3 shows a proportionate allocation of seats given the 2001 Census population figures, and allowing the size of the Lok Sabha to grow. If there were 647 constituencies to be filled by election, then no state would lose out in any redistribution. A total of 104 new MPs would be created. Twenty three of these would be returned by Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra would return 12 more seats, Bihar 11 more seats, and Rajasthan 10. Whilst the growth in the jump in the size of the Lok Sabha seems large, this, again, is largely a consequence of the block on delimitation imposed in the 1970s. If redistribution had occurred in the 1980s and 1990s there would have been a much gentler increase.<sup>7</sup>

**W**hilst creating more MPs may not at first glance seem an ideal solution, it is a remarkably simple way of carrying out a reallocation of seats without any state

losing their number of representatives. The population of the average constituency is still enormous in comparative terms, and a larger Lok Sabha would not necessarily be more ineffective. A Lok Sabha of 647 would still be smaller than the British House of Commons, where 659 MPs legislate for a population of just 50 million.

**A** more radical solution would be to reform the way in which the Rajya Sabha is constituted, entrenching the federal basis of the Indian Union. The basic idea is to reassure those representing the various states that their voices will always be heard within central government, even if the state share of the national population falls, or if electoral arithmetic works against them. In such a way electoral federalism would be replaced by an institutional federalism. Such a reform would have to be wide reaching, addressing questions such as the method of redrawing state boundaries, and the mechanism for allocating revenue between the Centre and states, but at its heart it would involve a reassessment of the role of the Rajya Sabha.

The original conception of a bicameral Parliament for India was for one house to represent population, and one to represent the interests of the separate states, reflected in the choice of titles as House of the People and House of the States. However, uncertainty over how this would be constituted in the light of the incorporation of the princely states, and belief in the sovereignty of the people, saw a move towards a more passive second chamber, akin to the British House of Lords, which would be more of a deliberating and delaying body (see Shiva Rao, 1968: 420-22).

As presently constituted the Rajya Sabha is an extremely weak second chamber, too often being used to reward politicians incapable of winning their own elections, and any regional basis undermined by the manipulation of parties who put up candidates with no connection with the state. Since the Rajya Sabha is not a directly elected body there is less of a threat to its democratic legitimacy, and since it is called the Council of States then there seems to be no real reason why it should not be used as a conduit for states' rights.

The allocation of seats to different states is laid down in the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution, and it would be simple to readjust this, or (perhaps more coherently) to devise a formula which gives each state a minimum amount of seats and then allocates seats to states according to some weighted measure of their population. This would alter the representative basis of the Rajya Sabha, but in such a way that was not open to partisan manipulation, and avoided undemocratic procedures such as nomination to the legislature.<sup>8</sup>

**O**ther federal Parliaments have used bicameralism as a means of entrenching the position of states within the structure of the national constitution. Examples include Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Spain, Russia, South Africa, and the United States. In each of these countries a lower chamber based on representation on the basis of population is balanced by a second chamber which is filled on a regional basis, giving regional representatives additional influence over national policy.

The decision not to face up to the democratic consequences of the changing demography of India undermines the representative nature of the Lok Sabha. The Constitution (91st Amendment) Bill is a deliberate fudge, which rather than addressing the issues involved, simply delays having to address it for another 30 years. In this period the differences between the populations of the states and the number of representatives returned from each state will become much more extreme. This could distort the outcome of elections which are meant to be free

and fair, and devalues the vote of those living in certain states.

A simple solution is available, which would keep the original constitutional mechanism for reallocation of seats after each census, but allow the number of MPs elected to increase. This would maintain the representative basis of the Lok Sabha, but mean that no state would have its number of MPs reduced. Instead, using the spurious justification that the democratic basis of the Lok Sabha should reward states who have limited the growth in population, the government and the Congress party have stuck their heads into the sand, and hoped that in 30 years the problem will have disappeared. The truth is that the problem will only get worse, and that short-term expediency has over-ridden democratic principle.

**TABLE 1**

**Population Change, 1991 to 2001**

	<i>1991 Population</i>	<i>2001 Population</i>	<i>Increase 1991 to 2001 (%)</i>
All India	846,302,688	1,027,015,247	21.35
Andhra Pradesh	66,508,008	75,727,541	13.86
Arunachal Pradesh	864,558	1,091,117	26.21
Assam	22,414,322	26,638,407	18.85
Bihar*	64,532,271	82,878,796	28.43
Chhatisgarh*	17,614,735	20,795,956	18.06
Goa	1,169,793	1,343,998	14.89
Gujarat	41,309,582	50,596,992	22.48
Haryana	16,463,648	21,082,989	28.06
Himachal Pradesh	5,170,877	6,077,248	17.53
J&K**	7,718,700	10,069,917	30.46
Jharkhand*	21,843,841	26,909,428	23.19
Karnataka	44,977,201	52,733,958	17.25
Kerala	29,098,518	31,838,619	9.42
Madhya Pradesh*	48,564,515	60,385,118	24.34
Maharashtra	78,937,187	96,752,247	22.57
Manipur	1,837,149	2,388,634	30.02
Meghalaya	1,774,778	2,306,069	29.94
Mizoram	689,756	891,058	29.18
Nagaland	1,209,546	1,988,636	64.41
Orissa	31,659,736	36,706,920	15.94
Punjab	20,281,969	24,289,296	19.76
Rajasthan	44,005,990	56,473,122	28.33
Sikkim	406,457	540,493	32.98
Tamil Nadu	55,858,946	62,110,839	11.19
Tripura	2,757,205	3,191,168	15.74

Uttar Pradesh*	131,997,503	166,052,859	25.8
Uttaranchal*	7,113,727	8,479,562	19.2
West Bengal	68,077,965	80,221,171	17.84
A and N Islands	280,661	356,265	26.94
Chandigarh	642,015	900,914	40.33
DNH	138,477	220,451	59.2
DD	101,586	158,059	55.59
Delhi	9,420,644	13,782,976	46.31
Lakshadweep	51,707	60,595	17.19
Pondicherry	807,785	973,829	20.56

Source: Census of India (provisional figures).

\* The provisional Census figures for the new states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttaranchal included figures for population growth since 1991. These have been used to re-calculate the 1991 figures for Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh to reflect the boundaries of the new states. The resulting figures do not tally exactly with the actual 1991 totals for the states, but are a good approximation.

\*\* The 1991 figures for Jammu and Kashmir are Census of India estimates.

**TABLE 2**

**Over- and Under-representation According to 2001 Census Figures**

	<i>Seats 2001</i>	<i>Proportional seats using 2001 Census population</i>	<i>Over- and Under- representation</i>
All India	524	524	
Andhra Pradesh	42	39	3
Assam	14	14	0
Bihar	40	43	-3
Chhattisgarh	11	11	0
Gujarat	26	26	0
Haryana	10	11	-1
Himachal Pradesh	4	3	1
Jammu and Kashmir	6	5	1
Jharkhand	14	14	0
Karnataka	28	27	1
Kerala	20	17	3
Madhya Pradesh	29	31	-2
Maharashtra	48	50	-2
Orissa	21	19	2
Punjab	13	13	0
Rajasthan	25	29	-4
Tamil Nadu	39	32	7
Uttar Pradesh	80	87	-7

Uttaranchal	5	4	1
West Bengal	42	42	0
Delhi	7	7	0
Calculations were made with a divisor of 1,919,000. For details see text.			

**TABLE 3****Proportionate Allocation of Seats, if Lok Sabha is Allowed to Grow**

	<i>Proportionate seat allocation with enlarged Lok Sabha</i>	<i>Increase in number of seats returned</i>
All India	647	104
Andhra Pradesh	47	5
Arunachal Pradesh	2	0
Assam	17	3
Bihar	51	11
Chhatisgarh	13	2
Goa	2	0
Gujarat	31	5
Haryana	13	3
Himachal Pradesh	4	0
Jammu and Kashmir	6	0
Jharkhand	17	3
Karnataka	33	5
Kerala	20	0
Madhya Pradesh	37	8
Maharashtra	60	12
Manipur	2	0
Meghalaya	2	0
Mizoram	1	0
Nagaland	1	0
Orissa	23	2
Punjab	15	2
Rajasthan	35	10
Sikkim	1	0
Tamil Nadu	39	0
Tripura	2	0
Uttar Pradesh	103	23
Uttaranchal	5	0

West Bengal	50	8
A and N Islands	1	0
Chandigarh	1	0
DNH	1	0
DD	1	0
Delhi	9	2
Lakshadweep	1	0
Pondicherry	1	0
Calculations were made with a divisor of 1,613,000.		

**Footnotes:**

1. This article updates previous work done on the delimitation process in India, using 2001 Census data (see McMillan 2000 and 2001). The data is available from <http://www.nuff.ox.ac.uk/users/Mcmillan/delim/delim1.htm>.

2. Simulations of fair allocations of seats between states have been calculated using the Webster method, named after Daniel Webster, a US Senator who worked on the question of apportionment in the 1830s. The details of the method, as well as an account of the history surrounding the process in the United States, can be found in Michael Balinski and Peyton Young's classic account (1982). Balinski and Young show that the Webster method is the system which most closely satisfies the ideal of one-person, one-vote, one-value. It does not favour larger or smaller states, and allocates seats as near as possible to the quota – the number of seats of average population size that each state could return. It is also unaffected by the 'Alabama paradox', whereby the introduction of a new state changes the allocation of seats to other states, even when the size of the House is allowed to rise. This is important in the Indian context, where only those states with populations over six million are included in the proportionate allocation of seats process, and hence new states are periodically introduced (in these simulations Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh have been included when they were previously below the population cut-off). The Webster method involves first choosing the size of the Lok Sabha. Then a divisor  $x$  is chosen which, when the populations of the states is divided by  $x$  and the resulting numbers rounded to the nearest integer, the results sum to the chosen size of the Lok Sabha. Each state is given the number found by dividing its population by the divisor and then rounding the result to the nearest integer. In the analysis presented here, where the size of the Lok Sabha is assumed to be fixed at 543 elected members (524 from the states large enough to be included in the reallocation process), the divisor used was 1,919,000. This is slightly less than the average size of each seat (the quota), which for the 524 seats is 1,928,634. If the quota is used to allocate seats between states, and the same principle of rounding the remainders up or down is used, only 523 seats are allocated. This is a problem with the use of the quota – it does not necessarily allocate the same number of seats as were used to calculate it. The difference arises when the remainders are not equally divided between those more than 0.5 and those less than 0.5. In order to get around this flaw a number of different methods have been proposed, such as allocating seats to the states with the largest remainders until all the seats have been filled. However, all such solutions introduce a bias either towards small or large states, and are thus unsatisfactory. Only the Webster method is free of bias.

3. This is under the Constitution (31st Amendment) Act, 1973, s. 2.

4. Why the National Population Policy felt the need to delve into matters of constitutional restructuring and electoral mechanics is unclear. The incongruity between the statements of the NPP on delimitation and the actual proposals for changing patterns of population growth, which move away from focus on incentives and disincentive towards a focus on health care, education, and female empowerment, is glaring. The NPP hardly appears as a neutral arbiter in the current debate, with Gita Sen noting that the National Population Policy 2000 'was drafted and discussed almost entirely within a closed circle of the government' (Sen 2000).

5. For a description of the politics of fertility control and the associated excesses of the Emergency, see Panandiker and Umashankar (1994).

6. See McMillan, 2000.

7. An estimated projection of the size of the Lok Sabha, assuming that the delimitations after the 1981 and 1991 censuses had taken place, is shown in McMillan (2000: 1273).

8. At present, the President can nominate up to 12 members of the Rajya Sabha to represent Literature, Science, Art, and Social Service. The President can also (and does) nominate two members to the Lok Sabha to represent the Anglo-Indian community. Nominations to the Lok Sabha are clearly inappropriate, and the representation of Anglo-Indians should, if still deemed necessary, be switched to the Rajya Sabha.

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