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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Illogical Acts — Mob Attack on Judicial Officers in Malda Demands Accountability

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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Illogical Acts — Mob Attack on Judicial Officers in Malda Demands Accountability

 The Hindu

7 April 2026

GS2

 The Hindu

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CONTEXT

The Hindu editorial titled “**Illogical acts**” condemns the **April 1, 2026 mob gherao of seven judicial officers** in **Malda, West Bengal**, who were **held without food or water for over nine hours** while serving as Election Registration Officers under Supreme Court orders for the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls. The editorial argues this calculated assault on the judiciary marks a dangerous escalation of West Bengal’s election-season lawlessness ahead of the **April 23 and 29 Assembly polls**.

THE EDITORIAL ARGUMENT

- ① **Judicial officers as ERO is a constitutional function** — these officers were performing duties under Supreme Court orders during the SIR; attacking them strikes at the rule of law itself
- ② **State government’s failure** — the West Bengal administration failed to provide adequate security despite the known volatility of election-time rural Bengal; the editorial holds the state directly accountable
- ③ **A dangerous escalation** — Bengal’s history of election violence is well-known, but holding judicial officers hostage represents a qualitative escalation
- ④ **ECI’s role under threat** — if Election Registration Officers cannot perform their duties safely, the integrity of the electoral roll itself is compromised
- ⑤ **The need for accountability** — those responsible for the gherao must face criminal charges; the state government must explain its security failure

WHAT IS SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION (SIR)?

The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls is a process conducted by the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** before elections to ensure the accuracy and integrity of voter lists. Under SIR:

- Each household is physically verified by an Election Registration Officer (ERO)
- Names are added (eligible voters), corrected, or deleted (deceased, shifted, duplicates)
- The process is overseen by the District Election Officer

For 2026 Assembly elections in West Bengal, the **Supreme Court** ordered SIR to address concerns about voter list manipulation. **Judicial officers** (often Civil Judges or Magistrates) were appointed as EROs to ensure independence from the state administration.

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA — POWERS AND LIMITS

POWER	SOURCE
Conduct of elections	Article 324
Plenary powers (residuary)	Article 324 — interpreted broadly by SC
Model Code of Conduct	Convention; not statutory
Transfer of officials in poll-bound states	Article 324
Voter list maintenance	Representation of People Act, 1950
Election dispute adjudication	Election Tribunal mechanism

The ECI's powers under **Article 324** are broad but enforcement depends on the state administration. When the state fails to cooperate, the ECI's authority is undermined.

WEST BENGAL ELECTIONS 2026

PHASE	DATE	SEATS
Phase 1	April 23, 2026	TBA
Phase 2	April 29, 2026	TBA
Total seats	294	
Counting	May 4, 2026	

West Bengal is one of five states going to polls in April-May 2026: Assam, Kerala, Puducherry (April 9), Tamil Nadu (April 23), and West Bengal (in two phases).

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AT STAKE

ARTICLE	PROVISION
Article 14	Equality before law
Article 21	Right to life and personal liberty
Article 50	Separation of judiciary from executive (DPSP)
Article 235	Control over subordinate courts vests in High Courts
Article 324	Election Commission's powers
Article 356	President's Rule (in case of constitutional breakdown)

The editorial implicitly raises the question: if the state cannot protect judicial officers performing constitutional duties, has there been a “failure of constitutional machinery” warranting central intervention under Article 356?

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — Polity & Governance

- Election Commission of India: powers, structure, challenges
- Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls
- Centre-State relations in election administration
- Judicial independence and security
- Federalism: state's responsibility for law and order

Mains Probable Questions:

- “The integrity of electoral rolls is fundamental to free and fair elections. Examine the role of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in ensuring this integrity, and the challenges in its implementation.” (250 words)
- “Should judicial officers be deployed for non-judicial functions like Election Registration Officer roles? Discuss the constitutional and practical implications.” (250 words)

FACTS CORNER

- **Article 324** gives the ECI broad supervisory, directional, and control powers over elections — but the SC has ruled (*Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner, 1978*) that these powers must be exercised reasonably and fairly.
- The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** differs from the **annual summary revision** — it is a more rigorous, door-to-door verification process triggered by specific concerns about voter list accuracy.
- **West Bengal's election violence** has been a recurring concern — the 2018 panchayat elections saw over 30 deaths, and the 2021 Assembly polls saw post-result violence that drew Supreme Court attention.
- **Article 235** vests control over subordinate courts in the respective High Courts — judicial officers are protected by the High Court's administrative jurisdiction, not the state government.
- **President's Rule under Article 356** can be imposed when the Governor reports that the constitutional machinery has broken down — but the *SR Bommai* judgment (1994) imposed strict procedural safeguards on its use.

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[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujyari](#) →<https://ujyari.com/editorials/2026/04/hindu-illogical-acts-malda-judicial-officers/>

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