**No legal mandate to share voter turnout with public, says EC**

The Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday told the Supreme Court that there was no “legal mandate” to provide the voter turnout data to any person other than electoral candidates or their agents.

“There is no legal mandate to provide Form 17C [account of votes recorded] to any other person other than the candidate or his agent,” the EC said in a 225-page affidavit.

The poll body was responding to an application filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), represented by advocates Prashant Bhushan, Neha Rathi and Cheryl D’Souza, primarily seeking to disclose authenticated record of voter turnout by uploading on the EC website scanned legible copies of Form 17C of all polling stations after each phase of polling in the Lok Sabha election in 2024.

The NGO had alleged an inordinate delay in publishing voter turnout details followed by a sharp spike in figures from the initial voter turnout percentages released by the EC. The development, according to the ADR, had rung alarm bells about the authenticity of the polling data available in the public domain and raised suspicions whether the electronic voting machines (EVMs) were switched.

In the previous hearing on May 17, the Supreme Court had asked why the EC could not upload voter turnout details.

However, the EC countered in its affidavit that the ADR was merely trying to “create an entitlement in the middle of the election period”.

It said the statutory mandate required Form 17C to be shared only with candidates and their agents. However, it was the EC’s voluntary and “non-statutory” initiative to disclose the voter turnout through voter turnout app, website and various press releases.