



Welfare on hold

Slow and steady poll process is on

THE Election Commission's directive to the Union Government to suspend the preparatory work for the rollout of the direct cash transfer scheme is illogical. The scheme is to be launched in 51 districts on January 1, 2013, and right now only ground work like the identification of eligible families, the process of providing unique identity numbers under the Aadhar scheme and the opening of bank accounts is being done. The commission thinks this violates the model code of conduct. It was the Union Budget for 2012-13 that first unveiled the cash transfer scheme. So the announcement of the scheme is not new. Only the implementation process has begun now. To start with, only pensions, scholarships and other welfare benefits are to be paid directly into the bank accounts of beneficiaries. Many people are already getting these benefits.

Moreover, the scheme covers a very small area and a small number of people: just four districts of Gujarat. Should an important reform in the disbursal of subsidies which has a bearing on the lives of so many people be held in abeyance because voters in four districts might get influenced? As for Himachal Pradesh, where only two districts are covered, the Election Commission's expression of displeasure over the Central initiative makes less sense. People in the hill state have already cast their votes. So how will the spade work to be done in pursuance of the cash transfer scheme change the verdict?

The Election Commission itself is conducting the assembly elections in a leisurely way. Himachal Pradesh went to the polls on November 4 but will have to wait for the result till December 20. The Gujarat elections are scheduled for December 13 and 17. Why such a large gap between the poll dates of the two states? The whole country has been kept on the tenterhooks needlessly. Why should development work come to a halt during this period? If it takes the EC almost two months to conduct two assembly elections, how long will it take to hold the countrywide general election in 2014?