

Don't just be a voter

Now, YOU can also monitor the poll process. **Votereport.in**, a first-of-its-kind citizen-powered platform, allows you to highlight irregularities via SMS, email, or even a Tweet

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WHAT could the 26/11 terror attacks, a Kenyan post-election violence blog and one more avid blogger possibly have in common? The mix, as this correspondent discovered, is more potent than you might imagine at first.

Gaurav Mishra (29) was only a Yahoo! Fellow in International Values, Communications, Technology, and Global Internet in Washington until the Mumbai terror attacks. But the tragedy got him toying with the idea of forming a network for the Indian elections along the lines of the Kenyan post-election violence blogger network, Ushahidi.

The aim was to increase transparency and accountability, instill a participatory mindset among citizens and provide a complete picture of public opinion during the 2009 polls.

Armed with these goals and the aid of Internet technologist Selvam Velmurugam (35), Mishra converted his idea into reality on April 6 with the website **Vote Report India (VRI)**. **MID DAY** explores the site...



BRILLIANT: Gaurav Mishra (above) and Selvam Velmurugam



To watch a video of Gaurav Mishra talk about VRI, log on to www.mid-day.com



How VRI works?

VRI allows users to report violations of the election code of conduct via SMS, e-mail and online complaints. The platform will compile these with news reports, blog posts, photos, videos and Tweets from all relevant sources on an interactive map.

This means, when you click a

point on the VRI map, a timeline of all the incidents related to that location would be displayed.

"We will eventually do an analysis of incidents to present trends as well," said Gaurav.

The dual approach will up transparency levels in the election process, the founders believe.

A hit already

THE duo believes VRI has managed to throw up great numbers since its launch, as it gives the youth the sense that they have the power to create positive change by making the election process transparent. Over 100 blog posts have been linked to the site and it is receiving 1,000+ page views per day. "We hit 60 reports on April 16. The most popular categories are Election Commission Interventions, Voter Bribing and Violence. As of now, most of the stories are based on stories already reported in the media," says Gaurav.

Mishra and Selvam are confident that VRI will be around for future elections. Meanwhile, they are working on another platform for elections around the world, starting with Lebanon in June.

The 9 categories that you can report under are...

Forged Vote, Violence, Voter Bribing, Voting Machine Problems, Other Irregularities, Inflammatory Speech, Election Commission Interventions, Voter Went Missing, What Went Well.

Citizens
can send reports via
SMS with VoteReport to 5676785, e-mail to report@votereport.in, tweet with the Hashtag (#VoteReport) or by logging on to www.votereport.in. You can even join the group's communities on Facebook, Orkut, Twitter (@votereportindia), SMS GupShup or Google Groups.

The team

While Mishra is involved in research on how Internet and mobile technologies transform society, Selvam has founded eMoksha.org, a non-profit organisation aimed at enabling stronger democracies through increased citizen awareness and

engagement.

"When I was in India, by elections were being held in parts of Tamil Nadu. I heard friends and relatives complain about not finding their names on the electoral roll, or their vote being cast by someone else. I wondered who they would approach," says Selvam.

They were supported by 35 other volunteers — with the core team in the US and a handful of partners and local promoters helping them reach out to organisations in India.

The service is powered by Ushahidi and SwiftRiver, and managed by eMoksha. Ushahidi is an award-winning platform

that sources citizen reporting. SwiftRiver is a platform that makes sense of multiple sources of information in a fast-changing crisis situation.

VRI has also partnered with the Arabic news network Al Jazeera.

'Shiv Sena, MNS share the same genes'

Gurudas Kamat, the Cong candidate from Mumbai North West, talks to Varun Singh about the tug-of-war with NCP over the PM's post and much more...

THE NCP has reiterated that Pawar is their prime ministerial candidate...

There can be no discussion on this. We have made it clear that Dr Singh is our candidate.

Is Singh the Congress candidate or the UPA's?

Dr Singh is the UPA candidate.

What about Rahul Gandhi?

We do see him as a PM material, but it's up to him to decide when he is ready.

What is your stand on the issue of migrants?

I condemn the attacks against migrants. The parties responsible for the attacks have done nothing for Maharashtrians.



POLL KHOL: Gurudas Kamat, makes his party's stand clear.
PIC/ATUL KAMBLE

Watch a video of Kamat on www.mid-day.com

The Shiv Sena has even nominated non-Marathi industrialists to the Rajya Sabha.

You mean the Shiv Sena or the MNS?

They both share the same genes. Our opposition to communal forces remains as strong as ever.

But you chose not to tie

up with the Samajwadi Party in UP...

We did not because Mulayam Singh welcomed BJP's Kalyan Singh, who was behind the Babri Masjid demolition, into the SP.

Why did you decide to contest at the last moment?

I was chairman of the state

election campaign committee and, hence, had not applied for a ticket. But when it emerged that we did not have a sitting MP from North West, I decided to contest.

What issues are you taking up?

Water scarcity is a major issue here. I will also work for the monorail and the metro to be completed quickly.

Cars confiscated

LAST night, the Aarey police confiscated eight cars used by Kamat to campaign, as they didn't have the required permission from the election officer.

Morparia



Appeal

SABA Shaikh (8), a thalassaemia major patient, is undergoing a blood transfusion at St George Hospital. As per the medical report by Christian Medical College

POLLING STONES
With 58 criminals, state 2nd to Bihar

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BIHAR has the maximum number of candidates with criminal records contesting for the 15th Lok Sabha elections and Maharashtra is fast catching up. With 58 out of the 312 candidates being tainted, the state is comes a close second to Bihar, where 60 candidates out of the 182 have criminal backgrounds in the second phase. Uttar Pradesh tails Maharashtra with 39 candidates with criminal records.

According to an analysis released by the Association of Democratic Reforms, the maximum number of candidates with criminal charges in Maharashtra were found in the Beed constituency from where BJP leader Gopinath Munde, who does not have a clean chit either, is contesting the elections.

Other prominent candidates facing criminal charges in the state include Shiv Sena leader Chandrakant Khaire, former minister Padamsingh Patil and Janata Dal leader Nihal Ahmed, to mention a few.

Interestingly, Maharashtra tops the list when it comes to crorepati candidates boasting of 57 crorepaties followed by 53 out of the 214 candidates contesting in Andhra Pradesh.