

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT
THE SECOND READING OF THE ELECTION
BILL IN THE DEWAN RAKYAT ON 12TH
MARCH, 1963

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

I beg to move that a Bill intituled "an Act to provide that, in respect of a polling district or an election ward or division, the Election Commission may assign a distinguishing number or a distinguishing number and letter, instead of a distinguishing letter or distinguishing letters" be read a second time.

Sir, in the years 1958 and 1959 the electoral rolls for each State in the Federation were prepared by each State Supervisor of Elections by having the names of electors typed out on ordinary typewriters. These names, over two million in number for the whole country, had had to be retyped annually during the revision. The process of typing the rolls and re-typing them was not only slow and cumbersome but expensive. These rolls, prepared under the Elections (Registration of Electors) Regulations, 1958, and its amending regulations, were then applicable only to Parliamentary and State elections.

With the passing of the Local Government Elections Act, 1960, and the Local Government Elections (Amendment) Act, 1961, the Election Commission took over the responsibility of conducting elections to Local Authorities and Local Councils throughout the country. Various regulations for the purpose of registration of electors were also passed. Thus, the Election Commission was committed, not only in respect of the conduct of all elections in the country but also in respect of the registration of electors and the preparation of rolls to be used for all such elections.

Under the provisions of sub-section (1) (b) of section 7 of the Elections Ordinance, 1958, the Election Commission shall, in respect of Parliament and the State Legislative Assemblies, after

the delimitation of a constituency and thereafter when any constituency is altered or a new constituency is created, assign to each polling district a distinguishing letter or letters, and under the provisions of sub-section (1) (b) of section 16 of the Local Government Elections Act, 1960, the Election Commission shall, in respect of Local Authorities and Local Councils, specify the names of the wards and other divisions of the local area and assign a distinguishing letter or letters to each such ward and division.

The assigning of letters to polling districts was originally necessitated by the fact that polling districts did not have names. However, all polling districts are now named and it is not necessary to assign distinguishing letters in order that all the political parties and the public may easily recognise the polling districts.

Since the year 1960, the system of typing and re-typing the names of electors in the State Elections Offices was abolished and the Election Commission introduced a new system of producing the electoral rolls. This consisted of using a punched-card system centrally. In their functions of sorting, collating and merging, the punched-card machines use numerieals and as such it is necessary to employ a set of code numbers to enable one polling district to be distinguished from another. Incidentally, the use of such code numbers is not confined to polling districts. Code numbers are also assigned to Parliamentary constituencies and localities in each polling district.

As the code numbers are now a permanent feature in the electoral rolls, it is possible that in the near future the use of code letters (distinguishing letters) may be dispensed with altogether. It is therefore desirable that code numbers be legally assigned to the electoral rolls, whether they be the electoral rolls to be certified annually or whether they are the merged rolls after certification. It is not contemplated at this stage to abolish by law the use of code letters. Discretion, however, is left to the Election Commission to use either code letters or code numbers but it can be foreseen that code numbers will replace code letters in the not too distant future.