

**12<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
on  
'ELECTORAL & POLITICAL REFORMS'**

Organised by

**Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Election Watch (AP & TEW)  
&  
Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)**

**Venue:** Dr. Marri Channa Reddy HRD Institute, Road No.25,  
Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad

**Date:** 12th and 13th March 2016

# ASSOCIATION FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

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# SELECT PRESS COVERAGE

**THE HINDU**  
NATIONAL - ANDHRA PRADESH  
Hyderabad, March 12, 2018

**'Compulsory voting difficult to implement in India'**



Chief Election Commissioner Nasim Ahmad Zaidi at the 12th annual conference on electoral and political reforms in the city on Saturday. Photo: Nagesh Gupta

The pros and cons of introducing compulsory voting during elections was one of the topics that took centre stage at the 12th annual conference on 'electoral and political reforms'. During the panel discussion on 're-hauling the electoral system in India' held on Saturday, panelist K.J. Rao, general secretary, FAME, argued that given the complexity of the country and the large number of voters it would not be easy making voting compulsory.

"Compulsory voting in India is very difficult to implement. It was tried in the local elections in Gujarat and to take action against those who did not vote was tough. India is a huge country and it will not be easy enforcing this rule. The reason why many people do not vote is because they feel all the parties are the same and won't do anything for them," said Mr. Rao.

Jaya Prakash Narayana (JP), president, Lok Satta Party, had a different take on it.

"Compulsory voting needs to be taken seriously. The fine for not voting can be probably Rs. 100 towards municipal tax. There will be moral pressure on the voters and the model can be similar to the one in Australia," said JP.

The two-day conference is being organised by AP and Telangana Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).


Srinivasan Ramani, associate editor, The Hindu felt that NOTA (None Of The Above) option on the EVs was being exercised only to satisfy the voters' conscience. "NOTA is a waste of vote.

It is a negative vote which doesn't count and does not serve any purpose. I do not see any significant value except for the voter emotionally boycotting the voting and registering it," he said.

News link: <http://bit.ly/1WZMNGx>

**INDIAN EXPRESS**  
NEW DELHI, March 12, 2018

**CEC Proposes Jail for Politicos Hiding Info**



Hyderabad: Stressing on the need to de-criminalise the election process, Dr Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, said here on Saturday that any attempt to conceal information in the affidavit by a political candidate should attract an imprisonment of two years.

Addressing the 12th annual national conference on Electoral and Political Reforms, Zaidi said that voters have the right to know their candidate. "The voters have the right to know their candidate. So, any attempt to conceal information deliberately should be taken seriously and awarded two years jail term. Also, the courts should deliver verdict within a year so that there is no chance for a wrong candidate to assume office," he opined.

Expressing his objection to candidates contesting elections from jail, Zaidi said there is a need to re-look the case. "The judgment given by the SC that a candidate can contest elections while languishing in police custody is a backward step. There is a need for experts to look into this point to make elections clean," he said.

The CEC observed that none of the above (NOTA) option in elections should be studied by experts and see whether it serves good to people. He stated there are 40 reform proposals pending before the law commission and said that these reforms need to be implemented.

Answering a query on corruptions in MLC elections, Zaidi said corruption has touched new heights with advent of technology. "People are finding new ways to give 'gifts' to MLC and others, and it is becoming even harder to catch the culprits as the gifts are directly delivered to their home, it would be better if we can have an open ballot system for MLC elections so that corruption can be curbed," he observed.

When asked why all the information with election commission is in an un-downloadable PDF format, the CEC assured that changes will be made soon. "Within the next couple of months, we are going to get a new software and we will make sure that all the information on the site is accessible to the general public. The site will be revamped and changes will be visible within 2 months," said Zaidi.

The CEC revealed that the EC has a database of over 85 crores voters with them and that they will be cleansing the voter rolls to identify duplicate profiles. He said that the election commission is planning to send candidates information to the voters via SMS so as to help voters choose the right candidates.

**live mint**  
New Delhi, March 12, 2018

**CEC revives debate on 2-year jail for wrong information in poll affidavits**

The two-year conviction period could bar the candidate from contesting elections for up to six years.



A live photo of chief election commissioner Nasim Zaidi. Photo: Mint

New Delhi: Ahead of the crucial Assembly elections in four states and one Union territory, chief election commissioner (CEC) Nasim Zaidi has revived the debate on a key demand for electoral reforms, seeking two years' imprisonment for those furnishing incorrect details in poll affidavits, a conviction period that could bar the candidate from contesting elections for up to six years.

"The commission has proposed that if there is any attempt to conceal relevant information... this should be criminalized and there should be a punishment of two years for concealing or giving false information in (poll) affidavit," Zaidi said, while addressing the 12th Annual National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms on Saturday organized by the National Election Watch (NEW) and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

Currently, Section 125A of the Representation of People's Act (RPA) provides for a punishment of up to six months of imprisonment or fine or both for furnishing wrong information or concealing any information in an election affidavit. There has been a long-standing demand to increase this punishment.

The Election Commission, while suggesting electoral reforms in 2004 formulated under then CEC T.S. Krishnamurthy, had said that the offence of undervaluing, concealing or not furnishing correct information in affidavits should attract a minimum prison term of two years and proposed doing away with the alternative clause for fine. Earlier in 1998, the Election Commission had written to the then law minister to make false declaration "an electoral offence" under RPA.

"The commission has proposed that if there is any attempt to conceal relevant information... this should be criminalized and there should be a punishment of two years for concealing or giving false information in (poll) affidavit," Zaidi said at the Saturday event.

"To plug the loophole (of inadequate or false information), the commission has proposed that any concealment of information must be punishable with two years imprisonment. The Law Commission has also endorsed it and the matter is under process of the law ministry," the CEC added.

See more at: <http://bit.ly/20UDaHC>

**Business Standard**  
New Delhi, March 12, 2018

**'Proposal on penalising candidates furnishing wrong info under**

Press Trust of India | Hyderabad  
March 12, 2018 Last updated at 11:02:07

Election Commission's proposal seeking two years imprisonment for those furnishing incorrect details in poll affidavits is under the process of Union Law Ministry, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Nasim Zaidi said here today.

"The Commission has proposed that if there is any attempt to conceal relevant information... this should be criminalized and there should be a punishment of two years for concealing or giving false information in (poll) affidavit," Zaidi said while addressing 12th Annual National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms.

It was organised by National Election Watch (NEW), and Association for Democratic Reforms.

He said there have been attempts to ensure that candidates furnish full information about their antecedents, criminal antecedents in particular, adding if candidates have not declared their criminal antecedents fully and concealed something, voters get only half truth which is in fact more harmful.

"To plug the loophole, the Commission has proposed that any concealment of information must be punishable with two years' imprisonment. The Law Commission has also endorsed it and the matter is under process of Law Ministry," the CEC said.

He further said electoral trusts at present are not prohibited from receiving foreign funds and since they are giving money to political parties, therefore, indirectly even foreign funds can go to political parties while it is prohibited for parties to receive such funds).

"Quid pro quo of vested interests through these trusts and their funding is not ruled out," he noted, adding there are no restrictions on these trusts on receiving foreign funds.

"We have taken up (this matter)... I have learnt that the Ministry of Law and Finance are working together to plug this loophole to bar electoral trusts from receiving foreign funds. Therefore, the Commission suggested that electoral trusts should be prohibited from receiving foreign funds and we understand that the matter is under examination," Zaidi said.

NEW, a congregation of over 1200 Civil Society groups across India, and ADR, a citizen led non-political and non-governmental organisation has been working with an objective of improving democracy and governance in India.



**पुनरावृत्त अडानों को रोकना सुनिश्चित करने के लिए उम्मीदवारों को दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है**

**कांग्रेस ने उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है**  
 चुनाव आयोग के अध्यक्ष आनंद कुमार ने कहा है कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है। उन्होंने कहा कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है। उन्होंने कहा कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है।

**अव्यवस्थापित उम्मीदवारों को दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है**  
 उन्होंने कहा कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है। उन्होंने कहा कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है। उन्होंने कहा कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है।

**दो वर्षों तक की अवधि के लिए उम्मीदवारों को दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है**  
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### थम्पुदु अफिदवित्तों जैलुते

13 March 2016  
 epaper.namathelanguans.com/13676711

### सगानिसे पैगा ओड्लोस्तेने गेलिचनल्लु!

13 March 2016  
 epaper.namathelanguans.com/13676711

### THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Politics and Nation

#### Congress declares highest total income at Rs 1,687 crore followed by BJP

13 Mar 16, 2016 09:00 AM IST

**HYDERABAD:** Indian National Congress topped the chart of political parties in India by declaring the highest total income at Rs 1,687.12 crore, followed by the BJP for the period 2010-11 to 2014-15, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

The total income of national parties, including BJP, INC and the National Congress Party for 2014-15, collectively for five years (2010-11 to 2014-15), from all over India was Rs 4,261.23 crore.

"Despite lack of information for 2014-15, Congress declared the highest total income from all over India of Rs 1,687.12 crore followed by BJP with Rs 1,475.94 crore," the ADR said.

The report titled 'Analysis of Income Tax Returns and Donations received by National and Regional parties of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for FY 2010-11 to 2014-15' was prepared by the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Election Watch and ADR.

The report stated that CPI collected Rs 352.30 crore, Bahujan Samajwadi Party Rs 391.21 crore and CPI (M) Rs 8.82 crore.

"Income for INC from sale of coupons/publication amounted to Rs 1,311.96 crore (77.7 per cent of total income)," stated the report released at a press conference by the office-bearers of both the bodies.

Voluntary contributions/donations to the INC remain the highest source of income for most of the national and regional political parties. It forms 48.49 per cent (Rs 2079.847 crore) of the total income of all political parties together, it said.

BJP has received 87.93 per cent income (Rs 1,297.37 crore) from voluntary contributions while Congress received 10.93 per cent (Rs 184.408 crore) income from donations.

According to its IT returns, 94.39 per cent (Rs 1,12.78 crore) of the total income of BJP was through voluntary contributions. But the party declared that it never received any amount above Rs 25,000 as donations, the report claimed.

Sources for the data used in the report are audited accounts/return statements submitted by the political parties to the Income Tax Department and Election Commission of India.

ADR recommended that national and regional political parties must provide all information of their finances under RTI.

Breaches: ECI should impose rules that no part of the form 244 submitted by political parties providing details of donations above Rs 25,000 should be left blank and full details of donors should be made available for public scrutiny under the RTI.

It further recommended that any party which does not submit its donation statement to the ECI on or before the due date, their income should not be tax exempted and defaulting parties should be de-certified.

### THE TIMES OF INDIA

CITY

#### Decentralisation of power needed for 'real democracy', says Loksatta chief

13 Mar 16, 2016, 11:02 PM IST

**H**YDERABAD: Empowerment of local bodies through decentralisation of power from the Centre is important for achieving "real democracy" and improving governance, said Jayaprakash Narayan, founder of the Loksatta party, on Saturday.

Addressing the gathering as part of a panel discussion titled 'Reforming the electoral system in India', Narayan also called for the need to break entry barriers created by abnormal money power vested in a section of candidates so as to make way for the "best and the brightest" in the electoral system. "Candidates should be allowed to rise through ethical means so that we can have political parties that offer credible alternatives in terms of politics and agenda," the political leader said.

The issue of democracy was also highlighted by Prof. Trilochan Dasgupta of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) who termed India as a "very heterogeneous democracy". "We need to develop our own variation of democracy as no other democracy in the world has such variations in terms of language, dialects, caste, religion, culture etc.," he said.

Striving on how the complete takeover of politics by contractors and businessmen, largely for "investing their money", has led to distortion of the political system, Kingshuk Nag, resident editor of The Times of India, Hyderabad, suggested that the Rajya Sabha be abolished and the number of seats in Lok Sabha be increased by three times - from the current 543 to 1,500 - for bring in a proper balance of representation.

"The seats in Lok Sabha have not increased since 1971. The defunct need to take place in 2002 was also shot down as we thought there would be consequences as all states were not witnessing a proportional population increase. The states that were seeing a larger increase in population would have a larger share of seats and this could shift the balance of power," he explained.

The urgent need for electoral reforms was upheld by K J Rao, general secretary of Foundation for Advanced Management of Elections (FAME), an NGO. "Ensuring political parity for "out grouping any interest" in bringing in reforms, he said how the Election Commission of India was fighting since the 1990s for the same. "The basic aim of electoral reforms is elective representation. There should be a stable government so that they can do proper development work," he added.

Meanwhile, speaking on Indian voters' choice of candidates being based on the performance of political parties and chief ministers, Srinivas Raman, associate editor, The Hindu, said, "Indian democracy is more of party democracy than representative democracy. We need more of legislative reforms than electoral reforms. Now is the time to perfect our legislative performance. Just looking to improve transparency and political performance," he said.

### नईदुनिया

#### उम्मीदवारों और दलों की अज्ञात फंडिंग से निजात चाहता है EC

Published: Sun 13 Mar 2016 08:57 PM IST | Updated: Sun 13 Mar 2016 08:57 PM IST

**अर्थ दिवसी** चुनाव आयोग की उम्मीदवारों की राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है। उन्होंने कहा कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है। उन्होंने कहा कि उम्मीदवारों को राजनीतिक दलों का नाम देना आवश्यक है।

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# Acknowledgement

We take this opportunity to thank Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu, Shri Rajendra Prasad and the Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Election Watch (AP & TEW) team for making the 12th National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms, a grand success.

The Conference would not have been a possibility without our eminent speakers and participants; we thank them for their participation and valuable inputs. Special thanks to the media and the journalists who have always been very supportive of our work and have been one of the important mediums to reach out to the masses.

We are profusely thankful to Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India, for his presence and inputs at the Conference and extend our gratitude to the Election Commission of India (ECI) for its constant support to our efforts. We would also like to thank all the other dignitaries, whose participation added impetus and synergy to our work.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) would like to thank participants of various political parties, the ECI, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Assemblies, NGOs and others who dispassionately reviewed our past efforts on electoral and political reforms and came forward with thought-provoking suggestions to remedy prevailing issues.

Last but not the least, we are deeply grateful to all our State Election Watch coordinators and partners for their participation and support in reaching out to citizens across the country. We conclude by thanking the management of Dr. Marri Channa Reddy HRD Institute, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad, for their consistent support before and during the event.

# Executive Summary

This year, the Annual National Conference was held in Hyderabad with the primary focus on Electoral and Political reforms. The Conference was held with the aim of bringing together and synergizing efforts towards strengthening democracy in our country.

The Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, inaugurated the Conference. Representatives of the National Election Watch (NEW) from each state chapter, members of political parties, government institutions and media were present to deliberate on issues related to electoral and political reforms in the country. The National Conference was an opportunity for us to add impetus and synergy to our work by bringing together all stakeholders. Their participation and inputs were instrumental in making the Conference a success.

Topics of discussion during the 12th National Conference ranged from '*Re-hauling the Electoral System in India*,' '*Criminalization of Politics and lack of transparency in political party finances*,' '*Conflict of Interest: Impact on good governance*,' to '*Innovative ideas to decrease money and muscle power in elections at the grass-root level*' and '*Impact of the Internet, Social Media and Data Analysis on Elections & Governance*'. These discussions were enriched by the participation of eminent people including the Chief Election Commissioner Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, representatives of political parties, civil society and the media.

At the end of the Conference, the house unanimously came up with recommendations addressing issues related to re-hauling of the current electoral process, local body elections and use of money & muscle power, prevalence of black money in politics, political parties under RTI, criminalization of politics, use of Internet and Big Data to reach out to people etc.

# Agenda

12th March 2016	
9:00 – 10:00	<b>Registration</b>
10:00 – 10:30	National Anthem and Lamp lighting Chief Guest: Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, Chief Election Commissioner <b>Inauguration &amp; Welcome Address:</b> Prof. Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR), Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Coordinator, AP&TEW), Ms. Anitha Balakrishna (Joint Director General – Dr. MCR HRD Institute)
10:30 – 11:00	<b>Address by Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India,</b> Chairperson – Dr. Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee of ADR) <b>Book release</b> – Bihar Election Watch Book, 2015
11:00 – 12:15	<b>Re-hauling the Electoral System in India</b> Chairperson – Dr. Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee of ADR) Panelists: Dr. Jaya Prakash Narayana (President, Lok Satta Party), Shri K. J. Rao (General Secretary, FAME), Prof. Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR), Shri Kingshuk Nag (Resident Editor - ToI), Shri Srinivasan Ramani (Associate Editor, The Hindu)
12:15 – 13:00	Open Session
13:00 – 14:00	<b>Lunch</b>
14:00 – 15:00	<b>Criminalization of Politics and lack of transparency in political party finances</b> Chairperson – Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustee of ADR) Panelists: Shri H. S. Brahma (Former CEC), Shri Dasoju Sravan (Chief Spokesperson, Indian National Congress), Shri Shailesh Gandhi (Former Information Commissioner), Shri Subhash Chandra Agarwal (RTI Activist)
15:00 – 15:30	Open discussion



15:30 – 16:30	<p><b>Conflict of Interest: Impact on good governance</b></p> <p>Chairperson: Prof. Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)</p> <p>Panelists: Dr. R. Balasubramaniam (Founder &amp; President – Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Founder &amp; Chairman – Grassroots Research &amp; Advocacy Movement), Shri Harish Narasappa (Founding Partner – SAMVAD, Co-Founder and President of Daksh), Ms. Bhanupriya Rao (Founder Member – Gender in Politics &amp; RTI campaigner)</p>
16:30 – 16:50	Open discussion
16:50 – 17:00	Vote of thanks : Shri Y. Rajendra Prasad (Coordinator, AP & TEW)
20:00 onwards	<b>Dinner</b>

<b>13th March 2016</b>	
09:00 – 09:30	Registration
09:30 – 10:45	<p><b>Innovative ideas to decrease money and muscle power in elections at the grass-root level</b></p> <p>Chairperson: Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head – ADR &amp; NEW)</p> <p>Panelists – Shri V. Panduranga Rao (Former Sarpanch, Nalgonda), Shri Kusam Rajamouli (Former Sarpanch, Warangal), Shri Rajiv Kumar (Bihar EW), Shri Sudhir Pal (Jharkhand EW)</p>
10:45 – 11:00	<b>Tea</b>
11:00 – 12:30	<p><b>Impact of the Internet, Social Media and Data Analysis on Elections &amp; Governance</b></p> <p>Chairperson: Dr. Vipul Mudgal (Trustee of ADR)</p> <p>Panelists: Shri Naveen Gattu (COO, Gramener), Shri Abhinandan Sekhri (Co-Founder, Newslaundry), Shri Nikhil Pahwa (Founder, Editor &amp; Publisher – medianama.com), Shri Sanjay Dubey (Founder &amp; Editor, satyagraya.com), Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder – factly.in, Coordinator, AP &amp; TEW)</p>
12:30 – 12:45	<b>Open Session</b>
12:45 – 13:00	<p><b>Resolutions and ‘Next Steps for NEW’</b></p> <p>Chairpersons – Prof. Trilochan Sastry and Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Coordinator, AP&amp;TEW)</p>
13:00	<b>Lunch &amp; Dispersal</b>

## Documents Distributed to the Delegates

- Report analysing **ITR and donations of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana parties - FY 2010-11 to FY 2014-15.**
- Background notes on Panel Discussion themes: **Re-hauling the Electoral System in India, Criminalization of Politics and lack of transparency in political party finances, Conflict of Interest: Impact on good governance, Innovative ideas to decrease money and muscle power in elections at the grass-root level and Impact of the Internet, Social Media and Data Analysis on Elections & Governance.**
- **Bihar Assembly Elections 2015: Analysis of Criminal Background, Financial, Education, Gender and Other Details of Candidates & Winners.**

The above documents can be found at [www.adrindia.org](http://www.adrindia.org).

# Minutes of the Sessions

Day – 1 (12th March'16)

## Inauguration & Welcome Address

*Prof. Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR), Dr. Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee of ADR), Ms. Anitha Balakrishna (Joint Director General – Dr. MCR HRD Institute) and Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Coordinator, AP & TEW)*

At the inaugural of the two-day annual event of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW), Prof. Trilochan Sastry welcomed the Chief Guest of the event, Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India, and Ms. Anitha Balakrishna, for the lamp lighting ceremony. Prof. Sastry also thanked the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Election Watch (AP & TEW) for organizing the event and the eminent audience for their participation and encouragement. He said that every year this event is organized in a new state **to analyze the work done by our 1200 State Partners in the past year and to formulate the Action Plan for the current year**. Prof. Sastry said, this event also gives us an opportunity to listen to the ideas of the eminent personalities, including politicians, bureaucrats, journalists and social activists, on how to improve elections and governance.

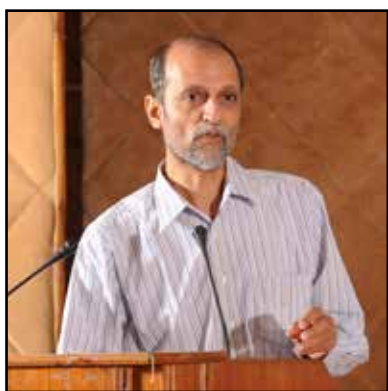




# Address by Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi,

**Chief Election Commissioner,  
Election Commission of India**

*Chairperson – Dr. Ajit Ranade*

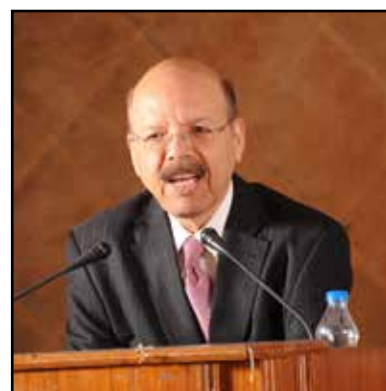


## Dr. Ajit Ranade

Dr. Ajit Ranade welcomed the Chief Guest and keynote speaker of the **12<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference**, Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). Introducing Dr. Zaidi to the eminent guests present there, Dr. Ranade thanked the Election Commission of India (ECI) for its pro-active support to ADR's work since its inception. He also welcomed the representatives of different State Election Watches, who came all the way to Hyderabad to participate in the event, and appreciated their constant efforts in the direction of decriminalization of Indian politics and betterment of democracy.

## Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi

In his opening remarks, Dr. Zaidi said that ECI has tremendously benefitted from the ongoing dialogue with ADR and acknowledged the organization's effort in improving the purity of elections. The CEC stated, the current electoral process faces many challenges such as criminalization of politics, abuse of money, electoral malpractices amongst others. NEW & ADR have been serving as the watchdogs of the electoral democracy by educating people, building opinions and seeking intervention of authorities for free and fair elections, he said. **The CEC highlighted the following issues in his speech:**



## Decriminalization endeavours

Dr. Zaidi lauded ADR's contribution towards spreading awareness about the increasing influence of money and muscle power in Indian politics. He also mentioned the **landmark 2003 judgement of Supreme Court** on ADR's petition that made it mandatory for candidates contesting elections to declare their background information by filing an affidavit.

The CEC said, the Commission has laid down a framework for issuing notices to the candidates if any column in their affidavit is found blank. Not only this, the candidature of the candidate can also be rejected by the Returning Officer in such cases. Going a step further, **the ECI has proposed that concealing information in an affidavit should be made a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment for two years.**

Dr. Zaidi also mentioned the Lily Thomas judgment of July 2013, in which ADR had intervened. In its judgement, Supreme Court had struck down Section 8(4) of the Representation of the People Act under which an MP/MLA could retain his/her seat through an appeal in the higher court. Following the verdict, a legislator stands disqualified immediately, once convicted of an offence mentioned under the Section 8 of RPA. He said, in compliance with the order, **the ECI subsequently setup a system for prompt reporting of such convictions of sitting members to Speakers of the Assemblies and Chairman of the Parliament.** The CEC also hailed Supreme Court's order to complete the trial of legislators facing criminal cases within one year, saying it will prevent such cases from lingering on for years.

The CEC emphasised that the Commission has proposed that **candidates should be disqualified even on cognizance taken and framing of charges by the court in certain defined crimes** as well as heinous crimes, involving a sentence of more than 5 years. Dr. Zaidi said that the Law Commission has also made the same recommendation to the Law Ministry, hence major reform proposal needs to be addressed at the earliest.

The CEC stated, Supreme Court's order to insert a 'None of the Above' or NOTA button on EVM, so that voters can reject all the candidates in the fray if none of the candidates is suitable enough, was another big step in the direction of electoral reforms. In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, around 6 million voters opted for NOTA and afterwards in the 10 Assembly Elections between 2014 and 2015, around 2.3 million cast their vote in the favour of NOTA. Dr. Zaidi said, though the Commission has till now not been able to publicize NOTA on a large scale, there are various instances in the recent elections where the margin of victory is lesser than the NOTA votes. **The CEC was sanguine that NOTA votes may not be a deciding factor right now but in the long run it may bring in big changes.**

Highlighting another important aspect pertaining to the criminalization of politics, Dr. Zaidi informed that in India, criminals and musclemen can contest elections even while being in jail. Giving an insight into the issue, he explained the Patna High Court order in this regard, according to which a person in jail or lawful custody of police does not have any voting rights under Section 62(5) of the RP Act, on the same grounds a person in jail should not have the right to contest. When the Supreme Court had also upheld this order, instead of implementation of this important order, **the Section 62(5) of the RP Act was amended. This amendment added a provision to the Section 62(5) of the RP Act allowing a person in jail or lawful custody to vote in elections if his/her name is already in the electoral rolls thus also paving the way for a person in jail to contest the elections. The CEC emphasized that this was a backward step which needs to be reversed without any delay.**

Dr. Zaidi believed that the Commission has so far been successful in curbing the use of muscle power during elections, which is directly associated with the criminal elements winning the elections. He expressed faith that the current framework of the use of Central Police Forces, targeted actions on identified musclemen and grant of protection to SCs/STs and other weaker sections has worked very effectively. Citing the example of 2015 Bihar Assembly elections, the CEC said, it was for the first time an election was completely violence free.

## Election Financing

On the issue of election financing, Dr. Zaidi said, it is another major area of concern which is in dire need of reforms both at the level of candidates and political parties. He said, **the pernicious effects of money, particularly black money, on the purity of electoral process is too well known to be narrated here.** He gave some valuable suggestions to regulate the election financing, such as, **(i) Laying down the election expenditure limit of political parties, (ii) Disclosure requirements, (iii) Its compliance and (iv) Penalty for non-adherence to this framework.**

Dr. Zaidi said that under the current legal framework, political parties are rather loosely governed as far as the issues of registration, de-registration or financing are concerned. The money spent by the political parties on their candidates' election campaigns, make the current election expenditure limit of the candidates totally meaningless, he lamented. Dr. Zaidi informed that to curb the opaque funding methods of political parties, in its Transparency Guidelines, ECI has clearly mentioned that political parties' contribution to the candidates should be made only through cheques, so that it could be traced back, and in no circumstances exceed their Statutory Expenditure Limits.

Talking about the Electoral Trusts, the CEC said that these Trusts came into existence since 2013 and became an important source of funding for political parties. There is no limit on the contribution by these trusts to political parties. **In the year 2014-2015, Electoral Trusts have given over Rs 170 crores to the various political parties. The quid pro quo of the vested interest of these Trusts and their funding cannot be ruled out, the CEC warned.** He also informed that these Trusts are not governed by the RP Act and there are no restrictions on them with regard to receiving foreign funding. Thus, **the Section 29(b) of the RP Act needs to be amended to prevent political parties from receiving foreign funding through Electoral Trusts, Dr. Zaidi stated.**

As far as the disclosure reports are concerned, the Commission's view is that political parties should declare all kind of contributions. Taking cognizance of this aspect, the Commission has, even in the absence of a law on political party financing, invoked Article 324 and laid down Transparency Guidelines for political parties and Electoral Trusts and made it mandatory for both the political parties and Trusts to submit their Contribution reports to the ECI.

With regard to the limit on election expenditure of political parties, the CEC informed that there are some recommendations from the Law Commission which are presently with the Law Ministry. These recommendations need to be implemented at the earliest, he added.

On the issue of variation in the election expenditure statements of candidates and political parties with regard to the funds received by the candidates from their respective parties, the CEC said that **ECI has prescribed that political parties will have to furnish candidates' related expenditure part within 30 days, instead of 75 days or 90 days. As the candidates' deadline to submit the election expenditure report is only 30 days, the new guideline will help establish a co-relation between the two statements in the future.** The variation in the election expenditure statements of candidates and political parties was revealed by ADR in its report.

On the issue of mushrooming of political parties, from 1000 in 2009 to around 1900 in 2016, the CEC explained that the Commission has created a list of political parties which have not contested any elections in the past 10 years. **These registered and un-recognised political parties can be a conduit for black money.** Dr. Zaidi said that under the revised Transparency Guidelines, **ECI has directed that all the registered, un-recognised parties will have to file their Annual Audited Contribution Report to their respective Chief Electoral Officers annually.**

## Concluding Remarks

On the front of voter education, the ECI is now focussing on ethical voting and its new initiative to set up Voter Awareness Booths has started yielding positive results, Dr. Zaidi said. The CEC informed that the Awareness Observers of the Commission go to the field 6 to 10 days ahead of the elections to review the entire system. **He observed that the problems lies at the micro level and not the macro level.** All the information pertaining to rules and regulations must be passed on to the Flying Squads which are operating at the polling booth level, he stated.

Informing about ECI's advancement in the IT and technological front, Dr. Zaidi said, the Commission is using Android software for uploading real-time pictures, videos and complaints of election malpractices. He informed that this framework will also be established at the grass-root level during the elections in the near future. **The CEC revealed that the ECI is working on the idea of a mobile-friendly one-stop Voter Information System.** The Commission has already collected around 10-crore mobile numbers of citizens on which election-related information will be pushed through for voter awareness.

Dr. Zaidi exhorted other Civil Society Organisations, like ADR, to come forward to assist the ECI in its electoral rolls correction/management project because the correction and update of electoral rolls across the nation is imperative to ensure the purity of the election process. He informed that serious efforts to revise the electoral rolls began in March 2015 with the launch of 'National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Program' using Aadhaar cards. **Dr. Zaidi stated that the one-time cleansing of the electoral rolls is of highest importance and the Commission is aiming to complete the revision of the electoral rolls by September-October 2016. The CEC has also suggested that Paid News should be made a punishable offence with imprisonment of two years.**

The CEC informed that till date, over 40 reform proposals have been submitted to the Law Ministry by the ECI and **it is high time that the Ministry takes action on these proposals.** There is a need for enactment of new laws, amendments to the RPA and an effective institutional structure to reform the existing electoral process, he asserted. The CEC opined that the Standing Committees of the Law Making bodies are required to sit together and mull over the recommendations put forward by ECI, Law Commission and various Civil Society Organizations in this regard. Dr. Zaidi also conceded that what ECI is doing, is not enough, and more efforts need to be made, particularly at the grass-root level, to spread awareness among the voters. In the end, he reiterated that the Commission will continue to work with the like-minded, right-thinking people in a non-political and non-partisan manner.



# Re-hauling the Electoral System in India

*Chairperson: Dr. Ajit Ranade*



*Panelists (left to right): Dr. Jaya Prakash Narayana (President, Lok Satta Party), Shri. K.J. Rao (General Secretary, FAME), Dr. Ajit Ranade (Founder member & Trustee), ADR, Shri Kingshuk Nag (Resident Editor - TOI), Shri Srinivasan Ramani (Associate Editor, The Hindu) & Prof. Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)*

## Dr. Jaya Prakash Narayana



Opening the discussion, Dr. Jaya Prakash Narayana, President, Lok Satta Party, said that their party's former President, Shri Venkatraman, was the one who first put forward the suggestion of '50% + 1' vote system as a panacea to problems related to the Indian elections. Later, the Election Commission of India also included this vote system in its reform proposal, the leader claimed. However, Dr. Narayana stated that **'50% + 1' vote system is not suitable for India and would not bring any change to the present system due to the 'disproportional' outcome of the elections.**

The veteran leader said that before suggesting the new ways of reforms, it is necessary to analyse the real challenges faced by our current election system and what would be the consequences if the proposed new system was to be implemented. He said, it is also imperative to find answers to the basic questions like, "Are we ready for a new kind of system?" Or, "Would it be able to achieve the goals and bring the changes we seek?" In a fair and transparent system, a common man should not face any difficulty or entry barrier to contest an election, whereas in the present scenario, it is very difficult for a common man to actively participate in the political process, Dr. Narayana said. **A capable and energetic common man should not only be welcomed to contest elections but also be given the opportunity to rise and acquire the positions of power through ethical means. He said another purpose of the electoral**

**process is that the political parties should offer credible alternatives in terms of policies and agenda.**

Dr. Narayana also mentioned the **“Three Vices”** afflicting the Indian elections—**i) Enormous amount of money being spent on election campaigns, ii) Bribing of voters on a large scale, and iii) Election campaigns aimed at dividing the society on the lines of region, religion and caste in order to lure voters.** He said that almost all the mainstream parties are equally guilty of these crimes. According to Dr. Narayana, the proposed ‘Proportional Representation’ cannot address these challenges and the real change can occur only if the “incentives” offered by the present electoral system change for all the parties -- the voters, candidates and political parties.

### Shri Kingshuk Nag



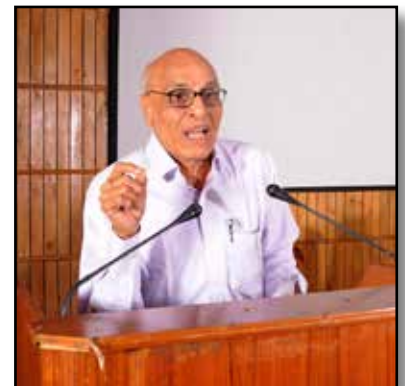
Shri Kingshuk Nag, Resident Editor, TOI Hyderabad, lamented that Indian politics, nowadays has become a “Contractor’s Raj” and politicians with deep business interests, represent their respective corporations on most of the platforms. Referring to the New Economic Reforms of 1991, Shri Nag claimed that the growth that is currently seen in the country is mostly in Real Estate and there has been no growth in the manufacturing sector and no new jobs have been created. He said only those who dabble in “Contractory” have become richer and using the same money they have entered into politics. The senior journalist said that this phenomenon had distorted politics and gave entry to all sorts of dubious people in politics. **Shri Nag suggested the following remedies to reform the existing electoral process:**

- 1) Increase the representation of people by increasing the existing 543 seats in Lok Sabha by three times as it has not been increased since 1971. This would provide a level playing field to a common man with the ambition and ability to enter politics.
- 2) Abolish the Rajya Sabha as it has become a preferred place for the entry of “Contractors”.

Shri Nag was also of the opinion that the system of ‘Proportional Representation’ should not be implemented in India as it will lead to the growth of more caste-based and religion-based parties. **He proposed that the one system that is worth a trial in India is the ‘Single Transferable’ vote system practiced in Australia and New Zealand.**

### Shri K. J. Rao

Before discussing about the reforms, it is necessary to understand that no electoral system, presently in use in other democracies of the world, is 100% perfect, said Shri K. J. Rao, General Secretary, FAME, and former Election Observer. He, however, accepted that the electoral system being followed in India presently needs a little tweaking but emphasized that it is only in the hands of political parties to bring the much-needed change in the system. Shri Rao stated that the ruling parties should come forward and take the initiatives to reform the system rather than just mentioning these in their election manifestos and media interviews.



Since the days of Shri T. N. Seshan, former CEC, ECI had been sending reform proposals, but unfortunately, **no political party is forthcoming to implement the desired reforms**, Shri Rao revealed. **Political parties always find ways and means to thwart the process of reforms and maintain the status quo**, he said. It was only because of the Supreme Court of India's active role, some of the important electoral reforms have been introduced, Shri Rao emphasized.

He opined that a complete overhaul of the electoral system in a country like ours with such a huge population is easier said than done. Seminars and brain storming sessions among concerned people will slowly sow the seeds of change and lead to a much better system that would succeed in fighting the menace of money and muscle power. **On the '50%+1 Vote System,' he said, as per this proposal if a winning candidate did not secure '50%+1' votes then the first two candidates securing maximum number of votes will be made to contest again.** This, the former Election Observer said, would pose a different problem in terms of money and muscle power being in ugly display.

### Shri Srinivasan Ramani

Focusing on a different angle of the issue of electoral reforms, Shri Srinivasan Ramani, Associate Editor, The Hindu, said that in India, since 1977, there has been a shift from 'One-Party System' to the 'Multi-Party System' by concomitant federalization and regionalization of polity. Various regional parties have become relevant in almost all parts of India over the time and the single party rule has become a passé except for 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Shri Ramani explained. The reason was the existing 'First Past the Post System,' which despite its deficiencies, allowed the regional parties to become dominant in their specific regions and therefore made coalitions important at the Central level, he added. The senior journalist believed that **in terms of proportionality and representation, from a macro-perspective, federalization and regionalization of polity made India much more plural democracy and this has happened in a structural manner and not because of the electoral reforms.**



Even after 2014 General Elections, despite the fact that the BJP has a majority in the Lok Sabha, the party needs to engage with the Opposition parties as it does not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha. Therefore, re-hauling the system is a very difficult question, said Shri Ramani arguing that more than electoral reforms, we need Legislative Reforms. **Indian democracy is not just a 'Representative Democracy', it is more of a 'Party Democracy' and there have been various legislative reforms over the time, which have made this conjecture much stronger, for example the 'Anti-Defection Law',** the senior journalist said. These kind of legislative reforms can improve the electoral system and enhance the representation of people.

Even the '**Proportional Representation**' system has its own fallacies, Shri Ramani added, in case of a close list, the leadership of the parties would primarily have the keys to who will be elected on the party ticket, whereas the open list, on the other hand, will be far more complicated and India, currently, is not ready for it. He believed that it is not the right time to think about an alternative electoral system but to focus on perfecting our current Legislative functioning and political party reforms. He was also sceptic **about NOTA option**

and said that right now it holds no significance. Only if it paves the way for the implementation of 'Right to Recall' option, it will have any impact on election results, Shri Ramani said.

### Prof. Trilochan Sastry



Prof. Trilochan Sastry said that the British System which India had copied has total 650 Parliamentary seats whereas India, which has 20 times more population than England, has only 543 total seats. So **the quality of representation or how many people does an MP represent is much higher in Britain as compared to India in order of magnitude**, Prof. Sastry said. He added that India has the worst ratio of representation in the world. Even the United States, which has the second worst ratio in the matter of representation, is far ahead of India. **He agreed with the other panelists that there is a need to improve the quality of representation in the country and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats from present 543 seats.**

# Criminalization of Politics and lack of transparency in political party finances

*Chairperson: Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar*



*Panelists (left to right): Shri Subhash Chandra Agrawal (noted RTI Activist), Shri H. S. Brahma (Former CEC), Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustee of ADR), Shri Shailesh Gandhi (Former Information Commissioner) & Shri Dasoju Sravan (Chief Spokesperson, Congress, Telangana unit)*

Opening the discussion for the panelists, Chairperson **Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar** stated that the issue of increasing criminalization of politics is perhaps one of the most serious issues facing the Indian electoral process today. He, though, accepted that many initiatives by the ECI and various Civil Society Organizations over the time have made the existing electoral system cleaner and more transparent but that is just the starting and a lot needs to be done in this direction.

## Shri H. S. Brahma

Shri H. S. Brahma, former CEC, explained that **the basic questions that the citizens of any country ask about their electoral system are: “What are the work and responsibilities of our elected representatives?”, “Are we being adequately represented?” or “Will the change/reforms promised by them happen in reality?”** To get the answers to these questions in Indian context, we first need to devise a parameter to measure the performance of our elected representatives, he added. According to the former CEC, **other major issues which need to be addressed immediately in order to improve our electoral system are: “How to check the huge expenditure on election campaigns?” and “How to pressurize political parties to bring transparency in their finances and internal functioning”.**



Shri Brahma said that the use of exorbitant amount of money during elections thereby converting the electoral process into a marketing gimmick where the voters are treated as consumers is a big threat to Indian democracy. If more money is spent, he said, more will be the chances of the person or the party to come to power. If this continues, he warned, money power would pose a serious threat on the integrity of our nation. **The former CEC also highlighted that with enormous amount of money at their disposal, people with criminal background either threaten voters or try to buy their voters with gifts and cash.**

In his concluding remarks, Shri Brahma said that every one of us, as Indian citizens, need to realize that the present paradigm needs to undergo a drastic change in order to do away with the issues discussed earlier. This change cannot be brought about unless there are political party reforms and parties start functioning transparently and become accountable to the citizens as it is the political parties which set the agenda for elections, decide who would contest and finally form the government and run the nation, Shri Brahma emphasized.

### Shri Dasoju Sravan



**Shri Dasoju Sravan**, Chief Spokesperson, Congress, Telangana unit, lamented that though we call ourselves as the largest democracy in the world, unfortunately, we are also the largest hypocrisy in the world. **Naming the four “viruses”, which have contaminated our democracy, Shri Sravan said, the first one is the caste system, second is criminalization of politics, followed by commercialization of the electoral system and communalization of our democracy. He explained that 90% of the population is ruled by 10% of the leaders, and the 90% of the social groups never get an opportunity to enter the Legislative Assemblies.**

On the issue of commercialization of the electoral system, he agreed with former CEC Shri Brahma and said that the situation is grave as the candidates who invest huge amount of money on their election campaigns look for ways and means to recover the multifold of the same amount after coming to power. He lamented that though **it is an ‘open secret’ that candidates contesting elections spend much more than the prescribed limit of ECI but rarely receive any penalty for their violation.** He felt that if the Commission could take a stronger stand and **debar such candidates as well as penalize their party** by restricting them to participate in the electoral process for a term, a positive change could then be seen.

### Shri Shailesh Gandhi

Highlighting a different angle of the issue of criminalization of politics, **Shri Shailesh Gandhi**, former IC, informed that the Central Information Commission (CIC) had in 2013 passed an order bringing all the National Political parties under the ambit of the RTI Act. He stated that the political parties refused to abide by the order and the matter is now in the Supreme Court and it may take years before a final judgement is delivered. **He expressed disappointment over the delay in the disposal of court cases and said that the judiciary system in India has become**



**dysfunctional. Until the courts start delivering and convictions start happening within a reasonable timeframe, no set of reforms would be possible.** He also said that the declaration of criminal offences has so far not played any significant role in curbing the criminalization of politics as convictions do not happen on time. **He put forward the following suggestions to improve the electoral system:**

1. After every election, the ECI should forward the affidavits of the winner and two runners-up of each constituency to the Income Tax department for verification, it would bring a monumental change in what the candidates declare at the beginning.
2. ECI should encourage citizens to do ‘sting operations’ during elections, it would help immensely record the instances of voter bribing and other election malpractices. This could be a ground to penalize political parties and candidates.
3. The limits on election expenditure of candidates should be done away with as it’s an ‘open secret’ that the limit is always violated.

### Shri Subhash Chandra Agrawal

**Shri Subhash Chandra Agrawal**, Guinness Book record holder RTI Activist, focused on the finances of political parties and their expenditure during elections. **He felt that there is not enough transparency in the accounts of parties where the election expenditure is concerned.** But he was hopeful that once the opacity of party finances is done away with, the much needed reforms concerning the other facets of the electoral system would automatically fall in place.



Regarding the frequency of conducting elections, Shri Agrawal said, the Law Commission recently proposed that the Assembly elections be held in such a way that at least half the country go to polls every 6 months thereby reducing the flow of black money. He added that another alternative is to implement the suggestions made by the Supreme Court in *Kalyan Singh vs. Jagdamba Pal Singh case*. In its order the Apex Court said that **the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers should be elected by ‘Secret and Compulsory Voting’ by Members of the Lower House and nominations should be signed by at least 34% of the Members.** Even Speakers and Deputy Speakers should be simultaneously elected with Chief Ministers in the same manner.

In order to bring a positive change in the current system, Shri Agrawal suggested that **NOTA should be given additional powers wherein it should be converted into ‘Right to Reject’ but with riders.** **“Those candidates who have lost against NOTA should be barred from contesting for life. This would compel the political parties to distribute tickets only to worthy candidates.**

On the issue of political party reforms, the RTI activist said that despite CIC’s order to bring the six National Parties under the ambit of RTI Act, political parties refused to abide by the orders. Unfortunately, the makers of the law have themselves become the breakers of the law, he lamented.

Concluding his remarks, Shri Agrawal said that there is **an additional issue of contention, one candidate contesting from multiple constituencies. This leads to waste of money and machinery** if the candidate wins both the constituency seats because then election have to be conducted again at one of the constituencies.

Wrapping up the session, Chairperson **Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar** said that there are thousands of suggestions available, including the valuable suggestions given in the 170<sup>th</sup> Law Commission Report which was authored by Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy. **He said, there is no dearth of ideas on what should be done but the important question is how they will be implemented.** Everyone works within the Constitutional scheme and changing that scheme, changing laws is rightly the prerogative of people sitting in the Parliament, Prof. Chhokar concluded.



# Conflict of Interest: Impact on Good Governance

*Chairperson – Prof. Trilochan Sastry*



*Panelists (left to right): Ms. Bhanupriya Rao (Founder Member – Gender in Politics & RTI campaigner), Prof. Trilochan Sastry, Shri Harish Narasappa (Founding Partner – SAMVAD, Co-Founder and President of Daksh), & Dr. R. Balasubramaniam (Founder & President – Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Founder & Chairman – Grassroots Research & Advocacy Movement)*

## Prof. Trilochan Sastry



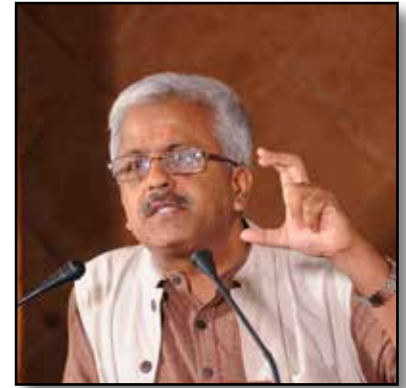
**Prof. Trilochan Sastry** opened the session by defining what ‘conflict’ means, and how the discourse around ‘**Conflict of Interest**’ is still in its nascent stage in India. He said that Indian Parliament has even today not passed any law making it mandatory for members to declare their interests. Prof. Sastry also touched upon the system of patronage networks that exist in our country and emphasized that making a strong law governing ‘conflict of interest’, is an urgent need.

## Dr. R. Balasubramaniam

**Dr. R. Balasubramaniam**, Founder & President – Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Founder & Chairman – Grassroots Research & Advocacy Movement, stated that **the easiest way of dealing with conflict is to recognize what characterizes conflict and whose interest it is conflicting with.**

It is the attitude of the citizens, bureaucracy and the political class that determines and classifies what can be seen as conflict. The major issue at hand, according to Dr. Balasubramaniam is the arrogance and indifference of power that lead to a growing disregard for issues that arise out of a conflict.

In his address, he emphasized that **the biggest challenge with regard to ‘Conflict of Interest’, was not so much the political class, rather the hidden elite class that indirectly runs the country by forcing certain policies to be drafted and implemented.** This invisible conflict forms the crux of the problem.



In his opinion, an engaged, empowered and an enlightened citizenry is the only way ahead.

## Shri Harish Narasappa



**Shri Harish Narasappa**, Founding Partner – SAMVAD, Co-Founder and President of Daksh, believed that **the ‘Conflict of Interest’ is practically unavoidable thus the major question in this regard is how to deal with the conflict so that public and private interests do not converge.** Some of the suggestions put forward by him to handle the issue of Conflict of Interest are listed below:

- a) Stricter laws for individual members whereby it is mandatory for such members to declare all their interests. They should be barred from voting on issues where they hold a personal interest.
- b) Public meetings and debates should be held regularly where elected representatives should discuss issues they shall be voting on in the Parliament or the State Legislative Assemblies. They should also be pressurized to explain their respective stands on these issues.
- c) The constitutionality of the 10<sup>th</sup> Schedule needs to be challenged. Owing to the fact that elected representatives cannot vote against the stand of their party, many of them often find themselves in a place where they find their opinion to be of no value.
- d) Attendance records, questions asked and other details relating to the activities of elected representatives in the Parliament and State Assemblies need to be publicized in order to bring greater transparency in their functioning.
- e) No Bill should be passed in either the Parliament or State Legislative Assemblies without a gap of 6 months, so as to ensure enough time for discussion and deliberation.



## Ms. Bhanupriya Rao

**Ms. Bhanupriya Rao**, Founder Member – Gender in Politics & RTI campaigner, said while the Lok Sabha has no mandatory rules around declaration of interests, the way the registers are maintained in the Rajya Sabha poses a huge problem. **The Rajya Sabha Register of Interest**

**has only five categories under which interests need to be declared, whereas other countries around the world have about 10 to 15 categories** for declarations to be made, she said. Moreover, in India, the Register of Interest is updated only once a year as the country has **no real law governing the issue of Conflict of Interest**. Comparing the practices around the Register of Interests that exist in India and in other countries, Ms. Rao said that in the United Kingdom for instance, an independent commissioner is appointed to look into complaints that are brought in. In India however, the timelines under which data is disclosed and the lack of cognizance taken by the Ethics Committees, poses a serious problem.

**The role of the Civil Society Organizations in this regard is to pressurize Government to carry out these disclosures in a proper manner**, she said. Ms. Bhanupriya emphasized that since these disclosures are already in the public domain, it should also be available on Rajya Sabha Website. According to her, the focus should be on ensuring that **the existing rules governing the Register of Interest be correctly implemented**, before advocating for an extra provision for absolute transparency with regard to declarations by elected representatives.

### Vote of thanks



Shri Y. Rajendra Prasad, member of the Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Election Watch team, gave the vote of thanks at the end of the first day of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Conference. Prasad said that the first day of the National Conference jointly organised by AP & TEW generated meaningful discussions. He thanked Dr. Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, the CEC, for enlightening everyone with his speech and elaborating upon the challenges faced by ECI and the new initiatives taken by them. Shri Prasad thanked all the other speakers and the eminent audience who came from long distances, various districts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and across the country, to make this Conference a success. He concluded by thanking the Director of Dr. MCR HRD Institute for his cooperation in making the event successful.

# Minutes of the Sessions

Day – 2 (13th March'16)

## Innovative Ideas to Decrease Money and Muscle Power in Elections at the grass-root level

*Chairperson: Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.)*



*Panelists (left to right) – Shri V. Panduranga Rao (Former Sarpanch, Nalgonda), Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head, ADR), Shri Kusam Rajamouli (Former Sarpanch, Warangal), Shri Rajiv Kumar (Bihar EW) & Shri Sudhir Pal (Jharkhand EW)*

### **Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.)**

Chairperson Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.), Head of ADR, opened the session by sharing his experiences from field trips to UP and Jharkhand during the recently-held State Panchayat Elections. He said that according to the eye-witness accounts, in UP, almost every candidate on an average have allegedly spent a minimum of Rs 10 to 15 lakhs on election campaigns and openly distributed alcohol and other goodies to lure voters. **General Verma praised the efforts of UP and Jharkhand Election Watches for their intense voter awareness campaign to warn people regarding the long term effects of vote selling and selecting**



**candidates facing criminal charges.** Inviting the panelists to express their opinions, he said that the primary objectives of the session were: **i) Ascertaining ground-level realities, and ii) Identifying the role of ADR and NEW in empowering voters and spreading awareness.**

### Shri Sudhir Pal



**Shri Sudhir Pal** from Jharkand Election Watch (JEW) informed the audience about JEW’s voter awareness campaign during the recently-held Jharkhand Panchayat elections. He said that to maximize the outreach, JEW collaborated with other Civil Society Organizations, the State Election Commission and also participated in Government programmes, like Sakshar Bharat and Mahila Samakhya. Shri Pal said that **these collaborations helped them cover more than 50% of the Zila Panchayats in the state.**

Talking about the innovative ideas used during the voter awareness campaigns, he said that **JEW created 10 message-driven songs to educate citizens about Panchayati Raj system, the electoral process and their responsibility as a voter and disseminated those songs widely via CDs, WhatsApp groups and USB Flash drives.**

### Shri Rajiv Kumar

**Shri Rajiv Kumar** from Bihar Election Watch (BEW) put forward some suggestions to decrease money and muscle power’s influence on local body elections. He recommended that **‘Open Ballot System’ should be introduced for voting in Panchayat Elections**, whereas for counting of votes **‘Totaliser Machines’ can be put in place.** He also advocated **strict monitoring of election malpractices and candidates’ expenditure on election campaigns.** For this, Shri Rajiv said, **Flying Squads, State Surveillance Teams and Booth Level Awareness system should be introduced at the Panchayat level.**



Shri Rajiv said that for the convenience of voters, there is a need to make identification of candidates contesting elections easily accessible either through ECI website or a Helpline facility at the Panchayat level. The affidavits of Mukhiya, Sarpanch, Members of District Council and Members of Panchayat Samiti should also be uploaded on the main ECI website for spreading awareness.

### Shri V. Panduranga Rao

Shri V. Panduranga Rao, former Sarpanch of Nalgonda, opined that **the development of villages are the key to the development of the country.** The first step towards this is creating awareness among the people, who would eventually pressurise their elected representatives to deliver good governance, Shri Rao said.

He recommended that the **elected candidates should resign from their political party for the entire**

**period of their tenure so that they can represent all equally without any partiality.** The former Sarpanch suggested that the **time period for the campaigning should be reduced in order to curb the huge election expenditure on campaigns** as well as candidates be restricted from making election promises to lure voters. Shri Rao also **advocated the ‘Right to Recall’ system** in order to make the elected representatives more accountable towards the citizens.



## Shri Kusam Rajamouli



**Shri Kusam Rajamouli**, former Sarpanch of Warangal, warned that people should be careful while selecting a candidate because a corrupt person, if elected, would obviously promote corruption and one cannot expect a clean and honest governance from him/her. He further suggested that **MLAs and MPs should not be allowed to participate in the local body election campaigns** instead the candidates be instructed to interact with people at the village gatherings and do door to door campaigning.

Shri Rajamouli believed that in the local body elections, party affiliation of candidates affects adversely, thus **party’s influence should be discouraged at the panchayat level and even after the elections**, the elected representatives should work beyond the party politics. In the end, he also agreed with others to implement the ‘Right to Recall’ system.

# Impact of the Internet, Social Media and Data Analysis on Elections & Governance

*Chairperson: Dr. Vipul Mudgal*



*Panelists (left to right): Shri Nikhil Pahwa (Founder, Editor & Publisher – medianama.com), Shri Sanjay Dubey (Founder & Editor, satyagraha.com), Dr. Vipul Mudgal (Trustee, ADR), Shri Abhinandan Sekhri (Co-Founder, Newslandry), Shri Naveen Gattu (COO, Gramener), Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder – factly.in, Coordinator, AP & TEW)*

## Dr. Vipul Mudgal



In the opening of the session, Chairperson Dr. Vipul Mudgal, ADR Trustee, said that today Big Data analysis and New Media, comprising Internet and Social Media platforms, play a significant role in the decisions made by Government, political parties, corporate houses, media and CSOs. He stated that **Big Data creates systems and connects dots in a way that allow people to make more informed and reasonable decisions.**

## Shri Naveen Gattu

Shri Naveen Gattu, COO, Gramener, made a presentation on 'Leveraging Big Data: Election & Governance'. Showing how data can be used in various interesting ways, Shri Gattu said that '**media, information and emotions**' are the three things that impact elections and politics in India. He said, Social Media has started to play a big role in elections and it is also an important tool to educate voters.

He accepted that **data sometimes tends to be biased, but with the use of technology data and information could be processed to produce some amazing results.** The infographics and reports on Big Data can be presented in various interesting way which could grab people's attention easily, Shri Gattu said. But **the presentation of data is a tricky thing, it is notwithstanding the human angle which becomes crucial** in determining how a set of data should be presented to the layman so that it catches their attention, he added.



### Shri Abhinandan Sekhri



Shri Abhinandan Sekhri, Co-Founder Newslaundry, said that **the concept of 'objective opinion' is an ideal thing and does not exist in reality.** So what can be achieved is to make one's subjectivity transparent to others. According to him, **the job of Big Data is to make ideas that are invisible, visible and comprehensible to the viewers/audiences.** He believed that **Social Media has the ability to make people's subjectivity transparent and visible to others at an unprecedented level.** Shri Sekhri stated that the **Social Media has not only made data more usable but has also eliminated the 'middle man' concept or the in-between levels where data used to be tampered with before reaching out to the people.** Now it is possible

to connect with the people directly using these mediums.

### Shri Sanjay Dubey

Shri Sanjay Dubey, Founder & Editor, satyagraha.com, focused on a different angle of the issue relating to the hidden disadvantages of the use of Social Media. He disagreed with Shri Sekhri that Social Media is a tool that can be used to freely express views, without having a mediator. On the contrary, **he believed that the Social Media made it difficult for people to express their views freely. The need for approval on Social Media in the form of Likes, Shares and Retweets, has affected the independent thinking and expression of people,** he added. Shri Dubey emphasized that not only this, even the conventional media is getting affected by this trend and its independence is being compromised. According to him, **the responsibility of maintaining the independence of the conventional media lies with the public, who will have to decide which stories deserve an 'approval'.**



### Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu

Shri Rakesh Dubbudu, Founder – factly. in, Coordinator, AP & TEW, stated that for all the good that has come about with the use of Social Media, there have been some dangerous outcomes as well. **The Social Media allows people with half-baked knowledge and little understanding of actual facts to express**



rather ‘extremist thoughts’ in order to gain approval in the form of ‘Likes and Shares’. Circulation of lies has thus become easier.

Agreeing with Shri Gattu, he said that **data in itself is toothless, and seeing it in isolation could even pose a danger.** For the common man, data in itself holds little value and only the addition of a perspective, often through a host of data visualization tools as well as a human context, converts it into information, Shri Dubuddu added. According to him, this information can then be readily consumed, to draw inferences. **The insights that are provided to data, hold the key.** He made a detailed presentation on how data visualization tools have been used by his company to depict political data in the past.



## Shri Nikhil Pahwa



Shri Nikhil Pahwa, Founder, Editor & Publisher – medianama.com, began his discussion by explaining how the **Internet is like a double-edged sword, it definitely empowers us but at the same time also makes us vulnerable by recording all the data often for the purposes not known.** The Internet, according to him, has become severely polarized. Processes on the Internet tend to showcase more of an idea that a particular user generally consumes. This further reiterates the same views for the viewer. This prevents citizens from seeing a point of view different from what they already subscribe to, for the contents sold to them are packaged in a way that blurs another perspective.

Shri Pahwa stated his growing concern with the emergence of a sort of surveillance state in India, especially in the context of the Aadhaar card scheme, for it continues to be unclear how the biometric data recorded will be put to use by the state. The most pressing need he stated, was the need for public participation. It is imperative that the contribution of people to politics and governance stretch beyond just a vote, so citizens can be aware of the activities of their elected representatives, paving the way for greater transparency and accountability.

## Open Session

In the open session that followed the panel discussion, Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar asked the panelists to highlight how ADR can reach out to a large number of people with the use of New Media.

Answering the question, Shri Sekhri said that ADR can use platforms like Facebook and Twitter on a large scale to reach out to the people. He countered Shri Dubey’s claim that the Social Media allow little scope for independent expression. Shri Sekhri mentioned that individuals who fear being hounded on social media must quit journalism altogether. According to him, while social media does not embody perfection, it is constantly evolving as a tool and has helped a lot of organizations such as ADR along with other startups that have limited resources at their disposal, to make a change.

Shri Gattu also said that Social Media as a tool could be used in both a negative as well as a positive way.

## Resolutions and Next steps of ADR & NEW

Prof. Trilochan Sastry thanked everyone for their participation and cooperation. He said that the purpose of the Annual National Conference is to meet each other, update everyone with the work done by different State Election Watches in their areas and get ideas for next year's Action Plans. **He was particularly, appreciative of Chief Election Commissioner's suggestion to send SMS containing Candidates' details to the voters across the country with technological help from ADR.** Prof. Sastry said that ADR has already been sending such messages but due to the limited resources, it cannot be done on a large scale and as ECI has shown a willingness to do the same, ADR will definitely come forward for assistance.

He felt that as a lot of discussion has taken place regarding the local body elections, it is time that ADR and NEW start focusing on these elections as well. **Though it is not possible to cover the local body elections all over the country due to limited resources, ADR and NEW can pick and choose certain areas in the beginning to spread awareness among the citizens.** He said this is something which should be taken forward.

Another thing which he highlighted was that though ADR is already using Social Media platforms and New Media to reach out to the people but these mediums need to be used intensely and on a larger scale to maximize the reach.

# Photo Gallery - National Conference









# State Partners' Meet

## Strategy Workshop – National Election Watch Partners' Meeting

**Date & Time: 11th March'16, 15:00 onwards**

Agenda	
Time	Session
15:00 – 15:05	<b>Welcome address</b> Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.)
15:05 – 15:15	<b>Background to the meeting:</b> 12 years of Electoral and Political Reforms – Future Course of Action Prof. Trilochan Sastry
15:15 – 16:00	<b>2016 Assembly Elections:</b> Plans for Strategy, Outreach, Advocacy and Dissemination Assam EW, Kerala EW, Puducherry EW, Tamil Nadu EW, West Bengal EW
16:00 – 17:00 (Including Tea)	<b>Strategy Building</b> Group discussion – region-wise: 1. Broad activities envisioned a. Target groups b. Communication & Outreach methods c. Research & Advocacy to be undertaken d. Network and alliance partners 2. Resources required (human, knowledge, skill, technology, finance etc.) 3. Ideas on how the resources can be enhanced (including generating them locally) <i>Group I (Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur)</i> <i>Group II (West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar)</i> <i>Group III (J&amp;K, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh)</i> <i>Group IV (Gujarat, Goa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan)</i> <i>Group V (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh &amp; Telangana, Puducherry)</i>
17:00 – 18:00	<b>Presentation by all groups</b> Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.)
18:00 – 18:15	<b>Future Plans and Way Forward</b> Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar

**Annual brainstorming session with the state partners was held on 11th March'16 as a prelude to the National Conference. Discussions were held as per the Agenda and attended by the team members listed below.**

*Prof. Trilochan Sastry, Dr. Ajit Ranade, Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.), Shri Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (AP&TEW), Shri Y. Rajendra Prasad (AP&TEW), Shri Balvinder Singh (J&KEW), Shri Subir Dasgupta (WBEW), Shri Diplak De (WBEW), Shri Gautam Mukhopadhyay (WBEW), Prof. Anath Bandhu De (WBEW), Pankti Jog (Gujarat EW) Shri Biswendu Bhattacharjee (Tripura EW), Catherine Kyndiah (Meghalaya EW), Shri Amihe Swu (Nagaland EW), Shri Kuovi Angami (Nagaland EW), Shri Rajiv Kr (Bihar EW), Shri Sudhir Pal (Jharkhand EW), Shri Tasaduk Ariful Hussain (Assam EW), Shri T. Ravindran (Kerala EW), Shri Bhasker Assoldekar (Goa EW), Dr. Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Tamil Nadu EW), Shri Alphonse Raj (Tamil Nadu EW), Shri P. Joseph Victor Raj (Puducherry EW), 4 Members (Puducherry EW), Shri Parvinder Singh Kittna (Punjab EW), Ms. Rolly Shivhare (MPEW), Ms. Muskan (MPEW), Shri Atul Rajawat (MPEW), Shri Subhash (MPEW), Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Odisha EW), Shri Sitakant Das (Odisha EW), Shri Suchit Singh (Odisha EW), Shri Sitakant Sahu (Odisha EW), Shri Sanjay Singh (UPEW), Shri Siddharth (UPEW), 3 Members (UPEW), Shri Rajasthan Kamal Tak (Rajasthan EW) and Volunteers (AP&TEW).*

### **Prof. Trilochan Sastry**



Prof. Trilochan Sastry opened the session welcoming all the delegates from different State Election Watch teams at the Dr. Marri Channa Reddy HRD Institute on the eve of the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference. At the brainstorming session with the State Partners, Prof. Sastry encouraged all to come forward and share their experiences, successes and challenges faced throughout the year in the effort of educating people regarding their duties and responsibilities as citizens of India and why they should be extra careful in choosing whom to vote for during elections. He requested the representatives from the five states, where Assembly Polls were to be held in the months of April-May 2016, to share information regarding their campaigning plans and the innovative voter awareness methods they had

planned to use at the grass-root level.

He said that another question, which is worth pondering is that **after 15 years of work, have we been able to make any real difference.** Though we can make a long list of 'Achievements' in the form of SC Judgements, Press coverage, RTI Applications etc. but we have to keep asking ourselves, **have we made any small difference to the larger goal of improving elections and democracy.** Prof. Sastry said that suggestions are also coming to shift our focus to local body elections as well. He first invited Shri Abhay Kumar, a noted social activist from Raichur, to speak and requested the state partners to share their experience thereafter.



## Plans for Strategy, Outreach, Advocacy and Dissemination

### Shri Abhay Kumar

Shri Abhay Kumar, a noted social activist from Raichur, Karnataka, who was a special invitee for the National Conference, said that people often say ADR & NEW needs to intervene at the governance level as well and only voter awareness campaigns are not enough. He said, people lament that they do not have options, they have to choose between two goons. **Thus its necessary to provide good alternatives to the people to choose from, otherwise our efforts will go in vain.**



Sharing his experience, he said that the same question was posed to their *Sangathanas* well five years ago, and then they decided to field people from their own *Sangathan* in the local body elections. Shri Ajay said that they soon realized that **election is a complicated thing at the local level as compared to the MP/MLA elections, which is much easier. In the local body elections the candidates have to compete with someone from the same locality and caste factor also plays a big role.** He said that first time, they did not do very well and realized that campaigning only during the elections is not enough. So they planned a long-term door-to-door campaign method which started yielding results in the ensuing elections.

He said, finally they had been able to connect with the people. They also involved citizens in the funding campaign by taking Rs 50-100 donations from each household. This gave a sense of ownership and commitment to the people, this move was opposed by all the political parties as they got scared. Shri Ajay summed up by saying that as awareness level in people are rising, it is necessary to provide them good alternative candidates and ADR & NEW should seriously think about this.

### Prof. Sudarshan Padmanabhan (TNEW)



**Prof. Sudarshan Padmanabhan** from TNEW informed that they were working with the Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Officer to ensure that the Assembly election is conducted in a fair and transparent manner. As there is a large number of young voters in Tamil Nadu, the CEO has sought TNEW's collaboration in their awareness campaigns.

He informed that during 2014 Lok Sabha elections, they had conducted various quiz programs for students to give them an idea regarding democracy and elections. This time also they have started organizing the quiz programs in different educational institutes. Their experience revealed that students are curious and want to know about how politics, especially elections, affect the economy and environment of the country and why is it important for them to be politically aware citizens. He however lamented that students and teachers are not ready for a long term sustained engagement and the TNEW is working in the direction of mobilizing students.

TNEW was also planning to organize live debates amongst political parties and journalists besides collaborating with different media houses for the voter awareness campaigns, he informed.

### Shri T. Ravindran (Kerala EW)



Speaking about the existing political scenario in the State of Kerala, **Shri T. Ravindran** informed that corruption, which was otherwise not blatantly practiced in Kerala, had unfortunately become a part of the political life in the last few years. He also talked about the controversy over the latest voters list as there was a substantial increase in the number of voters and there was no logical explanation about the increase in such a short time as Kerala's population growth rate is not very high.

Shri Ravindran said fortunately in Kerala 'real' criminals are not fielded by political parties, though there are number of serious criminal cases attributed to MLAs, but further analysis would reveal that those cases are filed during agitation. He said that another major issue in Kerala is Media houses and their political affiliations, a number of major controversies are deliberately created by journalists with a hidden agenda.

One of the biggest challenges that KEW is facing is with respect to the analysis done by ADR regarding criminal cases is not accepted by the politicians and journalists who claim that these charges are politically motivated and related to rallies and political agitations.

Informing about the campaigning plan, Mr. Ravindran said that KEW would be working closely with the CEO and conduct programs to raise awareness amongst IT professionals and techies, because they are totally alienated from the electoral process due to their belief that it is better to stay away from politics as it is a nasty world. One of the basic aims of KEW is to encourage these disillusioned young professionals to come out and vote for the right candidates. He said that KEW will also be popularizing NOTA as it is being inserted in the EVM machines for first time in Kerala.

### Shri Tasaduk Ariful Hussain (Assam EW)



Shri Tasaduk Ariful Hussain from Assam EW said that criminalization is a big problem in Assam. People are scared of the candidates who are facing criminal charges, especially those who are former insurgents. He said, money power also plays a big role in the elections in Assam. AEW is trying to create awareness among the masses to persuade them not to vote for candidates facing serious criminal charges. Shri Ariful said that their team is using various methods to educate people regarding their duties as a citizen and the current political scenario in the state. They were also creating a performance rating card of all the current MLAs based on their assembly attendance, what kind of questions they had raised and the kind of debates they had participated in.

The AEW is also trying to determine how much amount of money an MP/MLA has used from his/her MLALADS fund and what work he/she has done in his/her constituency under different schemes and programs through

different government websites and grass-root level inspection. These information will be disseminated widely to make people aware.

Ahead of the 2016 Assembly polls, AEW has selected five ultra-sensitive constituencies, where huge amount of money is expected to be spent, to do sting operations to unearth election malpractices like bribery and vote buying. The AEW has planned to click photographs of such incidents and put it on the website.

The AEW also planned to start school and college outreach program to reach out to young voters.

### **Shri P. Joseph Victor Raj (Puducherry EW)**



Shri P. Joseph Victor Raj said that they would be repeating all the voter awareness activities done during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. They had planned to use Facebook and other social media platforms besides Whatsapp groups.

They are focusing on the first time voters and college students this time and have planned to use interesting methods like puppet shows and short videos messages to make young voters aware of ethical and informed voting practices.

On the lines of the previous Assembly election campaign, their team would be creating MLAs performance sheet analyzing the attendance, number of questions asked by the representative in the Assembly etc. He said that the ruling party had made 15 promises during the last Assembly polls out of which only 3 have been fulfilled, so the PEW is also planning to publicize that.

He said they were also planning to focus on Residential Welfare Associations because parties try to buy their votes offering cash. They would also conduct booth visits and set up Citizens Election Observers to help the voters.

### **Shri Gautam Bhattacharya (WBEW)**

Shri Gautam Bhattacharya raised a question that despite Internet and Social Media boom, how many people are really informed in the country. It is very necessary to disseminate true facts and right information amongst the masses about the current political scenario and WBEW is focussing on the same. He said different strategies need to be adopted for the urban and rural citizens. In rural areas, WBEW team would focus on people's rights, while in urban areas, the focus would be on promoting transparency in the functioning of political parties.



He informed that they have written to all the political parties in West Bengal to remove the Rs 20,000 barrier for the declaration of donations and set a precedence by disclosing the names of the donors, who have donated below the prescribed Rs 20,000 limit.

He said they have divided the entire West Bengal in three target areas – West, South and North, and would be conducting 8 to 10 conferences each in all the three areas to make people aware of their duties as a citizen. They would also be analyzing the manifestos and the affidavits of the candidates and would disseminate the information through media.

**Shri Sanjay Singh from UPEW, Shri Sudhir Pal from Jharkhand EW and Shri Rajiv Kumar from Bihar EW** also shared their experiences of the recently-held Panchayat Elections. In UP, 768 gram panchayats and 8 districts had been selected for analysis of candidates contesting local body elections and the reports were disseminated through media. The different EW not only held voter awareness campaigns but also promote candidates who were contesting on low budgets and had a clean record.

## **Strategy building, future plans and way forward**

Subsequently the attendees were divided into four groups and they discussed regarding various issues and challenges they had faced in their grass-root level campaigns.

**The teams unanimously decided that ADR and NEW should focus on local body elections as it would prove a big step in the direction of improving governance and elections at the micro level.**

**The Partners also stressed on the use of Social Media platforms like Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Whatsapp message groups on a larger scale to reach out to the citizens.**

**They also suggested that we should focus on spreading awareness among young voters by creating short message-oriented videos.**

# Photo Gallery - State Partners' Meet





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