

12<sup>th</sup> March 2016

## Press Release

### 12<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms: Day 1

The 12<sup>th</sup> ADR Annual National Conference commenced today at Dr. Marri Channa Reddy HRD Institute, Hyderabad with the inaugural speech of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Dr. Syed Nasim Zaidi.

#### **Address by Dr. Syed Nasim Zaidi**

While addressing the Conference on the issue of electoral and political reforms, CEC Dr. Zaidi unequivocally stressed on the importance of reforms in the functioning of the Political Parties. He said that the reforms in Political Parties are quintessential to electoral reforms in India.

Dr. Zaidi elaborated in length on the ECI's proposal to penalise concealment of information and furnishing false information by the candidates contesting elections. He also explained to the audience the need for amending section 29 B of the R.P.A. to prevent Electoral Trusts from funding Political Parties from foreign sources. Dr. Zaidi told the audience that the ECI has written a letter to the Law commission to amend form 24A to include sources of income in the election affidavit.

Dr. Zaidi said that the political parties under the current legal framework are loosely governed, be it registration, funding, expenditure etc. Regarding election financing, he said that it should rest on four pillars. 1) Laying down the expenditure limit of candidates and also of political parties, 2) Disclosure requirements for more transparency, 3) Compliance of disclosure requirements and 4) Penalties for non-adherence.

#### **Re-hauling the Electoral System in India**

*[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); Chairperson: Dr. Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)]*

Commenting on the nature of electoral system in India, Dr. Jaya Prakash Narayana, President Lok Satta party said that the first past the post system is quite detrimental and empowerment of local govt. bodies is required through decentralisation of power from centre to achieve real democracy & improve governance.

Resident Editor of ToI Shri Kingshuk Nag said that the Politico-business nexus is at the root of corruption. He suggested that the number of seats in the Parliament should be increased for proper representation of the citizens and Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils should be abolished as it has become an easy entry into politics for businessmen.

Shri K. J. Rao (General Secretary, FAME) said that the basic aim of electoral reforms is elective representation. He added that there should be a stable government so that they can do proper development work. He said that ECI has been fighting since the 90's for electoral reforms, however, political parties have not shown interest in electoral reforms.

Shrinivas Ramani of the Hindu said that along with electoral reforms we also require legislative reforms. He said that there is a need to monitor the performance of MPs and MLAs.

He also opposed NOTA as he felt that it is a negative vote and presently it has insignificant value and should be removed.

Prof. Trilochan Sastry (of ADR) said that India is a very heterogeneous democracy and 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 also said that all national issues can't be resolved only by electoral reforms.

### **Criminalization of Politics and Lack of Transparency in Political Party Finances**

*[Panelists: Shri H.S. Brahma (Former CEC), Shri Dasoju Sravan (Chief Spokesperson, Indian National Congress), Shri Shailesh Gandhi (Former Information Commissioner), Shri Subhash Chandra Agrawal (RTI Activist); Chairperson – Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)]*

The representatives of Political Parties shared their views regarding transparency and accountability in Political Parties.

While speaking on the criminalization of politics and lack of transparency in political parties, Shri H.S. Brahma (former CEC) termed elections in India as the 'most prohibitive election' where voters are treated as commodities. He urged the people of India and the civil society to be more aggressive to bring about change in our electoral and political system.

Dasoju Sravan (of INC) said that our democracy is getting contaminated due to casteism, criminalization, commercialization and communalization. He also said that like any other job, politicians should also have some kind of criterion and there should be a mechanism for citizens to take part in policy making.

Shailesh Gandhi (former Information Commissioner) shared his experiences of how our courts have become dysfunctional and that there is an urgent need for judicial reforms else rule of law cannot prevail and any set of reforms are futile. He also suggested that ECI should refer the top 3 candidates with highest assets to Income Tax for verifying their sources of income.

Subhash Agrawal stressed on the need to convert NOTA into Right to Reject with riders and said that today the law makers have become the biggest law breakers.

Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar (of ADR) said that the election expenditure limits are laid down by the government and not by the ECI. The ECI only makes recommendation and everybody works under the Indian Constitution and it is the prerogative of the government to decide on election expenditure limits.

### **Conflict of Interest: Impact on Good Governance**

*[Panelists: Dr. R. Balasubramaniam (Founder & President – Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Founder & Chairman – Grassroots Research & Advocacy Movement), Shri Harish Narasappa (Founding Partner – SAMVAD, Co-Founder and President of Daksh), Ms. Bhanupriya Rao (Founder Member – Gender in Politics & RTI Campaigner) ; Chairperson – Prof. Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)]*

Prof. Trilochan Sastry (of ADR) while speaking on the issue stated that in general conflict of interest is not thought about and debated much in India despite the fact that there are many politicians who have conflicting pecuniary interests and might directly affect their decisions in the Parliament. He also said that while the Rajya Sabha has a Register of Interest, the Lok Sabha doesn't despite the need to have it.

Dr. Balasubramaniam of SVYM said that it is important for people to be aware of the election process. He said that there is a hidden class which is forcing policies to be made as per their convenience which is more bothersome.

Shri Harish Narasappa of Daksh opined that instead of trying to define what conflict of interest is, it is better now to focus on how to look into the matter. He said that there is a complete lack in transparency on how a bill is passed. Only a few ministers, CMs and bureaucrats decide on which bills to be passed.

Ms. Bhanupriya Rao (of Gender in Politics) submitted that though the Rajya Sabha maintains a register of interest, it is not maintained well. The Rajya Sabha secretariat should pro-actively display this information in the public domain as well.

Regards,

<b>Media and Journalist Helpline</b> +91 80103 94248 Email: <a href="mailto:adr@adrindia.org">adr@adrindia.org</a>	<b>Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.)</b> Head National Election Watch, Association for Democratic Reforms 011 4165 4200, +91 88264 79910 <a href="mailto:adr@adrIndia.org">adr@adrIndia.org</a> , <a href="mailto:anilverma@adrindia.org">anilverma@adrindia.org</a>	<b>Prof Jagdeep Chhokar</b> IIM Ahmedabad (Retd.) Founder Member, National Election Watch, Association for Democratic Reforms +91 99996 20944 <a href="mailto:jchhokar@gmail.com">jchhokar@gmail.com</a>	<b>Prof Trilochan Sastry</b> IIM Bangalore Founder Member, National Election Watch, Association for Democratic Reforms +91 94483 53285 <a href="mailto:trilochans@iimb.ernet.in">trilochans@iimb.ernet.in</a>
--	--	--	---

--

Association for Democratic Reforms  
T-95A, C.L. House, 1st Floor,  
(Near Gulmohar Commercial Complex)  
Gautam Nagar  
New Delhi-110 049

M: +91 8010394248

T: +91 11 41654200

F: 011 4609 4248

Web:



[Find ADR on Facebook](#)

[Find ADR on Twitter](#)