

Press Release

16th Oct,'17

Eastern Regional Consultation on Electoral & Political Reforms

Kolkata: A discussion was organised on 16th October at the **Ramakrishna Mission Institute, Golpark** on the various issues concerning **Electoral and Political reforms** in the country. Eminent speakers from West Bengal, including **Prof. Saugata Roy** (Former Union Minister of State for Urban Development), **Shri Manoj Bhattacharya** (Senior Member – Revolutionary Socialist Party), **Dr. Amiya K. Samanta** (Former DGP, Govt. of West Bengal), **Shri Sneathish Sur** (Senior Journalist -Doordarshan Kendra), **Shri Gautam Mukherjee** (Mem), presented their views and answered multiple questions posed by the audience which constituted members from various research organisations, students and the media. The event was organised by West Bengal Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

They were joined by distinguished panel members from other Eastern States of **Jharkhand - Mr. Supriyo Bhattacharya** (General Secretary, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha party), **Bihar - Prof D M Diwakar** (Prof & HOD, Division of Economics, A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies), **Odisha - Mr. Panchanan Kanungo** (Former Finance Minister, Odisha), **Prof Surya Narayan Mishra** (Former Prof and HOD, Political Science Dept. Utkal University) and Assam - **Prof. Bhupen Sarmah**, (Director, Omeo Kr. Das Institute of Social Change and Development) and **Shri Dileep Chandan** (Editor – Asam Bani)

Shri Chittotosh Mukherjee (Former Chief Justice of Kolkata & Mumbai High Court), chaired the first session on **Electoral Reforms** in which *“Electoral malpractices and its concerns”, “First-Past-the-Post – is it representative enough?”* and *“Rejuvenating “Gram Sansad” – a step towards functional democracy?”* were discussed. He summarised the session by stating that the topics **cannot be considered in isolation** but as a single issue because to bring about electoral reforms, it is necessary to discuss about all the three issues and bring **changes simultaneously**. He said that we needed to **inject a sense of responsibility** among the political parties and that is possible through a **dialogue** between the parties, civil society organizations and Election Commission. Regarding concrete steps towards electoral reforms, he emphasised the need for a) mass **awakening** and mass **mobilization**; b) **manifesto** of parties to be made **binding** so as to make the parties more accountable; c) **Constitutional** deliberations and subsequent changes and d) **Strengthening Gram Sabha** which is a challenge but it is important to have a **functional structure**.

Further he added that the discussion was **an attempt to bring about a healthy change in our democracy** and hoped the consultation would help in drafting an action plan to improve the current scenario.

The second session on **Political Reforms** was chaired by **Dr. Buddhadeb Ghosh** (Former Director, State Institute of Panchayat & Rural Development) during which *“Electoral Bonds and increasing opacity – what next?”* and *“Possibility of scrutiny of financial statements of political parties”* were discussed. He summarised the session by stating a majority of the public is **disenchanted** with the political system due to the **increasing opacity** in the functioning and finances of political parties. With the introduction of **Electoral bonds**, the regional parties with a paucity of funds might not be able to tap into the benefits of the scheme as the larger parties with a national appeal and better infrastructure/ man power would ensure that the bonds are deposited in their accounts. Regarding **scrutiny of statements of parties**, he said that being transparent in its finances should be a **voluntary act** of the political parties in the absence of legal provisions by uploading their statements on their websites. He concluded by stating that all accounts of parties should be **scrutinised** by a **CAG** appointed team and **public funding** of parties and **right to recall** of candidates could be discussed so as to reduce money power during elections and improve accountability in the performance of elected representatives.

West Bengal Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms pledged to keep their advocacy going based on the recommendations and suggestions made by the eminent panel members and that of the participants. The Head

of the organisation stated that such consultations are being planned in the Southern region as well as the Western region of the country so as to get an in-depth view of the issues specific to the regions and submit these recommendations to the Election Commission of India, the Central Bureau of Direct Taxes and the Central Government, for further discussion and subsequent implementation.

For a copy of the Agenda, concept note and pictures of the event, please refer to <https://goo.gl/GCuZGr>

Contacts

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