

## Press Release

27<sup>th</sup> Oct,'16

### Are Simultaneous Elections Desirable? A Debate on Possibilities & Challenges

**New Delhi:** A discussion was organised on 26<sup>th</sup> October at the **India International Centre** on the possibility of having simultaneous elections in India and the challenges which need to be overcome to make it a reality. Eminent speakers, including **Shri Bhupender Yadav** (Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha), **Dr S. Y. Quraishi**, former CEC, **Prof Sanjay Kumar**, Director of Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and **Dr M R Madhavan**, President of PRS Legislative Research 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 Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and chaired by the organisation's Founder – Trustee, **Prof Jagdeep Chhokar**.

The proceedings began with brief opening remarks by **Prof Chhokar**, emphasising the significance of elections. He said, *"...elections are the most fundamental way of operationalising democracy"*. Further he added that the discussion was **an attempt to make an informed choice** regarding the simultaneous elections and hoped to get concrete suggestions from the panel for action to improve the current scenario.

While speaking on the *"Possibilities of holding simultaneous elections in India"*, Shri **Bhupender Yadav** put across his argument using Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of means and ends. He emphasised that *"...Elections are the means towards the end of serving the people. However, nowadays elections have become an end in itself"*. He claimed that constant elections throughout the year all the over country act as a hindrance in the working of the government. He suggested that simultaneous elections will solve this problem and that, *"There should be a pre-defined schedule for the elections and uniformity"*.

**Dr Quraishi**, began by clarifying, *"...this issue is not politically motivated"*. Although he appreciated the idea of simultaneous election, he also mentioned that **there is no clarity on how it will be implemented**. He said, *"...elections have become the root cause of corruption in the country."* He mentioned that political donations require quid-pro-quo, hence after winning elections, the politician-bureaucrat nexus indulges in *"recovering the investment"* and that is where corruption begins. He also emphasised on the fact *"caste, religion and communal issues are perpetuated by constant elections."* Speaking on election expenditure, he pointed out that, *"There is a limit on candidate's expenditure but not on party's expenditure. Thus, there should be a limit on the political parties' expenditure. Secondly, there should be state funding instead of private funding for the political parties. Thirdly, the elections should be held within a shorter span of time."* He said that the proposal needs to be *"thought through"* in detail as there are many logistics issues involved like additional requirement of EVMs and security forces.

**Prof Sanjay Kumar**, speaking on *"the challenges in holding simultaneous elections in India"* felt that the democracy had an intrinsic value, and added, *"...efforts should be made to hold simultaneous elections in those state assemblies which are completing their tenure together rather than forcing simultaneous elections by law."* He stated that a **study by CSDS** of 31 Assembly elections that were held along with Lok Sabha elections from 1989 to 2014 show that **in 24 instances/elections the major political parties polled almost a similar proportion of votes both for the Assembly and the Lok Sabha**, while only in seven instances was the choice of voters somewhat different. If elections are held separately then regional parties have a better scope of winning. He concluded by saying, *"Simultaneous elections will curb the voice of people living at the margins of the society by strangulating the scope for regional parties which reflect local aspirations/issues. This will reverse the process of deepening democracy."*

While talking about the various legal roadblocks faced in ushering in simultaneous elections, **Dr Madhavan** agreed with Prof Sanjay Kumar's views on **".....wave election problem"** and explained that when the public is deeply swayed towards a party, there might be **more chances of the party winning** not only during the **general elections** but also any **assembly elections** held around the same time which could **drastically affect the role of the regional parties** representing the marginalised communities of the country. Quoting Shri Praveen Chakravarty's paper which analysed the possible effect of simultaneous elections on voter behaviour, he added, *"The paper analysed the 2600 Assembly Constituencies in 16 elections and during simultaneous election, 77% of the time the same party was chosen in the assembly constituency as well as the parliament and in non -simultaneous elections, difference was 61%".* He concluded by asking whether **it was desirable if the focus was shifted away from local issues and moved towards only the national issues.**

The speakers took various **questions from the audience**, revolving around the **fate of regional parties**; scope for the **formation of new parties** and **increased expenditure over EVMs** in simultaneous elections. Dr Quraishi addressed these questions and provided several counter-arguments to the fellow panellists' arguments. He **disagreed with politicians' stand** that **elections were a hindrance to the implementation of government schemes.**

**Prof. Sanjay** addressed the issue regarding the proliferation of regional parties. He re-asserted that *"...simultaneous elections might lead to the decline in the political status of regional parties. It will cause reverse democratisation."* Further, he called out for *"... the need of revision in the model code of conduct."*

Concluding the session, **Prof. Chhokar** stated that, *"... 'one nation- one election' is a surreptitious attempt to destroy the federal character of India."* He argued that it was **against the federal character of Constitution.** Secondly, while **disagreeing with Mr. Yadav**, he stated, *"that means and ends are interlinked."* He expressed his disagreement with Prof. Sanjay over the revision in the model code of conduct. He stated that **revision of the model code of conduct would destroy it.** He stated that the **proposal for simultaneous elections was politically motivated.**

For a copy of the Agenda, concept note and pictures of the event, please refer to <https://goo.gl/5UIPJP>

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