

16th ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL REFORMS

Organised by
Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)
&
Maharashtra Election Watch (MEW)

Venue
Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, Maharashtra

Date
15th and 16th July, 2023

ASSOCIATION FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORMS (ADR)

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सुबई, बुधवार 19 जुलाई 2023

सिस्टीम मीडिया 5

चुनावी और राजनीतिक सुधारों पर 16वां वार्षिक राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन

पुणे, 15 जुलाई 2023 (दिन 1): एसोसिएशन फॉर डेमोक्रेटिक रिफॉर्म (एडीआर) और महाराष्ट्र इलेक्शन वॉच (एमईडब्ल्यू) 15 और 16 जुलाई 2023 को गोवले इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ पॉलिटिक्स एंड इकोनॉमिक्स (जीआईपीई) में 16वां वार्षिक राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन का आयोजन कर रहे हैं। दो दिवसीय कार्यक्रम के पहले दिन, चर्चा चुनावी और राजनीतिक क्षेत्र में सबसे गंभीर समस्याओं के समाधान की तलाश आवश्यकता पर केंद्रित थी। कार्यक्रम के पहले दिन भारत के सभी राज्यों के स्टेट इलेक्शन वॉच समन्वयकों के साथ-साथ विभिन्न नागरिक समाज समूहों के सदस्यों, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं, पत्रकारों, सेवानिवृत्त नौकरशाहों, सेवानिवृत्त न्यायाधीशों, अधिवक्ताओं, राजनीतिक दलों के प्रतिनिधियों, विधायकों और छात्रों ने भाग लि सत्र को मंचवर्ता के रूप में, जो विचारजनक है और इसे कौशल और विश्वविद्यालयों में युवा जागरूकता और कौशल एकेडमिक कार्यक्रमों के माध्यम से संबोधित किया जाना चाहिए।

भूमिका और निहितार्थों पर प्रकाश डाला। इसके बाद, उन्होंने चुनाव प्रचार पर उम्मीदवारों द्वारा बेहिसाब धन। राजनीतिक दलों को अपनी वार्षिक रिपोर्ट में चुनावी बजट के माध्यम से प्राप्त धन का पूरा विवरण देना अनिवार्य नहीं है। रिपोर्टर्स कलेक्टिव के सह-संस्थापक भी निम्नलिखित

कि यदि नोटा जीतता है, तो चुनाव फिर से होगा। हरियाणा के मामले में, यह अधिसूचित किया गया था कि नोटा से कम वोट पाने वाला कोई भी उम्मीदवार नामांकन दोबारा दाखिल करने या चुनाव लड़ने के लिए पात्र नहीं होगा। इस सत्र की अध्यक्षता कर रहे प्रोफेसर जगदीप छोकर ने कहा कि अगर हम चुनाव आयोग और राज्य चुनाव आयोग (एसईसी) पर दबाव डालें तो नोटा अधिक प्रभावी हो सकता है। उन्होंने नोटा को सफल बनाने में अधिक से अधिक एसईसी को शामिल करने की आवश्यकता पर जोर दिया। एक और बहुत महत्वपूर्ण फैसला चर्चा 'राजनीतिक दलों को आर्टीआई के तहत लाना: आंतरिक-पार्टी लोकतंत्र को बढ़ावा देना' पर थी, जिसकी अध्यक्षता एडीआर के ट्रस्टी डॉ. विजय मुदल ने की, जिन्होंने सत्र की शुरुआत यह कहकर की कि एक राजनीतिक दल एक इकाई है। यह कमेंट



सेटी ने राजनीतिक विरोधों में बदले की भावना की उपस्थिति पर प्रकाश डाला। उन्होंने कहा कि हम राजनीति में काले धन को नहीं रोक सकते क्योंकि उस काले धन को कॉरपोरेट्स द्वारा निवेश माना जाता है। यह कॉरपोरेट्स हैं जो चुनाव जीतते हैं, न कि राजनीतिक दल। राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन के पहले दिन का तीसरा मुख्य भाग डॉ. दलीप सिंह, आईएसए (सेवानिवृत्त) ने 'नोटा का महत्व और भारतीय चुनावों में सुधार के कठनाई' विषय पर किया। डॉ. सिंह ने बताया कि पहली बार नोटा का उपयोग किया गया था, 15 लाख मतदाताओं ने इसे सत्र (कुल वोटों का 1.58 से कम)। उन्होंने कहा कि नोटा ने लोगों को वोट देने के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया। उन्होंने महाराष्ट्र और हरियाणा का उदाहरण दिया। महाराष्ट्र राज्य चुनाव आयोग ने आदेश पारित किया

प्रमुख - एडीआर और न्यू इस आयोजन को सफल बनाने के लिए सभी वैनीलस्ट्री, प्रतिभागियों, ईसीआई, जीआईपीई और एडीआर को धन्यवाद देते हैं। नोटा इवेंट के पहले दिन की तस्वीर संलग्न है। बाएं से दाएं: प्रोफेसर त्रिलोचन शास्त्री, डॉ. अजीत रामादे, डॉ. नसीम अजी, न्यायमूर्ति नरेंद्र पणपगामकर, डॉ. किरण जी छोकर और प्रोफेसर जगदीप छोकर। प्रमुख - एडीआर और न्यू इस आयोजन को सफल बनाने के लिए सभी वैनीलस्ट्री, प्रतिभागियों, ईसीआई, जीआईपीई और एडीआर को धन्यवाद देते हैं। नोटा इवेंट के पहले दिन की तस्वीर संलग्न है। बाएं से दाएं: प्रोफेसर त्रिलोचन शास्त्री, डॉ. अजीत रामादे, डॉ. नसीम अजी, न्यायमूर्ति नरेंद्र पणपगामकर, डॉ. किरण जी छोकर और प्रोफेसर जगदीप छोकर।

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लोकसत्ता ५

गुन्हेगारांना निवडणूक लढविण्यास बंदीचा प्रस्ताव प्रलंबित

माजी केंद्रीय निवडणूक आयुक्त डॉ. नसीम झैदी यांची माहिती

लोकसत्ता प्रतिनिधी

पुणे: गुन्हेगारी पापबुद्धी असलेल्या व्यक्तींना सहा वर्षे निवडणूक लढविण्याची बंदी आहे. मात्र, ही बंदी कायदाप्रमाणे घालणी गेली पाहिजे या विषयाचा निवडणूक सुधारणेतला प्रस्ताव अद्यय पणपगामकर प्रलंबित आहे, असे माजी केंद्रीय निवडणूक आयुक्त डॉ. नसीम झैदी यांनी माहिती सांगितले. गुजरात गुन्हेगारी पापबुद्धी असलेल्या व्यक्तींना राजकीय पक्षांनी प्रवेशवादी देना बanned, अशी अपेक्षा व्यक्ती व्यक्त केली. आसोसिएशन फॉर डेमोक्रेटिक रिफॉर्म (एडीआर) आणि नेशनल इलेक्शन वॉच (न्यू) यांच्या वतीने

'निवडणूक आणि राजकीय सुधारणा' या विषयवरील वार्षिक परिषदेने उद्घाटन डॉ. नसीम झैदी यांच्या हस्ते झाले. त्या प्रसंगी ते बोलत होते. त्या नंतर पणपगामकर, 'एडीआर'चे संस्थापक सदस्य आणि गोवले राज्यशास्त्र व अर्थशास्त्र संस्थेचे कुलपति डॉ. अजित रामादे या वेळी उद्घाटन केले. राजकीय प्रक्रियेमध्ये आणि मतदान प्रक्रियेमध्ये महिलांचा सहभाग मोठ्या प्रमाणावर असला, तरी लोकप्रतिनिधित्वाच्या महिलांची संख्या अत्यल्प आहे, याकडे लक्ष वेधून डॉ. नसीम झैदी यांनी लोकसभेचा विचार करता २०१९ मध्ये महिला खासदारांची संख्या

जेव्हा ८.८ टक्के होती. देशभरातील विविध राज्यांमध्ये मिळून ३ हजार ६२३ आमदार आहेत. त्यापैकी ३७३ महिला आमदार असून ही संख्या १४ टक्क्यांपर्यंतच आहे. महिलांमार्फत विधानसभेत एकही महिला आमदार नाही, तर कर्नाटक विधानसभेत महिला आमदार पणपगामकर यांचे टाकले होते. डॉ. नसीम झैदी यांनी महिलांच्या संख्या वाढविण्यासाठी महिला संघटना आणि कार्यकर्त्यांनी सक्रिय झाले पाहिजे, निवडणूकांमध्ये महिलांना उमेदवारी न देणाऱ्या राजकीय पक्षांना मोठ्या रकमेचा दंड ठोठावण्याची गरज आहे, प्रसंगी अशा पक्षांवर निवडणूक लढविण्यासाठी बंदी घालण्याचा

निर्णय घेतला गेला पाहिजे. चपरागावकर म्हणाले, की निवडणूक आयोगाने निवडणूकांमध्ये उमेदवारांवर खाचोपी बंधने घालणी आहेत. पण, त्याचे पालन होत नाही. उमेदवार निवडणूक प्रचारदरम्यान किती रक्कम खर्च करतील हे सर्वोपलब्ध दस्तऐवज असले, पण, ते सिद्ध करता येत नाही ती सर्वोपलब्ध माहितीची अडचण आहे, येथेचालवला येत निवडणूकांमध्ये उमेदवारांचे दखल केलेल्या प्रतिज्ञापत्रातील उल्लंघनाच्या आरोपांवरही अन्य माहिती येऊ शकते, याकडे आपले लक्ष वेधून घेतले. मा आपली लोकशाही उदारमतवादी आहे, असे म्हणता

निवडणूकसुधारक कायदाचे अंमलबजावणी करणे आवश्यक आहे. निवडणूक प्रक्रियेमध्ये गुजरात राज्य शासनाच्या कसबदार निवडणूक आयोगाच्या अखोलांनी त्याची लक्षणी अंमलबजावणी करावी.

नेते का याचा सर्वांगीत विचार करायला हवा. देशामध्ये लोकशाही विकसित व्हावी यासाठी निवडणूक आयोग कार्यरत आहे. पण, राजकीय पक्षांमध्ये लोकशाही कितपत अंमलबजावणी आहे याचा विचार घाला पाहिजे, असे डॉ. रामादे यांनी आपल्या मनीषांमध्ये सांगितले.

सुबई, सोमवार 17 जुलाई 2023

सिस्टीम मीडिया 3

चुनावी और राजनीतिक सुधारों पर १६वां वार्षिक राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन

पुणे, एसोसिएशन फॉर डेमोक्रेटिक रिफॉर्म (एडीआर) और महाराष्ट्र इलेक्शन वॉच (एमईडब्ल्यू) 15 और 16 जुलाई 2023 को गोवले इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ पॉलिटिक्स एंड इकोनॉमिक्स (जीआईपीई) में 16वां वार्षिक राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन का आयोजन कर रहे हैं। दो दिवसीय कार्यक्रम के दिन, चर्चा चुनावी और राजनीतिक क्षेत्र में सबसे गंभीर समस्याओं के समाधान की तलाश आवश्यकता पर केंद्रित थी। कार्यक्रम के पहले दिन भारत के सभी राज्यों के स्टेट इलेक्शन वॉच समन्वयकों के साथ-साथ विभिन्न नागरिक समाज समूहों के सदस्यों, सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं, पत्रकारों, सेवानिवृत्त नौकरशाहों, सेवानिवृत्त न्यायाधीशों, अधिवक्ताओं, राजनीतिक दलों के प्रतिनिधियों, विधायकों और छात्रों ने भाग लिया। प्रोफेसर त्रिलोचन शास्त्री (अध्यक्ष), अजय लोखंडेकर (सह-अध्यक्ष), डॉ. नसीम अजी, पूर्व मुख्य चुनाव आयोग, अजय लोखंडेकर (सह-अध्यक्ष), प्रतिभागियों और पत्रकारों के बीच सत्र को मंचवर्ता के रूप में, जो विचारजनक है और इसे कौशल और विश्वविद्यालयों में युवा जागरूकता और कौशल एकेडमिक कार्यक्रमों के माध्यम से संबोधित किया

भूमिका और निहितार्थों पर प्रकाश डाला। इसके बाद, उन्होंने चुनाव प्रचार पर उम्मीदवारों द्वारा बेहिसाब धन का मुद्दा उठाया। उन्होंने चुनाव के पहले और चुनाव के बाद संघर्ष की घोषणा की जबरन पर जोर दिया। उन्होंने यह भी खुलासा किया कि चुनाव आयोग द्वारा बनाया गत नियमों जैसे संवैधानिक प्रावधानों और कानूनों को उपरोक्त और सत्य बनाया जाना चाहिए। अंत में उन्होंने कहा कि लोकतंत्र का मतलब केवल वार्ड करना नहीं है, इसे हर नागरिक के साथ व्यवहार में भी महसूस करना चाहिए। न्यायमूर्ति पणपगामकर के भाषण के बाद, डॉ. अजी ने 'भारत की 28 राज्य विधानसभाओं और 2 केंद्र शासित प्रदेशों के मौजूदा विधायकों का विश्लेषण 2023' और विषय वर्ष 2022-23 के लिए एडीआर की वार्षिक रिपोर्ट पर रिपोर्ट जारी की। भारत की 28 राज्य विधानसभाओं और 2 केंद्र शासित प्रदेशों के मौजूदा विधायकों के विश्लेषण 2023 की रिपोर्ट यह देखी जा सकती है।

रिपोर्टर्स कलेक्टिव के सह-संस्थापक भी निम्नलिखित सेटी ने राजनीतिक विरोधों में बदले की भावना की उपस्थिति पर प्रकाश डाला। उन्होंने कहा कि हम राजनीति में काले धन को नहीं रोक सकते क्योंकि उस काले धन को कॉरपोरेट्स द्वारा निवेश माना जाता है। यह कॉरपोरेट्स हैं जो चुनाव जीतते हैं, न कि राजनीतिक दल। राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन के पहले दिन का तीसरा मुख्य भाग डॉ. दलीप सिंह, आईएसए (सेवानिवृत्त) ने 'नोटा का महत्व और भारतीय चुनावों में सुधार के उपाय' विषय पर किया। डॉ. सिंह ने बताया कि पहली बार नोटा का उपयोग किया गया था, 15 लाख मतदाताओं ने इसे सत्र (कुल वोटों का 1.58 से कम)। उन्होंने कहा कि नोटा ने लोगों को वोट देने के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया। उन्होंने महाराष्ट्र और हरियाणा का उदाहरण दिया। महाराष्ट्र राज्य चुनाव आयोग ने आदेश पारित किया कि यदि नोटा जीतता है, तो चुनाव फिर से होगा। हरियाणा के मामले में, यह अधिसूचित किया गया था कि नोटा से कम वोट पाने वाला कोई भी उम्मीदवार नामांकन दोबारा दाखिल करने या चुनाव लड़ने के लिए पात्र नहीं होगा। इस सत्र की अध्यक्षता कर रहे प्रोफेसर जगदीप छोकर ने कहा कि अगर हम चुनाव आयोग और राज्य चुनाव आयोग (एसईसी) पर दबाव डालें तो नोटा अधिक प्रभावी हो सकता है। उन्होंने नोटा को सफल बनाने में अधिक से अधिक एसईसी को शामिल करने की आवश्यकता पर जोर दिया। एक और बहुत महत्वपूर्ण फैसला चर्चा 'राजनीतिक दलों को आर्टीआई के तहत लाना: आंतरिक-पार्टी लोकतंत्र को बढ़ावा देना' पर थी, जिसकी अध्यक्षता एडीआर के ट्रस्टी डॉ. विजय मुदल ने की, जिन्होंने सत्र की शुरुआत यह कहकर की कि एक राजनीतिक दल एक इकाई है। यह कमेंट

For more press coverage of the conference and reports released during the event, click here: <https://bit.ly/44RluUk>.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement.....	5
Executive Summary.....	6
Agenda	7
Documents Distributed to the Participants.....	11
Minutes of the Session.....	12
• Day-1 (15th July 2023)	12
❖ Inauguration & Welcome Address.....	12
❖ Keynote Address by Dr Nasim Zaidi (former CEC, Election Commission of India.....	14
❖ Address by by Hon'ble Mr Justice Narendra Chapalgaonkar (former Judge, Bombay High Court) on “Challenges to Indian Democracy”	19
❖ Book Release.....	20
❖ Session 1: The Continuing Trend of Money Power and Criminality in Indian Politics: What is the way forward?.....	21
❖ Session 2: Decoding the Controversial Electoral Bonds Scheme: How long for Supreme Court to adjudicate?.....	31
❖ Address by Dr Dalip Singh, IAS (Retd), on “Importance of NOTA and Measures to Improve Indian Elections”	39
❖ Session 3: Bringing Political Parties under RTI: Fostering inner-party democracy.....	41
❖ Session 4: Local & Urban Governance.....	53
• Day – 2 (16th July 2023)	60
❖ Session 1: Youth and Women Participation in Electoral Politics: In preparation for General Elections 2024.....	60
❖ Address by Dr. Anand Deshpande (Founder, Chairman, and Managing Director, Persistent Systems) on “Decentralisation of Economy using Technology”	67
❖ Session 2: Election Campaigns, Digital Technology and Social Media Mobilization in India.....	68
❖ Concluding Session (with institutional stakeholders).....	76
• Strategy Workshop – National Election Watch Partners’ Meeting	84
❖ Welcome Address and Background to the Meeting.....	85
❖ Presentation by Groups	86
❖ Future Plans & The Way Forward.....	97
Photo Gallery.....	98
National/State Election Watch Coordinators.....	99

Acknowledgement

We take this opportunity to thank Dr Ajit Ranade, Vice Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics, Pune, for giving ADR the opportunity to host the 16th National Conference and organising all the logistics support for making it a grand success. We express special thanks to Mr Vilas Manakar, Ms Himangi More and the entire team of Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, and Maharashtra Election Watch (MEW), for extending all possible support for the conduct of the conference.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to **Dr Nasim Zaidi, former Chief Election Commissioner**, Election Commission of India (ECI), for his presence and inputs at the Conference and are extremely appreciative of 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.

The Conference would not have been a possibility without the 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 supportive of our work and have been one of the important mediums to reach out to the masses.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) would like to thank participants of various political parties, NGOs, and other participants 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, Administrative staff and volunteer students of Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, for their consistent support before and during the event.

Executive Summary

The Annual National Conference was held in Pune 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 former Chief Election Commissioner, **Dr Nasim 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 National Conference ranged from *‘The Continuing Trend of Money Power and Criminality in Indian Politics: What is the way forward?’*, *‘Decoding the Controversial Electoral Bonds Scheme: How long for Supreme Court to adjudicate?’*, *‘Bringing Political Parties under RTI: Fostering inner-party democracy’*, to *‘Local and Urban Governance,’* *Youth and Women Participation in Electoral Politics: In preparation for General Elections 2024, and Election Campaigns, Digital Technology and Social Media Mobilization in India’*. These discussions were enriched by the participation of eminent people including the former Chief Election Commissioner **Dr Nasim Zaidi**, representatives of political parties, bureaucrats, academicians, students, civil society and the media.

At the end of the Conference, the house unanimously came up with recommendations addressing issues ailing our political and electoral system.

16th ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE on 'ELECTORAL & POLITICAL REFORMS'

Organised by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) & Maharashtra Election Watch

Venue: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune (846, BMCC Road, Fergusson College Campus, Deccan Gymkhana, Pune, Maharashtra-411004)

Date: 15th and 16th July 2023

AGENDA

15th July 2023 – Auditorium: Kale Hall

9:00 – 09:30	Registration	
09:30 – 09:55	<p>National Anthem and Lamp Lighting</p> <p>Guest of Honour: Dr Nasim Zaidi, former Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India</p> <p>Inauguration & Welcome Address: Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head-ADR/National Election Watch (NEW)), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee –ADR/NEW), Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW, Maharashtra Election Watch Coordinator, Vice-Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics, Pune)</p>	
09:55 – 10:25	<p>Keynote Address by Guest of Honour: Dr Nasim Zaidi, former Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India</p> <p>Chairperson – Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee - ADR/NEW)</p>	
10:25 – 10:40	<p>Address by Hon'ble Mr Justice Narendra Chapalgaonkar (former Judge, Bombay High Court) on "Challenges to Indian Democracy"</p> <p>Chairperson – Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee - ADR/NEW)</p>	
10:40-10:45	<p>Book Release – Report on "Analysis of Sitting MLAs from 28 State Assemblies and 2 Union Territories of India 2023" & ADR Annual Report 2022-23</p>	
10:45 – 11:35	<p>The Continuing Trend of Money Power and Criminality in Indian Politics: What is the way forward?</p> <p>Focus areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact of information on voter turnout and voters' choice - Innovative strategies to address voter apathy and encourage informed & ethical voting - Research findings and best practices from around the world 	<p>Chairperson – Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee –ADR/NEW)</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr J. S. Saharia, IAS (Retd) (Chairman, International Society for Human Awakening & Development (ISHAD); former Chief Secretary; former State Election Commissioner, Maharashtra) 2. Dr Sanjay Paswan (Member, Bihar Legislative Council; former Central Minister; Member,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publication of criminal cases against candidates selected by political parties along with reasons for such selection 	<p>N.E.C, B.J.P; Professor at Patna University, Patna)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Mr Vijai Sardesai (Member of the Goa Legislative Assembly (Fatorda Constituency) from Goa Forward Party; former Deputy Chief Minister of Goa) 4. Prof Yugank Goyal (Associate Professor - Public Policy, Flame University, Pune)
11:35- 11:50	Open Discussion	
11:50- 12:20	Tea Break	
12:20 – 13:15	<p>Decoding the Controversial Electoral Bonds Scheme: How long for Supreme Court to adjudicate?</p> <p>Focus areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional paralysis and Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018 - Judicial intervention and electoral bonds case - Opposing parties continue to accept electoral bonds 	<p>Chairperson – Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder Member & Trustee – ADR/NEW)</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prof M.V. Rajeev Gowda (National Spokesperson, All India Congress Committee (AICC); Chairman, AICC Research Department; former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, from Karnataka) 2. Prof Satya Narayan Misra (Professor at KIIT School of Management (KSOM), Bhubaneswar) 3. Mr Nitin Sethi (Founding Member, The Reporters’ Collective; Senior Journalist) 4. Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee – ADR/NEW; Director and Chief Executive, Common Cause)
13:15 – 13:35	Open Discussion	
13:35 – 14:35	Lunch	
14:35 – 14:50	<p>Address by Dr Dalip Singh, IAS (Retd), on “Importance of NOTA and Measures to Improve Indian Elections”</p> <p>Chairperson – Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder Member & Trustee – ADR/NEW)</p>	
14:50 – 15:50	<p>Bringing Political Parties under RTI: Fostering inner-party democracy</p> <p>Focus areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parties’ refusal to come under the purview of RTI - Absence of legal oversight or public scrutiny over political party functioning outside of elections - Inner party democracy & transparency in ticket distribution - Emergence of RTI as a powerful tool in exposing the truth 	<p>Chairperson – Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee – ADR/NEW)</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr TR Raghunandan (Consultant in Anti-corruption, Decentralised Public Wealth and Heritage Restoration; Director of Avantika Foundation) 2. Mr Venkatesh Nayak (Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)) 3. Prof Narayana A (Faculty-School of Policy & Governance, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru) 4. Mr Ruben Mascarenhas (National Joint Secretary & Campaign Secretary, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP); Working President of AAP Mumbai)

15:50 – 16:05	Open Discussion	
16:05 – 16:55	Local & Urban Governance Focus areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing influence of money and muscle power in Panchayat/ULBs elections and its impact on governance - Community mobilisation and participation in the decision-making process - Role of CSOs & People's movements in strengthening electoral politics and local governance - Experience sharing/case studies and suggested reforms 	Chairperson – Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head - ADR/NEW) Panelists: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ms Malti Sagane (President, Mahila Rajsatta Aandolan (MRA)) 2. Mr Bhim Raskar (Director, Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD)) 3. Dr Ujjaini Halim (ADR's State Coordinator – West Bengal) 4. Mr Sudhir Pal (ADR's State Coordinator - Jharkhand)
16:55 – 17:10	Open Discussion	
17:10 – 17:40	Tea & Dispersal	

16th July 2023 – Auditorium: Kale Hall

09:00 – 09:30	Registration	
09:30 – 10:35	Youth and Women Participation in Electoral Politics: In preparation for General Elections 2024 Focus areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unique entry barriers to female political participation - Tickets to untainted young male and female candidates over dynastic candidates or those with muscle/money power - Gap between low women representation and high women participation - 33% Women Reservation in Lok Sabha & Assemblies still pending-Why political parties resist women empowerment? - 65% of the Indian population is under 35 years of age but only 12% MPs are below 40 years of age. What measures can be undertaken to enhance the role of young politicians in designing policies for better governance? 	Chairperson – Dr Kiran B. Chhokar (Trustee-ADR/NEW) Panelists: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr Chaitra Redkar (Associate Professor- Humanities and Social Sciences, Dy. Chair, and Associate Dean at Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune) 2. Dr Sonia Bhaidas Nagarale (Associate Professor at the Department of Law, Savitribai Phule Pune University) 3. Ms Angellica Aribam (Founder, Femme First Foundation) 4. Prof Sridhar Pabbisetty (Senior Director of School of Government, MIT-World Peace University, Pune)
10:35 - 10:50	Open Discussion	
10:50 - 11:05	Address by Dr Anand Deshpande (Founder, Chairman, and Managing Director, Persistent Systems) on “Decentralisation of Economy using Technology” Chairperson – Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee –ADR/NEW)	
11:05 – 11:20	Tea	

11:20 – 12:35	<p>Election Campaigns, Digital Technology and Social Media Mobilization in India</p> <p>Focus areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of robust institutional framework to trace/regulate the actual expenditure by parties on digital media - Covert nature of political campaigns & data-driven micro-targeting - Parties and political consultancy - Fake news, hate speech, deep fakes, voter suppression, surrogate advertising etc. - Impact of social media in shaping the narrative for youth - Blockchain Voting, Artificial Intelligence, Biometrics, Bogus Voting, Booth Capturing, Voter Intimidation, Misuse of electoral rolls 	<p>Chairperson – Mr Jaskirat Singh (Trustee-ADR/NEW)</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Saurabh Dwivedi (Editor and Founder, The Lallantop; Senior Journalist) 2. Ms Karen Rebelo (Editor, Boom Live) 3. Mr Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder, Factly.in and ADR's State Coordinator- Andhra Pradesh & Telangana) 4. Mr Pulkit Sharma (Political Strategist and Digital Media Specialist)
12:35 – 12:50	Open Discussion	
12:50 – 13:40	<p>Concluding Session (with institutional stakeholders)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summation of ideas generated over the two-day conference - Discussing some concrete solutions to be taken forward - Open discussion inviting suggestions - Mera Vote Mera Desh Campaign for Lok Sabha 2024 Elections 	<p>Chairperson – Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee –ADR/NEW)</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Babloo Loitongbam (ADR's State Coordinator- Manipur) 2. Ms Rolly Shivhare (ADR's State Coordinator – Madhya Pradesh) 3. Mr Sanjay Singh (ADR's State Coordinator – Uttar Pradesh) 4. Mr Manoj Dhyani (ADR's State Coordinator – Uttarakhand)
13:40 onwards	Lunch & Dispersal	

Documents Distributed to the Participants

- **Report on “Analysis of Sitting MLAs from 28 State Assemblies and 2 Union Territories of India 2023”**
- **ADR Annual Report 2022-23**

The above documents can be found at www.adrindia.org

Minutes of the Sessions Day – 1 (15th July 2023) Inauguration & Welcome Address



(From Left to Right) Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW; Maharashtra Election Watch Coordinator; Vice-Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics, Pune), Dr Nasim Zaidi (former Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee –ADR/National Election Watch (NEW)), and Justice Narendra Chapalgaonkar (former Judge, Bombay High Court)

Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member and Trustee-ADR/NEW)

Prof Sastry welcomed the Guest of Honour - **Dr Nasim Zaidi**, former Chief Election Commissioner, other eminent personalities, the distinguished panelists and all participants attending the National Conference. He briefly spoke about the necessity of clean politics, outlining the rise in criminal records of elected representatives from 22% earlier to 43% now. He also raised concerns about the emerging issues in electoral politics such as fake news, hate speech, divisive politics and the role of digital media in exacerbating these. He concluded his speech by reiterating the need to address these issues and work towards establishing a healthy society.

Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW; Maharashtra Election Watch Coordinator; Vice-Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics, Pune)

Dr Ranade began by talking about the history of the Gokhale Institute - the venue of ADR's National Conference. He spoke about the relevance of clean politics, transparency and accountability over the years and made references to speeches of previous prime ministers such as Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee on electoral and political reforms. While expressing his concerns on the current political scenario, he quoted Russell Dickerson, 'The night is darkest just before the dawn. And I promise you, the dawn is coming.'



(From Left to Right) Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW; Maharashtra Election Watch Coordinator; Vice-Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics, Pune), Dr Nasim Zaidi (former Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India), and Justice Narendra Chapalgaonkar (former Judge, Bombay High Court)

**Keynote Address by Dr. Nasim Zaidi,
former Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India
*Chairperson – Dr. Ajit Ranade***



Dr. Zaidi started by thanking ADR for inviting him for the National conference at the historic Gokhale Institute, Pune. He mentioned that this was the third time he was attending the ADR conference, the earlier two being at Hyderabad and Chandigarh.

He briefly narrated his experiences as an election observer in Sierra Leone in June 2023. He was impressed by the strong election watch, a coalition of civil society which observes and reports on elections and election processes and advocates electoral reforms which are consistent with best international practices.

He lauded the active role of ADR in strengthening the rights of voters, giving voters candidates' information, and sensitising people about the adverse effects of money and muscle power in elections. He also mentioned reading references pertaining to the work of ADR in a book written by Prof Manjuri Kaju.

Dr Zaidi stated that democracy thrives on participatory governance and elections form the structure of our democratic setup where the will of the people must prevail. Hence elections should be inclusive and participative right from registration to voting.

He said that though ADR recommends 50% plus one voting system, currently in India, first past the post system is followed in our parliamentary and assembly constituencies and proportional representation system in the Upper house. He said that though this change is desirable it will not happen in the near future as it involves constitutional reforms.

There are certain current challenges that our Electoral system faces and one of the important ones is the independence of the Election Commission. Our Constitution has provided an independent Election Commission, which ideally should be free from political influence and insulated from the executive of the day. The ECI has transitioned from a single person to a multi- membered body. The CEC is

protected because he can't be removed by way of any process other than impeachment however, such protection is not available to the other Election Commissioners.

There have been persistent demands and recommendations from various committees, ADR, civil society and the ECI itself for change in the process of appointment of ECs. Dr Zaidi congratulated ADR for being a party to the petition filed in the SC which after hearing the whole issue pertaining to 3 matters: appointment process, the consolidated fund availability to EC and a permanent secretariat, gave a historic judgement.

It mentioned that the ECs would be appointed by the President on the advice of a committee comprising of PM, CJI and leader of the opposition. The judgement makes a fervent appeal to the Union of India and the Parliament regarding the permanent secretariat and consolidated fund availability for the ECI. If the Govt starves the ECI of funds then a vulnerable Commission may cave in to the pressure from the executive. He hoped that the new selection system would bring greater neutrality and independence in the functioning of the EC and also cautioned that lot depends on the ECs as to how assertive they can be.

The second important challenge facing us is the criminality in politics. As pointed out by Prof Sastry, the numbers of MPs/ MLAs with criminal cases has almost doubled over the years. This is against the spirit of our Constitution makers who wanted men of integrity and character in our legislative bodies to provide better governance.

ADR has been highlighting the criminality in politics for over two decades and there are a lot of court judgements like: Lily Thomas case, NOTA, fast track courts, completion of trials within one year and publicising criminal cases details by the candidates and the political parties. ADR had filed a PIL to the SC regarding the political parties not complying with the order of the SC regarding publication of the criminal cases. He expressed dismay at the SC judgement directing ADR to go back to the ECI. He said the problem lies in the fact that the ECI has no power to deregister a political party. Issuing a notice to the political parties and receiving a reply is of hardly any value. To have a real impact, going forward, the ECI should take some action like withdrawal of the party symbol.

Dr Zaidi recalled some cases in the High courts, one filed by Lok Prahari asking for disqualification of the candidate with criminal records by the Returning officer. He mentioned that this is fraught with

legal consequences as happened with him when as a young IAS officer while performing duties of a Returning officer in a district of UP, he disqualified a candidate for various reasons. Fortunately for him, his orders were upheld by the High Court and Supreme Court.

Further on removal of criminality from politics, Dr Zaidi said that another area that has been challenged is the power given to the ECI to reduce the disqualification period. He mentioned one case where the disqualification period was reduced and that person contested because he became eligible and is occupying a very high political office in some state. He stated that this was arbitrary use of powers. Another issue being challenged in the court is why a person should be disqualified for only 6 years and not for the rest of his life. An important challenge is the publication of verification reports of affidavits filed by the candidates. There was a mutual agreement between CBDT & ECI to this effect however, it is pending implementation. He expressed the hope that there would be collaboration among civil societies and such parties to challenge these matters.

The third important area he spoke about was on adult suffrage. Our women to men ratio was very poor compared to the global ratio and this is also reflected in the registration of women voters. Though now, slowly the number of women voters is increasing and it touched 67.18 % in 2019. However, we are lagging behind in women contestants, in 2019 it was only 8.5 %, only 14% women were elected for Lok Sabha and 9% in the assemblies.

Mizoram assembly has zero percent and Karnataka has only 4% women legislators. Dr Saharia mentioned that there is a quota of 30 % women in the local government system and it is working very well. However, the women's reservation bill was not passed in the parliament because of the problem of quota within quota.

Dr Zaidi recommended that our women activists have to push hard and political parties should have women's wings. However, without a law there cannot be a quota and if the political parties do not comply with the quota system there should be sanctions, heavy fines etc.

He also suggested that it is well within the powers of the ECI under Article 324, to issue directions to the political parties to have a 30% women quota in their party structure and their decision making bodies.

Youth participation in elections is another important area of concern. As per figures available, out of 4.58 crore youth in the age group of 18-19 years first time voters, only 1.3 crores are registered. This means 70% are not on the voters list and hence not participating. How can the youth representation increase in the legislatures if for a variety of reasons, they are disillusioned, don't like the party/candidates etc. and don't go out to vote. This is a problem not only in India but across the world. Innovative strategies have to be evolved to increase youth participation. He said that all stakeholders have to get involved. He appreciated the ADR campus ambassador program and ECI increasing the registration for new voters in a year to 4 times once a person turns 18 years.

Another problem is the 300 million Migrant Resident Indians (MRIs) who generally do not vote in the elections as they are located outside their home constituencies primarily for livelihood reasons. The SC has examined the issue and 2-3 committees were set up. TISS was tasked by ECI, and it submitted a report but nothing came of it. The ECI proposed development of remote voting technology whereby the domestic migrants could vote from their place of residence but unfortunately this was not favoured by the political parties.

The other question relates to the voting list preparation, revision and updation being taken in a very routine manner by most stakeholders. Purification of the voters list is very important as there are lakhs and lakhs of duplicate voters. It is the duty of the ECI to produce an accurate and error free Electoral roll.

Dr Zaidi mentioned the draft 'Regulation of the Political Parties' bill prepared by ADR a few years ago. He gave the example of Sierra Leone where after a decade of civil war when the country adopted democracy, 'Political Parties Act 2002' was enacted for the regulation of the political parties. They also set up a 'Political Parties regulation commission' with powers ranging from registration, internal democracy, financing and audit disclosures etc. He mentioned that in India our political parties regulation is very loose and weak. When he was the CEC, many political party leaders told him that they did not want the ECI to be their regulator.

He stated that under the RPA 1951 there are 3 sections which are perfunctory. The ECI acts as a registrar, as an Accounting office for putting into public domain some statements filed by political parties and does not have any powers to deregister a party. Even if the scope of the RPA were to be enlarged he doubted if the ECI would still be able to exert any effective control on the system. He felt

that there was a need for a separate Act. Mentioning the Electoral bonds scheme, Dr Zaidi said that he had opposed it when he was the CEC and he was also eagerly awaiting the SC hearing and verdict in times to come.

In conclusion, Dr Zaidi said that there is an urgent need for electoral reforms in the country but it's a very slow moving process. As CEC he had recommended to the Government that unless we institutionalise a structure within the Parliament e.g a standing committee on electoral reforms, there is little possibility that this will engage the attention of the powers that be. He advised ADR to devise new ways to reach the voters as mere disclosure of information is not having the desired effect of reducing money and muscle power in politics.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/47cgPhh>

Address by Hon'ble Mr Justice Narendra Chapalgaonkar (former Judge, Bombay High Court) on “Challenges to Indian Democracy”

Chairperson – Dr Ajit Ranade



During his special address to the delegates on the first day of the National conference, Justice Narendra Chapalgaonkar (Retd) spoke on "Challenges to India's democracy."

He thanked ADR for inviting him to address the conference and stated that we should make the process of elections more truthful and more useful so that it serves the cause of Indian democracy.

He started by narrating an old story when Jawahar Lal Nehru was the PM.

Nehru wanted that even if a person was not a member of the Congress party, Congress party should not oppose their candidature for elections. This was opposed by Morarji Desai who said that they should canvass only for Congress party and whoever wins should be their candidate. Even then political parties were selecting candidates based on caste, religion etc. After a passage of 70 years, situation has not improved, even now voters are told that a particular candidate/minister represents a particular caste/community. The council of ministers has been reduced to council of caste and religion.

Speaking about the malaise of money power in the elections, he said that we all know that a candidate contesting elections spends Rs 40-70 crores. However, in expenditure report submitted by him it is much lesser. When there is a disproportionate increase in the wealth of the candidate after 5 years, shouldn't we be raising questions? But it is largely ignored by the ECI and other Govt. agencies. He suggested that details of criminal cases of the candidates should be displayed outside the polling stations.

He said that he was proud of the work being done by ADR for the last 20-22 years and urged the youth in the audience to take up the task of ADR because if we are not able to protect the democracy now, the future will look bleak.

He ended by saying that he was very happy to see people from different walks of life coming from different states expressing support with the aim in mind that this democracy must succeed.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/3QH0AU4>

Book Release



(From Left to Right) Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee –ADR/National Election Watch (NEW)), Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW; Maharashtra Election Watch Coordinator; Vice-Chancellor, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics, Pune), Dr Nasim Zaidi (former Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India), Justice Narendra Chapalgaonkar (former Judge, Bombay High Court), Dr Kiran B. Chhokar (Trustee-ADR/NEW), and Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder Member & Trustee – ADR/NEW)

The Continuing Trend of Money Power and Criminality in Indian Politics: What is the way forward? *Chairperson: Prof Trilochan Sastry*



(From Left to Right) Dr Sanjay Paswan (Member, Bihar Legislative Council; former Central Minister; Member, N.E.C, B.J.P; Professor at Patna University, Patna), Mr J. S. Saharia, IAS (Retd) (Chairman, International Society for Human Awakening & Development (ISHAD); former Chief Secretary; former State Election Commissioner, Maharashtra), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW), Mr Vijai Sardesai (Member of the Goa Legislative Assembly (Fatorda Constituency) from Goa Forward Party; former Deputy Chief Minister of Goa), and Prof Yugank Goyal (Associate Professor - Public Policy, Flame University, Pune)



Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW)

At the outset, Chairperson Prof Trilochan Sastry, spoke about the criminal cases on elected representatives/politicians. He started by saying that rules must apply equally to all citizens. Laws have been passed by parliament so Parliament has to follow the laws that they have made. He added that a criticism ADR often faces regarding these criminal charges is that they are filed by opposition parties to malign the political parties.

ADR analysis shows clearly that most cases against politicians were filed when their own party was in power.

He then requested the audience to glance through a document in the resource kit, compiled by one of the team members who put together a list of 23 judgments given by the honourable Supreme Court. He further added that recently we heard in the media that the opposition parties are raising a hue and cry rightly or wrongly that there is no level playing field and most of the political funding is going to the ruling party. Bringing the political parties under RTI with a view to make their financial system transparent has been furiously resisted by the political parties. This makes us wonder what would happen to a citizen refusing to follow a CIC or court order, but when political parties refuse to follow any order nothing happens. While there is a judgment on the disqualification of MPs and candidates, we then wonder why are so many people with criminal cases allowed to contest. The law is that until you are convicted you cannot be disqualified but court cases in India drag on for years. The Supreme Court has now said that if you are convicted you cannot contest, but if you go on appeal in a higher court, you will stand disqualified unless the higher court stays the conviction. The Supreme Court also said since so many cases are pending they should be fast-tracked and finished within one year. That judgment was given in 2014, nine years have passed and none of these matters have been attended to in spite of the Supreme Court saying that all cases against MLAs and MPs should be decided one way or the other within one year.

Speaking of FCRA, he mentioned how foreign funding is being used or misused against or for national interests and a lot of civil societies facing action against it. In the High Court and Supreme Court it was proved that both the Congress and the BJP had received foreign funding which is against

the law. While NGOs can receive foreign funding if they get permission, there is a blanket ban on political parties getting foreign funding because we don't want foreign governments and foreign sources to influence politics. Even though the two parties have been found guilty, nothing is happening. No FCRA rule seems to apply to political parties.

Speaking of criminalization of politics, he said that as citizens we have no power, we can only talk and put pressure and hope for goodwill. The government and Parliament have powers that we don't have. Parliament has powers to make laws and rules. They can easily change the system but they are not interested. Some state governments have withdrawn cases, from the research that we have done in ADR, this power to withdraw criminal cases is not there in most of the democracies of this world. However, this power to withdraw criminal cases was conferred upon itself by the British Government and we are very happy to continue with that colonial system so thousands of cases have been withdrawn.

Giving this as a background for the panel discussion, he then introduced the panelists.



Mr J. S. Saharia, IAS (Retd) (Chairman, International Society for Human Awakening & Development (ISHAD); former Chief Secretary; former State Election Commissioner, Maharashtra)

Speaking on the issue, Mr Saharia, started his presentation by highlighting the importance of the elections at the third tier, local body elections and the Panchayat level. He said that very little work is done in this country about the third tier of governance, which is the most important tier. The elections at the local level do not receive as much attention as those at the state and national levels. More than 30 lakh local representatives are elected across the country. The volume is large but the voter base is small.

The permitted expenditure is at least five to six times more than what is allowed for Parliamentary elections. He mentioned a study that was conducted under his supervision and the findings revealed that three to five times more than the declared limit is spent in local body elections. These are the most important elections but least talked about and least analysed.

He gave examples of three states where some concerning developments have been taking place.

1) West Bengal - SC had to intervene to deploy paramilitary forces; 2) Maharashtra - Constitution says that elections must be held after five years but five years have passed and no elections have been conducted. He raised the question that are we not killing democracy deliberately?; and 3) Andhra Pradesh - The State Election Commissioner has been given the same protection as the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) such as that his tenure cannot be cut short, his terms of tenure cannot be changed to his disadvantage etc. However, the Andhra government cut short the tenure of a sitting SEC to 2.5 years from 5 and then asked him to go one fine morning immediately.

These are areas of grave concern and must be looked at dispassionately. State governments by not providing financial and human resources to the SEC are trying to cripple the democratic process throughout the country. SECs are not allowed to operate independently. The majority of Election Commissioners feel obligated as they are appointed by the Executive. They are not able to exert in the manner they should be exerting themselves.

He recommended that the following steps be taken:

1. Seizure of disproportionate assets of candidates. Every candidate, before the election and after the five-year tenure, must declare their assets. If the assets are found disproportionate, they must be seized.
2. Fix the number of terms of election of an elected representative. Having no cap on the term denies the opportunity to the younger generation to come forward.
3. Election expenditure should be charged. The assessment of the Election Commissioner should be fully honoured. Any request made by the Election Commissioner to the government will compromise his authority completely.
4. Six months before the term of the local body is ending, that period should be declared sacrosanct. It takes the Commission about six months to get done with the delimitation process, making of voter lists, reservation, polling etc. A large number of state governments are resorting to the trick of passing a new law during this time, a strategy followed by many state governments.
5. The Election Commission is not supposed to express helplessness. The Election Commissioners both at the Central and State levels should be fiercely independent and assertive. Plenary powers under Article 324 must be exercised to make elections better.

6. Giving teeth to NOTA. Our orders as the Maharashtra SEC declared if NOTA gets more votes then elections will be declared null and void and fresh elections will have to be done.
7. Use of technology has to be done vigorously in all stages of elections. Maharashtra perhaps is the first state where nomination papers and affidavits are filed by the candidates using a computer, in 100 % digital format up to gram panchayat level. Data being available in the digital format could be easily analysed.

In conclusion, he said that the local body elections are equally important and more work needs to be done at this level.



Dr Sanjay Paswan (Member, Bihar Legislative Council; former Central Minister; Member, N.E.C, B.J.P; Professor at Patna University, Patna)

Dr Paswan, opened his address, with emphasis on the importance of facts and figures in politics. He mentioned that political funding is very complicated. He stressed the importance of the role of organisations like ADR that act as a watchdog and scrutinise information about elected representatives that may hardly be noticed by others. He added that this is like taking Dr Ambedkar's legacy forward. He mentioned that Dr. Ambedkar gave three warnings: 1) Post independence, there will be grammar of anarchy, 2) There exists political democracy but it will take a fight to achieve social democracy, and 3) There will be hero-worshipping in political parties. He further added that socialisation of democracy is required.

He then spoke about the terror of technology, that those who don't know technology will be at a disadvantage. Furthermore, he said that politicians want discontentment. But how can we change it? He spoke about the need to study what is happening in the garb of voting today. Caste is a reality and it is important to acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of different people or candidates. There is so much diversity in the country. In addition to celebrating diversity, we need to also calibrate it. We have accepted things but we have not tolerated them.

While concluding his address, he said that there is a need to understand the importance of Gandhi, Lohiya, Ambedkar and Deendayal to move forward. Democracy is the best available tool right now and it needs to be protected and defended.



Mr Vijai Sardesai (Member of the Goa Legislative Assembly (Fatorda Constituency) from Goa Forward Party; former Deputy Chief Minister of Goa)

Mr Sardesai started his address by mentioning that he was not among the 43 per cent of the sitting MLAs having criminal cases. He believed that the topic that ADR has taken up is very important. He stated that ADR deserves applause because the criminalization of politics in our country is a clear and present danger to our Indian democracy. He added that the criminalization of politics is a direct consequence of the criminalization of society in general. The culture of corruption that exists in politics is a part of the subculture of corruption that exists in society and that is what makes this criminalization of politics a complicated thing and very daunting to solve. We have heard before how the Election Commission of India and the ADR for the last 20 years have been trying to see that less number of criminals enter the legislative assemblies and the Parliament, however, in spite of the best efforts it has increased.

He argued that he is an opposition legislator and criminality has become a very relative term, it's basically which side you are on...so yesterday's criminals can be today's ministers and Maharashtra is the best case. To absolve yourself of all the crimes is to join the ruling party. He gave the example of the Goa state elections where there was a situation in which his party went against the State Election Commissioner (SEC). He said that the SEC was a government servant, a Power Secretary of the government, he manipulated the delimitation and reservation the way they wanted. His party went to the High Court and won the case. The government then went to the Supreme Court and in the Supreme Court again his party won the case. It was an epic judgment just given two years ago. After which all state election commissioners cannot be government servants so basic manipulation of the delimitation and reservation which they could otherwise do, which the ruling party at the state level could do, cannot be done now. Election Commission rule to make the candidates accountable for their affidavits, veracity of their affidavits is very important especially when there is a huge voter

mistrust. This voter mistrust is because the independence and the autonomy of the Election Commission is crucial and if the voter does not believe in the information made available then he goes on the traditional criteria – religion, caste and creed rather than a candidate’s qualities and capabilities. This is happening because the Election Commission is failing to enlighten the voters enough. The voter is convinced that the authenticity of the information he gets makes him more amenable to choosing based on logical criteria. This is what needs to be done more vehemently.

He stated that NOTA is not the solution, the answer lies in people voting for someone rather than a negative vote. He further added that there is a complete breakdown of trust and this is seen because the parties and candidates do not fulfil their promises after the elections. The voter believes that what he or she personally gets before the voting is what makes him vote for a particular person. So it is an inducement that makes him/her vote. This growing economic insecurity makes an average voter forget social commitment. The social commitment that we are talking about is about the nation, about saving our democracy, all of which becomes secondary and the voter concentrates on what he gets. The voter is no longer bothered about the community, he has become selfish and self-centred.

He mentioned that criminals becoming lawmakers can be prevented: 1) if the political parties do not nominate candidates with criminal backgrounds and 2) if the people don't vote for them and get them elected. However, both these actions are continuously happening. Political parties are fielding criminals as candidates and people are voting for them. So now it is almost appearing that criminality is required by political parties. They want it as a qualification, a necessary qualification and also the people want it in some cases. Now why do the people want it? He stated that people elect candidates with serious criminal backgrounds because either they are unaware of their criminal antecedents or that the connection between criminality, politics and how it affects people's daily lives have not been effectively communicated. We have not told people why criminals are bad for the entire system? How they'll be bad for our children? We are looking at it only from the point of this particular election and the failure to understand these practical implications is because we understand only the theoretical aspect of criminalization. Hence an effective campaign by the EC has to be done to make the people more aware of the practical implications of voting for criminals.

He further added that people also tend to see politicians with money and muscle power as more effective in addressing problems because the civil administration has become corrupt, incompetent and inefficient in solving even small issues of the people. People have lost faith in the civil

administration and they believe that the person with money and muscle power is delivering better and the last bastion of faith for the people.

In conclusion, he said that the onus should be on the political party to declare why it has chosen a candidate with criminal antecedents instead of somebody else. It should be the political party that should be held accountable as to why they are choosing a candidate or somebody who's in jail. Why is there nobody else that they could find? There also has to be a public debate on these crucial issues especially between the candidates, parties and the people. He said that this has to be made mandatory and expressed hope that this darkness would end someday.



Prof Yugank Goyal (Associate Professor - Public Policy, Flame University, Pune)

He began by mentioning about the three interconnected stories connected to the themes and also some of the points that were mentioned earlier. In 2017 or 2018, Harvard Business Review had a very highly cited article that came about which was called, "Why bad men win at work?" So why are most of our bosses, horrible guys?

Many of us here are bosses of some people but generally this was the question and the idea was that in the literature of Psychology - the dark triads, Machiavellianism, attitudes and those that relate to psychopathic tendencies as well as narcissism are mostly found at a very high probability amongst people who are at a leadership position. This is a norm and the article tried to explore why that is a good idea or a bad idea. If it's good for the person but it's really bad for the organization.

He then mentioned that he did a very simple engram research to check the frequency that a word has appeared in all the books in the last 200 years that have been digitized by Google. He did this research for two terms: 'Politics' and 'Crime' and both words have gone up and down almost synchronously in the last 200 years amongst all the books digitized by Google. So in some ways, his doesn't show a correlation so to speak but it does show that when people talk a lot about politics in parallel, there's a lot of conversation happening about crime as well. Therefore, this appears to us as a norm.

He said that in a way the normalness or the ordinariness of the connection between politics and crime makes it hard for people to sense it as a problem, there is no shock that people get by this idea that politicians are criminals and because there is no shock, there is less of ADR-type institutions in India. We should have hundreds of them so to speak. He further tried to find out why would that be the case and looked at some academic reports and journal articles and realized that while the ideas of Socrates or the Gandhian ideas in terms of leadership should be absolutely pristine; in terms of morality are very well and they're extremely valuable. There is very little empirical work on what happens when politicians with criminal backgrounds enter politics in terms of tangible outcomes.

Jae Kim and Alexander Lee of University of Rochester found out that the probability of somebody with a criminal background in terms of cases against him or her winning a seat leads to a higher probability of IPS officers getting transferred from that seat. This was a direct correlation but they also showed some causality by controlling for various other factors. In some ways, as was mentioned by the previous speaker politicians would use this opportunity to clean their cases up. They remove the bureaucrats and remove the IPS officers of police so they control the police. In terms of reforms, this is a very important point that we should recognize and this is like an empirical outcome of a research.

Another research used ADR's data, in this research the authors looked at the night-time data from the satellites of various constituencies in India and did a simple correlation between those constituencies where people with criminal backgrounds had become MPs or MLAs and looked at over a period of time to see what is the economic growth and the proxy of economic growth in night-time data and they saw that there's a 22% reduction in economic growth in those constituencies where "tainted" politicians have taken over. If you don't know these papers or this type of research is not known amongst ordinary voters, the impact of this normalness will be very low and so we need to create lots and lots of vernacular literature in terms of how tainted politicians can be harmful for their own constituencies over a long period or even in short periods of time. This in some sense puts in the center the importance of information. We need to inform people about the tangible harms that politicians with criminal records bring to their own constituencies.

Researchers at Harvard and World Bank in 2017, just before UP elections collaborated with the telecom companies and they sent around three or four and a half lakh messages to the voters. They collected the data from the voters' list by collaborating with the telecom companies and so they reached out and this was done in around 3500 villages in Uttar Pradesh right before 2017 elections. The message

contained the information that this candidate in your constituency has criminal records. This was a field experiment to inform people versus villages where you don't inform people when both of them are going to vote for people who have somewhat similar criminal backgrounds. The result of the field experiment: the candidates about who the messages were sent, they received or their parties received around seven and a half per cent fewer votes than the previous time and the candidates without a criminal record secured around six and a half per cent more votes. In fact, the voter turnout in these places also increased by one and a half per cent. Seven and a half per cent is not a lot but if you know how the First Past the Post system works, it is actually a lot right. Candidates with criminal backgrounds do not win with very large majority in general.

Another interesting paper is by Amrita Manjunath. She sees that parties give tickets to the politicians who have criminal background in those seats where the party is neither going to be surely winning nor surely leaving, where the party is somewhere in the middle. This is an interesting point to note. The number of billionaires in India have gone up in the last 15 years significantly. The portion of the wealth of Indian billionaires really comes from what we call as rent thick sectors like mining or construction or real estate and so on and so forth. Money going into politics is of the order that cannot be taken care of by individuals, it's large corporations that can have so much money. So it might be worthwhile to look at how much public procurement in India has gone up and taken control of private corporations. If you look at the top five corporations in India by market capital: Reliance, HDFC, Infosys, Wipro and if you look at the top five corporations by market capital in the US: Alphabet or Microsoft, Tesla, you will realize that none of the Indian company can become big without a government contract and therefore, despite privatization we realize that government has become extremely powerful and that creates more and more money and when the wealth increases the rent-seeking increases. Therefore, criminality increases but that's an idea to put forth for probably future research.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/46SDzTP>

Decoding the Controversial Electoral Bonds Scheme: How long for Supreme Court to adjudicate?

Chairperson: Prof Jagdeep Chhokar



(From Left to Right) Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee – ADR/NEW; Director and Chief Executive, Common Cause), Prof M.V. Rajeev Gowda (National Spokesperson, All India Congress Committee (AICC); Chairman, AICC Research Department; former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, from Karnataka), Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder Member & Trustee – ADR/NEW), Prof Satya Narayan Misra (Professor at KIIT School of Management (KSOM), Bhubaneswar), and Mr Nitin Sethi (Founding Member, The Reporters' Collective; Senior Journalist)



Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder Member & Trustee – ADR/NEW)

Prof Jagdeep Chhokar who moderated the discussion, started by stating that Electoral bonds being the most popular form of political funding, needs no introduction. He then introduced the panelists and invited the first speaker to share his thoughts.



Prof M.V. Rajeev Gowda (National Spokesperson, All India Congress Committee (AICC); Chairman, AICC Research Department; former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, from Karnataka)

Prof R. Gowda started the discussion by stating that he was one of the first to have witnessed the introduction of electoral bonds in the Rajya Sabha during the budget speech given by Late Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitley. He stated that he discovered that the *electoral bonds are actually the opposite of transparency and accountability* as emphasized

by the then Finance Minister during his speech. During the debate in the budget session Dr. Gowda informed the audience that he opposed the introduction of election bonds by stating that it is not a positive step as it enhances opacity in political funding as citizens are not able to follow the flow of money in political funding. He also countered the argument that the money received through electoral bonds was white money as it will be through cheque. He stated that we all have witnessed that during demonetisation how the black money got easily converted to white through the banking system. Another argument that Prof Gowda had against Electoral Bonds was that the *electoral bonds are issued by the State Bank of India (SBI) and since the SBI is broadly under the Central Government and therefore the government with a slight nudge should be able to find out 'who contributed to whom'*. Anonymity in the Electoral Bonds was justified by the argument that the people contributing were concerned about vindictive retaliation.

Prof R. Gowda informed the audience that *Congress party is opposed to the Electoral Bond Scheme*. He stated that *we have not as a nation properly confronted the issue that keeping democracy alive costs a lot of money, being a politician costs a lot of money*. Being an active politician is a full-time occupation that requires resources. Political parties need lot of money to function and to run campaigns but *there is indeed a loophole in the expenditure law as only candidates have a limit for the election expenditure but there is no limit for the political party's expenditure*. But even the candidates spent ten times above the average limit. So, the question arises '*where is the money coming from?*' Therefore, we need clean money in the system and we need to spend realistic amount.

Prof R. Gowda stated that *during election time, 'ECI goes after overt money rather than covert money.'* '*Current election expenditure limits do not encourage a level playing field. It rather favours the people with black money and the network to distribute that black money.'* He informed the audience that he

had moved a Private Members Bill in the Parliament to get rid of election expenditure limits but it was not passed. He stated that we have created a system that favours the tainted and punishes the untainted. A clean politician in today's politics cannot survive.

Prof R. Gowda emphasized that clean polity is a public good and if we all want it, '*we should have public funding of elections wherein both candidates and parties can legally raise money and this money should come out of our tax contributions*'. It will allow people to have a minimum threshold election expenditure to be able to mount a credible campaign. Nowadays, new technology like social media, emails etc., which should create a level playing field is actually misused by the people who can fund massive social media campaigns to worsen the imbalance.

He concluded by stating that Congress party is opposed to the Electoral bonds because more than two-third of the bonds go to the ruling party i.e., BJP and very little to the rest. We therefore, need to create rules for distributing resources. Until and unless we are able to figure out a way to come up with a clean legal way of political funding, we will not only be a '*world's largest democracy but also world's largest hypocrisy*.'



Prof Satya Narayan Misra (Professor at KIIT School of Management (KSOM), Bhubaneswar)

Prof Misra began by stating that there is a diametrical view point with respect to electoral bonds between political parties and civil societies. Contrary to the popular notion among political parties that BJP is the highest beneficiary of receiving electoral bonds, in the West Bengal Assembly elections TMC was the biggest beneficiary of electoral bonds. Similarly, in the recent Karnataka elections there was a large spurt about 8 times increase in funding through electoral bonds in comparison to 2014. He stated that one doesn't know who the beneficiary was, but it appears that if there is a political wave in favour of a certain political party, it could be the beneficiary of the electoral bonds.

Prof Misra said that maximum number of amendments were made in the Finance Act, 2017. He specified the major loopholes in these amendments i.e., a) no reporting to the Income Tax Dept., and

Election Commission of India b) no limit to the amount that can be contributed. He termed these amendments as some kind of a legalization of unaccounted money without limit and without reporting to the existing system. Prof Misra stated that in his opinion there has never been such kind of a bill with such huge ramifications. Prof Misra also mentioned that Finance Act, 2017 peddled as a Money bill under Article 110 doesn't justify the scheme of Article 110.

He also emphasized on 'Right to informed voting' not being explicitly mentioned in the Indian Constitution and this right is through an amplification by Supreme Court through various pronouncements where the court has had held numerous times that '*Freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) also includes Right to Informed Voting*' with reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) which is also subject to judicial review. He informed the audience that in the Keshav Nanda Bharti case, '*Free and Fair elections were held as part of basic structure of the Constitution.*'

Prof Misra also emphasized that we as a nation need to make a clear distinction between economic integrity and cultural homogeneity. Crony capitalism and religious fundamentalism is building up in this country which he found very disturbing. In conclusion Prof Misra requested ADR and other similar civil societies to take note of these disturbing trends while working on the issues relating to transparency and accountability with respect of electoral bonds. Prof Misra concluded by saying that unless we are aware of these insidious signals, we as a democracy can be at a serious loss.



Mr Nitin Sethi (Founding Member, The Reporters' Collective; Senior Journalist)

Mr Sethi began his talk by stating that when former Finance Minister Late Mr Arun Jaitley introduced electoral bonds in the Parliament by sheer logic it was evident that it '*is abetting corruption in a fashion that was not being done before*'. There has been already enough cash flow in the political system for generations in the way elections are run but electoral bonds is creating a separate channel of banked unaccounted money with no limits and no ability to judge the real source of money being generated. Mr Sethi informed the audience that '*electoral bonds allow foreign entities, large entities, unknown entities to funnel unaccounted black money through shell companies steadily*'.

He said that we already know the volume of money that moves around during elections. He stated that during the first round of sale of electoral bonds when the details were coming out through RTI applications filed by various citizens we noticed that while we are not able to do away with the cash flow in the economy during elections, electoral bonds were rather legitimising the large entities and corporations to channel money through bank accounts to political parties. He stated that in some ways it was the first step where you remove the tag of shame from corruption being done at that scale.

Mr Sethi also stated that it is the first step where instead of implementing reforms suggested by the civil societies and various other stake holders to reduce the impact of money and make the system transparent, we are now moving to an era where *'we have a legitimate legal system where corporates can provide large sums of money to the politicians to carry out their business.* He said that it would be very fair to imagine *that any company which is investing in a politician is a high-risk game and therefore the return on that investment needs to be high.'* He emphasized that *clearly anyone who gets elected with that kind of resources is going to pay the return to the investor and not the citizens.*

Mr Sethi informed the audience that in the last six months he had heard conversations in the political corridors of taking the next step forward from electoral bonds where you actually move towards a U.S style funding from corporates and even this system of electoral bonds would become redundant in the next 5-7 years. He said that we would be moving far away from the fact *that 'not only would we be unable to do away from the cash flow in the system that goes into elections but we would also move towards a regime where there is no social moral and legal sanction for corporates to provide large sums to a politician to win elections.'* He said that while the constitutional and legal debates can continue but once that rubric is crossed where the shame about it is over, we would have moved to a substantively different kind of politics.

Mr. Sethi also threw light on another important aspect that the quantum of money going into electoral bonds is not huge in comparison to the overall amount of money that is required to run an election. Therefore, why funding through electoral bonds is such a significant issue for the government when the volume of money is not so high in comparison to the ballpark figure of cash required in an election. He said that this issue is more important to study than just to inquire who gets the money.

He informed that since this is money that is coming through a bank account it can be paid in circumstances *'where political parties have to make payments as a bank transfer. Bank transfer for political parties is almost essential survival when they cannot provide cash'* on a few occasions where a party has to do so like when the helicopters are booked by parties for election campaigns. Mr. Sethi stressed upon the other important aspect i.e *the social media investments made by political parties*. He stated that all payments to social media or any platform of advertising which is partly in India but perhaps has a headquarters outside essentially requires you to give money in cheques or online transfers unless a party has made conduits around where you fund money to someone and the cash moves into a bank account and then gets transferred to the main parties. He informed the audience that he has tracked some political parties on the investment they have made on the social media platforms and the impact this has had. He cited the example of the ruling party BJP regarding the relation it had with Facebook and how cross funding happened to support a party or to support polarisation.

Mr Sethi stressed upon the fact that it is crucial to look into *'digital dominance in elections and its influence in elections because financing digital space and elections are interlinked now.'* Every rupee spent through these digital channels by a political party helps them reach far more people in comparison to any other medium. He stated that the cost per reach is much cheaper but the level through which the political parties are able to hide *'how they spent, how much they spent and how well they can micro target audience is tremendous.'* Mr Sethi underlined that to that effect the electoral bond money makes complete sense for any political party across board.

Mr Sethi concluded his speech by suggesting that in order to look at the larger theme of corruption and criminality we need to understand the political economy and other drivers that keeps these issues alive. He said that if we can have elections in states where people actually do not think these elections provide them democratic values but just survival spaces and yet the parties are able to invest more than Rs 20,000-30,000 crores in an Assembly election, it clearly implies that there are other different kind of factors that are in play than just looking at it through a simplified lens of corruption as an evil.



Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee – ADR/NEW; Director and Chief Executive, Common Cause)

Dr. Mudgal began his speech by informing the audience about the petition filed by ADR and Common Cause against the Electoral Bond Scheme, 2017 and stated that *'the petition has not been heard properly even once since the filing of the petition back in 2017.'* He said that every single aspect of electoral bonds is breathtakingly questionable. *'ADR has been emphasizing on this fact for the longest time that why should corporates be allowed to take part in elections at all in the first place.'* He informed the audience that earlier there used to be a limit to the amount a company could donate to a political party. Before the amendment, only a profit-making company could donate 7.5% of the average net profit of the last three years. Now due to the amendment, that limit has gone which means that it has opened the floodgates of money into the political system. He stated that anyone can now exclusively form a shell company for the purpose of fighting elections and later on the company can go bust. He informed that the Finance Act, 2017 has allowed even the loss-making companies to make donations to a political party.

Dr. Mudgal underlined that dubious interest groups and corporates lobbies now have a complete sway in the elections through the Electoral Bonds Scheme, 2017. Dr. Mudgal informed the audience about the background behind the intention of introducing the scheme in the first place. He stated that both the main national political parties i.e., INC and BJP were found guilty by the Delhi High Court in 2014 for taking foreign funding. He emphasized that the punishment for this was definitely de-registration and perhaps criminal cases.

The scheme has also resulted in the fact that only one or two individuals from a party are involved in deal making with the companies *which implies that there is no inner party democracy within the political parties at all and this is happening to all political parties because of this kind of an arrangement.*

He also informed the audience that the government has now allowed foreign companies through their subsidiaries in India to fund a political party. He said that the government made certain amendments to the FCRA law in retrospect to get them out of the Delhi high court order which had found them guilty of taking foreign funding. Because of these amendments if you are a Dawood Ibrahim or if you

are a foreign country like China or Pakistan and you want to have a share in India's politics, you are most welcome. He also informed the audience that *anyone can make an Indian subsidiary of some company and since there is no dearth of shell companies in this world, anyone can come walking on a red carpet and participate in India's elections.* He cited an example of Chinese and Russian companies which were trying to affect the US elections.

Dr. Mudgal also gave audience status of the petition pending in the Supreme Court since 2017.

- On 3rd October, 2017, notices were issued by the Supreme Court of India to the UOI and ECI.
- On 25th March, 2019 ECI submitted its affidavit before the Supreme Court. Dr. Mudgal informed the audience that while ECI had some divergent views about the electoral Bond scheme, but the Commission did not say that during the hearing before the court.
- On 14th October, 2022 the Supreme Court asked the government whether the Electoral Bonds Scheme revealed the source of money and the government informed the court that the methodology of receiving money through electoral bonds is completely transparent and it is impossible to get any black or unaccounted money.
- On 31-01-2023 ADR contended before the Supreme Court that there are several constitutional questions involved in the petitions which have a bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process and therefore, the petition should be referred to a constitution bench for adjudication.

Dr. Mudgal told the audience how ADR tried multiple times for an early adjudication of the petition before the Supreme Court by filing various applications for urgent listing of the case. He also stated that applications for urgent hearings were filed before the 2020 Bihar Assembly elections, 2021 Assembly elections in the states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Assam and 2022 Assembly elections in the States of Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat.

Dr. Mudgal concluded by emphasizing the fact that every citizen has a right to question the Supreme Court for not being able to hear this petition against the Electoral Bonds Scheme which is not only the most regressive step taken since Independence but is also the most dangerous in the light of participatory democracy and free and fair elections.

Full Video Link: <https://bit.ly/49jhSh3>

Address by Dr Dalip Singh, IAS (Retd), on “Importance of NOTA and Measures to Improve Indian Elections” ***Chairperson – Prof Jagdeep Chhokar***

Prof Jagdeep Chhokar introduced the speaker and mentioned how Mr Saharia (ex SEC Maharashtra) had issued a notification that if NOTA gets more votes than any of the candidates, the election will be cancelled and a fresh election will be held. Subsequently, as SEC Haryana, Dr Dalip Singh issued a notification that not only will the election be cancelled, the candidate would not be allowed to contest the new election. In effect, Dr Dalip Singh took NOTA to its logical conclusion. With that as the backdrop, he invited Dr Dalip to deliver his talk.



Dr Dalip started by thanking ADR for inviting him and appreciated the work of ADR in the field of electoral and political reforms. He stated that when NOTA was introduced for the first time, only 15 lakh voters exercised the NOTA option. After 10 years now the number of voters exercising NOTA has grown tenfold to 1.4 crore.

However, there was some criticism of NOTA in social and political circles that it has not made any difference and is akin to a wasted vote. However, there were other objectives which were achieved. The secrecy of the NOTA vote was maintained and it encouraged voters to go to the polling booths. It is a method of the voters showing disapproval of the candidates and is prevalent in various forms in different countries like USA, Greece, Ukraine, Spain, Brazil, Finland, France, Colombia, Russia, Bulgaria and even Bangladesh.

Dr Dalip went on to say that after the SC judgement of 2013 on NOTA, the ECI implemented it partially only for the parliamentary and state assembly elections. The ECI stated that if NOTA got maximum number of votes, the candidate securing maximum votes would be declared the winner. This weakened the significance and importance of the NOTA system. He hoped that someday in the future, the ECI will correct this anomaly.

He said that lot of people are unaware of the fact that like ECI is responsible for conducting Parliament and State assembly elections, each state of India has a SEC which is responsible to conduct all other elections e.g., for local bodies, panchayats, sarpanch, zila parishad, municipalities etc. The number of candidates and voters strength is very large, even in a small state like Haryana.

A new dimension to the implementation of the SC NOTA judgement was added by Mr Saharia, when he was SEC Maharashtra. For Maharashtra a rule was passed by SEC that if NOTA secured more votes than the candidates, then no candidate would be elected and re-election would be ordered. However, the same candidates could contest in the re- election. When Dr Dalip Singh was the SEC Haryana, he went a step further and ordered that all candidates who secured less votes than NOTA shall not be eligible to re-file nomination or contest the polls.

He went on to say the trend of more voters opting for NOTA is increasing. Even the margin of votes secured by winning candidates as compared to NOTA in many cases, was less than 1000 votes.

In conclusion he said that implementation of NOTA is bringing more transparency and increasing the voter turnout. He hoped that other states SEC would follow the example set by Maharashtra and Haryana and implement the rules introduced by the two states regarding NOTA. Perhaps that would shame or inspire the ECI to implement NOTA in the true spirit of the SC judgement.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/3spnp57>

Bringing Political Parties under RTI: Fostering inner-party democracy

Chairperson – Dr Vipul Mudgal



(From Left to Right) Mr Venkatesh Nayak (Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)), Mr Ruben Mascarenhas (National Joint Secretary & Campaign Secretary, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP); Working President of AAP Mumbai, Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee of ADR/NEW), Mr TR Raghunandan (Consultant in Anti-corruption, Decentralised Public Wealth and Heritage Restoration; Director of Avantika Foundation), and Prof Narayana A (Faculty-School of Policy & Governance, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru))



Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee of ADR/NEW)

Dr Vipul Mudgal, the moderator of the session started the session by emphasizing the importance of the RTI Act and lamented the continued weakening of it by the politicians. He briefly introduced the speakers and invited the first speaker to share his views.



Mr TR Raghunandan (Consultant in Anti-corruption, Decentralised Public Wealth and Heritage Restoration; Director of Avantika Foundation)

He started by discussing corruption because he wanted to emphasize where political corruption stands in the "corruption universe". He stated that political corruption doesn't exist as an isolated island but is connected to all other forms of corruption. He started unpacking political

corruption by highlighting the inflow of corrupt money, as listed below:

1. Farming corruption in front-line service delivery through bribes in transfers and postings
2. Big single kickbacks in procurement contracts and sale of natural resources
3. Unaccounted contributions (through electoral bonds) to political parties by business and other interests in the hope of obtaining favours
4. Payments made by business interests and others to have questions asked in legislatures that favour some vested interests, or lay bare information about competitors
5. Internal transactions and sale of candidatures for elections

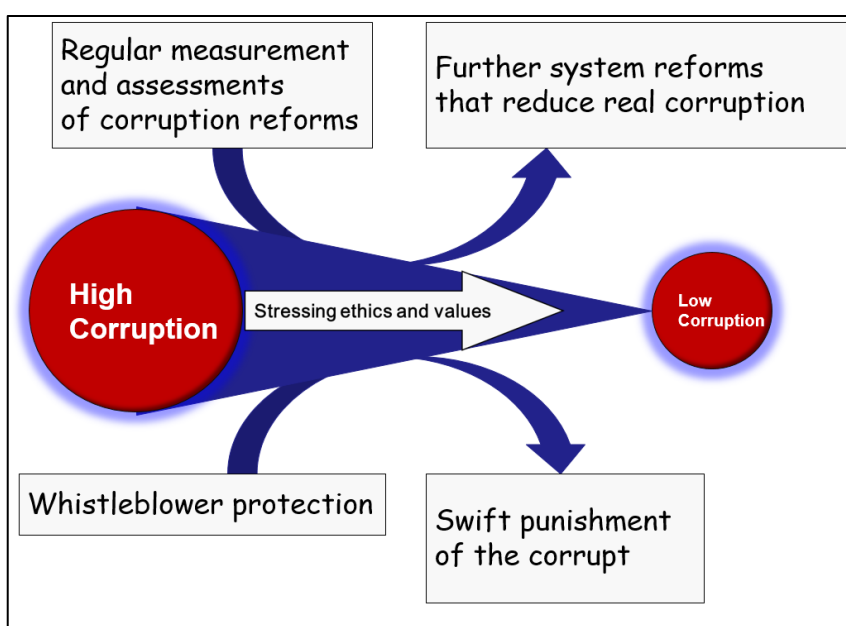
He listed the following outputs using corrupt money:

1. Bribe voters
2. Fund expensive election campaigns, including through the securing of funds into private coffers, ostensibly for funding campaigns beyond limits set for the same
3. Bribe media to produce favourable reports
4. Engineer defections or prevent mid-term destabilisation efforts by bribing elected representatives
5. Channelise money into private pockets of politicians

He stated that for a person who has entered the political system, the only way to remain competitive is to bribe voters and that's the biggest problem here. India is in hyper-corruption which is a situation where the disease becomes cancerous and the interconnections become part of a market chain. The literature reveals that when a country gets into a hyper-corrupt situation it sometimes takes 40/50/60 years for a country to get out of it. He said that in the United States presently, it's a kind of manageable corruption. However, between 1865 and 1930 that is between the Civil War and the Great Depression, it was one of the most corrupt places on the planet because of hyper-corruption. He believed that perceptions of corruption in over-the-counter transactions is reduced in India, which

means that every political party has now decided that they are so corrupt that they can afford to do certain things honestly and so they will deliver services over the counter to people, that will be squeaky clean, but the rest of it is the public procurement because all this is shielded from public eyes. They are not directly affected by public procurement corruption. The public doesn't see bad roads etc as personal like somebody putting his or her hand into your pocket whereas that's not the way one sees an over-the-counter transaction.

He explained how countries eliminate corruption, and how they go from high corruption to low corruption. He said that there is a pattern wherein there is a regular measurement of corruption which leads to systems' improvement. This is a positively reinforcing cycle and then there is a visible protection which leads to swift punishment of the corrupt and that is not enough because through this there is a common thread of ethical education; teaching children that honesty pays and so on. He displayed the following diagram of how countries have gotten out of corruption. He said that there are a number of case studies that show that if one invests their time in these concepts one can reduce corruption.



He then said that there are different ways of measuring corruption; this is where the RTI comes into use. RTI for political parties is a tool to measure the extent of corruption which is by examining their accounts etc. so that then you can take the corrective steps. We discuss the RTI in the context of controlling the corruption of political parties, however, the problem is that the RTI law as of today excludes political parties from the definition of public authorities. He expressed doubts about the idea

of asking the political parties who are the beneficiaries of the corrupt system today to amend the law so that they come under the RTI. He suggested that we should understand the interconnected system which will help us realize that a corrective applied somewhere else can cure our problem; even though it doesn't look intuitive at the first step.

He further explained how the voters are bribed. The candidate/his goon comes, takes away the voting card after paying the first instalment of the bribe and takes a selfie of the voter with the voter identity card. This process itself is scary for the voter, then on the day of the election the rest of the money is given and the card is given back to that individual. Mr Raghunandan suggested that this cycle of quid pro can be broken by having a system of mixing the votes of different ballot boxes, and he said that it's a very old-fashioned belief that it cannot be done unless we dispense with Electronic Voting Machines and go back to ballot papers.

He further said that today the problem is that counting ballot papers or ballots you know box wise or machine wise is partially compromising the secrecy of the ballot. It enables parties to keep track of whether the bribes they have paid on a polling booth-wise basis has actually translated into votes for them. If they win without the votes from that place then they can undertake reprisals against the people. As per him, if the suggested solution is applied then it might incentivize politicians to drop bribery as the largest outflow of corrupt money.

In conclusion he said that he was not against having RTI but by adopting the suggested counter-intuitive approach we might achieve or at least minimize the pain of the situation as we see today.



Mr Venkatesh Nayak (Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI))

Mr Nayak began by highlighting some of the disagreements with thoughts/ideas of the public about bringing Political Parties under RTI. His first disagreement was with the proposition that Right to Information Law does not cover Right to Information, as it was not designed to be so. He emphatically stated that this was a canard spread by the Government Babus to mislead the people. He mentioned this based on his discussion with the Secretary of the Department of Personnel and Training in charge of RTI implementation who urged him to observe the Preamble

and definition of public authorities. The Secretary highlighted that it does not cover public authorities because the Preamble says very clearly that this is to make government and its instrumentalities accountable to the governed; hence, how can political parties be considered instrumentalities of the government? Mr Nayak's counter to this proposition was that if India were to be that ideal democracy, it would continue to be a functional democracy in the absence of civil society organisations such as ADR, CHRI, NCPRI, and Common Cause. The country cannot function as a democracy in the absence of political parties. Political parties are central to the idea of a government that is elected by the people hence political parties are not instrumentalities of government. However, political parties are instrumentalities to capturing government power so it is a higher pedestal which political parties are applying. Therefore they must be transparent, as they are aiming to capture power.

In his second proposition, he begged to disagree with some of the arguments that have been placed before The Supreme Court. He emphasized that he has been part of that whole exercise and watching the case closely and also intervening in it from 2013 onwards. The Central Information Commission (CIC) declared the national political parties as public authorities, and the single foundational principle that the CIC found was that political parties are substantially financed. Looking at the finances of political parties, we know that substantial financing whether it is direct or indirect does not come from government sources; it comes from the public. There is a second argument that was taken to make the case stronger when political parties refuse to comply with the CIC's decision of 2013 where they said to kindly look at the 10th schedule of the Constitution of India which contains the Anti-defection Law. He said that the term political parties is mentioned in the Anti-defection Law, and is particularly placed there to ensure that after elections politics remains reasonably clean and defection from one party to another party doesn't happen. Therefore, the stronger base now after the CIC decision is that a political party if it is registered with the Election Commission, either it's a state-level or the central level, it becomes a body that is established or constituted under the Constitution of India which is another criteria for a public authority to be considered as being covered by the RTI Act. However, the political parties are neither going to the High Court to get the CIC's decision dismissed nor are they complying with the CIC order.

The third proposition came from his experience of about 18 years of promoting RTI. He mentioned that while conducting training workshops for Civil Society Representatives, media persons or students, he asked them why they thought RTI was important. The answer often was that there was corruption, abuse of power, mismanagement of natural resources etc., and RTI solves a lot of problems. Trainees

emphasized that they need to know what the Government is doing which is not in the public domain. This shows that they are indirectly expressing a trust deficit with the government. Can trust deficit be the basis for a relationship between something as important as a citizenry and a set of people who say they want to represent the citizenry at the highest law-making authority in the country? He created a hypothetical situation for his trainees and questioned them if there is no corruption and everything is working perfectly fine, but the government gets to decide what information will be in public, will they still want RTI; the trainees could not answer the question. Therefore, it can't be the basis for RTI as far as the Government citizen relationship is concerned. When we are stakeholders, then political parties can't hide information which is of public interest. Additionally, the law can deny the information where its disclosure will harm the public interest, and that is understandable. However, what will then be the basis for treatment for transparency from people vis-a-vis political parties? The basis is simply that political parties are the only entity in our country who stand up and say that they want to represent the citizens in Parliament/ State Assemblies/ Local bodies. He stated that when somebody says that they want to represent the public, then shouldn't we have a right to ask them what they are doing, why they want to represent us, how they plan to represent us, how are they planning to raise their finances in order to represent us, what is the source of the money that they are getting for us, so, there is a more positive basis here. The moment political parties say that they want to represent us a relationship of trust, which is part of 8(1)(e) of RTA Act- a duty relationship/ a trust-based relationship, develops; that has to be the basis for any measure.

He laid stress on making use of the Right to Information law to ask for information about political parties that are already available with other public authorities. The compilation of decisions which ADR got in the form of Income Tax Returns in 2008 was denied to him last year. It has not been institutionalized as a matter of transparency. Asking for information from the Income Tax Department, Finance Department, and Election Commission, is one way of building pressure on political parties to be more transparent towards people until we reach that day when a law can be passed either to amend the RTI act and include them fairly and squarely or to have a separate regulatory law that will govern the internal working of political parties.



Prof Narayana A (Faculty-School of Policy & Governance, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru)

Prof Narayana began by asking if it is possible for anyone in this country to get something done when the entire political establishment is opposing it in unison. He painted three possible future scenarios before the audience- two of which were pessimistic and the third one was a little optimistic. It will be if one is a congenital optimist. The RTI matter is pending before the Supreme Court, and it will have to decide based on all the arguments whether the ambit of RTI applies to political parties. He said to assume that the Supreme Court is going to decide in favour of the demand that RTI is going to apply to political parties and political parties will have to be bound by the provision for the party. We may think that this is the end of the story but it is not going to be the end of the story given the virulent position that the political parties have taken. Just to see some of the political debates that took place on TV after the Information Commission gave its verdict, the political parties were very angry and were showing unity. Therefore, what will happen in case the Supreme Court gives a judgment in favour of the demand? He said that we would see a second Keshavananda Bharati case in this country, which is the entire legislature and political establishment fighting the Judiciary to ensure that the political parties are not going to be under the purview of the RTI. Political parties are protecting something but we do not know what they are protecting.

If the Supreme Court gives a favourable judgment, and the political parties accept it. In this case, we can file an RTI and get the information from the political parties; we don't know what kind of information apart from funding aspects one can get/demand from the political parties. Even if the political parties furnish the information then the question is what transparency is possibly ensured. Theories of governance tell us that transparency does not automatically translate into accountability. If there is one area of governance and politics in India where the translation of transparency into accountability is extremely difficult is in the openness of the system and in the electoral system. However, well-informed the electorate may be because of the strength of the RTI, all the anomalies that are present now in terms of the electorate's choice of candidates will continue. The electorate today is more or better informed than ever before in India because of the efforts of Institutions like ADR. Because of a judgment, the Election Commission mandates the candidates to file their criminal and financial background right, and it's all there in the public.

There is an accessibility issue whether people come to know about it etc; it's a different thing but more information is there in the public domain. Due to social media platforms, information about candidates is landing on mobiles. Hence, at any point in time today, the electorate in India is better informed than ever before but there is no direct correlation between how well-informed the voter is and the kind of candidate a voter chooses. Therefore, this is a pessimistic future scenario.

In the Bharati case, the question was whether Parliament could change or amend the Constitution in the way that it wanted, and the Supreme Court at some point in time said that no it can't reach fundamental rights; Parliament can change other parts but not fundamental rights. However, the Parliament was unhappy. It was a 30-year battle between the Parliament and the Supreme Court. Finally, it settled down in some form in Keshavananda Bharati's judgment. Keshavananda Bharati case is now reopened because even now, the political establishment is unhappy with the compromise position that the Judgment has given, and the same thing is going to happen in case the Supreme Court is going to give us a favourable judgment. Therefore, it is a pessimistic scenario.

The third possibility is that we have to accept one thing, which is that as long as this political system continues, the way it operates, and as long as we have kept our political parties in the way they are, there is no way you can have the kind of accountability that you are faking through measures like RTI. In other words, the possibility for us to see a free and fair election system in India is only when we replace the current political parties with a new set of political parties, and those new set of political parties will have to operate on the principle that it is possible to fight elections in this country without having to spend so much. As long as there is demand for money by political parties, then somehow they will mobilize it. So, the only possibility which will not happen overnight- we can administrate is when we have a situation where it is possible for us to fight elections without having to spend so much money.

He stated that three kinds of changes are happening in Indian politics today- the first is getting more professionals such as consultants, who were unheard of decades ago, entering into the field. Second, those who get elected are seeking more professional advice via institutions like PRS, which sends fellows to work with MPs etc.; and the third is there have been innumerable experiments which are working on this principle of "is it possible to win elections in this country from Panchayat to Parliament without having to spend so much of money and without having to resort to the kind of things which political parties in general resort to such as caste, religion etc. He added that this might

sound a little unrealistic, but it is time that we document all the micro-level experiments which are going on in Indian politics. There are far too many youngsters there who are trying to do something; some of these institutions are started by the youth. He gave an example of a girl in Odisha who has started an all-women political party, and she is trying to convince women to vote for her party. It will take maybe three to four decades for her, but it doesn't matter. People are working on political models where you don't need so much money and resorting to questionable means to win elections and unless this happens RTI alone cannot cleanse the system.



Mr Ruben Mascarenhas (National Joint Secretary & Campaign Secretary, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP); Working President of AAP Mumbai)

He started by agreeing with his co-panelists, who mentioned that it is possible to win elections without money power, muscle power, and divisive agenda. He stated that it is the same clean politics in the new political culture, which enables a 35-year-old like him without any political

background to Head the Aam Aadmi Party in Mumbai.

He said that they are not arguing against democracy, but they are arguing about a specific instrument. He mentioned that at the threshold, there are different levels of knowing, which are necessarily not the same, there are things that are good to know, there are things that need to be known, and there are things that must be known; when we talk about a disclosure law we need to make a distinction between these three. Disclosure law only applies to what we must know. He said he is fine with political parties being under RTI, but only for the funding part. The political parties are refusing this because the question "Should political parties come under RTI?" is too binary. Instead of this question, the question should be on revealing the source of funding; this will involve no debate because if one agrees to the whole law then that means that one also has to agree with everything that one doesn't agree to.

He stated- "*I am all for transparency, I am not for nakedness*". He further explained that when they started the Aam Aadmi Party he was one of the founder members. Every donation that they got would automatically go to their website - even 50 rupee donation- was displayed on their website. He highlighted that their donors got calls and all their top donors got raided.

When he goes to people for fundraising, people question him that they are already in power in Delhi and Punjab why they need money. He said that there is no culture that people need to donate to a political party. He said that in such an atmosphere, they were all transparent, but their transparency was used against them. It is very difficult to actually raise honest money. One requires some money even in this new model of clean politics and new political culture without money, muscle power and divisive agenda.

He said that they now file funding details with the Election Commission, but all information doesn't go on AAP's website. This is because their donors say that they no longer want to donate to them because the agencies breathe down their neck. He said that in an authoritarian state like we are right now, rather than an authoritarian regime, transparency is a double-edged sword sometimes.

He said that political parties are in the domain in which they operate and are not formally the state; the location of political parties is that they fall between the State and Society. The state apparatus is responsible for governance and various mechanisms of representation of people that provide for public representation both by individuals as well as entities which can contest. So, political parties are governments in waiting. Political parties aggregate political demand, and then the larger question there is, can you regulate Civil Society if political parties are civil society, or do you think of parties as quasi-states to which he said he did not think so. Furthermore, he said we should also ask the question, is it a good thing to do or is it a necessary thing to do.

Everyone agrees on why we need to know the source of funding. It is because we need to find out who is trying to influence a political party, is this funder's vested interest being promoted by the political party, and are things being favourably legislated for that particular funder. Therefore, who is giving money to the party should be public but not everyone who is giving to the party anonymously is always maliciously trying to influence outcomes; if political parties are not quiet sometimes then there is pressure from society because they are competing interests around.

Talking about inner-party democracy, he said it is desirable, but it is not the role of the government to ensure it. Political parties are instruments created by founders and supporters to advocate certain causes. The party decided to organize it in a certain way to pursue those causes. If party members are comfortable with that, what is the business of the government? RTI is primarily a disclosure law; it is Right to Information and not Right to Democratic Functioning of the party.

The other point he talked about was transparency in ticket distribution. He said that these are not the goals of a disclosure law. Disclosure law is what is going on and what has gone on. There are other remedies available for people who don't like the party; they can leave it. He said if someone is a donor to a party then that person has a right to ensure that the money is spent in the manner presented by the party. It is a contractual obligation, but it is not a violation of the Right to Information per se. However, that does not mean that the law gives one a right. Electoral bonds don't meet that test. There is no way to know if any donor has undue influence over any party, and there's no way to know whether the government has arm-twisted someone to get money. He gave an example of an industrialist, who before a State Assembly Election had purchased some crores worth of electoral bonds; after a few days he gets a call from a party (Ruben indicated that we all know the name of the party) saying they know that he has bought the bonds but couldn't find the amount in their account so when should party person come and receive the bonds. The industrialist had thought that he would divide the bonds into different parties in different players, but he couldn't. He further said that there are all kinds of pressures being applied by the Government of the day.

People file RTI applications and discover what the government has done. So, the public are stakeholders, but they're not shareholders. When it comes to law we need to make a distinction between purpose and instrument. We agree with the purpose but whether a single instrument should be used to pursue goals or whether a single instrument can deliver multiple goals. For example, if we want more leaders we should put term limits. He suggested two terms of public office which will lead to more leaders. He further said that we have to ask, for whatever goal that we set, is this the right instrument to pursue it?

Talking about the strategy of a political party and the way it develops its positions, what it considers, what it rejects from part of the political strategy of the party. The political strategy of a political party doesn't have to be in the public domain. He gave an example of the Cricket Board. If we ask the Cricket Board to share the strategy that they use to select the team; that can't be revealed to the opposition. Opposition needs to know the position of a political party; it doesn't need to know how that political party arrived at a decision.

Public interest is whether a political party receives money. He said he is willing to reveal that but maybe sometimes not to his opponent but maybe to an independent body. Not all disclosure means disclosure to the government. Political parties compete with each other to win elections. Hence, the

strategy needs to be kept secret. Giving minutes of the Steering Committee meeting etc. may put the party at a disadvantage.

If one thinks of RTI as a way of reforming political parties then we should make it part of a package of other reforms- there should be proportional representation, there should be term limits, and so on and so forth. We must not think that RTI is the only instrument.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/3QjZ2Og>

Local and Urban Governance Chairperson – Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd)



(From Left to Right) Dr Ujjaini Halim (ADR's State Coordinator – West Bengal), Ms Malti Sagane (President, Mahila Rajsatta Aandolan (MRA)), Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd), Head of ADR/NEW, Mr Sudhir Pal (ADR's State Coordinator - Jharkhand), and Mr Bhim Raskar (Director, Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD))



Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd), Head of ADR/NEW

Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) started the session by introducing the panelists.



Ms Malti Sagane (President, Mahila Rajsatta Aandolan (MRA))

In her opening statement, Ms Malati Sagane highlighted the key points of her discussion, emphasizing the crucial role of Power, Party, Politics, and Elections in our democracy. She also addressed the challenges faced by women in politics, particularly regarding reservations, training, and the need for them to balance their political roles with family responsibilities.

Additionally, she echoed the sentiment of some seasoned activists in the Women's Political Movement, urging women to raise their voices for meaningful change.

The speaker discussed several critical issues in her address, she highlighted the growing influence of money power in elections, the need for ideological empowerment, challenges faced by social organizations participating in elections, and the issue of candidates facing accusations during elections. Additionally, she raised the idea of citizens having the right to recall elected representatives and questioned the effectiveness of the NOTA option in elections. These points emphasize the need for comprehensive reforms in the political system to ensure fairness and transparency in the electoral process.

In conclusion, the speaker highlighted the need for disqualification of elected representatives if NOTA wins in order to make people realize its effectiveness. She also raised concerns about the challenges posed by rural urbanization and the inadequate provision of basic amenities in such emerging areas. Finally, she pointed out the disparity in voting rights for different local government positions, particularly the village Sarpanch, and called for consideration of this issue. These points underscore the need for reforms and a more equitable approach to local governance.



Mr Bhim Raskar, Director - Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD)

The speaker began by acknowledging the extensive work carried out by the entire assembly, including the ADR team and the Rural Self-Governance and Community Development (RSCD) efforts of the Women's Political Movement over the past 30 years. He emphasized the need to empower the electoral process and mentioned the involvement of several Panchayati

Raj Civil Society Organisations working with women.

Furthermore, the speaker shared a recent experience in Gadchiroli, specifically in the village of Mutnoor, where they observed four power centers or polling booths that play a crucial role in the electoral process. One of these centers is reserved for women.

The speaker expressed that none of the women in the community are ready to participate in politics, and they highlighted the influence of certain dominant individuals and groups in the electoral process, which hinders the empowerment of women in politics. The speaker also discussed their work in the village of Utnur, emphasizing the importance of empowering women in politics. He reflected on the evolving perception of politics, suggesting that one is inherently political from birth.

Continuing the discussion, the speaker emphasized the critical aspects of voting, urging a thoughtful approach free from financial influence. He drew a parallel between the current political scenario and instances where people were allegedly selling voter cards. The speaker also highlighted Supreme Court interventions that were shaping the electoral landscape.

In the current local election landscape, concerns center around revenge politics, vested interests, and monetary influence, particularly at the MLA and MP levels. People often exhibit disinterest in elections, reflecting a perception of mismatch in governance and electoral processes which are interlinked. The internalization of these issues poses a significant threat, necessitating the development of legitimate voter tools and a call to avoid corrupt leadership. Recent experiences during Bhandara's local election revealed technological vulnerabilities and the need for improved electoral procedures.

In summary, the current situation regarding electoral practices extends beyond surface-level concerns. There is a widespread perception that leaders can be exploited to the fullest during elections. Moreover, the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is significant, particularly in campaigns against corruption, distribution of goods, alcohol, and monetary influences during elections. Initiatives like "Bhram Daan Mukh Matdan" have started to yield positive results, primarily in villages where awareness boards were established. Collaborations with the Election Commission are ongoing, although there is reluctance to conduct certain types of campaigns due to the Code of Conduct. Nevertheless, efforts such as the "Vote Not For Sale" campaign have made a notable impact, particularly in Latur district and neighboring villages. It is crucial to acknowledge and celebrate voters who resist monetary influences and consistently exercise their voting rights, potentially through written pledges and ceremonies of recognition.

Expanding on the subject, the speaker emphasized the need for increased awareness and appreciation of democratic values and governance at the grassroots level. Initiatives like the Democracy Award and constitutional literacy campaigns are essential to promote civic engagement. Additionally, there is a call for political parties and government officials to actively participate in these efforts, along with a focus on property declaration and collaboration between different governance bodies. GPDP planning at the village level is also emphasized.

The speaker emphasized the increasing participation of women in politics and their dedication to addressing various issues. He stressed the importance of spreading the message "Vote for our rights" nationally and educating voters, especially women and youth. The speaker also called for political neutrality and support for citizens becoming politically aware. Finally, he concluded by reciting a poem by Dr. Uday Prakash, highlighting the significance of taking action rather than remaining passive.



Dr Ujjaini Halim (ADR's State Coordinator – West Bengal)

In the opening remarks, Dr Halim emphasized the importance of local governance and the role of people in it. She acknowledged the influence of power, party politics, and politics in general but highlighted the often overlooked factor, which is "people." The speaker shared an anecdote about a recent TV debate regarding West Bengal Panchayat elections, emphasizing the violence and the role of money and muscle power and also the need for strengthening Panchayati Raj.

The speaker highlighted the significance of local governance institutions, from Gram Sabha to Zilla Parishad and stressed the importance of addressing the actual concerns of the people at the Panchayat level. Regarding the recent Panchayat elections in West Bengal, she noted that the issues discussed primarily revolved around political parties rather than the genuine concerns of the villagers. The speaker emphasized that issues related to the people, especially those concerning women and youth, should take precedence. She also highlighted the excessive use of party affiliations as identity markers, overshadowing the focus on village development. Additionally, the speaker noted the dominance of money and muscle power in local elections, diverting attention away from essential development issues.

In West Bengal, the speaker's organization focuses on promoting awareness and strengthening Gram Sabhas (village parliaments) throughout the year. She emphasized the importance of Gram Sabha, which often gets overlooked, despite being a constitutionally recognized institution. The speaker expressed concerns about the trend of transferring power from Panchayati Raj Institutions to the bureaucracy in some states, including West Bengal.

The efforts of IMSE include organizing awareness programs, particularly targeting Gram Sabha, training youth and women, and developing leadership at the Gram Sabha level. They ensure that real, issue-oriented Gram Sabha meetings take place, breaking the norm of merely signing minutes. The speaker cited an example of successfully revitalizing a Gram Sabha in Birbhum district, where they established a functional office run by local leaders and youth.

Overall, the speaker's organization works towards making Gram Sabhas more active and functional by nurturing local leadership and facilitating meaningful discussions, which has yielded some success and sustainability.

The speaker conducted a rapid survey in 11 panchayats across seven districts just before the Panchayat elections to understand voter behavior and perceptions of Panchayats. The survey revealed that people highly value the presence of Panchayats as they consider it a space where they can interact with leaders and address local issues.

However, when it comes to active participation, responses were not very satisfactory. A significant portion of the respondents lacked awareness about income-expenditure plans, Panchayat budgets, and day-to-day functioning. About 41% of respondents had limited knowledge about the functions and importance of Gram Sabha, and they also had limited understanding of various Panchayat committees. Despite this lack of active participation, most respondents were aware of the existence of Gram Sabha and had signed meeting resolutions. The speaker also interviewed Self-Help Group (SHG) members who mentioned that they had signed resolutions but were not actively engaged in the decision-making process.

In summary, while people recognize the value of Panchayats, there is a need for greater awareness and active participation in the local governance process, including Gram Sabha meetings and committee activities.

The survey in West Bengal revealed concerns about increasing money and muscle power in Panchayat elections, political violence, and gender representation issues. Voters should become informed citizens, and reforms like expenditure limits are needed. Preserving the space for citizen participation is crucial for strengthening grassroots democracy.



Mr Sudhir Pal (Chief Functionary – Manthan, State Coordinator - Jharkhand/NEW)

The speaker discussed the ongoing struggle for self-governance in the Jharkhand region, emphasizing the battle between corporate interests and community rights in resource governance. He highlighted the significance of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the presence of money in tribal areas. The speaker also noted that despite numerous MOUs worth over a lakh crore

rupees, signed by various governments over the past 23 years, none have been successfully implemented, raising questions about resource politics and governance. This perspective on resource politics and governance challenges should be considered in the report.

The speaker's perspective centered on the enduring resource-related conflicts in Jharkhand, marked by the clash between corporate interests and community rights. He underscored the prolonged legal disputes, including the Pathalgadi movement and Naxalite insurgency. Furthermore, the speaker highlighted the hurdles in implementing progressive legislation like the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and PESA in tribal regions, where traditional institutions hold sway. He also emphasized the challenges of amending laws and altering governance regulations related to resources. This viewpoint should be incorporated into the report to provide insights into the resource politics, legal battles, and governance issues prevalent in Jharkhand.

He stated that while there has been some success in local self-governance and the implementation of progressive laws like the Forest Rights Act (FRA), the threat to land and resources remains. He highlighted ongoing resource conflicts and the struggle for community rights against powerful entities. The speaker also praised the use of the 73rd Amendment, PESA, and FRA at the grassroots level but stressed that more work is needed. The speaker shared the positive experience of the 2010 panchayat elections, where over 50% of elected representatives were women, particularly in the fifth schedule areas. However, he pointed out the differences in panchayat functioning between these

areas and other regions like Maharashtra or West Bengal. This perspective should be included in the report to illustrate variations in local governance across different Jharkhand regions.

According to the speaker, the decentralization of governance to the third tier, represented by panchayats, faces significant challenges due to bureaucracy and higher-level panchayats. He highlighted instances where state governments and parliaments hindered the autonomy of panchayats despite the 73rd Amendment. The speaker emphasized the importance of empowering panchayats independently and ensuring transparent decision-making, especially in selecting development project locations. He called for mechanisms to reduce the influence of powerful entities within panchayats.

The speaker emphasized the need to establish Panchayati Raj as an independent self-governing body in line with the spirit of the 73rd Amendment. He highlighted the importance of providing strong support to panchayats and pressurising the government to grant them more autonomy. The speaker also pointed out that the Panchayat Raj Department often neglects the role of Gram Sabhas, which is against the legal provisions. He stressed the significance of Gram Sabhas in decision-making, fund allocation, and audits, especially in the context of tied and entitlement funds. The speaker called for greater control by Gram Sabhas over entitlement funds and underscored the importance of audit rights.

The speaker emphasized the significance of accountability, audits, and empowering Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) for effective governance at the grassroots level. He expressed concerns about larger panchayats not being under elected representatives' control and highlighted the importance of regular interactions between village heads and Gram Sabhas to ensure accountability. The speaker suggested that these practices can lead to better outcomes and believed that the fourth tier of governance, the Gram Sabha, should have functional authority for effective governance, especially in smaller panchayats.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/49fzTgr>

**Day – 2
(16th July'23)**

**Youth and Women Participation in Electoral Politics: In preparation for
General Elections 2024**

Chairperson: Dr Kiran B. Chhokar



(From Left to Right) Prof Sridhar Pabbisetty (Senior Director of School of Government, MIT-World Peace University, Pune), Ms Angellica Aribam (Founder, Femme First Foundation), Dr Kiran B. Chhokar (Trustee-ADR/NEW), Dr Sonia Bhaidas Nagarale (Associate Professor at the Department of Law, Savitribai Phule Pune University), and Dr Chaitra Redkar (Associate Professor-Humanities and Social Sciences, Dy. Chair, and Associate Dean at Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune)



Dr Kiran B. Chhokar (Trustee-ADR/NEW)

Dr Kiran Chhokar appreciated the remarkable panel of speakers, and commented that it was evident that women outnumber men, reflecting a commendable commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

She mentioned that in India, female representation in the Lok Sabha has long been inadequate. With only 14 women for every 50 male representatives, the contrast is stark, especially compared to countries like Bangladesh (21%) and Rwanda (64%).

Women's participation in voting has been catching up with men's, with a higher percentage of women voting in the 2019 elections. However, women's reservation in politics, which has been dormant for a decade, needs revival. The time is ripe for renewed focus on this issue. Additionally, it's crucial to engage the youth in the electoral process, marking a significant moment for change.

Out of the millions of youth who reach 18 years old annually, roughly 70 percent fail to register for voting, and among those who do register, only around 10 percent actually participate in the voting process. With this as the background, she invited the first speaker.



Dr Chaitra Redkar (Associate Professor-Humanities and Social Sciences, Dy. Chair, and Associate Dean at Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune)

Dr Redkar stated that though her perspective was rooted in the experiences from Maharashtra, it was important to note that her concern extended to the situations in other Indian states as well. She had chosen to focus on Maharashtra due to its prominent role in India's historical social reform and modernity discussions, often

mentioned alongside Bengal. This state has had a rich tradition of addressing social issues, including women's concerns, over many centuries. Interestingly, Maharashtra had a long history of women participating in the public sphere compared to some other states. However, despite this legacy, when it came to women's participation in electoral politics, there was little difference in the representation of women in Maharashtra's Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and legislative assemblies

compared to states where social reform and women's rights came later through constitutional measures.

Dr Redkar addressed the issue revolving around the paradox in Maharashtra. Despite a significant historical presence of women in the public sphere and active involvement in socio-political movements for over a century, their representation in electoral politics remained similar to, if not dramatically different from, that of other Indian states. Despite a larger number of women contesting elections for legislative assemblies in 2019 and 2014 (277), the number of women who actually got elected remained disproportionately small (2024). This trend highlighted the need to explore the reasons behind this discrepancy and understand why higher participation wasn't translating into more significant political representation for women in the state.

The second question she raised delved into the characteristics of women who received party nominations and subsequently got elected. This pattern was consistent with the broader scenario, not just in Maharashtra. While it was often referred to as the "father-daughter duo" in Maharashtra politics, the trend extended beyond the state; it frequently involved candidates from political families securing candidatures. This brought us to the pivotal issue of women's political participation. In Maharashtra, there was an extensive tradition of women participating in non-party democratic politics, with a robust history of involvement in movements like the autonomous women's movement of the 1970s. Several prominent women activists, renowned across ideological and party boundaries, continued to lead this charge. Notably, women had spearheaded various social movements and exerted a significant presence in such roles. The crucial distinction was that women were engaged in politics, but primarily within non-party democratic spheres, and their involvement in electoral politics was comparatively limited.

Dr Redkar's presentation revolved around four pivotal topics: non-party democratic politics, social movements, electoral politics, and women's involvement in Maharashtra's context. These discussions could be extended to encompass broader non-party democratic activities like those undertaken by ADR. The core question was why the gap persisted between these spheres. A significant aspect was the distinct role pursued by non-party democratic politics. Prominent figures in this sphere had asserted a deliberate separation from electoral politics due to concerns about becoming part of the state machinery. Bridging this gap required addressing the differing approaches to politics. The introduction of the 33% reservation for women in Maharashtra had prompted an intriguing perspective. Some activists argued that the state had appropriated the

agenda of social movements. This shifted the focus and led to discussions about a "quota within a quota," reflecting how state influence impacted the women's movement agenda.

Scholars' analyses revealed a notable pattern in Maharashtra's cabinet composition, with over 85% coming from the Maratha caste for the past 50 years. Transitioning from local and social movement politics to the state level, the dominance of caste politics, especially the rise of OBC politics, played a significant role in women gaining election tickets. This trend restricted access to electoral opportunities, favoring dominant caste women from political families. Additionally, our definition of politics was crucial. Instances such as the study on women gram panchas from the "Lakshmi Mukti Andolan" showed that despite their elected roles and public work, their efforts were often perceived as social work rather than politics. This skewed perception of politics could hinder women's re-election and progression in the political hierarchy. Another case involved historical examples, like S.M. Joshi in 1952 and recent instances in 2014, where even strong social activists and organizers faced challenges in securing votes during elections. This raised questions about the disconnect between support for social activism and electoral support for candidates. Thus, redefining our understanding of politics beyond nuisance value to encompass meaningful public work became pivotal in enabling women's success in electoral politics.



Dr Sonia Bhaidas Nagarale (Associate Professor at the Department of Law, Savitribai Phule Pune University)

Dr Sonia started by stating that the Indian Constitution's Preamble underscored democracy as a core principle, reflecting the need for representative and inclusive democracy. This included gender equality and the absence of sex-based discrimination, in line with our Constitution's fundamental rights. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's significance in championing women's issues was highlighted, as he advocated for

equal political rights and proper representation for women in education and politics. The journey of women's political participation can be traced back to the 1917 All India Home Rule Mission, led by Sarojini Naidu, advocating for equal voting rights for women. Notably, leaders like Begum Shah Nawaz also submitted memoranda to the British Prime Minister, emphasizing the need for absolute equality in political status. It's important to note that Sarojini Naidu and others weren't advocating

for reservations; they believed women were capable of contesting and participating equally in the political arena without the need for special provisions.

The Constituent Assembly, consisting of 389 members, included 15 women representatives. However, the idea of reservation for women was debated and ultimately dismissed as unnecessary. In the first Lok Sabha, 51 women contested, constituting about 4.70% of the representation. Over time, this figure increased to the current 14.44% representation of women in the Lok Sabha. A significant milestone was the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992, which mandated a reservation of at least one-third (33%) of seats in panchayats and municipalities, with a ceiling of 50%. Certain BJP-led states utilized this by interpreting "not less than 33%" to mean over 33%, thus implementing 50% reservation, as allowed by the 50% ceiling.

Constitutional provisions played a significant role in shaping political representation. Article 15(3) called for special provisions for women and children, forming the basis for political reservations introduced through the 73rd and 74th Amendments in 1992. Other articles like 243D(3), 243D(4), 243T(3), 243T(4), and 326 pertained to elections and adult suffrage.

The Women's Reservation Bill, introduced in 2008 as the 108th Amendment, remained pending for 26 years. The bill aimed to transform parliamentary dynamics by reserving 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative assemblies for women. Seats would be rotated and determined by drawing lots, reserved once every three consecutive general elections. The bill was intended to be operational for 15 years. However, opposition based on intersectionality emerged, resulting in its lapse. Certain political parties like RJD, JD(U), and SP proposed a "quota within the quota," seeking further reservation within the 33% allocation for women. Discussions also arose about reservations within political parties themselves to pre-empt internal debates on quotas.

A notable example came from Uttar Pradesh where Priyanka Gandhi committed to allocating 40% of tickets to women in the Legislative Assembly elections, along with proposing 40% reservation in government jobs. This highlighted the potential of internal party democracy to foster greater women's participation. Currently, the matter was sub judice in the Supreme Court.

The Women's Reservation Bill had garnered substantial arguments both in favor and against its implementation. Supporters emphasized the necessity of affirmative action to bolster women's political participation, citing successful precedents like the 73rd and 74th Amendments that had empowered women at the grassroots and municipal levels. This proactive involvement had led to

effective governance, addressing gender-specific concerns, and budgeting. Furthermore, proponents highlighted the potential for a more robust lobby for women's rights within parliament. On the contrary, opponents raised concerns about merit-based competition, potential isolation of women from political diplomacy, and the restriction of voter choices. There were worries that reservations could reinforce unequal social hierarchies, disrupt family dynamics, and limit the pool of candidates.

International comparisons revealed India's ranking at 148th out of 193 countries in women's political representation, emphasizing the need for progress. Case laws affirmed the constitutionality of reservations for women, while the reintroduction of the Women's Reservation Bill was under consideration. Overcoming obstacles like patriarchal norms and cultivating political discourse on women's reservation were crucial. Grassroots women's involvement yielded advantages like reduced corruption, improved education and nutrition outcomes. Addressing youth participation challenges, initiatives like the National Youth Policy 2022 and global efforts highlighted the importance of empowering young women in governance.

In conclusion, Dr Sonia hoped that achieving substantive women's representation aligned with the democratic objectives of the Constitution, would pave the way for gender parity and equitable progress in India's parliamentary democracy.



Ms Angellica Aribam (Founder, Femme First Foundation)

Angellica expressed gratitude for the opportunity to address the audience and contemplated the approach for their talk, considering whether to focus on data or personal experiences. She chose the latter, reflecting on her journey with a non-profit organization established four years ago. This organization aimed to enhance women's political representation in India through capacity building, advocacy, and fostering a Sisterhood of women political leaders. The speaker's decision to start this initiative was influenced by her personal story, which began when she entered

politics at the age of 20 years and retired at 25 years. This trajectory was shaped by her life journey and experiences.

She shared her journey from Manipur to Delhi, highlighting her experiences with gender-based injustice, racism, and her entry into politics at a young age. She emphasized the need for women's political representation and discussed the challenges faced by women in politics. She touched on issues of retention and tokenism, as well as the significance of viewing the entire pie rather than fighting for limited seats. She argued for the effectiveness of fixed and rotational quotas over voluntary quotas in achieving gender parity. She also advocated for the revival of the Women's Reservation Bill as a crucial step toward achieving true gender equality in political representation.



Prof Sridhar Pabbisetty (Senior Director of School of Government, MIT-World Peace University, Pune)

Prof Sridhar highlighted his experience with regard to electoral reforms and discussed the importance of enhancing political representation for women and youth in India. He emphasized the demographic advantage of youth and the need for more inclusive governance. The speaker underscored the significance of promoting grassroots representation and pushing for higher political participation for women. He urged for changing the narrative, encouraging younger participation, and implementing lower age limits for political involvement. The speaker also emphasized the need to celebrate positive strides in women's representation and shared success stories from states with higher women representatives. He suggested learning from countries like Rwanda and changing perceptions about youth involvement in politics. Prof Sridhar concluded by advocating for sustained efforts to challenge traditional norms and bring positive change in political representation.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/3SmokOk>

Address by Dr Anand Deshpande (Founder, Chairman, and Managing Director, Persistent Systems) on “Decentralisation of Economy using Technology”

Chairperson – Prof Trilochan Sastry



Dr Deshpande highlighted that Computer Science and Next-Gen Technology could be used to ensure that we get the transparency and decentralisation that would be helpful for the future of elections. Talking about the creator economy, he highlighted that in Web 2.0, which we are currently using, the ownership of content creators is with the websites which creators are using. Hence, he insisted on exploring

Web 3.0 (the next evolution of the World Wide Web), where Freedom of Speech can be intact in a creative and collective way and privacy can be maintained. He encouraged to explore electoral reforms in the context of decentralisation in Web 3.0.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/40j6AoW>

Election Campaigns, Digital Technology and Social Media Mobilization in India

Chairperson: Mr Jaskirat Singh



(From Left to Right) Mr Pulkit Sharma (Political Strategist and Digital Media Specialist), Mr Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder, Factly.in and ADR's State Coordinator- Andhra Pradesh & Telangana), Mr Jaskirat Singh (Trustee-ADR/NEW), Mr Saurabh Dwivedi (Editor and Founder, The Lallantop; Senior Journalist), and Ms Karen Rebelo (Editor, Boom Live)



Mr Jaskirat Singh (Trustee-ADR/NEW)

In his opening remarks, the session moderator Mr Jaskirat Singh emphasized the crucial discussion ahead, delving into the intersection of technology and elections. He stressed the significance of understanding how technology is not only currently being used but also misused in electoral processes. Moreover, he highlighted the

urgency of recognizing the potential future misuse of technology, given its rapid evolution. In this ever-evolving landscape, politicians have been quick to adapt and utilize technology to their advantage, making it imperative for others to catch up and learn swiftly to prevent them from gaining an undue advantage.



Mr Saurabh Dwivedi (Editor and Founder, The Lallantop; Senior Journalist)

Mr Dwivedi started by stating that his motivation for attending the event was the inspirational work of ADR (Association for Democratic Reforms) and the need for ordinary individuals to contribute to improving the country rather than relying on a messiah figure. He expressed deep respect and admiration for ADR's efforts in the field of political reform and saluted the organization for its significant contributions.

The speaker emphasized the importance of effective communication and education on social issues like caste-based discrimination and gender identity from an early age to combat biases and prejudices. He highlighted that the lack of awareness was a major problem, and appreciated ADR's efforts in presenting complex issues to the public in a simplified manner.

The speaker discussed the idea of watching interviews of important politicians and emphasized the need of fact-checking of statements made in political interviews. He emphasised the need for asking tough questions, providing data-driven responses, and addressing the lack of transparency in social media algorithms. The speaker mentioned the MGNREGA scheme run by the Indian government, how The UPA had initiated it and the NDA had continued it. Despite ongoing allegations, the budget remained the same. This benefited both the leaders and the labourers, as well as the rural economy. Hinting at prevalent corruption, he stated that earlier Leaders used to purchase bikes, now they buy Boleros and their future aim remains to acquire Scorpions. He said that the unemployed youth was being fooled by the political parties and were being repressed. They were being exploited by the education mafias. However the students had digital tools that made political parties very afraid. They used hashtags and sent messages to many WhatsApp groups. On a specific date, a campaign started and everyone messaged, and it trended on Twitter.

Digital intervention has multiple dimensions, and its applications can vary significantly. While some individuals and groups may employ it for constructive purposes, others exploit it for more sinister ends, such as disseminating propaganda or shaping political narratives.

In the context of political discourse, digital intervention often involves the exertion of pressure from different quarters. Political leaders and figures may find themselves subjected to scrutiny and questioning on public platforms, forcing them to respond to pressing issues and concerns.

One aspect of digital intervention pertains to holding politicians and leaders accountable through interviews and open forums. These interactions provide an opportunity for individuals to question and challenge those in positions of power, seeking transparency and accountability in governance. Additionally, technology plays a pivotal role in collecting and analyzing political data. This data can be instrumental in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes. It enables political actors to understand voter sentiment and tailor their strategies accordingly.

However, not all digital interventions are constructive or ethical. Some individuals or groups resort to abusive tactics, such as altering the wording of their messages to bypass content filters. This allows them to continue spreading harmful or misleading information, undermining the integrity of public discourse.

One of the underlying objectives of such tactics is to weaken the credibility and impact of journalists and communicators. By inundating them with offensive or misleading content, these actors seek to disrupt their ability to engage effectively in political discussions.

In sum, digital intervention in the realm of politics is a multifaceted phenomenon. While it can serve as a tool for transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making, it also presents challenges in the form of misinformation, propaganda, and the manipulation of public opinion.



Ms Karen Rebelo (Editor, Boom Live)

Ms. Karen Rebelo, addressing an engaged audience, expressed her enthusiasm for the intriguing topic at hand and commended the impressive turnout in the auditorium. She thanked ADR for the invitation, citing her long-standing admiration for their work. In a casual, slide-free approach, she initiated an interactive discussion. Karen engaged the younger attendees, prompting a show of hands to

gauge their encounters with fake messages or images, or knowledge of family members sharing such content. Drawing upon her background in technology, she drew parallels between the tech sector and the issue of fake news, emphasizing the importance of addressing misinformation and disinformation.

The phrase "it's a feature, not a bug" emphasizes that misinformation isn't an accidental byproduct of societal changes; it's intentionally employed by political parties due to its effectiveness. The speaker, a fact checker, highlighted that misinformation was deliberately used and was highly successful in political campaigns. She said that investigating the root cause of misinformation reveals that it thrives because of its efficacy. The speaker discussed how political campaigns operate like warfare, meticulously planned months in advance, making early preparation essential for researchers and journalists.

Rather than dwelling on personal opinions, the speaker illustrated her point with an example. Facebook's ad library reveals the misuse of technology in political campaigns. Smear campaign pages like "Corruption Nath" and "Paltu Express" spend millions on ads targeting opposition leaders. Lack of public awareness stems from limited tracking. Journalists and citizens can investigate spending through the public ad library to understand the battle for India's mind and soul, a battle currently being lost.

In April, News Minute reported a concerning incident in Bangalore where a private company was selling voter data to politicians, exposing the sale of data of over six lakh voters. This development raised questions about the potential use of UPI for voter bribery, highlighting how politicians are constantly adapting to new tactics, even ahead of fact checkers.

Another pressing issue discussed was the rise of AI and deep fakes, which pose significant challenges for fact checkers. Manipulated images, videos, and now even audio threaten the credibility of information. The speaker stressed that this problem is not confined to English-speaking regions and cited an example of manipulated images of female wrestlers in Delhi, demonstrating how easily such manipulations can deceive the public. In conclusion she emphasized the urgency of addressing these challenges, as they affected everyone, regardless of location or background.



Mr Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu (Founder, Factly.in and ADR's State Coordinator- Andhra Pradesh & Telangana)

Mr Rakesh began his speech by expressing gratitude to Karen and acknowledging the issue of fake news, which he decided to touch upon. He emphasized the inadequacy of the current framework for tracing digital expenditure, intending to illustrate its limitations.

Drawing from his experience in Hyderabad, he provided an example involving a Telugu YouTuber who releases an astonishing 60 videos daily, each averaging three minutes in duration. In these videos, the YouTuber reads and comments on messages from WhatsApp groups, often containing misinformation and fake news. Rakesh posed a critical question: under the existing election commission rules, how should this YouTuber be categorized, and should his ad expenditure be attributed to a candidate or political party? He pointed out the inherent challenges in the current structure, such as the absence of clear definitions for key elements like "who," "where," "when," and "how," particularly significant in the context of digital media's borderless nature.

Mr Rakesh delved into the issue of ad tracking on Facebook in India, particularly focusing on the "political ads" category. In the past seven days, around 3,300 advertisers spent approximately Rs 90 lakhs on over 14,000 ads. Notably, this analysis occurred during a relatively quiet period in terms of elections.

Rakesh raised a critical concern: when India faces significant elections, such as those in five states in 2024 or the Lok Sabha elections, the volume and complexity of ads will skyrocket. He pointed out that during such periods, the Election Commission of India (ECI) sets up Media Certification and Monitoring Committees (MCMCs) at the district and state levels. However, these committees consist of only four to six members each and are operational only during elections, which makes it virtually impossible for them to effectively certify and monitor the massive influx of ads.

This leads to a glaring issue: the current infrastructure is woefully inadequate to combat the challenges of tracking political ad expenditures and ensuring transparency in the digital sphere during elections.

Mr Rakesh highlighted the voluntary compliance of social media and tech companies during the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections. He questioned the accuracy of reported instances of misinformation, which stood at 154, suggesting that this number likely didn't capture the full extent of the issue. Additionally, he mentioned that around 900 pieces of content were requested to be removed, mainly related to campaigning during the silence period. This, coupled with the previous discussion on the inadequacy of the current system, emphasized the need for more effective measures to combat the impact of fake news and misinformation during Indian elections.

Mr Rakesh provided a non-political example of how misinformation can impact the election process itself. He recounted an incident during the 2019 elections where a board member of Apollo Hospitals (A billion-dollar company) in Hyderabad couldn't find her name on the voter list. In frustration, she began arguing with polling staff and even cited a viral WhatsApp message related to the "Tender vote challenge vote." This incident illustrated how misinformation affects individuals across different classes and backgrounds.

Rakesh acknowledged that there might not be a single solution to all the issues discussed in the session. However, he emphasized the importance of addressing the expenditure front. He suggested that tracking who is spending during elections, as per the election commission's guidelines on candidate and party expenditures, is a critical step in addressing the problem.

Mr Rakesh proposed clear and mandatory guidelines to address the issues discussed, particularly focusing on tracking digital political ad spending. He suggested that registration of individuals, entities, or organizations wishing to run political ads should be mandated by the Election Commission of India (ECI) at least six months in advance of any election. This registration process would require them to declare their allegiance, specifying whether they were promoting a specific candidate or party and disclosing the relevant expenditure.

Rakesh argued that transparency at the platform level, coupled with ECI oversight, is crucial for tracking expenditure effectively. He highlighted the challenge of monitoring the increasing number of advertisers, particularly during election periods, which may reach tens of thousands. To address this, he proposed that all digital political ads, especially those promoting specific parties, must go through the ECI's scrutiny.

While acknowledging that stringent measures may pose challenges for independent candidates, Rakesh emphasized that prioritizing transparency in digital spending could be a crucial starting point to combat misinformation and ensure fair elections.



Mr Pulkit Sharma (Political Strategist and Digital Media Specialist)

Mr Pulkit Sharma began his remarks by expressing his gratitude to ADR for providing a platform where experts from various backgrounds could share their insights and ideas. He proceeded to share examples from his experience in political campaigning, particularly focusing on the digital advertising space.

He highlighted the simplicity of running digital ad campaigns during elections, mentioning that it has become so accessible that one can start and manage them from a mobile phone, connected to a Paytm account. This ease of access allows for the rapid creation and distribution of ads, making it challenging to track and monitor their content, expenditures, and appropriateness for online sharing.

Mr Pulkit emphasized the need for a more sophisticated mechanism to handle the evolving landscape of social media, where new features, platforms, and audience targeting methods continuously emerge.

Mr Pulkit Sharma highlighted the disconnect between the rapidly evolving landscape of digital advertising and the lack of corresponding advancements in mechanisms for tracking and monitoring these activities. He pointed out that while new features, platforms, and audience targeting methods emerge every month, the means to oversee and regulate these developments have not kept pace. He provided an example related to the Election Commission's approval process during the model code of conduct. Political parties seeking approval for their ads must undergo a rigorous procedure, which includes submitting physical pen drives with content and transcripts of the ad pieces. However, this process can take up to a week for approval, which is not practical for political parties aiming to run timely campaigns.

Pulkit emphasized that the content submitted for approval represents only a small fraction (less than five percent) of the actual ads run by political parties. The majority of these ads are

disseminated through unofficial channels, making it challenging to monitor and regulate their content. This mismatch between the approval process and the reality of digital campaigning poses a significant challenge.

Mr Pulkit Sharma discussed the challenges associated with the rapidly evolving landscape of digital campaigning. He emphasized that the mechanisms to track and regulate digital advertising have not evolved at the same pace as the technologies used for campaigning.

He highlighted the issue of untraceable propaganda pages and misinformation campaigns, particularly those disseminated through unofficial channels during elections. These challenges pose a significant threat to social harmony during election periods.

Mr Sharma provided examples of deep fake technology, where videos and audio recordings can be manipulated to create convincing but false content like in a video featuring Manoj Tiwari, he appeared to speak in six different languages, even though he doesn't know those languages. Additionally, there was a campaign where BJP leaders sent tailored videos to a vast database of voters, using their specific names, despite the fact that Manoj Tiwari wasn't actually speaking those languages – it was all created using deep fake technology. This highlights the potential dangers of such technologies, as they can be used to create misleading content, manipulate opponents, and spread misinformation. He further emphasized how crucial it is to recognize that these challenges are rapidly evolving, and we need to keep pace. Collaboration between institutions, organizations like ADR, Boom, and FactCheckers, and platforms where these ads are run is essential to effectively monitor and regulate digital campaigns and online content.

He also raised concerns about the growing political consultancy business, which makes it difficult to trace the source of digital campaign spending. Mr Sharma agreed with the suggestion to start monitoring campaign activities well in advance of elections to address these issues effectively.

Finally, he stressed the need for institutions to work more closely with online platforms to integrate mechanisms for monitoring digital campaigns and ads. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges promptly.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/45Tu0CM>

Concluding Session (with institutional stakeholders)

Chairperson: Prof Trilochan Sastry



(From Left to Right) Manoj Dhyani (ADR's State Coordinator –Uttarakhand), Sanjay Singh (ADR's State Coordinator – Uttar Pradesh), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee, ADR/NEW), Rolly Shivhare (ADR's State Coordinator – Madhya Pradesh), Mr Babloo Loitongbam (ADR's State Coordinator- Manipur)



Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee, ADR)

Prof Sastry requested the panelists to initiate the session.



Mr Babloo Loitongbam (ADR's State Coordinator- Manipur)

Mr Babloo expressed his deep appreciation for ADR and its commitment to safeguarding democracy. He highlighted his first physical encounter with ADR, having previously participated in online meetings. Drawing parallels with the current situation in Myanmar, where elected representatives faced challenges, he underscored the value of citizens uniting to protect democracy.

Mr Babloo shared his interactions with MPs and MLAs from Myanmar who sought refuge in India's border states like Manipur and Mizoram due to political turmoil in their homeland. He emphasized the need for a robust refugee policy in India. Despite acknowledging the challenges faced by Indian democracy, he found hope in the passion and ownership displayed by its citizens.

As a border state, Manipur is already experiencing the repercussions of the situation in Myanmar, making it imperative for the rest of India to rally behind the democratic spirit. Mr Babloo also touched upon unique issues faced by the Northeast, particularly regarding local self-government institutions. These institutions differ significantly from traditional Panchayati Raj structures, with the Northeast featuring distinct mechanisms such as the Sixth Schedule and alternative forms of decentralization.

Mr Babloo pointed out several unique aspects of the Northeast's electoral dynamics during the discussion. He mentioned that, despite being considered remote areas with lower corruption levels, the per capita election spending in states like Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh was among the highest. Mr Nitin Sethi had highlighted this issue, calling for closer examination.

Furthermore, Mr Babloo focused on three distinctive features of Northeastern politics. First, he highlighted the presence of numerous ethnic nationalist movements and aspirations in the region. Unlike the rest of the country, which has largely addressed caste dynamics, the Northeast still grapples with ethnic rivalries and conflicts. He emphasized the need for a more comprehensive approach, as the constitution only recognizes religious and linguistic minorities, omitting ethnic and national minorities. This gap in the constitution fails to address the reality of ethnic and national minority politics in the Northeast, which remains absent from the policy discourse of the country.

In the context of Manipur's current situation, Mr Babloo highlighted the complexity of the conflict between various groups, such as the Kukis and the Meiteis, in the state. He emphasized that this conflict should not be simplified into a Hindu-Christian dynamic, as the actual dynamics are quite

distinct. Unfortunately, this nuanced perspective has not been adequately represented in the country's policy discourse, leading to misunderstandings.

Mr Babloo also discussed the presence of numerous armed groups in the region, which has evolved beyond the Naga insurgency that began in the 1950s. These armed groups do not necessarily engage in direct conflict with the state. Some of them receive a stipend of Rs 6,000 per month from the Union Home Ministry and operate under suspension of operation arrangements with designated camps. This creates a complex interplay among these groups.

Mr Babloo mentioned the Central Govt.'s negotiations with certain armed groups in Manipur in 2022, where promises were made regarding support for the ruling party during and after the elections. However, some of these groups have now claimed that these promises were not fulfilled. The dynamics of these armed groups play a crucial role in Manipur's hill districts, where elections can be more accurately described as selections due to the influence of these powerful armed groups and their associated dictators, making it challenging for returning officers to uphold fairness and impartiality.

Mr Babloo addressed several significant issues in Northeast politics. Firstly, he highlighted that the ruling party's MLAs often align themselves with certain agendas, which can overshadow other important concerns. Secondly, he emphasized the pervasive issue of black money in politics, citing the substantial turnover in the narcotics trade in Manipur, which surpasses the state's budget. This economic context is crucial for understanding elections and ethnic conflicts in the region.

Mr Babloo expressed the importance of regional consultations in the Northeast, considering its unique dynamics and forces. He stressed that Northeastern democracy should be customized to fit the specific context, rekindling the spirit of democracy from the grassroots. He noted the presence of a strong aspirational spirit for democracy in the region and welcomed the idea of bringing the ADR spirit to the Northeast at the earliest opportunity.



Ms Rolly Shivhare (ADR's State Coordinator – Madhya Pradesh)

Ms Shivhare began by highlighting the significant changes observed during the last elections, which encompassed both the Lok Sabha and Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly elections, spanning the past five years. She pointed out that the electoral landscape, traditionally dominated by issues related to criminality, financial resources, and physical influence, had witnessed a notable shift. While hate speech was a topic of discussion in the previous election, it has become even more apparent that addressing this issue needed heightened attention in the current election cycle.

The speaker emphasized that in context of this year's elections, ADR associates from all states need to think differently. Until now, electoral roll issues had not received extensive attention. During interim elections, the sudden disappearance of voter IDs from the voter lists raised concerns. For instance, if one family member lived in a particular ward, the polling booth for another family member might be shifted to a different location, leading to voter displacement. The speaker noted that such inconsistencies were observed in the last election. Additionally, a focus was needed on voters from minority communities whose names had been deleted from the voter lists. Strategies were required to include new voters and reinstate those who were wrongfully removed.

The speaker emphasized the importance of working on the Electoral Watch, particularly focusing on monitoring the electoral roll. She then highlighted the significant presence of young voters in recent elections, addressing issues related to young voters who often migrate for education and may not return home to vote. While acknowledging that ADR approaches the topic of young voters neutrally, the current political environment often sees young people associated with specific ideologies, making it challenging to discuss issues related to them. Addressing women voters and maintaining gender parity in voter turnout required specific strategies.

The speaker also mentioned the importance of conducting research related to the elections, such as tracking fast-track court cases and monitoring the filing of RTIs regarding such cases. She highlighted the value of having data readily available for use during election campaigns and media interactions, as specific information and details often shape the narrative.

In conclusion, the speaker suggested forming committees at the local level to monitor hate speech-related issues throughout the election process, involving state coordinators and experienced

individuals, including journalists. This would enhance ADR's ability to address these critical concerns effectively.

The need for a committee to monitor hate speech and related issues during the elections was proposed. This committee would comprise senior individuals and journalists at the local level and would work in coordination with State Coordinators.

Additionally, the importance of broadening the campaign narrative beyond just focusing on money and muscle power was highlighted. It was suggested that voters should be made aware of how political parties acquired funds and engaged in power politics. There was a need to conduct research related to campaign strategies and how to effectively use data for media interactions during the elections. These measures aimed to enhance the transparency and integrity of the electoral process.



Mr Sanjay Singh (ADR's State Coordinator – Uttar Pradesh)

Mr Sanjay Singh looking back at the past, recalled an important conference organized by ADR in which he had articulated the primary objective of the conference, which was to deliberate on strategies for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. These discussions coincided with the preparations of various political parties, adding a sense of urgency to the deliberations.

The agenda for the conference had encompassed a variety of topics, including the targeting of specific demographic groups, such as migrant labor communities, to ensure their rightful participation in the democratic process. Equally important was the exploration of innovative ways to boost youth engagement in electoral affairs.

A recurring theme that emerged was a collective concern for the waning involvement of youth in matters of paramount importance. Past presentations and discussions had shed light on this distressing trend, prompting the exploration of potential solutions. Women voters had been identified as a specific target group deserving of attention, with deliberations centering around strategies to enhance their participation and representation within the political sphere. The agenda had also delved into the intriguing topic of NOTA (None of the Above) and grappled with the issue of instilling confidence and alleviating the atmosphere of fear among voters.

The solutions discussed in these forums had laid the foundation for a roadmap for the future, where technology would undoubtedly play a pivotal role in reshaping the electoral landscape.

In past endeavors, the speaker emphasized the paramount importance of research and advocacy efforts. The significance of reports and publications in building voter awareness had been acknowledged. It had been a shared belief that continuous awareness campaigns, extending beyond election cycles, were essential. These efforts had included constructive dialogues with political parties, regional consultations, and addressing the ongoing challenge of promoting ethical voting.

The conferences of yesteryears had also provided a platform to deliberate on critical issues demanding attention. Over the course of three days, participants of the National conference had immersed themselves in discussions surrounding the menace of hate speech and strategies to effectively counter it within the framework of ADR. Resource mobilization had emerged as a pressing concern, particularly the challenge of local fundraising within a large organization like ADR.

The collective resolve of participants had been channeled towards fostering a public movement that transcended political affiliations. Contributions from diverse sources had been encouraged, recognizing the imperative of efficient resource management, particularly in the context of sustained campaigns spanning five years in Uttar Pradesh.

Despite these formidable challenges, what had stood out was the remarkable energy and unwavering support demonstrated by participants over those two transformative days. Their resolute commitment to increasing youth participation and surmounting hurdles had been evident, and the speaker remained optimistic that, with their continued support, the obstacles that lay ahead could be overcome.

In conclusion, Mr Singh expressed heartfelt gratitude for the collective efforts that had shaped the journey thus far. Together, he looked forward to forging a brighter, more inclusive future for democracy.



Mr Manoj Dhyani (ADR's State Coordinator –Uttarakhand)

Mr Manoj began by highlighting the significance of the ADR organization serving as an exemplary entity for the entire nation and other democratic units. The speaker quoted a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, which emphasized that whatever actions noble individuals established as an example, the rest of society tended to follow. He emphasized the need to set high standards and values in today's society, especially in parliamentary and legislative assemblies.

The speaker commented on the composition of parliamentary and legislative assemblies, where a significant portion of legislators have criminal backgrounds, are rich, may have engaged in hate speech, or contributed to social divisions. This raised concerns and posed significant challenges to the democratic system. The speaker underscored the importance of addressing these challenges and transforming the existing system to better represent the diverse and conscious population of the country, which had embraced a democratic system.

The concept of "as the people choose, so are the rulers" had evolved. Now, it was more about "as the rulers are, so are the people." However, if the people elected wrongdoers, if they chose the wealthy, if they didn't provide representation to women, if they didn't give a voice to the marginalized, then the legislatures and the parliament they envisioned as generators of excellent laws would not materialize.

From this perspective, he believed that the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and its state coordinators, given the resources, had the power to bring about change. They were evidence of a vibrant and functional democracy. For this he extended congratulations to the founders of the organization as he considered it a significant milestone in India's history.

Mr Dhyani stated that in the past two days, the participants had discussed various important topics, received guidance on the need to work on electoral roll purification and actively address the problem of hate speeches, both in the public domain and with the government and apps like cVIGIL, which empower observers to report actionable information. Involving the youth in these efforts is crucial. Citing the example of Uttarakhand, he mentioned the successful collaboration with youth which resulted in over 100 individuals involved in criminal activities and corruption being sent to jail.

Visits to factories and interactions with workers revealed their dedication to increasing their income, even beyond their standard shifts. It was noted that finding ways to engage with various sections of society, including slum dwellers, ragpickers, and individuals without access to digital resources, is essential.

Mr Dhyani recalled the Election watch campaign conducted in Uttarakhand where extensive journeys covered huge distances. He believed that such journeys should be undertaken within each state to engage in dialogue with the common voters. In Uttarakhand, they had formed small WhatsApp groups of 50-200 members in small villages and towns, allowing them to interact with the youth. This approach proved effective in bringing about change.

While ADR has been doing remarkable work, he emphasized the need for their initiatives to reach the grassroots level for maximum impact. He highlighted the importance of gate meetings in front of factories and advocated engaging with employees during their break times. Gate meetings also played a crucial role in universities and colleges, where they actively engaged with the youth, encouraging their participation. Placard writing was considered crucial, with a special emphasis on children writing, "Your vote is my future." Street plays and physical outreach through journeys and gate meetings were deemed essential for spreading awareness, especially in Uttarakhand's diverse constituencies.

Lastly, the importance of standing up for truth and justice, as exemplified in Lord Krishna's teachings to Arjuna, was emphasized. It was reiterated that silence in the face of injustice, like those who witnessed Draupadi's disrobing, should be avoided, and active participation in promoting democracy and upholding ethical principles should be our guiding path.

Full video link: <https://bit.ly/47gqUcS>

All the videos can be found here: <https://bit.ly/44VnafS>.

National Election Watch

Strategy Workshop – National Election Watch Partners’ Meeting

Date & Time: 14th July 2023, 14:30 onwards

Venue: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune (846, BMCC Road, Fergusson College Campus, Deccan Gymkhana, Pune, Maharashtra-411004)

Agenda

Location: Classroom S3

Time	Session
14:30 – 14:45	Welcome address and Background to the meeting Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)/National Election Watch (NEW))
14:45 – 15:00	General Instructions
15:00 – 15:45	Strategy Building – Preparation for Lok Sabha Elections, 2024 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 (<i>including generating them locally</i>) <i>Group I (Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur, West Bengal)</i> <i>Group II (Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh)</i> <i>Group III (J&K, Punjab/Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand)</i> <i>Group IV (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan)</i> <i>Group V (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu/Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh/Telangana, Goa)</i>
15:45 – 16:00	Tea Break
16:00 – 18:00	Presentation by all groups Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd)
18:00 – 18:10	Future Plans and Way Forward Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee-ADR/NEW)
20:00	Dinner

Welcome address and Background to the meeting

Chairperson- Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head of ADR)

Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head, ADR)

Maj Gen Verma welcomed all the State Coordinators who were present for the partners meeting on the first day of the National conference. At the outset he thanked Dr. Ajit Ranade for offering the premises of Gokhale Institute and providing logistics and support staff for the National conference.

He mentioned that despite the paucity of resources, various state partners had carried out limited election watch activities where elections were held. Innovative methods were used by partners. He gave the example of Himachal Pradesh where state assembly elections were held few months back. Dr. OP Bhuraita in consultation with the CEO Himachal Pradesh, conducted a vibrant EW campaign in the Shimla region by engaging the youth from the local colleges in door to door campaign to increase the voting percentage in traditional low voting percentage areas.

Gen Verma briefly covered the state of politics in the country citing examples of split of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the continuing violent strife in Manipur. He lamented the fact that there's a total lack of will on the part of political parties for any electoral and political reforms and emphasized the important role of civil society in this regard.

Coming to the day's agenda he said the discussion would be focused on the EW activities we need to do in 5 state assembly elections in November/December and the upcoming general elections in April 2024.

Thereafter the state partners were divided into 5 groups and asked to give their respective strategies after an hour or so.

Presentation by Groups

Group I (Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur, West Bengal)



The team members from Group 1 represented by Ms Ujjaini Halim and Mr T. Ariful Hussain mainly discussed about the steps taken in the previous elections and challenges faced by them. Based on the previous experiences, Group 1 planned to take some steps to meet the challenges in the previous elections.

Group 1 planned some broad activities for General Elections, 2024 which included targeting focus groups;

1. **Panchayat elections** at the grass root level targeting villages, communities etc
2. **Youth** should be the main focus and various youth centric activities should be created by targeting students from schools and colleges etc. Group 1 has already worked and taken lot of initiatives focused towards youth and they have decided to take it forward for General Elections, 2024.
3. **Different cultural and human rights groups** should be targeted who can take the key messages on electoral reforms, transparency and accountability etc. to the larger communities.

As part of communication strategy, Group 1 proposed some steps to be taken;

1. Group 1 felt the need to engage more with ***media in terms of debates and dialogues with different political parties, politicians and various other stakeholders etc.***
2. Opening avenues for ***regular dialogues, debates and engagement with Election Commission of India, State Election Commissions.***
3. Another part of communication strategy would be ***using technologies such as social media, podcast, YouTube with catchy content.*** Ms. Halim cited examples of video campaigns songs made by Manipur and West Bengal as part of their campaign strategy.

Group 1 also felt that the enthusiasm amongst volunteers is usually high before and during the election time but we need to figure out ways to keep this energy maintained throughout the year. Creating various activities to keep them engaged is one of the solutions which can make state chapters and activities conducted by them more sustainable, strong and successful. Group 1 also suggested capacity building training for the volunteers. Ms. Halim stated that visibility of the chapters at the state/regional level should be strong. She also suggested the need to increase our members and volunteers. On behalf of Group 1 she also suggested organizing small regional meets and debates to discuss various issues around electoral politics amongst sub-groups formed during the partners meeting.

Group 1 also strongly felt the need ***to create awareness on NOTA especially in situations where NOTA receives maximum numbers of votes.*** She informed the members present during the partners meeting that political parties have built up a counter campaign against NOTA by stating that it's a wastage of a citizen's vote. Ms. Halim therefore, proposed that ADR should carry elaborate in-depth research on the importance of NOTA in electoral democracy. Keeping Lok Sabha, 2024 in mind, Group 1 ***supported and planned to continue translate in local languages various reports created by ADR for better awareness and dissemination.*** Ms Ujjaini Halim also informed the member groups that ***West Bengal chapter wants to do a detailed 'Political Parties Election Manifesto' analysis at the state level before the Lok Sabha, 2024. West Bengal chapter also wants to develop a 'People's Manifesto' based on citizens' priority issues since Political Parties' Election Manifestos do not necessarily carry citizens' priority issues.***

In terms of resources Ms. Halim stated that all the state partners are bringing in lots of resources in terms of volunteers, devoting time and working from their respective office space which is a positive step but she felt the ***need to create an institutional fund raising*** and therefore a capacity building

training amongst state partners and volunteers should be organized for such fund raising. Based on unique experiences and approach of each state chapter in dealing with various issues relating to electoral reforms, Group 1 also suggested ***cross learning between state chapters*** by creating space inside ADR at national/regional level to learn from each partner on a regular basis.

In terms of accumulating the resources, Mr T. Ariful Hussain on behalf of Group 1 added that partners should try to ***merge and bring in the core issues of electoral, political and related voter awareness into their respective independent activities*** that are typically conducted by them in different villages/places as part of their individual programs.

Mr Hussain also informed the partners about ***the unique local governance institution i.e Autonomous Councils in Northeast States under the 6th Schedule, Article 244 of the Indian Constitution***. He stated that these institutions have a different working principle, voters list and therefore the strength and weaknesses of these states would be different. He also informed the members that some of the Autonomous Councils are also under different State Acts e.g. *Mising Autonomous Council, Gorkha Autonomous council*. He suggested that since these institutions which are neither under the Panchayati Raj nor under the 6th Schedule, need to be the focus while carrying out various initiatives. Mr Arif concluded Group 1 suggestions by proposing judicial activities at the local level to deal with the local level issues which at present remain unaddressed.

Group II (Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh)



1. The target groups identified by Group II included migrant voters (a common problem across all selected states), women, youth, farmers, tribal communities and minorities (UP especially).
2. The locations were also identified constituency-wise where the aforesaid target groups exist and need to be paid attention to. The group also discussed the locations where electoral violence had taken place and it is important to consider them.
3. One of the strategies discussed by the group included robust use of social media, it was reiterated that the young voters between the age group of 18-35 years must be targeted through social media. The group stated that the voting percentage among youth seems to be reducing so we must devise strategies to target youth. For this, it is crucial to identify the social media platforms that can be targeted for reaching out to such voters. Social slogans, songs, street plays must be promoted for voter education.
4. Other strategies suggested by the group included interaction with stakeholders especially the Election Commission of India, community leaders such as sarpanches etc. Fostering collaborations and meetings with them will help in achieving the desired objectives.
5. Under research and advocacy, there is a need to study electoral violence and its impact, how it can be addressed; more research on new voters, youth participation, voting patterns, voting behaviour must be paid attention to. Engagement with political parties is decreasing and we must find ways

to engage with them. In networking and alliances, it is important to collaborate with like-minded civil society organisations. Issue-based networking needs to be promoted.

6. The group raised the concern that election expenditure reports are not properly streamlined and fielded by observers and hence, the group also looked at ways and means to track expenditure during elections.
7. It further mentioned that in the last few years, there has been more focus on increasing voter turnout rather than activities under SVEEP, awareness and voter education are not as enthusiastically pursued by the Election Commission. The group discussed the ways to change this. They added that along with voters, other target groups such as political parties are also important. There should be a continuous dialogue and acting as a pressure group is important.
8. The group concluded by saying that the challenge is not to make voters aware but how educated voters are motivated to cast their votes independently and ethically. Using various technologies like community radio to reach a larger audience, and creating good social messages to attract youth and women is important. We must also focus on NOTA.

Group III (Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab/Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand)



Group III started by identifying the problems which are listed below:

1. Money & Muscle Power: This age-old issue still persists.
2. Polarization power: It is operational at a larger scale.
3. Voter Awareness Activities: If early elections are declared, ADR will have less time to work on voter awareness activities.
4. Enforcement Directorate and other agencies' power.
5. Narrative Building: It has been going on for years, however it is now done at a larger scale and is being built by media houses to be encashed ahead of elections. These narratives are being built by WhatsApp which is the most prominent social media platform used by the IT cells of political parties.
6. Freebies: Whichever political party is in power, it is designing new ways of extending freebies to the voters.

The group made some suggestions for the state election watch campaigns:

1. During election rallies, traffic rules such as wearing helmets are not followed. We should make sure that these rules are implemented properly during election rallies so that the atmosphere is not ruined.

2. Political parties break the rules blatantly by placing promotional posters everywhere and the breaking of rules is normalised.
3. ECI's cVIGIL app should be used frequently for raising complaints. Since complaints are often not addressed, we can request ECI to share these complaints not only with the local officers but also with the observers.
4. On the issue of encouraging voters who are raising quality complaints it was suggested to check with those voters if they were interested in being honored by the ECI via a certificate, and if they are then the ECI should provide a good citizen certificate to them.
5. The liquor shops should be closed seven days before and till three days after the elections.
6. Using media houses, narratives are being built by discussing who will win just to create an atmosphere. ECI should be reached out to stop this activity to ensure a level playing field.

Whom should ADR target for voter awareness activities?

1. Anganwadi workers are a potential target group as they work on the ground level.
2. Other scheme workers, such as ASHA workers can also be approached.
3. Farm unions are very strong, so ADR can reach out to the apolitical unions and brief them about the important elements of free and fair elections.

Group IV (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan)



Group IV initially discussed how to gather and plan resources for the target group. In different locations where we work, we can gather manpower, equipment, and mobilize people. When we go to various districts, our networks can help us arrange accommodations and meals. However, for travel and program expenses, we can only use the available ADR funds.

Secondly, besides money and muscle power, the group talked about the cVIGIL app and had a discussion on hate speech. At the national level, it seems that there should be a capacity-building exercise, similar to preparing for elections. We need to understand how to identify and address hate speech. It's also important to analyze the aspects of candidates. We should pay attention to the performance of MLAs and MPs in each state, prepare reports, and release them during campaigns to improve the situation.

There is a significant issue with the cVIGIL app as it lacks transparency and accountability. Many complaints do not receive a satisfactory response. It is essential to request the Election Commission of India (ECI) to address this issue and improve transparency and accountability. The challenges related to the NOTA option, viewing affidavits, and accessing information on cVIGIL should be addressed before the Lok Sabha elections.

Regarding the criteria for MP's performance reports, there is a need to establish a mechanism for tracking and identifying hate speech complaints effectively. Creating strong complaint procedures is essential. Making cVIGIL more accountable is crucial, and there should be a strong focus on MP's performance reports.

Regarding election expenditure monitoring, there is a need to pay attention to expenses related to star campaigners, which should be monitored as per the rules. It's essential to verify whether such expenditures are recorded in their expense reports or not. We can also mobilize people to observe and register campaign expenditures.

There are numerous booth capturing incidents, but the cVIGIL app does not seem to show any action taken on the complaints.

Observers are not reporting their findings. We need to find a way to inform people about who is right and engage in healthy discussions in each constituency. Conducting this in different blocks can be an effective way.

Ensuring the involvement of migrants in voting is essential. We must address any challenges they face and find the right system for their participation.

The C1 and C7 reports were published in English in newspapers, but they should also be available in regional language media. Some reports were not published by political parties/candidates three times as per the guidelines. During the counting of votes, discrepancies in vote counts were observed as the percentages kept changing, and when this was reported, there was no response.

Group V (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu/Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh/Telangana, Goa)



In the group 5 discussion, several strategies were proposed for targeting the new generation in the context of elections and voter awareness:

1. **Educational System:** One approach is to work through the educational system. This involves continuous voter education efforts that start well before the elections. These efforts aim to raise funds, create awareness, and make voters feel that they are part of a neutral body trying to bring sense to voters.
2. **Engaging College Teachers:** Collaborating with college teachers and associations can be effective. Engaging with educational institutions and students can help spread awareness and knowledge about the importance of voting and civic responsibility.
3. **Communication through Mouth:** While social media is important, oral communication, especially from teachers to students and students to their families, can be highly influential. Teachers can play a significant role in shaping the views and actions of the new generation.
4. **Research and Advocacy:** Research and advocacy efforts should be undertaken to address challenges such as voter deletions, misuse of resources, and hate speech during campaigns. Advocacy can lead to changes in electoral practices and policies.
5. **Social Audit of Electoral Rolls:** Conducting social audits of electoral rolls can help identify and rectify issues like mass deletions of voter names, which can disproportionately affect certain communities.
6. **Collaborative Efforts:** Collaborate with intellectuals, literary figures, and respected individuals in society to influence public opinion and shape the electoral discourse in a positive direction.

7. **Report Cards on Government Performance:** Prepare report cards on the performance of the incumbent government, highlighting achievements and shortcomings. Share this information with voters to help them make informed choices.
8. **Meet the Candidate Programs:** Organize forums where all candidates can meet with citizens, answer questions, and provide access to their affidavits. This allows voters to judge candidates based on their performance and background.
9. **Campaign against Hate Speech:** Actively campaign against hate speech and divisive rhetoric during election campaigns. Raise awareness about the negative consequences of such speech and advocate for action against offenders.

Gen Verma thanked the partners for giving out their suggestions and strategies after internal discussions within each group and invited Prof Sastry to give his concluding remarks.



Future Plans & Way Forward

Prof Trilochan Sastry (Chairman, Founder Member & Trustee, ADR)

Prof Sastry started by thanking all the state coordinators and their colleagues who had come to attend the National conference from almost all the states of India. He said that we had listened carefully to all the wonderful suggestions and solutions recommended by them. It also reflected their commitment and hard work because of which we have reached where we are now.

He stressed that all the points given by the partners were excellent and equally important but he would focus only on some important action points.

The first one was about voter rolls. He said that during the last Karnataka assembly elections, after an analysis they found that for India around 66.5 percent citizens were on the voters list. Talking about the state of UP, he said that there were 38 constituencies where the percentage of voters on the voters list was less than 60 percent. He suggested that all the states should make an effort to increase the numbers of voters on the voters list in their respective states.

The second point he raised was regarding the Observers reports of the ECI during the election period. He mentioned that initially ADR tried getting the observer reports but the ECI refused stating that those reports cannot be shared in the public domain. Whether the ECI observers are mentioning malpractices like distribution of cash, liquor or other freebies by politicians in the observer reports is not known. He suggested that we form 3-4 teams of volunteers in the states to monitor fake news/ hate speech on social media or in rallies. For intercommunication, WhatsApp groups can be formed. All volunteers should read the RPA 1951 so that they are aware of the various offences listed therein.

The third point he raised was regarding the large numbers of domestic migrants who were left out of voting as they do not have the resources to go to their hometown just to vote. We should apprise the ECI regarding this problem too.

In conclusion he said that ADR has been working for over 20 years now, we don't get disheartened by failure and also not satisfied with success. We have to think how we can use the 2024 general elections to bring about a long term change. Specifically addressing the youth present in the audience he exhorted them to pick one constituency and form a group to report Electoral malpractices during elections on cVIGIL app of ECI.

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