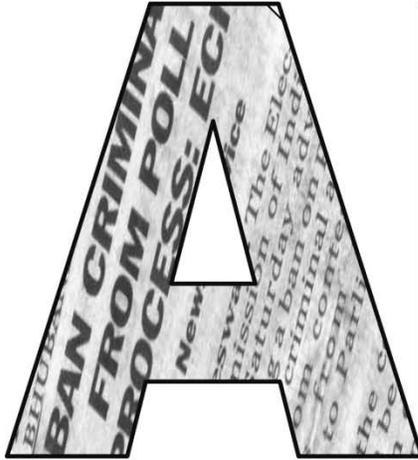


Proceedings of the 8th National Conference
On
Electoral & Political Reforms

5th & 6th May 2012
Bhubaneswar, Odisha



THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS
BHUBANESWAR 6 MAY 2012

BAN CRIMINALS FROM POLL PROCESS: ECI

Express News Service

Bhubaneswar: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Saturday advocated putting a ban on persons having criminal antecedents from contesting elections from gram panchayat to Parliament level.

"Most of the country's problems can be solved if we succeed in debarring criminals from election process," Election Commissioner H S Brahma said at the 8th Annual National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms here. He said persons facing charges like murder, rape, loot and extortion have been made MLAs and MPs. The Government should take a decision in this regard in order to save democracy. "Once we decide to debar persons with criminal background from election process, ways will come out how to implement it," he said.



politicalbusinessdaily
www.pbd.in
Cuttack, Monday, May 7, 2012

'End of black money can bring political reform'

PBD BUREAU
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 6

STATING that Odisha is not far behind other states in terms of black money, Union Minister for Chemical and Fertiliser Srikant Jena today said political reform will be possible only if generation and circulation of black money can be stopped.

Speaking at a seminar on political reforms organised by National Election Watch here today, Jena said the mine owners are getting around Rs 4,000 black money from every tone of iron ore in the state and giving a part of it to the political parties.

Formulation of a law cannot bring political reforms, he said adding that it is the political parties which have to take steps on the issue.

On the Election Commission's proposal to bring the accounts of political parties in the ambit of

audit, he said the way political parties or candidates are spending money in the election process, no mechanism can trace the money.

The Union Minister lamented that the Assembly and Parliament, which formulate policies for the people, are not debating the core issues.

Stating that the people are not influenced by political parties during the election, Jena said it is the leadership of parties which motivate them.

Lashing out at dynastic politics, he said unless the feudalistic practice is brought to an end, there will be no democracy.

Speaking on the women reservation in Parliament, Revenue Minister of Uttar Pradesh Ambika Choudhry said the backward class people should be included in the 33 per cent reservation for women. "We support the women reservation bill, but there should be reservation for OBC, SC and ST in the Bill.



ORISSA AGE
Odisha's Own English Daily
SUNDAY 06 MAY, 2012

Debar criminals contesting polls: Election Commissioner

Bhubaneswar: Election Commission on Saturday advocated putting a ban on the persons having criminal background to contest elections beginning from gram panchayat to Parliament level. "Most of the country's problems can be solved if we succeed in debarring criminals from election process," Election Commissioner HS Brahma said at the 8th annual national conference on electoral and political reforms here. He said persons facing

SUNDAY TIMES OF INDIA, BHUBANESWAR
MAY 6, 2012

Criminals should be banned from contesting polls: EC

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: India should debar criminals from contesting elections, election commissioner Hari Shankar Brahma said here on Saturday.

Articulating a strong stand against outlaws entering electoral politics, Brahma said, "It is a disgrace that men involved in rape and murder are making law. The day we debar criminals from getting elected, most of the problems in the country will be solved." The EC was speaking at the 8th national conference on electoral reforms, organized by National Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms.

Putting forth the arguments further against criminal politi-

ians, Brahma said around 20 lakh undertrials in the country are languishing in jails without even charges being framed against them. All the democratic rights have been taken away from them. On the contrary, men with heinous criminal charges are allowed to fight elections.

Another big problem for the country's democracy Brahma said, is stupendous flow of black money in the country.

Brahma highlighted paid news as a serious area of concern as well. "Not reporting correct picture of what is happening on the ground may sabotage democracy. Media can manipulate the entire country," the EC told the gathering, comprising mostly civil society members.

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Poll reforms meet calls for greater accountability from political parties

The eighth national conference on electoral and political reforms, which ended in Bhubaneswar on Sunday, has recommended political parties should be declared as public authorities so that their functioning could be transparent and made more accountable. The conference, which was attended by election commissioner HS Brahma, BJP spokesperson Nirmala Sitharaman and CPI leader AB Bardhan, among others, also recommended the accounts of the political parties should be audited by CAG appointed auditors, a statement by National Election Watch (NEW) and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BHUBANESWAR MONDAY, MAY 7, 2012

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NEW & ADR release report on election expenses in 5 states

Bhubaneswar: Samajwadi Party candidate Narad from Ballia Nagar assembly constituency and Surajpal Singh of BSP from Fatepur Sikri in Uttar Pradesh won the recent elections by spending only two per cent of the poll expense limit of Rs 16 lakh.

This was claimed by National Election Watch (NEW) and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) which released a report here today on the analysis of election expenses of newly elected MLAs of Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand-2012.

Among all the newly elected MLAs from the five states, Narad of SP from Ballia Nagar in Uttar Pradesh has shown minimum expenses of only Rs 24,344 or 2 per cent of the expense limit of Rs 16 lakh, said Anil Bairwal, national coordinator of NEW and ADR. Narad was followed by BSP's Surajpal Singh from Fatepur Sikri with expense of only Rs 36,470 or 2.27 per cent of the expense limit of Rs 16 lakh.

MLAs declared their average election expense to be very low. While the amount was Rs 6.68 lakh in UP, it was Rs 6.77 lakh in Punjab followed by Uttarakhand Rs 6.49 lakh, said Anil Bairwal.

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The report said 20 of the 447 MLAs analysed declared they did not spend any money on public meetings and processions though their both parties and the candidates themselves claimed huge crowds at their rallies, it said.

While most vehicles were rented during elections and candidates travelled in large cavalcades, only 9 out of 447 MLAs of the five states declared they did not spend any money on vehicles, the report said. "Six out of 447 MLAs declared they have not spent any money on any kind of campaign material," the report said.

NEW and ADR released the report a day before the 8th National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms to begin here from today (Saturday).

Debar criminals from fighting polls: EC

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"Most of the country's problems can be solved if we succeed in debarring criminals from election process," Brahma said at the Eighth Annual National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms here. Asserting that people with criminal antecedents should be formulated to prevent entry of people with criminal antecedents into the political spectrum.

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Poll reforms conference begins on Saturday

Bhubaneswar: At least 400 delegates from different walks of life are expected to attend a two-day national conference on electoral and political reforms beginning in state capital on Saturday, organisers said.

"This year's conference is important because it will focus on political parties' reforms," Anil Bairwal, national coordinator of non-political groups National Election Watch (NEW) and Association for Democratic Reforms, told reporters here Friday.

The demands of the citizens for clean candidates and free

Representatives of all political parties would participate in discussions on "Political Parties (Registration and Regulation of Affairs) Act, 2011", he said.

Media personalities, judges and bureaucrats, police officers and political analysts would join discussions on issues like role of media, money power, role of youths and participation of women in elections.

Local representatives of parties were also expected to participate in the conference, said H.S. Brahma.

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The Common Times

Bhubaneswar, Saturday, 5 May 2012

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Local representatives of parties were also expected to participate in the conference, said Ranjan Mohanty, state coordinator of the NEW.

National Election Watch demands EC to investigate poll expenses

Bhubaneswar: A body formed to monitor the expenditure of political parties in the forthcoming 2013 Lok Sabha elections has demanded that the Election Commission (EC) should investigate the expenditure of political parties in the forthcoming 2013 Lok Sabha elections.

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The Statesman

BHUBANESWAR, SATURDAY 5 MAY

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Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Mr. Rajan Mohanty and Mrs. Anuradha Mohanty for making the 8th National Conference on Electoral and Political Reform successful held in Hotel New Marrion at Bhubaneswar on 5th an 6th May 2012. We would also wish to thank all the speakers and participants who contributed to make the conference a success. We would like to show our gratitude towards the team of People's Cultural Centre whose sincere efforts contributed to the program. Our special thanks to media whose enthusiasm to cover the programme enabled us to create awareness among the citizens.

We are grateful to Mr. H. S. Brahma, Election Commissioner for sharing his valued ideas and aspirations with us, which inspired us all. We are also grateful to Mr P. K. Das, D.G. (Exp), ECI, for the informative and thought provoking presentation and ideas on efforts to curb money power in elections. We would like to thank representatives from various political parties namely, Mr Srikant Jena, Union Minister Statistics and Programme Implementation, Chemical and Fertilizers from INC, Mr. Ambika Chaudhary, Minister of Revenue, Relief and Rehabilitation, Uttar Pradesh from SP, Mr. Panchanand Kanungo, Former Finance Minister, Odisha, Mr. A. B. Bardhan (Secretary CPI National Council), Ms Nirmala Sitharaman (National Spokesperson BJP), Mr. Baishanab Ch. Parida (MP, BJD) and Mr. Dushyant Das, CPI(M), Odisha for their views on political parties reforms. We would also like to thank all the other dignitaries, whose participation made the event more constructive.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude towards our partners from across the country. Their experiences and opinions inspired us to carry on with the initiative. Finally, we would like to thank the management of Hotel New Marrion without whose tireless assistance this conference would never have materialized.

Association for Democratic Reforms/ NEW

Summary

Eighth National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms

5th and 6th May 2012

Bhubaneshwar, Odisha

The purpose of organizing the National Conference is to bring together all stakeholders in the process towards political and electoral reform. These include Election Watch groups from across the country, the Election Commission of India, the media, various political parties and other institutions and eminent personalities. It is a platform to discuss pertinent issues that our democracy is faced with, celebrate efforts towards viable solutions and strengthen existing initiatives towards reform.

In the past National Conferences have been held in Ahmedabad (2003), Bangalore (2004), Patna (2006), Lucknow (2007), Mumbai (2008), Bhopal (2010) and Chennai (2011). The 8th National Conference was inaugurated by the Election Commissioner Shri H.S.Brahma. This was two-day conference was attended by Election Watch groups of more than 22 States, various NGOs and activists, eminent citizens, media personalities, representatives of all major political parties and other stakeholders from all over the country.

Discussions took place on various aspects of the electoral and political reforms, particularly the issues concerning money power in elections, financial transparency and inner-party democracy of the political parties. Concerns were also expressed on the increasing role of media in electoral mal-practices and its impact on news coverage.

By the end of the conference the participants unanimously came up with recommendations to move towards a resolution of these issues

AGENDA

Day 1

8.00 - 9.30 am	Registration
9:30 -10.00 am	INAUGURATION: National Anthem, Lamp lighting etc. H S Brahma, (Election Commissioner) along with NEW and OEW Team-Sh Sahadeva Sahoo, Sh A.B.Tripathy, Dr Seba Mohapatra, Mr K.K.Swain, Mr Ranjan Mohanty
10:00 -10.30 am	Welcome address: <i>Mr. Ranjan Mohanty/ Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar/Mr. Ajit Ranade/ Prof. Trilochan Sastry/ Mr. Sunil Handa /Mr. Anil Bairwal</i>
10:30 -11:30 am	Experience sharing of the recent Assembly Elections 2012: by Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur Election Watch representatives (10 min for open house) <i>Chairperson – Mr. I.C. Dwivedi (former DGP, UP)</i> <i>Panelists – Dr B P Maithani (Uttarakhand), Mr. Sanjay Singh (Uttar Pradesh), Mr Utkarsh Sinha(Uttar Pradesh) Mr. Jaskirat Singh (Punjab), Mr. Tasaduk Ariful Hussain (Manipur), Mr. Bhasker Assoldekar (Goa)</i>
	Tea to be served in the meeting
11:30 -12:30 pm	Money power in Elections (10 min for open house) <i>Chairperson - Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar</i> <i>Panelists - Mr. P.K. Das (D.G. Expenditure, ECI), Sh Sahadeva Sahoo (Former Chief Secretary,Odisha), Mr A.B.Tripathy (EX DGP,Odisha), Mr Nageshwar Patnaik(Senior Journalist, Economic Times), Sampad Mahapatra(NDTV), Dr. R. Balasubramaniam(Founder SVYM)</i> <i>Vote of thanks – Mr K K Swain, OEW</i>
12:30 - 1:15 pm	<i>Address by Mr H S Brahma (Election Commissioner)</i> 15 min for open house <i>Chairperson – Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Prof. Trilochan Sastry, Mr Ranjan Mohanty</i>
1:15 - 2:00 pm	Lunch
2:00 - 3:30 pm	Political Party Reforms (What and How) (20 min for open house) <i>Chairperson – Prof Trilochan Sastry</i> <i>Panelists – Mr. A. B. Bardhan (Secretary CPI National Council), Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman (National Spokesperson BJP), Mr Baishnab Ch. Parida (MP, BJD), Mr Dushyant Das (CPI(M), Odisha)</i> <i>Vote of thanks – Suchit Ranjan Singh, OEW</i>
3:45 - 4:00 pm	Tea Break
4:00 - 5:15 pm	Role of Media in ensuring free and fair elections (10 min for open house) <i>Chairperson – Mr. Eshwar Anand (Symbiosis International University)</i>

	<p><i>Panelists – Mr Soumya Ranjan Pattnaik(Editor,Sambad), Rajaram Satpathy(Times of India), Mr Anil Sharma (Senior Journalist, Orai), Mr M R Misra(OTV), Rajiv Kumar (BEW)</i></p> <p><i>Vote of thanks – Mr Sitakanta Dash, OEW</i></p>
5:15 - 6:15 pm	<p>Role of youth in Democracy (10 min for open house)</p> <p><i>Chairperson – Mr Jagdananda(State Information Commissioner, Odisha),</i> <i>Panelists – Dr Bhagaban Prakash(Senior Advisor, ECI), Arun Sahoo(MLA, Odisha Assembly), Harinesh Bhai (Gujarat EW), Mr. Vanlaruata(Manipur EW), , Mr. Ravindran (Kerala EW), Mr Victor(Puducherry EW), Mr. Biswendu Bhattacharjee(Tripura EW), Mr Rakesh Reddy (Andhra Pradesh EW), Prithvi Reddy (Karnataka EW)</i> <i>Vote of thanks – Dr Dilip Kumar Samal, OEW</i></p>
7:00 - 8:00 pm	Cultural Session

Day 2

8:30- 9:00 am	Registration
09:00- 10:00 am	<p>Local Body Elections (10 min for open house) <i>Chairperson – Mr Sarat Chandra Mishra(Former DGP, Odisha)</i> <i>Panelists – Mr Avaya Rath(Ex-SEC), Mr Sanjeev Hota(Ex SEC), Dr. Amiya K. Samata(former DGP, West Bengal), Ms. Sriparna Chaudhury (Hunger Project), Dinesh Kinu(Jharkhand EW), Mr. Gautam Bandopadhyay(CG EW)</i> <i>Vote of thanks – Sachi Bhai(OEW)</i></p>
10:00- 11:00 am	<p>Women’s participation in Political Process (10 min for open house) <i>Chairperson – Mrs. Manipadma Jena, Senior Journalist,</i> <i>Panelists –Ms Kamini Jaiswal (Senior Counsel, Supreme court), Mrs Kastruri Mohapatra(State Commission for Persons with Disability),Mrs Tapasi Praharaj(AIDW), Sneha Misra (State coordinator, We Can, Ms Namrata Chadha, Women Activist and Dipanita Biswas, TDH</i> <i>Vote of thanks – Mashqura Fareedi, ADR</i></p>
11:00-12:00 noon	<p>Political Party Reforms(Practical issues in implementation) (20 min for open house) <i>Chairperson – Prof Trilochan Sastry</i> <i>Panelists – Mr. Srikant Jena (Union Minister Statistics and Programme Implementation; Chemicals and Fertilizers from INC), Mr. Ambika Chaudhary (Minister Revenue, Relief and Rehabilitation, Uttar Pradesh from SP), Mr. Panchanand Kanungo (Former Finance Minister, Odisha)</i> <i>Vote of thanks – Mr K K Swain, OEW</i></p>
12:00 – 2:00 pm	<p>Concluding Ceremony, Discussion on ‘Next Steps for NEW’ and Vote of Thanks <i>Panelists – Prof. Trilochan Sastry, Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Mr. Ajit Ranade, Sh Sahadeva Sahoo), Mr. Anil Bairwal, Mr. Ranjan Kumar Mohanty</i></p>

2:00 – 3:00 pm	Lunch
3:30 pm	Press conference

Documents distributed to the delegates:

1. Draft Bill to regulate the working of political parties
2. A 4 page report on criminal/financial background of current Odisha MLAs/MPs
3. One high level summary of all Election Watches till date
4. Report on the election expenses of MLAs elected in the 5 Assembly elections of 2012
5. FAQ on filing of election expenses and election petitions
6. FAQ on Rule 49-O
7. 2 pager on why political parties should be declared as public authorities
8. 2 pager on why MPs' IT returns should be in the public domain
9. Odisha 's Annual budget analysis
10. Organizational brochure

Documents distributed at the Press Conference (3rd May, 12 noon):

1. Odisha 's Annual budget analysis
2. Election expenses of MLAs elected in the 5 Assembly elections of 2012
3. Analysis of working of Odisha Assembly
4. Political Party income and donations (BJD vs other parties)

All above reports are available at adrindia.org

PROCEEDINGS

DAY 1

Inaugural address

Speakers: Mr. Ranjan Mohanty (Coordinator Odisha Election Watch), Mr. Anil Bairwal (National Coordinator, ADR), Prof. Trilochan Sastry, (Founder Member of ADR), Prof. Jagdeep Chokkar, (Founder Member of ADR), Mr. A.B. Tripathy (Ex DGP, Odisha), Mr. Sahadeva Sahoo (Former Chief Secretary, Odisha)

Mr. Ranjan Mohanty, Coordinator, Odisha Election Watch

“A warm welcome to all dignitaries, Shri. Brahma (Election Commissioner), Mr. P.K. Das (DG, Election Expenditure) and Shri. Baghaban Prakash (Senior Advisor to ECI), representatives from different states and different districts of Odisha, the media and the whole ADR team. Hope everyone has a pleasant stay in Bhubaneswar. We expect this national conference to be a unique event in terms of coming up with various issues and recommendations to address electoral and political reforms. All of us together can bring a change – make political party more transparent and responsive to people’s needs.”

Mr. Anil Bairwal, National Coordinator, ADR

The 8th National Conference began with Mr. Anil Bairwal (National Coordinator, ADR) welcoming all the participants. He said “Our mission is getting even stronger. This is our 8th and most important conference till now – there are 20 states delegates and representatives from each district of Odisha.”

The welcome was followed by national anthem and lighting of the lamp by Shri Brahma, Mr. Sahadeva Sahoo, Mr. AB Tripathy, Mr. K K Swain, Mr. Ranjan Mohanty, Dr. Mohapatra, Professor Jagdeep Chhokar, Professor Trilochan Sastry and Mr Anil Bairwal.

Professor Trilochan Sastry, Founder Member of ADR

Before giving a brief background on as to why this conference was being held, Prof. Sastry welcomed Shri Brahma and other esteemed guests present. He said, “I am overwhelmed to see the senior people from Odisha sitting in front rows, I hope to take advantage of their presence and meet their expectations.” ADR/NEW has been hosting the national conference across the country, the Election Commissioner has always graced us with their presence.

Prof. Sastry later introduced the two issues for this year’s conference. He said, “There are two main themes for this conference, one is the issue of political party reforms. After several years of work,

people have been saying the way political parties function is vital to functioning of a democracy. Other major issue is money power in elections. It was seen that Uttar Pradesh alone spent 1000 crores in this election, so 100000 crore for election spending in the whole country is easily imaginable. We also wanted to discuss the Draft Bill on political party reforms, for the first time in public. This is a national convention, but we also want to start discussions in all states and start using our persuasive power.”

Professor Jagdeep Chhokar, Founder Member of ADR

Prof. Jagdeep started his remarks by thanking Mr Mohanty and Ms Anuradha. Then, he presented the history of ADR and NEW. He said, “ADR is an organization created in 1999 soon after a PIL was filed in the Delhi High Court regarding filing of affidavits by candidates contesting elections. This then spread to all states. Now we have 1000-1200 friends and partners. We are a loose confederation of organizations, not a formal arrangement. In the last few years, strong relationships have been made so that there is no need for a formal arrangement. This work of election watch is not by any one organization or one person but is carried out across the country by a network of volunteers, of their own will. That is its strength. The aim of this conference is to discuss political and electoral reform and how we can make it work.”

Mr. A.B. Tripathy, Ex DGP, Odisha

“As far as electoral reforms are concerned, there is no doubt that it is overdue. There are several forums where we are going to discuss this. How we in our own capacity are going to create consciousness about several things that have become bane of elections – money power, criminalization, booth capturing, defections etc. So far we have not been able to do anything worthwhile. This issue attracted the attention of civil society only in 80s, after that it has gained momentum. The aim is to try to evolve a consensus on how to take the electoral reforms forward. Primary host of this conference is Ranjan and Anuradha, have taken lot of pains to make this convention a success.”

Mr. Sahadev Sahoo, Former Chief Secretary, Odisha

“Hearty welcome to Bhubaneshwar and Odisha . Privileged to hold this conference here, since NEW has chosen it as venue. We hope to have hearty discussion and thorough critical analysis. Theme – money power in elections. However we must recognize some people’s heart cannot be changed, that is, those who only want to amass money. Another problem is the vast majority, like the IT workers, who don’t vote, they think one vote doesn’t make a difference– this attitude has to change. People who matter should be brought into the voting class. If we encourage them to vote, there will be better candidates.”

Street Play

In the welcoming session there was **Street Play organized by Sanjog**: People's Movement through Theater, NGO Bhubaneswar, projecting the corruption in politics with special emphasis to the electoral system in India.

Experience sharing of the recent Assembly Elections 2012

Chairperson – Mr. I.C. Dwivedi (former DGP, UP)

Panelists- Mr Jaskirat Singh (Punjab Election Watch), Mr Sanjay Singh (Uttar Pradesh Election Watch), Mr Utkarsh Sinha (Uttar Pradesh Election Watch), Dr BP Maithani (Uttarakhand Election Watch), Mr Bhaskar Assoldekar (Goa Election Watch), and Mr Tasaduk Ariful Hussain (Manipur Election Watch)

The Session began with Mr Dwivedi, the chairperson, introducing all the panelists.

Mr. Jaskirat Singh, Coordinator, Punjab Election Watch

Mr. Jaskirat Singh from Punjab was the first panelist who shared his experience of Election Watch in Punjab recently. He pointed out, "The preparations for the Punjab Election Watch began 6-8 months in advance. Reports using the 2007 data were created and disseminated to the media in press conferences. This resulted in good media coverage and generated awareness among the people of Punjab."

The quality of election was upped to another level and the credit goes to the organizers. We also saw an active participation from the media as well as the citizens in order to make it a success. We also received tremendous support from the CEO of Punjab.

The media hence churned out a lot of stories with new and fresh data.

A positive aspect of the elections pointed out by Mr. Jaskirat was, "The CEO of Punjab released and uploaded the data before the election. Hence, the 2012 data was made available 11 days before the election." This led to an increased dissemination of information due to an increased media interest. The CEO also released the election expenses for the first time. There was an awareness generated among the people about the election expenditure limit. The election expense limit was set at 16 Lakh. The media took this topic up as well and throughout the campaign, questioned the expenses of the parties. Since the code of conduct of election expenses came into being, the election campaigning was mellow as compared to the usual rallies with loudspeakers and music.

In the 2012 expenditure data, the focus was mainly on paid news. A press conference was held with the focus of discussion being media monitoring. A media monitoring committee was set up. 300 notices were issued to politicians out of which 200 candidates agreed they had indulged in paid news. 1.17 crore is the paid news figure which the Election Commission has sent to the Press Council for further monitoring.

Mr. Sanjay Singh, Coordinator, Uttar Pradesh Election Watch

Mr. Sanjay Singh from Uttar Pradesh Election Watch (UPEW) pointed out that they not just work during the election time but all around the year. Mr. Singh stated “UPEW started its preparations for the elections a year back with the aim of creating an atmosphere among the people, civil society and political parties. Seminars were held with the participants comprising of citizens, civil society, NGOs and politicians. We had to bring a change in the strategies in order to reach a larger audience. We made use of the local and regional media as well as theatre and music in order to increase voting awareness.”

A vital role was played by the students and the youth, during the recent Assembly elections, who went door to door creating awareness, especially among the women. The media also played an active role in disseminating the reports of UPEW and ADR.

For the elections Mr. Singh said, “We started a toll free/helpline which provided free advice to the people from 10am to 10pm. This was an alliance between the National Election Watch, the media, the NGOs and the citizens. This networking helped fasten the process. Even in the dacoit prone areas of UP people voted independently without any problems making it a zero violence election. We had aimed for 80% voter turnout in 10 constituencies. We managed to garner a 75% turnout in these constituencies and a 60% turnout in the remaining state.”

Mr Utkarsh Sinha, Coordinator, Uttar Pradesh Election Watch

Mr. Utkarsh Sinha again from UPEW pointed out how their election watch process was not capital centric. The strategy was to divide the state into four parts and focus on all of them equally. “We had press conferences in various parts of the state. We had assistance from not only the regional and local press, but also from NGOs and teachers in schools, colleges and universities.”

Criminalisation of politics according to Mr. Sinha is an issue which needs to be dwelled upon. People with strong criminal background should not be allowed to contest elections. A change has been noted recently with people rejecting candidates with criminal records.

Dr B. P. Maithani, Coordinator, Uttarakhand Election Watch

Dr B.P Maithani from Uttarakhand Election watch said their experience of such a process was for the first time. They had no past experience to guide them and thus extensive work was not done.

Dr. Maithani said, “We did not have much clarity on NEW and ADR initially. Our first meeting was held in November where the data from 2007 was disseminated in the form of reports highlighting the criminal background and the assets of the candidates. However, the new 2012 data showed that the initial criminal cases against candidates in 2004 no longer existed now as many withdrew their criminal cases. This was a negative experience as the media was proactive in bringing out this point.”

These elections saw cooperation from the youth as well as the media. The focus was on disseminating the information available and providing awareness about myneta.info. The newspaper “Hindustan” started a campaign wherein they installed booths in various areas for voter registration which was done immediately. In remote and cold areas, helicopters were sent in for setting up booths for registration.

Dr. Maithani pointed out that ADR should have a long term perspective. He said:

1. They need to look into party manifestoes, analyze the same and disseminate it to the people for them to understand if the agenda has been met or not. We should aim at having a ‘People’s Manifesto “for the 2014 elections where in people put in their demands, which will be taken to the political parties. This needs to be a long and sustainable process.
2. We also need to look at having state budget analysis in order to better understand inter-sectoral politics. The district budgets, plans need to be shared with the people and increase the transparency of the financial aspect of the government.”

Mr Bhaskar Assoldekar, Coordinator, Goa Election Watch

Mr Bhaskar Assoldekar from Goa Election Watch shared his experience of the recent elections. Goa also for the first time had election watch in its state.

Mr. Assoldekar appreciated the Election Commission for introducing for the first time a ‘Poll Monitoring System’. This system when installed gathers the digital finger prints as well as a webcam image in order to eliminate the possibility of bogus voting.

Problems that Goa faces during elections Mr. Assoldekar stated are localized. These include family raj, nepotism and a high level of corruption which they had to look into.

Sharing his experience Mr. Assoldekar said, “Our aim was to target first time voters and the youth. We had support from the Goa Youth Forum where the youth engaged in disseminating information through Facebook and other social media. We also had support from the strong local press in Goa. In order to emphasize the Election Watch credibility of being non partial and non bias, we conducted interviews with the press to increase the awareness of Election Watch among the people. We also informed the people on how they could access candidate information. In 2002 Goa registered a voter turnout of 69%, 74% in 2007 and 82% in 2012. The youth registered an 18% turnout.”

In the end Mr. Assoldekar suggested and requested the Election Commission to avoid elections on weekends since people have the ability to treat it as a long weekend.

Mr Tasaduk Ariful Hussain, Coordinator, Manipur Election Watch

Mr Tasaduk Ariful Hussain representing Manipur Election Watch shared his experience of conducting two elections, one in Assam and one in Manipur, both of which face major insurgency issues. He stated,

“In Assam 87% of the candidates with criminal records were rejected. The media and the Election Watch together worked towards disseminating information among the people. Lawlessness prevailed in the State and many candidates did not disclose their criminal records.”

Commenting on the asset growth and policies of the government Mr. Arif said, “There is an increase in the number of crorepatis as per the assets of the candidates in comparison to the last election and the current one. The policies of the government are shifting from pro-poor to pro-corporate, which is currently a big concern. I request the people to put thought into this.”

Mr. Arif in the end also requested the Election Commission to amend the affidavits in order to add their sources of income as well.

Mr. Dwivedi, Former DGP, UP

Mr. Dwivedi the chairperson before allowing questions from participants gave few remarks. He said,

1. I have been witnessing that while in some areas the problems pertaining to elections have reduced in terms of booth capturing or threatening voters, some problems still persist. The Election Commission is working hard towards eliminating these issues.
2. Corruption is heavily prevalent in the system. In the UP 2002 elections from 403 MLAs, 203 had criminal cases against them. These candidates get elected despite having a criminal record.
3. This time, UP Election Watch engaged in visits to the educational institutions to mobilize the youth who in turn mobilized their families to vote. The voting percentage increased to 70% from 40%. It is noted that while the urban class opines and discusses, they do not vote in elections.
4. There is a violation of the model code of conduct in many cases which needs to be brought out in the public domain such that they are pursued further.
5. It is noticed that the government withdraws cases of their candidates contesting elections. We need to compare the 2007 and 2012 data and find out how many cases have been reduced due to withdrawal of cases.
6. We also need to find an effective system which takes punitive action against candidates forging or lying in their affidavits.
7. We also need to look at the misuse of state machinery like the police by politicians in pursuing their own demands.”

The floor was then open for questions:

A participant made few suggestions to EC

1. The candidates should specify the cases withdrawn by them and the reason behind it such that the citizens are aware of this.

2. There are plenty of cases of violation of the code of conduct. One can file an FIR under the direction of the EC against the accused such that the people are aware of this.

Mr. Dwivedi's responded to these suggestions by stating that it would be welcome if all the cases are registered. However, cases are registered but no one cares about it. There are many cases against important functionaries but the police will not take the matter up.

Question 1: The Punjab CEO for the first time officially quantified paid news. Can't this in the future practices be counted towards an electoral petition?

Mr. HS Brahma's reply: This can be taken up and looked into

Question 2: The affidavit process is an obligation process and we need to do away with it since we cannot scrutinize the candidates and information can be forged.

Mr Dwivedi's reply: There has been nothing better than the affidavit system in order to procure the information of the candidates. An affidavit is the candidate's own statement on his information.

Mr. Brahma's reply: If a candidate is accused of forging information on the affidavit, then any person is allowed to file a case against him. If he is proven guilty, the candidate is entitled to 6 months of imprisonment.

Question 3: Why doesn't the EC make a provision for Right to Reject?

Mr. Brahma's reply: We have expressed our thoughts over this and the Commission is currently looking into it.

Money Power in Elections

Chairman: Professor Jagdeep Chhokar

Panelist: Mr P.K. Dash (D.G. Expenditure, ECI), Sh. Sahadeva Sahoo (Former Chief Secretary, Odisha), Mr. A.B. Tripathy (Ex D.G.P., Odisha), Mr Sampad Mahapatra (NDTV) and Dr R. Balasubramaniam (Founder SVYM)

Prof. Chhokar, Founder Member of ADR

Prof. Chhokar introduced the session by stating that the issue of use of Money Power in Elections is plaguing the electoral system in India. It is very important to take effective measures to control it. In 2010 a new division was created within the Election Commission to oversee the expenditure incurred by the candidates during the elections.

Mr. P. K. Dash, D.G. Expenditure, ECI

The first panelist to speak was Mr. P.K.Dash (DG, EE, ECI) who being from Odissa itself felt privileged to address such a conference in his own state. He expressed his gratitude to ADR and NEW for this opportunity.

He was also grateful to ADR and NEW for its initiative during 2009 Tamil Nadu bye elections which was won by paying Rs. 5000 to each voter, slipped through newspaper. Election Commission visited Tamil Nadu and initiated certain measures to curb it. 8 PILs were filed against ECI's measures leading to the Tamil Nadu High Court terming the initiatives as illegal and asked the Election Commission to stop them. ADR and NEW along with other civil society groups filed counter petitions and helped to revise the order and the court came heavily on the candidates.

Mr. Dash in his presentation on use of Money Power in Elections and steps taken by ECI to control it, highlighted various points which included the risks of excessive use of money. He said, "There are risks involved when the use of money is not checked in a multi party democracy. These risks are:

- It creates unlevel playing field
- Certain sections are excluded
- Politicians are under campaign debt and then are obliged to the lender
- Tainted governance : money needs to be recovered by scams
- Foreign funding destabilizing polity (black money)"

Mr. Dash talking about election expenditure stated that there are 2 types of election expenditure. These are:-

- Legal Expenses in the form of advertisements, posters, banners etc. which requires ceiling which is already in place. It is 16 Lakhs for State Assemblies and 40 Lakhs for Lok Sabha elections.
- Illegal Expenses in the form of distribution of money, liquor and drugs, which needs to be stopped.

Mr. Dash congratulated ADR for the excellent research it has taken up. He said that many new orders by Election Commission have been issued at the request of ADR which create awareness.

Mr. Dash also highlighted various instances of use of money power in recently concluded elections and the various steps taken by the ECI to control it. Mr. Dash said, "Various strategies have been undertaken to monitor expenditure. These include:

- Change Outdated Procedures
- Revisit the Legal Provisions
- Susceptible Area Management
- Capture the Evidence (video graph major events)
- Watch Out Cash: Separate bank accounts to be opened for the election expense, Flying Squads, Static surveillance, Video surveillance etc.
- Associate with Income Tax Departments to implement financial accountability

- Watch out Media for paid news where 40% of the total expense is done.
- Toll free helpline numbers for receiving complaints from the citizens and civil society groups and establish complaint monitoring system.
- Punish the guilty: For the first time punishment was given to the proven guilty.”

Shri Sahadeva Sahu, Former Chief Secretary, Odisha

Shri Sahadeva Sahu (former chief secretary, and OEW member) pointed out how money is playing a big role in changing attitude of the people. Mr. Sahu stated, “The under privileged people are influenced because of their needs while people, who have lots of money use money to influence policy making.”

According to him there is a need to influence the behavior of educated people to make them understand the importance of voting as more voter turnout will lead to better candidates.

Mr. A.B. Tripathy, Ex DGP Odisha

Mr. A. B. Tripathy (retired DIG, Odisha) quoted the Indrajit Gupta Committee report which stated that all the expenditure should be done by the State. He said, “If there are political party reforms, the solution to this issue can be found.”

Mr. Sampad Mahapatra, NDTV

Mr. Sampad Mahapatra states, “Most of the time a very microscopic community is worried about the electoral and political process of the country. Most of the people are indifferent to voting. The urban literate as well as the poor wait to get money and receive goodies. The politicians are under pressure to distribute goodies, cash, promises etc.”

According to Mr. Mahapatra paid news is a big issue as most of the media houses are owned by people who have a direct connection with politics and they support their candidate. Politicians also collect money for either personal or for political party funds. Due to lack of concrete evidence, this cannot be countered. Mr. Mahapatra states, “The funding of political parties does not only happen during the election time. If the political parties are allowed to gather money, they gather it around the year. Therefore, state funding of elections is necessary so as to streamline the flow of funds. There is an urgent need to device a system to enable people from all backgrounds (people who do not have much money) to become a part of the political system.”

Dr. R. Balasubramaniam, Founder SVYM

Dr. R. Balasubramaniam commenting on money power in politics said, “It is time to watch voters as well. It’s not just politicians who make money after entering politics but also people with money coming into

politics. If I can't afford all politicians I'll become a politician myself." According to him a lot of money is pumped into the system even after elections to influence policies. Rules are made by a different class of people for a different set of people.

Dr. Balasubramaniam stated, "The Conviction rate (deterrent) in our country is very low, which makes control of money flow all the more difficult. It is important to look at the role of money post elections as well."

Mr. H.S. Brahma's Address

Mr. Brahma began by thanking all the present distinguished guests from Odissa and other states. He confessed that he has come in order to learn from all present and not to represent something that Election Commission has to say. He said he is proud to be a part of the 8th National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms, one of the most relevant and important issue confronting our country.

Mr. Brahma said, "Today in our country we have 120 crores population and 75 crore voters. This is equivalent to the entire population of Europe and Africa. By 2014, we are going to have 10 lakh+ polling stations and deploying more than a crore of employees, mindboggling figure and stupendous task. Lots of planning, commitment and initiative is required from ECI side, also parties, candidates and voters side."

According to him today we have tremendous amount of social, economic and employment problem, insurgency and scams which are unfortunate. We are passing through a delicate phase in our country and hence all of us must be concerned and together look for a solution.

Talking about India's democracy Mr. Brahma said, "Our country has one of the most dynamic democratic sovereign republics. It gives every region, every community a right to share solid participation in democracy. It is our duty and responsibility to maintain the spirit of our Constitution and the spirit of our country. Our Constitution is the most detailed record of social reform. Nowhere in the world is it so elaborate and detailed on the issue of social reform. Every part of the constitution talks about social reform and guarantees it. It is one of the finest documents on social reform and affirmative action."

Mr. Brahma also shared a recent experience of his when he attended a dinner hosted by an ex-director of IIT Madras in honour of Mr. Kalam. During the dinner few people asked Mr. Kalam what his opinion was on the political future of our country and how thing should go? Mr. Kalam said that if this country has to move forward as a vibrant democracy its family system has to improve. Moral values in the 1930s and 40s was given by the family however now it has been taken over by the so called electronic media. Family attachment is weakening and education from the older generations to the younger ones is not

happening. He said education to future generation must be done by parents. Another point that Mr. Kalam pointed out was that most young or middle aged boys and girls are also concerned by political life – better leadership and politicians. However the problem is that they don't have an idol like Gandhiji or Nehruji. There is an erosion of respect and credibility of apex authority figures. Earlier there was quality in leadership, this today has to be watched and carefully checked.

Speaking on reforms Mr. Brahma pointed out that since 1999, ECI has submitted more than 2 dozen proposals on legal reforms. However no results have come yet. He said, "If we can do 2-3 things it will solve 90% of the problems of manipulation and bias and ethics. First and foremost is banning of criminals. Time has come for this country to decide. The day we debar criminals 90% of our problems will resolve. It is not right that murderers, rapist etc. are sitting in Assemblies instead of being in jails." An example given by the Election Commissioner to explain this was that in the entire country, there are more than 8 to 10 lakh citizens under trial, who are in jail for 6 months to 2 years. They are denied employment, movement and the right to vote also. We are curbing their democratic rights. But contesting elections is not stopped for people against whom charge sheet has been filed.

Another area of great importance to be worked on is black money according to Mr. Brahma.

Paid news is also an issue which needs to be tackled. Media and press is one of most important pillar of any Democracy. Mr. Brahma states, "To have a solid, transparent free and fair democracy we need to have an independent press. But this pillar of democracy is no longer a pillar, it is becoming a crutch. Barring a few, they are no longer free and fair. They are now owned by big MNCs, corporate and private entities. They are no longer unbiased or reporting correct or free and fair facts from the ground. All the NGOs, teams from election watch, ADR and colleagues must study the impact of this new system emerging in our country. See how print media can manipulate the entire system of our country."

Mr. Brahma also shared a point which came up during the SAARC meeting on 30th April and 1st May, New Delhi. It was strongly felt in the meeting that every country should use its civil society and press in strengthening democracy. He said that he always studies the ADR reports and goes by them, even before ECI reports come. ADR must be more strengthened, be more aggressive and enterprising not only during elections but also in disseminating information according to the Election Commissioner.

Mr. Brahma also pointed out the need for transparency in political parties' income. He said, "I think political reform is a must, much check how parties can collect 3 crores without receipts in 2 months from 5-10 rupees donation. Driving transparency in political reform will be great for our democracy and growth of our country."

Mr. Brahma suggested ADR to be more aggressive and proactive. He said, "Have more seminars and discourses like this, so that more people participate and be alert. Whichever position you hold, let us leave the place better for the future generation."

Discussing the North-East regions of India Mr. Brahma said “The biggest bottleneck for North-east is electoral practice based on community and pride. There is need for education about political ideology. In Nagaland or Manipur, voting is not done on principles but on caste, community or religion...In North East, there is need for tremendous educational work. More aggressive steps should be taken on voter education to go beyond religious or tribal identity. So I request team ADR to take more aggressive steps.”

Question 1: I don’t know how many politicians are present here. We cannot discuss electoral reforms without having politicians here. Can voting rights of criminals who participate in politics and are seen with candidates be taken away. What to do with them during election time?

Answer 1: There are legal restrictions on voting rights. But right to vote and right to contest public office are 2 different things. Permitting him to do these 2 things are different.

Question 2: How to bar criminals from contesting on the basis of cases alone?

Answer 2: ECI for last 2 years have been very serious about criminals – proposal, barred if cases filed 2 years before elections. We have conducted 7 different conferences. Committee now has to meet with all political parties. Everything is ready on this proposal.

Question 3: All of us know there is discrepancy between actual expense and data filed. The discrepancy data is with ECI. Are you planning on making shadow observer expense report public. If yes, when, if not, why?

Answer 3: Our effort is to scrutinize all expense reports filed. We will consider putting expense reports of winners on the website.

Questions 4: What about government bribes and declarations of benefits made by the government?

Answer 5: Can announce benefits 6 months prior to elections, not suddenly in the middle. No Government can announce benefits once the model code of conduct starts.

Political Party Reforms (What and How)

Chairman: Prof. Trilochan Sastry

Panelists: Mr Dushyant Das (CPIM), Ms Nirmala Seetharaman (spokesperson BJP), Mr. A.B. Bardhan, Secretary (CPI, National Council) and Mr Baishnab Ch. Parida (MP, RJD)

Mr Rajan Mohanty, Coordinator, Odisha Election Watch

The session started with Mr. Ranjan Mohanty welcoming all panelists. Prof. Trilochan Sastry, the chair, then gave a brief background of National Election Watch. He said that we are ready to play any role, however small to enhance and strengthen democracy. He also introduced the draft bill on regulation of

Political Party drafted by a committee headed by Justice Venkatachaliah. Prof Sastry said, “We also had discussions with two major political parties, INC and BJP on the need for such a bill. The bill has been put out for discussion so that the collective wisdom of political parties and society at large can give it shape.”

Prof. Trilochan Sastry, Founder Member of ADR

Prof. Sastry pointed out how democracies across the countries have regulation of political parties while India has no regulation for political parties. Several committees and commissions in India itself have written about this. Now all are eager to hear about the political parties views. State level workshops for wider discussion on this bill are being planned.

Prof. Sastry discussed the 2 issues prevailing with regard to the political parties. These are:-

1. “Inner party democracy within parties. (CPIM has taken the view that it limits the term of its president to 3 terms, a welcome view that some parties have taken). Two issues within this which need to be discussed are:
 - Election/selection procedure of office bearers and selection/election procedure of candidates
 - Terms of office bearers and rules and regulations pertaining to that.
2. The other issue is funding and financing of political parties. Transparency and accountability is required in the funding processes. Some regulations are already in place, some are required - limits to corporate funding, limits to who can fund, what are the penalties on flouting of regulations, issue of media (paid news), party funding of candidates etc. need to be looked into.”

Mr Dushyant Das, CPI (M)

Mr Dushyant Das from Communist Party of India (Marxist) clearly pointed out that Inner party democracy is guided by centralised democracy and that democratic election process is being followed in their party.

Decisions are taken right from the branches. Party conducts its elections and two months before the party congress the party drafts a political resolution. This resolution is not only open to the party but also to the public. We invite discussions on this resolution. Mr. Das pointed out how the party had 18000 suggestions outside the realm of the CPIM political party in Kozhikode Kerala. Some suggestions were accepted by the political party. In the process, the party not just takes the view of the party members but also takes the views of those outside the periphery of the party.

Regarding funds received by their party Mr. Das said, “We are for transparency in funds as well. But do not take funds from capitalists since we believe in the rights of the working class. We cannot accept money from the TATAs and jeopardize the interests of the working class.”

Mr. Das acknowledged that criminalisation of politics still persists and is dangerous to our democratic system. He said, “Voters are considered as a commodity. There is a growing nexus between bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen which is affecting the democracy.”

Mr. Das also gave few suggestions on what the State can do with regard to elections. These are:-

1. The state should help with regard to funding of election campaigns
2. Proportional representation for a particular percentage should be provided.
3. There should be direct election with regard to certain seats.

With regard to the draft bill Mr Das said his party agrees with certain aspects of the bill while not with others.

Ms. Nirmala Seetharaman, National Spokesperson, BJP

Ms. Nirmala Seetharaman the National Spokesperson for BJP began by stating that she is here to represent the functioning of the BJP party. In the BJP, she stated, “we opt for a completely open electoral process. We first asked for 33% reservation for women. We have systems with timely procedures and resort to a democratised governing. The party's process of governing is systematic, open and transparent.”

According to Mrs. Seetharaman elimination of candidates who are not suited is built in the system. There is complete transparency in the choosing of candidates and also in the election process of the party president. The President of BJP cannot hold more than 2 terms and not in 2 consecutive years.

“3 ways of funding exists in BJP, also mentioned in our website”, said Mrs. Seetharaman. These are:

1. Ajivan Sahayoj Nidhi- Rs 1000-10000 fund can be made in cheque to the party. This is given every once a year for your entire lifetime. The amount is chosen by you.
2. Vishesh Sahayog Nidhi: 1 lakh donation can be paid once by cheque.
3. Rallies: Collections are made through receipts only during the programme. People are open to question the method.

She concluded by stating that the systems within BJP clearly are laid out to limit errors and that they are moving ahead in the direction of transparency.

Mr. A.B. Bardhan, Secretary CPI National Council

Mr. A. B. Bardhan (Secretary CPI National Council) began by congratulating National Election Watch for its work on transparency and research. He said, “ADR’s data on criminal politicians and assets cannot be ignored. The data brought out how many criminals exist in the parliament.” He however was apprehensive on who criminals are as many cases are politically motivated against politicians. Muscle and money power still exists according to Mr. Bardhan.

Talking about reforms Mr Bardhan pointed out that till the first past the post system doesn’t come into existence, governments will continue to form despite having 20% - 30% votes. He said, “This leads to the formation of minority governments. CPI stands for a proportional representation system. Till this system is brought, money power will not be eliminated. I hope the Election Watch will think more on these lines.”

Discussing the functioning of his party Mr. Bardhan stated how there is a need to form a constitutional system for all parties. Comparing his party functioning with others he said, “Some parties have a definite head that makes the agenda for the party and selects the party people. Our party makes the agenda and the political resolution, circulates it to all the party units two months before the elections. This is made open to public for their critique. Is there any other party which circulates their documents even 15 days in advance and takes inputs from the public? What is a more transparent method than this one?”

“Our party Congresses are held once in 3 years and the preparation starts 6 months in advance. Every branch holds conferences. We have 38000 branches of CPI where meetings are held. They elect their delegates. Second is block or taluk level from which delegates are elected to district level. The district level delegates are elected and go to state level from which there are delegates who go to the national level. This is a democratic way of functioning in the party. Party reviews are held regularly.” said Mr. Bardhan.

According to Mr. Bardhan no corporate house contributes to their party fund, neither do they approach them for any kind of funding. “CPI has an audit commission, chartered accountants and they regularly send their accounts and income tax returns to ECI and the Income Tax department,” said Mr. Bardhan. The party has replied to two RTI applications demanding details of party accounts and the source of regular funds is the annual renewal of membership fee by the party members. 1% of the income of party members is accepted as levy while ex parliamentarians and MLAs have to pay 10% of their income pointed out Mr. Bardhan.

At the end of Mr Bardhan’s speech the chair, Professor Trilochan Sastry said, "If we believe that your party has democracy then we would require your help to bring democracy in other parties".

Mr Baishanb Ch. Parida, MP, BJD

Mr Baishanb Ch. Parida (MP, RJD) began by expressing how the Indian democracy is passing through a critical phase. India has a multiparty system wherein the political parties register their names; produce their constitution, programmes and the commitment to adhere to a democratic system in the country. However he says, “Every party would say that we are functioning as per our constitution. But I think if they actually are doing so then, why is democracy deteriorating?”

Mr. Parida stated that in our country 160 MPs have criminal records. He agreed that some of them may be accused due to political bias. But 100 out of these 160 may actually have criminal records against them. Hence, can one say that so many people accused of criminal charges are free from it? According to Mr. Parida power hungry politicians are utilizing the stomachs of poor people. He states, “Democracy dies not only due to dictatorship, but also because of its electorate. If people lose faith in the system, then system can’t function.” Hence according to him patriotic forces of this country should work together to give India a new ray of hope.

The floor was then opened for questions.

Question 1: Why didn’t we see a single elected woman leader in the recently conducted Goa state election?

Ms. Nirmala Seetharaman: The reservation Bill has its own internal weaknesses. It doesn’t mean that party is not fully in favor of it. Once you make it mandatory at the Parliamentary level, parties will have to stick to it.

Mrs. Bijoy Laxmi Sahoo was called upon by the chair to represent the views of Indian National Congress. She stated that the congress party works on the principles of democracy. Women however will not get their right until the reservation bill is passed as the society is male dominated. She concluded by stating that the political parties should work towards reducing the gap between the haves and the have not’s.

Role of Media in ensuring free and fair elections

Chairman: Mr. Eshwar Anand

Panelist: Mr Saumya Ranjan Pattnaik (Editor, Sambad), Mr Rajaram Satpathy (Times of India), Mr Anil Sharma (Senior journalist, Orai), Mr MR Mishra (OTV) and Rajiv Kumar (BEW)

Mr Saumya Ranjan Pattnaik, Editor, Sambad

Mr Saumya Ranjan Pattnaik the editor of Sambad began by stating that democracy can never be strengthened until and unless one respects the views of the rest. He said, “Media is a part of the same society to which the political parties, businessmen and NGOs belong. Why is the media expected to be

different from the rest of the people? You pretend as if we should behave like god and the others act as the beneficiaries of our godly endeavors.”

According to him media should only act. However there are allegations against the media that they are controlled by the corporate houses and that they indulge in paid news i.e. they are controlled by the same forces which are supposed to be fight against. In contradiction to these allegations Mr. Pattnaik states, “...we have accepted the principles of modern market economy and open society and liberalized system, we can’t fight it out. Media will be controlled by corporates. It is bound to be supported by corporates for advertising.”

He denied the existence of something called an ‘independent media’. According to him anybody who claims to be independent is not speaking the truth. He said, “The media needs to openly disclose their identity and their partners. Media is under a false impression of being the fourth estate. We do not want to belong to any estate. Only if it is not titled as the fourth estate, can the media contribute fairly to the democratic process.”

Mr Rajaram Satpathy, Times of India

Mr Rajaram Satpathy from Times of India began with a question as to who wants free and fair elections and who is free and fair. According to him we need to understand that the present system itself is corrupt. He said, “The political parties were deemed as corrupt initially. It was assumed that the general poor people are duped by politicians.” However his experience has been something different. He believes that today it’s not just the politicians who are taking advantage of the people but the people themselves are taking advantage of the politicians.

Mr. Satpathy agrees to the fact that media in the last few years has given up the social responsibility aspect and has become commercialized. “A commercial media cannot expose the corrupt media system nor can it give justice to their coverage. Newspapers and TV channels get lots of money from advertisements issued by political parties and politicians. The cost of the advertisements is what the media works on,” said Mr. Satpathy.

Mr Anil Sharma, Senior Journalist, Orai

Mr Anil Sharma, a senior journalist of Orai said, “National Election Watch and media have together worked towards creating awareness among the people. With regard to paid news, one does not know how many of paid news cases exist.” He also suggested that the election watch work needs to be all round the year.

Mr M.R. Mishra, OTV

Mr M.R. Mishra from OTV did not agree with some of the panelists and said, “I do not believe that the corporate media does nothing for the society. It has exposed and sent many corrupt politicians to jail.

Let not cynicism prevail. Let us believe that this media will ensure a free and fair society. We have to ensure that corrupt politicians have no place in the society.”

Mr. Mishra also talked about the 3 critical aspects media needs to pay heed to. These are: “

1. Reporting: Reporting needs facts, feeling, perspective
2. Are the corporate houses pumping money without any returns? No one reports the agenda behind it. It should not be so. You cannot demand honesty from a person who doesn't have money.
3. Paid news need to be checked.”

Mr. Rajiv Kumar, Coordinator, Bihar Election Watch

Mr. Rajiv Kumar from Bihar Election Watch pointed out that media does not follow on the issues brought up by the election watch teams. They do not discuss important issues and matters like inner-party democracy.

The chair finally concluded the session by pointing out that there needs to be reforms for issues like criminalization of politics. He said that all reforms and suggestion by the Election Commission should be accepted and the press and electronic media need to step up and accept the pressure.

Role of youth in democracy

Chairman: Mr Jagdananda (SIC Odisha)

Panelists: Dr Bhagaban Prakash (Senior Advisor, ECI), Mr. Arun Sahoo(MLA (Odisha Assembly), Mr. Harinеш Bhai (Gujarat EW), Mr. Ravindran (Kerala EW), Mr. Victor (Puducherry EW) and Mr. Biswendu Bhattacharjee(Tripura EW)

Mr Jagdananda, State Information Commissioner, Odisha

Mr Jagdananda the chairman, opened the session by inviting the audience first to ask the questions.

Some questions that came up were:

1. What was the immediate need to make youth participation a topic of discussion?
2. Can democracy be defended without hurting the development paradigm?
3. Can an educated rural dweller be a part of politics?
4. What is the way forward for the youth to move forward from the crossroad at which it is standing?

Mr. Baghban Prakash, Senior Advisor, ECI

The first panelist to address the audience was Mr. Baghban Prakash who began with the constitutional amendment of 1988, which reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 years. With this amendment scores of

youth became eligible to vote and become a part of the democratic process of the country. However 24 years later, in 2010, it was found that 90% of voters were not even registered.

Mr. Prakash said, “Young people are the major stakeholders in democracy. Today, there are more young people in the Parliament than in the 80s and the 90s. I am fully confident that youth participation is vital for the strengthening of the democratic process.”

He also discussed the YUVA (Youth United Voter Awareness) campaign started by the Election Campaign to educate young voters and encourage them to take part in the democratic process. According to him young people are not losing interest in democracy but are losing interest in elections. Today 36% of youth are registered voters also in January 2012, 38 million voters were enrolled.

Mr. Arun Sahoo, MLA, Odisha Assembly

Mr. Arun Sahoo a young MLA of Odisha stated how no youth aspires to become a politician. “Parents do not want their children to enter politics,” said Mr. Sahoo. According to him people should be prepared to come forward and be a part of the political system.

Mr. Harinesh Bhai, Gujarat Election Watch

Mr. Harinesh Bhai from Gujarat Election Watch said that youth have played a huge role in all political and non political movements. To strengthen democracy Mr. Harinesh Bhai states, “It is important to connect with young people at grass root level. There is a need to visualize the role of youth in the democratic process.”

Mr Ravindran, Kerala Election Watch

Mr. Ravindran from Kerala Election Watch reiterated the important role youth play in the development of a country. He said, “For being the largest democracy in the world, we have to find ways to get youth in the lime light. Nature of voter and voting will change by youth participation.”

Mr. Victor, Puducherry Election Watch

Mr. Victor, Coordinator of Puducherry Election Watch pointed out how all sectors of the society are corrupt today including Politics. According to him more youth involvement will lead to minimizing corruption at all levels.

Mr. Biswendu Bhattacharjee, Tripura Election Watch

Mr. Biswendu Bhattacharjee from Tripura Election Watch states that all students do not register as voters due to lack of interest. He said, “Youth is a major stakeholder, so we should have a democratic reform program for the young people. In that program, we should incorporate issues which will encourage and keep the young people interested.”

DAY 2

Local Body Elections

Chairperson – Mr Sarat Chandra Mishra (Former DGP, Odisha)

Panelists: Mr Avaya Rath (Ex-SEC), Mr Sanjeev Hota(Ex SEC), Dr. Amiya K. Samata (former DGP, West Bengal), Ms. Sriparna Chaudhury (Hunger Project), Sudhir Pal (Jharkhand EW) and Mr. Gautam Bandopadhyay (CG EW)

Mr. Avaya Rath, Ex SEC

The chairperson introduced the topic of discussion and the panelists after which the discussion started. Mr. Avaya Rath (Ex SEC) brought forth his experience as a SEC in conducting elections at Panchayat level. He pointed out how he himself has witnessed that efforts have been lacking for organizing Panchayat elections on sound footing. Many times even elections were not held. Powers were not devolved and finally 73rd and 74th amendments came into effect.

He pointed out that Panchayats hold office for no longer than 5 years. Office and constitutional office of the SEC was established through competition to conduct, supervise and hold body elections for the panchayat. The powers that were entrusted to the SEC were a carbon copy of those by ECI as in 1950. Mr. Rath pointed out few issues they face during the Panchayat elections. He said, “There are certain issues that we faced during holding period of elections. These are:-

1. Assembly & Parliamentary constituencies are by act of Parliament. Powers are with independent Commission while the delimitation of wards at the panchayat level has been kept reserved by the Government
2. Reservation of wards in favor of SC, ST and OBCs are again reserved by the government.
3. The SEC will only hold the elections.”

Mr. Rath during his term as the SEC (1999-2004) experienced two elections. Rural elections happened in 2004 and urban in 2003. He pointed out the following, “ We have to elect 1,00,000 ward members, 6234 sarpanches and 854 Zila Parishad members, all through direct franchise. The arrangement, resources,

training & law and order is a stupendous task. But agencies cooperated to help hold elections. I made some observations during the period.

1. Elections to the Panchayats have spoiled village life. When I visited my village, I found there was no peace since people were seriously divided into groups.
2. According to law elections to Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha are based on party less bases, and those in districts is Party based. A writ petition is pending in High Court of Odisha over this.
3. Use of money power in elections in Gram Panchayat wards. Even for tiny wards of 400-500 people banners and *bada khana* is organized. There is no provision on ceiling of election expenses at the local body elections.
4. Observance of the Code of Conduct, a set of instructions which are given to the political parties to the contesting candidates and government in power.”

Mr. Sanjeev Hota, Ex SEC

Mr. Sanjeev Hota sharing his experience stated, “In my tenure, I experienced that conducting panchayat elections are much more difficult than conducting State elections. The total number of booths for Panchayat election in Odisha state is 98,000. The code of conduct (COC) is heavily loaded against the party in power. That is the reason why it is seen that the same party and candidates go on winning elections term after term. I have even observed that high constitutional dignitaries actively violate the code of conduct.”

Another significant fact pointed out by Mr. Hota is the voting percentage during Assembly elections and Panchayat elections. During State elections percentage polling in Odisha is around 60% while during Panchayat elections it goes way up beyond 75%. Mr. Hota spoke to the villagers about it and the reason they gave is that they get to see ward members everyday while MLA visits once a month while this is even less so for MPs. “Polling percentage in the tribal areas is more than 80%, which is among the highest anywhere in India. This clearly shows that tribal people have played their role in democracy. However when we talk about repression of tribals, it shows in state average reservation in place like Koraput which is just 22% even though their population is about 70%.”

Another critical issue brought into forefront by Mr. Hota is duplication of votes. Many times voters’ names appear in multiple locations allowing bogus voting. Unless there is uniformity in election laws, there is a permanent house number used commonly by ECI and SEC for panchayat elections, it can’t be managed.

Mrs. Sriparna Chaudhury, Hunger Project

Mrs. Sriparna Chaudhury with an experience of working in 8 states of the country observed, “In the last 5 yrs or so there has been an increase in political party’s presence in Gram Panchayat elections, when

they are supposed to be absent from it. Political Party's have started with their own candidates, and genuine candidates are frightened away."

In Gujarat, a system called *Samras*- unanimous selection of candidates – has been institutionalized. Gram Panchayat doesn't conduct elections here, but gives 5 lakh rupees for unanimously selecting the candidate.

Mrs. Chaudhary also shed some light on the difficulties women face in the local body elections. "In Odisha, it came out for the 1st time that women candidates who want to stand in reserved seat, they need to submit caste certificate. It was told 15 days before elections. Women had to go to their birth places to get those and get land pattas as well to have these certificates made. They wanted to contest elections but ultimately couldn't. There is also a prevalence of 2 child norm in Odisha. It debar those with more than 2 children to contest in Gram Panchayat elections. It is again discouraging women participation since women have no control over number of children they give birth to in these areas. Getting an affidavit made is also a big issue in Odisha. For Sarpanch, they need one and there is a lot of corruption to get that. In Rajasthan, Mrs. Chaudhary found that "SEC gives election symbols at 5pm, just a day before elections leaving just 10 hours for campaigning. But women can't do that and miss out on contesting in such elections. This becomes a reason for their loss."

Mr. Amiya K Samata, Former DGP, West Bengal

Mr. Amiya K Samata pointed out how Panchayats have gradually reduced to be branch of the parties. "It becomes an official extension of the party. In West Bengal, the winner of the elections is these days called as Pradhan chalok (of the party) and pradhan (of the panchayat). It is a consequence of this that it is becoming dominated by one party in power and elections have successively been won by only one party. Panchayat elections must be free from party vote."

Gram Panchayats, Mr. Samata stated, has been constituted as an instrument of self-governance (SG). But that is not actually so. If they are instruments of Self Governance, then they should be given the power to decide whether they want to give land or not for SEZ type projects. Issues like Posco and Vedanta won't have happened if Gram Panchayats were empowered according to Mr. Samata. But nobody cared to consult them. "Artisans, poor producers, agriculture cultivators were never consulted. ADR should study these things. Local bodies should be allowed to actually work like self governance to make democracy a success."

Mr. Dinesh Kinu, Jharkhand Election Watch

Mr. Dinesh Kinu sharing his experience during the recent elections stated that, “Elections happened for the 1st time in 32 years and even those conducting elections didn’t know how to conduct it or fill forms. We had a 24*7 helpline open for 15 days to help fill forms.”

Mr. Gautam Bandopadhyay, Chattishgarh Election Watch

Mr. Gautam Bandopadhyay clearly stated, “Local self governance is as important for decentralized governance as it can get. Democratization, militarization and development can’t go hand in hand.”

Mr. Sarat Chandra Mishra, Former DGP, Odisha

Mr. Sarat Chandra Mishra said, “We can’t expect elected candidate to be non-corrupt when voters itself are corrupt. Our local bodies are not as powerful as those in other countries like USA, UK. We have been electing governments at Centre and state but not at district level. We need to devise a mechanism for that.”

Women’s Participation in Political Process

Chairperson – Mrs. Manipadma Jena, Senior Journalist

Panelists: Ms Kamini Jaiswal (Senior Counsel, Supreme Court), Mrs Kastruri Mohapatra (State commission for persons with disability), Mrs Tapasi Praharaj (AIDW), Ms. Sneha Misra (State coordinator, We Can), Ms. Dipanita Biswas (TDH) and Ms. Namrita Chhadda (Women Activist)

Mrs. Manipadma, Senior Journalist

Mrs. Manipadma, the chair, began by stating how India is in a point of transitions, where women are becoming more empowered and they have potential to do good politics. She, however, was not in agreement with the general perception that with women there will be less corruption as after elections the position that an elected woman leader takes is an institution, and with institution comes power.

Ms. Kamini Jaiswal, Senior Counsel, Supreme Court

Ms. Kamini Jaiswal stated that women’s participation in politics is a neglected subject and a discussion on this topic should start from the grassroots level, i.e. at the voter level. She also said how it is a complete shame that the Women’s reservation bill introduced in 1997 was opposed by many and even today it is given the least priority by the Parliamentarians. Roughly 50% of India’s population is that of women however there is only 11% representation of women in the Lok Sabha. She however clearly states, “Women’s reservation should not be for wives and daughters.” It should be able to fight the heredity trend and fight to give ticket to the right candidate.

Ms. Namrata Chadha, Women Activist

Ms. Namrata Chadha said, “There is a mindset that woman do not belong in politics. In rural areas, women cast their vote but not for a candidate of their own choice. They go by family will.” However if women come into direct politics, according to Ms. Chadha, they will think about different issues like domestic violence, sanitation, land rights, health issues, displacement and migration. This will help in policy development of the whole society.

Ms. Kasturi Mahapatra, State Commission for Persons with Disability

Ms. Kasturi Mahapatra quoted Mahatma Gandhi who had said that if women don’t come to public life, then it is unlikely that we would to attain Swaraj. In today’s scenario women have very little opportunity in any party to stand for elections. “Women do not have necessary resources to enter political life,” said Mrs. Mahapatra.

Ms. Tapsi Praharaj, AIDW

Ms. Tapsi Praharaj brought into the forefront two issues when talking about women participation in politics. These are:

1. The space woman has (reservation) and
2. How capable are they?

Discussing these two issues Mrs. Praharaj pointed out that there is not enough space for women and people who oppose women reservation also say that capability is not there. There is some merit in this argument but it’s mostly wrong as women have won many Panchayat elections. She agrees that many times their decisions are influenced by the male members of the family because of the existing patriarchal society. According to Mrs. Praharaj there is high representation of women in local governance because it is not a decision making body, it only implements.

Ms. Sneha Mishra, State Coordinator, We Can

Ms. Sneha Mishra pointed out how from Odissa itself there has been no women candidate for Rajya Sabha though two elections have occurred since 2009.

Ms. Dipanita Biswas, TDH

Ms. Dipanita Biswas shared some statistics which had occurred during women’s day celebration. In 2010, India ranked 99th in women’s participation in politics while in 2011 it has risen to 98th and in 2012 to 105th. Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan are many places above us. She said that because of reservation the representation of women at the panchayat level is good however the question is that is their participation here genuine or sabotaged.

Question 1: Whenever we talk about empowerment of women, very soon it deviates and becomes man vs. women. That is not the direction. Always there should be more men on the dias, their opinions should be aired.

Answer: Agreed, this has to be a debate not a tussle. This is not about man vs. women; opposition to reservation is about shifting of power. Many men have initiated progressive women's legislation.

Political Party Reforms (Practical Issues in Implementation)

Chairman – Prof Jagdeep Chhokar

Panelists: Mr. Srikant Jena (Union Minister Statistics and Programme Implementation; Chemicals and Fertilizers from INC), Mr. Ambika Chaudhary (Minister Revenue, Relief and Rehabilitation, Uttar Pradesh from SP) and Panchanand Kanungo (Former Finance Minister, Odisha)

Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Founder Member of ADR

Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar began the session stating that change in the political system can come about only by getting politicians to the debate. He also referred to the political parties as the largest pillar of democracy.

Mr. Srikant Jena, Union Minister Statistics and Programme Implementation, chemicals and Fertilizers from INC

Mr. Srikant Jena began by saying that the topic of political party reforms is very dear to all political parties. However he feels that political system reforms are more required than political party reforms because political parties today are becoming irrelevant as compared to political persons. According to him political personalities influence the voters more than political parties. He said, "With this system where individuals have stronger impact than the political party, political party reforms can be difficult."

Speaking of electoral reforms Mr. Jena stated that more political parties are required for a vibrant political system. He also said, "Parliamentary system is getting diluted as no discussions or debates happen."

Mr. Jena felt that only drafting a law on regulation of political parties is not enough. There needs to be a brainstorming session on this issue and it should start from the scratch as the political system is completely destroyed even at the village level.

Mr. Ambika Chaudhary, Minister of Revenue, Relief and Rehabilitation, Uttar Pradesh from SP

Mr. Ambika Chaudhary began on a positive note stating that our political system is very strong, however, he agreed that discussions can happen on how to improve it. He believed that the problems in front of the political parties and political systems cannot be separated. Some of these problems are: Problem of criminalization, corruption, non - accountability, hypocrisy and discrimination. Mr. Chaudhary stated, “The solution to all these problems have to be integral from top to bottom and not in pieces.”

Mr. Panchanand Kanungo, Former Finance Minister, Odisha

Mr. Panchanand Kanungo agreed that political party reforms and electoral reforms are required. He specified some reforms required when talking about the electoral system of our country. These are voting should be made compulsory, cost of the elections should be made by the state and no candidate shall be elected unless he gets at least 1/3 of the total votes.

Some political party reforms important according to Mr. Kanungo are “One man - one post” should be introduced within the parties. The annual budget of parties should be published in the newspapers and political parties should give information to the Election Commission about criminal charges against every candidate standing for elections. Parties should also be compelled to make reservations upto 50% for women. Elaborating in reforms required in the election system Mr. Kanungo stated that online voting should be introduced. Political parties should be allowed to give only one manifesto which should be published in the newspapers and they should be allowed to campaign for 20 days only. Voters should also be given the right to recall.

Prize Distribution

At the end of the session prizes were distributed to the winners who participated in the competition held on 2nd May 2012 for elocution, poster making and slogan competition.

Concluding session

In the concluding session various issues discussed in the two days were reviewed and the following recommendations were passed:

- Candidates with Criminal antecedents should be debarred from contesting elections.
- There is an urgent need for a comprehensive Bill to regulate the functioning of Political Parties to ensure inner party democracy and financial transparency within the political parties.
- The internal elections for the offices of political parties should be done using secret ballot and the culture of unanimous selection of the office bearers must stop.
- The ticket distribution process of the political parties should be made transparent and should be decided by the registered members of political parties.
- The accounts of the political parties should be audited by the CAG appointed auditors.

- The Political Parties should be declared as Public Authorities so that their functioning could be transparent and be made more accountable.
- Strict Laws should be passed to punish candidates involved in Electoral malpractices, particularly for buying of votes.
- Implement ceiling on expenses of Political Parties during election period.
- Strict Action against candidates who fail to file their election expenses.
- There should be a cooling off period of 5 years before which bureaucrats or people who have changed their parties are allowed to contest elections on tickets of a political party.
- The requirement for winning election should be “50% + 1 of the registered votes cast.
- Voting machines should have the option of “None of the above”. If the election in a constituency results in “None of the above” getting the maximum number of votes, there should be a re-poll and the candidates who contested should not be allowed to re-contest in that election.

Press Conference

At the closing stage of the program a press conference was held, whereby the motive of the 8th National Conference was shared with the media. It also covered the suggestions and recommendations to National Election Commission which were the outcome of the National Conference.

The major media working in Odisha like Janavani, Pragativadi, STV, OTV, Dharitri, News Express, MBC TV, Capital News, Kanak TV, The Telegraph, UNI, Ananya, ETV, The Pioneer, The Statesman, The Economic, The New India Express and many others.

Background of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW)

Early 1999: 11 IIM-Ahmedabad professors get together to form Association for Democratic Reforms to work on electoral reforms.

August 1999: ADR files PIL in Delhi High Court seeking disclosure of pending criminal cases by candidates contesting elections to parliament and state assemblies.

November 02, 2000: Delhi High Court upholds above PIL.

December 2000: Government of India appeals to Supreme Court against the judgment of Delhi High Court.

May 02, 2002: Supreme Court rejects the appeal and upholds the High Court judgment.

June 28, 2002: Election Commission issues orders to implement the Supreme Court judgment.

July 08, 2002: All party meeting decides to amend Representation of People Act to prevent/dilute the Supreme Court's orders.

August 22, 2002: Cabinet sends Ordinance for amending the Representation of People Act, to President for signature.

August 23, 2002: President returns the Ordinance.

August 24, 2002: Cabinet sends the Ordinance to the President a second time, the President signs, in keeping with the convention.

October 2002: PILs filed in Supreme Court, including one by ADR, challenging the constitutional validity of the amendment to the Representation of People Act, done by above Ordinance.

March 13, 2003: Supreme Court declares above amendment of the Representation of People Act as "illegal, null and void" and restores its May 02, 2002 judgment.

March 27, 2003: Election Commission issues orders implementing the Supreme Court judgment.

December, 2002: First Election Watch conducted for Gujarat Assembly Election

Post 2002, data for over 70,000 candidates, self-declared by the candidates themselves under the Supreme Court order, is now available.

2007: RTI applications filed before the Election Commission and Tax authorities seeking information about whether Political Parties file their contribution reports as per Sec 29(A) of RPA (Representation of Peoples' Act) 1951 to get tax benefits under Sec 13A of Income Tax Act, 1961

21 Jun 2007: EC response contains details on 21 parties' contribution reports. Many parties are listed for **not** submitting the reports ever. Tax authorities refuse to divulge the information

2008: CIC on Second Appeal allows tax returns of political parties to be made public and directs the authorities to furnish copies of the IT returns of the parties to public

2008: Scrutiny of copies of the return reveals that all the parties have availed benefit under Sec 13 A of the Income Tax Act, even those who have not filed their statutorily mandated contribution reports before Election Commission.

2008: PIL filed in the Supreme Court to issue order to conduct an inquiry to examine all defaulting parties whom have been given benefit of section 13A of Income Tax Act and to take

appropriate action against the defaulting political parties to recover the income tax due from them from the date of default till date

Nov, 14 2008: Supreme Court sets the PIL aside saying that the time is not appropriate to take up the PIL.

Jan 2009: Discussion with network partners to strategize on next steps.

May 2009: Results of Lok Sabha Election Watch shows that majority of candidates with heinous criminal records lost elections.

Nov 2009: First ever report on election expenses released by ADR and NEW.

17th August, 2010: First ever report on Income Tax returns and Assessment Orders of Political Parties from AY 2002-2003 to AY 2009-2010 released by ADR and NEW.

14th September, 2010: First ever report on sources of Income and Expense details as per Income Tax filed by political parties for FY 2007-08 and 2008-2009 released by ADR and NEW.

3rd January, 2011: First ever report released by ADR/NEW based on contribution reports filed by political parties.

12th February, 2011: Webpage containing scanned and uploaded copies of Income Tax Returns and Assessment Orders of national and regional political parties inaugurated by Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. S.Y. Quraishi.

24th March, 2011: First report on MLA performance released by ADR and NEW.

3rd June, 2011: CIC on Second Appeal filed by ADR orders the Rajya Sabha secretariat to disclose the Register of members' interest (containing crucial business and financial information of the MPs)

17th November, 2011: First analysis and report based on the business interests of Rajya Sabha MPs.

Jan-Feb, 2012: First report on the Analysis of State budget allocation by ADR and NEW.

Some eminent persons who are or have been involved with this initiative

1. Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, Former Chief Justice of India
2. Justice Jeevan Reddy, Former Supreme Court Judge and Chairman of the Law Commission
3. (Late) Justice B.J. Divan, Former Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court
4. (Late) Justice P.D. Desai, Former Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court
5. Justice T.U. Mehta, Former Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court
6. Mr. V. T. Shah, Former DG Police, Gujarat
7. Mr. Julio Rebeiro, Former DG Police, Maharashtra
8. Admiral Ram Tahiliani, Former Head of the Indian Navy, and President of Transparency International
9. Mr. J.M. Lyngdoh, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India
10. Mr. T.S. Krishnamurthy, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India
11. Mr. C G Somiah, Former Comptroller and Auditor General of India
12. Justice Shiva Shankar Bhatt, Former Justice of the Karnataka High Court
13. Late Mr. L.C. Jain, Former Member Planning Commission; Former High
14. Mr. T R Satish Chandran, Former Chief Secretary; Karnataka, Former Governor Goa

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15. Dr. Samuel Paul, Former Director of IIM Ahmedabad
 16. Dr. Narayan Sheth, Former Director of IIM Ahmedabad
 17. Mr. Ramachandra Guha, Eminent Historian and columnist
 18. Mr. P.S. Appu, IAS, Former Secretary to the Government of India
 19. Mr. P.V. Shenoi, IAS, Former Secretary to the Government of India
 20. Mr. K C Sivaramakrishnan, , Former Secretary to the Government of India
 21. Mr. I.C. Dwivedi, Former DG Police, Uttar Pradesh
 22. Justice Sachidanand Awasthi, Former Judge of the MP High Court
 23. Mr. B.G. Deshmukh, Former Cabinet Secretary, Government of India
 24. Justice Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari, Former Justice of the Mumbai High Court
 25. Mr. D.M. Sukhtankar, Former Chief Secretary; Maharashtra
 26. Lt. Gen. Y.D. Sahasrabudhe, Former Director General Army Service Corps
 27. Justice S.C. Verma, Former Lokayukta U.P.
 28. Justice Kamleshwar Nath, Former Judge of Allahabad High Court
 29. Justice D.K. Trivedi, Former Judge of Allahabad High Court.
 30. Shri R.C. Tripathi, Former Secy. Genl. Rajya Sabha
 31. Shri S.A.T. Rizvi, Former Secy. Parliamentary Affairs, Govt. of India.
 32. Prof. Banwari Lal Sharma, Formerly of Allahabad University
 33. Prof. S.K. Agarwal, Former Vice Chancellor Agra University.
 34. Dr. Bhumitra Former Vice Chancellor Gorakhpur and Ruhelkhand Universities.
 35. Dr. Veer Bhadra Mishra, Retd. Prof, BHU
 36. Prof. Waseem Barelwi, Renowned Urdu Poet and Social Activist
 37. Shri Prakash Singh, Former DG BSF & DGP U.P
 38. Shri Ram Arun, Former DGP, U.P.
 39. Dr H.K. Paintal, Former Professor, Lucknow University
 40. General(Retd) Shankar Roychowdhury, Former General, Indian Army
 41. Ms Aruna Roy, founder member MKSS

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Mr. Ranjan Mohanty welcoming the guests



Election Commissioner, Mr H. S. Brahma inaugurating the National Conference



Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar's welcome speech



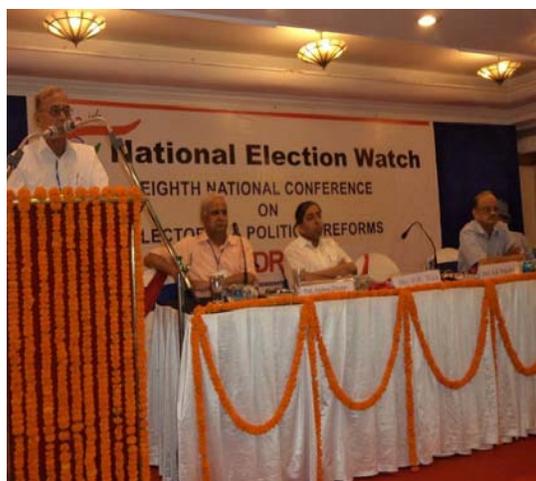
A Scene from the Street Play Performed by Sanjog NGO (Bhubaneswar)



Sharing of experience on 2012 Assembly Elections by the State Coordinators of National Election Watch (NEW)



Chairperson Mr. I. C. Diwivedi speaking on Uttar Pradesh Election Watch



Panel discussion on Money Power in Elections



Mr. H.S. Brahma (Election Commissioner) delivering the speech



Release of Election Watch books by Mr Brahma



Discussion on Political Party reforms



A Scene from Cultural Programme: Arranged by
Nrutyalaya Academy



Discussion on Local Bodies Election



Discussion on Women Participation in Political Process



Prof Chhokar chairing the discussion on Political Party Reforms



Mr. Panchanand Kanungo giving his views on Political Party reforms



Mr. H. S. Brahma (Election Commissioner) addressing the Press Conference



Mr. Ranjan Mohanty addressing the Press Conference

The House





Interactive Sessions





Award function



