

STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSION ON ELECTORAL & POLITICAL REFORMS: ISSUES, CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

 **10th March 2026 (Tuesday)**
09:30 AM to 5:00 PM

 **Multipurpose Hall**
(Kamaladevi Complex),
India International Centre, New Delhi

Organized by: Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) & National Election Watch (NEW)

TEA/COFFEE **09:00 AM - 09:30 AM**

REGISTRATION **09:30 AM - 09:45 AM**

WELCOME ADDRESS **09:45 AM - 09:55 AM**

Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd) (Head of ADR & NEW)

REPORT RELEASE **09:55 AM - 10:00 AM**

Political Finance in India: Assessment and Recommendations (jointly published by ADR and The University of Melbourne's Electoral Regulation Research Network)

Session 1: **10:00 AM - 11:45 AM**

Criminalization of Politics: Implications for Electoral Integrity

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

Speakers: (12-15 minutes per speaker)

- 1. Mr Om Prakash Rawat (former Chief Election Commissioner of India)**
- 2. Mr Ghanshyam Tiwari (National Spokesperson, Samajwadi Party) [joining online]**
- 3. Dr Manoj Kumar Jha (Member of the Rajya Sabha, RJD)**
- 4. Ms Priyanka Kakkar (Chief National Spokesperson, AAP)**
- 5. Mr Anish Gawande (National Spokesperson, NCP (SP))**

Questions & Answer Session (30 minutes)

Discussion cues of session 1:

- i.) Curbing the rising number of legislators with criminal cases: Who will bell the cat? Executive or Judiciary?**
- ii.) Does repeated selection of tainted politicians adversely affect good governance?**
- iii.) Is the Indian voter unaffected by the tainted background of politicians?**
- iv.) Why the law on disqualification at the stage of charges framed by the court has not yet seen the light of the day? (continued...)**

Discussion cues of session 1:

- v.) Lifetime ban or disqualification for 10 or 15 years for convicted politicians: Which is appropriate?
- vi.) Why the slew of Supreme Court judgements such as fast-track courts, special courts, trials of convicted MPs/MLAs within a year, C7 forms filled by parties, etc, have been unable to bring about reform?
- vii.) Need for a comprehensive law on political parties functioning to regulate inner party democracy, criteria for ticket distribution, RTIs, civil/criminal liability on non-compliance
- viii.) Is the 130th Constitutional amendment bill really the answer to growing criminality or rather a political weaponization turning procedural custody into the disqualification penalty?

TEA BREAK

11:45 AM - 12:00 PM

Session 2:

12:00 PM - 01:45 PM

Rebuilding Transparency in Political Finance Post-Electoral Bonds

Chair: Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder Member & Trustee - ADR & NEW)

Speakers: (12-15 minutes per speaker)

1. **Mr Manish Tewari (Member of the Lok Sabha, INC)**
2. **Mr Saurabh Bhardwaj (President, AAP- Delhi Unit)**
3. **Dr Gumma Thanuja Rani (Member of the Lok Sabha, YSRCP)**
4. **Dr Niranjana Sahoo (Senior Fellow, ORF)**
5. **Mr Venkatesh Nayak (Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative) [joining online]**

Questions & Answer Session (30 minutes; Questions from in-person and virtual attendees)

Discussion cues of session 2:

- i.) A comprehensive political parties' law to regulate finances, internal democracy, and leadership accountability
- ii.) Bring political parties under the ambit of the RTI Act
- iii.) Compliance with limits on corporate donations and ensure a level-playing field
- iv.) Enforceable expenditure limits for parties and candidates to prevent financial dominance and corruption
- v.) Develop and enforce specific rules for online and third-party campaign spending.
- vi.) Ensure public disclosure of all election-related seizures, including names of involved candidates or parties and the status of disposal of cases
- vii.) Announcement of pre-poll freebies and welfare schemes
- viii.) Public funding of elections

LUNCH

01:45 PM - 03:00 PM

Session 3:

03:00 PM - 04:45 PM

The Impact of Election Commissioners' Appointment Procedures on Electoral Credibility

Chair: Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee - ADR & NEW)

Speakers: (12-15 minutes per speaker)

- 1. Hon'ble Mr Justice Madan Bhimarao Lokur (Chairperson, United Nations Internal Justice Council and former Judge, Supreme Court of India)**
- 2. Mr Ashok Lavasa (former Election Commissioner of India)**
- 3. Dr Laxmikant Bajpai (Member of the Rajya Sabha, BJP)**
- 4. Mr Pawan Khera (Chairman, Media & Publicity Deptt. AICC)**
- 5. Ms Anjali Bhardwaj (Social Activist)**

Questions & Answer Session (30 minutes)

Discussion cues of session 3:

- The Act of 2023 on appointments replaced the SC mandated collegium (PM, LoP & CJI) by removing the CJI by a Cabinet Minister.
- The law was passed without any debate or discussion at a time when the majority of the opposition Members of Parliament were suspended by the speaker of Lok Sabha.
- The Selection Committee dominated by the executive renders the selection process vulnerable to manipulation by choosing those whose loyalty to it is ensured.
- ECI's independence has been systematically diminished by lowering the status of Election Commissioners from being equivalent to Supreme Court judges to Cabinet Secretary.
- Lack of clear rules on other government posts after retirement raises concerns about post-tenure benefits.
- The petitions against the present law are pending in the Supreme Court since January, 2024.

CLOSING REMARKS & VOTE OF THANKS

04:45 PM - 05:00 PM

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

TEA & DISPERSAL

05:00 PM - 05:30 PM
