



MINUTES OF THE ADR'S MEDIA DIALOGUE

Press Club, New Delhi

25th September 2014

The aim of the media dialogue was to obtain views of the media as to how ADR, as an organization, can do better and do differently. Based on ADR's reports, it is evident that the number of criminals in the Parliament keeps increasing, as has been observed over the years. The media has been very helpful in reporting the analysis that ADR brings out but ADR would be keen to know what it is that we can still improve at the organization's end.

The overall objective is to work towards a better democracy and enhanced voter awareness.

Agenda: Media Dialogue on Haryana Elections

Organized by: Association for Democratic Reforms & Haryana Election Watch

Venue: Press Club of India, New Delhi. Date: 25th September 2014

Time	Sessions
10.00 AM - 10.10 AM	Welcome and Introduction Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Anil Verma, Head, ADR & NEW. Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Founder Member, ADR and NEW, Former Director In-Charge, IIM-Ahmedabad.
10.10 AM - 11.20 AM	Session – I The State of Governance and Functioning of Government Institutions in Haryana. Chair: Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Founder Member, ADR and NEW, Former Director In-Charge, IIM-Ahmedabad. Speakers: Sharad Gupta (Dainik Bhaskar), Satya Prakash (Hindustan Times), Archana Kapoor (Radio Mewat), Tridib Raman (NTI Media Ltd--ETV), OPEN SESSION
11.20 AM - 11.40 AM	Tea Break
11.40 AM - 12.50 PM	Session - II The Issue of Paid News and Media's Responsibilities during Elections. Chair: Vipul Mudgal, Visiting Senior Fellow, CSDS. Speakers: Vipul Mudgal, Visiting Senior Fellow, CSDS, Sanjay Kapoor (Hardnews), Alka Saxena OPEN SESSION
12:50 PM – 01.00 PM	ADR's Presentation on Methods of Voter Awareness
01.00 PM - 02.00 PM	Session – III Curbing the Influence of Money in Elections. Chair: Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Anil Verma, Head, ADR & NEW. Speakers: Shri P. K. Dash (ECI), Shahid Parvez (The Statesman), Rukmini Srinivasan (The Hindu), Siddharth Pandey (NDTV) OPEN SESSION
02.00 PM - 02.05 PM	Concluding Remarks Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Anil Verma, Head, ADR & NEW.
02.05 PM Onwards	Lunch

Session I: The State of Governance and Functioning of Government Institutions in Haryana

*Chair: Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Founder Member, ADR and NEW,
Former Director In-Charge, IIM-Ahmedabad.*

Speakers: Sharad Gupta (Dainik Bhaskar), Satya Prakash (Hindustan Times), Archana Kapoor (Radio Mewat), Tridib Raman (NTI Media Ltd--ETV)

After a brief welcome and introduction by Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, the 1st session of the day started

Mr Satya Prakash of **Hindustan Times** summed up his position thus:

Mr Prakash said that ADR has been doing a good job as far as elections are concerned. The media is very familiar with the work that ADR does, and very often depends on ADR for data and stories. This session has immense importance in terms of raising issues, he said. Elections are generally a huge challenge and in Haryana, it is a bigger challenge. It was at this juncture that he said he was reminded of the 90s, when many people were killed in violence related incidents during elections. Haryana is a feudal state, and often people have embedded loyalties towards their caste and community, which makes it complicated to conduct elections. The few issues that Mr. Prakash thought seriously plague the efficiency in Haryana include:

1. According to Mr. Prakash, the feudal nature of society in Haryana is a very influential factor in determining caste and community politics in the state. Haryana is more feudal than other parts of the country. Loyalty to caste and community is more important.
2. Mr Prakash was of the view that money and muscle power are prevalent in Haryana. 66 out of 88 MLAs are crorepatris in the outgoing assembly. The average assets of each MLA is Rs 7.11 crores. 13 MLAs had declared serious criminal cases against them and 40% are only 12th passed or lesser. Haryana has other administration issues as well, including an alarming sex ratio. Only 10 MLAs are women, he summed up. He also cited examples relating to the frequent transfers of honest bureaucrats in the state. Bureaucrats have been hounded and threatened for revealing corruption in Haryana society. Mr. Prakash said that this is done to make the bureaucracy commit to the political party in power. The administration has tremendous power today. They have to remain free and fair, otherwise elections cannot be conducted, opined Mr Prakash.
3. Mr Prakash also said that democracy functions through institutions. They act as checks and balances against each other. The media and civil society highlight issues. He also said that, in this system, the bureaucracy has an important role to play. Politically loyal

bureaucrats are given lucrative positions and this has to stop. Mr Prakash was of the opinion that attention has to be paid to the attempt at putting fair, independent and honest officers at key positions. Collaboration between civil society and the media can address this issue, and dishonest officers can be weeded out.

Mr Tridib Raman of **NTI Media Ltd.** was of the opinion that:

Governance should be equal and fair. He said that his organization is in the process of creating a program on Haryana and Haryana elections, called “Vote Karega Haryana”. Mr Raman also recounted a story regarding his friend who had a hospital built and was offered huge amounts of cash during its inauguration by a former Haryana CM for a part in the project.

Mr Raman opined that caste based politics is deeply embedded in Haryana. Both the ‘*AJGAR*’ and the ‘*MAJGAR*’ formulations came to his mind. He emphasized that during the 90s elections in Haryana, violence ensured that nobody could get out of their houses to vote after a certain time period in which supporters of a particular party would have voted. Politics of this sort has been followed in Haryana, he held.

Haryana politics tries to accommodate its people in the state when someone comes to power, said Mr Raman.

Ms Archana Kapoor of **Radio Mewat** illustrated her point of view:

Mewat was declared a district in 2005, and still does not have an independent parliamentary seat. Ms. Kapoor started her journey in Mewat in 2000, and till today, she said that she raises the question that despite being only 70 km away from the capital, why are things so bad in her district? Why is the community marginalized? Young boys and women are still not allowed to vote, she claimed. Recently, few political parties tried to project things that have been happening for years there.

Fear versus fair is her major battle, holds Ms Kapoor. She wonders how they should allow people to exercise their choice and not fear the consequences. She said that over the years, she has come to realize that the four problems that continue to plague society in Haryana are:

- Money
- Muscle
- Mafia
- Mines

Ms Kapoor said that caste politics can’t be won. If a male candidate is standing, despite being corrupt, he will be voted to power. The police is absolutely non-existent during elections, she claimed.

She went on to elaborate that whether it is panchayat elections or the implementation of NREGA, no elections in Mewat have ever been conducted without the loss of life. Recently,

four youths lost their lives in communal violence. Work has to begin with the empowerment of women in Mewat, and their ability to exercise their voting rights. Ms Kapoor opined that there is so much patriarchy embedded in the society in Haryana that diktats given regarding non-participation are even followed and are actually obeyed.

Ms Kapoor said that when the program by her community radio started, there was a sense of urgency and excitement. Gradually, when bigger and stronger issues were raised regarding corruption, Radio Mewat started being portrayed as anti-community and has started facing heat. Ms Kapoor said that they need to continue to work and provide choices – they need to continue to report the positive as well as negative.

However, these issues are not exclusive to Mewat, they are relevant to the whole country, said Ms Kapoor. She is of the view that the media is not helping – people are creating a negative picture which is deterring people from doing any meaningful work in the area. She said that they didn't receive any help from the politicians for any meaningful engagement or to stop any illegal activities. She said that in this environment, they have to work with common people, take away fear from their hearts and empower them. Ms Kapoor hopes that the community takes charge of this medium and spearheads change. She summed up her position by saying that they have to break this nexus between crime, politics, money and muscle power which prevents the citizens from exercising his / her right.

Mr Sharad Gupta of **Dainik Bhaskar** held the following views:

Mr. Gupta mentioned that tainted candidates are being chosen by political parties for the upcoming assembly elections in Haryana. Mr. Gupta said that feedback from his correspondents in Haryana tells him that the average span of assembly in Haryana is 14 days. Last year, the assembly met for only 13 days. This practice is to suspend the opposition and then conduct any politics in the state, he said. Institutions are dysfunctional, and do not work at all – they are almost non-existent, opined Mr Gupta. Every government which comes to power in Haryana, runs a personalized government and that is why there are so many scams in the state, said Mr Gupta. He said that “*Change of Land Use*” has become one of the major industries in the state.

Mr Gupta summed up by saying that violence has decreased since the violence recorded in the years of 1989, 1990 and 1991 and things seems to be improving. He pointed out that no tax is deducted on the salaries of our MPs. Most of the MPs claim that they are farmers or social activists by profession. Most of them don't file their IT returns, he said. He signed off saying that efforts could be pitched in to highlight these things and pressurize the government to make it mandatory for all MPs to file their IT returns. In India, we don't know the source of our MPs' income, he laments.

Prof. Chhokar summed up the dialogue:

Earlier, it was reported that people died in the elections, said Prof. Chhokar. He said that the ECI takes pride in saying that violence has stopped. EVMs make it impossible for booths to be captured, along with the presence of security forces ensuring law and order. However, Prof. Chhokar said that this is disturbing and worrisome. He said that we pride ourselves on being ruled by the ballot, but our ballots are cast under the shadow of a bullet, which negates democracy.

He also said that ADR has been successful in obtaining the IT returns of political parties. ADR got the six political parties declared as public authorities. Efforts have been made toward obtaining IT returns of individual MPs, work on which is still in progress. More needs to be done, he opined.

Some Suggestions from the audience:

- We can focus on civil society activism, and the media needs to disseminate the ADR reports widely.
- Haryana holds civil society in very low esteem. Print / visual media needs to be alert about small stories.
- In terms of this election, civil society movement cannot be created overnight. As media personnel and civil society, we can highlight shortcomings in the process and ensure that those with strong political nexus not be appointed at key bureaucratic posts. If such a person is a RO, nobody can reverse what he does. Even courts cannot interfere. Election petitions would take up to 5 years. The ECI can intervene under Article 324. The ECI however, has limited powers, but the media and civil society can be very powerful.
- There are a very few civil society organisations in Haryana. Media can assist in encouraging civil society to acquire momentum, coherence and visibility.

SESSION II: THE ISSUE OF PAID NEWS AND MEDIA'S RESPONSIBILITIES DURING ELECTIONS

Chair: Vipul Mudgal, Visiting Senior Fellow, CSDS.

Speakers: Sanjay Kapoor (Hardnews), Alka Saxena, Vipul Mudgal, Visiting Senior Fellow, CSDS

Mr. Vipul Mudgal, who was chairing the session, threw light on the political context in Haryana giving a few examples. He spoke about a study on paid news conducted by the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR). In Haryana, he said, there is no requirement for discourse or textual analysis of media content to identify paid news. The examples that he gave amply elucidated his point of the reports being “embarrassingly one sided”.

Mr. Mudgal also noted that in India, there is no concept of pre-legislative transparency as opposed to some countries where the media is directly involved in the role of propagation. The situation is worse in a state like Haryana, he added, where all the laws in the last at least 10 years have been passed without any discussion in the Assembly. Vested interests, he said, may have been writing the entire policy for the state. This, he explained, is mainly because of lack of any interventions, which are direly required. Even if any intervention does not succeed immediately, it will start a process of change. Therefore, the right interventions are required, he said, at the right places in Haryana.

Alka Saxena:

Ms. Saxena said, that the term “paid news” was coined somewhere around 2004, during the Lok Sabha elections. It became established as an industry in 2009. Although people, including media itself, politicians and civil society, express concern about paid news, the issue is growing, she emphasized, and there is a need to know why.

Paid news, she explained, started with small bribes at the lower levels that were paid to ensure a coverage. Now, she said, that it is at the level of decision makers and has become a corporate-like activity. Media houses, she explained, offer packages to politicians during elections, where coverage is sold. The rates differ for each politician/candidate, she said. Politicians, in turn, do not just pay back through the rates quoted but may also be helping the media houses with other issues, like say licensing, land allotments etc. she said.

Ms. Saxena said that while we analyse the asset increase of politicians, there should be an institutions to analyse the asset increase of the owners of media houses as well.

This issue of paid news, Ms. Saxena said, has increased after the advent and growth of the electronic media. She explained how anyone who wants to mint money is now starting a TV channel. A channel, she said, usually breaks even in 3 years. But since none of the income is white, even when there is hardly any profit shown for 3 years on paper, a channel will still be running.

What is required, she emphasized, is a certain watch dog and rules to monitor the media. Transparency is required, she said. But the obstacle, she said, is that people who are profiting (the political class and the media) do not want the circumstances to change.

Sanjay Kapoor:

Mr. Sanjay Kapoor, who is the owner and editor of 'Hard News, said that owners and editors when combined do not do justice to either responsibilities. Editorial responsibility, he said, requires an ethical restraint. Hard news, he explained, is not tied to any interest and was started with a purpose of bringing in value to journalism.

Paid news, Mr. Kapoor said, is against the idea of media, which should essentially be independent and free. It is important to note, he pointed out, that the issue of paid news came up at the time of the recession around 2008 – 09. Since the revenue from advertising was small, paid news grew. Freedom of press, he said, can always be upheld if editors stand up to the pressure. But sustainability is also a big issue, he said. Marketing executives, therefore, got control over editorials, he said. The issue seemed to have hit an abysmal low with Mrinal Pandey's admission that there was no more autonomy in editorials, he said.

Mr. Kapoor said that 2009, paid news became integral to how institutions were run. (He gave the example of Mr. P. Sainath's findings on paid news against a noted politician in Maharashtra¹). This, he said, was because the economic scenario changed post liberalization; the ethics of market infiltrated the media. Now, he said, no one is bothered as to how news is gathered (He also gave the reference of his book, '*Bad money, Bad politics*' based on the same issue).

Mr. Kapoor said that the editor is the "safe-keeper of morality" and every editor is faced with a question of whether he/she would let go of that morality during a crisis. People with larger establishments, he explained, had bigger issues, and that probably led to compromises.

Further elucidating the point that paid news is not black and white issue, he emphasized that it requires to be looked at in detail and in the context that money is always scarce. He gave the example of how the media in West Bengal is hit by the scam in the Sarda Chit Fund Company.

Referring to Mr. Mudgal's point on vested interests being involved in policy making in Haryana, he said that the trend is similar in a lot of other states. For example, he said, that

¹ <http://psainath.org/paid-news-the-bills-start-coming-in/>

Gujarat's policies are made by Reliance long before Mr. Narendra Modi stepped in as Chief Minister. Private meddling with policy is a tendency, he said, in almost all states.

Vipul Mudgal (closing remarks):

Mr. Mudgal threw light on existing efforts to combat paid news. He said that in collaboration with the Election Commission of India, a Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) is formed in every district to monitor paid news. He added that the issue, however is that the members are usually appointed at the behest of politicians. He enumerated the following suggestions to address the issue:

1. Have strict, rules, unbiased appointment of MCMC committee members
2. Capacity building of members: "commitment to journalism may be more than ability". Therefore, identify parameters for capacity building.
3. Requirement of an over-arching Conflict of Interest policy – ADR and other civil society members should frame a policy to build transparency and accountability
4. Veracity of affidavits and declarations under oath should be ensured. He gave the example of two politicians in Gurgaon, winner and runner up in the last elections, who are both builders. Both their affidavits, he said, mention prime construction land as agricultural land in their affidavits. The question, he said, is will we tolerate the false declarations or complete the process of disclosure by ensuring veracity of the declarations. This is a very big intervention space, he emphasized.

Discussion and final remarks:

Sanjay Kapoor: Mr. Kapoor said that in India, criticism or critiquing of the media, was not present earlier. This is an important aspect especially in cases where professionalism is missing in media reporting, he added. Editors, he said, would then be more cognizant because of moral pressure. People will then also become more conscious, he said. In an evolving economy, Mr. Kapoor said, morality always takes a hit: in elections, people are not bothered about how news are being reported. Anywhere in the country during elections, buying of votes is also rampant. Those impulses, he emphasized, have to change.

Alka Saxena:

Ms. Saxena said that everyone fears the media as it functions like a watch dog. She said that the UPA had said that the media should be regulated but the media resisted the move saying it will bring about self-regulation, which never happened. When we speak of electoral and judicial reforms, she added, we should talk of media reforms also. A strategy should be developed for the same, she said.

Q: Do we have enough regulatory mechanisms to check paid news?

Ans. (Alka Saxena): There is no regulatory authority. She said that the Government has no right to regulate the media. But it can surely put a time frame for a system of self-regulation to be put in place, which the Government, she added, will not initiate, because of its vested interest.

Q: Can paid news be made an “electoral offence”? Is there any regulation that has been recently passed to the same effect?

A (Vipul Mugal): TRAI had asked for suggestions from the media on a national policy², which were made. These, however, do not work, said Mr. Mudgal. In the freedom movement, newspapers were used for political awakening, he added. Politics and media, therefore, cannot be dissociated, he said.

Mr. Mudgal advised that we must look at regulation in the broader context. In India, he said that the Government is retreating from many governance aspects which should be compensated by good regulation. Political parties, he said, own the media directly and some by proxy. 4 or 5 politicians own TV channels in Assam alone, he added. The new trend is either builders, politicians or chit fund companies owning the media. There are certain over-arching policies that are required, he said, like conflict of interest. Some specific regulations are also required for sectors like the real estate.

For media, it will be fatal to be regulated by the Government, Mr. Mudgal warned. Self-regulation also, he added, is no regulation. Therefore strict laws are required which establish boundaries, he explained: like for example, if Times of India is caught in paid news or private treaties, it should lose the mast head “Times of India”. Regulation with strict penalization, he said will address the problem. Regulation should be ‘citizens’ regulation’, he added; people should decide whether content is “news” or “entertainment”.

Sanjay Kapoor: Added that “we are zealous of keeping government at bay” giving the example of countries like Turkey where Government regulation has had adverse effects. Leaders in media houses, he said, need to take hard steps.

Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar: Added that there are other industries which are involved in elections: construction, mining and education (where there is more cash transaction). It is true, he said that laws are written by corporates.

Paid news and functioning of media, he said has become a serious problem with the corporatization of media where a capitalistic philosophy has taken over. **“Certain human endeavours”, Prof. Chhokar said, “cannot be only for making money”**, for example, education and health care. The other most abused profession, he said, is law. These professions,

² <http://www.thehindu.com/business/decide-on-media-freedom-in-national-media-policy-tra/article6429947.ece>

he lamented, have become purely money making. The same is true for media, he said. “***The business of journalism has killed the profession of journalism***” Prof. Chhokar said.

Q/Remark: The Uttar Pradesh elections of 2002 saw numerous cases of paid news. Reforms are good but not adequate. Paid news flourished after liberalization which has affected all sectors. Media is also engulfed in the same wave. The economic policies, therefore, also need to be reformed.

Q. The root is in the problem with the election system. Although there are caps, a large amount of money is spent. Therefore, monitoring of election expenses should be strict.

A: TRP system can be improved, should be based on the socio economic aspects of the people. Regarding election expenses, caps should be put election expenditure of political parties.

Sanjay: The main challenge is to restore the credibility of news. Leaders in media houses have a responsibility to ensure the same. In other countries like the UK, self-regulation exists, especially where there is an active civil society and good journalists.

Session 3 – Curbing the Influence of Money in Elections

Chair: Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Anil Verma, Head, ADR & NEW

Speakers: Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Anil Verma, Head, ADR & NEW, P. K. Dash (ECI), Siddharth Pandey (NDTV), Shahid Parvez (The Statesman) and Rukmini Srinivasan (The Hindu).

The speakers focussed on the increasing influence of money power in elections, the link between muscle and money power and efforts at mitigation.

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

Maj. Gen. Anil Verma, Head, ADR & NEW commenced the third session of the Media Dialogue, quoting some important figures regarding the expenditure incurred in the conduct of elections.

He said, according to the book by ex- CEC, Dr. S.Y. Qureshi, “Elections: An Undocumented Wonder”, the expenditure incurred in each constituency by candidates is approximately Rs. 25 crores. This amounts to Rs. 1 Lakh crore for 4000 assembly constituencies in India and Rs. 12,500 crores for 543 Lok Sabha constituencies. Municipal corporation and block level elections account for Rs. 750 to 1000 crores in election expenditure. All of this amounts to a total of Rs. 1.5 to Rs. 2 Lakh crores in election expenditures.

He also mentioned that as per the ECI website, around Rs. 3500 crores was spent on the recently concluded 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

Clearly there is a gross underreporting of election expenditure by political parties and candidates in elections.

Furthermore, taking into account data from the last assembly elections in Haryana, he said, around 75% of Haryana MLAs are Crorepatis and the average assets of Haryana sitting MLAs is Rs. 7.11 crores

He said, one of the major issues hindering transparency in election expenditure is that while candidates are required to declare their expenditure but there is no such mandatory rule for the political parties. The political parties in their quest for power spend huge amounts of money in elections. However there is no accountability and there is a naked display of black money in elections.

Mr. P.K. Dash (Director General, Election Commission of India)

Mr. P.K. Dash thanked ADR for extending an invitation for the media dialogue. He also thanked ADR for making good, rational and impartial analysis of the facts put up on the website as the ECI has limitations in making such analysis. Mr. Dash felt, that there are many areas where the ECI finds that the law is not stringent or robust enough and in such areas ADR has been doing a good job through PILs and RTIs. He also referred to the initial PIL by ADR which brought the affidavits of contesting candidates in the public domain and the recent CIC judgment which brought the national political parties under the domain of Right to Information.

Mr. P.K. Dash went on to say that, without money a multi-party democracy cannot function. At the same time the excess use of money by any of the stakeholders is worrisome. One of the major concerns during elections is vote buying. The ECI seized 315 crores of cash in a duration of 20 days during the Lok Sabha elections. Huge amounts of liquor (more than 2 lakh litres) and drugs (more than 1700 crores mg) were also seized.

One of the major reasons for the proliferation of these methods of vote buying is that there is no law which bans the carrying of cash and so the Election Commission initiated the process of intercepting these exchanges through flying squads and static teams in places where such incidents were likely to happen. However in the recent Lok Sabha elections it was noticed that money was being carried in surreptitious ways for example in the bonnet of the car, in helicopters in ambulances etc.

Mr. Dash said that though the ECI works under limitations, as far as political parties are concerned there are no laws regulating them and no caps on election expenditure. The parties have funds received from unknown sources to the amount of 75% of their funds. Some parties don't even send their contribution reports to the commission and many claim that all their funds come from under Rs. 20,000 receipts. The law ministry has been sitting on the file for amendment of the form for contribution reports (24A). Further, there is no mention of political parties in the constitution. There is no provision for de-registration of political parties. This has led to the proliferation of political parties in India. There is a need for awareness to mobilise pressure to bring in such laws that are required.

With regard to Haryana in specific, he said, there is cash flowing during elections freely and there is no law limiting pre-candidature expenditure. Our concept of election expenditure starts from the time of the candidates' nomination. However most candidates spend most of their campaign money before filing nominations. This expenditure is not reported nor accounted for in the election expenditure statements.

He informed that there are 13 assembly constituencies in Haryana that are expenditure sensitive pockets. In view of this the Election Commission has undertaken the constituting village level awareness groups, with independent citizens, retired people etc. and sensitizing these groups

who in turn sensitize their immediate society. This is undertaken through training programs and dissemination of our material to them.

Mr. P.K. Dash concluded by stating that, if there is awareness in the society the issues of vote buying can be resolved, however, the ECI cannot undertake this task alone. Civil societies, individuals and the media need to come together for this. He further states that the root of corruption in our society comes from elections and that's why there is a requirement for voter awareness. In Kerala, where there is such voter awareness, incidents of excessive vote buying are few and far between. We need this in Haryana as well.

Mr. Shahid Parvez (The Statesman)

Mr. Shahid Parvez stated that most of the money swirling through our political system is black money. He highlighted the need to make our system open, transparent and clean. He congratulated the Election Commission for undertaking some landmark moves such as directing the political parties to provide the name and address of donors who have given donations to the party of below Rs. 20,000. He stated that this move will lead to greater transparency of the funding of political parties as most of the funding is black money.

Having said that, he qualified his statement by mentioning that these guidelines would not have much effect unless they come with the required statutory backing – which it currently does not have. If the details of every donor is maintained and recorded meticulously the cleaning of the political system of this black money can start.

Mr. Shahid Pervez also proposed state funding of elections.

Ms. Rukmini Srinivasan (The Hindu)

Ms. Rukmini Srinivasan stated that there is an evident influence of money in elections. The chances of winning of a candidate with high assets is far greater than the chances of winning of a candidate with low assets. She further said, that civil societies and the Election Commission have made many significant moves towards greater transparency in the election expenditure of political parties and candidates. She also stated that while some suggested methods were of fast tracking the cases against MPs, she was wary of this move as it would overburden the courts. Further she stated that the efficacy of NOTA is still left to be measured as it is possible that NOTA is being used in reserved constituencies with greater propensity in order to hinder candidates from the lower castes to come into power.

Mr. Siddharth Pandey (NDTV)

Mr. Siddharth Pandey said, that ADR's press releases have been particularly helpful to the media and the ECI.

He summarized his opinions briefly by stating that Public-Private Partnerships are the order of the day. When media persons like him use the RTI to garner information from PPP enterprises they hit a roadblock. He further stated that there is a lot of money being funnelled through the private sector and this opacity in the funding of political parties through the private sector is part of the problem of money in elections.

He concluded by stating that the Election Commission needs to be given greater powers.

Open session

In the open session, Mr. P.K. Dash responded on two issues. Firstly, he stated that a candidate can only be implicated in the electoral offence if he is caught with the money that is used to distribute to the voters. He went on to say that the candidates are far smarter than carrying the money themselves and usually the money is carried by any other businessmen in collusion with them. In view of this the ECI now reports any unaccounted cash seized during elections to the Income Tax Department for investigation.

With regards to Election Commission's powers, the ECI has been fighting in courts for greater powers in disqualifying a candidate.

He further stated that he had noticed most political parties do not show expenses on helicopters in their election expenditure statements even when it is clear that such expenditures were made during the elections. One of the most common excuses made by the political parties regarding this is that the expenditure was made by a third person and the helicopter was given as complimentary to the party by a supporter. The ECI in cognizant of this has amended the form for expenditure stating that even expenses through complimentary expenditure must be disclosed.

He concludes by stating that unless the society at large stands up, there would be no change.

Mr. Pervez said that the only major criterion for nomination of candidate is winnability and the ticket goes to a candidate who can marshal money and muscle power. He stated that the media and civil society needs to play the role of watchdogs and he suggested ADR that they should collaborate with jan sanghathans and grassroot level organisations all across the country.

Prof. Chhokar said, that recently ADR has filed a PIL to make it mandatory for the political parties to declare their expenditure beginning one year before the elections. Regarding state funding he said, that it should only be considered when the finances of the political parties become transparent. On being asked, how much money should the state pay, he answered that

we need to know how much money is being spent first. Quoting the Law Commission he stated that, transparency of finances of political parties is a prerequisite to state funding. Prof. Chhokar concluded by saying that the media is an important ally in bringing about electoral and political reforms in the country.