

Press Release

March 24th, 2013

9th Annual Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms

- **Chief Election Commissioner V.S Sampath Says:**
 - **Need for a full-fledged law for the regulation of Political Parties**
 - **Election Commission has contained the evils of Booth Capturing and vulgar Muscle-power, currently taking substantial steps to curb the role of Money Power in elections**
- **Panchayati Raj despite its short-comings has given chances to the women and extremely underprivileged sections of the society: Nikhil Dey**

The second day of the 9th Annual Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms saw CEC Mr. V.S. Sampath gracing the occasion with an extended speech covering the issues concerning the current electoral and political system in the country. He conveyed that after successfully countering the menace of booth capturing and muscle power, ECI currently is devising and implementing extensive plans to curb the evil of money-power in the elections. He talked about the Expense Monitoring Committees, Video Surveillance Teams, Static Flying Squads, the existence of a shadow register maintained by the Commission that keeps detailed accounts of the expenses of a contesting candidate in a constituency.

He also described in great details the changes done in the process of submission of election expense affidavit by the contesting candidates. He expressed the helplessness of the Election Commission in taking the action against the instances of Paid News as only Press Council of India has the mandate to look into those matters. He also stated that under current laws the Election Commission has no power to de-register political parties in the country.

Mr. Sampath also said that there is a grave need of a full-fledged law to administer the functioning of Political Parties.

Other issues he touched upon were Incomplete filing of contesting candidate's affidavit, de-criminalization of Politics, NRI voting, spending of Political Parties etc.

The second day of the 9th Annual Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms, which is being organized by the National Election Watch (NEW) and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), began with the motivating tales of the individuals belonging to the deprived and neglected segments of rural Rajasthan who after getting disturbed by the rampant corruption all-around them in Panchayats successfully fought the Panchayat Elections and have become Sarpanches without spending any money.

The stories like Kalu Ram who won his Panchayat Election by spending merely Rs. 695 and defeated the opponents who disbursed lakhs of rupees. Another inspiring story was narrated by Kamla Bai who beat a candidate from the family that had been winning Sarpanch elections since independence. Gyarsi Bai from the most impoverished 'Gariya' community won her Panchayat election and freed the bonded labour belonging to her community and also freed agricultural land from the upper-caste people without violence. Every single of these individuals narrated their achievements with

regard to the regular disbursement of MNREGA money to the villagers, correction of MNREGA master rolls and regular social audit of the Panchayat funds.

Presiding over this session was Rajasthan State Election Commissioner (SEC) who amazed by the spirits and confidence of these individuals also threw light on the issues related to electoral reforms in Panchayat elections. By asserting that electoral reform is a never-ending on-going process, some of the issues he touched upon were- *regular Delimitation of the Panchayat Constituencies, regular rotation of reserved constituencies, security of women contesting candidates, change in the nomination process etc.*

Chief Election Officer (CEO) of Rajasthan also spoke at one of the sessions and elaborated upon the preparedness of the ECI regarding the upcoming State Assembly Elections. He also emphasized the role of Civil Society Organization (CSO) in these elections and called upon the electorate to vote ethically.

Presiding over an interactive session, noted journalist Srinivasan Jain mentioned that a back of the envelope estimation of money spent in an election cycle in Parliament, State Assemblies and Panchayat Elections is around Rs. 80, 000 Crores.

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