

ELECTION COMMISSION HOLDS MEETING WITH POLITICAL PARTIES ON VARIOUS ELECTORAL REFORMS

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Election Commission

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The Election Commission of India, comprising Chief Election Commissioner Sh O P Rawat, Election Commissioners Sh Sunil Arora and Sh Ashok Lavasa, today held in depth interactive session with all the recognised national and state political parties on a broad range of issues concerning various aspects pertaining to Elections. Altogether all 7 National parties and 34 State parties attended the meeting. In his opening remarks Chief Election Commissioner Sh O P Rawat said the Commission always values the inputs from Political Parties in making our Election process robust, fair and credible.

The Chief Election Commissioner Shri O.P. Rawat observed that political parties are initiators of reforms and act as agents for mobilizing people and electors, enabling them to express their political choice. The Commission considers Political Parties as the most important stakeholders in its endeavor to strengthen electoral democracy. The Chief Election Commissioner further observed that the Commission is uniquely privileged and honored to enjoy trust and confidence of people, media and all political parties because the Commission has an open door policy treating all with respect, impartiality and fairness. The Commission urged the representatives of political parties to put forward their views on important issues such as transparency in political funding, media management including that of social media, bringing in trust and confidence of all stakeholders in the voting and counting process and as such strengthening democracy in our country while setting an example globally. The Chief Election Commissioner mentioned about the challenges faced by all the democracies globally in view of the new media and advancements in information technology. He said the Commission is taking initiatives to prevent such interference. The Commission sought suggestions and support of political parties to comprehensively meet these and other challenges for ensuring free and fair elections.

All the parties assured the Commission that they would extend the requisite support in the process of preparation of Electoral Roll. They also suggested to share with them copies of the list of deletions in Electoral Roll. Some parties also suggested to strengthen the system of Booth Level Officers for better preparedness of Electoral Roll. Some parties requested for avoiding the festival season for Roll Revision. It was

informed to the Parties that the Commission has already taken this into account and revision in all States (excluding the poll going states), will start from 1st September itself for 2 months which is more than the usual period of one month.

All parties appreciated the Commission's efforts in making elections inclusive for all especially PWD electors. They also lauded the steps taken under SVEEP to enhance the awareness and participation of electors.

Some political parties requested the Commission to fix a certain percentage of VVPAT slips-counting to enhance the trust in EVM. Commission assured them that it is being looked into with the expert inputs of Indian Statistical Institute. Commission also informed that any candidate may approach the Returning Officer concerned for the specific count of VVPAT of a Polling Station under the law already available.

Political parties urged the Commission to link Aadhar numbers with electors' detail for better electoral roll management.

Political parties expressed concern on paid news and suggested to make it an electoral offence to curb this menace.

Political parties also asked the Commission that on the lines of Doordarshan and AIR, the free airtime to political parties should be provided on private media for electoral campaigns.

They suggested for a ceiling on expenditure limit for council elections, as suggested by the Commission.

All political parties welcomed the discussion on taking the steps for enhancing the role of women in the Electoral process.

For no campaign period, they suggested for more measures in view of current electronic and digital environment.

Commission assured all the political parties that each of the suggestions will be looked into and will be responded by Commission in time bound manner.

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