

# Business Standard

## ECI hosts International Seminar on Strategies for Empowering Young and Future Voters MoUs on Electoral Cooperation with Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Fiji and Nepal signed

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On the occasion of 7th National Voters Day falling on 25th January 2017, Election Commission of India (ECI) hosted an International Seminar on Strategies for Empowering Young and Future Voters on 24th January 2017, in partnership with UNDP India.

In his Inaugural Address, Dr. Nasim Zaidi, Chief Election Commissioner of India, reiterated ECIs resolve to uphold the rich democratic traditions of India and the sanctity of free, fair and peaceful elections. He highlighted the major initiatives taken by the ECI, including the Flagship Programme Systematic Voters Education Electoral Participation (SVEEP) which comprises several thrust areas for young people such as Social Media, Campus Ambassadors and National Service Scheme volunteers in awareness campaigns for electoral engagement, enrolment and active participation in ballot exercise. He also briefed the delegates about the Interactive School Engagement Programme launched in January this year for school children with a strategic focus on future voters in the age group of 15-17 years.

In his address, Election Commissioner Mr. A.K. Joti stated that the ECI attaches

high priority to focus on young and future voters in view of the fact that India has a sizeable young population. Strategic investment in this segment for engaging and encouraging electoral participation would mean securing and strengthening the future of democracy. Interaction through the International Seminar on the subject at this relevant juncture provides a larger opportunity to gain from international experience, practices, policies and knowledge for developing innovative approach on addressing the issues and challenges in this area.

Election Commissioner Mr. O. P. Rawat stated at the Seminar that the world over, the democracies have recognized the importance of electoral participation right from a young age and have invested in the form of research, innovative strategies, new initiatives, programmes and practices for empowering young and future voters for a confident and ethical electoral participation. Investment, focusing on educating, engaging and empowering the youth through well designed strategic interventions would help in generating a population capable of confident and comfortable electoral participation besides exercising informed and ethical ballot decision.

Addressing the delegates at the Seminar, Ms. Marina Walter, Deputy Country Director, UNDP India referred to the ECIs successful record of delivering free, fair and credible elections and UNDPs continuing partnership with ECI. She spoke about the importance of inclusion of youth, both in enrolment and voting process.

Aiming to establish an institutional framework for their ongoing cooperation in the field of election management and administration, **ECI signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the following Election Management Bodies at the Seminar:**

- (1) Australian Electoral Commission
- (2) Central Election Commission of Bosnia-Herzegovina
- (3) Fijian Elections Office
- (4) Election Commission of Nepal

The major aims of these MoUs are promotion of exchanges of knowledge and experience in the field of organizational and technical development, with a view to strengthening the administration of electoral processes; exchange of information, material, expertise and technical know how relating to electoral processes and systems; training of personnel and development of human resources, and organizational development and capacity building.

Election Commission of India has so far signed MOUs with more than twenty Election Management Bodies and international organizations across the world for cooperation in election administration and management.

**At the closing session of the Seminar, Dr. Nasim Zaidi, Chief Election**

**Commissioner of India launched e-journal VOICE International**, to be published quarterly containing the relevant photographs, articles, news and events related to elections in various parts of the world.

International Delegates at the Seminar included Chairpersons/Chief Election Commissioners/Commissioners of seven Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and senior officials from ten countries and five International Organisations viz. Afghanistan, Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB), Australia, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Fiji, International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), International Centre for Peace and Democracy (ICPS), Jordan, Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Centre, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Tunisia. International delegates gave country presentations and shared their experiences, best practices and initiatives aimed at electoral engagement, enrolment and active participation in ballot exercise by the young voters in respective countries.