

## **Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia**

### **Stewardship Report** **by Outgoing Chair, Election Commission of India** **(Thimphu, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2013)**

The last meeting of the Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (hereinafter called the “the Forum”) was hosted by the Election Commission of India in New Delhi on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2013, with Mr. V.S. Sampath, CEC of India in the Chair. The meeting was attended by Heads/Representatives of all eight SAARC EMBs.

A brief synopsis of the discussions / decisions taken at the meeting and subsequent activities of the Forum is given below:

#### **Renaming of the Forum**

The Forum members unanimously adopted and signed a resolution renaming the Forum as “Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia” with consequential amendments to the Resolution and Charter of the Forum. It was decided that ECI, as the Chair, would communicate the new name of the Forum to all the organisations, which had earlier been informed of the creation of the Forum in its original avatar – Forum of Heads of Election Management Bodies of SAARC countries. This was done. A copy of the resolution is circulated again with this Report for reference and record.

#### **Selection of a Logo for the Forum**

Election Commission of Bangladesh, which had volunteered to coordinate the exercise for selection of a Logo for the Forum, reported to the meeting that it was actively engaged in the process and would soon circulate a few short-listed designs. Subsequently, ECB sent ten short-listed logos to ECI and these have been circulated to all the members for indicating their preference. We as a Commission have our preference. We have received preferences of Bhutan and Afghanistan. This item is on the agenda of today’s meeting.

### Activities of the Forum

Following is a brief summary of activities undertaken by various members under the aegis of the Forum:

- a. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2013, ECI organized a Seminar for the Forum Members at New Delhi. The seminar was titled “Towards More Inclusive Elections – Interventions in South Asian Region”. Each delegation shared their perception of the challenges faced by them in working towards inclusive elections and the attempts they have made to ensure that all eligible voters are registered and are able to vote.
- b. ECI also invited the delegates to the Seminar to attend the national-level celebration of the National Voters Day function on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2013. The delegates were also invited to India’s Republic Day Parade on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2013.
- c. Coinciding with the meeting of the Forum of Election Commissions, a two week Training Programme was conducted at ECI’s India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) exclusively for Election Officials nominated by the Forum Members. 12 mid-career Election Officials participated in the programme titled “**Capacity Development for Election Management**” which included field level exposure to ECI’s election machinery, with visits to Agra and Bhopal.
- d. Earlier in December, 2012, ECI also hosted a visit by a ten-member team from the Election Commission of Bhutan to witness the State Assembly elections in Gujarat.
- e. In February, 2013, ECI/IIIDEM conducted another course for Capacity Development in Election Management, this time exclusively for 17 Afghan Election Officials, including field-level exposure to ECI’s electoral machinery in Delhi and Agra.
- f. In May 2013, a six-member delegation nominated by the Commissioner of Elections, Sri Lanka undertook a study tour, to witness the State Assembly elections in Karnataka.

- g. In July 2013, ECI/IIIDEM conducted a special course in Election Management, exclusively for a team of six mid-career election officials from Maldives, including a Commissioner.
- h. In July, 2013, at the invitation of the Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan, the Chief Election Commissioner of India, Mr. V.S. Sampath visited Bhutan to witness the National Assembly elections.
- i. In August 2013, under a special Electoral Assistance Programme jointly organized by the Government of India and the Election Commission of India, a team of 6 IT programmers was deputed to Election Commission of Maldives to help it in developing an IT-based Electoral Management System.
- j. In September, 2013, ECI/IIIDEM conducted the second special course for Capacity Development of Election Officials from SAARC countries, with participation from 20 mid-career election officials. The participants were also taken on field visits to Jaipur, Agra and Delhi. .
- k. In September 2013, the Commissioner of Elections, Sri Lanka invited a team of observers from the Forum member-countries, alongwith a leader of the team on behalf of the Forum, to observe the Provincial Council Elections in three provinces of Sri Lanka. A 20 member Team was deputed with representatives from each Forum member-country. Mr. N. Gopalaswami, former Chief Election Commission of India, was appointed the Team leader. The Team has successfully completed the observation work.
- l. Election Commission of India also organized group briefing and interaction with various groups from Forum member-countries, which visited India earlier this year. The latest such briefing was organized on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2013, for a delegation of 12 editors/senior Journalists from Bangladesh.

### **Work Plan for 2013-14 and a web-site**

The last meeting had adopted an ECI suggestion that the Forum should have a Work Plan for 2013-14. This is being taken up later today, where ECI and other Forum members would have the opportunity to present suggestions for inclusion in the Work Plan. The last meeting also took up a proposal that the Forum should have its own Web-site to facilitate sharing of information and experiences etc. Since developing the Web-site would involve funding issues, the Members had approved that, as a first step, the web-sites of the members may be inter-linked, as a precursor to a Forum web-site to facilitate faster connectivity, coordination, exchange of information and experiences. Work on Web-site pages was initiated by the Election Commission of India, and the relevant content is being transferred to the new Chair, Election Commission of Bhutan, for hosting it on their web-site.

### **Mutual cooperation between Forum member-countries**

Such activities may be regularly reported at this Forum for record. It would be better to institutionalize this by sending a briefing to the Forum Chair, each time the collaborative activities take place.

### **Conclusion:**

As Chair of the Forum, ECI would like to thank all the forum members for their active cooperation and unstinted support in strengthening the fledgling Forum and the interest they have taken in sharing their experiences, knowledge and skills, as reflected in their manifold activities under the aegis of the Forum.

A special word of thanks is due to the Election Commission of Bhutan, for their contributions and for hosting this meeting in these beautiful and salubrious surroundings. ECI reiterates its commitment to strengthening the Forum and contributing to its future activities. It also extends its full support to Bhutan as the Incoming Chair.

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