National Workshop of Senior Officers of SECs
on
"Expectations of Constitution – Role of SEC"

by
Institute of Democracy and Elections for Good Governance
(a wing of State Election Commission, Maharashtra)

27 and 28 March 2019
The Dukes Retreat Hotel, Lonavala-Khandala, Maharashtra

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26 / 27 / 28 March, 2019, Lonavala

A two-day National Workshop of senior officers of the various State Election Commissions on the subject, "Expectations of Constitution – Role of SECs" was arranged by the State Election Commission, Maharashtra on 26th, 27thand 28th March, 2019 at Lonavala. The Workshop was attended by 4 State Election Commissioners and 19 representatives from 12 State Election Commissions as per Annexure I.

2. **26th March 2019 – Pre-Workshop Meeting (6 -7 p.m.)** –

Hon'ble State Election Commissioner, Maharashtra briefed all the participants about the genesis of the said Workshop. He informed that though the State Election Commissioners meet regularly and discuss ways and means of making the elections more free, fair and transparent as per the expectations of the Constitution, the same was not being done for the senior officers of the State Election Commissions. It is not only necessary but essential also that the officers / staff of SECs should also work in an Independent manner as per the Constitutional provisions. The present Workshop has therefore been arranged as per the suggestions given by the various State Election Commissioners from time to time in the past.

3. Hon'ble State Election Commissioner, Maharashtra further explained that this being the first Workshop of its kind, it has been deliberately kept as a paid workshop so that the various SECs own it and feel fully involved in the entire process.

4. Representatives of various SECs agreed that there was an urgent need for the senior officers / staff of the SECs to work in terms of the Constitutional provisions. They all welcomed the initiative taken by SECM.

5. **27th March 2019** –Details of the day long programme are as follows :

i) 9.00 to 11.00 – Hon'ble State Election Commissioners of Maharashtra, U.T., Haryana and Gujarat expressed their views in the Inaugural function. They informed that the subject of the Workshop had been discussed amongst the various State Election Commissions from time to time in the past in one form or the other. All the SECs generally felt that:

- Various stakeholders including Government treat SECs either as a department of the Government and / or subordinate office of ECI.
- Several State Election Commissioners and their senior officers / staff seek guidance from the Government on various issues which is not correct.
- Various provisions in the State Laws which are inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution, are required to be amended.
- State Governments do not provide staff and / or finances as per the assessment of the State Election Commissioners.
- State Election Commissions have to identify and fill vacuous areas by issuing orders under their Plenary Powers.
- There is an urgent need to conduct awareness workshops for senior officers of the State Government, local representatives, various stakeholders etc.
- State Election Commissions must take any and / or all activities required to ensure free, fair, transparent and timely elections as per the expectations of the Constitution.

- State Election Commissioners must assert themselves and use the authority given to them by the Constitution.

ii) 11.15 to 12.15 – Session II – Shri Kiran Kurundkar, Secretary, SECM, Prof. Shri.Mrudul Nile, O.S.D., IDEGG and Shri. Avinash Sanas, Dy. Commissioner, SECMexpressed their views on "Laws on Election and landmark judgments of Apex Courts".

iii) 12.15 to 13.30 – Session III – Dr. Manasi Phadke, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, Smt. Anuya Kunwar, Asia Cordinator, Commonwealth Local Government Forum, Prof. Shri.Mrudul Nile, O.S.D., IDEGG and Shri. Avinash Sanas, Dy. Commissioner, SECM gave details of "Innovative and Good Practices adopted by SEC Maharashtra".

iv) 14.15 to 15.30 – Session IV – Shri. Anil Pande, AVP and Global Head,L and T Infotech,Dr. Kulkarni, Sr. Director, CDAC, Dr. Bhirud, HoD,VJTI, talked about "Possible future technologies which may impact the electoral processes".

v) 15.30 to 16.45 – Session V – Shri. Parimal Maya Sudhakar, MIT, and Shri. Jagdish More, PRO, SECMtalked about "Communication strategies for tapping the untapped".

vi) 17.00 to 17.45- Session VI – Shri. Ajit Ranade, Co-Founder, Association for Democratic Reforms, talked about "Electoral Reforms with special focus on financial transparency".

vii) 17.45 to 19.00 – Session VII – Participants were divided into 4 groups and asked to finalise their strategies on the following subjects :

a) Role of SEC
b) How to ensure Independence of SEC
c) How to ensure Government abides by directions of SEC andprovide all the resources (staff / finance etc.) as per its assessment
d) How to involve maximum stakeholders, increase voter turnout, Awareness generation, research, etc. and use of Modern Technology

6. **28th March 2019 :**

i) 9.00 to 9.30 -Shri.. Bhim Raskar, Resource and Support Centre for Development,gave detailed presentation on "Communication strategies for tapping the untapped".

ii) 9.30 to 11.00 – Thereafter all the 4 groups gave their detailed presentation on the identified themes.

iii) 11.00 to 11.30 - Concluding Session - Shri. Kiran Kurundkar, Secretary, SECM, Shri. Shekhar Channe, Transport Commissioner, Govt. of Maharashtra, and Shri J.S.Saharia, State Election Commissioner, Maharashtra, gave their views.

7. Presentations given by the various persons including State Election Commissioner, Maharashtra have been sent separately to all the SECs and Knowledge Partners of SECM.

8. Most of the participants agreed with the views expressed in the Workshop specially the following:

(i) Need for SECs to assert themselves and take all possible steps in terms of the Constitutional provisions,
(ii) Need to adopt modern technology and computers in handling the voluminous and complex elections, and
(iii) Need to devise strategies for handling future challenges etc.

9. After detailed discussion, following decisions were taken:

(i) All the State Election Commissions shall try to implement the various new initiatives at the earliest, say in 3 months time (Annexure-II)
(ii) 2nd Workshop of senior officers of SECs for sharing their experiences should be arranged in June / July 2019, wherein some Commissioners should also be invited.
(iii)All the SECs should send the details of their best practices to SECM by 15th of April 2019 so that they could be compiled in a book form.

(iv) Each SEC should devise strategies for using the services of "Institute of Democracyand Election for Good Governance" established by SECM.

10. The Workshop thereafter ended with vote of thanks to all the Election Commissioners, participants and the organizers.