



Indian Institute of Public Administration J&K Regional Branch

Report on the Prelude Conference on “One Nation, One Election”

Date: December 17, 2024

Venue: Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), J&K Regional Branch

Introduction

The Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), J&K Regional Branch, organized a significant prelude conference themed “One Nation, One Election.” The event featured prominent speakers, including Prof. Suresh Misra, Chair Professor (Consumer Affairs) at the Centre for Consumer Studies, IIPA, New Delhi, who delivered the keynote address. Sh. B.R. Sharma, IAS (Retd), State Election Commissioner and Chairman of IIPA JKRB, served as the Chief Guest, while Shri Kuldeep Khoda, IPS (Retd), former DGP of J&K Police, presided over the event.



Keynote Address by Prof. Suresh Misra

In his keynote address, Prof. Misra underscored the essential principles of democracy, emphasizing the necessity for free and fair elections. He acknowledged India's robust parliamentary system and explored the concept of simultaneous elections, referencing international practices from countries like South Africa, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Prof. Misra traced the initiative's origins back to discussions initiated by former President Sh. Pranab Mukherjee in 2017 and the subsequent formation of a high-level committee under Sh. Ram Nath Kovind.

The proposed electoral reform aims to implement a two-step process for Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, followed by panchayat and local urban body elections within 100 days. Prof. Misra highlighted the expected merits of this approach, including continuity of governance, a greater emphasis on policy implementation, reduced expenditures, and a unified voter list. However, he also acknowledged potential demerits, such as the risk of overshadowing regional issues by national concerns and neglecting local needs. He stressed the importance of building consensus to maintain electoral integrity.

Insights from Sh. B.R. Sharma

Sh. B.R. Sharma outlined essential concepts underpinning democracy, emphasizing its mechanics and structure as crucial for fostering greater accountability. He highlighted the importance of making democratic processes accessible to empower citizens and enhance their engagement with government. His insights reinforced the critical role of informed citizen participation in strengthening democracy and ensuring that governance remains responsive to the populace's needs.

Presidential Remarks by Shri Kuldeep Khoda

In his presidential remarks, Shri Kuldeep Khoda emphasized the importance of collating diverse opinions to drive major electoral reforms. He discussed the necessity of a coordinated approach in managing elections, particularly in deploying security forces to ensure a smooth electoral process. Shri Khoda referenced the intersection of preservation and internal security during elections, citing the influential contributions of former Chief Election Commissioner Sh. T.N. Seshan and underscoring the significance of the Delhi Elections 2019 as a case study in effective electoral management. He

cautioned citizens to judiciously use social media to foster a positive environment for strengthening democracy.

Welcome Address and Proceedings

Sh. K.B. Jandial, IAS (Retd), Vice Chairman, set the context for the conference by discussing the multifaceted implications of the “One Nation, One Election” proposal. Prof. Alka Sharma, Honorary Secretary, presented the formal vote of thanks, while the proceedings were conducted by Prof. Anil Gupta, Joint Secretary.

Participation and Observations



The conference attracted a diverse audience, including officials from the State Election Commission, media representatives, faculty and students from the University of Jammu, members of IIPA, and eminent individuals from civil society and the Central Government Pensioners Association, Jammu.

Observations from Participants:

- Political pollution and the need to address the complexities of a unified electoral process.
- Concerns regarding the feasibility of oneness in electoral practices.
- The potential silencing of the majority and the emergence of asymmetrical political patterns.

- The necessity for chaos management in electoral processes.
- Suggestions for a digital voting process and Aadhaar authentication to enhance electoral efficiency.
- On-going projects under the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and cost comparisons in electoral management.
- Recognition of the 2008 economic meltdown as a critical factor in shaping electoral policies.
- The importance of stability in governance and the need for meaningful electoral engagement.
- Advocacy for viewing voting as a civic duty rather than merely a right.
- Discussions on the right to recall representatives and the deepening of democratic practices.
- The critical relationship between political dynamics and electoral integrity, with an emphasis on maintaining a level playing field and a robust code of conduct.



Conclusion

The Prelude Conference on “One Nation, One Election” provided a platform for meaningful discourse on electoral reforms in India. The insights shared by esteemed speakers and participants highlighted the importance of building consensus and understanding the multifaceted implications of such reforms. As the nation contemplates significant electoral changes, careful consideration of diverse perspectives will be essential for strengthening India’s democratic processes
