

Address By Shri V S Sampath, Chief Election Commissioner,
on 4th National Voters' Day (25th January, 2014)
at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi

Hon'ble President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, my colleague, Commissioners, Sh. Brahma and Dr Zaidi, Director General, leaders of Political Parties, Commissioners and delegates from Election Management Bodies from abroad, Excellencies, distinguished guests, Young Electors of Delhi, Award Winners, Ladies and Gentlemen! It is a moment of great honour and pride today for the Election Commission of India that we are gathered here to celebrate the National Voters' Day, which was launched three years ago on 25th January, 2011.

Today is also the day when the founders of Indian Constitution gave to their people 'the Election Commission of India', 64 years ago. The Commission is dedicated to the task of delivering free, fair and credible elections to the Indian people. It has done so in mandated regular intervals. Till date, we had 15 General Elections to the Lok Sabha and 348 General Elections to Legislative Assemblies of states and Union Territories. We take all steps to make sure that elections are held in time, these are peaceful and that electors are able to vote freely and fearlessly. However, democracy requires more than a technically correct election. The essence of representativeness lies in participation. To make our democracy meaningful, there has to be maximum participation of the people in the electoral process.

Our endeavour is to ensure that everyone eligible is enrolled and all those enrolled should vote in the elections, voluntarily. Besides, the participation of citizens in elections needs to be informed and ethical for a healthy democracy.

What we are witnessing here today is a part of the countrywide exercise simultaneously taking place at 6.53 lakh locations covering over 9 lakh Polling Station areas. It gives me great pleasure to inform you that over 3.90 crore new electors have been enrolled in the Electoral Rolls in the last few months. Around 1.27 crore out of these are the newly eligible voters of the 18-19 year age group. Through revision of electoral roll on annual basis that culminates with the National Voters' Day, we specially seek to bridge the gap in the enrolment of the newly eligible electors.

All this has been accomplished through the laudable efforts and sustained hard work of the election machinery right from Chief Electoral officer in the state down to the Booth Level Officer and through the sustained nation-wide SVEEP programme, which stands for 'Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation'.

We have launched vigorous and comprehensive initiatives under our SVEEP programme, to disseminate necessary information, motivate voters and facilitate participation. In recent years, we at the Election Commission are in a continuous and purposeful dialogue with Indian citizens on electoral participation and democratic processes.

Our efforts have started yielding results. We received consistently higher turnout in the last twenty three general elections in the states. There was historic turnout in the most recent Assembly Elections to the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Delhi. A greater achievement for us was that the women turnout increased across all these states and the women turnout was higher than men in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan for the first time ever in their history.

Some of our finest officers are amongst us today to receive the National Awards. They have contributed hugely to Election Commission's efforts in election management and people's participation. While some have innovated in the field of technology use in the electoral process, others have innovated in the efficient management of human resources, all to the cause of free, fair and participative elections. I congratulate them on behalf of the entire Commission.

I expect all our officers and staff to rise to the challenge of holding elections to the 16th Lok Sabha this year, which will be the largest exercise in the world undertaken ever by an election management body. I am talking about an electorate of over 81 crores in polling stations close to 9 lakh with several million polling personnel involved in election management.

I also congratulate the 6 young voters of Delhi, who will receive their EPICs today. I am sure you would act as informed and ethical voters at the first opportunity. Additionally, you must inspire your fraternity to do the same.

We are honoured to have the President of India as the Chief Guest. I am sure that with his encouragement and support we would be further motivated to work towards achieving our goal of universal enrolment and complete participation of people in elections.

The enormous strides by the Commission in voters' participation in recent times would not have been possible without the significant support from Union and State Governments, Educational Institutions, Civil Society Organizations, the Corporate sector and the Media. Contribution from Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and more particularly from AIR and Doordarshan has been precious. I need to specially mention the collaboration from National Literacy Mission Authority for including electoral literacy in the Sakshar Bharat

Programme. I would also like to mention the collaboration with UNDP in the field of voter education and participation.

However, the Commission feels that a much higher level of contribution in the field of Voter education and awareness is due from the vibrant and resourceful Corporate Sector of the country. I call upon them to include this under Corporate Social Responsibility of the Companies Act. We look forward to more synergy in future in advancing greater participation of people in the electoral process. Reinforcing Indian democracy through the process of participative elections cannot be a task for ECI alone. It has got to become a national mission.

Finally I would like to thank the Booth Level Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, District Election Officers, Chief Electoral Officers of States and UTs, all colleagues and staff of the Election Commission, specially officers of the SVEEP Division, the whole election machinery, and all other stakeholders for making the National Voters' Day a success.

Jai Hind!