

Empower people to reject corrupt candidates



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Daya Nath Singh 18 February 2011 9040 views

National Election Watch (NEW), a nationwide campaign comprising of more than 1200 NGOs and other citizen-led organizations working on electoral reforms, improving democracy and governance in India, has stepped up the pressure on political parties to demand accountability from them in the state of Assam as well. It announced several initiatives with the purpose of bringing transparency and accountability in the political system on February 17 last through a press conference organized in Guwahati Press Club.

Addressing the media persons the coordinator of the Assam Election Watch, Tasaduk Ariful Hussain, said that different civil society organizations, eminent citizens, media, senior bureaucrats and police officials, came together to form the Assam Election Watch group in the year 2009, to watch the Parliament elections in the State. It continued its endeavor and watched the Urban Local Body election also in July 2009. The Assam Election Watch is all set now to watch the forthcoming Assembly elections in the State and make politicians accountable. It would also work for the voters' awareness so that the citizens could make an informed choice while casting their valuable votes, he said.

The specific demands of the National Election Watch partners are the barring candidates against whom criminal charges have been framed in a court and disqualifying of candidates who indulge in electoral malpractices and striking off names from electoral rolls, of people with non-bailable warrants,.

Secondly, it demands the implementation of 'None of the Above', clause which would include providing a real option for the people to vote 'None of the Above', if people do not like any of the contesting candidates. If the option gets maximum votes, it would mean that all the contesting candidates have been rejected by the voters. This would result in a re-election, but the contesting candidates from the previous election would not be allowed to contest.

It further demands a comprehensive bill to regulate political parties to make them more transparent and accountable. All leading democracies have such a Bill, our country has none, said Hussain. In particular, the Income statement and sources of income should be mandatorily disclosed for all parties. The issues of inner party democracy in political parties and greater transparency and regulation of political party funding is required, he added.

Talking about the resolutions, Sadhana Dutta, a member of the Assam Election Watch group said that details on these points and resolutions have emerged from consultations around the country including all the Northeastern states. Most of these have been endorsed by the Election Commission. The political parties should listen to the people's demand and make appropriate changes for their implementation. Since 2002 the major impacts of these campaigns have been on criminalization of politics and transparency in candidate and political party assets.

Shayesta Parween, another member of the AEW group speaking about the criminalization of politics said as a result of the election watch campaigns across the country, the percentage of contesting candidates with criminal records has come down from over 20 percent to about 12 percent based on the data from recent elections. People want able and honest people to lead them and not those against whom the criminal charges have been framed in a court..

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