

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

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PRESS NOTE

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ECI delegation led by CEC Shri Sushil Chandra visits South Africa and Mauritius**CEC urges members of Indian Community to register as Overseas Voters****Extension of ETPBS facility to overseas voters under consideration:
CEC Shri Sushil Chandra**

An Election Commission of India (ECI) delegation led by Chief Election Commissioner of India, Shri Sushil Chandra visited South Africa and Mauritius from April 9-19, 2022. During this visit, a series of meetings were held with the Election Commission of South Africa and Mauritius as well as interactions with the large NRI community in the two countries. Both Election Management Bodies (EMBs) are also MOU partners with ECI. The three countries share a relationship which is fundamental, unique and rooted in the collective experiences and cumulative strength of their people. During interaction with the members of the Indian community, CEC urged them to register as overseas voters as the present numbers are abysmally low. He also shared with the members that extension of Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) facility to overseas voters is being contemplated.



CEC Shri Sushil Chandra met with Chairperson of Electoral Commission of South Africa Mr Glen V. Mashinini and Mr. Jonghyun Choe, Secretary General A-WEB on April 12th, 2022



A major highlight of the visit was the rare occasion of a tripartite meeting between ECI, Mr. Glen Mashinini, Chairperson, Electoral Commission of South Africa and Mr. Jonghyun Choe, Secretary General, Association of World Election Bodies (AWEB) held at Pretoria on 12th April 2022. India is currently the Chair of AWEB, the largest conglomeration of 118 EMBs of the world and South Africa is the Vice Chair.

As AWEB completes ten years of its foundation and steps into a new decade, the meeting was positioned at the right juncture wherein it was time to reflect on the way forward for AWEB as an organization. AWEB provides a unique platform for exchange of knowledge and information between its members. During the meeting, it was acknowledged that this umbrella organization had EMBs with a lot of experience and expertise which could assist and advise those EMBs who were looking for further development and upgradation of their systems. It was felt that the focus must now be on increasing membership and enhancing the sense of belonging of the members. More avenues must be explored so that the members can interact and meet more often.

During the meeting, CEC Shri Sushil Chandra expressed profound appreciation for the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of South Africa for organizing this meeting. He said that South Africa has made big strides in democracy and would be hosting the next General Assembly of AWEB in October 2022. India has a very intense and active association with AWEB. Both India and South Africa are the founding members of this organization. He stated that coming to the land which made Mahatma out of Gandhiji and the land of Nelson Mandela was a veritable pilgrimage for him.

Shri Chandra recapitulated the numerous activities and initiatives taken by ECI for strengthening cooperation among AWEB members by way of organizing webinars, International Election Visitor Programme events and also coming out with several international publications. Thereafter, he shared India's experience of conducting 11 state assembly elections and various by-elections during the unprecedented time of COVID-19 pandemic and the new protocols devised by ECI for conducting safe elections from the perspective of voters, polling personnel and polling stations.

While highlighting the need for AWEB to reinvent itself, CEC Shri Chandra stressed on three areas for further strengthening of this institution. First,

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AWEB must endeavour to come out with standard protocols for various aspects of election management which will be known as AWEB global standards and will help EMBs to work towards achieving these goals. Two, increasing the interaction between members through regional thematic summits, celebrating significant dates in the AWEB calendar like its foundation day on the pattern of India's National Voters' Day and developing an annual activities calendar for AWEB. Three, intensifying sharing of best practices, training and capacity building. He offered that ECI would be happy to organize more training programs including customized programmes for AWEB members at India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM).

During his visit, CEC also paid homage to Mahatma Gandhiji on 15th April 2022 at the Constitution Hill, a former prison complex now converted into a museum, in Johannesburg. He also visited the Gandhi-Mandela Exhibition Centre at the Constitution Hill.



Chief Election Commissioner Shri Sushil Chandra during his visit to South Africa paid homage to Mahatma Gandhiji at the Constitution Hill



CEC at the Gandhi-Mandela exhibition centre at the Constitution Hill on April 15, 2022

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CEC met with Mr. Mohd. Irfan Abdool Rahman, Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius at Port Louis on 18th April 2022. During this meeting, he stated that the two countries shared a filial bond of brotherhood, ancestry, kinship and affection. The two EMBs are not only closely connected through the formal relationship of MoU but also by a close relationship of understanding of each others' systems, support and drawing strength from each other. CEC gave a snapshot of recent elections held in India and stated that the two Commissions would continue sharing best practices, skills and experiences for mutual benefit.



CEC meeting with Mr. Mohd. Irfan Abdool Rahman, Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius at Port Louis on 18th April 2022

Meeting with NRIs

During the visit to the two countries, a briefing cum interaction was organized with the NRI community at Cape Town on 10th April; Johannesburg on 12th April and at Port Louis on 18th April 2022. CEC Shri Sushil Chandra shared the Indian experience of conducting elections with the members of the diaspora. He said that India, being the largest democracy, conducts elections for more than 950 million voters across more than a million polling stations. Over the past few years, Indian elections have made steady progress towards making elections inclusive and accessible which has led to greater participation of women, persons with disabilities and senior citizens in Indian elections. He added that this remarkable achievement of conducting free, fair and participative elections in a country as diverse as India - linguistically, geographically comes as result of robust election management practices which include use of technology for enhancing participation of voters through applications like cVIGIL, voter education through SVEEP, use of EVM-VVPAT, all women managed polling booths, single unified electoral roll on a single digital platform, deployment of central observers and very robust expenditure monitoring mechanisms.



CEC Shri Sushil Chandra along with senior Officials from ECI interacted with officials from Indian Consulate & representatives from NRI community on April 10, 2022 during his visit to Cape Town, South Africa.



CEC Shri Sushil Chandra interacted with officials of High Commission of India and NRI representatives in Port Louis, Mauritius on 18th April 2022.

CEC Shri Chandra also highlighted the new electoral reforms undertaken in the past few months which included four qualifying dates in a year for registration of eligible citizens as electors as compared to once a year earlier, linking of Electoral Roll and Aadhar data and extension of postal ballot facility to new categories of voters i.e. senior citizens aged 80 plus years, PWDs and covid affected persons.

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