

Chief Secretary Inaugurates Two-Day International Conference on Legal Framework of Election Management Body Independence in Leh



Leh, July 23, 2026: A two-day International Conference on "Legal Framework of Election Management Body Independence" commenced today at Hotel Diskitsal, Leh, bringing together constitutional experts, election administrators, legal scholars, academicians and international delegates to deliberate on strengthening the institutional

independence of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and advancing global democratic governance.

The conference is being organised by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Union Territory of Ladakh, in collaboration with the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), the Election Commission of India (ECI), and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). The inaugural session was graced by the Chief Secretary of UT Ladakh, Shri Ashish Kundra, as the Chief Guest.

The conference witnessed participation from senior officials of the Election Commission of India, the Chief Electoral Officer and Deputy Chief Electoral Officer of Ladakh, Vice Chancellors of the University of Ladakh and the Central University of Ladakh, constitutional and legal scholars, representatives of International IDEA, foreign delegates, members of the judiciary and tribunals, heads of various government departments, students and early-career researchers from across the country.



Welcoming the participants, Chief Electoral Officer, UT Ladakh, Shri Rahul Sharma, described the conference as a significant platform for fostering dialogue on strengthening democratic institutions through independent, transparent and accountable election management systems. He said that credible electoral institutions remain the cornerstone of democracy and highlighted the importance of continuously evolving legal frameworks to address emerging challenges while safeguarding the voting rights of every eligible citizen, irrespective of geographical location. He also acknowledged the invaluable contributions of the Election Commission of

India, IIIDEM, International IDEA and the resource persons for supporting meaningful academic deliberations on electoral governance.

Delivering the keynote address, Chief Secretary Shri Ashish Kundra underscored the pivotal role of independent Election Management Bodies in preserving the integrity and credibility of democratic systems. He observed that India's electoral process has continuously evolved under the constitutional framework to ensure inclusivity, transparency and universal participation. Tracing the evolution of the country's electoral system from ballot boxes to Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), he highlighted the Election Commission of India's commitment to adopting technological innovations while safeguarding the principles of free and fair elections.



The Chief Secretary noted that technological advancements such as EVMs, VVPATs and ongoing research into remote voting solutions demonstrate India's leadership in electoral innovation. Referring to pilot initiatives on remote voting technologies, including blockchain-based solutions, he said such innovations have the potential to facilitate greater participation by migrant voters

while maintaining the integrity and transparency of the electoral process. He emphasised that public trust remains the foundation of every democratic election and that every reform must strengthen the credibility of electoral institutions.

Highlighting the conference theme, Shri Kundra said that discussions on the constitutional and statutory foundations of Election Management Bodies are essential for reinforcing institutional autonomy, accountability and resilience. He expressed confidence that the deliberations would contribute significantly to strengthening electoral governance and developing best practices that can guide democratic institutions both in India and internationally.

A major highlight of the inaugural session was the presentation of an international research initiative examining the legal and institutional independence of Election Management Bodies across more than 150 jurisdictions. The study proposes a three-tier framework comprising 64 Model International Electoral Standards (MIES), designed as aspirational benchmarks for assessing institutional independence, legal safeguards, accountability and operational effectiveness. The conference aims to validate these standards through comparative research, expert consultations and practical experiences from election management practitioners across the world.

The inaugural session concluded with a vote of thanks, following which the conference proceeded with its first technical session on "Constitutional and Statutory Foundations of Election Management Body Independence." Moderated by Dr. Alok Puri, Assistant Professor, University of Jammu, the panel brought together eminent scholars and legal experts, including Prof. Mukesh Sharma, Dr. Khalid Waseem Hassan, Dr. Jain Sabel, Dr. Sandeep Singh, Dr. Nitin, Dr. Shazia Malik and Dr. Konchok Chorol. The panellists deliberated on constitutional safeguards, statutory frameworks, comparative

international practices and the alignment of national legal systems with emerging global electoral standards.

Another penalist Mr Sonam Chosjor in his technical presentation provided by an overview of the Model International Electoral Standards framework, explaining its three-tier assessment mechanism for evaluating constitutional guarantees, legal provisions and practical implementation of institutional independence. The session also examined comparative experiences from different jurisdictions, identifying best practices and institutional gaps that could guide future electoral reforms.

The second technical session focused on "Appointment, Tenure, Removal and Financial Autonomy of Election Management Bodies." Moderated by Dr. Khalid Waseem Hassan, the session examined institutional safeguards required to ensure the independence of electoral bodies, including appointment procedures, tenure security, financial autonomy and accountability mechanisms. Experts from IIIDEM, legal institutions and academia deliberated on international standards, judicial safeguards and comparative constitutional practices.

The interactive session concluded with active participation from students and young researchers, who raised questions on electoral reforms, representation, institutional independence and constitutional accountability, reflecting the growing engagement of youth in democratic governance.

The two-day conference will continue with technical sessions, research presentations and expert discussions aimed at developing practical recommendations for strengthening the legal and institutional framework governing Election Management Bodies and promoting resilient, transparent and independent democratic institutions.