Report on the India International Conference on Democracy and Elections Management: 21 January to 23 January, 2026

Attended by: Chairperson of Electoral Commission, Justice Usaia Ratuvili

Director Corporate Services, Sanjeshwar Ram

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. INDIA'S CHAIRSHIP OF COUNCIL OF MEMBER STATES OF INTERNATIONAL IDEA 2026

India assumed the Chair of the Council of Member States of International IDEA for 2026. India's Chair ship holds the unique distinction of being led by the Election Commission of India (**ECI**).

1.2 ABOUT INTERNATIONAL IDEA

International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (**International IDEA**) is an Inter- Governmental Organization (IGO) which is mandated to promote sustainable democracy. International IDEA was born in 1995, to fulfill the void and provide for the unmet needs for international cooperation in the field of democracy and electoral assistance. International IDEA currently has 35 countries as members and two countries as observers.

1.3. CHAIRSHIP THEME

India's Chairship theme, "Democracy for an inclusive, peaceful, resilient, and sustainable world," reflects the nation's timeless ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutum-bakam the belief that "the world is one family." It also aligns with India's commitment to fostering inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development. India's Chairship envisions sharing with Member States and other stakeholders not only the experiences of the world's largest, most diverse, and inclusive modern democracy, but also the democratic values and principles enshrined in India's civilizational heritage.

1.4. IIIDEM TO SUPPORT INDIA'S CHAIRSHIP

ECI has established the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (**IIIDEM**) as a global resource centre in the field of democracy and election management. India's Chairship will be supported by IIIDEM, which will work very closely with International IDEA for the fulfilment of aims and objectives of the Chairship particularly thematic priorities.

2.0 CONFERENCE IN NEW DELHI, 21 to 23 JANUARY, 2026

India's Chairship was led by the ECI's Chief Election Commissioner and supported by IIIDEM. IIIDEM under the aegis of ECI and in partnership with International IDEA had organized a three-day IICDEM at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

The Conference provided a platform for sharing, co-creating and collective international stewardship for democratic and electoral innovations. It provided an opportunity to develop a shared vision on global challenges being faced by Election Management Bodies and deliberate on model standards and best practices to address the challenges in election management.

The theme of the Conference was 'Democracy for inclusive, peaceful, resilient and sustainable World.

The thematic priorities drawn from India's Chairmanship priorities, had been organized around two interlinked thematic pillars, Reimagining Democracy for the Future, and Independent and Professional Election Management Bodies are essential for Sustainable Democracy.

The Conference had been designed through a carefully structured mix of high-level plenaries, closed-door leadership engagements, and thematic sessions that span the entire electoral cycle and various facets of democracy.

Across the three days, EMB leaders, electoral experts and practitioners and academic experts discussed the core aspects of election management, including legal frameworks, voter registration, political participation, campaign regulation, polling and counting, and election technology, while also engaging with emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, misinformation, risk management, sustainability, and democratic inclusion.

3.0 EMB LEADERS PLENARY SESSION

The Chairperson of the Electoral Commission Republic of Fiji (**EC**) attended the Leaders Plenary session and there were various discussions done by the members, academics, professionals from various institutions. This forum was chaired by the Chief Electoral Commissioner of Indian Electoral Commission.

4.0 THE MATIC SESSIONS

Various thematic on the following topics were scheduled for respective delegates to attend and be part of group discussions. Some of the thematic areas included:

i)   Democracy that delivers

ii)   Legal framework of EMBs and independence

iii)   Eligibility of Electoral Rolls

iv)   Ease of Voter Registration

v)   Democracy in 2050

vi)   Ease of Identification at the Ballot

vii)   Ease of Political Party in Registration

viii) Independent and Professional EMBs for Sustainable Democracy

ix)   Technology Driven Voter Registration'

x)   Grievance Redressal in Voter Registration

xi)   Transparency and Political Parties as Concurrent Auditors

xii)   Demographic Electoral Campaigns

xiii) Electronic Voting Machines

xiv)   Artificial Intelligence and Elections

xv)   Campaign Finance and Expenditure

xvi)   Risk Management and Electoral Resilience

xvii) Model Code of Conduct for Campaigns

xviii) Postal Ballot System

xix)   Election Technology

xx)   Training and Capacity Building of EMBs

xxi)   Polling Day Operations

xxii) Tackling Misinformation and Disinformation in Elections

5.0 AREAS OF INTEREST

5.1 The Electronic Voting Machines (**EVMs**)

Electronic Voting is the standard means of conducting elections using EVMs in India. The system was developed for the Election Commission of India by state-owned Electronics Corporation of India and Bharat Electronics. Starting in the late 1990s, they were introduced in Indian elections in a phased manner.

Prior to the introduction of electronic voting, paper ballots were used and manual counting was done. The printed paper ballots were expensive, required substantial post-voting resources and time to count individual ballots and were prone to fraudulent voting with pre-filled fake ballots. Introduction of EVMs have brought down the costs significantly, reduces the time of counting to enable faster announcement of results and eliminated fraudulent practices due to safety features such as security locking, limits to rate of voting per minute and verification of thumb impressions. EVMs are stand-alone machines that use write once read many memory. They are self-contained, battery-powered and do not need any networking capability. They do not have any wireless or wired components that connect to the internet.

We were able to fully see the demonstration of how a EVM machine is used in Elections. We were also given the opportunity to vote and went through the voting process as in a polling station.

The significant advantages included that there were no invalid votes and counting process was extremely quick.

5.2 Artificial Intelligence was also an area of interest and its use in Elections.

Technology has long been used in electoral processes, such as e-voting, and it is a valuable tool in making this process efficient and secure.

AI has the potential to improve the efficiency and accuracy of elections. It reaches out to voters and engages with them more directly through personalised communication tailored to individual preferences and behaviour. AI-powered chatbots can provide real-time information about polling locations, candidate platforms, and voting procedures, making the electoral process more accessible and transparent.

AI also improves data management by ensuring accurate collection, storage, and analysis of extensive electoral data, enabling officials to make swift decisions and identify trends effectively. Automated systems make election administration more efficient by managing large datasets with speed and precision, significantly reducing human errors. This leads to more reliable and timely results, thereby reinforcing public trust in the electoral process. Additionally, AI strengthens electoral security by fortifying cybersecurity measures against cyber threats, ensuring the integrity and resilience of electoral infrastructure, by detecting anomalies and fraudulent

However, recent advancements in artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT (OpenAI) have an unprecedented impact on the electoral process. These digital innovations offer opportunities to improve electoral efficiency and voter engagement, but also raise concerns about potential misuse. AI can be used to harness big data to influence voter decision-making. Its capacity for launching cyberattacks, producing deep fakes, and spreading disinformation could destabilize democratic processes, threaten the integrity of political discourse, and erode public trust.

5.3 Introduction of Election Commission of India Network (**ECINET**)

The ECI has recently developed and launched a digital app to facilitate the citizen engagement and participation in the electoral process of the world's largest democracy. It seamlessly connects citizens candidates/political parties and election officials, offering all key election services on one secure platform.

The platform enables faster information sharing, enhanced transparency, and timely dissemination of the election data such as polling trends.

Some of the services i offered from this app include:

a) Voter Registration

b) Tracking Application

c) Voter Card Complaints

d) Search of name in the list

e) Download E voter card

f) Connecting with Election Officials

g) Knowing your candidates

h) Model Code of Conduct Complaint

i) Past Elections

j) Current Elections

k) Polling Trends

6.0 BILATERAL MEETINGS

6.1 Meeting with the Chief Electoral Commissioner of India

We were invited to meet with the Chief Elections Commissioner of India for bilateral discussions and areas of assistance.

The Chief Elections Commissioner offered bilateral assistance and exchange on the following areas.

I) That India could assist the EC and Fijian Elections Office (**FEO**) on development of similar App such as ECINET for use in Fiji during elections.

II) Capacity Building Training programs for FEO staff to attend in India on conduct of elections.

III) Senior Election Officials from India visit to Fiji for Knowledge Exchange programs.

6.2 Meeting with the Secretary General of the International IDEA

The Secretary General of International IDEA also met us and offered the Electoral Commission of Fiji a membership of this body. Currently they have membership comprising of 35 states. The Chairperson advised that he would consult the EC in Fiji regarding the proposal for consideration.

6.3 Meeting with the Officials of Ministry of External Affairs in India

We were invited to attend a meeting with the External Affairs Ministry of India. We were accompanied by the Fiji's High Commissioner to India for this meeting. Matters discussed included the donation of vehicles by the Indian Government that was being undertaken including any future assistance Fiji would require. The Officials advised that EC and FEO could request for any further assistance in any areas they required and this could be submitted through the Fiji High Commission in India.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The Conference was attended by more than 40 Election Management Bodies of the world and more than 30 countries were represented by their Missions in India. The Conference had close to 500 national and international delegates drawn from Chairpersons and Senior officers of EMBs, electoral experts, academic experts from reputed Universities and Institutions including IITs, IIMs, NLUs in the field of law/ technology/ management/ communication and other stakeholders.

It was interesting to learn and observe various areas of interest and hear the views and opinions of various distinct experts in their respective areas. The experts came from various organizations and countries and represented a cross-sectional stakeholder of EMBs across the world.

India being the largest democracy plays a significant role in the elections management and uses advanced methods of voting. The hospitality and manner in which the conference was organized was indeed overwhelming. It portrayed a totally professional approach in logistics, hosting and management of an event of such magnitude.

There are a lot of future collaboration the EC and FEO can have with its counterparts in India and all opportunities extended must be explored for consideration on offers made through bilateral assistance.