

CEC Sampath wants greater autonomy for EC

Sunny Sebastian

JAIPUR: Chief Election Commissioner V.S. Sampath has sought greater autonomy and more power to the body he heads, for its effective functioning. The Commission has made much headway in recent times in empowering voters and guaranteeing a higher polling percentage across States through massive campaigns, but it needed more powers to carry on with the agenda of providing a fuller democracy to citizens, he said.

"In a country of 70 million voters, just one Commission cannot be reasonably expected to deliver on [all] fronts; greater public interest and partnership is essential for the proper functioning of the electoral process," Mr. Sampath said. He was speaking as the chief guest at a symposium on 'Electoral Reforms and Voter Empowerment,' at the National Law University, Jodhpur, on Friday.

Mr. Sampath said the Commission could deal firmly and decisively in the past with complaints of electoral frauds and malpractices. However, greater autonomy would en-

hance the capacity of the Commission for holding free and fair elections. He regretted that there was no strong law to curb the practice of "paid news."

There should be a provision to make the elected persons who stepped down from one seat, after winning two, pay for the expenses incurred in holding the by-election caused by his resignation. Another way to curb the additional expenditure caused by such resignations could be to prevent a candidate from contesting from more than one seat, he said.

Among the possible electoral reforms which Parliament could take up, Mr. Sampath suggested the "right to reject." "Right to reject is an idea inherent to democracy, whose time for execution has come," he noted. The CEC also spoke eloquently on the need to provide for not only the "registration" of the political parties, but also their "de-registration," if necessary.

Mr. Sampath appealed to youngsters who turn 18 to make sure that they registered as voters, so that they could share their responsibility in building the nation.