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For a Better Democracy

A Concept Paper
for the consideration of
the People and Leaders of India

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eElections

1. There are two serious and well-known problems with our political system: One, the rise of criminality and corruption, and two, the lack of fair representation for the various socioeconomic segments of the population. There are also a few other significant, but less-known issues that need to addressed.

2. In this paper, we propose a simple and novel alternative to the current system, that will solve these problems and address these issues. We crafted this alternative using electronic age technologies like QR codes and touchscreens, and hence we call it eElections, taking inspiration from the terms like e-banking, e-seva, e-ticket, etc.

The well-known problems

3. **Criminality and Corruption**: Criminality and corruption has been increasing to embarrassing and dangerous levels in politics over the time. We need a two-pronged approach to solve this problem. One, put in place measures to identify and purge politicians with criminal and corrupt background. A good number of measures of this kind are already in place, but are not effective for obvious reasons. Hence we should consider a second measure, which is to try to bring back honest politicians into the political scene who are staying away from it unable to compete with unscrupulous opponents. Even 20% to 30% honest and principled leaders in power would make a huge difference to the discussions and voting on the floor of the legislatures. Honest leaders would vote based on the issues at hand rather than based on party pressures and monetary enticements. Their votes could be the crucial deciding votes nudging the legislation and executive policies in the right direction.

4. **Lack of fair representation**: In a democracy, every socioeconomic segment of the society should have fair representation, in proportion to their numbers. But, unfortunately, our political system is dominated by a few ‘upper castes’. This is leading to lot of discontent among many segments of the population, and to the loss of faith in democracy. The demand for caste-based census and SC classification are just a symptom of this problem. We need to address this issue before it goes out of hand. Every caste, religion, profession, language, region, and for that matter any socioeconomic group that has similar needs, issues and concerns, should be able to elect leaders of their choice instead of having to choose between two or three candidates fielded by the major political parties in every constituency. Women should be able to elect candidates who focus on women issues, farmers should be able to elect candidates who focus on farmers issues, Divyangs should be able to elect candidates who focus on Divyang issues, and so on.

The less-known Issues

5. **Local contests**: The territorial constituency system turns elections to a national body like Lok Sabha into local contests. This systems sends leaders who are strong in local politics to the national body, rather than sending leaders who have national spirit, outlook and appeal, and passion for addressing national level issues. Policies and programs of the governments can only succeed when led by leaders with nations spirit and outlook. Unable to find such leaders among the members of Lok Sabha, governments often use Rajya Sabha as a vehicle to bring leaders with national vision into parliament and cabinet. The local contests favour leaders who are locally strong. This is why we see the dominance of upper caste leaders who has the necessary money and muscle power and the local clout to win the election. To put up a tough fight, they need to raise large amounts of money and distribute large amounts of money, all under the radar. Only politicians who are ethically compromised and can enrol ethically compromised elements in to the campaign cadres can survive in this environment. Small and medium scale businesses find it very hard to survive without political patronage. Genuine entrepreneurship suffers at the hands of even small time politicians and party cadres, hampering economic development.

6. **Perpetual minority rule**: In the current system, the winning candidates typically get about 35% of the vote. However, the system makes them represent 100% of the voters, including the other 65% of the voters who did not vote for them. This being the case in almost every constituency and in every election, the country is perpetually under minority rule. Majority of the voters, all over the country, have to put up with leaders whom they do not trust, respect or support.

7. **Delimitation issues**: Adjusting the number of seats in the parliament (and legislatures) and redrawing the boundaries of the constituencies, called delimitation, is a huge political and administrative exercise. The problem is that it does not happen promptly and frequently and to the satisfaction of everyone. States and regions with high economic growth and low population growth resent the higher number of representatives from the states and regions with low economic growth and high population growth. This is a huge problem that is spreading underneath the rug and can cause serious issues to the integrity of our nation if not addressed.

8. **Lack of internal democracy**: Political parties, once upon a time, used to conduct internal elections of one sort or another to elect their leaders. They became a thing of the past now. ‘Dynasty rule’ has become prevalent. This is not only an issue for the overall democracy, but also for political parties themselves. Political parties has the risk of becoming stagnant, and even imploding, under the leadership of an incapable successor of a deceased leader. It is in the interest of political parties as well as the democracy to keep all political parties vibrant with strong leaders.

9. **Voters' dilemma**: Voters sometime like the prime ministerial (or chief ministerial) candidate, but not the local MP (or MLA) candidate or vice versa. The system doesn't give them a mechanism to resolve this dilemma. Consequently, they end up either choosing a candidates whom they do not like, or not vote for them inadvertently affecting the prospects of the political party and the prime ministerial (or chief ministerial) candidate they like. Neither of the choices are desirable and should be addressed.

10. **Binary thinking**: No political party is flawless. Voters know that. Most voters, in general, have a low opinion of all political parties. They rate one party to be only slightly better than the other at any given time. But, the current one-vote-per-voter system forces them to pick one of them and reject the others. Their vote is interpreted as the completely endorsement of one party and completely rejection of all the others, which is far from the truth. The one-vote-per-voter system forces the voters into binary thinking, in a sense. There should be a mechanism for the voters to express their true feelings about the different parties. They should be able to *rate* the parties than *vote* for the parties.

11. **Independent candidates**: In the early decades of democratic India, quite a good number of independent candidates used to win the elections. Their number has been dwindling ever since and hardly there are an independent candidates now in the political scene. Lack of independent candidates means lack of plurality of opinion. Every issue in a party-based system has only two or at the most three answers. No issue gets examined from multiple perspectives. Party in power forces its opinions and agenda, rather than working to build a consensus with the other parties. Parties that are not in power oppose anything and everything proposed by the ruling party, just for the sake of opposing, regardless of the merits of the proposal. Ideally, the legislative sessions should run like the sessions of constituent assembly, where everyone could voice their independent perspectives and where everyone respects the opinions of the others. Legislatures should focus on building consensus making necessary compromises. Plurality of perspectives is the hallmark of democracy. It keeps democracy healthy and vibrant.

12. **Loss of strong leaders:** Parties usually field strong leaders against strong leaders and average leaders against average leaders in various constituencies. No matter who wins, half of the strong leaders would not get elected, and half of the average leaders get elected. The system thus lays many good parliamentarians on the way side. Their services are not available for people for the next five years. Strong political leaders, from every party, should be in power, not out of power. Strong leaders are needed in the ruling party to craft good policies and programs. Strong leaders are needed in the other parties to offer a critical view of the policies and programs. Only one

or two strong leaders and multitude of average leaders turn parties and governments into one-man shows.

13. **Proportional Representation**: In the current model, parties may lose disproportionately high number of seats for losing a small percentage of votes and vice versa. This is not only bad for parties, but also for democracy, because the seat count doesn't accurately represent people's mandate.

A simple and novel alternative

14. The members of the Constituent Assembly were aware of all these potential problems and issues, and discussed them at length. Yet they went ahead with the current system in spite of its shortcomings, because the other alternatives are complex and difficult to implement.

15. But now we are in a different era altogether. The electronic age has brought forth many advanced technologies. With their help we could build sophisticated and powerful systems like Aadhaar cards and UPI. Taking advantage of the same technologies, we should be able to craft better political and voting systems too. In this spirit, we crafted a simple and novel alternative to the current system called eElections. This alternative suggests making two fundamental changes to the political system.

16. **Change One:** The first change is to abolish the concept of territorial constituencies and let voters vote for any candidate of their choice from anywhere in the country (or state in the case of state elections). Political parties, instead of fielding one candidate per constituency, would publish a nationwide (statewide in the case of state elections) endorsed list of candidates, and a voter could vote to anyone of them or to independent candidates based on their interests and needs. In this system, farmers, for example, can vote for a leader who focuses on farmers' issues, regardless of which part of the country the leader comes from. Similarly, people can choose a leader who belong to their own caste, profession, cause etc., if they so choose, regardless of where the leader comes from.

17. **Change Two**: The second change is to give multiple votes, (some ten or twelve or twenty or so) to each voter and let them distribute those votes to multiple leaders of their choice, and in any proportion they like. A woman from an agricultural family, for example, can distribute some of her votes to a leader who focuses on farmers' issues, some to another leader who focuses on women's issues and the rest to a leader who focuses on the issues of her caste. A teacher who also happened to be a Divyang can also similarly distribute some of his votes to a leader who focuses on education system, some to another leader who focuses on Divyangs' issues and the rest to a leader who focuses on the issues of his caste. This is similar to a rich person hiring multiple servants, one for

cooking, one for cleaning, one for gardening, one for driving and so on. In a democracy voters should be *rich enough* to do the same, i.e., choose multiple *public servants* of their choice to serve them. The multiple votes make the voters politically *rich*.

18. eElections system also requires two supplementary changes as follows:

19. **Top Rankers method**: In the eElections system, candidates do not compete against each other directly in a constituency. Rather, they try to attract voters from everywhere in the country (in the state, in case of state elections). Election Commission ranks the candidates by their vote count, i.e., the votes received by them and declares the 'top rankers' as the winners. In the case of elections to Lok Sabha, the 'top 543' would be declared as winners, 543 being the current number of seats in Lok Sabha. The number would vary for each state in the case of state legislative assembly elections.

20. **Weighted voting**: In the current system, each member of the house represents roughly the same number of voters. Hence their votes on the floor of the house on any bill or motion or resolution are considered equal. But in the eElections systems, the vote counts of the leaders can vary widely. The most popular leaders can get ten or even twenty times as many votes as an average leader. To be fair to the voters of such leaders, for that matter, for every leader and his or her voters, we need to give them varying 'weighted voting' power on the floor of the house, according to the number of voters represented by them. This can be accomplished by letting the speaker of the house add up the vote counts of the leaders who voted in favour or against any bill, motion or resolution, with the help of computers, instead of taking a simple head count.

* * *

21. eElections is certainly more complex than the current system, and cannot be implemented using the current EVM system. To enable voters vote for any candidate from anywhere, the names of all candidates from all over the country (or state in the case of state elections) should be included in all EVMs all over the country. The current EVMs cannot handle more than 384 candidates. Moreover, creating thousands of unique and distinct election symbols for the thousands of candidates is simply not practical. It would also be a nightmare for the voters to browse through thousands of candidates to find the candidate they like to vote. Distributing multiple votes to multiple leaders in different proportions would certainly be challenging and confusing to an average voter. eElections would not be feasible unless we solve this complexity. We will, later, discuss how we address this complexity using advances in technology such as QR codes and touchscreens. In fact, the process we present would be much simpler and less confusing than the current EVMs, as you would see.

22. First, we will focus on describing how the eElections system would solve the problems of the current system that we described earlier.

How it works

23. The most salient feature of the eElections system is that it breaks down the barriers of the territorial constituencies and brings voters of common interests, needs, values and socioeconomic backgrounds together from all over the country (or state, in the case of state elections). They are no more sliced up into small chunks in each constituency as is the case now.

24. This means, people of every profession, caste, religion, language, interest, etc. can elect leaders of their own. Divyangs, land labourers, construction workers, teachers, farmers, etc. who are large enough in number when combined from across the country, can elect leaders of their own. Voters of no socioeconomic segment need to complain about unfair representation any more. They can select leaders exactly in proportion to their numbers. There is no need for pesky measures like reserved constituencies, caste-based census, SC classification or delimitation to ensure fair representation.

25. Not only population segments but also political parties will be represented in proportion to their support in this system. In the current system, if one party gets five lakh votes and the other party gets four lakh votes in a given constituency, the party which gets five lakh votes gets represented in the house and the party which gets four lakhs will not. This would not be the case in eElections system. In this system, both the candidates who gets five lakh votes and four lakh votes are likely to be in the 'top rankers' list, or both will not, except in the marginal situations.

26. Also, in this system, the number of seats in the Lok Sabha (or state legislatures) can be increased as needed to reflect the increase in population by merely declaring more number of 'top rankers' as the winners. There is no need to depend on the census or redraw constituency boundaries.

27. The eElections system brings together not only voters with common interests, needs and backgrounds, but also voters with common values, such as those who care deeply for democracy and want to vote only for leaders of principles and integrity. When brought together they will be large enough in numbers to elect honest and principled leaders. In the current system, voters who care for values are staying away from elections as they find no candidate who meets their standards of character and capability, and with good chances of winning the election. Honest leaders are also staying away from politics in the current system as they do not have any hope of finding a large enough voter base. All of them will come back to the political scene in the eElections system, as they can find substantial number of voters from across the country who will vote for them. Even the

average voters can be expected, at least out of guilt, to distribute some, if not all, of their votes to the honest leaders, increasing the chances of honest leaders getting elected. Honest leaders do not compromise on their values and integrity under political pressure or monetary enticements. Even if they make up 10% or 20% or 30% of the membership of a house, they can have a huge influence on which bills get passed and which do not, as they get the chance to make the crucial deciding votes. Honest leaders would challenge every policy and action of the executive without fear or favour.

28. As noted already, the current territorial constituency system reduces the elections to the national body into local contests. As such it is conducive for leaders with local clout, such as the 'upper caste' leaders and local *dadas*, and not for leaders with national vision, spirit and appeal. This will completely change with the eElections. Leaders with local clout cannot compete with true 'national' leaders who can attract votes from all over the country by focusing on issues of national level importance, i.e., that are of concern to people of all over the nation. Political parties also would stop seeking and patronizing politicians with local clout. The dominance of upper caste leaders, local *dadas*, etc., will be a thing of the past. Criminality and corruption also will come down, as extortions at the local level and distribution of money and other enticements to the voters at local level become less rewarding.

29. In the current system, the winning candidate is forced to represent all the voters of the constituency, i.e, even the voters who did not vote for him or her and also who did not vote at all. Similarly, the voters who did not vote at all, or did not vote for the winning candidate are forced to accept the winning candidate as their representative. This is nothing but a forced marriage. This means there is no trust or love or honest conversation between the elected politicians and majority of the electorate. Forced marriages weaken the trust in democracy itself. Weak trust in the system is a bigger danger than even the presence of criminal elements in politics. eElections system solves this problem completely. In this system, a leader represents *only* the voters who voted for him or her and not the others. One hundred percent of the voters, in this system, are represented by a leader chosen by them. This promotes honest conversation between the leaders and voters. Since voters can choose multiple leaders, it is highly likely that voters would have at least one leader of their choice in power.

30. In the current system, the candidates have to pretend to be all things to all the people, so that they get the votes of people of different interests, needs and socioeconomic background in any given constituency. They would not have deep knowledge of any particular cause or field or profession or population segment and it can actually work against them. As a result this political system promotes the 'jack of all, master of none', type generic politicians. No one is passionate or dedicated to any field

like healthcare, education, sports, tourism, agriculture, etc. This is one of the reasons why India is mediocre in everyone of these fields. How can any field develop without strong champions? All this would be a thing of the past with eElections system. In this system, politicians need not have to pretend to the 'all things to all people'. They can dedicate themselves to just one or two fields and attract enough voters who are also interested in those fields, to make it to the 'top rankers' list.

31. Dedication to a field also frees politicians from their heavy dependency on the political parties. Just as sportspeople develop their own fan base, regardless of which team they play for, politicians can make a name for themselves with their dedication to one or other field. They can maintain a solid voter base and get elected on their own. Leaders who can maintain their own voter base can launch themselves as independent candidates, similar to what freelance journalists do, launching their own channels and shows. The more the independent leaders in power, the more the plurality of opinion, and the better the democracy fares.

32. In the current system, as mentioned earlier, half or more of the strong leaders will be laid on the way side by the system, in the constituencies where two or more strong leaders contest. This would never be the case in the eElections system. Because of the 'top rankers' method of election, all strong leaders, i.e., leaders with high vote counts, belonging all parties, will get elected, before the 'average' leaders get elected.

* * *

33. With multiple votes, the eElections system completely eliminates 'binary' thinking among voters. Voters have to no more pick one party or one leader over the other. The idea of selecting 'multiple public servants' and giving chance to all political parties, will change their thinking entirely, for the better. They can use the 'multiple votes' in many creative ways. They can distribute some votes to one party and some to another, without having to put 'all the eggs in one basket'. They can give some votes to their caste leader, some to an 'expert' politician, and some to an 'honest' politician. They can give some to politicians with party affiliation and some to independent politicians. They can give some to old and established politicians and some to young and upcoming politicians. It is up to their interests and imagination how they distribute votes. More votes in voter's hand simply means more power in voter's hand, as should be the case in an ideal democracy.

34. The multiple votes feature also brings down the rivalry and acrimony among political parties to a minimum. In this multiple-votes system, parties cannot hope to get all the votes of any single voter. They can only ask for a higher share of votes from any voter. We can call this 'voter-sharing' system, i.e., parties have to 'share the voter'. Since parties expect and accept that voters are likely to give some of their votes to the other

parties also, they will be hesitant to bad-mouth and demonize the other parties, as it can backfire. Voters would not like to hear anything bad about a party whom they want to give a portion of their votes. Hence, political parties, in their own interest, will stop attacking the other parties. They would, rather, focus on highlighting their own policies and programs. This will be a welcome change and leads to a better democracy.

35. The eElections system also makes the lives of political parties easier. In the current system, they have to field one candidate per constituency. No matter whom they field, the other aspirants in the party can get disappointed and may not work for the success of the nominated candidate wholeheartedly. Even the voters who like the party, but not the candidate fielded by the party may not vote for the party, which is a loss to the party. Further, if a party cannot find a 'strong' candidate, it can lose the seat to the other party. All these issues are resolved by the eElections system. In this system, political parties can give *multiple choices* for the voters by releasing a nation-wide (state-wide for state elections) list of endorsed candidates, which we can call 'endorsed list'. Voters who want to vote for the party can vote for any candidate on the endorsed list, whom they truly like. A party would thus retain the votes of all voters who like the party.

36. With the 'endorsed lists' concept, there is no need for 'internal elections' in the political parties, because voters get the chance to decide who on that endorsed list is truly worthy. They can even vote for a candidate who is not on the list, if they so choose. In other words, the selections of the party are validated by the voters and voters can even deviate from the party selected candidates. This serves the intended purpose as 'internal party elections'.

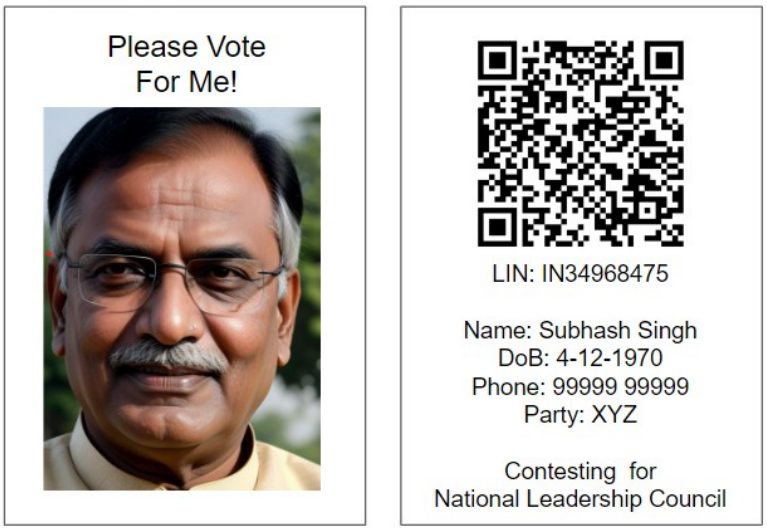
Technology detail

37. As noted earlier, eElections is more complex compared to the current system, and hence we would use the advances in technology to simplify it, and this is how we do it: Instead of an election symbol, the Election Commission would assign a LIN (Leader Identification Number) to each leader. It would replace the EVMs with what we call AVMs (Advanced Voting Machines) and loads every AVM with information about all the candidates from all over the country (or state in the case of state elections), which includes their LIN, name, picture, date of birth, phone number, party affiliation, party symbol, etc.

38. Candidates will create their own 'leader cards' with their respective pictures, names, dates of birth, LIN, party affiliation, and other details and a QR code and would distribute them to their potential voters in physical form at political events or in electronic form through social media and by making them available on various websites. Voters can also obtain the leader card of any candidate by sending an SMS or making a

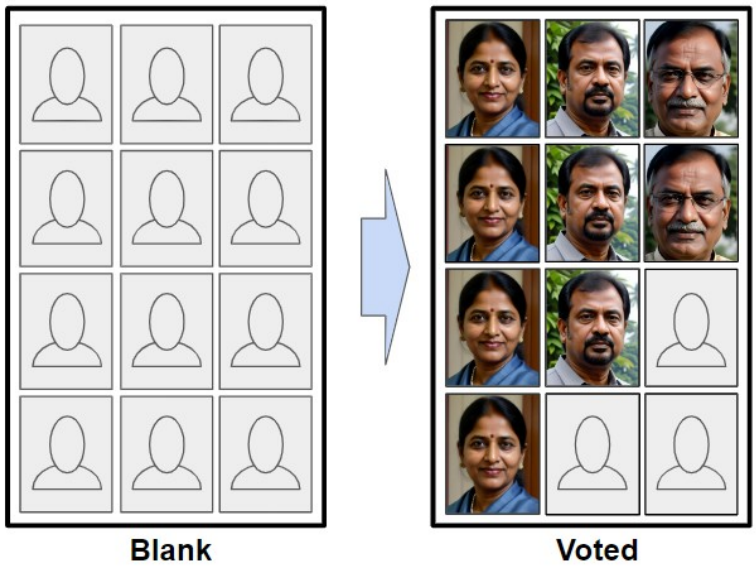
phone call to the office of that candidate. They can also get the leader card of any candidate printed for free at any e-Seva centre. A leader card would look somewhat like the one shown in the image below.

Sample Leader Card



39. The voters would take the 'leader cards' of their chosen leaders to the polling station. In the polling booth, the voters would see a touch screen attached to the AVM. It shows a 3x4 grid with blank faces, as shown on the left side of the image below. The 3x4 grid represents the twelve votes a voter can cast. (It could be a 4x5 grid instead, if each voter is given twenty votes).

Sample AVM Screen



40. The voter would touch one of the boxes, which makes the box blink indicating that it is activated. The voter would then scan the QR code of the leader card into the camera of the AVM which is positioned to a side or above or below the screen. Upon scanning, the face of the candidate appears in the activated box, as a confirmation of distributing that vote to that candidate. The voter can touch each one of the boxes in turn, and scan the QR codes of the same or different leaders to cast all the twelve votes. Educated do not have to use the QR codes, if the so choose. Instead, they can search for a candidate by name or date of birth or phone number.

41. The right side of this image shows an example of the screen after voting, with the voter distributing four votes to one leader, three to another leader, two to yet another leader and three left 'un-voted', which is also a legitimate option.

42. Voters could make a mistake and cast one or more of the votes to a wrong leader. In such a case, the voters can activate the box in which mistake was made by touching it again and then scanning the leader card of the 'correct' leader. They can repeat this exercise till they get it correct. Upon completing the casting of the votes to their satisfaction, voters would click a green 'Submit' button to confirm their choices. The voting is final once the Submit button is clicked.

43. To further help the voters with the use of AVMs, the Election Commission can provide a dummy AVM at each polling station, filling the dummy AVM with the same information of all the candidates as the real AVMs. Dummy AVMs can be installed at the polling stations even two or three days before the election day.

44. By using the 'voter identification methods' developed for the RVMs, the Election Commission can allow the voters to vote at any polling station in the country, as every AVM everywhere would have the information on all candidates from all over the country. This means no one need to travel back to their place of residence on the election day to cast their vote. This is useful not only for the migrant labour but also for everyone who happened to be away from their home for business, family, pleasure or other reasons.

Implementation

45. A change of this magnitude to the political system cannot be successfully implemented without broad political consensus. If the ruling party proposes the implementation of eElections system, the other parties will oppose it just for the sake of opposing it, and vice versa. Such is the political atmosphere, unfortunately. To avoid this problem, an all party forum, similar to the constituent assembly, should be setup to review, improve and endorse the eElections system. Eminent constitutional lawyers should be commissioned to draft the necessary changes to the constitution to implement

this system. The political parties should unanimously pass the necessary bills and amend the constitution, as needed.

46. This system should be introduced in a gradual manner instead of all at once. To begin with, it should be implemented in four or five states in different parts of the country where different political parties are in power. Adjustments and modifications should be made based on the experience gained in this process. eElections should then be implemented in other states and finally at the center over the time.

Start the discussion

47. We need to first start the discussion on eElections today, to make it a reality one day. The problems of the current system and the opportunity that the electronic age presents need no further discussion and emphasis. But the proposed alternative should be discussed thoroughly, including its pros and cons. It should be modified as needed to address any and all of the identified cons.

48. Political science departments in various universities, citizens' forums for democracy across the country, and individuals who actively think about making our democracy better are all well positioned to lead the discussion. The political parties and political leaders in our country fortunately hold philosophers, thinkers and intelligentsia, who are neutral, apolitical and truly stand for the long term well being of the country, in good regard, especially on matters of systemic changes. Hence their discussions will not go in vain.

49. Political science departments at the universities, especially, should take the initiative to allocate some time for discussing this alternative in their classrooms and thus engage the young minds who bring fresh perspectives. They should also consider holding conferences, inviting their academic brethren and other political thinkers beyond academia, and thought leaders in various political parties.

** The End.**