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Do you agree that this form of reforming political parties will be acceptable to them?

MP changes parties, he or she will lose the seat in the legislature. This new law has helped bring defection down. At the same time this has made any dissent even more difficult. MPs and MLAs have to accept whatever the party leaders decide.

- The Supreme Court passed an order to reduce the influence of money and criminals. Now, it is mandatory for every candidate who contests elections to file an **AFFIDAVIT** giving details of his property and criminal cases pending against him. The new system has made a lot of information available to the public. But there is no system of check if the information given by the candidates is true. As yet we do not know if it has led to decline in the influence of the rich and the criminals.

Glossary

Affidavit: A signed document submitted to an officer, where a person makes a sworn statement regarding her personal information.

- The Election Commission passed an order making it necessary for political parties to hold their organisational elections and file their income tax returns. The parties have started doing so but sometimes it is mere formality. It is not

clear if this step has led to greater internal democracy in political parties.

Besides these, many suggestions are often made to reform political parties:

- A law should be made to regulate the internal affairs of political parties. It should be made compulsory for political parties to maintain a register of its members, to follow its own constitution, to have an independent authority, to act as a judge in case of party disputes, to hold open elections to the highest posts.
- It should be made mandatory for political parties to give a minimum number of tickets, about one-third, to women candidates. Similarly, there should be a quota for women in the decision making bodies of the party.
- There should be state funding of elections. The government should give parties money to support their election expenses. This support could be given in kind: petrol, paper, telephone etc. Or it could be given in cash on the basis of the votes secured by the party in the last election.

These suggestions have not yet been accepted by political parties. If and when these are accepted these could lead to some improvement. But we must be very careful about legal solutions to political problems. Over-regulation of political parties can be counter-productive. This would force all parties to find ways to cheat the law. Besides, political parties will not agree to pass a law that they do not like.

There are two other ways in which political parties can be reformed. One, people can put pressure on political parties. This can be done through petitions, publicity and agitations.

Ordinary citizens, pressure groups and movements and the media can play an important role in this. If political parties feel that they would lose public support by not taking up reforms, they would become more serious about reforms. Two, political parties can improve if those who want this join political parties.

The quality of democracy depends on the degree of public participation. It is difficult to reform politics if ordinary citizens do not take part in it and simply criticise it from the outside. The problem of bad politics can be solved by more and better politics. We shall return to this theme in the final chapter.

1. State the various functions political parties perform in a democracy.
2. What are the various challenges faced by political parties?
3. Suggest some reforms to strengthen parties so that they perform their functions well?
4. What is a political party?
5. What are the characteristics of a political party?
6. A group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government is called a _____.
7. Match List I (organisations and struggles) with List II and select the correct answer using the codes given below the lists:

	List I	List II
1.	Congress Party	A. National Democratic Alliance
2.	Bharatiya Janata Party	B. State party
3.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	C. United Progressive Alliance
4.	Telugu Desam Party	D. Left Front

	1	2	3	4
(a)	C	A	B	D
(b)	C	D	A	B
(c)	C	A	D	B
(d)	D	C	A	B

8. Who among the following is the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party?
 - A. Kanshi Ram
 - B. Sahu Maharaj
 - C. B.R. Ambedkar
 - D. Jotiba Phule
9. What is the guiding philosophy of the Bharatiya Janata Party?
 - A. Bahujan Samaj
 - B. Revolutionary democracy
 - C. Integral humanism
 - D. Modernity



EXERCISES



10. Consider the following statements on parties.

- A. Political parties do not enjoy much trust among the people.
- B. Parties are often rocked by scandals involving top party leaders.
- C. Parties are not necessary to run governments.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) A, B, and C (b) A and B (c) B and C (d) A and C

11. Read the following passage and answer the questions given below:

Muhammad Yunus is a famous economist of Bangladesh. He received several international honours for his efforts to promote economic and social development for the benefit of the poor. He and the Grameen Bank he started jointly, received the Nobel Peace Prize for the 2006. In February 2007, he decided to launch a political party and contest in the parliamentary elections. His objective was to foster proper leadership, good governance and build a new Bangladesh. He felt that only a political party different from the traditional ones would bring about new political culture. His party would be democratic from the grassroots level.

The launching of the new party, called Nagarik Shakti (Citizens' Power), has caused a stir among the Bangladeshis. While many welcomed his decision, some did not like it. "Now I think Bangladesh will have a chance to choose between good and bad and eventually have a good government," said Shahedul Islam, a government official. "That government, we hope, would not only keep itself away from corruption but also make fighting corruption and black money a top priority."

But leaders of traditional political parties who dominated the country's politics for decades were apprehensive. "There was no debate (over him) winning the Nobel, but politics is different - very challenging and often controversial," said a senior leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Some others were highly critical. They asked why he was rushing into politics. "Is he being planted in politics by mentors from outside the country," asked one political observer.

Do you think Yunus made a right decision to float a new political party?

Do you agree with the statements and fears expressed by various people? How do you want this new party organised to make it different from other parties? If you were the one to begin this political party how would you defend it?