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THE ASIATIC AGE

Dalits barred from voting at many places

RASHME SEHGAL

NEW DELHI

May 14: The National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW), an umbrella group of dalit organisations set up to monitor dalit voting patterns, highlighted at a press conference that dalit voters were not allowed to vote in an unprecedented 3,325 polling stations in 210 constituencies spread across 13 states.

The National Dalit Election Watch took the unprecedented step of using the services of 3,690 volunteers to man these booths, both at the state and national level.

Their findings highlight the extent of dalit apartheid that continues to exist on the ground. NDEW received 478 complaints cases which included cases of violence, intimidation and an exclusion of 13 per cent voters whose names were excluded

NDEW findings

anti-democracy

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NDEW national coordinator Prasad Chako pointed out, "In 18 per cent of the villages spread across these constituencies, dalits were not allowed to caste their vote while in 50 per cent of the villages, dalits were forced to vote for candidates against their choice."

"What was even more alarming was that in the eight per cent of the villages, dalits were forced to stand in separate queues at the polling booths while in

another 18 per cent, dalits were allowed to vote after the dominant castes had caste their votes," Mr Chako added.

In Bihar, the NDEW team reported several cases of "violent intimidation of the Dalit voters, including booth capturing. In the Madhubani district alone, 74 dalit homes were burnt and eight dalits were seriously injured in the ensuing violence." This information has been forwarded to the Election Commission and the NDEW plans to take up each individual cases to ensure proper legal and punitive action.

The organisation is pressing on the Election Commission to ensure 100 per cent inclusion of dalits in the electoral rolls in future elections. They have also shot off a letter to CEC Navin Chawla to accelerate the technical modification of the EVMs.