



News Letter

Inside

- ♦ 1,06,32,816 citizens in support of local government empowerment
- ♦ Political parties respond favourably to Lok Satta's demands
- ♦ Lok Satta interacts with Cabinet Committee
- ♦ Gala celebrations to mark the end of the 1 crore signature campaign
- ♦ National Workshop - Deepening Democracy – Agenda for Action
- ♦ Training of Elected Woman Representatives
- ♦ Consultation meetings of National Campaign for Electoral and Governance Reforms
- ♦ AP Election Watch 2004
- ♦ Invited lectures, seminars and workshops

1,06,32,816 citizens in support of local government empowerment

Over the past few months, many of you might have followed Lok Satta's campaign for local government empowerment in Andhra Pradesh, which was reported in our earlier News Letters. As you are aware, we launched an ambitious drive to collect One Crore (ten million) endorsements in support of local government empowerment from the people of Andhra Pradesh. The campaign was officially launched on the 9th of August and concluded on the 2nd of October.

We take immense pride in announcing that we have exceeded our target of collecting 1 crore signatures and the final tally stood at a whopping **1,06,32,816** endorsements from the people of Andhra Pradesh (go to www.loksatta.org/felgreport.htm for detailed information on the campaign and related events). More significantly, we made the people understand the importance of local government empowerment. This historic effort, never before attempted on such a scale on an issue, which has neither emotive nor religious appeal, is unparalleled in India. Thanks to the efforts of thousands of volunteers who have toiled day and night for 10 weeks, we succeeded in not only meeting the numeric targets but also in making the people realize that, local government empowerment is not a trade union issue of elected representatives, but an issue which will truly empower them and improve their quality of life

profoundly.

The most significant aspect of the campaign is that it evolved as a genuine people's movement, which cannot be ignored by the political process. Now, for the first time in our democracy, instead of the parties setting agendas through their manifestos at campaign time, the people have set their own agenda. AP has an estimated population of 70 million, of whom about 60% or 42 million are adults above 18 years of age. Of these, no more than a third, or about 14 million are functionally literate. Of them, 11 million – or over 75% - have supported local government empowerment! This support was not based on starry-eyed notions of idyllic village republics, but well-considered and pragmatic arguments of governments closer and more accountable to the people. Such a powerful, well-reasoned voice could not have been ignored by the political system except at its own peril and the reaction of the political parties as reported below vindicated our stand.

Gala celebrations to mark the end of the 1 crore signature campaign

Lok Satta organized a massive public meeting on October 19th in Hyderabad to celebrate the historic achievement of collecting one crore signatures. Thousands of activists representing tens of millions of voices across the state of Andhra Pradesh and noted activists from other states notably Sri LC Jain, Dr. George Mathew, Dr PV Sheno, Sri SV Raju, Sri AK Venkata Subramanian, Sri Elango Rangaswamy, Smt Shanta Sinha, Dr Bhaskara Rao, Sri Mayank Gandhi and others participated in the colorful celebrations and expressed their solidarity in support of the movement. The celebrations featured inspiring performances by local folk artistes, songs, ghazals and messages from a few noted leaders. The event truly captured the spirit of people's empowerment and was broadcast live by cable channels in Hyderabad.

About 8000 people participated in the meeting, and the Lalitha Kala Thoranam (venue) was jam packed, with hundreds standing for want of seats. Nearly half the participants came from outside Hyderabad at their own expense for travel, lodge and board. Several hundreds of people traveled from far off places at distances ranging from 300 to 800 kms. The serene Lalitha Kala Thoranam turned into a sea of people who thronged it to witness an unusual and an innovative cultural fest. The need for reforming the Indian democracy was subtly depicted in the cultural programmes. Praja Natya Mandali demonstrated through their popular "palle sudullu" the pain that they endure due to centralized bad

governance, which struck a chord with the audience. This was widely regarded as the largest gathering in decades at a meeting unrelated to political parties, caste or religion. It had a profound impact on the public discourse in the state and put local government empowerment, and electoral and political reform on center stage. Complete information on the local government campaign along with media reports and can be accessed at <http://www.loksatta.org/felgreport.html>.

Political parties respond favourably to Lok Satta's demands

Delegates from Federation for Empowerment of Local Governments (FELG) and Lok Satta called on the Chief Minister Sri Chandrababu Naidu, the Congress Legislature Party leader Sri Y S Rajasekhar Reddy as well as the Pradesh Congress Committee President Sri D Srinivas and presented a memorandum outlining the specific measures that we are seeking towards devolution of powers to local governments. Sri Reddy gave us an assurance that if his party comes to power, the first signature to be affixed will be to empower local governments. Sri Naidu restated his party's oft-repeated commitment that they are all for devolution and requested the Cabinet Committee for local governments to study the issue. We have also called on both the communist parties, BJP and MIM and all of them responded favourably to our demands.

Lok Satta interacts with Cabinet Committee

On November 5, 2003, the government of Andhra Pradesh formally invited representatives of Lok Satta and FELG to meet the Cabinet Committee on local governments to discuss the modalities of transfer of power to Panchayats and Municipalities, and creation of mechanisms of accountability. A delegation of Lok Satta and FELG met the Cabinet Committee on 6th November at the AP Secretariat. All the senior officials of various departments were present along with the Minister for Panchayat Raj Dr N Janardhan Reddy and Home Minister Sri Devender Goud, both senior members of the Cabinet. We had a detailed interaction that lasted for 2½ hours. Some of the issues covered in the discussion are:

- Manner of devolution of subjects listed under 11th and 12th schedules, and clear division of responsibilities between various tiers of government.
- District-wise budget allocations under each department to be clearly specified in the state budget with clear demarcation of allotment to local governments. The budgetary allocation should be completely transferred to the district government, which will have the authority to re-appropriate the allocation subject to certain guidelines.
- 50% of all plan grants should be transferred to the local governments as untied resources, to be utilized within broad parameters laid down.
- The recommendations of the State Finance Commission in all matters relating to devolution of resources and sharing of revenues should be binding on State government.
- Beneficiary-oriented schemes to be completely transferred to local governments.
- All employees responsible for subjects transferred to local governments to be kept under local government control, while protecting their service conditions. Local governments will be the 'appointing' authorities for all such functionaries.
- The District Rural Development Agencies must function as integral part of Zilla Parishads, with Chairperson of Zilla Parishad chairing each DRDA.

- Abolition of District Development Review Committee's and constitution of an elected District Planning Committee (DPC) in its place as mandated by the constitution. The DPC should be headed by the Zilla Parishad Chairman and should be made an integral part of the district government.
- Similarly, in cities and metropolitan areas, elected Metropolitan Planning Committees should be constituted in place of the un-elected Urban Development Authorities.

The government representatives gave Lok Satta and FELG categorical and unambiguous assurances that the local governments will be fully empowered and enabled to function as genuine local self-government institutions in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution and democracy. The government requested us to give specific advice on instruments of accountability that need to be put in place to ensure high standards of probity, transparency and people-centered governance. At the request of the Cabinet Committee, Lok Satta sent detailed written suggestions along with the report of Lok Satta Committee on Local Government Empowerment, headed by Sri BPR Vithal, member of the Tenth Finance Commission.

The government requested us to give specific advice on instruments of accountability which need to be put in place to ensure high standards of probity, transparency and people-centered governance. Lok Satta and FELG suggested the following specific measures:

- There should be a District Audit Team for each district, which will function similar to Accountant General's Audit.
- A District Staff Committee for each district to hear and decide upon the service matters and grievances of employees in local governments.
- The staff strength in each tier shall be reviewed periodically by a Staff Review Commission of the State level.
- There should be a statutory requirement that the revenue budget of the local government must be balanced in any given year.
- An ombudsman must be appointed as an independent, impartial institution for every district, with the power to enquire, punish and remove any local government employee or elected representative.
- A right to information law must be implemented in respect of government at state and local levels, on the pattern of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa. The law should provide for compensation for non compliance and penalties/punishments for delays, and wilful misinformation.
- A Citizen's Charter is in operation in Andhra Pradesh Municipalities in respect of a few services, and it provides for fixed time frames and a compensation of Rs.50 per day's delay, the amount to be paid to citizens by the municipality first and to be subsequently recovered from the erring employee(s). Similar charters must be implemented in respect of all services in local governments.

On November 8, the Cabinet met and according to media reports, discussed the issue of empowerment of local governments in detail. The cabinet decided to transfer all functions, powers, functionaries and resources to local governments. Subsequently, the government issued a series of GOs giving effect to some aspects of devolution.

National Workshop - Deepening Democracy - Agenda for Action

On the 20th of October, Lok Satta organized a national workshop with the theme: "Deepening Democracy - An Agenda for Action". Our partners from other states and a few distinguished civil society

representatives from Hyderabad participated in the workshop. The workshop has attempted to identify a pan-Indian reform agenda, which can be pursued simultaneously in various states. In an attempt to identify distinct advocacy issues at the state and national level, the agenda for the workshop has been split into three sections – first, local governments; second, governance agenda that can be pursued at the state level and finally the National Campaign for Electoral and Governance Reforms.

The discussion on the local governments focused on constitutional amendments, administrative measures and the necessity of public campaigns for strengthening of local governments. Taking cognizance of the lack of functional devolution to local governments, the following steps for further action have been discussed:

- Specific constitutional amendments to strengthen local governments, in line with the public commitment of both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition
- Forming a Federation for Empowerment of Local Governments (FELG) in each state
- Launching mass campaigns in select states on similar lines of AP
- Constituting 'Association of Local Governments of India' (ALGI) at national level for collective action
- Measures for capacity building of elected local government representatives in each state
- Need for constant interaction and mutual support
- Documentation and sharing of best practices

The following state and local goals have been identified for further action at the workshop:

- Implementation of Right to Information with compensation for delays.
- Citizen's Charters with compensation for delays
- Empowerment of local governments and empowerment of stakeholders
- Empowerment of ward committees - for each ward
- Toilets for every household
- Comprehensive rural health care (Dr Arole model)
- Local Courts for speedy justice. (patterned after the Draft Bill in AP)
- Independent and effective anti-corruption agency in each state (Karnataka Lok Ayukta model).
- Police reforms at the state level
- Independent crime investigation
- Elimination of corruption in subordinate judiciary (Maharashtra model)

The workshop focused on various methods of citizen action such as Peoples' Watch, and special techniques for mass mobilization such as signature/ballot campaigns, for collective and informed assertion of people.

Participants at the workshop discussed in detail the recent reform initiatives and expressed satisfaction that the political parties are showing signs of responding positively to people's urges. The mandatory disclosure of candidate details is an important step in the direction of empowering voters. The recent political funding reform legislation enacted in September 2003, is a far reaching step in opening up legitimate funding avenues to parties, and cleansing our electoral process. This is one of the most vital pieces of legislation in the history of our democracy. Several other important initiatives, and the broad bipartisan support to them indicate that parties are alive to the urgent need for political reforms. The participants emphasized the need for bringing in the other reform initiatives such as making the post office as a nodal agency for voter registration, constituting Indian Judicial Service and facilitating

independent crime investigation.

It was broadly agreed that the most fundamental reforms required in our governance are in the electoral system. Faulty electoral system and excessive, unaccounted and illegitimate expenditure in elections have been identified as the root causes of corruption and mis-governance in the country. Therefore, systemic changes such as proportional representation and direct election of the head of the government at state and local levels were endorsed as the key reforms for which collective struggle should be launched. The participants at the workshop observed that it is imperative to institutionalize and strengthen the National Campaign for Electoral and Governance Reforms, and create a powerful national platform of like-minded institutions/individuals for democratic reforms. A National Communication Campaign will be launched soon to mobilize public opinion, and to persuade the youth, media, opinion makers and political parties.

Training of Elected Woman Representatives

As many of you are aware, in pursuance of the constitutional amendments and the conforming state acts, one-third of the elective positions in local governments were reserved for women. Traditionally, the participation and involvement of women in public institutions has been limited, partly owing to the male dominated nature of our society. Most of the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) are catapulted into office without any experience in politics and governance. In this context, Lok Satta felt that it is necessary to orient these EWRs on various facets of the working of local governments, their roles and responsibilities and expectations of the people. Above all, we felt that the EWRs have to be made aware of the importance of focusing on crucial issues such as Health, Education and Sanitation, and other facets of good governance. For the past 2 years, Lok Satta has been conducting orientation and training sessions for EWRs across the state of Andhra Pradesh with the help of Singamma Srinivasan Foundation (Bangalore). As part of this effort, we also endeavoured to form non-partisan associations of EWRs at various levels, so that they can assert and fight collectively.

In the past few months, Lok Satta conducted orientation sessions at the grassroots level for EWRs in Karimnagar, Warangal, East Godavari, West Godavari, Visakhapatnam and Medak districts, and assisted them in forming their respective district federations. Nearly 800 EWRs participated in the awareness programmes across these districts. In the next few months Lok Satta would undertake similar orientation sessions in other districts of the state and by the end of the year, we hope to assist the EWRs in the state to form their own state level federation.

Consultation meetings of National Campaign for Electoral and Governance Reforms

As reported in our May News Letter, a national coalition comprising of various civil society organizations and activists was formed under the aegis of National Campaign for Electoral and Governance Reforms. The aim of this coalition is to further the agenda of democratic reforms at the national level, as well as strengthening and supporting state level initiatives for good governance. As part of this effort, the members of the coalition met in a series of regional consultation meetings held in Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi and Tiruvanthapuram in the past few months.

AP Election Watch 2004

As many of you are aware, Lok Satta made a huge impact on the polity of the country through its innovative Election Watch

campaign during the 1999 elections. Thanks to Lok Satta's efforts, criminalization of polity is arrested in AP, though not reversed. The parties stopped entertaining any new criminal elements, though the entrenched criminals continued to be in the fray as they have struck deep political roots. At the national level, Lok Satta's work during the 1999 Election Watch formed the basis for litigation on candidates' disclosure, which finally became the law due to the Supreme Court judgment of March 13th.

Lok Satta has launched a similar campaign – AP Election Watch 2004 (APEW 2004) for the ensuing assembly and parliamentary elections in Andhra Pradesh. The primary focus of the campaign will be to reverse the process of criminalisation, and encourage informed debate on issues of public importance through common platforms. Lok Satta has constituted a screening committee comprising of eminent jurists, civil servants and civil society activists under the chairmanship of Justice Jeevan Reddy, former Supreme Court judge for screening the criminal and/or corrupt record of potential candidates. Complete details of the APEW 2004 campaign and related activities can be accessed at www.loksatta.org/apew2004.htm.

Invited lectures, seminars and workshops

Invited to participate in a symposium on **Water and Sanitation for Cities**, ASCI, Hyderabad, October 6.

Addressed the students of University of Hyderabad on **Role of Youth in shaping the Nation**, Hyderabad, October 13.

Organized a National workshop: **Deepening Democracy-An Agenda for Action**, Hyderabad, October 20.

Invited to address the Catholic Health Association of India on the occasion of their Diamond Jubilee Celebrations on : **Universal Access to Health**, October 24, Hyderabad.

Invited to address the senior executives of National Hydro-Electric Corporation on **Power Sector Reforms – The way forward**, ASCI, Hyderabad, November 1.

Invited to address the employees of Central Excise Department during the vigilance awareness week on **Corruption – Its impact on Indian Society**, Hyderabad, November 7.

Invited by Association of Youth for a Better India (AYBI) to deliver a lecture on **Proportional Representation and Electoral reforms**, Mumbai, November 8.

Invited to deliver the keynote address on: **Revitalization of Cooperative Credit and Rural Development** to the officers of AP State Co-op bank, Hyderabad, November 14.

Invited to address the members of the High Court Bar Association on: **Local Courts for Speedy Justice**, Hyderabad, November 14.

Invited by the Press Academy of Andhra Pradesh to address the media on National Press Day: **Parliamentary Democracy – Role of Media**, Hyderabad, November 16.

Invited by the Comptroller of Defence Accounts to deliver a lecture on : **Work Ethics and Accountability**, Hyderabad, December 2.

Invited to participate in a **National Consultation on Citizen's Social Charter** by the Council for Social Development, New Delhi, December 6.

Invited to address a public meeting on **International Anti-Corruption Day** at Qutbullapur, Hyderabad , 9th December.

Invited to address the participants of a workshop on **Directions in Higher Education – Indian Context** , Hyderabad, December 15.

Invited to deliver keynote address on **Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development** at YES regional forum, Hyderabad, December 16.

Invited to address the National convention of the Consumer Coordination Council on: **Citizen and Governance**, Pondicherry, December 20.

Invited to address the regional meet of International Lion's Dist. 324-D1 on **Corruption – India's Curse**, Bangalore, December 21.

New Publications

E-Governance - From Virtual to Real

This paper written by Dr Jayaprakash Narayan with the assistance of Sanjay P (Advocacy associate with Foundation for Democratic Reforms/Lok Satta) takes a critical look at the role of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in our society. The paper discusses at length the positive power of ICT in transforming societies and empowering people. The role of ICT in increasing transparency, and as an effective tool in combating corruption is dealt with in detail. The paper can be accessed at www.loksatta.org/egovernance.pdf.

Suggested Agenda for Administrative Reforms

This paper authored by Dr Jayaprakash Narayan was written at the request of Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. This paper outlines a comprehensive agenda for political and governance reforms in India, encompassing electoral and judicial reforms. This paper also examines critically the aspect of federalism and local governments, and suggests practical measures to enhance local governance. Finally, the paper deals with self-correcting institutional mechanisms such as an independent CVC, Citizen's Charters for public services etc. for enhancing transparency and accountability in governance. The paper briefly touches on civil service reform also. This paper can be accessed at www.loksatta.org/admreforms.pdf.

Your Contributions Can Make A Difference

In India

Foundation for Democratic Reforms
#401/408, Nirmal Towers, Dwarakapuri Colony,
Punjagutta, Hyderabad - 500082, AP, INDIA
url: www.loksatta.org
91-40-23350778 / 23350790
91-40-23350783
U/S 80 G of the IT Act, 1961

Mrs Pratibha Rao: loksatta@satyam.net.in

Contributions may be sent to

Cheques Payable to

Address

Tel

Fax

Tax Status

Contact

In the US

Foundation for Democratic Reforms in India
PO Box 469
Wadsworth, IL 60083 USA
url: www.fdri.org
937-475-7809
501(c)3 Tax ID:31-1602-890
Mr Rao Chalasani: rao_chalasani@hotmail.com
Dr C Jampala: cjampala@dayton.net

All contributions are tax deductible