



VOTEINDIA Campaign launched!

Date: April 14, 2005.

Location: Bangalore and Hyderabad

First, a press conference by prominent civil society groups and public-spirited Indians followed by a citizen-led initiative for rectifying electoral rolls in Bangalore. Second, a simultaneous media-internet campaign originating from Hyderabad. These two events marked the formal launch of VOTEINDIA - National Campaign for Political Reforms, on the birth anniversary of the Father of Indian Constitution, Dr. B R Ambedkar. VOTEINDIA campaign is India's largest and citizen-led movement for changing the nature of Indian politics through systemic reforms. The time has come.

Read more on VOTEINDIA in this month's newsletter.

**If India wins,
who loses!**



Dr Jayaprakash Narayan and Ramesh Ramanathan at the press conference marking the launch of the VOTEINDIA campaign on April 14, in Bangalore

VOTEINDIA — It is Time

Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan

INDIA has had a proud record as a robust democracy for nearly six decades. However, there is also much that is wrong with our democracy. All of us are only too ready to blame politicians for these failings. Such emotional outbursts may provide us temporary outlets for our pent-up anger, but they do not address the real problems.

There are some who would argue that the people get the government they deserve. And if things are wrong, then people ought to be blamed. But in India, millions of ordinary people have time and again asserted themselves collectively. For over three decades, in every election over half of the incumbents are not returned to office. Mighty governments, strong leaders, and influential candidates have been felled with unflinching regularity. We have reached a situation in which no matter who wins the elections, we,

the people, always end up losing.

We need to ask three questions and find truthful answers. First, do we have conditions in which our finest citizens could be elected to public office through honest means? Second, if an honest and decent person does assume public office, can s/he survive for long through honest means? Third, if a decent politician does survive, can he effectively promote sustainable public good in ample measure? The answers : NO, NO and a resounding NO.

What then is the problem? We have adopted the first-past-the-post system (FPTP) of election as a legacy of British rule. Except Britain and its former colonies no stable democracy with a long history of freedom has a FPTP system. Even among former British colonies, Australia and

New Zealand have switched to other methods. In Britain itself, only the House of Commons is elected by the FPTP method. And yet we think that FPTP is the universal method of election. FPTP system is largely unsuited for a large, diverse democracy with vast illiteracy and poverty. In our system, there is enormous competitive pressure for the marginal vote that guarantees victory of a candidate in a constituency. Therefore, huge expenditure for vote buying, bribing voters and hiring hoodlums has become endemic. Large expenditure does not necessarily guarantee victory but low expenditure almost certainly guarantees defeat.

Is there a way out? The answer lies in redefining victory, and ensuring equitable representation based on public support. In such a system of Proportional Representation (PR), a party will get seats in proportion to its vote share in a state. Decent candidates will be chosen democratically by

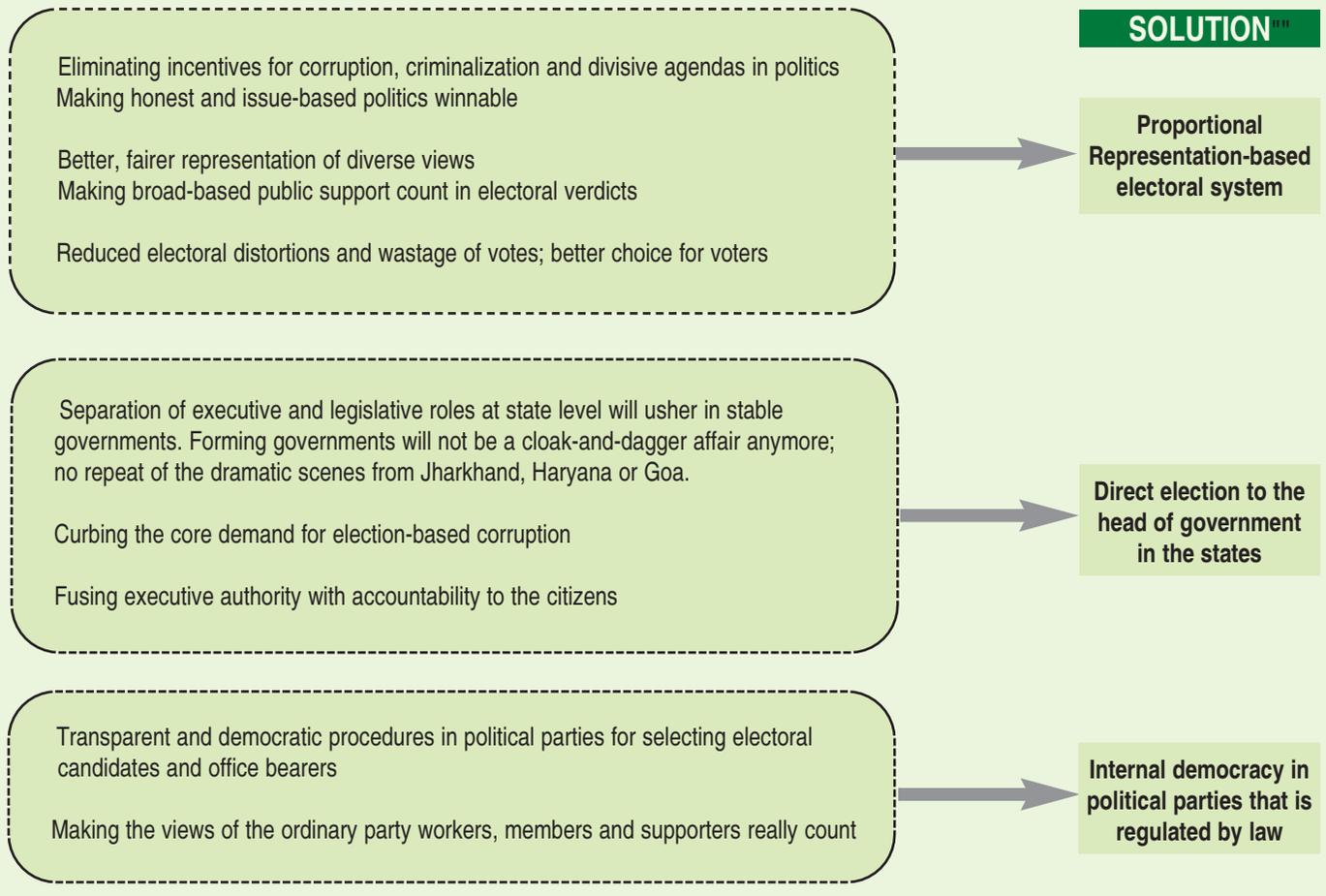
members and the party list will be the basis of election.

But PR has a limitation: Most states have stable, single-party governments. With a PR system, no party is likely to win a majority of seats. How do we then ensure stability? We can elect the leader of the state by direct election, instead of the Chief Minister being selected by the high command or MLAs. Such a leader, with a clear mandate and guaranteed tenure, can choose his Cabinet and give competent government without succumbing to pressure from MLAs.

How do we achieve such political reform? VOTEINDIA movement, a national campaign for political reform, orchestrated by several reform groups, is a major platform. We, the citizens, matter. And only we can change the nature of our politics. The time to act is now.

What is VOTEINDIA about?

VOTEINDIA is a National Campaign for Political Reforms. This Campaign has three key reforms as its goals for transforming Indian politics into the noble profession it ought to be.



The function of a government is to make it easy for the people to do good, and difficult for them to do evil.

William Gladstone

VOTEINDIA's Strategy

I. Communication Campaign

To convey VOTEINDIA's unique, positive and inclusive message through various channels. This communication campaign will emphasize the fact that political systemic reforms are the objectives of this movement.

II. Establishment of state/regional chapters and their expansion

- ⇒ Region-wise core groups have been formed for leading VOTEINDIA movement in respective states/regions. They will be expanded across the country in the coming months.
- ⇒ These regional chapters will enable public participation through memberships and co-option of reform-minded groups and individuals

III. Regional/Local activities and events

Local/regional chapters will take up activities that focus on proximate reform issues with wider/national implications. These activities will also serve as entry points for public participation in broader national campaign towards political reforms.

IV. Overall political strategy

Closely interacting with the political parties, media and key opinion-makers for transforming the vision of fundamental political reforms into a reality.

CIVIL Movement launched in Bangalore *CEC springs a surprise!*

THE residents of house numbers 102 and 108 on the 20th A Main Road in Rajajinagar (Bangalore) 1st Block had a surprise visitor on the morning of Friday, 15th of April. None other than the then CEC TS Krishnamurthy himself had turned up in front of their doors to personally check if the residents were included in the voter's list. In doing so, the CEC kick started the Citizen's Initiative on Voter's ID List (CIVIL) movement, led by JANAAGRAHA, a leading partner of the VOTEINDIA campaign. However, it was the CEC's turn to be surprised when he found that the names of three members of house 102 did not figure in the list! JANAAGRAHA volunteers, supervised by the community leaders and the jurisdictional Mangalore Mahanagara Palike (BMP) Revenue Officer, verified the voters' list on a pilot basis in Nagpur ward in the Rajajinagar constituency.

Based on the results in this ward, CIVIL will take up the exercise in the entire Rajajinagar constituency comprising 12 wards and three lakh voters.

The degree of accuracy of electoral rolls has an understandably huge bearing on the outcomes of our elections. This initiative for improving the

electoral rolls has high local importance and simultaneously, it has tremendous long-term implications of national significance. This effort forms an important part of the VOTEINDIA's campaign for political reforms. VOTEINDIA will provide the platform and necessary tools for expanding similar initiatives across all major regions and states in India. Regional/State VOTEINDIA Chapters will take up efforts to improve electoral rolls in their regions, in collaboration with the Election Commission.

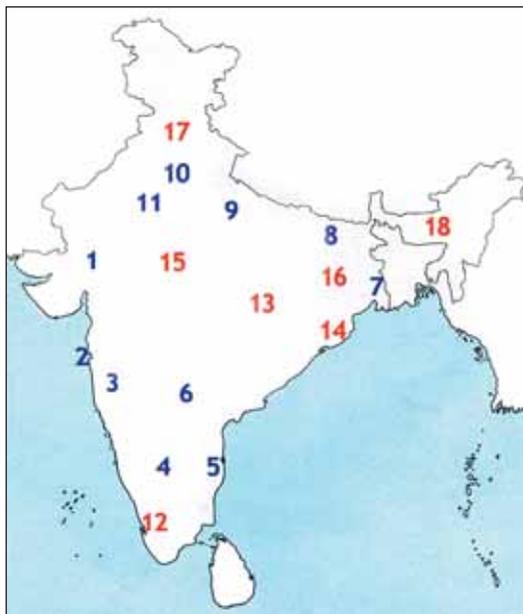


Where is your nearest VOTEINDIA Chapter?

The initial phase of the Campaign will be rooted in eleven cities and surrounding states/regions. Chapters in a majority of these cities have already begun functioning. The second phase will cover seven additional cities, by the end of the coming year. It will thereafter be expanded across the entire country.

Phase I

1. Ahmedabad
2. Mumbai
3. Pune
4. Bangalore
5. Chennai
6. Hyderabad
7. Kolkata
8. Patna
9. Lucknow
10. Delhi
11. Jaipur



Phase II

12. Kochi
13. Raipur
14. Bhubaneshwar
15. Bhopal
16. Ranchi
17. Chandigarh
18. Guwahati

Please visit the www.voteindia.org website-cum-universally accessible resource centre, for further details on VOTEINDIA. The e-mail address info@voteindia.org can be used for correspondence.

Aamchi LOK SATTA!

Leading Citizens start LOK SATTA Maharashtra Chapter

LEADING citizens of Maharashtra have come together and started the LOK SATTA Maharashtra Chapter. Their office, located on Sussex Road, Byculla (Mumbai), was formally inaugurated on the 18th April. Surendra Srivastava welcomed the members and guests to this opening ceremony and the first meeting of the Lok Satta Maharashtra Chapter. The Chapter has appointed Anant Shende as the coordinator of the Maharashtra Lok Satta Chapter and Suresh Nandawat to administer the day-to-day functioning of the Mumbai office. The Chapter also requested Rohinton Dumasia and Mayank Gandhi to oversee the infrastructure and technological work for the new office.

The outstation participants included leading figures of VOTEINDIA: Dr. JP, Fattchand Virani (Ahmedabad), Koushik Sekhar (Pune), Sandeep Verma (New Delhi). Dr. JP, in his remarks, broadly outlined the strategy adopted by Lok Satta to bring about the desired changes in the governance of the country in order to improve the quality of life of the Indian citizens and particularly that of the common man. He emphasised that the movement started by Lok Satta can assume national proportions only if Maharashtra and in particular, Mumbai, provided the necessary leadership. In his opinion, Mumbai was best suited to adopt this role of providing national leadership to the movement because of the unique environment provided by Mumbai that can effectively mobilise national opinion.

Apart from leading the VOTEINDIA Campaign in the Maharashtra region, the

Mumbai Chapter proposes to take up initiatives on:

- [a] the reforms in Public Distribution System (PDS)
- [b] the procedural reforms required in Excise and Service Tax department in order to eliminate repetitive visits to the department, multiple form filling, and other forms of harassment, without causing loss of revenue to the Government
- [c] introducing citizen participation in the functioning of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation

The methodology would be: -

- [a] to set up a Research Team for exploring a "model system"
- [b] to formulate a plan of action to bring about the necessary changes in the system so that it conforms to the 'Model System'
- [c] help create partnership between all stakeholders, educate and inform people about "model system", mobilise their support and then devise ways and means to ensure that the opinions and the voices of the people are heard by those in power and authority to bring about the necessary changes
- [d] to monitor whether the changes are being introduced, how effectively they are being implemented and whether the changes are, in fact, brought about.

Following the formal opening of Mumbai Chapter, a group of 30 committed volunteers met on the April 24th to chalk out the action plan for the above activities for the coming 6-8 months.

Of Women, Local Governments and their Empowerment



EWRs with the AP State Panchayat Raj Minister JC Diwakar Reddy

FOLLOWING the passage of the 73rd and 74th amendments to our Constitution in 1993, one-third among elected representatives at all levels in our local governments are women. The past decade-and-a-half had witnessed the election of enthusiastic and competent women to village, mandal, district and municipal level offices in Andhra Pradesh. However, these elected women representatives (EWRs) have been consistently rating their own performances as sub par. There are two key reasons:

(i) the EWRs are relatively inexperienced in governance and administration and face low levels of capacity and confidence, both feeding on the other.

(ii) in AP, the local governments themselves are not adequately empowered vis-à-vis funds, functions and functionaries so the leaders find it extremely challenging to fulfill their mandated duties.

To remedy this situation, Lok Satta, in active collaboration with the Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation (SSF, based in Bangalore), has been heading an effort towards building the capacity and confidence of EWRs in Andhra Pradesh. This effort also forms a key part of the broader movement towards the empowerment of local governments in the state. Formal federation of EWRs in several districts has been carried out as a part of this exercise, over the past three years. April 3rd, witnessed the culmination of the amalgamating phase of the effort when nearly 400 current and former

EWRs from across the state convened at the Jeevan Jyothi Center in Hyderabad to form the AP State Federation of EWRs in Local Governments. These EWRs represented village panchayats, mandal parishads, zilla parishads as well as municipalities. The participants were from diverse social groups (including dalits and backward classes) and religions.

This meeting gained wide coverage in the state's print and electronic media for the unambiguous and strong message its participants sent to the state establishment on the need for immediate devolution of powers to the local governments and for providing the

elected women with equal opportunities. The EWRs confidently asserted themselves and even put one of the main guests, JC Diwakar Reddy (State Minister for Panchayat Raj) on the mat when he in his address had questioned if local governments were 'capable enough' to handle the full and immediate devolution of the mandated powers. The EWRs unequivocally, unanimously and almost immediately, raised the point that it would be fallacious for the minister to question the performance/ability of the local elected representatives even as local governments are being denied their constitutionally mandated powers. Every single EWR, including those from the remotest villages and mandals, expressed confidence in serving their constituents better - provided the local governments are adequately empowered.

VS Ramadevi (former Governor of Karnataka) was the chief guest at the convention. In her address to the EWRs she traced the history of the 73rd/74th amendments and narrated how serious challenges to this progressive step arose even from the national-level (male) political leaders. Dr. JP too reminded the EWRs that their empowerment is only a means for the delivery of better governance and administration in the villages, towns and cities of AP. The April 3rd Convention was preceded by and is being followed by series of training programs, capacity-building workshops and field level activities involving the EWRs, Lok Satta and SSF.



VS Ramadevi addressing the EWR convention

From L to R: Sunita Patil (ZP Chairperson, Medak District), Dr. JP, S Ramachandra Reddy (Former MP, Rajya Sabha) and DVVS Varma (State Campaign Co-ordinator, LOKSATTA)

'Agri advances *must* reach farmers'

Lok Satta - BJP Study Committee discuss crisis in the farming sector

THE Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) recently formed a Study Committee to investigate the causative factors behind the agri sector crisis in AP, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Punjab and study the spate of suicides by farmers in the past few years. Venkaiah Naidu (former Party President and ex-Union Rural Development Minister) is the chairperson of this Committee, with Yashwant Sinha (former Union Finance Minister), Yeduriappa (Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly) and Sudheendra Kulkarni (who served as Director of Communications & Research to former PM Vajpayee) as members. They visited AP on April 13th and 14th to learn the views of representatives of farmers associations, experts and Lok Satta leaders.

The Lok Satta delegation emphasized the need to coordinate agricultural research with the needs of the ordinary farmers. Balanced usage of pesticides and fertilizers, improving yields by better varieties, addressing the zinc deficiency in soils, watershed development, etc. were the other main points discussed during the meeting. Lok Satta also pointed out that

agricultural extension machinery has virtually collapsed due to the indifferent attitude of successive governments. As a result, farmers are no longer being guided on the proper usage of pesticides, fertilizers and water management and this has led to increased investments without appropriate increase in returns. The delegation recommended that banks provide loans to farmers for post-harvest storage and management so that they are not compelled to sell at prices dictated by traders. Strengthening the institutional rural credit mechanism, promoting agro-based industries so that value-addition can be provided to farm produce and the removal of restrictions on inter-state trading were also emphasized upon.

Dr. JP led the Lok Satta delegation, with DVVS Varma (State Campaign Coordinator), B Ankaiah (General Secretary), MBNVV Prasad (Treasurer), G. Janakiramaraju (Coordination Committee Member), Vijayender Reddy and Dr. Prabhakar Reddy as members. BJP leaders B. Dattatreya and Seshagiri Rao also participated in the meeting.

FARMING FACTS

- ⇒ Did you know that small and marginal farmers own 80.3% of the total number of land holdings in India, but their average holding is a meagre 1.6 acres? This skewed distribution of land ownership can be looked at in another way: 76% of our land holdings account for only 13% of the total cultivated area.
(Data sourced from Center for Monitoring Indian Economy and FICCI, 2005)
- ⇒ The traditional joint family system has steadily declined over the past three decades, even in rural India. In villages, division of farmlands naturally followed division of families leading to increased fragmentation of landholdings. Consequently, between 1970 and 1995, the number of small and medium farmers increased by over 80%.
- ⇒ 70% of India's population and 57% of our workforce is dependent on agriculture. But agri-sector contributes only 24% to our GDP. Not surprisingly, widespread subsistence farming and very low profit margins dominate the Indian agriculture scenario.
- ⇒ Indian agriculture is also marked by extremely low crop productivity, low levels of institutional credit to the small and marginal farmers (forcing them into borrowing from private lenders at exorbitant interest rates), farmers lacking the freedom to select markets for their produce, lack of proper storage facilities leading to crop wastage and 'distress sales' by farmers and very low value-addition resulting in almost non-existent profit margins.

How to solve the agri crisis?

Expanding institutional rural credit ⇒ Improving crop productivity ⇒ Greater investments in agri-R&D ⇒ Giving greater freedom for farmers to choose suitable markets ⇒ Better crop storage facilities ⇒ Value addition through food processing ⇒ Developing the agro-industry.

EVENTS, NEWS & UPDATES

6,510-crore National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) launched

On April 12th, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW) unveiled the most comprehensive and largest national rural health programme till date. Key features of this NRHM include: (a) Decentralization of health care to the village and district level with the creation of district health funds (b) Training of over 400,000 health volunteers (the Mission terms them 'Accredited Social Health Activists'), as a vast majority of the routine health complaints can be successfully treated by such trained paramedics (c) Primary Healthcare Centers to become the first referral units (d) The Phase I of this Mission covers 18 of the most backward states in the northern and northeastern India; phase II of NRHM will begin in 2006 and will cover the rest of India.

NRHM is one major step towards providing accessible primary health care to every Indian, especially the rural and poor. Following the Prime Minister's invitation, Lok Satta is now a member of the Steering Group and is assisting in the oversight and implementation of this Mission.

FLASH NEWS!

Indians now have *unprecedented* Right to Information

(May 12, 2005. 'VOTEINDIA News Service') As this newsletter is getting ready, reports have started coming in that both houses of the Parliament have passed a comprehensive Right to Information Bill. It promises to usher in a new era of governance by creating the architecture for simple, easy and inexpensive access to information by all citizens. Significantly, civil servants face stringent penalties in case of delay or failure in providing the requested information. Further, it imposes obligations on governmental agencies to disclose information *suo motu* (i.e. on their own accord). This comprehensive law covers all governments at the local, state and union levels.

In his address to the Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister lauded the leading contributions made by the NAC in achieving this milestone. The NAC members contributed towards making the right to information a reality - both at the drafting stage in the NAC and during the hearings before the Parliamentary Standing Committee (chaired by Rajya Sabha MP Natchiappan).

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- ⇒ **The National Advisory Council (NAC) will be meeting on the June 4th in New Delhi.** It will deliberate on judicial reforms in India. The creation of National Judicial Council and an All India Judicial Service along with the establishment of local courts for speedy delivery of justice will be discussed.
- ⇒ **National Core Group of VOTEINDIA will be meeting on the June 5th in Hyderabad** to discuss the progress and future of the Communication Campaign of the National Campaign for Political Reforms.
- ⇒ **The Lok Satta Coordination Committee meeting will be held in Hyderabad on the June 11, 12** to evaluate and plan the VOTEINDIA campaign in Andhra Pradesh.
- ⇒ Procedures in our indirect taxation structure are highly complicated, unfriendly to the citizens and create room for corruption. Some studies even estimate that basic procedural reforms in the indirect taxation setup, alone, could improve the growth rate of our economy by nearly one percent. **VOTEINDIA has taken up a national initiative towards improving transparency and bringing in citizen friendly reforms in indirect taxation,** in collaboration with the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC). Public hearing will be held with the CVC, CBEC and the Industry, with VOTEINDIA partners as moderators. **The first workshop will be held in Hyderabad on the June 15, 16.** Senior officials of the Union Finance Ministry will also be involved. Lok Satta Maharashtra Chapter will hold the second workshop in Mumbai, about a week later. Other major cities will follow suit.

Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.

Sun Tzu

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