



News Letter

Rational Policies:

Key to economic and environmental well being

*K*olleru, India's largest fresh water lake is a vast and shallow water body situated in the flat expanse between the Krishna and Godavari deltas of Andhra Pradesh. Situated approximately 60 kms. from Vijayawada, it has become the subject of a serious public debate. Around 7 lakh people live in the Kolleru region-the shallow region below the 10 feet land elevation line - making its population density (800 persons/sq.km.) twice that of the national average. The lake is the direct source of livelihood for approximately 3 lakh people. Many of them, who belong to the dalit and other backward communities, have been able to earn a livelihood and improve their living standards only because of the fish farming industry initiated here by the State Government in the 1970s. What had until then been a backward area, with widely prevalent poverty, hunger and disease, is today prosperous with pucca homes, roads, schools, hospitals, public bus services and a drastically reduced hunger and poverty rate. At present, the fish farming industry in the entire Kolleru area generates approximately Rs.600 crores every year.

In 1995/1999, the Government declared the Kolleru Lake a Wild Life Sanctuary. Starting early 2006, a crisis was precipitated when the State government initiated the blasting of fish tanks in the name of 'restoration' of Kolleru. Economic realities were not taken into consideration and neither were the people taken into confidence before this decision was taken. This adversely affected the very source of livelihood of the people of Kolleru. This clearly demonstrated the callous attitude and apathy of the administration. Abdication of responsibility and centralized decision making leading to the complication of an otherwise straightforward issue point to a serious failure of the normal governance process.

Lok Satta has taken up the issue of Kolleru to ensure that the people receive a fair compensation and relief & rehabilitation package. It has also started an awareness campaign about the real issues at the bottom of the entire crisis. Dr.Jayaprakash Narayan, along with a Lok Satta delegation, made a trip to the affected areas and got a first hand impression of the ground realities after extensive interaction with the locals.

	Narmada	Kolleru
Issue	Construction of: 30 large dams 135 medium dams; and 3000 small dams for water diversion and hydro electric power generation leading to displacement of people and affected livelihoods	'Restoration' of Kolleru Lake and declaration of a Wild Life Sanctuary, leading to the uncompensated and forced displacement of people and destruction of livelihood source.
Area affected	8000 acres approximately	77,000 acres approximately
No. of people affected directly	1-1.5 lakh approximately	3 lakh approximately
Source of livelihood of affected people	Mostly Traditional farming	Mostly fish farming, agriculture and other allied industries
Economic worth of current livelihoods	-	Approximately Rs.600 crores per year
Compensation offered	To compensate for the 8,000 acres affected, 21,000 acres of land or equivalent monetary compensation have been/are offered.	A meager package of Rs.32 crores has been announced, of which 10.6 crores has reportedly been disbursed as loans. *

* Until Lok Satta took up the cause of the Kolleru residents, no compensation /R&R was offered. The Narmada compensation package could be taken as the basis for Kolleru too.

The size of the area and the number of people affected is far more than that affected by the Narmada project. And yet, almost nothing has been offered as compensation. This gross miscarriage of justice is the reason why Lok Satta has taken up the issue and is determined to get the people their fair due. It is proposed that the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal Award (1979), Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) package for Project Affected Families (PAFs) and Project Affected Peoples (PAPs) and the Special Rehabilitation Package (SRP) for the Narmada project affected people be taken as the basis for compensation and Relief & Rehabilitation of the affected people in Kolleru.

After Lok Satta took up this issue, the State Government set up the Kolleru Advisory Council (KAC) with a mandate to come up with policies to bring about large scale changes in the lives and livelihoods of the Kolleru people and also to create alternate livelihoods. According to media reports, the KAC has come up with a list of proposals that include fishing holidays and fish festivals to market Kolleru fish. The State government is yet to come up with a comprehensive R&R

package. News articles about ad hoc announcements on loan money being released or about a future industry being envisaged have become quite common. The Deputy Forest Conservator has announced that the Government is preparing a Kolleru Tourism Plan, to be implemented, after completion of Kolleru's restoration. The Government estimates an investment of Rs. 150 crore. None of the proposals however, address the core issue of fair compensation to the affected people.

The environment is extremely important. But in the name of 'restoration', lakhs of people should not be made to lose their source of livelihood without hope of any compensation or relief. **Both economic growth and development and the environment can be taken care of through rational and practical sustainable development policies.** Misdirected zeal and misplaced priorities combine to form a deadly cause for untold grief and suffering for most of our voiceless countrymen. Dedicated efforts, wisdom and restraint are needed to form and promote rational policies and to sustain growth and development of our people

From Bit Role to Hero!

Mumbai is, arguably, India's most important city. The Mumbaikar, until now, had at best, a bit role to play in local governance. It was decided to change all that!

The 'Vote Mumbai' campaign was launched on 28th June, 2006. It is the city's biggest public campaign on government reforms. The campaign is being led by several prominent and reputed civil society organizations and opinion makers. Lok Satta Maharashtra is a leading partner in this initiative.

The campaign is an endeavour to promote participatory democracy by empowering citizens and encouraging them to participate in the governance process. The campaign will bring together like minded people who believe that Mumbai needs a central authority that is directly accountable to its citizens.

The goals of the campaign are:

■ Empowerment of Local Government:

- ▶ Empowerment of ward committees by giving them a share of the taxes collected and allowing them to raise resources locally.
- ▶ Having a directly elected Chief Executive (Mayor) with a fixed tenure who is not beholden to Councilors.

Time to set it right



■ Accountability in Local Government:

- ▶ Empowering local bodies to recall elected representatives.
- ▶ Creation of offices of Ombudsmen for redressal of grievances.
 - ▶ Appointment of independent auditors
 - ▶ Providing information on demand.

■ Participatory Democracy:

- ▶ Setting up of Ward Committees in every ward along with Area Sabhas to serve as representative bodies. Ordinary people to have a say in the constitution of Ward Committees.
- ▶ A proportional representation electoral system which will make the system all inclusive and a model of fair representation will be used to elect candidates for these bodies.

■ Transparency in working of the Local Government:

- ▶ Clearly specified disclosure norms to periodically provide information, which should be of interest to the average citizen.

It is time that every Mumbaikar gets a major role to play in the way his/her city is run! Please visit www.votemumbai.org for more information.

Towards ushering in a New Political Culture

Lok Satta's *Prajarajyam* is a campaign to help refocus village-level political process on good governance, equitable development and eliminating distortions in electoral campaigns. This *Prajarajyam* initiative is training thousands of candidates for the Village, Mandal and District level governments. The trainees are drawn from varied political backgrounds and a significant proportion of the trainees are young, enthusiastic candidates. The campaign is being conducted across all districts of the State with the active collaboration of several like-minded civil society/reform organizations. So far 8000 citizens including aspirants from different political parties, elected representatives and leaders in local government were imparted training. The next phase is likely to train 2500 more such candidates and individuals.



The potential candidates were trained in :

1. Ushering in a **New Political Culture** that is centered around the welfare of the citizens instead of the 'perks' of elected offices.
2. Designing and running an election campaign that precludes the use of money and muscle power and instead focuses on improving the village-level governance.

The Campaign's progress is updated on LOK SATTAs website. Discussion Paper or Charchapatram on the New Political Culture in Telugu can be accessed through the link www.loksatta.org/Prajarajyam/home.html. Highlights of the Discussion Paper in English can be accessed through the link www.loksatta.org/preleases.htm. Readers can send in their comments or feedback on the New Political Culture to prajarajyam@loksatta.org.

Sangha Balam - Informed, Collective Citizens' Effort

'*Sangha Balam*' is an initiative of LOK SATTAs in Andhra Pradesh with two objectives:

1. To monitor current status of service delivery in areas covering education, health, community welfare programmes and other government services.
2. Catalyze informed, collective citizen actions for improving these urban services and for evolving solutions to civic issues such as efficient drainage systems, sanitation and drinking water problems.

This programme is supported by Ratan Tata Trust and is being launched in 10 villages per district covering 200 villages and 220 municipal wards in 22 municipalities in 21 districts. The essential features of this initiative are : Forming associations of Active Citizens, preparing 'Status Reports on the Public Services' and the training of people for improvement of local public services through democratic means.

A training programme was in Hyderabad for the select district and town Sanghabalam Unit coordinators on May 21. Nearly 90 representatives from various districts were trained to become facilitators for this project. Addressing the participants Dr.Jayaprakash Narayan said that

an initiative such as *Sanghabalam* is a noble endeavour evoking the spirit of citizen power in pursuit of democracy. LOK SATTAs State Coordinator DVVS.Varma, General Secretary B.Ankaiah, Janabalam Editor D.Somasundar and the programme coordinator B.Bandaru Ram Mohan Rao imparted training to the participants.



Report-I of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission, chaired by Mr. Veerappa Moily (with Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan as one of the members), submitted to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, its first report in June. The commission gave recommendations on the freedom of information as the Right to Information Act has been enacted recently and is a path-breaking legislation which signals the march from the darkness of secrecy to the dawn of transparency.

This law is very comprehensive and covers almost all matters of governance and has the widest possible reach, being applicable to governments at all levels—Union, State and Local as well as recipients of government grants. Access to information under this Act is extensive with minimum exemptions. Even these exemptions are subject to strict safeguards.

The report, titled, '**Right to Information—Master Key to Good Governance**', advocated a slew of measures for effective implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act at all levels including the judiciary and the legislature. The key recommendations made were:

- *The repeal of the Official Secrets Act (OSA) of 1923:*

To achieve the right balance between national security and freedom of information, the OSA should be repealed and adequate provisions for protecting State/Official secrets can be made by amending the National Security Act (1980). Some of the provisions of the OSA could be incorporated in the NSA.

- Ministers should take an oath of transparency with the office instead of the currently taken oath of secrecy. The concerned Article and Schedule of the Constitution should be suitably amended.
- Since security and police organizations such as the BSF, CRPF and Assam Rifles are already outside the purview of the RTI Act, the Armed Forces should be exempted as well. The second schedule of the RTI Act, listing the exempted organizations, should be amended accordingly. However, all these security and intelligence organisations listed in the Second Schedule have to appoint PIOs (Public Information Officers).
- The RTI Act should be amended (Sections 12 & 15) to enable the Union and State Governments to form Selection Committees to select the members of the

Information Commissions. The members of the Selection Committee, it has been recommended, should be the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. At the State level, the recommended members are the Chief Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of the respective High Courts.

- At least half the members of Information Commissions should be from non-civil service background.
- *Complete re-organization of public records* as it is essential for effective implementation of the Right to Information Act. A Public Records Office should be established as an independent authority in GoI and all States within six months by integrating and restructuring the multiple agencies currently involved in record keeping. This office will serve as a repository of expertise to monitor, supervise, control and inspect all public records.
- NGO's should be brought under the ambit of the RTI Act after evolving unambiguous guidelines to determine which NGO's will come under it.
- A National Coordination Committee (NCC) may be set up under the chairpersonship of the Chief Information Commissioner with the nodal Union Ministry, the SICs and representatives of States as members.
- States should frame rules regarding application fee and/or its payment mechanism in order to remove existing hurdles to the filing of an application by the citizen.
- The PIO may refuse a request for information if the request is manifestly frivolous or vexatious or if the work involved in processing the request would substantially and unreasonably divert the resources of the public body, provided that such a refusal shall be communicated within 15 days of receipt of application, with the prior approval of the appellate authority.

The act provides a priceless opportunity to redesign the process of governance, particularly at the grassroots level where the citizens' interface is maximum. Now the tedious process of system-building has to take over, the Commission concluded.

Stage II of RTI : It's Implementation

The Right to Information law signals a radical shift in India's governance culture and permanently impacts all agencies of state. This single law by itself cannot change everything. Its effective application depends largely on the institutions created, early traditions and practices, attendant changes in laws and procedures, and adequate participation of people and the public servants. Implementation of the law is now posing administrative challenges. It has thrown up various structural, procedural and logistical issues and problems, which need to be addressed in the early stages. A need was felt for a discussion on this issue.

A national conference on "Making Right to Information Effective", organized by the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) in association with the Administrative Staff College of India, was held on May 8th 2006, in Hyderabad. Information Commissioners from eight States and members from civil society participated in the meeting. The State Human Rights Commission Chairman Justice B.Subhashan Reddy was the chief guest. Among the speakers were C.D. Arha, the A.P. State Chief Information Commissioner, Jayaprakash Narayan of Lok Satta, Prof. Shekhar Singh of the

National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) and CMS chairman Mr. N. Bhaskar Rao.

Issues relating to the problems faced both by the people (demand side) and the public authorities (supply side) were examined. Lack of awareness among the people, unfamiliarity and lack of orientation programs for public officials and a casual approach towards the implementation of the Act were some of the mentioned problems.

Lok Satta's State Campaign Coordinator DVVS Varma presented a paper on the role of civil society in making the act successful, challenges faced, Lok Satta's experiences in invoking the Act and the key role played by civil society and the Media as enablers/catalysts in achieving effective implementation of the act.

The Conference served as a platform for bringing together and examining the problems and challenges associated with the implementation of the act and their solutions.

“ Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

--Margart Mead

Reforming Indirect Taxation Vexation...

CBEC/CVC accept Reform Proposals

Small and medium enterprises are subjected to enormous harassment and extortion in the name of tax administration. Vast amounts of time and energy is wasted dealing with cumbersome procedures which invariably affects production, productivity and competitiveness. Improvement of tax administration alone could boost the economic growth rate of India by about one percent per annum.

L O K SATTAVOTEINDIA initiated a campaign in June 2005 in collaboration with the Central Vigilance Commission(CVC) and the Central Board of Excise and Customs(CBEC) and organized workshops in Hyderabad and Mumbai in which officials interacted with representatives of trade and industry. The key proposals and recommendations that evolved at the workshops have now been accepted by the CBEC and CVC. The Full Action Taken Report of the CBEC/CVC on the recommendations made can be accessed through the following link: <http://www.loksatta.org/atr.pdf>.

Key recommendations accepted in areas of:

- ▶ Streamlining the CBEC organization and structure.
- ▶ Enhancing accountability.
- ▶ Simplifying excise and customs procedures.
- ▶ Ensuring transparency in the procedures.
- ▶ Reducing human interface through adoption of technology.

This is an outstanding example of proactive leadership of CVC, with the active and willing support of the regulatory / tax department and participation of all stake holders and civil society yielding dividends. As the next step, it would be useful if CVC could constitute a small team including CBEC and industry to

monitor the implementation of these procedural reforms, and to suggest further improvements. Such an institutional arrangement in each sector will go a long way in sustaining improvements and generating public confidence. Perhaps a similar mechanism could be evolved in respect of other key public agencies whose involvement is critical in the quest

for better governance and citizen-centered administration. This exercise relating to CBEC shows that our governance system does respond to people's aspirations, if only we create institutional mechanisms for improvement.

Platforms where Ideas/Views were shared:

1. [World Youth Council Against Terrorism](#) organized a two day conference of South and Far East Asia Nations on May 28 in Hyderabad for mobilizing public opinion against all terrorist organizations and sensitize respective governments to address those core issues which gives space for the terrorist to instigate people. Heads of youth wings of political parties, social workers and human rights activists participated in the conference to conduct a thorough socio psychological study to find reasons for terrorism and suggest effective steps towards good governance. Jayaprakash Narayan was invited to make the plenary address at the conference on the core issues that breed terrorism.
2. The FAPCCI organised a two-day seminar in Hyderabad on '[Showcasing A.P. - Steps towards Rapid Industrialisation](#)' on June 2nd and 3rd 2006. The objective of the seminar was to highlight the rapid steps taken by the State to facilitate the easy setting up of manufacturing industries in the State taking in to consideration the new challenges faced by the industries such as economic reforms, globalisation and extensive competition from across the globe. Jayaprakash Narayan addressed the delegates of the Seminar.
3. [Harnessing the 'Right to Information Act' and 'JNNURM reform for UWSS Reform'](#): The Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, in cooperation with the Water and Sanitation Program-South Asia hosted a workshop entitled "Harnessing Community Engagement to Improve Urban Water and Sanitation Service Delivery" in May 2006 at the Yashwant Rao Chavan Academy of Development Administration. The workshop included issues relating to the use of Right to Information Act and proposed community participation and disclosure laws envisaged under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal mission in a participated manner. Karthik Chandra represented LOK SATTA at the workshop.
4. A Regional Workshop on solution exchange for gender community was organized by United Nations as part of the Solution Exchange Project supported by several bilateral partners. Over 60 participants representing civil society organisations, government, United Nations and other international organisations attended the one-day workshop

and explored opportunities for strengthening knowledge partnerships between women's groups, State level women's commissions, various ministries and civil society organizations from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Lok Satta research team member Nisar Fathima attended the workshop.

5. The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard University, in association with John F. Kennedy School, of Government organized the Wilton Park Conference in West Sussex, UK on '[Strengthening Democratic Governance : The Role of Civil Society](#)'. The Conference aimed to bring together some 50 innovators and practitioners from civil society throughout the world with scholars, representatives of government and members of the corporate sector. The conference discussed concrete examples in which civil society has helped to strengthen



democratic government by enhancing government effectiveness, transparency and accountability. Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan addressed the participants on the topic "What are the sources of legitimacy of non-governmental organisations? Should NGO's become more accountable and transparent. If so, how?"

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