



# Dialogue on Political Parties



Hyderabad.

Lok Satta along with International IDEA and Lokniti, held a Dialogue on Political parties on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2005 at ASCI Bella Vista,

(PR). While most participants were convinced that the current election system of FPTP needed to be changed, some academics had reservations. Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan then presented the model of Mixed PR, which would constitute the best elements of both systems. It is in the parties' interest to opt for an electoral system, which eliminates dependence on marginal vote in constituencies for victory. It is this desperation to garner the marginal vote, which compels parties to nominate those with unaccounted money, muscle power, and

local political and caste links unrelated to public good.



The political participants present placed

the ball in the civil society's court and affirmed their willingness to examine suggested changes once the specific reform goals had been finalized and agreed upon.

Day one was divided into a welcome session and a post lunch session. The welcome session began with the presentation of a country report jointly produced by Lokniti and International IDEA. The presentation provided an overview on the functioning of the political parties and sought to explain the mechanisms of origins of political parties, leadership selection, their support base, membership, candidate selection, women's representation and their sources of funding.

The post lunch tea session focused on the intricate relationship between money, muscle power and political parties. The session also discussed public disappointment with political parties, party leadership issues, lack of willingness among the parties to change and enable reforms, women's representation, and internal democracy.

The participants were later divided into three groups. Each group was assigned a topic to discuss and present the next day. Day two consisted of presentations on the three topics namely, Political Party Structures and Organizations, Elections and Candidates and Political and Electoral System.

The final session involved active deliberations over the two prevalent election systems – the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and the Proportional Representation

Present at the event were representatives of Lok Satta, Prof. Suri (Nagarjuna University), Prof. Sandeep Shastri (Lokniti) and interns, Mrs. Sakuntala Kadigamar and Ms. Maja Tjernstrom (International IDEA), Mr. Murthy and Leela Devi Prasad (JD(S)), Prof. Gopa Kumar and Shaji Varkey (University of Kerala), Bibhu Mohapatra (Association for Democratic Reforms), Mr. Prakash Sarangi (Hyderabad Central University), Dr. Venugopal Rao (Foundation for Rural and Social Development), and other participating political parties, academia, representatives from ASCI, Mr. L C Jain and the former elected representatives and civil society members from Nepal. The report from the event shall be uploaded soon on our website.

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## Launch of a new movement on Transformation of Political Culture

Lok Satta has been advocating the need for a new political culture. This has assumed urgency in the light of recent episodes of members of parliaments taking bribes for asking questions in the parliament and misappropriating MPLADS funds by favoring projects.

With a view to imbibe the new political culture at the grassroots level, and give the right perspective and orientation to the people who propose to contest in the ensuing elections to village panchayats, Lok Satta has proposed to undertake a orientation and training program for about 15,000 people across the state, over the months of February and March.

Anyone who intends to undergo this training must affirm:

- To abide by the code of conduct for elections, in particular the limit of election expenditure.
- Not to entice voters by giving money or liquor
- By making a commitment for the development of the village with a specific action plan.

Any person, irrespective of his political affiliation (independent or member of a political party), can attend this training program as long as he abides by the above.

## Meeting with Political Parties held on 20<sup>nd</sup> December 2005 at Hyderabad

The Lok Satta supported Federation for Empowerment of Local Governments (FELG) convened an informal meeting of political parties to discuss the need for and the various options available for re-organization of panchayats. Senior functionaries of major political parties such as Congress, TDP, BJP and CPI (M) attended the meeting held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December at the Lok Satta office, Hyderabad.

Andhra Pradesh has 21,910 village panchayats. About 2/3rds of these panchayats have population of less than 3000 and likewise the annual income of 2/3rds of panchayats is less than Rs. 50,000. Most aren't even in a position to meet the salary of the village secretary.

In order to provide basic civic amenities and facilities like health sub-centre, it is imperative that the population and jurisdiction of the panchayats must be above a certain threshold. Reorganization of panchayats is a sensitive and a complex issue touching upon the sentiments of people. People living in small villages understandably have apprehensions that their interests would suffer if their village gets merged with the adjoining big village.

Lok Satta believes that a broad political consensus has to be arrived at on the issue of reorganization of panchayats, and this calls for a comprehensive understanding and consensus above partisan consideration. The meeting held in the above spirit witnessed a broad consensus on the need for re-organization. The representatives of the political parties however expressed a desire for time to hold broad based discussions within their parties. It was thus decided that the next meeting would be held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January to further this process and take it to the next level.

### VOTEINDIA Campaign in 6 cities

In January the VOTEINDIA Campaign will be launched in 6 cities, starting with Hyderabad and Chennai on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Though a Voter registration drive and some other events have been already held under the VOTEINDIA banner, this launch would mark the beginning of nation-wide VOTEINDIA initiatives to be undertaken by the core-groups in the respective cities. At the eve of the launch, a workshop on Political Reforms would be held with participation from media, local organizations, activists and citizens.

### VOTEINDIA Documentary:

A documentary created on the VOTEINDIA movement is likely to be screened on national television on Jan 26<sup>th</sup>. The documentary, which will be used extensively for bringing about greater awareness of the crisis in politics and electoral processes, raises the various issues challenging political reforms and also helps the viewer to understand measures suggested by the VOTEINDIA Campaign to tackle this crisis. The documentary will be available for viewing at the local Lok Satta district offices as well as with various VOTEINDIA chapters and partners from the month of February.

# Anti-Corruption Day celebrations held across the state



*Anti-corruption parade at Srikakulam*

## Pledge taken by students:



*Students at Medak taking the pledge*

**I love my country and as a good citizen I will strive for self-governance and good governance. I also pledge to participate in this democratic reform movement.**

Lok Satta chapters of Andhra Pradesh tied up with colleges across the state to celebrate UN Anti-Corruption Day on 9<sup>th</sup> December. Nearly 1 lakh students participated in the event and pledged to fight against corruption. Over two lakh pamphlets were distributed which contained statistics about the corruption problem as well as promoted the use of the Right to Information Act and Citizen's charter as two integral tools to fight corruption.

## Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan delivers the Papiah Memorial Lecture

The Xavier Vignana Jyothi Institute of Management invited Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan to deliver the fourth endowment lecture on 'Reforming higher education in India' in the memory of Late Rev. Fr. Y. Papiah S.J. The paper presented by Dr. Jayaprakash pointed out that though India made impressive strides in the field of higher education, there is much that is wrong, and the higher education system is in deep crisis.

This paper tries to debunk some of the myths surrounding higher education, and define what quality education means. This paper also outlines the nature of crisis afflicting higher education, points out the key challenges, opportunities and highlights a few reform proposals to address the current morass.

The paper is available for viewing at <http://www.loksatta.org/highedu.pdf>



## Reflections on the Current Political Crisis

By Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan

▪ The current spate of sting operations exposing MPs of various parties accepting bribes has made nationwide headlines. To dismiss the problem as one of corruption and to limit our concerns to the MPs caught accepting bribes is taking the escapist's route, for the issue is much deeper.

▪ The whole political system in India is founded on corruption. Crores are spent on elections. Recent estimates suggest that in a 5-year cycle, major political parties and candidates spend about Rs. 10,000 crores on elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Most of these expenses are not legitimate campaign costs but money spent to buy votes, bribe people or hire musclemen.

▪ Recently in the Andhra Pradesh municipal elections, (excluding the two largest cities of Hyderabad and Vishakapatnam), the cost of elections was an estimated 500-700 crores. This in a situation when municipalities in Andhra Pradesh are largely titular bodies with very few powers and resources! Kanakapura by-election in Karnataka, held about 2 ½ years ago, cost an estimated 20 crores. That by-election in fact was fought with very few stakes, as the elected member would have had less than 18 months as MP. As luck would have it, the Lok Sabha was dissolved prematurely and that tenure was further truncated! More importantly, whoever won, would have been in opposition as both Shri. DK Sivakumar of Congress and Shri. Deve Gowda of Janta Dal (S), were opposed to the ruling NDA combine. The eventual winner Shri. Deve Gowda was believed to have been outspent by Shri. Shivakumar by a margin of 3:1. Saidapet assembly by-election in Tamil Nadu held about 2 ½ years ago also saw a phenomenal expense of about 5-10 crores.

▪ The evidence is clear that large expense does not always guarantee victory. But modest, legitimate expenditure usually ensures defeat. Instead of blaming the politicians alone for this mess, we should look at deeper causes.

▪ Our First-Past-The-Post system ensures victory to a

candidate who garners more votes than any other rival. That is, the marginal vote a candidate brings to the table is of vital consequence in determining the outcome. As a result there is enormous competitive pressure to obtain the marginal vote, over and above the large chunk of vote the party guarantees. Therefore the candidates with abnormal and unaccounted money power, local caste clout, ability to deploy muscle power and strong family roots in politics have a decisive advantage in mobilizing the marginal vote. Understandably, all major non-left parties are compelled to nominate such candidates in order to maximize their chances of victory.

▪ As a result, no matter which candidate or party wins, the parameters of governance remain unaltered. Most of the candidates who win are forced to invest large sums of money to get elected. Such a system is unsustainable unless multiple returns are guaranteed.

▪ Not surprisingly, the legislators of the governing party at the state and national level have been making money mostly through transfers, contracts, influence peddling and interference in policing as their parties are in government. Members of opposition are more dependent on questions in legislature, their nuisance value and discretionary grants like MPLADS.

▪ Candidates and parties in general are locked into this vicious cycle and they are often as much helpless victims of an inexorable process as they are willing accomplices perpetuating a corrupt and dysfunctional system.

▪ The answers therefore lie in two broad directions:

- 1) **Importance of the marginal vote must be eliminated**
- 2) **The legislator's ability to influence discretionary executive decision on a day-to-day basis must be significantly curbed.**

▪ It is time that we convert the current political crisis and scandal as an opportunity for meaningful political reform to cleanse our public life. Mere expression of shock and disgust is not enough. Even expulsion of members is not sufficient. Parties, media and democracy movements must stand together to transform the process of power and evolve a new political culture which can sustain integrity and promote public good.

Lok Satta and VOTEINDIA movement are working precisely in this direction. We are evolving specific political reforms to address these questions, and meaningful strategies to