



People Power



# News Letter

### Inside

- ◆ AP Election Watch - Common Platforms
- ◆ Voter Rolls - Pre and Post Poll Surveys
- ◆ State - Level Debate Between TDP and Congress
- ◆ National Campaign for Political Reforms - Communication Campaign
- ◆ National Advisory Council
- ◆ Centre for Public Policy and Governance
- ◆ Remembering Sri Raj Monani
- ◆ Invited Lectures, Seminars and Workshops
- ◆ People behind - Profile of Mrs G Pratibha Rao
- ◆ New Publications

### AP Election Watch - Common Platforms

As part of AP Election Watch 2004, Lok Satta organized 'Common Platforms' at the constituency level between candidates of major political parties. These platforms have become very popular at the local level as they provided an opportunity for the voters to interact with the candidates and question them on issues that matter to them. This forum also served as a platform for people to hold their elected representatives accountable to their poll promises. Lok Satta laid out a clearly defined structure and format for conducting these Common Platforms to facilitate an orderly interaction between the candidates and the citizens. Lok Satta volunteers were trained well in advance on how to conduct these meetings. The typical structure of these interactions is that they are moderated by a Lok Satta member from the constituency and the candidates faced questions from a panel of eminent individuals as well as from the attending public alternately. The moderator's role was to ensure that the candidates adhere to strict time limits and do not indulge in personal abuse. Common Platforms were organized in approximately 150 Assembly and 23 Parliamentary constituencies across Andhra Pradesh. In many constituencies these interactions were broadcast live by the local cable TV channels.

### Survey of Voter Rolls

Tens of millions of people across the country including many rich and famous were effectively disenfranchised during the recent elections due to the flaws in the voter registration process. While there was general agreement about the nature of flaws plaguing the voter rolls, none in the country had any precise knowledge on the quantum of the problem. For the first time in the country, Lok Satta took up detailed field survey to get an idea on the nature and extent of flaws in voter rolls. Voter registration process, though impeccable on paper is inaccessible to the citizen, and ineffective in correcting flaws. The sample survey undertaken during the 1999 elections proved this. The survey covering 56 rural and urban polling stations (sample size - over 40,000) showed that the problem was much bigger than expected. The survey revealed that there are 15% errors in rural areas and 44.8% in urban areas. These are errors of commission and omission, i.e. either names of voters which ought to be deleted remained on the rolls and those which ought to be added were not.

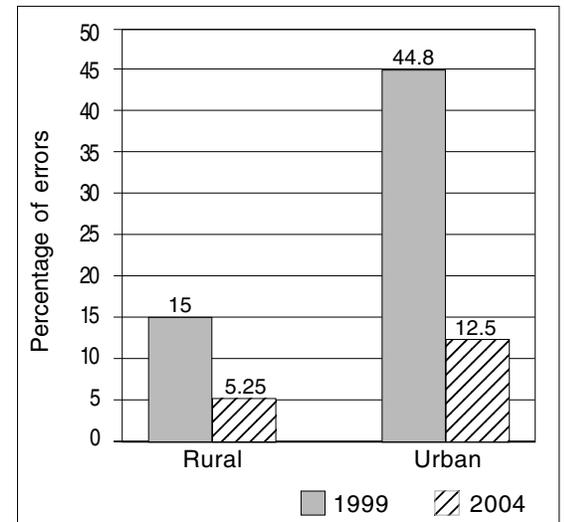


Fig. Errors in Electoral Rolls

Happily, voter registration flaws can be corrected to a large extent by making the process open, verifiable and accessible to citizens. Keeping in mind especially the rural populace, Lok Satta has been pursuing vigorously the idea of making the citizen friendly neighborhood post office as nodal agency for voter registration. The Election Commission agreed in principle to use post office as nodal agency for voter registration process and this will become a reality within the next few years.

In the interim, the EC has undertaken an extensive revision of voter rolls across the country to try and improve the situation. As a result, in Andhra Pradesh alone, about 64 lakh names were deleted, and a further 34 lakh new applications for registration were rejected. Lok Satta undertook a similar survey during 2004 elections to check whether there has been an improvement in the situation. The 2004 sample survey covered 112 rural and urban polling stations with a voter population of about 112,000. The survey revealed that the voter roll errors are 5.25% in rural areas and 12.15% in urban areas. This certainly is a huge improvement when compared with 1999 and is a result of the sustained advocacy of Lok Satta. (see Fig.)

But given the sheer inaccessibility of the registration process, the voter rolls still remain deeply flawed. The magnitude of the problem can be better comprehended in the context that the 500 votes in Florida that decided the US Presidency constitute only 1 out of 200,000 votes cast (.0005%). In the recently concluded polls, the margin of victory for 139 state legislators in AP is less than 10% of the votes polled. In such tightly contested elections, even a slight distortion in voter rolls will result in a skewed verdict, undermining the legitimacy of the democratic process. Given this scenario, large, military-style operations are prone to error, and permanent, citizen-centered, accessible mechanisms need to be put in place.

Lok Satta also undertook a post-poll survey to determine the magnitude of bogus voting. This survey was carried out in 45 polling stations and in 25 assembly constituencies. The survey results showed that of the total votes polled 0.9% in rural areas and 1.9% in urban areas were bogus votes. This is a significant improvement over a possible 12-15% bogus votes cast in Hyderabad urban area in 1999.

Lok Satta has been invited by the Election Commission of India to a workshop in Jamshedpur to be held in September. The modalities of improvement of voter registration process by making post office as the nodal agency will be discussed in detail at this workshop. As a preliminary step/pilot project, the EC has roped in the postal department in Mumbai to update the voters list in view of the forthcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra.

### State Level Debate

Elections in India are usually associated with loud campaigning and politicians addressing huge gatherings of citizens mobilized by loyal party workers. People are often ferried by trucks and treated with little dignity. Their role is limited to nodding their heads, and paying obeisance to self-appointed leaders. The election speeches do not focus on issues and are not at all thought provoking. There is no organized structure for either - the parties or the candidates to communicate to the public, at large, on what their agenda or core beliefs are.

As an alternative to these 'Tamashas', Lok Satta, during the past few elections, has been organizing debates between candidates. Even in the recently concluded elections, Lok Satta proposed a debate between the chief ministerial candidates of the two leading political alliances in the state i.e. the TDP and the Congress. While the Congress agreed, the chief ministerial candidate of the TDP declined to participate in the debate. The TDP, instead sent their erstwhile Home Minister, Sri Devender Goud for the debate. Congress reciprocated by sending its senior leader, Sri Rosiah as their representative.



The debate, largely modeled after the American Presidential debates, was moderated by Dr Jayaprakash Narayan and Smt Janaki Rani. It was conducted in the presence of a small studio audience and was broadcast live by leading TV channels all over the state.

The candidates faced questions from the (invited) audience on a range of issues and the moderators ensured that they adhered to strict time limits. The 90 - minute debate between the two candidates was not only very intense, but also assumed highly animated proportions, with each attacking and counter-attacking the other. Sri Goud, being the incumbent, naturally was on a weaker footing and had to face the onslaught of Sri Rosiah's attacks. But both leaders being well- informed and articulate speakers enthralled the viewers. The debate did serve the purpose of enabling the parties to put across their agenda to the people of the state. We are happy to report that it was widely welcomed by the public as well as the media.

### National Campaign for Political Reforms / Janadesh

As we have communicated in our earlier news letter, Lok Satta and its partners from across the country came together under the banner of 'Janadesh' and decided that an innovative communications campaign has to be designed targeting specific audiences utilizing all modern media forms to create awareness and mobilize public opinion on governance and political reforms. The campaign will have to be in regional languages covering all major states.

Towards this end, Lok Satta and its partners held a series of

interactions in Thane, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad to discuss and debate the strategies to be adopted for the communications campaign. Recently, 'Momentum' a communications strategy outfit based in Bangalore, had offered its services *probono* to develop a strategy and build a team of creative partners to launch the campaign. Lok Satta is extremely appreciative of their spontaneous gesture and deep commitment to National Campaign for Political Reforms (NCPR).

In September, 2004, we propose to have a meeting with key partners of the National Campaign to formalize a coordination mechanism and to finalize the first few steps.

### Dr JP's US Lecture Tour

At the invitation of Foundation for Democratic Reforms in India (FDRI), Dr Jayaprakash Narayan visited the US between 19<sup>th</sup> June and 4<sup>th</sup> July to address the Indian community in the US and mobilize support for governance reforms. Dr JP interacted with the Indian community in various meetings held in Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Fort Myers, Houston, Huntsville, San Diego, San Jose and Los Angeles. The lecture tour evoked extremely positive response from the Indian diaspora. Members of FDRI, IFA, ATA, IPN and other Indian organizations in addition to the scores of volunteers across the US worked tirelessly to make the lecture tour a success.

### National Advisory Council

Dr Jayaprakash Narayan was invited to be a member of the National Advisory Council (NAC) constituted by the United Progressive Alliance government to advise the government on the implementation of the National Common Minimum Programme. Many friends have expressed reservations both in public and private about the wisdom of Dr JP agreeing to be a member of the NAC headed by the Congress party president.

To address their concerns, Dr JP sent out a communication outlining our position on serving on the NAC. The gist of the communication is as follows:

- Dr JP has agreed to serve only on the explicit condition that he would have the freedom to speak his mind freely and openly, and that he will zealously guard Lok Satta's independence and non-partisan approach.
- There is an important philosophical reason in support of working with the executive and political parties. In a democracy, the citizen is sovereign, and elected representatives and the bureaucracy are there only to serve their masters, the citizens. If the relationship between the citizen and the politician is that of a master and servant, how can the master refuse to work with the servant? Therefore, while there is unavoidable tension between the establishment and reform advocate, there should also be creative engagement to make progress possible.
- If the government of the day seeks consultation and advice, it becomes our duty to interact with it. "Civil Society" does not necessarily mean that we should always be in an adversarial position with reference to the state and its apparatus.

Lok Satta welcomes the opportunity to work with the government for strengthening the democratic governance process in the country. We are optimistic that the political system will respond to people's urges, and transcend party differences and act unanimously to improve the quality of governance, and build a corruption-free India helping every child fulfill her/his potential and prevent all avoidable suffering.

As we are going to the press, the NAC held its first meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July. In the first meeting the members agreed to come up with policy papers on ten key sectors such as health, education, agriculture, governance, employment generation etc. The NAC members also had a meeting with the Prime Minister on the same day. The second meeting of the NAC is scheduled to be held on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July.

### Centre for Public Policy and Governance

For a long time now, Lok Satta had plans for having its own facilities. An office in Hyderabad, and a centre a little removed from the city to serve the following purposes:

- To house a Centre for Public Policy and Governance
- To facilitate training for Volunteers and Active Citizens and Leadership Development
- For undertaking research on various governance areas and issues of public policy
- Research and Documentation Department to serve our increasing needs.

We are delighted to report that Sri Ramalinga Raju of Satyam Computers and his family donated 5 acres of land on the outskirts of Hyderabad for setting up such a facility. We are in the process of drawing up requirements for the proposed facility. This site will be ideally suited to house the Centre for Public Policy and Governance, Leadership Training Institute, with conferencing and other support facilities.

### Invited Lectures, Seminars and Workshops

- Invited to participate in a meeting on **Civil Service Reforms** committee headed by Mr.Hota - former chairman UPSC at MCR HRD, Hyderabad, April 2.
- Invited to address a seminar on **NGO-Corporate Partnership against Trafficking in Persons** organized by American Chamber of Commerce in India, Hyderabad, April 2.
- Invited to deliver a lecture on **Democracy and Elections - Citizens Role and Responsibilities** organized by Social Cause at ECE Auditorium, OU, Hyderabad, April 10.
- Invited to address **Young Presidents Organization**, Calcutta, April 29.
- Addressed the **American Associations of Physicians from India** (AAPI) annual convention, San Diego, 26<sup>th</sup> June.
- Invited to address the **American Telugu Association's** (ATA) biennial convention in Chicago, 4<sup>th</sup> July.

### Remembering Sri Raj Monani



We deeply regret to inform the sudden demise of Sri Raj Monani, a member of Foundation for Democratic Reforms (FDR) and a cherished supporter of the Lok Satta movement. Sri Monani passed away during a trip to the USA on June 7<sup>th</sup>. Sri Monani had been associated with the Lok Satta movement since its inception, and served as a member of the FDR board since 1998. A keen thinker and a social activist, harmony among various groups, protection of our diversity and promotion of democratic values were very dear to his heart. His expertise as a management consultant and his deep concern for people were of immense value to FDR and Lok Satta movement, which greatly benefited from his constructive and pragmatic problem solving approach.

## People Behind - Profile of Mrs G Pratibha Rao



Mrs G Pratibha Rao is one of the most dedicated and committed members of Lok Satta's volunteer corps. She has been a full-time volunteer with the Lok Satta movement since its inception in 1997. She is known for her sense of perfection and has brought discipline and order to the sometimes chaotic functioning of the organization. Mrs Pratibha Rao graduated from the Madras University with a Master's degree in English literature and taught briefly at the Maris Stella College in Vijayawada, AP.

She lived in the US for 12 years along with her husband, Dr GN Rao, the well-known Ophthalmologist. Mrs Rao was deeply

influenced by the American society and their governance institutions, and during her stay in the US, was actively involved in community work. The couple returned to India in 1986 and established the non-profit LV Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad, which in a short time has emerged as the leading centre for eye care and research in India.

Mrs Rao played a key role in virtually every major activity and campaign of Lok Satta in the past 7 years. The campaign for Right to Information, One Crore Signature Campaign for Local Government Empowerment and various Election Watch campaigns are just a few to name that benefited from her leadership and involvement. Currently, she is spearheading Lok Satta's efforts in the area of healthcare reform. Mrs Pratibha Rao is a member of the Board of Management of Foundation for Democratic Reforms and also serves on the Coordination Committee of Lok Satta.

### New Publications

**Successful Anti-Corruption Strategies Around the Globe:** This paper written by Chris Hanks Drielsma, an intern from Canada discusses the successful anti corruption strategies across the world. The paper examines how various nations have employed different types of anti corruption strategies with good effect. He examined various institutions, legal procedures and administrative processes. This paper can be accessed at: [www.loksatta.org/corruption\\_chris\\_report.pdf](http://www.loksatta.org/corruption_chris_report.pdf)

**Voter Registration Systems:** This paper written by Ramya Juwadi, an intern from NALSAR University of Law discusses in detail the different types of voter registration systems. This paper can be accessed at: [www.loksatta.org/votereg.pdf](http://www.loksatta.org/votereg.pdf)

**Access to Justice:** This paper written by M.V. Pratap Kumar, an intern from NALSAR University of Law makes a comparative study of the various local court systems existing in India and tries to identify the best practices. This paper can be accessed at: [www.loksatta.org/ajustice2.pdf](http://www.loksatta.org/ajustice2.pdf)

**Presidential and Parliamentary Systems of Government: Recent trends in World Democracies:** This paper written by T. Rajavardhan, an intern from National Law University, Jodhpur examines the pros and cons of the presidential and parliamentary systems of government. This paper can be accessed at: [www.loksatta.org/democracies.pdf](http://www.loksatta.org/democracies.pdf)

### Your Contributions Can Make A Difference

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*Contributions may be sent to*

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