



People Power



News Letter

Inside

- ◆ Maharashtra Election Watch
- ◆ National Advisory Council Meetings
- ◆ Lok Satta Resists State Government's Proposal to Amend MACS Act
- ◆ Recent Developments: Post Office as a Nodal Agency
- ◆ Lok Satta Special
Lok Satta Brings Back Smile to the Faces of "Unsuccessful Students"
- ◆ Dr JP's Media Appearances
- ◆ Invited Lectures, Seminars and Workshops
- ◆ New Publications
- ◆ Recent Visitors

Maharashtra Election Watch

It was election time in Maharashtra, another opportunity for Lok Satta to draw people to participate in the Election Watch campaign. Lok Satta, along with AGNI (Action for Good Governance and Networking India) and Anna Hazare's organisation 'Bhrastachar Virodhi Jan Andolan,' came together under 'People's Movement Against Criminalisation of Politics' to fight the malady afflicting our democracy - criminalization of politics. As a part of this campaign Shri Anna Hazare toured the state of Maharashtra sensitizing the people about the dangers of criminalization of our polity. The Maharashtra Election Watch committee released a report on the educational, financial and criminal background of the candidates contesting in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Maharashtra. Maharashtra Election Watch, with the help of Lok Satta, analyzed the affidavits of 1,625 candidates, representing all major political parties in the state. The findings revealed that of the 1,625 candidates, 366 candidates had a criminal background. This means that 22.5% of the candidates had criminal cases pending against them. At the top of the political heap was the Shiv Sena, which had 57% of its candidates with criminal backgrounds. Following closely was the BJP with 41.4%, then the NCP with 25%, the Congress with 19% and finally the BSP with 15%. The number of criminal cases registered against each of these candidates ranged between 1 and 22.

This crusade was a part of public awareness campaign against the criminalisation of politics. Shri Surendra Srivastava, heading Mumbai Lok Satta unit, coordinated the entire Maharashtra Election Watch Campaign, and under his able guidance, the

Lok Satta team conducted *sabhas* across the state to inform people about the significance of voting and urging them to vote for candidates who have no criminal records.

On 9th October, Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan and Shri Anna Hazare briefed a large media gathering on the ongoing movement. This press conference was covered widely by the media in Mumbai and was successful in bringing this critical issue to the fore. Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan gave an impetus to the movement when he addressed a mammoth rally at the Sacred Heart School on October 10th. Giving his insights into the election scenario in the state, Dr Narayan said that the phenomena of anti-incumbency is a euphemism which only shows that earlier governance had made no meaningful difference to the lives of the poor people and a rejection vote is their only way of expressing displeasure. He also made an appeal to the middle class to come out and vote for the right candidates if they want to bring about a change in existing state of affairs. This rally got good reportage in the Mumbai press and was able to make an impression on the minds of the voters there.



Dr JP addressing a mammoth rally in Mumbai as part of Maharashtra Election watch campaign TOI, Mumbai dated 16-10-2004

The ever-enthusiastic Lok Satta team in Hyderabad worked overtime and compiled the affidavits of candidates in the race for the Assembly elections. The detailed information distilled from the candidates' affidavits is now available on:

www.indiaelectionwatch.com

A signature campaign was launched to get one-lakh endorsements from the people of Mumbai on this raging issue of 'criminalisation of politics'. Though the newly setup Mumbai Lok Satta unit is constrained by limited staff, this did not deter it from

taking up this challenging task. The volunteers from all over the city enthusiastically supported Mumbai team of Lok Satta. This massive exercise was undertaken at important public places in Mumbai with high concentration of people like railway stations, bus stops, etc. As a result of this exercise, it became very evident that the people are really vexed with the problem of criminalisation of politics and are looking for an outlet to vent their anger against criminalisation of politics.

Anna Hazare's Maharashtra Tour



Dr JP and Shri Anna Hazare addressing a press conference in Mumbai as part of Maharashtra Election Watch

Anna Hazare, on behalf of 'People's Movement Against Criminalisation of Politics', and as a part of Maharashtra Election Watch, embarked on a statewide tour of Maharashtra urging the people to resist the menace of criminalization of politics. This tour was flagged off on the 17th of September, the same day on which Shri Anna addressed a press conference along with the representatives of Lok Satta and AGNI. Many celebrities pledged their allegiance and supported this campaign. Prominent among them were Gulzar, Sudhir Mishra (film director), Javed Siddiqui (writer), Suhail Katan (TV actor), Pallavi Joshi (actress) and Kunika (actress). Shri Anna toured the state in Lok Satta's van. The A/V equipped vehicle, displaying anti criminalization messages was used effectively to campaign against criminalization of politics and to spread the message of Lok Satta. The tour of Shri Anna went on for three weeks and culminated with the massive rally on the 10th of October.

Media Campaign

The People's Movement Against Criminalisation of Politics launched a media campaign to create awareness among voters about this cancerous growth of criminalization of politics in our society jeopardising the health of our democracy. The main aim of this media campaign was to highlight this growing trend and to persuade the voters that the power of the people can eventually fight it. As a part of our media campaign, we printed around 25000 posters containing catchy and evocative messages against criminalisation of politics in both Marathi and English.



Campaign material used in Maharashtra Election watch

National Advisory Council (NAC) Meetings

As you are aware, Dr Jayaprakash Narayan has been invited by the Government of India to be a part of the National Advisory Council, which has been constituted to oversee the implementation of the National Common Minimum Program. Dr Jayaprakash Narayan was involved in six National Advisory Council Meetings, which discussed among other things, issues pertaining to right to information, health, education and administrative reforms. Two NAC meetings in every month of this quarter were held. Dr Jayaprakash Narayan is specifically looking at the health sector and during a series of meetings has made recommendations for improving the delivery of public health services in the country.

Following are some of his recommendations:

- Raising an army of Community Health Volunteers
- Strengthening the Primary Health Care Delivery System
- National Mission for Sanitation
- Taluk / Block-level Referral Hospitals for Curative Care
- Risk-pooling and Hospital Care Financing

The complete report presented by Dr JP titled 'Ensuring A Healthy Future' can be accessed at: www.loksatta.org/health.doc

Dr Jayaprakash Narayan has also recommended task forces in the following areas to improve the delivery of health care services:

Task Force

- Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) and birth control in High Fertility States
- Convergence and Integration of Services
- Medical Education and Medical Grants Commission
- Training of Voluntary Health Workers
- Regulation of Medical Care and Medical Ethics
- Regulation of Medical Profession
- Accreditation and integration of Rural Medical Practitioners (RMPs) into Health System
- Health Financing Mechanisms

Lok Satta Resists State Government's Proposal To Amend MACS Act

Thanks to the 'Andhra Pradesh Mutually Aided Cooperatives Act' of 1995 (better known as MACS Act), two sectors (dairy and thrift) in the cooperative movement have been running well without any interference from political executives and bureaucrats of the State Government. But the recent proposal of the State Government to amend this robust law perturbed the cooperatives and their members, and brought back bad memories of governmental hegemony over self-reliant cooperatives.

Right to form and run cooperatives is a fundamental right guaranteed under Article 19(1)(c) of the Constitution. Lok Satta, Sahavikasa and several cooperatives from across the state strongly felt that any effort to dilute the autonomy of cooperatives in



Dr JP, Sri Rami Reddy and other representatives of the cooperative movement addressing a press conference highlighting the dangers of government's proposal to amend the robust APMACS Act

Andhra Pradesh would be a patently regressive step.

It is in this backdrop that representatives of the cooperative movement, Sahavikasa and Lok Satta, led by Lok Satta's National Coordinator, Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan, briefed the media on this issue. The issue got wide publicity, and it was only because of sustained pressure built up by Lok Satta that the ruling government's actions were restrained and it was made to rethink its decision.

Finally, Post Office as a Nodal Agency

Lok Satta's six year long advocacy for Post Office to be made the nodal agency for the voter registration is now a reality. Finally, Election Commission of India vindicated the efforts of Lok Satta by issuing a series of directives to utilize Post Offices in the voter registration process. Lok Satta views this as a significant step in cleansing the electoral roles and making the voter registration process accessible to all citizens. Though this is a significant step forward, certain other vital measures have to complement this to make the voter registration process citizen friendly. However, in furtherance of Lok Satta's goal, Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan sent a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner of India, Mr. T.S. Krishnamurthy, suggesting few more additional steps to make this initiative successful and durable.

The current Election Commissioner's directive provides for displaying the voter rolls in the Post Office. We have recommended that the voter lists for each polling station be also offered for sale at a price higher than the cost of printing. This will enable the cash-strapped postal department to make some money and provides incentive to the Post Office to be involved in this work. It will also provide the citizens access to the electoral rolls at their doorstep. Inadequate access is the single biggest problem in voter registration. Post Offices can in fact build on this model, and provide a variety of services and raise revenues. For instance, a voter's name can be verified in electoral rolls by the Post Office for a fee.

As many citizens don't know under which Post Office their polling station will fall, Lok Satta has suggested that each delivery Post Office display a list of polling stations that come under its jurisdiction.

Lok Satta has strongly recommended that the deadline for the summary revision be extended up to at least 31st December 2004, and preferably up to 31st March 2005. When a far-reaching reform in the form of enhancing access to voter registration process is introduced, people must have the opportunity to get to know it by word of mouth, and internalize the process. Otherwise, there will be poor public response, leading to wrong conclusions. In a poor country with vast illiteracy and passive population, adequate time is needed for the system to respond, and the innovation to succeed. The EC should also consider making Post Office a permanent institution for voter registration on a continuing basis. Unfortunately, this significant initiative by the EC hasn't received much media attention, and as a result, the public at large is unaware that they can use the Post Office for voter registration. We have urged the EC to undertake a mass communication campaign to make the citizens aware of this process. Short, interesting films of 30-60 sec duration could be produced and telecasted in all government and private channels. Lok Satta also offered to produce the capsules that the EC could ask the public and private channels to broadcast as public service messages.

Along with its recommendations Lok Satta sent the EC a few capsules made earlier on Post Office as the Nodal Agency for voter registration.

Dr JP's letter can be accessed at: www.loksatta.org/lr2ec.pdf

Lok Satta Brings Back Smile on the Faces of "Unsuccessful Students"

A student given 0 marks gets 65 marks on reevaluation!

A B.Sc. (Mathematics) 2nd year student got zero in the initial evaluation by the university. The same student secured 65 marks – way above the pass marks – after his papers were re-evaluated by an expert faculty as a result of Lok Satta's initiative. Similarly, a student who got 16 marks secured 74 marks after Lok Satta's reevaluation. A B. Sc. final year student, B. Sudhakar, who was awarded 33 marks for his Maths-3, was given 68, 70 and 71 marks by three different expert evaluators for the same paper!

How the Guntur unit did it: In a shining example of collective action, the Lok Satta unit in Guntur helped in bringing back smiles on the faces of 2254 students in Guntur. In the recently conducted degree exams by Nagarjuna University, Lok Satta received complaints regarding evaluation of the answer sheets. Responding to these complaints, Lok Satta procured the photocopies of those answer sheets after paying the requisite challan. These answer sheets were then re-evaluated by faculty of various universities in the presence of the media at the Lok Satta office. After scrutinizing the answer sheets, the faculty unanimously voiced their opinions that all the students have done well and that they would not have hesitated to pass the students. This was an unprecedented event in the history of this university. The re-evaluated papers were handed over to the Vice Chancellor. Quickly responding to this, the VC ordered an immediate reevaluation of the concerned students' papers.

Dr JP's Media Appearances

- Meeting with the *Outlook* Editor, Mr. Vinod Mehta, Hyderabad, July 9.
- Gave an interview to the www.indianngos.com (a website dedicated to voluntary sector), Hyderabad, July 13.
- Invited to attend the CNBC recording for Karan Thapar's programme called 'Tonight At Ten' on the topic 'Exorbitant Perks of Parliamentarian and Swelling Paychecks of Parliamentarians', Hyderabad, July 21.
- Gave an interview for BBC Radio on Education, Hyderabad, July 22.

Gave an interview to the 'India Today' (Telugu) magazine for the Independence Day issue, Hyderabad, August 11. (This appeared in the issue dated Aug-24-2004 with the title 'Uchita Vidyutchakti manchidena?' (Is Free Power Good?))

Invited Lectures, Seminars, And Workshops

- ◆ Invited to address a seminar at the **Conference of the American Telugu Association (ATA)** at the Rosemont Convention Center, Chicagoland, USA, July 3 and 4.
- ◆ Awarded the **D. Ch.Tirupathi Raju Memorial Award 2004** by the Sri.D.Ch.Tirupathi Raju Memorial Charitable Trust, Vishakhapatnam, July 10.
- ◆ Invited to address Round Table on '**Socio-Economic Dimensions of Extremism-An Agenda for Sustainable Development**' at Jubilee Hall, Hyderabad, July 18.
- ◆ Invited to interact with students of **St. Stephen's College, Delhi**.
- ◆ Invited to deliver a lecture on '**Citizen and Democracy**' at the Rotary Club of Madras, August 3.
- ◆ Invited to deliver the keynote address on '**Trade Union Rights**' at the Corporation Bank Officers Association in connection with the 16th All India Conference, Hyderabad, August 8.

- ◆ Invited to participate in the unveiling function of the **statues of Smt.Malladi Subbamma and Mr.MV.Murthy** and address the gathering, Hyderabad, August 2.
- ◆ Invited to deliver the Foundation Day Lecture on **'Instrumentation and Social Justice'** at OU campus, Hyderabad, August 23.
- ◆ Invited to release the book **'Constitution for 21st Century'** by Kambhampati Sastry at ICFAI Business School, Hyderabad, August 24.
- ◆ Invited to deliver a talk on **'Approaches For Improving Participation, Transparency and Accountability in Urban Local Bodies'** during the second phase of the ASCI-WBI 2004 programme on "Certification Programme in Urban Management in India, Hyderabad, August 31
- ◆ Invited as Chief Guest in the **All India Youth Federation(AIYF)** programme on **'Present Government-Youth Policy'**, Press Club, Hyderabad, September 7.
- ◆ Invited to deliver a talk on **'Civil Society And Governance in the Future'**, Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), Hyderabad, September 25.
- ◆ Invited to deliver a talk on **'Electoral Reforms'** at Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad, September 25. The two lectures were organised by ASCI as part of their programme on **Senior-Level IAS Officers Course: Governance in the New Millennium.**

Dr. JP presented the following papers / policy inputs at National Advisory Council meetings:

- *Governance Reform and Delivery of Services.*
- *Ensuring a Healthy Future.*
- *Amendments to Right to Information Act.*

Visits by Lok Satta team to workshops/conferences organised by partner organizations

- The Lok Satta team consisting of K. Sivaram and P. Sanjay, (Advocacy Associate, Lok Satta) participated in 'National Seminar on Electoral Reforms' and gave a presentation on Lok Satta's Election Watch 2004 programme. This seminar was organized by Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and Association for Democratic Reforms.
- The Lok Satta team consisting of P. Sanjay (Advocacy Associate, Lok Satta) and Kodanda Rama Reddy (Training Coordinator, Lok Satta) participated in the PROOF(Public Record of Operations and Finance) campaign organised by Janaagraha and other partner NGOs based in Bangalore.

- P. Sanjay (Advocacy Associate, Lok Satta) participated in a workshop on 'Democratic Decentralisation' organised in Pune by 'Indian School of Political Economy'.

Recent Visitors

In addition to the visits by teams from the World Bank, DFID, and other agencies involved in health and governance issues, we, at Lok Satta are privileged to have:

- ◆ Ms. Amrita Patel, the Chairman of National Dairy Development Board (NDDDB) and an advocate of cooperatives, was in Lok Satta in solidarity with Lok Satta's cooperatives initiative.
- ◆ Sri Arun Jaitley was with Lok Satta team at LVP Eye Institute. Lok Satta representatives briefed Mr Jaitely about the activities of Lok Satta. Sri Jaitley interacted on the various issues pertaining to Electoral Reforms and the Election Commission's proposals.
- ◆ Mr Stuart Innes, Deputy British High Commissioner, was in Lok Satta and talked at length with Dr JP.

New Publications

Apart from the regularly featured articles in various newspapers, Lok Satta published some important papers during the last quarterly.

- **Local Government Finances - A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh** written for Indian Institute of Public Administration. This paper was co authored by Dr JP and P. Sanjay, Advocacy Associate.
- **The Tale of the Crab** written for Humanscape for the July issue.
- **Ensuring Accountability in Local Governments** written for Humanscape for the August issue.
- **Vote for Change** written for Humanscape for the September issue.
- **Lok Satta report on Local Governments**, a comprehensive overview on vital issues such as devolution of adequate functions to the local government, provision of adequate funds and functionaries to the local governments, establishment of District Planning Committees, Metropolitan Planning Committees, stakeholder group, and Ward Committees have been examined from a closer dimension so that the fruits of freedom percolate to the lowest strata of governance in a state and reach the largest number of people possible.

Your Contributions Can Make A Difference

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