



Loksatta and civil society demands for 'Empowered Lokayukta' within 100 days; will take the fight against corruption to Delhi

26th June 2010

Loksatta Party and many civil society organisations gathered today to launch a campaign to urge the government to take necessary action to empower the Lokayukta in the next 100 days. This campaign has been launched following the recent resignation by the current Lokayukta Justice Santosh Hegde.

A delegation of Loksatta Karnataka visited Justice Hegde yesterday morning and appealed to him to take back his resignation. He has refused to do so saying that even if he does, it will make no difference since the institution of Lokayukta itself currently does not have enough powers to make a difference.

Loksatta party has been persistently advocating for more powers to be given to the Lokayukta. Earlier this year, the party organised a signature campaign for gathering citizen support for its Empower Lokayukta movement. This received the support of over 3,000 citizens of Karnataka and it continues to gain in strength.

The current campaign titled "We want Empowered Lokayukta" is a unique form of protest adopting the principles of what is now popularly referred to as 'Gandhigiri'. In this, every day one letter will be sent to the Chief Minister urging him to introduce the necessary Amendments to the Lokayukta Act in the Karnataka Assembly. The first of these letters is signed by a large number of citizens from various organisations and civil society groups such as Coalition against Corruption (CAC) that have assembled today.

During the meet, Dr. Meenakshi Bharath, a senior Loksatta leader expressed, "Justice Santosh Hegde is an iconic figure. He being harassed and forced to resign is disheartening for all people who want to work for the good of society. We want him to continue in his fight against corruption."

Loksatta Shadow Cabinet Member Muralidhar Rao told the assembled journalists, "Corruption is a problem all over India. While the Karnataka team has launched this campaign here, the National team under Loksatta National Party President Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) is launching a nation-wide movement by leading a delegation to the Prime Minister to demand a comprehensive amendment to the Prevention of Corruption Act. "

In an interview yesterday, Dr. JP said, "The resignation of Justice Hegde, a valiant fighter against corruption, eloquently testifies to Karnataka Government's moral bankruptcy,". He recalled that Karnataka had been more fortunate than other States in that eminent jurists like Justice Venkatachala earlier and Justice Santosh Hegde until now, both Justices of the Supreme Court, had occupied the Lokayukta position. The previous Congress Government and the present BJP Government made the institution toothless by denying it powers, resources, and personnel.

The Loksatta - led delegation to the Prime Minister will seek an amendment to the Prevention of Corruption Act providing for the creation of a Lokpal /Rashtriya Lokayukta headed by a jurist of the rank of a former Chief Justice of India. It should have jurisdiction over the Central Vigilance Commission, the Central Bureau of Investigation and similar agencies and be armed with powers and resources to inquire into corruption indulged in by all Central Government officials and elected people's representatives barring the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister, the Lok Sabha Speaker, and the higher judiciary. Chief Ministers will, however, come under its purview.

The amendment will also provide for the creation of an empowered Lokayukta in all States with jurisdiction over all anti corruption agencies including the Anti Corruption Bureau and the Vigilance Commission and authority to go into cases of corruption against all State Government employees and elected people's representatives other than the Chief Minister. Both the Lokpal/ Rashtriya Lokayukta at the national level and the Lokayukta at the State level will have powers to order seizure and confiscation of ill-gotten wealth pending an inquiry.

Dr. JP said that Justice Santosh Hegde's resignation should spur all right-thinking people to take corrective action before it is too late. Corruption further impoverishes the already poor people and hurts economic growth and investments. As a signatory to the International Convention against Corruption, India cannot hold its head high so long as it adopts an amoral attitude to corruption.

Loksatta: Government *by* the people

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