

Report reveals state's poor RTI rating and MLAs' performance

UNPLEASANT FACTS

The findings of NGO Daksha show that Karnataka finished second last among the states in the implementation of Right to Information Act. Lawmakers' performance was equally bad as many kept away from assembly sessions and were least involved in the proceedings whenever they were present, **Sunitha Rao R** and **Jayalakshmi Vengugopal** report



BITTER TRUTH: The report on 'Review of democracy and performance of the Government of Karnataka during June 2008 to November 2009' released by Lokayukta N Santosh Hegde (pictured) gives an insight into the poor performance of MLAs

Here is another bolt from the blue to shake the public trust in the elected representatives. Karnataka is faring poorly in the implementation of Right to Information Act. There is absenteeism and lack of involvement by MLAs in assembly sessions.

These facts came to light in a report by NGO Daksha released on Friday by Lokayukta Santosh Hegde and Prof Trilochan Shastri, dean of IIM Bangalore and founding member of Association for Democratic Reforms in India.

"Karnataka scored 29% on the response satisfaction levels and finished second last among the states, Centre and the national agencies surveyed (on RTI implementation). Several departmental websites are not in compliance with the RTI requirements. Further, Karnataka ranks very low in a survey conducted by independent NGOs on the rate of satisfactory responses," said the report on 'Review of democracy and performance of the Government of Karnataka during the period June 2008 to November 2009'.

The figures collected by Daksha were based on a series of RTIs filed.

The data on questions in the assembly was also shocking. Seventy-eight lawmakers never asked a single question during 46 days of the assembly session. This constitutes nearly 40% of the MLAs for whom records are kept. A further 31 MLAs asked less than five questions each. Only 35



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MLAs asked 20 or more questions. Just one MLA asked more than 100 questions.

"They (MLAs) are not using funds allocated by the government for various projects. Only a few attend the session to create ruckus and walkouts when some controversial issues are discussed," said Hedge replying to questions from journalists after they went through the report.

"Sixty per cent of MLAs come to the session to earn their stipend. They don't have any social responsibility. In the last 148 days of session, only 12 MLAs had 100 per cent attendance. At least 78 per cent MLAs have not even asked a single question in the assembly. These factors should help voters decide on the right candidate," he said.

"In our state, church attacks and communal violence are on the rise. But the Haveri police firing report is yet to be released by the government. The report on the impact of the JNNURM project is

also not ready."

Vikram Simha, RTI activist, said that in Bangalore there are only 3% of people who are knowledgeable about RTIs which he found during a dipstick survey conducted by Mahiti Adhyayana Kendra in September 2009.

"Language is a constraint while filing RTIs. Many Bangaloreans born and brought up here do not know how to write in Kannada whereas most of the official documents are in the local language. Though RTIs can be filed in English, many of them fail to interpret the information," said Simha.

According to him, the right questions need to be asked and they must be of larger public interest while filing an RTI application. Speaking to *DNA*, Prithvi Reddy, co founder of Koramangala SmartVotes, said most of the MLAs are too busy doing works which they are not supposed to do.

"Every politician from MLA to MP speaks about roads, which is not their role. They have all reduced themselves to the position of corporators. People are also at fault when they expect the MLAs to solve their individual problems," said Prithvi.

Asked about the action taken on the reports submitted by the Lokayukta, Hegde said, "Lokayukta has already submitted a report on 35 mining companies in the state. The government is not taking any action based on it.