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FOR THE FAVOUR OF PUBLICATION

State undermining the mandate of the elected members of the Panchayat and their constituencies

Karnataka Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2013

Yet another cruel blow to the Panchayat Raj System in Karnataka was delivered yesterday by the newly formed Karnataka Legislative Assembly when they passed the Karnataka Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2013. It is deplorable that despite the strong opposition from all the opposition parties and the Speaker of the House, the party in power has been in great haste to pass this Bill that clearly undermines the democratic mandate of the Grama Panchayats, the very foundation of participatory democracy in this country.

While the importance and sanctity of the Grama Sabhas and Ward Sabhas in the Panchayat Raj System are unquestionable, the disqualification or removal of the concerned President or member by the Regional Commissioner for not holding two successive meetings as proposed in this Bill is unconstitutional and totally unacceptable.

This Bill is clearly a means to usurp the powers of the Grama Panchayats whose presidents and members include representatives of women and marginalised communities who currently face many real challenges to perform their duties, including that of holding meaningful ward and Grama Sabhas. There are already provisions in the Act for ensuring the conduction of the Grama Sabhas and Ward Sabhas. Instead of streamlining them and enabling the Panchayat President and members to fulfil their mandate; and empowering the members of the Grama Sabhas to hold their own elected governments responsible, this Bill aims to strengthen the hands for the bureaucracy that is accountable to the State Government. This Bill also has the potential to be used as a tool by vested interests within a Panchayat who may deliberately hinder the conduction of Ward Sabhas and Grama Sabhas to undermine the elected Panchayat members, especially when they belong to the marginalised communities. In this light, the claim of the RDPR Minister that the aim of the Government, through this Bill, was to 'empower the Grama Panchayats' stands exposed for its double-speak. It is also ironic that

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while the MLAs are not held accountable their participation in the legislative sessions or in the Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) meetings, they claim to impose accountability on the Grama Panchayats.

The Grama Panchayat Hakkottaya Andolana demands that the Legislative Assembly revokes this Bill. It urges the Legislative Council and all its members, led by the 25 Local Self Government Representatives to oppose this Bill unanimously and to reject it summarily.



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