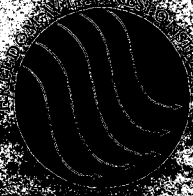


The Liberal Position

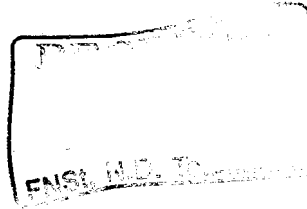
Newsletter of the INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP

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~ umbe2 ~ April 2002



THE STORY SO FAR....

In the first issue of this Newsletter (No.1 – October 2001) we explained why we felt it necessary to revive the Indian Liberal Group and give it a structure. We reminded our members of the shared Liberal values that had brought us together and our hope, that through an organizationally strong ILG, we would defend and promote these values which are spelt out in some detail in the document 'Basic Principles – Guidelines for Action'.

We then went on to discuss why the ILG's organizational growth had been "so excruciatingly slow" by asking ourselves the question: "Where have we gone wrong". We shared with you the response from members. Based on these answers we came to the conclusion that the structure we had devised (in our Constitution) was too rigid and was inhibiting growth.

This led us to recommend several amendments to the ILG Constitution to make the structure flexible. These draft amendments were circulated to all members then on the rolls. They were asked to send in their responses. Many replied. These replies have been collated and will be circulated to members of the National Executive. However, the one amendment that met with approval from all members related to the setting up of Local Chapters. These Local Chapters replace the District Committees as the base of the ILG's organizational pyramid. This can be done without any difficulty because, even after three years we do not have a District Committee anywhere. This means that the concept of District Committees is not working.

We told you about our **website** and its features. At the same time we expressed disappointment that only a handful were accessing the **website** and hoped that soon accessing the **website** would become a matter of habit. That hope, as of now, has been belied.

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NOW TO CONTINUE WITH OUR STORY...

Membership

We'll begin with our membership figures.

As on April 15, 2002, we have 355 members. The table below indicates the statewise distribution and the number of Local Chapters that are possible in each state where we have a presence.

State	No. of members	No. of possible Local Chapters
Andhra Pradesh	68	7
Bihar	1	1
Delhi	9	1
Goa	1	1
Gujarat	13	3
Karnataka	34	7
Kerala	39	5
Maharashtra	82	17
Rajasthan	1	1
Tamil Nadu	103	10
Uttar Pradesh	1	1
West Bengal	3	1
	<hr/> 355	<hr/> 55

Membership Subscription

Among the suggestions received is one stating that as the National Convention has not yet been held, nor have elections of Office Bearers from the national to the local level taken place, the validity of the subscriptions paid by members so far, be extended to March 31, 2003. This is a fair request and subject to ratification by the National Convention, it is hereby stipulated that all subscriptions received so far are valid **upto March 31, 2003.**

Local Chapters

The Amended Article 9 of the Constitution of the Indian Liberal Group deals with the setting up of Local Chapters. Local Chapters replace District Committees as the **ILG's** primary units. This proposal has been accepted by members of the ILG. Pending its ratification by the National Convention of the ILG we shall go ahead with the setting up of Local Chapters in as many of the 55 Chapters as possible.

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The amended Article 9 reads as follows:

“ 9. Local Chapter

- (i) Any municipal ward in a city or town or a village in the countryside with at least ten members shall be entitled to form a Local Chapter.
- (ii) The National Headquarters may, on its own, or on the recommendation of the State Chapter, authorise the formation of a Local Chapter.
- (ii) A Local Chapter shall consist of a President, not more than two Vice-presidents, a Secretary, a Treasurer and a Public Relations Officer.
- (iii) The President and the Vice **President/s** shall be elected by the members of the Chapter concerned, at a meeting of members of the ward or village, convened for the purpose. The President shall nominate the Secretary, the Treasurer and the Public Relations Officer from among members of the Local Chapter **concerned.**”

The Local Chapters, ought to be the key to the **ILG's** organisational effectiveness. They will be autonomous within the parameters of the **ILG's** Constitution and policies and will be free to take actions on their own. Such autonomy for Local Chapters is consistent with the Liberal belief in democratic decentralisation. The Local Chapter President is enabled to choose his team. This will contribute to good teamwork.

Thus Local Chapters would provide the flexibility that is needed to ensure the active participation of all its members. Without such active participation, the ILG will be like any other top-heavy organisation with very little to show at the grass roots. If this becomes the case also with the ILG, then there is no reason for us to exist.

In short, Local Chapters will

- make it easy for members to be in touch with other members
- make it possible to meet as often as needed even while ensuring that there is a meeting at least once a month. The meeting place could rotate from one member's house to another. It would also be possible to arrange with a local club or school to allow members to meet in their premises on a specified date each month. The Chapter concerned could decide a specified day for the monthly meeting.
- make it possible to do away with having to maintain an office and other paraphernalia that go with an office. This will save on expense that has deterred even state committees from setting up offices.
- enable members to establish rapport with other organisations functioning in that area as also to liaise with the elected representatives in local bodies, state legislatures and parliament.

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What Can Local Chapters Do?

Imagine a hundred Local Chapters spread over various parts of the country. These Chapters meet once a month and oftener when necessary.

What do they discuss? When friends meet what do they talk about in addition to issues of a personal nature? They discuss local problems that affect them. They talk about school admissions, the quality of teaching, frequent power breakdowns, poor policing, water shortage, the current tragic communal frenzy that has torn apart Gujarat and is threatening to tear up the nation itself, and so on. They discuss, they grumble and shaking their heads helplessly, they disperse.

Imagine the same friends meeting as members of a Local Chapter of the ILG. They discuss the **same** problems and, perhaps many more. But they don't merely grumble or shake their heads helplessly. They decide to do something about it. Perhaps to write to the local paper or persuade the local cable operator to give them a few minutes to share with other subscribers serviced by him the views of the neighbourhood Liberals. Realising that they are part of a national organization, they take up issues that can be tackled locally with the local elected representatives. Where the issues have a statewide or national relevance, they take these up with the State Chapter or the National Headquarters. The feedback from the Local Chapters help shape the ILG's Liberal Position on a variety of issues at the state and national levels. Such policies would reflect reality, originating as they do from the grass roots level.

The ILG's views at all levels will be based on the five values the ILG has sworn to promote viz. freedom, responsibility, tolerance, social justice and equality of opportunity based on the belief that

- liberty with individual responsibility are the foundations of civilized society;
- the State is an instrument of the citizens it serves; and
- any action of the State must respect the principles of democratic accountability and the rule of law.

Let us always remember our values and our purpose.

Special Interest Teams

If Local Chapters are the ears, eyes and the foot soldiers of the ILG, the Special Interest Teams (**SITs**) are the ILG's 'think tanks'. We use this expression in a modest sense. We do not claim that our **SITs** are comprised of 'experts' whose 'expertise' is comparable to 'specialists', though some of our members are indeed specialists in their fields of endeavour.

Some of these **SITs** have started functioning. A Statement on the Union Budget was prepared and circulated to over **120** members of Parliament. Another on deregulation and disinvestment is being dealt with by the **SIT** concerned. A third will soon begin

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dealing with the Liberal understanding of secularism and the need to do away with categorising our people on the basis of majority, minorities, religion, caste; etc. These issues have assumed considerable importance in the context of the unfolding tragedy in Gujarat.

SITs will interact with and be available to ILG Chapters at all levels. Whenever required SITs will take the assistance of specialist NGOs and eminent persons who may not necessarily be members of the ILG but whose stance is liberal. We shall develop and refine the working of SITs as we go along. Your suggestions in this regard are of course most welcome.



Activities

Seminars and Meetings

January 10 - Kolhapur, Maharashtra. Seminar: Terrorism and the Law
The Seminar was organised by Prof. Suresh Shirodkar, President of the ILG's, Maharashtra Chapter. The keynote speaker was Dr. Satyaranjan Sathe, Honorary Director, The Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Pune. The theme of Dr. Sathe's talk : Human Rights and Laws in a Civil Society. Mr. P. K. Chavare, District and Sessions Judge, Kolhapur, spoke on "A New Face for Law to Fight Terrorism." The 37 participants at the seminar had the benefit of a three page note entitled 'Points to Ponder'.

The seminar was followed by a public meeting on "Terrorism and the Kashmir Problem".

January 12 - New Delhi. Meeting : War Clouds and the Economy
This meeting organised by the Delhi Chapter of the ILG was addressed by Mr. Jairam Ramesh of the Congress Party.² A report of this meeting has been posted on the ILG website.

March 14 - Kolhapur. Public Meeting : Globalisation - Threats & Opportunities
Organised by ILG's Maharashtra Chapter and the Kolhapur District branch of the Shetkari Sanghatana, this well attended and locally well reported meeting was addressed by Shetkari Sanghatana founder and leader Mr. Sharad Joshi. The meeting strongly supported the globalisation measures adopted by the government and was clear that for India's agriculture it was more an opportunity than a threat. Thanks to globalisation, agriculture in India will, at long last, come into its own after being shackled all these years by governments at the centre and the states.

Dr. Detmar Doering in India

The *Liberales Institut* (Liberty Institute) of the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung based in Potsdam, Germany is a Liberal think tank. Its Deputy Director, Dr. Detmar Doering was in India in February to attend a seminar of the Mont Pelerin Society held in Goa, a meeting of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation in Delhi and to meet members of the Indian Liberal Group.

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A Liberal intellectual, Dr. Detmar **Doering** studied philosophy and history at the University of Cologne where he secured a doctorate in Political Philosophy, and at the University College, London. He has published a number of books mainly in the realm of Liberal philosophy and Liberal thinkers and has published a number of articles in German and international academic journals on economic, political and historical subjects. He has been a member of the Mont Pelerin Society since 1996.

In association with the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung's South Asian Regional Office in Delhi, the Indian Liberal Group arranged for him to meet members of the ILG at Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kottayam.

February 1, Mumbai. Seminar: ***The State of Civil Rights: Post September 11.***

On February 1, Dr. Doering addressed our members on "The State of Civil Rights: Post September 11, 2001": Held in a conference room of the Indian Merchants' Chamber, the programme was attended by 25 members of the ILG in Mumbai. Mr. Minoo Shroff, member of the ILG and President of the Forum of Free Enterprise chaired the discussion.

February 2, New Delhi. Dinner discussion: Ongoing Economic Reforms
At Delhi he met our members on February 2 over a dinner hosted by the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung. Among the issues discussed were the ongoing economic reforms in India.

February 4, Hyderabad. Seminar: Liberalism and Social Responsibility
On February 4, Dr. Doering was in Hyderabad addressing 24 members of the ILG who had come in from places like Guntur, Vijayawada and Tirupati on "Liberalism and Social Responsibility". The meeting was sponsored by the AP Chapter of the ILG.

February 6, Chennai. Seminar: Economic Fallout after September 11
At Chennai, on February 6, Dr. Doering addressed another well-attended meeting. This meeting was jointly sponsored by the TANSTIA-FNF Service Centre and the Tamil Nadu Chapter of the ILG. The subject of his talk: "Economic Fallout after September 11".

February 8, Cochin. Workshop: Liberalisation, Privatisation & Poverty Alleviation
On February 8, Dr. Doering participated in a workshop organised by the Kerala Chapter of the ILG in association with the Kerala Chamber of Commerce and Industry at Cochin. Dr. Doering delivered a keynote speech on "Liberalisation, Pnvatisation and Poverty Alleviation":

Statements and Press Releases

- A report in the Business Standard that the Congress Party is gearing up to block key economic bills in the Budget session of Parliament prompted us to respond with a letter to the Business Standard on why such legislation was crucial for the success of the economic reforms process and pleading with opposition parties not to oppose for opposition's sake.³
- We issued a press statement expressing ILG's views on the Union Budget proposals and followed it up with a more detailed statement which was circulated to over 100 members of parliament and to leaders of some political parties in parliament⁴

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- A press release expressing anguish over the **communal** strife in Gujarat, the violence at Sabarmati Ashram and the attack on pressmen, was issued recently.⁵

Soon, ILG members with **email** addresses will also receive such press releases. The intention is not only to keep them informed but to request these members to pursue the publication of such press releases in newspapers and periodicals published in their area, particularly in the local languages, thus enabling the **ILG's** views secure a wider readership. Also, such statements and press releases **can** themselves become topics for discussion at Local Chapter meetings.



Programmes Planned for 2002

May 11	Bangalore:	ILG Members Meet
May 25	Patna:	Seminar: "Reviving Bihar – The Liberal Prescription" (in association with the Project for Economic Education)
May 27	New Delhi:	Minoo Masani Memorial Meeting. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mr. Digvijay Singh will speak on "More Governance with less Government" (in association with the India International Centre)
June 03/05	Mangalore:	National Workshop: "Accelerating Disinvestment from State Enterprises" (in association with Kanara Chamber of Commerce; Vishleshan Trust; Project for Economic Education and Friedrich Naumann Stiftung)
June 15/18	Devlali	Training Camp: Train the Trainers.
July 14/18	Muthukadu	Conference of Young Liberals. (Muthukadu is near Chennai)
Sept.14/17	Devlali	Leadership Training Camp
Oct.25/27	Kanpur	Development and Human Rights (in association with IIT Kanpur)
Nov.8/10	Devlali	Citizens' Empowerment in a Liberal Society (in association with the Indian Secular Society)
Dec.4/7	Hyderabad	National Convention

Publications

The following publications are available:

Name of Publication	Price	For ILG Members	Remarks
We Indians	Rs.50.00	Rs.40.00	Reprint of a book by Minoo Masani (An ILG publication). Though each member gets a free copy, we encourage members to buy multiple copies for presentation to the young.

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Liberal Priorities for India in the 21 st Century	Rs.20.00 + postage Rs.15	free	Report of a national symposium (A P.E.E. publication)
India's Security Strategy Historical Lessons and Contemporary Review	Rs.20.00 + postage Rs.17	free	Report of a Seminar (An LSP publication)
Reflections on the Freedom to Choose, Right to Die and Voluntary Euthanasia	Rs.20.00 + postage Rs.10	free	by Dr. B. N. Colabawalla (An SRDD publication)
Wake Up Call for India	free	free	Published by India Watch Foundation. Copy enclosed with this Newsletter.

Freedom First

Freedom First is a Liberal journal now in its 50th year of publication. It is the only journal in India championing the Liberal cause and the Liberal point of view. The large majority of our members are not subscribers. To persuade them to subscribe we offer a special 25% discount. The annual subscription is **Rs.100**. We offer ILG members an annual subscription of **Rs.75.00**.

1. Please visit www.liberalsindia.com. For a hard copy ask ILG-NHQ at the address on the masthead of this Newsletter on page 1. Send postage stamps **Rs.4/-** with your request. If you wish to get this plus the rest in these footnotes, Please send **Rs.20** in postage stamps.
2. As above.
3. As above.
4. As above.
5. As above.

Dear Friend

If you have read this far, then it indicates interest! Therefore a request:

Let me have your honest comments on this Newsletter. Your suggestions on how to improve it, so that it serves its purpose as a medium of communication and information within our organisation. Are there items in this issue which are, or would be of no interest to members. If so which are those. On the other hand have we missed out on things that would have interested you? In what way can you contribute to the contents of this newsletter?

I have some thoughts on this, particularly in the present situation when Gujarat is burning and the country is in ferment - all man-made! I will share them with you later. Meanwhile please share your thoughts with us.



S. V. Raju
President
April 26, 2002