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INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Adopted on March 5,2000

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Guidelines for Action

The principles of a liberal philosophy emanate from the essential rationality of man . Liberalism believes in equality as a natural right and democracy as the only political system that enhances the values of Liberalism and maintains the dignity and sovereignty of the individual.

Individual Freedom and Liberties

Personal liberty is among the most vital of human rights which needs strong re-affirmation. It will be the endeavour of the Indian Liberal Group (ILG) to promote an awareness of its significance and educate the people on why it is so important to defend this freedom.

The ILG views the following as matters of immediate concern:

- Muzzling of the freedom of expression in any media
- Illegal detention of citizens by any person or authority
- Fundamentalism in any form that threatens freedoms
- The resort to violence and intimidation
- The criminalisation of politics

The all-pervasive corruption.

Right to Information

The right to information is a corollary to the right of free expression. Citizens can exercise their rights meaningfully only

if they are adequately informed. The need to safeguard the country's security interests is often the excuse advanced to withhold information. Under blanket terms like "state security" or "public interest" numerous acts of omission and commission are hidden from public scrutiny. Actions of government should be both transparent and accountable. The ILG will actively support legislation for the right to information at the Centre and in the states including legislation to ensure that secrecy becomes an exception rather than the rule on the one hand and to guarantee appropriate safeguards to protect the privacy of the individual on the other. In the context of the intrusive capabilities of modern communications technology this cannot be over-emphasised. The ILG will educate the citizens on the need to exercise this right.

Economic Prosperity Through Freedom.

The ILG believes that people in their individual capacities can contribute to the wellbeing and prosperity of the community no less than government. This can be achieved only under conditions of freedom and equity. This is possible in an economic arrangement which is alive to its social obligations. Such an economy, best described as a social market economy, implies that

- farming should be dealt with in a manner as to ensure that the Indian farmer gets a fair return on his investment and labour;
- the manufacturer and the trader are free to engage in industry and trade untrammelled by needless impediments in the conduct of their business;
- it is the consumer's purchasing power reflected by the demand for specific goods and services that decides what to produce and how much to produce;
- the government should focus its attention on the social sector. These include the provision of clean drinking water, primary healthcare, primary education, basic infrastructure like roads, bridges, ports and the like. Even here, governments must not

insist on a monopoly. The social sector should be open to anyone or any organisation which seeks to participate in these activities;

- the dismantling of the permit licence quota raj will have to be accompanied by a gradual elimination of the regime of subsidies. The taxed rupee which is intended to benefit the poor should do so;
- for free enterprise to take root the state must ensure private property rights. Unless each citizen has the legally enforceable right to own, buy, sell, trade, mortgage and invest in private property, a normal, healthy, stable market economy cannot exist;
- the overall economic policy is guided by the principle of competition, efficiency, productivity, enhanced consumer satisfaction, full employment and the well being of the people, keeping in view the central liberal belief in the dignity of the individual. The fact that economic deprivation robs the individual of his or her dignity, makes it imperative that policies be such as would enable people overcome poverty.

Technology and Human Development

The ILG believes that Science and Technology can play a crucial role in enabling our people achieve a better quality of life. This involves

- encouraging private companies to invest in Research and Development. These can best serve the community when they are not shackled. In the latter event, there must be convincing and defensible reasons. A conducive environment can be created only through keen competition in the economy, strict patents regulation and promoting the scientific temper in education at various levels;
- the state confining itself to promoting pure science research and defence that require long term strategic investments. The

government should as far as possible leave the management of scientific research to scientists and technocrats. Here too the doors should be kept open for any individual or any organisation that wishes to participate in these activities to be able to do so. .

- restricting the government's regulatory sphere to setting up standards. At the same time the State has a role to play in creating an environment where private investment in Science and Technology is encouraged and the environment is freed from political and bureaucratic interference. Even here, government cannot insist on a monopoly.
- Ensuring that all scientific and technological development takes place with due concern for the protection of the environment.

Active Citizenship

The ILG believes that the ultimate purpose of society and the state is to assure the dignity of the individual. But this will remain a dream unless citizens are alive to their responsibilities to society. This requires active citizenship which implies that democracy is not merely voting once in five years but taking an active part in the life of the community and in the affairs of the nation. This involves collective and assertive action at the grassroots level. Citizens action groups should keep the elected representatives and public servants on their toes ensuring that they perform. The ILG affirms that participatory and active citizenship at all levels is crucial for building and sustaining a liberal democratic society. Citizens Charters have to be evolved in all spheres. The ILG will make special efforts to providing training in active citizenship.

Governance

- The Rule of Law is central to Liberalism. The ILG will strive to educate citizens in the principles of the Rule of Law.

- The ILG is concerned over the state of the judicial system characterised by shortage of judges, procedural delays and the consequent difficulties faced by citizens in securing justice.
- Powers should be redistributed in such a manner that the power wielders come in close proximity to the people. This will help enhance accountability.
- The need to review the Representation of the People Act has become imperative. A primary endeavour of the ILG will be to seek the removal of the stipulation that political parties seeking registration with the Election Commission need to affirm their belief in socialism. The ILG will also seek modifications in the electoral system to enable elected bodies reflect, as far as possible, the diverse interests in our society.
- The concept of sunset legislation should be introduced wherein all laws should have an in-built obsolescence clause.
- Liberals believe that taxation should be fairly balanced between the needs of the individual and the needs of society for saving and investment. Taxation should therefore play a positive role in encouraging enterprise and in ensuring greater equality of opportunity.

Social Issues

- To achieve a good quality of life, the ILG believes that a small family is essential. It advocates the education of the poor with particular emphasis on women's and children's education as the best guarantor of development and of small families.
- The irrefutable evidence of history is that there is a definite link between education and development. The Liberals commit themselves to the promotion of education particularly at the primary level to target full literacy.
- Corruption is a manifestation of declining values accelerated by economic policies involving controls, permits, licences and

quotas. Corruption is a cancer that eats into the vitals of democratic polity and destroys democracy itself. Liberals will have to fight corruption at all levels with positive action not only through public education but by advocating exemplary punishment that would act as a deterrent.

- The politicisation of any aspect of the problems of minorities should be opposed. The State should assume the role of a neutral referee with no interest in any one group. The Indian Constitution takes the position that India is a polyglot society wherein people of different religions and languages can coexist on the basis of equality. Liberals can contribute by promoting positive interaction between various groups and ensuring that the rights of the minorities are safeguarded.
- *All* attempts should be made to avoid uprooting tribals (*adivasis*) from their traditional homelands. If the national interest nevertheless demands this, they should be adequately compensated and rehabilitated.
- While the policy of reservations undoubtedly does some good to certain sections of the population, its administration leads to great dissatisfaction amongst several sections of the population. The larger issue of reservations needs to be reviewed critically and periodically.

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