



PRESS RELEASE

Launch of Vikendrikarana Balaga (Decentralisation Group)

Nearly 20 Gram Panchayats across Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts in Karnataka have come together to launch a **“No cash for votes” campaign** in the run-up to the upcoming panchayat elections in the state, in May 2015.

Select Gram Panchayat members have also formed the **Vikendrikarana Balaga**, modelled on the principles of decentralisation and values associated with it. The group wants to work with these values to bring about change at the Gram Panchayat level and also seeks to inculcate a culture whereby citizens vote in local elections without taking any money from candidates.

Vikendrikarana Balaga was born out of panchayats which have adopted the Gram Panchayat Organisation Development, an innovative framework developed by Avantika Foundation to build the organisation capacity of the village council in a systemic manner, by matching their vision to their mission, roles and structures, resources and incentives. The organisation development of these Gram Panchayats has in turn inculcated a sense of ownership and accountability among Gram Panchayat members, and resulted in greater transparency in panchayat governance and service delivery improvements in villages.

This is a positive development from the last panchayat election which witnessed distribution of money and liquor severely damaging citizenry and democratic values. Local residents recall an incident in Dibburhalli during the previous polls where 11 people from poorer sections died after consuming liquor that was illegally distributed.

“Having worked with Gram Panchayats for over three decades, I believe it is my responsibility to build a society which is clean and non-corrupt,” says K M Venkatesh, (70), Adhyaksha of Kundalgurkhi Gram Panchayat explaining his motivation to head the Vikendrikarana Balaga. Venkatesh is proud of having fought four elections without shelling out cash to voters and believes candidates can fight a clean election if they respond to the needs of citizens, effectively tap government schemes for public welfare and build a rapport with line departments.



According to the Karnataka State Election Commission candidates' guideline 2010, receiving and giving cash and gifts (saris, grains, liquor bottles etc.) for votes is a violation of the election code of conduct.

If we are holding ourselves responsible to build a civilized society, the candidates and citizens should ask themselves whether they are setting the right example for our children and the future generation. The Vikendrikarana Balaga "No cash for votes" campaign will in the run-up to the panchayat elections spread this message through the distribution of pamphlets, organisation of 'Jaatas' alongwith School Children and meetings with potential candidates.