

Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting of Common Cause

The Executive Committee of Common Cause met at Common Cause House on December 22, 2015 at 3:30 p.m. Mr. Vikram Lal, Mr. Kamal Kant Jaswal, Maj. Gen. (retd.) J P Gupta, Dr. B P Mathur, Dr. Divya Jalan and Dr. Vipul Mudgal attended the meeting. Dr. Ashok Khosla was granted leave of absence.

The Director reviewed the developments since the last meeting held on August 25, 2015 and apprised the Committee of the ongoing initiatives and interventions.

Inquiry into the conduct of Mr. Ranjit Sinha

The Director briefed the Committee about the inquiry being conducted by Mr. M L Sharma into the alleged transgressions of the former CBI Director, Mr. Ranjit Sinha under the directions of the Supreme Court. The President made his deposition on the subject to Mr. Sharma and had a fruitful interaction with the investigation team. Mr. Prashant Bhushan had earlier made his statement in the matter.

Initiative on judicial reforms:

Common Cause has been striving to resuscitate the e-Courts project and make its second phase meaningful for various stakeholders. In this connection, Mr. Vikram Lal, Mr. Jaswal and Dr. Vipul Mudgal had several rounds of discussion and exchange of ideas with Dr. Justice (retd) G C Bharuka and Mr. R Chandrashekhar, President, NASSCOM. Subsequently, Mr. Jaswal, Dr. Vipul Mudgal and Mr. R Chandrashekhar met with Ms. Kusumjit Sidhu, Secretary, Department of Justice, and Mr. Atul Kaushik, Joint Secretary. The discussion was helpful in understanding the Ministry's approach to the implementation of the project. It was felt that under the circumstance it was imperative to open a dialogue with the CJI with a view to bringing various stakeholders on the same page and realigning the project deliverables to the objective of making justice speedy, efficient and affordable.

It was observed that there was a synergy between the research-based advocacy of Common Cause and the path of street action and protests favoured by the Forum for Fast Justice, as the latter could serve to jolt the authorities concerned out of their inertia.

RTE initiatives:

Common Cause has interacted with Ms. Kiran Bhatta of Centre for Policy Research, Mr. Ambrish Rai of RTE Forum, Mr. Stalin K of Video Volunteers, and Ms. Kathyayini Chamraj of CIVIC Bangalore, to strategize on possible interventions for revamping the implementation of the Right to Education Act. The Director informed

the Committee that concrete suggestions have been made to the Education Minister of Delhi and other authorities for addressing the problem of high dropout rates in the schools of the NCR. Videographic evidence of the non-implementation of RTE in Bihar, Jharkhand and UP, which has been compiled by Video Volunteers, was screened during the meeting. It was felt that empowerment of the School Management Committees was crucial to the actualization of RTE. In this context, it was decided to prepare a primer/manual and appropriate publicity material for the education of members of the SMCs of Government schools in Delhi.

Police Reforms:

The Director apprised the EC of the progress of the State of Policing Report. Discussions have been held with Lokniti/ CSDS regarding the conduct of a pilot study in the states of Bihar, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Lokniti/ CSDS has developed the methodology for the pilot and will share the detail of the costing in due course. The ballpark figure is in the range of Rs 10-15 lakh. It was felt that following a successful pilot, Common Cause could look for project grants for undertaking a nationwide survey.

New issues:

The Committee discussed the issues raised in the draft C&AG report on the rice milling scam involving an undue enrichment of private millers to the tune of Rs. 10,000 crore per annum. It was felt that objective legal opinion ought to be sought before proceeding further in the matter. It was also suggested that the economics of levy and non-levy rice milling should be examined to assess the notional loss to the exchequer.

The members expressed concern over the arbitrary and unjustifiable use of Section 144, Cr. P. C. in some states to ban internet services. The Committee felt that issue needed further study, in the light of which one could intervene as and when an actionable cause presented itself.

The Committee underlined the holistic nature of governance reforms and the interdependence of reforms in the administrative system, the judiciary and the police. All of these needed to be pursued with determination. The Director said that he would have to assign a dedicated resource for each project to be pursued. This would greatly increase the scale of work and the human resource requirement in consequence. Moreover, the compensation in Common Cause was not in alignment with the pay structure in similar NGOs. The funding for Inclusive Media for Change is also drawing to a close and the project will have to be integrated with Common Cause in the near future. Once the current funding is exhausted, the salaries of the two staffers borne on the project will have to be paid from Common Cause. In view of this, the funding gap is bound to widen. The Director was advised to undertake a

realistic assessment of the gap. It was also felt that given the importance of fund raising, it might be expedient to engage a dedicated resource for this exercise.

Meeting schedule:

The next meeting of the Governing Council will be held on January 27, 2016 at 3.30 p.m. The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on March 12, 2016 at 11 am. As usual, it will be preceded by a formal meeting of the Governing Council.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the chair.

(Kamal Kant Jaswal)
President