

AN APPEAL

GOVERNMENT'S 'LOKPAL' IS DANGEROUS

[Following is an appeal circulated by Anna Hazare in the wake of his August 15-16 fasting movement against corruption]

GOVERNMENT'S LOKPAL IS targeted against those who raise their voice against corruption rather than to punish the corrupt!

The government's Lokpal bill covers only about 0.5% of public servants, yet it brings under its ambit virtually every citizen's group and organization, registered or unregistered, meant to serve the social sector. This raises a pertinent question—whom is the Lokpal really targeted at? There are more than 1.25 crore central and state government employees. Out of this merely 65,000 Group A Central Government employees would be covered in the government bill leaving out all the lower officers and staff. This effectively means that there is no remedy against corruption that a common person faces daily in police, roads, industry, licensing, transport, roadways, municipality, rations, health services, education, pension, provident funds, Panchayat, forest department, irrigation department, etc. On the other hand, Lokpal would have jurisdiction over ALL NGOs, trusts, societies like Resident Welfare Associations(RWAs), big or small, whether registered or unregistered, whether they receive government funding or not, up to the village level! For instance, consider a group of citizens that uncovers corruption of the Sarpanch and Block Development officer (BDO) in a village. The government's Lokpal can't take any action against the Sarpanch or BDO but it CAN lock up the group of HONEST active CITIZENS. Each and every association, like Resident Welfare Associations, Market Associations, even your neighborhood committees that organize festivals like Durga Puja, Ramlila, etc. would be under the purview of Lokpal. While there is no disagreement that the rot of corruption is also afflicting many societies, associations and NGOs, there already exists a plethora of laws like the Trust Act, Societies Act, FCRA, etc. to monitor them. Lokpal was originally intended for checking corruption in public servants. Regardless, if it is being extended to all associations of civil society, then why shouldn't it also cover all companies, businesses, political parties, and media houses?

Government's Lokpal Provides Greater Protection to Corrupt!

Provisions in the government's Lokpal Bill heavily favour corrupt public servants. Under this bill, a public servant accused of corruption is allowed to turn around and file a lawsuit against the complainant accusing him of filing a frivolous complaint. The government will provide a free advocate to the accused to help prove the citizen was wrong, while the citizen has to fend for himself. If the complaint proves to be frivolous, the minimum sentence FOR THE CITIZEN is TWO YEARS. But if the corruption charges are proved, the minimum sentence for the public servant is just SIX MONTHS! Will then any citizen dare raise a voice against corruption? □□□