

## Civil society warn against hijacking house

Written by Administrator

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CENTRE FOR REFORMS DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE

The elected from two major political dispensations on Friday August 5th 2011 converged on the need for the presence of civil society groups but cautioned them against usurping the role and responsibilities of the constitutionally mandated institutions like Parliament. Similar opinion also emerged from the two leading editors and other participants on a seminar on civil society in the national Capital on Friday. While Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Arun Jaitley presented, broadly what could be termed as their party view points, the media was represented by Alok Mehta, editor-in-chief of Nai Duniya and Dr Chandan Mitra of The Pioneer. The viewpoint of civil society was put forth by Kiran Bedi. Delivering the inaugural address at a national symposium on 'Rise of Civil Society: Participative Democracy or Anarchist Dictatorship', organised by Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice (CRD&J), Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit said the civil society should act within the framework of law and they could not be a substitute to the elected representatives. Though she acknowledged the need of the civil society in bringing about a positive change in the society, she maintained that their role should be confined to "opinion making" and not "law making". "They (civil society) have a role to play but the civil society has limitations as it has no defined leadership. It cannot be a substitute to elected bodies nor can they claim to be representatives of entire country and society," Dikshit said.

Later in the evening, delivering the Valedictory address, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Arun Jaitley said, "In recent years, we are witnessing a wave of what can be described as a civil society fundamentalism."

Making it clear that he was not against civil society activism, and Smt Reva Nayyar Jaitley said, "From role of campaigner and crusader, a megalomania has set in (civil society activists) of wanting to run the system." Jaitley added that the reason for the sudden keenness to run the system by civil society activists probably stemmed from an awkward power structure that "we have in our country today where there is constitutional authority, which is not in a position to call the shots."

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Kiran Bedi, the retired IPS officer and prominent member of the Anna Hazare group, however, claimed that the government lacked will power to fight corruption. "The issues of Adarsh Housing Society Scam, 2G Spectrum Scam and irregularities in conduct of the Commonwealth Games were first raised in October last year but no action has been taken till now. All our demands including registration of FIRs in corruption cases and live recording of the draft committee's proceedings were turned down by the government. Their inaction to our repeated petitions prompted us to take the fight to the streets. Even Anna Hazare's proposed fast from August 16 was unavoidable," She said.

One of the most outspoken advocates of Jan Lokpal, Bedi sought to justify the referendum conducted in Chandni Chowk constituency saying there was nothing illegal or irregular. "We also asked Kapil Sibal to hold an open meeting in his constituency (Chandni Chowk) and let people decide on the government's Lokpal Bill but he refused. The referendum conducted by us was based on the questionnaire drafted by psephologist Yogendra Yadav and that 85 percent people were against the government's draft bill," Bedi said. She rued that due to government's apathy towards serious issues people lost trust in the government and the system. The Magsaysay Award winner, however, appreciated the functioning of the Bhagidari scheme by Delhi Government and stressed upon the need of its replication at national level and in all state governments while giving a detailed account of rise of civil society in present context.

Dikshit, who was lauded for her government's Bhagidari initiative of consulting civil society, said public participation helped in understanding and meeting the demands of all sections of society. However, she stressed that any change that needs to be brought about, should be done by the elected lawmakers. "In a democracy, if a set up needs to be changed, it needs to be done by the parliament duly elected by the people. Others have the right to say, but no one has the right to override Parliament, they can though overthrow it every five years," she said.

Putting forth his point forcefully, Jaitley pointed that it was "NAC which started the epidemic" pushing the civil society into the role of decision makers. "The present ruling establishment thought it was a great model to have a division of responsibility whereby one runs the political system and gets the votes while you do the day-to-day administration. It was as part of this division of responsibility that the National Advisory Council was set up and civil society campaigners were brought in to run it. It suddenly acquired access to ears that were more powerful than the government and the prime minister. So a civil society which was supposed to be a campaigner and a crusader suddenly acquired the power to decide and nobody had the authority to question it," he said adding that what had happened in the government (with NAC) had now happened in the country.

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Others who presented there view points in the day long symposium included Reva Nayyar, chairperson CFM and Bal-Sahyog, Taiwan Ambassador Wenchyi Ong, former Delhi University Professor Subrata Mukherjee, Associate Editor of The Pioneer and Founder President CRD&J Sidharth Mishra and Founder-Trustee InvestCare Foundation Ajit Sinha.