

Odisha's civil society wants to piggyback Anna Hazare for brand building (www.bizodisha.com)

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Odisha's civil society gears up to bring anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare to mobilize public opinion on the issue of corruption and anti-displacement movement. However, Anna Hazare starting his two days Rajasthan tour from July 30th is non-committal about his visit to Odisha. His team is studying the possible impact of his visit to Odisha from various angles.

In fact, a number of organizations and activists have approached Anna Hazare to visit Odisha. The latest one to approach the Hazare Team was Orissa Nagrik Samaj (ONAS) whose two members had been to New Delhi for an interaction on July 6-7, 2011 with a proposal for holding a parallel dharna at Bhubaneswar while Anna Hazare will sit for a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar from August 16, 2011 to press the Union government to introduce Jan Lokpal Bill immediately in Parliament.

Dr Bhaban Prakash, the face of ONAS, along with other two members of the team did also hold a discussion with Arvind Kejriwal and others of India Against Corruption (IAC) requesting them to bring Anna Hazare to Odisha under the banner of ONAS. Their plea was that the ONAS with Anna's blessings would be able to launch an effective campaign against the State Government now plagued by a slew of scams and anti-displacement agitations like Posco.

However, unlike in the past, both the sides were accommodative on the issue of banner because of their own internal compulsions. IAC this time wants to keep its forum open for smaller groups to get associated under their respective banners with a view to garner a larger canvass at national level, because it is right now undergoing a tough time due to the visibly dampened spirit of the Anna Hazare bandwagon.

Though the national media still extensively covers happenings around the negotiations between IAC and the Union government over the Bill, the immense craze noticed earlier among the cross-sections of people for the Anna-led anti-corruption movement in New Delhi and elsewhere across the country has dipped sharply as a result of some unexpected developments, particularly in the wake of the government's midnight crackdown on the yogaguru Baba Ramdev and his numerous followers who were on a mass Dharna at Ramlila Maidan, New Delhi in the first week of June last on the demand for the recovery of black money stashed abroad. Besides, the Draft Jan Lokpal Bill had also come in for sharp criticism by some experts and analysts for it lacked in coherence between what its votaries publicly professed and what its text actually contained.

That apart, scathing attack by the UPA leaders like Digvijay Singh on the credibility of some stalwarts of Hazare team like Prashant Bhushan and Shanti Bhushan has also slighted the great dream of the people around the draft Bill. In the process, the government could also successfully fan out a feeler among the people that there were black sheeps in the civil society too.

Emboldened by the disintegration of Baba Ramdev campaign at New Delhi, the Union government seems to have made up its mind not to issue any permission to Anna Hazare for holding his coming Dharna at Jantar Mantar. Both the sides seem to be locked in a confrontationist mode, which infuses the common man with a fear of state reprisal and thereby deters him away from solidarising with Anna brigade again this time.

All the above factors spur the IAC team to accommodate banners of all hues within their amorphous fold to regain their lost sheen in the coming show-down against the government.

ONAS too is facing similar compulsions in Odisha, on account of which it decides not to stick to a rigid policy on the issue of whose banner shall be used to float the Orissa chapter of Anna Hazare campaign against corruption. Its sole concern at the moment is to re-build its bruised image in the wake of the recent controversy around the ONAS sponsored Orissa Draft Bill on time bound delivery of public services. This draft bill was subject to a scathing attack successively from Chitta Ranjan Behera and Pradeep Pradhan on various grounds.

Chitta Ranjan Behera, a legal and political expert, relying on the weird text of the draft Bill itself, had conclusively proved that the draft bill floated by ONAS was a copy of Delhi (Right of Citizen to Time Bound Delivery of Services) Act, 2011, which is not yet enforced. Besides, it lacked in the proactive and pro-people provisions of the corresponding Acts enforced in MP and Bihar.

Soon afterwards, the known RTI activist Pradip Pradhan, who had initially supported the ONAS move to propose such a Bill for Odisha, did however join the issue by revising his earlier stance. He circulated an open letter dated 11 July 2011, where he squarely criticized Dr Bhagban Prakash for his `undemocratic and authoritarian' style of functioning as reflected in his arbitrary manner of drafting and re-drafting the bill and releasing it in the public domain without taking the help of any drafting panel consisting of subject experts.

Such serial attacks in the e-platforms greatly told upon the clout and credibility of Dr Prakash and ONAS to a great extent. They were also not prepared to counter the specific points of criticism raised by the above duo.

In this backdrop, ONAS is looking for an opportunity to revive its lost face. It is therefore not strange at all that they are banking on Anna Hazare to pay his visit to the state under their banner.

However, Anna Hazare's team-members located at Ralegaon Siddhi are cautiously moving this time. They are into a reality-check on all the issues. They have scheduled Anna's visit to Rajasthan on July 30-31, 2011 and will decide his further tour-plan based only after his medical check-up is held in the first week of August. Till then, all the activists and organizations have to wait for a favorable health report of Anna Hazare.

The office bearers of Anna Hazare's outfit at Ralegaon Siddhi will ensure that Anna Hazare does not face any health problem before he sits for a hunger strike on August 16, 2011 at Jantar Mantar.

Moreover, the activists and organizations of Odisha ought to remember that Anna Hazare's advice in April that the people of Odisha should wage their own battle against corruption instead of banking on him. He suggested them to shun dependence on any leader from outside in fighting against unlimited scams taking place within the state.

Under the circumstances, one needs to watch and see whether the civil society groups of Odisha heed the wise counsel of Anna to launch the campaign against corruption on their own or they will still wait for his arrival to the state on some uncertain date in future to flag it off.

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