

**KRIA Katte Core Group on Advocacy & Publicity
- Meeting with DPAR on 10th December 2004**

Minutes of the meeting compiled by Mr. Somasekhar V.K-Grahak Shakti with inputs from Anu Rao & Palyam Suresh.

Gist of the meetings we had with Mr. M.N. Acharya IAS –Principal Secretary –DP AR (AR) in the morning 11.00 am to 01.00 p.m

Members present:

- Ms. Anu Rao – PAC
- Mr. Somasekhar V.K-Grahak Shakti
- Mr. P. Suresh, Consultant (Joined later)
- Ms. Jaishree Ravindra-Grahak Shakti
- Ms. Sindhu Naik- was present initially but had to leave for another appointment.

The meeting started very cordially and Mr. Acharya listened to our brief about the KRIA Katte and how it was evolved. The progress made so far including the symposium and also meeting the Chief Secretary and presenting a memorandum on the deliberations.

Subsequent developments that have taken place in the Courts and also our experience from our regular meetings etc.

He gave an opportunity for each one of us to present our views and heard us patiently. He then clearly mentioned that the portfolio of `Public grievance' was not with him and he does not monitor its implementation any longer. However, training and other related matters including the reference, opinions sought by Chief Secretary are still continuing.

He was of the opinion that any information that relates to the concerned department should not be a problem for sharing. However those that are `acquired' by them during their course of work and not generated by them should be got from the main source, which put in effort to obtain that information. He said this kind of information should be available and cannot be suppressed. Of course, it is the duty of the CA to communicate this to the citizen and also to inform citizens as to which agency they can obtain the information from. However, expert opinion and specialised reports, which are almost like patents and may divulge lot of valuable information obtained by paying heavily should not be made freely available. Citizens, he felt should be made to pay the same amount that the government agency in question paid to procure these expensive documents. He took pains to illustrate the reasoning behind his views.

He also mentioned that he had already given his own suggestions to the government on strengthening KRIA, which included a) if AAs are not notified, citizens should be able to appeal against a CA to the officer who sanctions him/her leave. This would prevent confusion about AAs b) citizens must pay a reasonable price to procure documents that the government had also paid for (as mentioned in the previous para) c) if citizens wish to reproduce information procured by the government, they must be bound by copyright laws and mention the original source d) appeals that are not responded to automatically reach the KAT [as suggested in our memorandum]. Further he stated that somebody in our group was provided all details regarding these suggestions and he couldn't recollect the gentlemen. He said they were explained in that note and he was not able to lay his hands on it now.

He was very proactive and cited the information reported in a magazine that nothing is so secretive these days and everything is available freely. He also mentioned that people do not really know what to ask and how to find information. He gave the example of a journalist who tried to look for some information without actually being able to pin point his needs. So the person wanting information also must be precise and work on some specific method to obtain them.

We clearly stated that in the case of those, whom we represent, the idea was not to do any wild goose chase but with well meaning intentions of setting right the problems. We also explained that the nature of issues that has been raised or mostly civic and within the domain of public knowledge. But nevertheless, we did emphasize that by closer interaction the intention and also elements trying to misuse the Act can be exposed.

We also offered our services to work closely in their training programmes and he readily agreed. We sought the course material and method of training adopted and he was readily forthcoming. Asking us to visit their training institute situated in various places. He asked us to go there and study the content and if necessary suggest suitable changes and he was willing to consider them. In fact, he also told us that we could take up some sessions in the course that were announced from time to time.

He cautioned us that there may be initial hiccups and reticence but we should pursue with our goal. To put it in his words: If people come to know that you're 'vegetarians' and will not eat them up, they should oblige.

We expressed our view that we wanted to strengthen KRIA as it has evolved as one of the best legislations in our Country and inspite of some handicap and last minute changes. Further we also told him that the spirit of the Law has not been understood properly and officials are still interpreting them to the letter. He agreed that a change of mindset was needed and it is one of the tasks that they have on mind. He therefore suggested that one of the things that we must press for in trainings is "attitudinal change" – i.e. teach government staff on how to examine the Act and be people-friendly about it.

In conclusion, we broadly suggested the following points for their support and consideration: -

- To recommend an independent Commissioner to monitor KRI
- To set up a task force with participation of Civil society organisations to take it forward and work together.
- To involve civil society organisations in the training programmes.
- To remove the lacunae and misinterpretations that are creeping in with regard to penalties and departmental action.
- Greater awareness programmes.

He was not only enthusiastic in supporting all our initiatives, he also mentioned that we get involved in the training programmes straight away and work on it to give him a feedback.

He also agreed that unless punitive action is strengthened nothing much can be achieved.

The meeting ended on this positive note.

Mr. Acharya also fixed up our appointment with Mr. R. Suresh, Principal Secretary, DPAR (PG) and we were asked to meet him at 2 p.m

Gist of the meetings we had with Mr. Raghavan Suresh IAS –Principal Secretary –DP AR (PG) at 2 pm

Members present:

1. Mr. Somasekhar V.K-Grahak Shakti
2. Mr. P. Suresh, Consultant

We again began with a brief introduction about KRIA Katte and how it was evolved, progressed etc. The progress made so far including the symposium and also meeting the Chief Secretary and presenting a memorandum on the deliberations. We wanted to provide him the memorandum, which we had not taken but was faxed by Ms. Anu, but then he acknowledged the fact that he had already seen it as the file was marked to him by the Chief Secretary, He said that he had already sent his comments and was yet to hear from the CS. We then mentioned to him about further developments and the courts interventions that have taken place.

With regards the confusion about CA's and AA's, he responded that several circulars from his department had already been sent and action was being initiated in this regard. He called Mr. Satyamurthy, the concerned officer and confirmed about this. He then asked the official about

updating the data on their website and also instructed that he must do it immediately and provide us copies.

He also stated that World Bank was very keen that KRIA should be strengthened and gave us a copy of the note sent to them where in these details were mentioned.

He also mentioned that the Central Act was getting tough and about the Indian Express story of imprisonment for 5 yrs and so on. However, he lamented that the funds were not sufficient for doing more than what is being done at present.

He stated that disciplinary action was contemplated wherever the Act was not being implemented and cited the instances of the PU Board and other offices that was brought to his notice.

He stated that there was a feeling that FOIA would supersede KRIA and that should not be allowed. He said that on the other hand it must be strengthened into one Act allowing for coexistence. He said that provisions in the Act should be made in such a way that FOIA must be applicable to all Central Government establishments and KRIA for State.

He agreed that some of the Corporations, Public sector undertakings are yet to constitute the CA / AA and also notify them but they are under his attention.

He lamented that there was no proper mechanism for feedback and we were not informed about the developments, efforts made by them. He also felt sad that public response was abysmally poor. Mr. R. Suresh also mentioned was that being in charge of Grievances, he could certainly take up the matter appropriately if any of the applicants were not satisfied with the response/actions of the AA. He suggested that he should be informed if the AAs do not initiate any penal action on the CAs. This was a welcome gesture on his part.

In conclusion, we broadly repeated what was said earlier with Mr. Acharya: and requested him to put up a note if possible before we meet the Chief Secretary.

He agreed to the proposal. He also wanted us to constantly interact and continue the feedback. He said constant interaction would make it more useful and take it forward.

Unfortunately, Mr. Muniyellappa –Joint Secretary was not there when we met Mr. R. Suresh. However, we met him on our way back and discussed briefly about our purpose of visit. He too expressed his willingness to help in whatever way we needed stating that we were after all working for a public cause.

On the whole we noticed that the efforts by KRIA KATTE was known to them either through media and also some of our activists who visited them and sounded about this. These bureaucrats are posted with the latest information about our activities and are very cooperative, proactive. With constant interaction and exchanges they will be more understanding and this will build rapport that

could help the objectives of our group. Within ourselves we must try and inform others rather than be informed through these officials that somebody from our group met them.

We must develop a strategy to involve these officials in our programmes and also send them a letter after every meeting highlighting the points for their attention.
