

Anna Hazare fails to draw out Hyderabadis

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HYDERABAD: Anna Hazare, revered by millions as an icon against corruption in India, failed to muster support for his cause in Hyderabad as people stayed away from his first rally here, a fortnight after the launch of 'Jantantra Morcha', which is supposed to challenge the Congress-led government's policies.

Anti-graft crusader Hazare along with former army chief general V K Singh addressed a public meeting on Sunday which saw not more than a few hundred people, mostly India Against Corruption (IAC) activists or senior citizens turning up. The low attendance at Hazare's first public address in the city surprised many, which was a sharp contrast to the scenario about two years ago, when hordes of people thronged to listen to the Gandhian in Delhi and other parts of the country.

But the low turnout did not deter Hazare, who said he will tour the country relentlessly for the next one and half years to encourage people to be a part of his movement. "In this country of 120 crore people, I am confident that I will be successful in awakening at least 6 crore public. Once I accomplish this, it is enough to force the government to bring about the much-needed changes in the system," said Hazare.

Cheered by a few claps, Hazare said "With the introduction of Janlokpall Bill, corruption is minimized by 50%. Hence to completely root out corruption a complete reformation in the system is required." He said the emphasis will be on the introduction of electoral reforms and Gram Sabha Swaraj.

"By next elections we should have a right to reject option while voting. If we see that there are no good candidates to vote for, then we can reject them. If majority of the voters use this option then elections will be held again," he said. Anna said it would serve as a big lesson to all those who spend crores on elections and would not dare to do it again. He added that people who have cases registered against them should not be allowed to contest in elections.

"The gram sabhas are more important than Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Everyone who has attained the age of 18 years becomes a member of gram sabha and they should be given the power to decide how the money will be spent and should be allowed to take important decisions related to the village," Hazare said, amid cheers of his supporters.

Some of the locals said that the infighting within the party which saw a media briefing getting cancelled on Saturday might have resulted in IAC's failure to get more crowds on a Sunday. The AP Pollution Control Board managed to gather hundreds for a half marathon among other rallies. "The IAC seems to have several fragments now. People of Hyderabad are a bit disconnected with the whole movement," said S Raju, a local techie.

The meeting also saw some young supporters of Telangana trying to get Anna's stand on the separate state issue. "I have heard your slogans and I understand it," said Anna after the slogans started, but refrained from saying anything.

Former army chief major general V K Singh called upon the people to unite and be a part of Anna's movement. "The policies of the country have not helped the common man. Corruption is increasing and natural resources are being exploited. We should collectively fight this menace and bring about the change."