

Make it a six-pack democracy

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BANGALORE: Vote, and vote right. That's the advice B.Pac, short for Bangalore Political Action Committee, is giving Bangaloreans. India's only political action group formed by corporate heavyweights has begun a Vote Maadi movement, in tune with TOI's campaign to promote the vote in the May 5 assembly election. Headed by [Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw](#), supported by TV Mohandas Pai, and backed by NR Narayana Murthy, B.Pac plans to identify good candidates and endorse them. Through them, it hopes to improve governance and the citizens' quality of life. TOI interviewed the core team of B.Pac on their plans and programmes.

Q B.Pac aims to create awareness of our voting rights, besides endorsing a candidate. Is B.Pac talking down to citizens?

A Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, CMD, [Biocon](#), and B.Pac chairperson: Not really. Since Bangalore is revered as a den of the educated class with a high literacy rate and financial stability, it's unfortunate that people in the city, especially the youth, are still unaware of the importance of free and fair voting. B.Pac's job will be only to tell such people through various mediums to become responsible citizens. We will also motivate them to come out and vote, with the rider that they have no right to complain about poor governance or underdevelopment if they don't vote.

Q Isn't it undemocratic for B.Pac to influence a section of the electorate to vote a candidate they endorse?

A Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw: How will it be undemocratic if we're persuading voters to come out and vote? Though we're planning to endorse candidates, we will not force or compel anybody to vote those candidates. We will only play the role of catalyst, saying what's good and what's bad about candidates. Eventually, the final choice will be with the voters.

Q B.Pac is positioning itself as the citizen auditor. As governance becomes more complex, will such auditing be a full-time function?

A TV Mohandas Pai, chairman, Manipal Global Education: No, we're not for full-time auditing. Our aim is not to function like the [CAG](#) or any other government auditing organization. The basic idea is to evaluate government policies and give feedback to the public and let them decide on it. We have no intention of become auditors, but only the voice of citizens.

Q Are political parties taking you seriously?

A TV Mohandas Pai: So far, they have all responded positively. When we recently met [BJP](#) and Congress leaders to discuss our plans, they were not only receptive but also encouraged us to take it forward. JD(S) leader HD Deve Gowda was acquiescent to our idea and gave some valuable tips too. I think they do understand that we are non-adversarial and a group wanting to do good for society.

Q Voters today look for a candidate's ability to execute, more than anything else. How can this be defined and assessed in a perception poll? How will you tell a voter a candidate is votable?

A Harish Narsappa, lawyer and a founder of voluntary group Daksh: Voters should not measure the candidates' ability on the basis of funds he gets from the government for development work. They should measure the candidate on his/her responsiveness to the issues and concerns affecting people in the constituency. If a road is damaged, voters should gauge whether their representative has made enough noise to make the government aware. Whether the roads are repaired or not is a different issue, as it involves financial constraints and other issues which are not in the hands of an MLA.

Q B.Pac is planning to fund 10% of the maximum election expenditure of Rs 16 lakh for the candidates it endorses. Will it be sufficient considering the money being spent by major parties?

A Harish Narsappa: I agree it may not be sufficient, but at least it helps a candidate make some noise in the constituency. We'll be paying these candidates through cheques and are bound by the Election Commission's rules and regulations.

Q How would B.Pac draw first-time voters? Are they difficult to pull in?

A Nooraine Fazal, educationist and CEO of Inventure Academy: Social media platforms have become a notable venue for people to try to convince their friends to vote. We're using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to reach out and speak to them in their language. Slogans like 'Voting is Sexy' works with them. We are also encouraging them to get their names registered online and ensure they come out and vote. I'm sure the present generations understand the importance of voting and governance, they just need a push to go out and vote. It's difficult but not impossible.

Q This year's election falls on a weekend, and people tend to stay away. How can B.Pac change this?

A Ashwini Nachappa, former international athlete: The whole idea of B.Pac is to make people come out and vote -- be it a weekend, holiday season or festival. This time, we'll tell them -- you spare a weekend to vote if you want to enjoy your subsequent weekends. People are bound to choose a pleasure trip over voting. But this attitude should change if they want to enjoy a better quality of life in Bangalore or elsewhere.