

Press Release : Bangalore : 09 May 2009

Hundreds gather to protest Metro through Lakshman Rao boulevard and Lalbagh

Metro MD states realigning Metro track is a political decision

Hundreds, including children, women, elderly, and the young, gathered in the early hours of Saturday on Lakshman Rao boulevard to continue protests against the construction of Bangalore Metro through Lalbagh and Lakshman Rao Park. The protest organised by *Hasiru Usiru* coincided with a visit to the Lakshman Rao boulevard by Mr. Sivasailam, IAS, MD of Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd., which was facilitated by Mr. Vijaykumar, MLA (Jayanagar).

As Mr. Sivasailam and his team explained the impacts of the Metro project on Lakshman Rao park, many residents of Jayanagar and volunteers of *Hasiru Usiru* sought permission to raise questions. Distressingly they were shouted down and denied opportunity to interact with the Metro officials at this time. Disregarding fervent appeals to interact with those gathered at the protest site, the official team moved on to explain the features of the Metro running through Lakshman Rao boulevard to representatives of various civic association of Jayanagar.


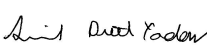

This egged the *Hasiru Usiru* protestors to intensify their demand that the Metro MD and his officials must return and respond to their concerns. With song and slogan, the protestors asserted that the Metro can be built without destroying parks. Initially reluctant, but finally relenting, the Mr. Sivasailam and his team along with Mr. Vijaykumar returned to address those gathered at the protest site, a gesture that was deeply appreciated by all.

A question was posed to Mr. Sivasailam why the Government has not explored constructing the southern reach of the Metro through an alternative alignment that runs through the Jayanagar shopping centre, thus completely avoiding the need to destroy precious heritage park zones. It was explained that this alternative alignment has been considered more viable in the Detailed Project Report of Bangalore Metro, as it also allows for expansion in future to Electronics city as well as Banashankari, and without destroying portions of Lalbagh and Lakshman Rao Park. Mr. Sivasailam refused to get into a debate on the alignment issue claiming that his agency was only implementing the project and the alignment was a decision of the Government. He stated that the Metro was implementing the project legally as it was approved by the Cabinet, but this was greeted by howls of protest. People demanded public accountability and wanted to know why the Government subversively chose to issue an Ordinance to take portions of Lalbagh, K. R. Road park and Lakshman Rao park, when this issue should have first been debated threadbare in the Assembly and in public. Mr. Sivasailam refused to comment on this issue as well.

Mr. Vijaykumar spoke and clarified that the issue is open to debate and he would do everything within his means to represent the grievances of the public at any level including with the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Karnataka. He also urged the public to visit the Metro office and go through any document to understand the implications of the project.

Prof. B. K. Chandrashekar, former Chairman of the Karnataka Legislative Council, came to the spot and addressed the gathering. He stated that with due respects to the Chief Minister, it was deeply distressing that Mr. Yeddyurappa had recently stated that there would not be any review of this alignment despite growing protests. Prof. Chandrashekar said this was unfortunate as the Chief Minister is the highest appellate authority for people to raise their grievance and his door should not be shut on them. He also expressed concern that such a critical issue had never been discussed threadbare in the Assembly or Council to the best of his knowledge. He also said that a mass transit system was very much required for Bangalore, and the present mess is a result of the irresponsibility of various governments not taking timely steps over the past two decades.

Hasiru Usiru will continue its protests and demand re-routing the Metro away from Lalbagh and Lakshman Rao parks. A collective decision was taken to approach the Hon'ble Chief Minister and convince him that it is possible to save precious heritage parks and also build the Metro progressively along the alternative alignment through Jayanagar's commercial complex and bus stand region.

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