

Improving Public Governance in Real Terms

A seminar on Corporate Governance and Citizens was held at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore on August 3, 2016. Keynote address was delivered by Gen. Bikram Singh, former Chief of Indian Army. He said, “Comprehensive education, e-governance and accountability can combat corruption, and usher in Public Governance based on ethical and moral values.”

Going deep into the root of present day unethical professional practices in governance, Gen. Bikram Singh said that “lack of ability to enforce regulatory frame work is the main culprit.” In spite of centuries old legacy of great ethical values, many of those engaged in public governance today fall prey to impulses at crucial decision making points, whether at personal level or at professional level. Even when the people of India were politically and economically in slaves format under foreign rules, personal integrity and moral values coupled with simple life style were part of the living mode in the society at large. From bottom to top, there was an aura of simple living and high thinking at every level. The vagaries of impulsive thoughts were checkmated by the quality of life and the general inclination of the people to follow ethical rules of life.

Explaining the modern day irony, he said, “unfortunately, once the country got political freedom in 1947, ethical and moral values began to get replaced with the urge to grow big outwardly or materialistically. This may be described as a

legacy of the top to bottom governance style. Chain of commands from the pyramid up to bottom level of public administration began to get loosened. International study on corruption, moral and ethical values put India in the 73rd place out of 145 countries. The study also shows that 62% of Indians have given bribe.”

Moving to solutions for achieving positive results, Gen. Bikram Singh emphasized on raising up the inherent quality of integrity, quoting certain examples of the Indian Army’s procedures such as:

- a) Steps to strengthen integrity and moral values in the cadre till it forms a habit;
- b) Guiding at all levels of training, not to fall prey for impulses. This is to be achieved through the will power of the trainees.

He concluded by reminding the erudite audience of the management profession, Gandhiji’s concept of governance starting from the village to the Parliament. “If that bottom-up governance style embedded with simple living value system of the village, the present day malady of Public Governance can be changed, taking independent India to the galaxy among the comity of nations.”

Other speakers were Dr. H.R. Nagendra, President, S.Vyasa, a world class Yoga Training Centre, Sri V.K. Viswanathan, Chairman, Bosch Ltd., and Sri Allen C.A. Pereira, Banker Extraordinaire.

Dr. Nagendra, Padmashree Awardee, shared his views on traditional education that focused on training the mind to increase will power and adhere to values, integrity, honesty, and transparency. “There are two dimensions to mastering the mind. One dimension that we have mastered is intelligence but we are yet to learn the power of silence and introspection. Both dimensions need to be incorporated in our current education system, with the help of yoga. When there is conflict in the mind, both dimensions help one adhere to values.”

The third panellist, Sri. V.K. Viswanathan, Chairman, Bosch Ltd., remarked that labour, land, skills and innovation could be bought, but not values. “It is, therefore, important to nurture, institutionalize and enforce values. There is a very thin line between flexibility and compromise. In the fast moving world, in order to succeed, we need to be flexible but we must not compromise on our values, since success achieved through compromising values will not last long,” he explained.

Mr. Allen C.A. Pereira, quoting well-known writer Rudyard Kipling said that, “I

keep six honest serving men/ They taught me all I knew/ Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who.” He went on talking of the Rotary 4-way Test and suggested that when in conflict, one must take the test and ask oneself: ‘Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? And will it be beneficial to all concerned?’ He also emphasized the importance of having an Ethical Board of Directors in an organisation.

Mr. Pereira further pointed out that in a rule-based system, people would find ways to break or circumvent rules. He said a principle-based system could influence desired outcomes. “Along with punishing unethical behaviour, there is a need for recognizing good ethical behaviour as well,” he added.

Mr. Monoj Chakravarthi, Chief Operating Officer, welcomed the gathering. Dr. Charan Singh, RBI Chair Professor of Economics at IIM(B) set the context of the discussion and anchored it.

A.V. Balakrishnan



Speakers on the dais (left to right): V.K. Viswanathan, Gen. Bikram Singh, Prof. Charan Singh (moderator) Dr. Nagendra and Allen Pereira