



Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce

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Report on the “Interactive Session with Mr. N. Gopaldaswami, IAS, former Chief Election Commissioner of India” held on December 7, 2010

Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce organized an Interactive Session with Mr. N. Gopaldaswami, former Chief Election Commissioner of India on Tuesday December 7, 2010. The session opened with an introductory remark by Mr. K R Girish, Immediate Past President, BCIC who exulted on the recent Bihar election as a ray of hope for the Indian democracy to revitalize itself for good governance.

"Bihar is a reference point", Mr. Girish said and added that amidst the despondency of the interminable scams and vitiated political atmosphere in the country, the Eastern State's recent assertion of its preference for development through the ballot box should pave the way for future politics to emphasize its priority for development and growth. Bihar has broken from its past rubric of caste and clannish politics to revive the State's fortune for the better, he said.

Speaking on "Elections in India and Democracy" Mr. Gopaldaswami, former Chief Election Commissioner said the Election Commission has been able to reduce the malpractices of booth capturing by using muscle power (by deploying a strong posse of security forces) to blunt the muscle power of political class. But it cannot match the money power of the political establishment. He however asserted that it was only through exercising adult franchise that the polity could be cleansed.

He said despite several measures taken by the Election Commission and the government, which included introduction of Electronic Voting Machines, encouraging transparency in donation of funds to political parties by extending tax exemption to donors and mandatory registration of political parties to discourage 'floor crossings', one of the key elements encouraging corruption and deterioration in governance, Indian polity was yet to come break free the vitiated atmosphere.

Lamenting the apathy of urban voters, particularly the younger generation, Mr. Gopaldaswami felt that it was ultimately the civil society which should play the crucial role in eliminating the profligacy of politicians and bureaucracy by casting their votes without fail.

The former CEC felt that citizens should always uphold their integrity and use the Right to Information extensively. He emphasized that one should never sacrifice one's conscience and must vote. With so many discretionary decisions controlling the political and economic life of India, it was time that these decisions were made public. People should also assert their right to demand to know the decisions, he further added.



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Uphold integrity, use RTI: Former CEC

Prahlad Rao

With so many discretionary decisions controlling the political and economic life of India, it was time that these decisions were made public.

This suggestion of N Gopalswami, the former chief election commissioner (CEC), made on Tuesday, needs to be seen in the backdrop of what is happening in Karnataka (allocation of sites, denotification and land transfers) and at national level (Adarsh scam and 2G scam).

He said that the incidents in Karnataka were nothing new. In the northern states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, the abuse of discretionary powers was rampant. At least in Karnataka, some politicians have been decent



Abuse of discretionary power is rampant in the North. At least in Karnataka, politicians are trying to defend the indefensible.

N Gopalswami, Former CEC

enough to admit, and are trying to defend the indefensible, Gopalswami said.

The former CEC was speaking at an interactive session on 'elections and democracy' organised by the Bangalore Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Gopalswami, clearly distressed at the state of Indian democracy, said that elections are the biggest generators of black money in India. The Election Commission has been able to reduce the mal-

practices of booth capturing by using muscle power to subdue the muscle power of political class. But it cannot match the money power of the political establishment. Multi-phase polling was required to deploy police force and this was evident even in the recent Bihar elections, Gopalswami said.

He also traced the evolution of the model code of conduct, which is enforced in the polling season, and said that India was only one among the

150 odd democratic nations to have such a code.

The code was enacted in 1960 but attained a moral force in the 1990s. Karnataka is currently under the code of conduct regime as local body election dates were announced on Monday.

On the return of investment in politics, Gopalswami's talk threw light on the fact that Karnataka was the most profitable state. Its ministers' assets have grown by a stupendous 797% in the last few years.

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Photos of the events



