

Third Session: Corruption and Governance

We had the third session of Vishleshan on 29th Jan, 2014. The speaker was Dr. Arvind Virmani, an eminent personality. He has served as the principal advisor to the government, member of planning commission, chief economic advisor to the Ministry of Finance and has also represented India at the IMF (International Monetary Fund). He has had the reputation of being an honest bureaucrat.

According to the speaker, the problem of corruption primarily started with the license permit quota raj system which gave the power in the hands of the government officials to give approval or green signal to entrepreneurs to start their venture or to be able to execute a project. He insisted that there should be systemic reforms which should translate the role of the government from the one who carries out business to one who only regulates it and not “control” it.

Government's over extended leviathan

The government has tried to take under its ambit a large range of subjects like policy, programs, art culture and enterprises. According to the speaker the role of government is just to make laws and ensure their strict and consistent implementation so that all the activities in the economic and political sphere of the economy run smoothly.

Other major flaw that he encountered with the governance was that there are new laws being implemented every now and then to resolve existing issues but the manpower needed to implement these laws is not increased, which means we have more laws to ensure safety but the same number of police officials as before, we have more health policy but doctors haven't increased, and each city has almost 250-300 welfare programmes under just one district magistrate(DM)—all this clearly proves why new laws can't be implemented efficiently and thus there is no visible improvement.

Policy and systemic reforms

According to the speaker all the shares of the public sector units should be sold to the private companies as they are more efficient. Natural resources like coal and minerals should be auctioned in the market as the prices of these resources can be known only by the “willingness to pay”.

There should be reforms in the police such that the onus of investigation lies on another department as the police officials have no incentive to do so. There should be reforms in the judicial wing as well so that a person is not allowed to appeal so many times to the higher court when judgement is pronounced against him. The process of appointments should be more transparent. A witness who is caught giving false statement should be persecuted.

In a nutshell, he advocated an urgent need to innovate ideas that will eliminate corruption from every level of governance.

They all enlightened us with their erudition and cognizance. During their visit, they inspired us in more ways than one.