

Krishan Kant

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The President said that more we talk of small government, downsizing, privatization, automation, e-governance and so on, the more the criticality of good governance emerges into focus. In fact, the importance of public administration as the mediator between the people and state, and between the people and business, has never been more pronounced than it is now, in this era of fast-paced liberalization and small government.

He observed that globalization has become synonymous with an era of receding state. In this new era, the role and the goal of state are fast changing, bringing it closer to the people, as an active facilitator. Today good governance is understood essentially in a generic sense which includes, among other things, forging sustainable partnerships between the administration, the private sector, the voluntary sector and the people. Empowering people, especially the marginalized and the poor, broadening people's

*Summary of the address

participation, and developing their power are seen as certain critical elements of good governance. One important feature of this scheme is that the people have moved from the periphery to the rim, from the margin to centre, and become the means, as well as the ends, of development.

Today, in fact, there is a path-breaking change taking place in public administration—a shift from the classical bureaucratic model of public organisation to an administrative system characterized by innovation, people-centeredness, team work, quality in management and superior service and delivery. This shift is as much evolutionary as it is due to the restraining inadequacies of the administrative system; its delays and sloth, its corruption, incompetence and apathy. There is a belief that the system is not sufficiently sensitive to the people's needs and their aspirations and hardly contributes to capacity development. Protected indifference to people's problems projects a negative profile of the Administration.

There is need to enhance our administration's depth and sharpen its focus. People today expect and demand tangible performance from the administration and demand it to cater to the felt-needs of the community. The traditional 'top-down' approach, where the Administration decides for the people, has been rightly criticized as being unresponsive. Empowerment of the community, through a 'bottom-up' approach, can bridge the hiatus between the Administration and the people. In a democracy, unless governance is enhanced by the people's active and willing participation, its credibility would be in question and its reach restrained. People's confidence in the Administration is key to efficient and effective governance.

As a mature democracy, we are better placed to reap the advantage of the deep linkage between democracy, empowerment and good governance. The "deepening of democracy", as reflected in the spread of the democratic idea, the rule of law, the freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary, has contributed immensely to the empowerment of the people. Conversely, empowerment of people has strengthened democracy. If people are sovereign in a democracy, then administration has to remain

steadfastly and vigilantly committed to the people's concerns. This is another key element of good governance.

We shall be in error, if we believe that good governance is an advantage only for the people. Good governance is good for the government as well as to its image and the image of its functionaries. In several studies and recommendations of international bodies, it has been pointed out that good governance is a crucial factor in promoting higher levels of economic growth. A recent study even went to the extent of suggesting that India could add a good two per cent to its GDP only by improving governance and the processes of decision-making. Accountability is not only an instrument of asserting people's sovereignty, but also a means of promoting good governance. Democratic decentralisation, devolution and delegation of powers and reduced bureaucratization do not just make democracy better, they also measurably improve administration's performance.

Shri Krishan Kant further said that this idea has been taken seriously in some states in the country but, he is afraid, the right mix of the various inputs for good governance is yet to emerge. There are states, which have extensively used information technology to improve governance, but are slow in democratic decentralization. There are other states, which score high in democratic decentralization, but are slow to take advantage of the information technologies and newer methods of governance. Institutes, like IIPA, can play an important role in sensitizing the state governments, about how to bring the right mix of various inputs of good governance for optimal results.

He further mentioned that in a federal country like ours, where the standards of administration and other parameters of governance may vary widely, it is all the more necessary that states receive dependable and workable advice from Institutes like ours, about improving governance. Recently, certain states in our country were struck by natural calamities, such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones, and suffered destruction on a very large scale. It was quite a revelation, how these states handled these challenges.

There was vast difference in the manner in which they set out to perform their tasks and the efficiency with which these tasks were handled. But one thing that stood out was that the states with a reputation for efficiency and high levels of performance acquitted themselves a lot better than the others, when faced with such sudden and daunting crises. This only heightens the need for more uniform standards of good governance all over the country. A Civil Servant character in the popular serial 'Yes, Prime Minister', when asked to coin a slogan for the government, suggested tongue-in cheek "Red tape bonds the nation". Bureaucratism may have several demerits, but it cannot be faulted for its sense of equality; it treats everyone equally badly. He believed that a drive for good governance must begin with taking the shine off the red tape. He expected that the IIPA to lead the way and its task appears to be cut out for us.