

“At the outset, let me pay my humble tributes to former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 97th birth anniversary today. One of the tallest Indian leaders ever and one of the most glittering stars of our political firmament, the charismatic former Prime Minister was an outstanding parliamentarian, able administrator, poet, writer, orator par excellence and above all, a great human being.

Atalji was an exemplary champion of consensual politics, who, throughout his active political life demonstrated this spirit of understanding and give and take. A reformist with farsighted vision, his tenure will always be remembered for ushering in connectivity revolution and citizen-centric governance. I am happy to know that a week-long ‘Good Governance Week’ is being observed since December 20th, 2021.

Atal Ji strongly believed in placing people at the centre of the development agenda and demonstrated how democracy can be strengthened through good governance in a people-centric mode.

Governance is the process by which decisions are taken and the process of their implementation. Decisions are taken and implemented through an elaborate institutional mechanism to serve the needs of the society. Ultimately, governance is aimed at improving the quality of life of the people and enabling them meet their hopes and aspirations. Good governance is therefore, a measure of effective delivery of goods and services of all kind that matter for the people. Timely and delivery of quality goods and services is the crux of good governance.

Good governance enhances the trust and confidence of the people in the administration and brings them together. Large sections of the people feel that they are at the mercy of the government babus even though the citizens are supposed to be the masters for whose service the administrative structures are conceived. This is a manifestation of the governance deficit. Such a deficit is a marker of the low credibility of administrative agencies and jeopardizes the goal of socio-economic advancement besides alienating the people from participatory governance. Governance deficit at the cutting edge of delivery of services like at the level of State governments and local bodies is a particular matter of concern and needs to be addressed on priority.

Governance should inspire confidence among the people. Good governance catalyses economic growth by enhancing the confidence of the investors. Investment flow is directly related to the quality of decision making and the culture of execution of projects. Inordinate delays and the attendant cost and time overruns speak poorly of governance. Our country has fared poorly in this regard for too long a period. Determined efforts have been launched in recent years to address this menace.

At the centre, execution of large scale projects languishing for several years is being regularly monitored at the highest level and this has made a huge difference. Introduction of Direct Benefits Transfer has resulted in substantial saving of precious resources. Opening of back accounts on a large scale is ensuring financial inclusion. Technology is being harnessed like never before to redesign the architecture of governance with visible impacts on transparency and accountability. Citizen participation in decision making and governance is being promoted through technology adoption. Such initiatives need to be adopted at the second and third tiers of governance.

Citizens’ Charters prescribing time frames for delivery of services by ensuring timely decision making would help in improving the quality of governance. Some efforts were initiated in this regard but are still to be placed on a firm pedestal. Ease of Doing Business and Ease of Living are dependent on the quality and culture of governance.

Democracy is all about governance with the participation of the people in it through elected representatives. Having fought for freedom for ‘Swaraj’, the people of our country opted for democracy in one single stroke so that our people can govern themselves through the means of parliamentary democracy. This implies that the people have vested the responsibility of ensuring good governance for their benefit in the legislatures. The representative, deliberative and oversight functions of our legislatures flow from the mandate of the people.

But unfortunately, at times our Parliament and State legislatures are betraying the trust imposed in them by the people. Legislatures are the prime vehicles of good governance by discussing in detail the problems faced by the people; making necessary laws to remove hurdles to socio-economic development and ensuring the accountability of the executive to the people. But the functioning of our legislatures is falling below the expectations and is a matter of concern. In the 75th year of our Independence, we find our nation lagging behind some of the countries in the region who were behind us in the middle of the last century. To make up for the missed time and opportunities, our legislatures need to function differently.

The function of ensuring the accountability of the executive to the people by the elected representatives has a lot to do with ensuring good governance. Rules of Procedure of the legislatures offer a variety of instruments to effectively discharge this important oversight function. These include; Question Hour, Short Duration Discussions, Calling Attention Notices, debates on Bills, Motion of Thanks to the Address of President and Governors etc.

These instruments enable the MPs and MLAs to take the governments to task for omissions and commissions in all matters of governance including implementation of policies, execution of various welfare and development projects etc. If the functioning of the legislatures is derailed by persistent disruptions and forced adjournments, this important accountability function is seriously compromised.

Dysfunctional legislatures lead to compromised governance as there would be no fear among the executive of being questioned in the legislatures. Steady decline in the sittings of legislatures and loss of functional time due to disruptions take the pressure off the executive and the pattern of such disruptions would promote the habit of carelessness among the executive with serious implications.

The point is very simple. If an MP or MLA does not discharge functions effectively, he or she would have no moral right to question the executive at various levels. We are aware of the nexus between the politicians and officers and other administrative personal at various levels that results in compromised governance. It is the poor and weaker sections that are the worst sufferers of such poor governance.

Talking about the oversight function of the legislatures, Rajya Sabha has lost about 61% of the total Question Hour time due to disruptions during the just concluded winter session. This is serious abdication of the important oversight function of the House.

The point that I like to stress on is that good governance needs good legislatures doing justice to all the three functions that I have earlier referred to. Good legislatures need good legislators who live to the expectations of the people and give their best to do justice to the trust reposed in them by the people. The need of the hour is such ideal legislators.

Good governance is too serious a matter to be taken lightly. Our country has been paying a heavy price due to governance deficit. In the 75th year of Independence, we need to take a solemn pledge to ensure good governance.

That is the befitting tribute we can pay to the late Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary as he dreamt of such good governance and strived to ensure it in various capacities as a parliamentarian, minister and Prime Minister.

Thank You!”