

DECCAN HERALD



M N Vidyashankar, former additional chief secretary, Prof P S Jayaramu, Chairperson of Political Science Department, Bangalore University, Dr Sandeep Shastri, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Jain University and K N Harikumar, former editor of *Deccan Herald* and *Prajavani* at a seminar on "Democracy, Citizens and Election in India" in City on Monday. DH PHOTO

Probe into malpractices should continue even after polls: Ex-CEO

BANGALORE: There is a need for electoral reforms that provide a framework for investigating malpractices even after the elections, said M N Vidyashankar, former chief electoral officer (CEO), here on Monday.

He was speaking at a one-day seminar on 'Democracy, Citizens and Elections in India,' organised by S Nijalingappa National Foundation and Department of Political Science, Bangalore University.

Stressing the need for amending laws to bring in electoral reforms, he said: "In a state (name not mentioned), the election commission had booked several cases against some of the candidates for malpractices. Unfortunately, it could not pursue the cases after elections, as the party that came to power decided in the Cabinet meeting to drop charges against these candidates."

Vidyashankar, who was CEO in Karnataka during the 2008 Assembly polls, said, however, there has been improvement in electoral process since the past several years. The Election Commission, when he was the CEO, had seized over Rs 82 crore, which was a record in the country. "We deposited to the treasury almost twice the amount of money spent by the State government for the elections. Usually, the State government spends Rs 45-50 crore on an election," he said.

He also cited several instances of poll-related irregularities which are difficult to trace sometimes. For example, he narrated, a candidate in Bangalore would give pens as gifts to voters, claiming his promise to voters is literacy. However, the pen would have a currency note of Rs 500 denomination in it instead of a refill.

Even if a complaint is lodged, it is difficult to prove the charges against the candidate. "We could establish that it belongs to him and booked him after we went through the number series of those currency notes," he said. In another instance, a candidate gave one gold earring to women voters, stating that another of the pair would be given if he wins.

Speaking on "Media and Elections" at the seminar, K N Harikumar, former editor, *Deccan Herald*, said there has been a decrease in poll-related violence in the recent elections.

"The kind of rigging, bullying and bogus voting common in the 1980s and 90s, has come down drastically. This is indeed an achievement," he said.

He also said the issue of exit poll should be left to the discretion of the media and there should not be any restriction.