

## Call for system to fund election campaigns



*L-R: **Sumantra Bose**, Professor of International and Comparative Politics, London School of Economics, UK; **M.V.Subbiah**, Retired Chairman, Murugappa Group; **Nikhil Kumar**, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha (Indian National Congress); **Samik Ghosh**, Principal, Shri Ram School; Moderator: **Kishan Rana**, Professor Emeritus, Indian Foreign Service Institute/Former Ambassador of India to Germany*

There is an urgent need to set up a system for funding electoral campaigns in India, bringing in both transparency and accountability in the process. This was the consensus that emerged at the session on 'The Plague of Corruption: Solutions to the Developing Country Syndrome' during Idea India 2008, being organized here by Aspen Institute India.

According to **Sumantra Bose, Professor of International and Comparative Politics, London School of Economics**, it was surprising that in a vibrant democracy like India's "there was no system to fund electoral campaigns. This is unique to India and this is the road to corruption." He said that this needs to be tackled on a priority basis, with the solution being distinctive for India as other models cannot be replicated. While doing so, he said, it has to be kept in mind that corruption means different things in different contexts.

Agreeing with Dr Bose on the need to have place systems for funding campaigns, **Mr Nikhil Kumar, Member of Parliament**, however, said that in the interim the cap on electoral expenditures must removed "Today, everybody realizes that these limits are non-enforceable and not realistic." At the same time,

all candidates must account for the funds / donations received as also the expenditure incurred.

He said that the corporate sector should again be allowed to fund political parties. Conceding that all efforts to stem corruption had not borne the desired fruit, Mr Kumar advocated a freer hand for the enforcement agencies, including the Central Vigilance Commission.

Speaking about corruption from a business perspective, **Mr M V Subbiah, former Chairman, Murugappa Group**, said that the key to checking corruption was to bring in greater transparency and accountability. In this regard, he cited the example of a local municipality in Tamil Nadu that had made the use of e-governance applications to deliver clean administration.

On his part, **Mr Samik Ghosh, Principal, Shri Ram Aravali School**, said that to tackle corruption, it was important that we first expose the younger generation to its ills. He said corruption did not only involve money but it also meant social corruption. This, according to him, was a bigger evil and it was for this reason that we should start from the schools.

Moderating the session, **Ambassador Kishan Rana, Professor Emeritus, Indian Foreign Service Institute**, said that one of the key reasons for greater corruption was that the distance between power wielders and the public is vast. "This gap needs to be bridged," he added.

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