Kalam: time has come to debate clemency issue

Seethalakshmi | TNN

Bangalore: India’s inspiration machine and former President of India APJ Abdul Kalam touches 80 next month. “I will be entering into my 81st orbit,” he said in his inimitable style. It was almost midnight when he sat down for an interview with The Times of India at the palatial VIP suite in Raj Bhavan. He just finished having his dinner – a glass of butter milk and a masala dosa. Excerpts:

Are you for clemency?
When I was the President, I suggested to Parliament that they must debate the issue. The time has come to do that. I cannot say yes or no to your question. As an individual, as Kalam, I feel that no human being has the power or right to take away the life of another. But as former President of India, I will say the country must debate the issue.

India is witnessing a massive movement against corruption. What are your views on the Lokpal and Anna Hazare? Will things change?
Ours is a beautiful country. The Anna Hazare movement was a communication channel for the entire country on a deep-rooted menace called corruption. But bringing in laws will put people in jail. That’s all. We need to have citizens with impeccable integrity only then will any law work.

Recently at Mussoorie, while addressing 150 new IAS probationers, I asked them to take an oath that they will work with integrity and succeed with integrity. A young IAS woman asked me what if the system around her and her superiors was corrupt. To that my reply was: There will be hurdles, you may not get good postings, you will be shunted out but then at the end of it, you would have to build a brand for yourself.

So all individuals should become a brand by themselves?
Yes. A brand of great integrity and purpose. Build a circle of integrity around you and don’t allow anyone to penetrate. When you eliminate the idea of ‘what can I get’ from each one’s mind, then we have handled the menace called corruption.

The law seems to be catching up with the corrupt. So is there hope?
Definitely. This country has a great future. We have gone through more difficult times. I am confident that the bad elements in the society will be eliminated sooner or later. If there is hope, it is here in India.

Have you paid or offered bribe anytime in your life?
Not once. I have worked for 50 years in government, including 20 years in Isro, another 20 years in DRDO and the remaining 10 years holding various positions. I have dealt with lots of money and power. I have not been approached for any wrongdoing. Like I said earlier, if the circle of integrity is firm around you, then no one will dare come near you. It’s a conviction that we have to make.

As someone who has been pushing for focus on education, do you think India will meet the Millennium Development Goals?

We are on the right path. But as I have always said merely producing literates is not enough. Is there righteousness in all those whom we educate? Literacy should be a mission with a purpose. That’s my belief and I am confident that India will achieve that.

Wheat export

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