

Shri H.D Deve Gowda, Former Prime Minister, India



Excerpts of a recent conversation with Shri. H. D Deve Gowda, Former Prime Minister of India and Former Chief Minister of Karnataka

In agriculture, in recent years, climate change has become a big issue! It is going to become hotter every year and more droughts are going to occur. What are your thoughts on this?

Today's issue is water. It is a man made problem. The cities are growing in an unplanned way. There is heavy traffic. All these culminate to the environmental problems in the urban and rural sector. The problem of drinking water now is the major issue. When there is insufficient water for drinking how do the farmers use it for agriculture? These are the kind of complicated decisions we have to make today. I would like to tell you, when I served as prime minister for about a period of 10 months, year and half as chief minister, and about five years as irrigation minister in Karnataka, I had certain ideas related to water conservation in my mind, nobody knows my

approach to the problem. It has also not been properly published by the media. When I was irrigation minister in Karnataka, I took steps to preserve the 280 tanks in Bangalore city. I went ahead appointed a committee of three members and myself. It included a very honest officer, eldest son of N. Madhava Rao, former Diwan from Mysore and his own younger brother was the chief secretary, Narasimha Rao, that was the golden period! They should be given a tribute to preserve all these tanks in Bangalore today.

Chief Minister Hegde saw the information about the policy changes brought about by the committee in Karnataka gazette. He called me and asked, "Why you have not brought this information to cabinet? I know the problem of drinking water in Bangalore." I responded back to the Chief Minister saying, "Drinking water is the

major problem. We should maintain these tanks." I explained though the irrigation department is not directly involved with drinking water issue in Bangalore city I took steps to maintain these tanks.

So I told him, "I am a person doing my humble service properly. I don't want to continue as minister." We should not spend money on non-planned expenditures like construction of mini Vidhana Soudhas, Kala Bhavans or adding a luxurious travelers' bungalow, change every furniture etc. These are all not important at this stage. First priority is to use our waters efficiently. However to gain popularity they spent public money on unwanted areas. That is how the trouble started! Two-third of the Bangalore cannot get the Kaveri water because it does not come under the Kaveri catchment and on the other side it may fall in the Krishna basin. Problem is dearth of water and now rainfall is also reduc-

When I visited Gujarat, I told Kurian to build a similar Amul in Karnataka. Kurian gently told me, "Mr. Prime Minister, I am sorry there can be only one Taj Mahal. We cannot build another one!". He was a great man, the contribution he has made these people today can't understand!

ing. So for future years we have to think how to protect whatever the rain water is available. Secondly we need to study the agriculture system.

As Prime Minister I brought the irrigation policy for the first time in the country. When I went to Delhi, it was a minority government headed by 13 political parties. On 11 June, I got the vote of confidence cleared, 14th June I was declared PM and I started the common minimum program to provide drip irrigation, sprinkler irrigation on subsidy – tractors: 30% subsidy and drip and sprinkler irrigation: 75%. The budget was approved. I took these decisions!

Women, widow or a lady cultivating the farmland was given 90% subsidiary. My whole objective was using less water to get more yields! In 1996 agriculture growth was around 4% growth. In 1997/98 the agriculture in this country was around 7.6%, including animal husbandry it was 9.8%.

K L Rao when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister prepared a project for connecting all rivers in India. Indira Gandhi should have got this done. At that point, in this country, all the states were under her control, in both houses of Parliament she was having two-thirds majority. She could have amended the concurrent list and brought irrigation under central government control. I discussed this as an irrigation minister when she called two days conference of irrigation ministers. I submitted a note in that meeting on how the Americans were inter linking the rivers between different states. Indira Gandhi should have linked the rivers in India. Even MGR was close to Congress. Now it is a remote chance to execute the project.

About Shri H.D Deve Gowda

Mr. Haradanahalli Doddegowda Deve Gowda, politician was the Prime Minister of India from June 1996 to April 1997. Previously he was the 14th Chief Minister of Karnataka from 1994 to 1996. He is a member of the 16th Lok Sabha representing the Hassan constituency of Karnataka, is the National President of the Janata Dal (Secular) party, and has strong support in the Vokkaliga community which is at the forefront of the state politics.

He joined the Indian National Congress party in 1953 and remained a member until 1962. During that period, he was the President of Anjaneya Cooperative Society of

Holenarasipura and later became a member of the Taluk Development Board, Holenarasipura taluk, Hassan. In 1962, Deve Gowda was elected to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly from Holenarasipura constituency as an independent candidate. Later, he was elected from the same constituency to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly for six consecutive terms from 1962 to 1989. He joined the Congress(O) during the Congress split and served as the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly from March 1972 to March 1976 and again from November 1976 to December 1977.[15] During the Emergency (1975-77), he was imprisoned in the Bangalore Central Jail.

Deve Gowda was twice the President of state unit of the Janata Party. He served as a minister in the Janata Party Government in Karnataka headed by Shri Ramakrishna Hegde from 1983 to 1988. He became President of the state unit of Janata Dal in 1994 and was the driving force behind the victory of the party in the 1994 State Assembly elections. He was born on 18th May 1933. Haradanahalli village, Holenarasipura taluk, Hassan District, Karnataka is his birth place. He completed Diploma in Civil Engineering from Smt. L. V. Polytechnic, Hassan, Karnataka. He married Ms. Chennamma and the couple have four sons and two daughters.

As an irrigation minister, I started Ganga Kalyan scheme. The cost of the scheme was covered with 75% government subsidy and only 25% the people were going to pay. It is similar to Jaladhar, nationalized scheme started by Rajiv Gandhi.

Now I am in the parliament and they are not prepared to allow the time to the man who has got some experience to discuss. The time a member of parliament is given to speak has been divided on the numerical strength of the party. So I am not allowed to speak in detail on these topics. I am in the 15th rank, have to wait for my turn and then given three minutes to give a speech! It is a great insult. I have almost decided not to contest elections.

I visited Israel as opposition leader and also visited Australia's Snowy Mountain. The snowy mountain in Australia supplies vital water to the farming industries. It was solution to provide relief from drought. They collected the water from rain and melting snow and diverted through tunnels in the mountains to supply to farming industries. Also it was stored in dams. The snowy mountain project is amazing in the way they managed to bring water from the other side to this side of the city. Nowadays who is bothered on these kind of big and bold things in India?

As opposition leader, I went to Philippines, there I met M.S Swaminathan, research director. He was a nice research director. I studied several plots and how much water was used.

These were the different approaches and solutions I thought about to reduce water crisis in India.

Brahmaputra river has so much of water even today and it goes to the sea. In Ganga, water is there but because of these dramatic climatic changes it is getting affected too. Earlier Ganga was full now there is little variation. Godavari, one of the most dependable river is also dried. I have seen Godavari drying for the first time. Narmada was again a dependable river in earlier years. And even the underground water we have overused. In Bangalore it has been observed till the depth of 1300, 1400, 1500 there is no water. Almost all the tanks in Bangalore the mafia has looted. There may be six or seven tanks left.

Do you think in future young generations will stay in agriculture?

No!! They are already moving towards urban areas to get some 2,000 rupees, 3,000 rupees, 4,000 rupees, 5,000 rupees. That is the situation now! When I became the member of the legislative council more than 80% of the people were depended on agriculture.

Now it is reduced to 66% or 67%. Slums have increased here and all types of criminal activities are going on. With these situations, how to use the water for farmers' sufficient growth? Only conventional, traditional crops are grown.

These so called farmers' leaders today are fellows trained to create unnecessarily problems. Besides the government is also corrupt and biased towards these fellows – they are not the farmers' leaders!

As told to Kartik Isvarmurti, Managing Editor,
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