

EC a fulcrum of democracy: Gill

NEW DELHI, Oct 3 (UNI) - The newly appointed Election Commissioner, Dr M.S. Gill, said here yesterday that he would undertake his new assignment with a positive outlook and contribute his bit to enhance the credibility and integrity of the commission in the service of the nation.

In an interview to UNI, Dr Gill said he had great understanding and sympathy for the "thousands of officials who conduct elections under the most difficult circumstances and along with them try to bring down the temperature of the polity".

He did not visualise any conflict among the three members of the commission. The Chief Election Commissioner, Mr T.N. Seshan, had been a valued senior colleague of his in the administration and "I look forward to working with him".

Dr Gill said his appointment as Election Commissioner along with Mr G.V.G. Krishnamurthy came as a surprise to him.

Dr Gill said he had gone to Gwalior on official work. As he got down from the train he was told that he was urgently required at Delhi. He flew back and met the Prime Minister who asked him to resign from the civil service and take up the new assignment. He had absolutely no inkling of this development earlier.

He said though he was sad that he had to leave the Agriculture Ministry

where many exciting things were happening, he was happy that he had been chosen for a more challenging job.

The Election Commission was the fulcrum of the democratic process and he was glad to be part of that. He was not new to this role. As an officer in Punjab and at other places he had the opportunity to supervise elections. But year after year conducting elections was becoming a tough affair

Edit: Charge of the poll brigade

for thousands of people involved in the exercise.

"As far as I am concerned they will have my sympathy and understanding. The temperature of the polity has gone up over the past some years and our endeavour will be to help reduce it."

Dr Gill said he was leaving the Agriculture Ministry with a feeling of sadness as he had a passion for farming, farmers and rural India.

Last year, he had joined the ministry as Secretary after making a request to the Prime Minister. During the one year he had participated, along with colleagues, in transforming the agricultural sector.

He had tried to improve the terms of trade for the farmers and waged a constant battle for increasing the investment for the agricultural sector. This must continue as the sector

was most vital for the success of the economic reforms currently underway.

"I have thousands of exciting things for Indian farmers. Though yesterday I dropped out of the civil service, I still have a dream of going back and serve the farming community in some form some day," Dr Gill said.

He said he had quit the civil service after 36 years serving in different places in India and abroad in various capacities.

But in a way he was happy that from yesterday he ceased to be a "bureaucrat". Unfortunately, in India, he said, the word bureaucrat was being used in a pejorative term though they were civil servant working for the public. "I have great regard for those working in government and I would like the people to appreciate the role they play in running the nation," Dr Gill said.

LTTE boatyard destroyed

COLOMBO, Oct 3 (UNI) - The Sri Lankan security forces destroyed the main boatyard of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the northern Jaffna peninsula and recovered 450 boats on the fifth day of an offensive yesterday, the military said today.

A military spokesman said four soldiers were killed and two wounded in the operations around Kilah yesterday, taking the number of soldiers killed since the offensive was launched on Tuesday to 119.

It said the air force and artillery effectively engaged rebel bases in depth as they consolidated their position at Kilah, from where the LTTE operated an illegal boat service.

BBC reporting

in accounts