

# 'IT sector yet to take off in N. Karnataka'

Mini Joseph Tejaswi | TNN

**Bangalore:** Aravind Melligeri, 42, and Ajit Prabhu, 40, grew up in Hubli. Melligeri's father died young. Prabhu's father died to lease a fruit tree for Rs 2 a day and made money by selling the fruit. They studied in a Kannada medium school, sitting on the floor with slates. But they worked hard and Melligeri went on to do engineering at KREC Surathkal and Prabhu at BVB Engineering College in Hubli. Both then headed to the US for higher studies and began working there. Melligeri at Ford and Prabhu at GE. In 1997, the two together started an outsourced engineering venture, with the focus on aerospace and power projects and with the execution being done out of Bangalore. That venture, now called Quest Global, did very well, and in 2009, Melligeri and Prabhu launched a 300-acre SEZ in Belgaum for aircraft components manufacturing. The SEZ hosts joint ventures of

global aerospace companies, and also makes floor and door components that go into the Airbus 380 and the Boeing 787. Melligeri spoke to TOI about the advantages and challenges of north Karnataka.

## What are North Karnataka's strengths?

The region has a string of boomtowns. Each town has its own strengths. Hubli is known for industrial valves and machining, Belgaum for casting, agriculture and education. Dharwad is the seat of education, culture and philosophy. Gadag is mostly an agrarian town growing vegetables, sunflower, jowar, wheat, etc. Bellary and Hospet are famous for iron ore, minerals and agriculture. Gulbarga/Raichur have military hubs, residential schools, peanut, jowar and wheat farming. Bijapur is known for its grapes and vineyards. Bagalkot has lime stone deposits and it produces cement. Jamkhandi is famous for sugar mills.



ONE-ON-ONE

Aravind Melligeri

CO-FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN, QUEST GLOBAL

## But the region has not developed as much as south Karnataka. What should the government do?

It has to do quite a lot, as it has neglected the region so far. Connectivity is the basic prerequisite to attract investments. It is high time that the government established adequate connectivity between north and south Karnataka. North Karnataka's over 30 engineering,

medical and dental colleges churn out thousands of graduates every year. They are unable to find proper employment, so they move to Mumbai, Pune or Bangalore. Developing north Karnataka would be the best way to de-congest Bangalore. It will also bring in well-rounded growth for the state. We anticipate our chief minister Jagadish Shettar, who hails from Hubli, will do something to unleash the potential of the region without further delay.

## Is south Karnataka a good market for north Karnataka?

South can be a good market for all the products and produce of north Karnataka. However, as of now, the south is not a market for the north due to logistics issues. Hubli is the trading hub of northern Karnataka. The city is like a chotta (little) Mumbai. It has strong trade links with Mumbai for cotton, chilly, peanuts, jowar, wheat and

its industrial valves are sent to Pune and Chennai. Belgaum has a sizable casting industry with over 100 firms. It also significantly caters to the casting and hydraulic needs of the automotive industry in Pune and Mumbai. Belgaum cultivates basmati rice and grows vegetables including lettuce and sends them mostly to the hotel industry in Goa and general markets in Pune and Mumbai.

## How is the IT & ITeS scene in north Karnataka?

The region has very few IT/ITeS ventures. Though Quest Global is not registered in this region, we still are the largest technology, engineering and manufacturing firm here. But sadly, the IT sector is yet to take off in the region due to lack of infrastructure. Since 2008 we have been asking the state government to establish an SEZ for IT in the region. As it stands, no IT company wants to set up business here.