

## Fighting Corruption

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Corruption is undoubtedly an evil which destroys any society. Very often, lack of knowledge of work, inefficiency, negligence of duty, favouritism, caste and community feeling, poor recruitment system, culture etc., contributes to corruption thriving at all places. The need to implement bold and urgent measures to fight corruption is too obvious to be ignored. Public expenditure of enormous proportions in emerging democracies to fight poverty, illiteracy, poor public health and lack of infrastructure provides a grand opportunity for both politicians and civil servants to indulge in corruption.

“India is a rich country which has managed to keep its people poor”, stated Nani Palkhivala; the famous public spirited and distinguished lawyer in Mumbai. It is ironical and unfortunate that his statement seems to hold good even today notwithstanding many achievements in India’s economic front. The main reason for this sad state of affairs is our inability to remove poverty altogether and tackle corruption effectively.

Corruption in India is rampant because of various reasons. In a developing democracy such as ours, the scope for corruption is immense because of tremendous developmental activities of the government. A touchstone

of any government is the quality of its performance reflected in the various decisions taken by its institutions and individuals manning the institutions. In order to ensure right and good governance, it is necessary for the government to be open, accountable, accessible, transparent, sensitive, fair and pro-active. A government that is not fair, sensitive and transparent is bound to be prone to corruption. Unfortunately, our track record in India in ensuring such corruption-free governance cannot be said to be satisfactory.

According to the fourth report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission on “Ethics in Governance”, “corruption is an important manifestation



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of the failure of the ethics and values system in society". It would therefore imply that unless proper values are nurtured and encouraged nothing much can be done to improve the conduct of human beings in public administration. Corruption is commonly defined as misuse of public office for private gains. It can be either political or administrative. In this article we can confine ourselves to corruption in civil service, although political corruption is the starting point of all corruption in any democracy.

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The failure of executive machinery in ensuring good quality public administration is mainly because of a feudal approach and excessive governmentalisation of public activities. This state of affairs was summarised by Edward Luce in his book "Inspire of the Gods" (Pages 100 to 101).

*"From the imperial corridors of New Delhi's loftiest ministry to the sleepest rural magistrate's court, India's government offices and courtrooms share a number of instantly recognisable characteristics. These are the trademarks of a state that is never absent from your life, except when you actually need it. If you were to access India's economic situation by walking through its corridors of power, it would be impossible to guess the country was undergoing a software revolution. Instead of computers, you have armies of men shuffling*

*paper. Instead of vacuum cleaners, you have lower-caste sweepers carefully redistributing the dust beneath your feet. As a substitute for a specific appointment, you are told: 'Just come.' Yes, but at what time? 'Don't worry. Just come.' In place of waiting rooms, you have queues of supplicants spilling over into the corridors and the courtyards outside, each hoping to snatch a moment with the VIP whose mere word or signature can put an end to a hundred sleepless nights and a thousand wasted phone calls. Instead of servants – civil or otherwise – you have masters."*

- *In Spite Of The Gods*, Edward Luce,  
Little Brown, 2006

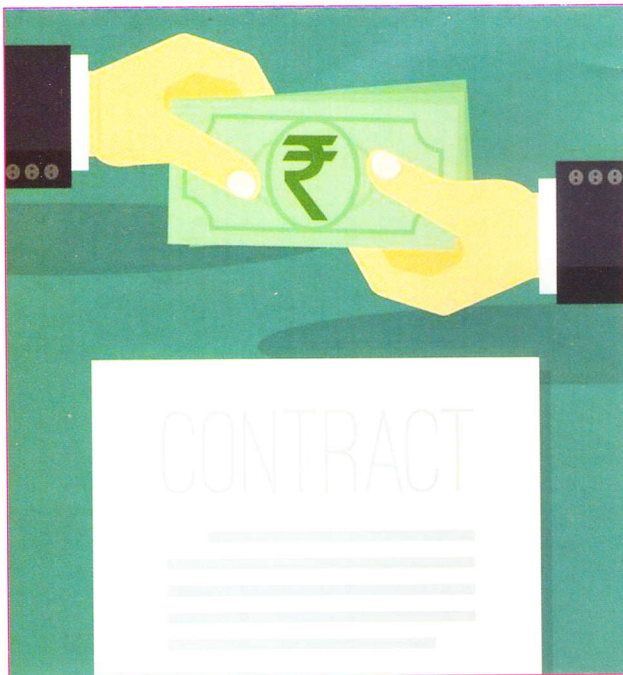
The second factor contributing to corruption thriving in the country is the over centralised administrative system both at the Center and the States. The main reason for this archaic and outdated administrative system is partly due to legacy of the colonial rule and also due to inadequate leadership in assuring new administrative system. There is, therefore, an urgent need to review and simplify the laws and the rules so as to decentralise decision-making with proper monitoring checks and balances.

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The public anger against misgovernance in the delivery of public services gets accentuated when government is insensitive to public grievances. This is more so when there is a failure in tackling problems arising out of natural disasters. We have seen similar pattern in many developing countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa and Europe and Middle East. The widespread public protest against lack of performance in public administration also contributes to violence and hatred between the people and the government. Although we have enough laws to deal with corruption, there are many areas we ought to take preventive steps so as to ensure that the scope for corruption is minimised. One important step could be to decentralise powers—financial and administrative—in favour of local self-government so that people are not forced to go from pillar to post for redressal of grievances. The distribution of powers should start from State Government level to district and village government levels. This was intended to be achieved by the Panchayat Raj programme but was not achieved due to failure in implementing the scheme. It is worthwhile to refer to the success stories in Surat where the local self-government was able to raise funds locally for meeting developmental activities within the district. Also, a Panchayat in Coimbatore District (Tamil Nadu) was able to raise funds by generating wind energy to meet the needs of the village and to distribute the surplus for others.

Reducing the manpower in government offices by outsourcing important public services with adequate checks and effective monitoring, will no doubt go a long way to improve the quality of delivery of public services. The surplus officials as a result of this measure will have

to be absorbed within the government against future vacancies and without any retrenchment so as to take care of human problems arising out of such measures.

The working of the government both at the Centre and the State needs to be made time-bound by insisting that every public grievance received should be dealt with within a time frame of say one month. When there is a non-compliance of this time-bound action, the senior officials will have to be made accountable so that monitoring becomes real and effective. Erring officials not complying with this requirement should be punished adequately unless there is any overriding reason.

Another important field requiring urgent action is “top-level police administration”. Unfortunately, the respect for rule of law from the citizens as well as civil servants especially in matters relating to law and order cannot be said to be satisfactory. Lack of impartiality on the part of enforcement agencies such as police and other regulatory authorities has also contributed to widespread corruption. In a recent trend that is taking place by which the investigating authorities communicate with the media even when investigation is still in progress, presumably to satisfy an over anxious media. Nowhere in the world do the investigating agencies keep on briefing the media on a daily basis even when the investigation is not complete. This needs to be shunned. Similarly, the Supreme Court has already given guidelines to various state governments to implement police reforms especially in the field of training, posting and transfers in order to delink political influence in police administrative matters. This should be implemented without any further delay to ensure effective law and order administration. To quote late Mr. P.A. Sangma, former Speaker of the Lok Sabha, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India’s independence:

*“We have a highly flawed system of management of administration. It is a highly politicised administration, away from the people. Our administration, including the police force, has got significantly politicised. The civil service which is designed to be neutral being pressed into service of political masters and use of the police force for settling political scores have become facts of life today. This is not conducive to the rule of law. The administration should be depoliticised and made responsive to the public and responsible only to the rule of law.”*

Ultimately our fight against corruption in civil service can succeed only if we have the right persons in right positions. This can be achieved only by fine-tuning our recruitment and training system as may be realised from the following observations by Dr. Rajendra Prasad,

*“Whatever the Constitution may or may not provide, the welfare of the country will depend on the way in which the country is administered. That will depend upon the men who administer it”.* □