

Editorial

Corroding Corruption

India's rank slipped from 84 to 87 in the last year's annual report of the Transparency International on the level of perceived corruption. A former Lok Sabha Speaker recently remarked, 'India is turning into a nation of corrupts and the image of the country has degraded to such a level in the recent times that now every individual is looked down with suspicion.... Only a "proper" education that not only breeds talented people, but produces honest people at the same time, is the need of the hour.'

Our country has indeed reached new heights in large scale corruption. The quantum of money involved is increasing by leaps and bounds. A little over twenty years back an alleged scam that rocked the Parliament and then the whole country involved about 64 crore. Now the organizers of the Commonwealth Games are said to have stolen tens of thousands of crores. The 2G spectrum scam resulted in a loss going upto 176 thousand crore from the government exchequer, according to the investigation bodies of the Central Government. The S-band scam may be even bigger. More importantly, it involves the renowned Indian Space Research Organisation.

It is not only the quantum of money that matters. Huge corruption in our once-clean Defence Forces shows that no quarter of the officialdom is an exception. We have stooped so low that substandard coffins were bought at high prices from a foreign firm for our fallen heroes, the soldiers who were martyred at Kargil. Satyendra Dubey, an IIT alumnus, tried to expose corruption in the Golden Quadrilateral project. He was murdered in 2003 at the age of 30. Another honest young man, Sanmugham Manjunath, a graduate from IIM, Lucknow, who zealously fought the oil mafia, met with the same fate two years later. Recently an Additional Collector has been burnt alive near Manmad in Maharashtra for daring to do the same. The top cop of Maharashtra says that the subsequent probe is a sham, as usual! Several activists were killed while fighting illegal mining. Hapless poor villagers work for the mafia for the sake of a living. Whether it is Karnataka, Gujarat or Haryana – hardly anybody dares to stand in the way of the wrongdoers in fear of life.

Unfortunately, our democracy thrives largely on this illicit money. So do hordes of foreign banks. The European authorities have now reluctantly agreed to part with information about the tax evaders who have stashed away enormous amounts in their banks, stealing the millions of have-nots in India. But, there may be a condition: such information cannot be made public!

All this could have been averted but for the politician-bureaucrat-police-businessman nexus that is deeply entrenched in the whole system. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, recently observed, 'A cancer-like situation is engulfing the political-bureaucratic-judicial system, which is harmful for growth. Certainly the country needs chemotherapy at this critical hour.'

He continued, 'Among people from every cross section of the society — youth, senior citizens, civil society leaders, thought leaders, political leaders, senior executives, judiciary — whom I have met, there is a sense of anguish, despair and concern over the deteriorating democratic values and value system, which is increasing day after day. Hence there is need for urgent, extraordinary corrective actions.

'If the situation is allowed to continue, then we cannot prevent the people taking to the streets; and there will be a catastrophic ripple effect, which the nation cannot bear at this moment, when India is poised to become a developed nation. The leadership across the

country, irrespective of their profession or political affiliation, will have to put the country, its development, and its pride above their individualism....

‘People with national spirit, leaders with impeccable track records, ignited youth with bubbling aspiration to make the nation develop cannot be watching silently. They should unite to bring back governance on its track and steer the nation forward.’

He also gave his prescription of the *chemotherapy* needed. He says, ‘I propose a youth brigade as the solution. “I can do it. We can do it. India will do it”, should be the spirit.’

Elsewhere he said in the same vein: ‘It is only a youth movement in the country which can remove and finally eradicate corruption and enjoy a corruption-free India by 2020, when it will be transformed into a developed country. We are a billion people, and with at least two billion houses. Corruption begins at home and around 60 million houses are estimated corrupt, and it is the duty of each student to curb corruption at their own homes first.’

‘India wants young people of ethics, youths of ethics. That will bring beauty in character and harmony at homes. We must have a corruption-free nation, but corruption begins from home. If children decide that their family will be free from corruption, India will greatly recover.’

The Mahamandal is trying to do exactly this for over four decades. While Dr Kalam rightly lamented: ‘We should be proud of our role models, but unfortunately, we don't have such role models’, we have found a wonderful role model, an ideal, for the modern Indian youth by going back a little in time. The ideal is no less a person than Swami Vivekananda, whose spirit is still working with increasing vigour, without waning with time. Long back he visualized the real need and urged India to work for ‘man-making, character building’ first. ‘And, therefore, make men first’, he advised again and again. Let us listen.