

Rajiv Mehrishi



भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखापरीक्षक
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MESSAGE

Eradicating corruption, for building a new India, is the theme for the Vigilance Awareness Week in the current year.

If we are to eradicate corruption, we have to ask why there is so much corruption? I reject the notion that we are morally weaker or "naturally corrupt". How is it, then, that in his day to day life, an average Indian faces corruption at almost every level - from guardians of traffic laws to provider of the most basic services, that are taken for granted in most countries, specially the developed ones?

I would venture to suggest that corruption is an outcome of shortages, which are sometimes artificially created, and of systems that have been created on basis of shortages, or distrust. The permit and license raj is a classic example of corruption due artificially created shortages. Not too far back, there was corruption even in getting phone connections or kerosene oil - or even in buying a car.

In my opinion, therefore, corruption can, firstly, be reduced by reducing shortages (Nobody gives a bribe now for getting a telephone connection) by increasing production and increasing availability of goods and services. That require sensible and sound policy making.

Secondly, corruption will also be reduced by improving systems by building them based on trust, such as self-declarations (which can be checked post-facto and wrong declarations punished) by reducing human interface, as is being done in e-Governance programmes such as Direct Benefit Transfers, and by reducing the role of the State, that would reduce Inspector Raj, for example, and minimise the discretionary powers of the State.

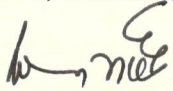
Thirdly, whenever the power of the State is wielded, whether in raising money, spending money, or coercing private persons, this should be surrounded by transparency, consultation and checks-and-balances. However, this needs to be tempered with a world of caution. There will still be need to make some discretionary decisions. A capable State, with well-honed state capacity, should be able to distinguish between corruption, incompetence, bad luck and malfeasance. Simple minded notions of launching inquiries, based on wisdom by hindsight, will induce extreme risk aversion among decisions makers, and paralyse state machinery.

The fourth element in reducing corruption is to make everyone equally accountable: there are institutions and organisations in India today which are less accountable than others; and unless all institutions/organisations are equally accountable, there would be room for corruption, or at least would have doubts about the honesty, of such institutions/organisations.

To conclude, it seems corruption needs to be handled on the four pillars of sound policies that increase the availability of goods and services; better systems, build on trust, and with minimal human interface; by increasing transparency when state expresses power, and by greater accountability of all institutions and organisations.

I hope some thought would be given to these suggestions during the Vigilance Week this year and in future.

I wish Central Vigilance Commission of all success in moving towards reducing and ultimately eradicating corruption and in the organisation of the Vigilance Week.


(RAJIV MEHRISHI)

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New Delhi, dated 26th October, 2018