

**Press Information Bureau
Government of India
Special Service and Features**

12-September-2017 09:48 IST

Combating Corruption



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India's fight against corruption is led by a robust and time tested institutional and legislative framework including the Prevention of Corruption Act, an independent Central Vigilance Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Judges (Inquiry) Act, the Lok Pal and Lok Ayukta Act 2013, Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2011, Prevention of Money /Laundering Act, Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act which cover a number of areas of criminalization and bribery. All civil servants are mandatorily required to declare their assets on an annual basis. The Elected Representatives are required to declare their assets every election cycle.

India's "zero tolerance to corruption" approach, as well as "minimum government and maximum governance" approach resulted in simplification of the governance model in recent years. Some of the steps included abolition of the system of attestation/ authentication by Government servants for submission of certificates, abolition of personal interviews for recruitments to lower level posts and weeding out inefficient public servants and those of doubtful integrity above the age of 50 years, prematurely. Further the Government demonetized high value currency to eliminate black money and corruption. A special investigation team was constituted to fight black money. Government also conducted online auctions of coal blocks. Government sought international cooperation in G-20 meetings on ending tax havens in Europe and other countries. In bilateral meetings with Swiss authorities India has said combating the menace of black money and tax evasion was a "shared priority" for both the countries.

In a recent visit to Jharkhand, the Prime Minister gave away a few smart phones to *sakhi mandals* (self help groups) in Jharkhand and said he was surprised by the answers he got from the villagers about the usages of smart phones. India's focus on "making government smarter" has been at the forefront of the Nation's Fight against Corruption. The same quantum of subsidy could benefit could be far more efficiently spent by a "Smarter Governance Model" than in a manual system.

The Jan Dhan Yojana provided universal and clear access to banking accounts with overdraft facility. In 2016, the Aadhar Act was promulgated to ensure targeted delivery of financial and other subsidies, benefits and services. The Act provided for an efficient, transparent and targeted delivery of subsidies to individuals, through assigning aadhar identification numbers. The third major step initiated by the Government was the introduction of BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money) which is a mobile application developed by National Payments Corporation of India. The BHIM application facilitates e-payments directly through banks and can be used on all mobile devices. Collectively the Jan Dhan Yojana—the Aadhar Act and the BHIM Application have provided for a *smart government* where subsidy flows reach the beneficiary in a timely and effective manner.

The Government has sought to promote preventive vigilance through the Central Vigilance Commission. Several preventive vigilance measures have been introduced by the CVC. Measures like Government E-Market (GEM) have helped improve the accountability and integrity in public procurement. The Commission has sought to promote ethics through education of students and youth, observance of vigilance awareness weeks, process simplification to reduce discretion and interface with public servants, focus on training and skill development and awarding exemplary punishment in all cases of proven misconduct to create deterrence. The CVC has sought to

create a people's movement against corruption through an e-pledge to be voluntarily taken by the citizens and organizations.

Further the Government has sought to strengthen the auditing and accounting processes. Some of the big changes introduced in financial governance are amalgamation of the Railways and General budgets, the merger of plan and non-plan expenditures, opening up of a number of sectors for foreign direct investment and the introduction of Goods and Services Tax. Looking at the enormity of the flow of funds to urban and rural local bodies, the C& AG has identified their audit as a critical area. The C& AG has also focused on the large volumes of digital information emerging from increasing automation of tax filing, assessment and recovery procedures.

There have been significant efforts made to promote transparency in Government. The Right to Information (RTI) Act is a rights based law that has created a durable stake for citizens in the administration of the Nation. The RTI Act has led to improvements in governance. By sharing information, the citizens have become part of the decision making process, which leads to creation of trust between citizens and Government. The Prevention of Corruption Act is an Act to consolidate the law relating to the prevention of corruption. The law provides for punishments for taking gratification other than legal remuneration in respect of official acts. The investigative powers have been given to the CBI and State Police Authorities. Government has said that accountability standards for public servants have to be kept at realistic levels so that officers do not hesitate in taking honest decisions.

In order to give statutory protection to whistle blowers in the country, Government made amendments to the Whistle Blowers Act in 2015. The amendments addressed concerns relating to national security and strengthened the safeguards against disclosures, which may prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of the country. Further the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988 was amended to empower the Income Tax authorities to attach and confiscate benami properties. Besides, if a person is found guilty of offence of benami transaction by the competent court, he shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment and shall also be liable to fine. Several benami transactions have been identified since the coming into effect of the amended law.

To conclude, it may be said that India continues the Fight against Corruption and Black Money. These efforts led by the focus on smart governance are yielding positive results.

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Views expressed in the article are authors' personal.