

FROM CHALLENGED BEGINNINGS TO STANDING TALL

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Socio-political evils of corruption: Not everything is lost yet

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mutually reinforcing drivers of effective anti-corruption strategy are indispensable. First is the political will at all levels, not only on paper but in practice without fear or favour. Second, the corrupt must be brought to justice ensuring equality of all before the law, irrespective of the identity and status of the individual. Third, the institutions of the national integrity system must be transparent, efficient, accountable and effective, both individually and collectively. Fourth, conducive environment must be created for people at large, particularly media, civil society, and NGOs to raise and strengthen the demand for accountability and against corruption.

The primacy of politics cannot be underestimated. The endemic malaise of mixing up what is public with what is private, much of it related to the increasing mutual dependence of political opportunity with business and profiteering



transactions system must be extensively introduced and robustly practiced. As the corrupt continue to remain unpunished, it not only frustrates the victims and makes them more vulnerable, many honest and heretofore uncorrupt people are forced to take recourse to corrupt practices. Raising voice and demand, especially of the new generation against corruption must be facilitated further if the government is sincere about its commitments. Public resources and capacities should be invested to control corruption, not to control the flow and disclosure of information on corruption.

Effective delivery of anti-corruption demands a retransformation of values, norms and practices in political parties. This retransformation involves the task of delinking political positions and political opportunities from business and profit-making opportunities, as difficult as it may sound. The sooner our politicians realise how badly politics is alienating itself from the people the better for corruption control. Our political leaders need to recognise that it is only in their hands that the Frankenstein of corruption that has been created can be controlled.

Equally important is the task of depoliticising the state institutions, rendered almost dysfunctional mainly by partisan influence. The state structure has been exposed to kleptocratic capture by those who benefit from corruption at the expense of those who would like to control it. In the absence of any real progress to reverse it by re-establishing effectiveness of institutions and primacy of the rule of law, there is no magic bullet to controlling the cancer of corruption.

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opportunity, must be treated effectively. The idea of managing conflict of interest is almost absent among many in important public functionaries, whether elected or appointed. We need a legal and operational structure to manage conflict of interest so that a power-holder's private or business interest cannot be improperly promoted by decisions and/or actions taken by using official position. A robust system of conflict of interest management founded on legal and ethical basis would be able to ensure that public interest related decisions are based on merit without regard for personal or group interest, backed up by disclosure of interests and their potential conflict. A business

integrity programme consistent with the National Integrity Strategy is long overdue, with the aim of creating ethical business practices. Collective action against corruption, as in many countries, may demonstrate to the business community that corrupt practices, coercive or collusive, are in the end harmful for all parties involved in business. Business entities and their associations can adopt standards and practices of self-regulation that can motivate stakeholders in the public sector to promote business integrity and stay away from corruption.

Adoption of sectoral and sub-sectoral code of conduct to practice regularly updatable disclosure of "what you earn, where and how you earn, what you pay, and whom you pay" including information on indirect beneficial ownership could go a long way in

detering corruption in the private sector, including money laundering in particular.

Implementation of RII Act 2009 must be further effective to ensure the people's right to know, especially in relation to what happens to public resources. Where such resources come from, how they are spent and on what basis, etc., are the key questions to which answers must be disclosed proactively and on demand. The perception that some institutions in the public sector like law enforcement and security agencies are exempted from such obligations is unfounded. Information on corruption and human rights violation by institutions included in the so-called exemption list is well within the jurisdiction of the Act.

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