

Bringing corrupt to book

Corruption has become widespread in our civil society. We are gradually losing ethical standards, which we once boasted were exemplary. Indians were known for contentment and austerity, the essential elements of a peaceful and virtuous life. These virtues have left us and we have fallen a prey to greed and materialism.

We accept that human beings cannot be angels. But that is not a license for unbridled aberration and greed. When the society allows aberration, governance becomes a victim. We are crying for good governance. How can it come about when those who are to deliver governance come from a corrupt and dissipating social system? We are heading towards a disaster of sorts if we do not mend our ways by voluntarily imposing strict ethical code on our selves. No legislation and no accountability mechanism proves viable enough to dissuade a Government functionary from indulging in corrupt practices. Self introspection is of much importance.

Addressing the Consultative Committee on General Administrative Department, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has been very candid in outlining the approach of his Government to deal with corruption at higher levels of administration. He has focused on two categories, namely the bureaucrats and politicians. It is sad that higher levels of bureaucracy, too, have been stained with corruption despite the fact that they enjoy such privileges as are not possible for ordinary mortals to dream about. Referring alleged corruption cases against bureaucrats and Government officials to the State Vigilance Commission and those of the politicians to the State Accountability Commission is a bold step to introduce for the first time, the process of accountability at the highest levels of governance in the State. The Government has received 193 cases of alleged corruption from SVC, and Crime Branch for prosecution and the process has already been set in motion. Three cases relating to IAS and IFS have been referred to the Government of India for necessary action.

This is the right step to be taken with the purpose of eradicating corruption from the administrative structure of the State. Of course over some time in the past the Chief Minister has been engaged in structuring the anti-corruption mechanism and in this connection significant steps have been taken. Primary requirement in this connection was of legal sanction. For that purpose one can recall the setting up of Vigilance Commission, Accountability Commission, Right to Information Act, Public Services Guarantee Act etc. The necessity of introducing these measures was to give no chance to the corrupt officials to wriggle out of the noose of law. There has been the loud noise that we lack adequate laws to combat corruption. To some extent this was true and alleged people managed to escape from the clutches of justice. But with these measures in place, chances of running away scot-free are curtailed to a large extent. The Chief Minister is contemplating of tightening the noose further. He has said that a high-ranking officer would be assigned the duty of keeping close watch in corruption prone areas. This is almost to say that an Ombudsman will be there to watch and report irregularities to concerned authorities. One more initiative on the anvil is Results Framework Document (RFD), which would help the common people to ascertain the performance and functioning of Government departments. This initiative is advanced streamlining of the Right to Information Act. The people have the right to ask and assess the progress made in various projects or schemes during a given period. This empowers the people to ascertain the performance of the Government.

The Chief Minister has tried to reach all sources that are liable to give rise to corruption in one form or the other. For example he has the idea of ordering videography of viva voice interviews because there have been complaints from aspirants to Government service or admission to professional institutions that they are not done justice. In final analysis these are very commendable steps, which the Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers are taking to stamp out corruption from the administration. True that the entire deck cannot be cleared in one go, but the beginning has been made in right earnest and we hope that all concerned will cooperate in rebuilding clean and transparent administration.

Sopore Bypass bridge

The story of five-year long stalemate over the completion of a bypass bridge at Sopore is a classical example of inefficiency and incompetence of the concerned quarters. The bridge that should have been completed in 2008 is hanging fire even after expiry of five years of contemplated date. Reports speak about complaints on both sides meaning the Border Roads Construction, which is the executing agency, and the contracting company called Mir & Co Construction. We do not want to go into the plethora of complaints. The simple question is that the purpose of building the bridge was to mitigate the difficulties and suffering of a large number of people in the areas. Since their suffering has not been removed for so many years, they are gradually loosing trust in Government agency. If the contract was to bring the bridge to completion in 2008, the contractor has to explain why the date could not be kept and what will be the penalty. If the contractor is able to put forth convincing arguments, which cannot be challenged by commonsense and the logic of the transaction, then of course his case needs to be considered with sympathy. Why should the stalemate be allowed to prevail and to the detriment of the common people? It is unacceptable. The responsibilities have to be fixed and the Government should intervene in the matter and find a solution of the impasse.

It has also to be remembered that Sopore and its hinterland is important commercial area. The bypass bridge would boost the economy of the area and also provide communication facilities to a large number of people. These are vital areas of concern for the Government and the people as well. It is desirable that the Government intervenes and finds out a solution that does justice to the stakeholders.

Cricket: then and now

It seems ages ago, when cricket was a gentleman's game, with little financial gain for those who played it. And, believe you me, it is not as if there were no cricketing heroes then, chased by students, hailed by the cognoscenti and coyly eyed by young ladies as the players moved up and down the steps from the 'pavilion' to the ground. Remember the thump by the mali on a thick brass plate (gong) to announce the start of the match and the umpires in their faded whites walking up to their positions. The players, for the most part young and bubbly, looked as graceful, if not better, as do some of the brats who have made millions from the same game in recent years.

Why suddenly cricket? You might ask. Simply because I started my journalistic career in 1951 as a sports reporter with a now defunct English daily published from New Delhi. I was lucky to be able to move from one ground to the other, thanks to the rented bicycle (Rs. 6 a month), chasing club players out on the many grounds where they played. Most players were expected to have their own kits, bats, guards of a basic nature, and even the whites they played in were bought by the player himself, and very often the white would have turned a muddy brown by the end of the day.

Those who didn't enjoy the luxury of a second pair had to wash it, dry it, press it overnight at their lodgings to be ready for the morn. Not the pampered lot of today whose kit might include a dozen, if not more, bats, all kinds of contraptions (guards) to protect their limbs, their heads and more. Can you imagine one of the most entertaining test cricketers of his era, Polly Umrigar telling you how he had just one pair of cricketing trousers and how he would commute by the Mumbai (Bombay then) locals between his home and the match venue.

There was favoritism then too, your group and my group, organized cabals which would somehow always manage to retain control of a club, a State association and at the highest level of the Cricket Board itself. The difference was that the men who occupied positions of power in a club or an association were working men, Babus of ranks high and low. But there was no dearth either of canny, sharp business men like the Malhotras and Mehra of the Delhi & District Cricket Association or the Bengali "mafia" Pankaj Gupta, Datta-ray,

A.N. Ghosh etc. who made the Board a monopoly of their own for a number of years. That's after they had gotten rid of the ebullient sports czar (a visionary man who wouldn't suffer fools, until the latter got together and showed him the door) Anthony De Mello who also gave the country the National Sports Club of India with residential as well as sporting facilities in Delhi and Bombay.

I distinctly remember Bawa Jaswant Singh, Hargopal Singh and Tulja Ram, sarkari babus, who led or played for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy for a number of years. They were dedicated men as were the others who played for the glory of the game. Their daily allowance, if memory serves right, was Rs. 6 per day. I remember University lads of

deposited in respective rooms; the message in each case was (in Punjabi) "Omī da khayal rakhna". The selectors of the team would obviously have received carefuls of the harder stuff!

Influence peddling at the time of selection was very much prevalent in cricket as well. And I have seen some of it displayed in the lobbies of Delhi's Imperial, Swiss, Maiden's and Cecil hotels. I saw it in Lucknow as well when the Pakistani team visited India with Pankaj Gupta and Datta-Ray acting as the cricket Czars of the day.

Frankly they weren't any different from the successive lots that have controlled the Board ever since those days in the 50s. Prior to that in the 40s and 30s it was the Maharajas, Nawabs and their advisers

MEN, MATTERS & MEMORIES

M L KOTRU

the day Kukejra, the Mathur brothers, Little and Bobo, Suresh Sharma, Prakash Bhandari, Rajan Mehra, each brimming with class, getting even lesser than the Ranji Trophy players, when they represented Delhi University in the Rohinton-Baria Inter-University cricket championship. Some 2,000 students would turn up each day to watch the inter-college tournament in Delhi played at the Stephens ground near Kashmiri gate and at the University ground itself.

That was cricket at its noblest, played by men of great honesty and dedication never waiting for corporate houses or match-fixers to fill their pockets. And it was not as if most teams did not have their backers in the community but obviously no one had thought of cricket as a money-making machine. Even the bosses who controlled the associations were very often happy with the good times office assured them: a good room, good food and good drinks. Money crept in only at the time of the selection of a National team or the State teams.

I am reminded of the early 50s when a father chased the press corps to their hotel rooms for days together to ensure that his son made it to the Indian hockey team for the Melbourne games. The turbaned old man showed up in our rooms in a Jalandhar hotel- the hockey Nationals were on under the legendary Ashwini Kumar's watch- a dozens bottles of beer tucked into large household buckets, duly

ers from among the 'gora' log, with each Indian boss trying to look sterner than the white man himself. Remember, the circumstances in which Lala Amar Nath, the cricketing legend, was sent home from a foreign tour by the Maharajkumar of Vizianagram, the captain of the team, who later had a stint as the Board President? A very poor cricketer himself, he was only asserting his princely right to put the ordinary 'Lala' in his place.

And how much do you think did a cricketer get as his daily allowance for a Test match then: Rs. 50 a day. That works out to Rs. 250 per match or was it Rs. 300 which it may have been in case they got paid for the rest day in between the match which actually lasted six days. They travelled third or second class (rail) with the captain and the manager probably sharing a coupe. Poor pickings, did you say? Think of Don Bradman who has calculated that the money the Australian players received on an English tour worked out to 1200 pounds for the whole year, considering that the team spent half the time in commuting by boat from Australia to the UK!

That brings me to my first interview with a visiting cricket captain. I was a young 22-years-old cub reporter (sports at the time) when I was rushed to Rajghat to see the first Pakistani side ever to visit post-partition India. I reached the spot a few minutes before the bus carrying the visiting team. As is wont with cubs I charged into the bus as soon as it

came to a halt and made for Abdul Hafeez Kardar, the handsome Oxonian Pakistani Captain. I had seen his photograph in my paper two days earlier and that had made identification easier.

Not having spoken to an international cricketer it took me a while and Kardar asked "Yes, what's that you want?". "I want to talk to you....." Be brief, I have to lead the team to the mausoleum". I asked some inanities which elicited polite replies. But my day was made; I had broken the sound barrier, spoken to a visiting captain".

To go back a little in time I had seen a Pakistani cricketer a few years earlier on the greenfields of Srinagar's Sri Pratap College. It was in 1944-45 probably. Khan Mohammad who was in Kardar's team now as a fast bowler, had come to Kashmir with the Islamia College, Peshawar team to play a friendly match with the local college team led by Billoo Sethi (later a national golfing champion) and beaten roundly by the visitors. Not an unexpected occurrence.

I don't remember Kashmir having many notable cricketers except the one who has now turned up for the one of the franchises in the just concluded IPL. The name: Rasool. I do, however remember the stench that was raised last year over the alleged defalcation of funds given to the Kashmir Cricket Association by the cash-rich BCCI.

The Cricket Board has indeed brought Indian cricket into much disrepute with the manner in which it has conducted the 6th IPL. Crimes of the most horrendous type have been committed in the name of cricket-and for filthy lucre. Such greed by men, young and old, would shame even the toughest of criminals and to think of the BCCI President and his family (his son in law) being directly involved in a grave misdemeanour! Don't they have a sense of shame?

I can understand a player from the hinterland tempted to make a quick buck but what do you make of billionaires like N. Srinivasan allegedly engaging, directly or indirectly, in illegal practices. A shame, it has been. And, don't you start imagining that the likes of Jaitley and Shukla are going to make any difference to Indian cricket. The rot is much deeper than we imagine. Take a look around and see how many billionaires Indian cricket has spawned in recent years, players and commentators included?

How easy is Nawaz Sharif's task?

K.N. Pandita

Nawaz Sharif's task is not easy. His party's numerical strength facilitates him but does not mandate him to force solution of the issues of long or short standing.

Power scarcity, economic recession, TTP menace, civilian-army strained relations, Afghan crisis, Indo-Pak tensions, ethno-sectarian crimes and Pak-American relations all are on his priority list. In short, he has to fight at economic, domestic and foreign fronts.

Astute diplomacy and political finesse are the instruments to tackle these issues. Pakistan has no dearth of eminent persons who know how to run civil administration. Nawaz Sharif will have a galaxy of advisers and bureaucrats around him to shape and support his policy and decisions.

In Pakistan, army is a factor to be reckoned with. But internal and external state of affairs of the country today have become so intricate as to leave little scope for the army to walk the old turf. Moreover the Army enjoys much reduced support and empathy from the Americans today.

Keeping in mind how army played its role during the election on very low key, there are strong indications that a compromise formula may be hammered out which takes away as little as possible from the army but gives as much as possible to the civilian government. The rhetoric of setting up a commission of inquiry into Kargil clash or the role of ISI in 26/11 will evaporate in thin air once the stakeholders sit down to discuss issues with all seriousness.

Kashmir has been the trump card with Pak Army. But with reasonable containment of the army impacting

Indo-Pak narrative, we can expect a change in a way to reduce the value of the trump card. Pressure is mounting on the army and its intelligence agency to revisit proxy war syndrome. Salahud-Din, the Chief of Jihad Council sitting in Muzaffarabad has a reason to cry foul.

Much of Mian Nawaz's maneuverability will be dictated by the contours of relations he is able to forge with the TTP. This is also linked to his policy towards the Afghan Taliban. Will he be able to draw mileage from the support he had given to the Afghan Taliban way back in 1996 by joining Saudi Arabia in formally according his government's recognition of Taliban regime in Kabul? This could brighten chances for tripartite negotiations leading to a compromise formula.

Washington is seriously weighing the possible impact of Nawaz Sharif's role in bringing about some semblance of peace and normalcy in Afghanistan. He enjoys much influence with the Saudi monarchy. In any broad based negotiations with Afghan Taliban, the role of Saudi monarchy will be crucial.

As these parleys progress, of course very little in open and mostly behind the curtain, the chances for Nawaz Sharif to bring in the issue of redemption of Pakistan's critical economic situation brighten fairly well.

Progress in multilateral talks should lead to gradual reduction of anti-US animus among religious extremist groups in Pakistan and their sympathizers. Even Tahreek-i-Insaf Party of Imran Khan, will also begin to lose the steam that fuelled its anti-American engine during the election campaign.

How is Mian Sahib going to build Indo-Pak détente is of great interest to political observers in the sub-continent? There is seldom change of heart with weather-beaten politicians. But there are many among them who are sharp enough to understand the change in political scenario. Astute statesmanship also means responding to the new situation and becoming more pragmatic in the response.

Suspensions and mistrust are deep-seated in their bilateral relations. The deck cannot be cleared in one go. But conditions have to be created that would help in clearing it. Pessimists on both sides will make Kashmir the "core issue" and reduce trade and commerce as something subservient to it. Nawaz Sharif announced that he would purchase electricity from India to bridge over the current acute shortage. Obviously, India must have shown her willingness to extend the hand of friendship.

Much harm has been done to both countries by spreading hatred and anger against each other. Arming the jihadis and infiltrating them into Indian side has done nothing good to the perpetrators of terror. They have sown the wind and are now reaping the whirlwind.

If expansion of trade and commerce means putting Kashmir issue in cold store for a decade or more, the experiment is worth making. Nothing will be lost but some new experience will certainly be gained.

If Nawaz Sharif thinks that the thread of talks on Kashmir should be taken up where it was left after his exit from power, this, too, has to be experimented. UPA II Government should have no hesitation in meeting Pakistan Prime Minister half way.

New Delhi needs to be reminded

that in the long course of flawed Indo-Pak relations, it has always found itself at crossroads in conducting bilateral talks including Kashmir issue with military regimes. India has always favoured talking to elected governments in Islamabad. The May 11 elections to National Assembly in Pakistan have been acknowledged as fair and impartial barring a stray case here or there. As such, Mian Sahib represents the true voice of the people of Pakistan. He carries a heavy burden of responsibilities on his shoulders. New Delhi should not miss the bus of talking to the elected leadership of Pakistan.

We know that New Delhi was seriously interested in talking to Pakistan when there was an elected government in Islamabad. Let us recall Rajiv-Benazir talks. If the ISI scuttled those talks, Pakistan has been the bigger loser. If this experience is repeated again in Nawaz Sharif's government, Pakistan and her vast population will be the bigger losers.

Lastly a formidable task before Nawaz Sharif is of restoring confidence among various ethnic and sectarian groups of people in that country. He will have to uproot sectarian violence lock, stock and barrel. This will be the litmus test of his good, impartial and just governance. The lawless elements have to be reined in and life and property have to be made secure.

He has to surmount many difficulties, he has to depict extraordinary courage, diplomatic skill and understanding and he has to persuade and convince a population that unfortunately has been oriented along extremist ideologies by myopic and indiscreet leadership in the past.

Mass marriages

LS Herdenia

If at all the Bharatiya Janata Party emerges victorious in the Vidhan Sabha elections to be held in November this year in Madhya Pradesh, the credit will go to the social engineering, on which Shivraj Singh has been laying emphasis from the day he took over as the Chief Minister in September 2005. The chief minister and the BJP are aware that they could not solve the basic problems of the people during the ten years of their rule, whether it is the field of education or health, civic infrastructure or power, and specifically the widespread problem of malnutrition, leading to high infant and child mortality rates. There has been a manifold increase in the crimes against women and the Dalits. Tribals and Muslims continue to live in miserable conditions.

If, despite these shortcomings, the Chief Minister and his party seem to be confident about the outcome in the next elections, it is because of their social engineering. The latest in the series of social engineering programmes were the mass marriages solemnised in different parts of the state.

'Akshaya Tritiya' is considered an auspicious day (tithi) for marriage. Normally, a large number of marriages take place on that day. Generally, the marriages are considered to be family affairs but Chauhan has converted it into social event. Even when he was not the Chief Minister, he used to arrange mass marriages. During that period, he himself used to raise the resources to finance the event, which he calls "Kanyadaan". After becoming Chief Minister, he made it a regular programme undertaken by the government. Funds are allocated by the government to local bodies, panchayats and non-government organisations to organise the event. This year, special efforts were made to ensure that a large number of mass marriages were organised. Most of the ministers left Bhopal to participate in the events at their constituencies on 'Akshaya Tritiya', which fell on May 12. Chief Minister himself attended mass marriage events at more than one place.

In the mass marriages, the government assumes the role of bride's parents. As parents of the bride, the government gives gifts to every couple. The gifts include cooking gas connection, LPG cylinder, bed, utensils and other things, which are needed to start a married life. Besides the state-sponsored gifts, ministers, party MLAs and other leaders also shower handouts on the newly-married couples. Thousands of marriages have been performed in various cities and in some cases, even in villages. The occasions have been used by ministers MPs, MLAs and other leaders to eulogise the Chief Minister and the outstanding achievements of the government. Speaking at one such mass marriage function, Jayant Mallaiya, a senior minister said that the "Kanyadaan" programme of the Chief Minister had helped the poor on a large scale. He said that out of 1,100 couples who got married at the function, some were such who were reconciled to the fact that they would not be able to get married in their life. Though, originally, the mass marriage programme was described as "Kanyadaan", but then secular thinkers pointed out that state funds were being used to advance the cause of a particular religion. In view of the mounting criticism, the MP government came out with the clarification that "Kanyadaan" included "Nikah"- the name of the Muslim religious wedding ceremony.

Besides mass marriages, another important programme of social engineering is the scheme under which people are taken to various places of religious importance. The government bears the entire cost of the pilgrims who take advantage of the programme. The state government charters special trains. Pilgrims are taken to various pilgrimage centres in these trains. Once a person boards the special pilgrims' train, all amenities including breakfast, lunch and dinner are made available by the government. The place to stay and local transport are also arranged by the government. Many elderly women and men going on pilgrimage become emotional and start blessing the chief minister profusely. They say that what the chief minister was doing for them had not been done by their sons and daughters. Originally, only Hindu places of pilgrimage were included in the scheme. But later on, Muslim and Christian places of pilgrimage were also included. Big hoardings announce the event, whenever a special train leaves with 1500-odd pilgrims on board for any place of pilgrimage. Many questions are being raised about the scheme, a prominent one being whether a government constituted under a secular Constitution can divert its financial resources to patronise religious activities?

The BJP government in Madhya Pradesh has given Hindu religious names to many of its developmental schemes, thus giving the impression that MP has already become a 'Hindu Rashtra'. Madhya Pradesh chief minister not only uses government's financial resources to promote Hindu religious activities in the state he is financing such activities in other countries too. For example, the government has decided to finance the construction of a Sita temple in Sri Lanka. Surprisingly, the government of India has cleared the state's proposal to construct Sita temple in Sri Lanka.

The main opposition Congress does not object to such activities, which undermine the letter and spirit of our Constitution. Perhaps, it is fearful of hurting the religious sentiments of the Hindus. There are some secular groups that raise their voice but they are ignored. The BJP leadership knows pretty well that religion-oriented programmes will help it swell its vote bank. (IPA)

Electoral reforms

Sir,

We have been witnessing startling events happening at this critical phase of national life. Time is really tough and studded with formidable trials and tribulations which warrant immediate attention followed by stern remedial action by the people holding levers of power. Deeply hurt and piqued at superlative degree of inertia & mal governance one is constrained to comment that the people in the driving seat have a vested interest in fatalistic status quo. Instead of undertaking some kind of realistic self introspection, Self Analysis for the purpose of hammering out some concrete action plan to initiate the process of radical change in the system. The wide spread rot is allowed to stick around and multiply in regular progression. Things are, therefore, going from bad to worse day in and day out.

Mind boggling revelation of use of tainted money in the IPL circus, though tip of the iceberg yet it is strong indicator of all pervading corruption in different segments of our system of Governance. It sees the corruption has become a way of life in our country with deep penetration into sub conscious mind of people in authority and ultimately culminating into the flash point of moral turpitude. The burning question is who will stem the rot? As

of now nothing is happening at Govt. level excepting half hearted knee jerk reaction treatment in the form of selective patch work aimed at siphoning off public money.Probes are instituted, prolonged court trials are held but the proven culprits go scot free in absence of cogent evidence. No efforts are made to revamp the Judicial as well as police system in keeping with the changing times.

We are just carrying on the imperial legacy by sticking to the British model which is unsuitable and uneconomical in the given circumstances. This is disgusting and unfortunate, the long pending issue of electoral reforms has been relegated to the back burner. Switch over to presidential form of democracy can be the most viable option who will bell the cat and become the catalyst of change is a million dollar question. The magic solution will emerge out of unity and concerted action of vital segments of society viz intellectuals, women, youth, tribal and the rural folk. They have to take the SOS call. The iron is hot, strike it now for catapulting the nation into topmost slot on the world horizon.

Yours etc....
P.C. Sharma
Trikuta Nagar

Debating Human Rights

Sir,

This has reference to the news item C D organizes debate on human rights DE May 30. It is a good initiative on the part of the police authorities to dwell on a serious issue as Human Rights.

Once police force recognises the need for honouring human rights, people will feel that their life and property is safe.

Generally, people hesitate to approach police with their complaints. It is only in grave matters that they approach these authorities. Most of the prefer to remain silent even when they feel insecure or are intimidated by goons or anti-social elements. People most of the time prefer to settle their scores without involvement of police. This is because people fear harassment at the hands of police authorities.

Respecting human rights will only enhance the esteem of police force in the eyes of public.

Yours etc....
Jatinder Jamwal
Karan Nagar

Readers Write

Forest fires

Sir,

During last two months many fire incidents were noticed in many parts of the Jammu province especially in rural areas. These incidents caused huge loss to farmers.

Though fire incidents are a common feature during summer season due to scorching heat and shortage of water, some incidents occur due to negligence and carelessness of people.

The Fire Department alone can't fight these incidents as it has been sufficient manpower and wherewithal people too have to share this responsibility.

There is urgent need to sanitize people about this issue, particularly those living near forests. These people should be provided equipments and guidance to fight fires. Huge loss occurs in forest fires. This loss is difficult to compensate. At times wildlife and human becomes its victims.

Yours etc....
Shamsher Singh
Sidhra