**Anti-Corruption Day**

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December 10, 2022

“If a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel there are three key societal members who can make a difference. They are the father, mother and the teacher.”-APJ Abdul Kalam

Ever since the passage of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in 2003, December 9 is observed as International Anti-Corruption Day. Transparency International (TI) defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. In a nutshell, one can say that allowing corruption to persist in a society, is bound to infest it with such evil that can eventually lead to a weakening hold over law and order situation, encourage nepotism, discourage merit, obstruct economic growth and further widen the gap between the haves and have-nots leaving little room for peace and prosperity. In a decent society, where governance is functional, the systems work in a manner that ensures the smooth provision of services to one and all without involving red tape.

Before suggesting solutions to fight off corruption, it is vital to first understand the different ways and means through which it finds its way. Three categories are popularly considered-at the government level, the political level and the corporate level-but the fact is that all spheres of life are prone to corruption-including businesses, courts, the media, civil society, and even health, education and sports. Nothing escapes corruption that has been referred to as a curse and cancer by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Joe Biden respectively.

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As revealed by Panama and later Pandora Papers, corruption also occurs in shadows assisted by bankers, accountants, estate agents and such professional enablers. This worldwide malaise brought into its folds those ultra-rich and powerful persons, as well as corporations, whose insatiable lust for wealth knows no bounds. Names of the many politicians engaged in depraved practices are proof of the way in which they have fleeced their countries and betrayed their people to fill up their own pockets with ill-gotten wealth while depriving the underprivileged of the chance to flourish. A few benevolent actions in the name of serving their country in the capacity of rulers certainly do not absolve them of the injustice and disloyalty they have displayed in their indulgence for luxuries, desire for assets and all at the expense of perhaps, better standards of education and health facilities for their people. With such examples on a global scale what can be done to stem these waves upon waves of corruption and malpractices, especially as these seem to exist the most in underdeveloped countries?

Perhaps one need only look at those states whose common people are enjoying a relatively better lifestyle because as Ramez Naam, a science fiction writer, says:

“We’ve seen over time that countries that have the best economic growth are those that have good governance, and good governance comes from freedom of communication. It comes from ending corruption. It comes from a populace that can go online and say, ‘This politician is corrupt, or this public official is corrupt.'”

Although what he said is an open secret about which everyone is consciously aware, then why there is no end to it? Today, there are so many checks and balances at both national and international levels, yet how come the money meant for public good ends up in the purchase of lavish off-shore properties for the opulent lifestyle of civil-military bureaucrats after their retirement, in spite of their low salaries while in-service? Each year, TI provides a list of countries that feature as most corrupt to least corrupt, but to no avail. Whereas the clean nations are conspicuous by their extraordinary growth, development and prosperity of their people, the dubious ones top the chart in regression, on-the-verge-of-collapse economies, social unrest, wasted resources and above all, tight controls over freedom of expression.

Prudent persons who intend to make some transactions or start new projects, usually sit down and make a cost-benefit analysis to ensure that they do not end up sustaining serious losses. However, those engaging in corrupt practices hardly ever realise that their actions have heavy costs in terms of suppressed freedom, lack of trust in government, unhealthy environment, poor economic growth and bleak future, for others and maybe for themselves too. They are somehow incapable of thinking for the collective good and welfare of all, so obsessed are they with boosting up their own sources of wealth and income.

Even the so-called regulations to curb this infirmity fail to penalize those in authority or power but are quick to punish the small fry and make an example out of them. This injustice is actually responsible for the spread of corruption to all walks of life. Regular availability of amnesty schemes prevents the process of accountability because of which the corrupt easily manage to shield themselves and instead of expressing remorse proudly boast about their misdemeanour.

According to TI, the only thing that can control rampant corruption in the world is transparency itself. This entails that the public should have absolute knowledge of who, why, what, how and how much. So, if a person is selected for a particular post, his introduction and reason for his selection are properly stated. Similarly, if there is a project in the making, its details must be made available in addition to the amount that would be involved in its execution. Such information is rarely shared with the public, especially in under-developed countries and it is only when people are forcibly dislocated or asked to detour, do they find out that something is brewing.

Questioning or seeking information is something that is mostly discouraged in corrupt societies. The right to information may be in existence in the form of a statute but that is mainly to gain recognition as a clean and clear state. Corruption can only be contained when the government, civil society and all connected agencies work hand in hand. The idea should be to nip the evil in the bud and not as Thomas More wrote in Utopia, “For if you suffer your people to be ill-educated, and their manners to be corrupted from their infancy, and then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them, what else is to be concluded from this, but that you first make thieves and then punish them.”

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