

Hon'ble Prime Minister's address at the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of CVC



I am delighted to participate in the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Central Vigilance Commission, or the CVC as it is commonly known. The CVC is a very important part of the institutional framework for fighting corruption and ensuring probity, transparency and accountability in the work and conduct of public servants. Ever since it was established 50 years back, it has served our country with distinction. I compliment the CVC for its outstanding record.

The past 50 years have witnessed an increase in the scope and complexity of the work of the CVC. When it was set up in 1964 by an executive order, it was expected to monitor all vigilance activities in the Central Government and advise Central Government organizations in planning, executing, reviewing and reforming their vigilance work. Later, in pursuance of the judgment of the Supreme Court in the

Vineet Narain case, it was accorded statutory status and superintendence of investigation of corruption cases by the CBI was added to its responsibilities. The Central Vigilance Commissioner was also given a major role in the selection of Director and other senior officers of the CBI. More recently, the responsibility of protecting whistle blowers has been entrusted to the CVC. And very recently, the coming into force of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act has added to the charter of the Commission's responsibilities like preliminary enquiries on matters referred to it by the Lokpal and action against those making false and vexatious complaints. It has also enlarged the jurisdiction of the CVC to cover Group B, C and D employees of the Central Government in cases referred to it by the Lokpal. This widening of scope of the work of the CVC over the years has also been accompanied by increasing complexity, as public policy formulation and implementation have become more and more complex with the passage of time.

In fact, it is not only the CVC but the whole institutional set up for fighting corruption that has undergone a transformation with the passage of time. This process of change has particularly picked up in the last 10 years. New laws have been enacted to ensure probity, transparency and accountability in administration. The Right to Information Act and the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act are major examples. A number of new laws are under consideration of Parliament. These include the Right of Citizens for the Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, the Public Procurement Bill and a Bill to amend the Prevention of Corruption Act. These legislative initiatives have been accompanied by administrative steps in the same direction. Greater use of Information and Communications Technology has also helped in increasing transparency and reducing opportunities for corrupt practices.

The last few years have also seen a very vigorous debate on corruption in our country, with civil society and media being active participants. As I have said earlier, I believe this debate has been on the whole for the good. It has led not only to increased awareness in the people about their rights and the responsibilities of public authorities but also a realization in public authorities of the heightened expectation that our people have from them.

The agenda of this conference covers all these developments. In fact, it is a vast agenda that is before you - from the effectiveness of the legal and institutional frameworks for fighting corruption to the use of Information and Communications Technology, from the role of investigating agencies to the role of media and civil society, from autonomy and accountability of investigating agencies to electoral reforms and political accountability. The conference also brings together men and women of distinction from diverse fields - Government, public and private sectors, media, law and academics. I am sure that the discussions that follow will be stimulating and of great benefit to the participants, and will also contribute towards strengthening our efforts for fighting corruption. On my part, I would like to briefly mention some broad issues which I believe are of abiding importance in our anti-corruption initiatives. I have stressed on some of these issues earlier occasions as well, but I think they are well worth repeating.

It is important to remember that the ultimate aim of any anti-corruption mechanism is to contribute towards improvement of the processes of governance and delivery of services. This can happen only when we encourage bold and innovative decision making. Therefore, we must make sure that honest officers are not harassed for bonafide mistakes that they might make while taking well-meaning decisions. At the time of establishment of the CVC, the then Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri had observed that the Commission was to be a fearless champion of the man of integrity and source of terror to corrupt officers. We must ensure the championing of the cause of the man of integrity in all our institutions. In the scenario in which this does not happen, decision making would suffer badly and instead of improving the processes of governance, we would end up stifling them.

Maintaining this balance necessarily involves a high degree of expertise in analyzing and scrutinizing complex decisions pertaining to policy formulation and implementation. This points to the need for greater professional expertise in diverse fields in agencies like the CVC and the CBI. Such agencies would perhaps do well in also inducting officers from expert organizations.

Another balance that agencies like the CVC ought to maintain is between the need to be careful and detailed and the need for speed. Matters like disciplinary proceedings and grant of vigilance clearance must be disposed of in time. Excessive delays make such exercises meaningless.

There is a need for moderation in the public debate about corruption as well. In the past few years, we have been witnessing a very vigorous public debate in our country on matters relating to corruption, with accusations flying thick and fast. While informed discussion on such matters is certainly desirable, much too often we see a trivialisation of complex public policy issues. This is accompanied by unwarranted condemnation of the decisions taken and imputation of guilt and malafide on the part of those who took those decisions. I sincerely think there is a need to change this state of affairs.

Autonomy of investigating agencies is a subject on which I have spoken earlier as well. Investigating agencies have always enjoyed complete autonomy in investigation of criminal cases. Our Government has also been willing to do more to insulate the CBI from extraneous influences. However, it is also necessary to ensure that the political executive exercises the oversight that it is expected to in a democratic polity over any investigating agency.

These are the few brief thoughts that I wish to share with you. I am sure that the distinguished men and women who are participating in this conference will examine these and other such matters in much greater detail. I wish you very productive deliberations. I also wish the CVC all success in the future.
