

CONTENTS

BOOK REVIEW

**Chronicling an America on wheels of change
(IANS Book Review) 3-5**

CIVIL SERVICE

New UPSC exam tests aptitude, not memory 7-8

Now, CAT model for IAS prelims 9-10

CORRUPTION

Time to name, shame 12-15

PM sets up panel to probe CWG 'corruption' 16-18

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A red carpet for growth 20-22

EDUCATION

UNICEF launches online campaign for RTE awareness 24-25

POVERTY

SC questions criteria for poverty 27-28

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

More power to the people 30-33

SOCIAL JUSTICE

All that glitters is not gold

35-38

BOOK REVIEW

TIMES OF INDIA 22.10.10 BOOK REVIEW

Chronicling an America on wheels of change (IANS Book Review)

Book: 'Looking for America'; Author: Avirook Sen; Publisher: HarperCollins-India; Price: Rs.299

By Madhusree Chatterjee

Veteran journalist-writer Avirook Sen's book, 'Looking for America', is inextricably linked to the much-awaited India visit of the US president because it helps unravel the phenomenon called Barack Obama from an Indian's point of view.

Launched by HarperCollins-India, the book captures the story of the journey of America scouting for change – in the heat, dust and heady excitement of the pre-Obama days when everyone in the rainbow land was working for a cause – 'Obama for America' – as the donation-seekers called their mission, treating the presidential poll pitch as their karmic 'battleground'.

'Sample one of these I got in my mailbox a few days after meeting a black man in downtown Chicago,' says Sen in his book.

The mail: 'Avirook, I never asked you to make a donation before. But I'm about to make some major decisions about deploying field staff – and volunteers to key battleground states...Please donate \$5...to get out the vote – and win the election.'

'We are stretching every dollar and doing everything we can with what we have. But every day I see first hand how more can we do and how far your donation will go...,' the mail from Joe Cameron, Obama for America, adds.

In the six years between a fateful September in 2002 when Sen visited the US on an assignment to cover the UN General Assembly and May 2008 when he returned to write his book flush with a kitty of Rs.2 crore – a settlement amount paid by a media organisation for unceremoniously throwing him out – America had changed beyond recall.

Gary, a small town in Indiana, was an inescapable metaphor, Sen says in his book launched Friday evening.

‘It had elected the country’s first black mayor and held the country’s first National Black Political Convention,’ he says.

Sen quotes the black mayor of Gary to home in on the change: ‘I’ll tell you what’s changed from then (in 1972, when the mayor was running for the state Senate) and now. Then we had approximately 800 African-Americans elected officials – but now we have almost 8,000. So, that’s a big change in terms of numbers. Now you gave Barack Obama knocking at the door...’

Sen explores the coloured history and psyche of the American landscape – Kentucky, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, the deep south with its blues and memories of hundreds of years of slavery; and even the prairies.

In 2008, Sen meets Coleman Smith, the tough security officer at the Montgomery Area Transmit Systems bus terminus.

Smith told Sen that he had been following the election more closely than any of the others who had in 63 years.

Why was that? ‘Because of Obama, I guess,’ he says.

‘What’s special about him?’

‘He’s black,’ Smith says.

Sen writes: ‘Forget running for president, it is easy enough to overlook the fact that blacks got the unfettered right to vote in the world’s greatest democracy less than 50 years ago.’

‘They have voted freely in the last 11 of the country’s 56 elections so far. By standing in Montgomery, which played a pivotal role in winning that right, I wasn’t about to let Smith go,’ he adds.

The coaxing yields fruit. Smith makes a point: ‘It isn’t the white man who keeps the black man down – it’s other black men.’

‘That is the recurring theme, wherever you travel across the US,’ Sen says.

Written in Sen’s breezy yet piercing style, the book reads like a travelogue till one reads the subtext.

In 17 chapters, it sweeps across the continent to capture the story of a metamorphosis at the grassroots – Obama’s political cradle and destiny.

And manages to mail deliver a nation on the move to a new era to readers across the world.

(Madhusree Chatterjee can be contacted at madhusree.chatterjee@gmail.com)

CIVIL SERVICE

New UPSC exam tests aptitude, not memory

Aloke Tikku

Setting the stage for civil service aspirants to be tested for their aptitude rather than their memory, the government on Monday announced the outline of the new Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) and changes in the General Studies paper that would require aspirants to be as well versed in environmental studies — say climate change — as social development.

Five lakh aspirants apply for the Civil Services Examination (Preliminary) every year. To help aspirants understand the new format, the Union Public Service Commission has been told to make the detailed syllabus public early.

"The government has also accepted UPSC's proposal to put out sample papers of the new format," a Department of Personnel and Training official said.

In its new form, the preliminary exam will have a tweaked General Studies paper and replace the Optional Paper — selected by candidates from a list of two dozen-odd subjects — with the CSAT.

The two papers will be a screening test to shortlist candidates for the Mains exam and interview.

Government officials insist the new aptitude test won't have the urban bias the common admission test for top management schools are accused

of that would test candidates for their knowledge in environmental ecology, bio-diversity and climate change.

Now, CAT model for IAS prelims

Reasoning, aptitude to count; IITians, medicos lose subject advantage

Aditi Tandon

In a major reform in the Civil Services Examinations, the government today scrapped the optional subject-based second paper system, replacing the same with a test of the analytical abilities and reasoning of the aspirant. The changes were notified late this evening by the Ministry of Personnel.

From 2011 onwards, Civil Services Prelims Exams will have two papers - Paper I (general studies) that will test the general knowledge of the exam taker along with his ability to comprehend and follow events of current national and international importance; and Paper II, modeled on the Common Aptitude Test (CAT) Scheme the IIMs follow to test basic English language comprehension and a candidate's proficiency in basic math and reasoning apart from his communication skills. Paper II was until today based on optional subjects, with a candidate free to take his pick from over 20 subjects on offer.

Of late, it was felt the toppers in IITs, IIMs and medical institutions had tremendous subject advantage in Prelims II paper which overstressed knowledge of the academics that included mathematics, physics, medical sciences etc, allowing top IIT, medical scorers to take their subjects and score the requisite marks.

In the old system, Paper I which tested general knowledge of the candidate carried 150 marks, while Paper II that tested his subject knowledge carried 300.

Now, not just have the paper contents been streamlined to ensure level playing field for all exam takers, the weightage of both papers has been revised at 200 marks each.

Also, in Paper I now, new age subjects like climate change, biodiversity have been added to ensure the IAS exams are in sync with the times.

Paper I will henceforth consist of the following subjects - current events of national and international importance; history of India and Indian national movement; Indian and world geography - physical, social, economic geography of India and the world; Indian polity and governance - constitution, political system, panchayati raj, public policy, rights issues, etc; economic and social development - sustainable development, poverty, inclusion, demographics, social sector initiatives etc; general issues on environmental ecology, bio-diversity and climate change-that do not require subject specialisation and general science.

Paper II will comprise comprehension; interpersonal skills including communication skills; logical reasoning and analytical ability; decision-making and problem solving; general mental ability; basic numeracy, data interpretation (charts, graphs, tables, data sufficiency) and English language comprehension skills. Both papers will be of two-hour duration each.

CORRUPTION

Time to name, shame

Ashok Malik

Give credit where it's due. The United Progressive Alliance government has done well to appoint a committee headed by V.K. Shunglu, former Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) and a respected civil servant, to investigate allegations of corruption in the organisation of the Commonwealth Games. That this happened immediately after the Games concluded — warts and all, they went off well, with Indian sportspersons doing their country proud — belied the widespread cynicism that the political class would use the relatively smooth conduct of the Games to whitewash the wrongdoing.

Mr Shunglu has three months to complete his inquiry. He has a large body of documentation before him, ranging from media reports to evidence already gathered by the current CAG and his office, and by investigative agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate and the income-tax department. In addition, he is expected to call and question officials and record primary evidence.

The budgeting and execution of the 2010 Commonwealth Games has been among the murkiest for any major sports event in recent years. India's private sector skills — say in the services sector, from technology to hospitality — were deliberately kept out of the preparations. The focus was almost entirely on state agencies and public sector corporations. It was obvious political and governmental control of such bodies allowed for a certain opacity, and made embezzlement that much easier.

Essentially, there are three sets of institutions Mr Shunglu needs to look at: the Organising Committee (OC); the Union ministry of urban development and its agencies; and the Delhi government and its civic

agencies. It is taken of course that his report will cover controversial financial deals and how these were entered into. It would also be useful if he were to make an assessment of the structuring of and decision-making systems within these bodies. This would clarify the mistakes India needs to avoid while putting together an event of this magnitude, whether related to sports or otherwise.

Take the OC. This was a strange hybrid body that was essentially living off taxpayer money and government hand-outs but claiming operational autonomy. Cultural institutions and sport federations can demand a similar status on the basis of long-standing tradition. The OC had no such legacy; it was an ad hoc entity, coterminous with the Games. It had a general body comprising over 450 people, besides 1,600 employees. It is an open secret that Suresh Kalmadi, chairman of the OC, packed it with his cronies and relatives of cronies. These people were paid salaries using grants given by the Government of India.

The process of making the OC accountable was delayed for two-and-a-half years by Mr Kalmadi and his lieutenants. In May 2007, the ministry of youth affairs and sports issued an order bringing the OC under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The OC took the matter to the Delhi high court, eventually losing its case in January 2010. Mr Shunglu's report would do well to recommend that all such bodies — whether delivering a sports event or an international health conference — need to conform to RTI provisions if they are seeking public money. The Union government gave the OC `2,394.25 crore as loans under various heads. The OC's projections were that it would get `1,708 crore as revenue and repay the government. Eventual revenue was less than half the amount, and much of it coerced from Union government agencies such as Indian Railways. The OC needs to explain how it arrived at these projections. The specific project planners need to be identified and their financial interest in the Games investigated. They have caused a loss to the exchequer. They need to be held liable. If nothing else, their incompetence should constrict them from managing public funds in future.

About a fourth of the sum given to the OC — `687 crore to be exact —

was for hire/purchase of “overlays”, i.e. temporary fitting inside stadiums that had already been built, covering such items as tents, porta cabins, air-conditioners, generators, fitness equipment. What is the state of this “overlay” material? How much of the money can be recovered by selling it or getting refunds from rental agencies? If specific equipment is declared as irreversibly damaged, can third-party audits happen? If the OC writes off hired equipment as damaged and offers to compensate renting companies, who are the vendors who will benefit? All this needs to be in the public domain.

Move to the ministry of urban development. It built three stadiums and was a partner, along with a property development company, in the construction of the Games Village. The Village was supposed to have been built in Bawana, in northwest Delhi, and meant to trigger urban renewal in an outlying part of the capital. In what circumstances and under whose direction was the Village moved to the Yamuna riverbed? Why were environmental risks ignored?

Who gave permission to the private developer to convert car parking space into incremental flats, and so caused flooding and seepage in the lower storeys following heavy rains in Delhi this summer? Can this be redressed, and the car parking space restored before the company and the Delhi Development Authority (an agency under the ministry of urban development) start selling these flats in the open market? Mr Shunglu’s committee needs to tackle these issues.

Finally, the government of Delhi spent `16,560 crore on the Games. Part of this money was used on the Delhi Metro, power plants, flyovers and bridges. About half was spent under decidedly dodgy heads. `650 crore was set aside for street lighting, `1,175 crore for widening and resurfacing of roads and street-scaping, `1,800 crore for buying buses. Some of this involved digging up completely good roads and pavements — repaired only months earlier — and relaying them.

Who approved this? Was there a broader plan? Who drew it up? Who were the contractors? When were tenders issued? What are market prices for comparable tasks? Did covering up nullahs to create parking facilities — a job still incomplete in some areas of the city such as

Defence Colony — really require `400 crore? How did the Municipal Corporation of Delhi choose partners who were given prized plots in key markets of the city and allowed to build toilets cum shops/restaurants? The questions could take years; Mr Shunglu has only 90 days.

Ashok Malik

TRIBUNE 16.10.10 CORRUPTION

**PM sets up panel to probe CWG ‘corruption’
Former CAG Shunglu to head high-level committee; PMO to get
report in 3 months**

With the Commonwealth Games over and demands for probe mounting, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh tonight appointed a high-level committee headed by a former Comptroller and Auditor General to go into allegations of corruption related to the mega sporting event.

The committee, headed by former CAG VK Shunglu, will submit its report to the Prime Minister within three months, PMO spokesman said.

The announcement came even as the CAG stepped into the picture to conduct assessment of various projects related to the CWG with officials set to visit all the stadia and go through records.

Significantly, CWG Organising Committee chairman Suresh Kalmadi, who has been in the line of fire over the corruption allegations, was snubbed when he was not invited to a felicitation at the Prime Minister’s residence for Indian medal winners.

“The government has decided to constitute a high-level committee under former CAG VK Shunglu to look into all matters relating to organising and conduct of the Commonwealth Games 2010, New Delhi, including to draw lessons from it,” the spokesman said.

The details of terms of reference will be announced in a day or two, the spokesman added.

The developments came as opposition parties, which had held their fire during the 12-day event, today stepped up their demand for thorough

probe into corruption charges which the Congress said should be done and those guilty, if any, be brought to book.

The CAG, which had held up its audit during the Games, today sent its inspection officials to the CPWD office located inside S P Mukherjee Stadium to check the accounts related to the CWG projects.

The audit work for CWG is related to work payments, contracts and leasing of sports equipment among others.

The CAG audit would look into how the balance between the cost and quality has been maintained and whether there has been any cost overrun.

“We have started with the CPWD office inside the S P Mukherjee Stadium today. Now that the athletes have vacated the venues, we will gradually start sending our inspection officers to all the stadia,” an official with the auditing watchdog said.

The CAG had begun assessing the Games’ expenditure in August, but had to stop the audit related works in the last week of September as they could not access the premises of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD).

The official said the CAG had to suspend the audit works for over a fortnight since most of the CPWD offices are located inside the venues which had the athletes till yesterday. The official said the biggest venue, the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, is yet to be inspected by the CAG and the government auditor would soon send its inspectors there.

The statutory auditor expects to submit the final report to the government by January-end, to be presented in the budget session of Parliament in February. In August last year, the CAG had submitted an evaluation report to the Prime Minister’s Office and the Sports Ministry

pointing out the slow pace of progress of all the projects connected with the Games.

Against the backdrop of attack on him from various quarters over delays and charges of corruption ranging from favouritism in award of contracts to expensive hiring of training equipment, Kalmadi had the ignominy of being ignored for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's reception to the medal winning sportsmen. Sports Minister MS Gill was seen on the lawns of the Race Course residence of the Prime Minister when he met the performers this evening. PMO sources said Kalmadi was not invited, nor was any other OC official. — **PTI**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A red carpet for growth

TK Arun

As India prepares for President Obama's state visit in early November, it is inevitable that Indians should be treated to a parade, across their daily headlines, of likely commercial deals, geopolitical tensions, protectionist moves and unfavourable comparisons with the president's Republican predecessor. All these, however, would not capture the essence of what ordinary Indians look forward to, when they prepare to greet Mr Obama, anymore than a botanist's description of the parts of a flower would capture its fragrance.

Barack Obama is more popular abroad than he is at home. In the US, he is a leader who has not quite delivered deliverance from unemployment, is caricatured as an apostate from the religion of free enterprise and is relentlessly criticised for not showing enough spine when it comes to tough customers like China, North Korea or even Iran. Abroad, he is a symbol — of power that acknowledges a possible distinction between might and right, of the possibility of pursuing the common good in an interconnected world and, ultimately, of the triumph of the human spirit, of the underdog who can come out on top. It is, indeed, in this latter vein that most Indians are likely to receive Mr Obama, and celebrate him.

And that is just as well. It is rare for state visits to herald or consummate big changes in the way two countries interact. Such visits are meant to give a fillip to the ties between the visitor and the host, not to transform it. Tokens of goodwill would be put on display — a deal for supplying

aircraft or locomotives, to remove high-tech sanctions, to cooperate in higher education. But tokens are form, not substance.

In their relations as states, India and the US have many areas of contention, where their immediate interests conflict. But over the long-term horizon, there is much convergence between their goals and scope for cooperation. The point is to keep both the long-term and short-term prospects in simultaneous perspective so that short-term dissonance is not allowed to embitter future ties just as promise of the good times to come does not become an excuse for current compromise on core issues.

India is a target of US protectionism, particularly in its services, suffers the consequences of loose US monetary policy in the shape of rising oil prices that float on dollars gushing into commodities, an excessively strong rupee and froth in the Indian stock market. The US has full sympathy with India in its battle against terror sponsored from Pakistan, but is reluctant to act against Islamabad because it is putatively Washington's key ally in its own war against al Qaeda. Pakistan can persuade the US to continue pouring aid and assistance into shoring up its founding hostility towards India, even as the US declares India to be its civilisational soulmate.

These are pinpricks that India has to live with, and can afford. However, there is no gainsaying that India is yet to reap the full benefits of the associate membership of the nuclear club that President George Bush wangled for India, in the teeth of stiff opposition. To realise the full potential of the nuclear deal, the US administration needs to move resolutely to remove all remaining barriers to India's unrestricted access to high technology.

Release from the technology denial regime was the prize that India sought through admittance to the Nuclear Club and once the Obama regime operationalises the abandonment of technology denial, India can

start acquiring the strategic capability it needs to sustain an independent national security strategy in a world that has divided into mutual defence pacts, all of which exclude India. And such moves would suit the US and most of Asia, all of which desperately seek a counterweight to China.

Continuing hostility between Israel and Palestine harms India, as well as the rest of the world. If Israel could be persuaded to negotiate its way, in good faith, to peace with a Palestine state, that would help bring democracy and stability to the Middle East, more vigorously than America's war on terror has so far. New Delhi wishes the Obama administration greater resolve in this matter.

India is too large a country, not just in terms of its population or economic size but also on account of its far-flung interests, for US-India ties to be strictly a bilateral affair. But the US president and India's prime minister will stick to what directly affects the two countries, leaving the broader set of issues to wideranging dialogue on a sustained basis.

Sections of public opinion in India still remain colonised and subjugated to the idea that engagement with a superpower can only be from a position of subservience. Large sections of India are yet to get used to the idea of India emerging as a major power in the world.

To span the long, schizophrenic gap between mass poverty and venality at one end, and the beckoning miracle of power and prosperity at the other, India needs a sustained process of inclusive, globalised growth. Bilateral relations with the US can yield vital bits and pieces needed for that transition. India will welcome President Obama as someone who symbolises and facilitates such a journey of redemption.

EDUCATION

TRIBUNE 18.10.10 EDUCATION

UNICEF launches online campaign for RTE awareness

The UNICEF today launched a special online campaign called “Awaaz Do” (Speak Up) to spread awareness about the landmark Right to Education Act among the Internet-savvy middle class people.

The campaign which invites people to sign up for the cause of eight million children currently out-of-school already has the participation of HRD Minister Kapil Sibal and film actor Priyanka Chopra. It now wants everyone to sign up and become a champion for the cause of education.

The campaign will operate through the specially crafted website called www.awaazdo.in which will have a series of pointers to lead the visitor to different sections - including those on the salient features of the law which guarantees free and compulsory elementary education to all children in the age groups of 6 to 14 years, bars screening or physical and mental humiliation of students, among a lot of other things. Then there are leads on what one can do to help children.

“The idea is to ensure that everyone fulfils his/her responsibility as a citizen. We want people to do what they can in this landmark effort. Currently, one out of two children who reach class VIII drop out. We must help the system track them and encourage them to go back to school. This is a challenge we have taken up against our own people as we know a lot of our own homes employ children as domestic workers. The new campaign allows people to participate in making India truly literate,” said UNICEF country chief Karin Hulshof at an interaction with mediapersons today.

The website even allows people to have an overview of the neighbourhood schools; it has a section of schools (district, block and unit-wise) which people can visit to find what the school report card is. The website also offers a contest for best picture and best video on the subject, with its makers toying with the idea of honouring those visitors who manage to make a difference to the lives of school children.

POVERTY

TRIBUNE 20.10.10 POVERTY

SC questions criteria for poverty

- **Expresses shock over method to determine level**
- **Suggests prosecution of people holding bogus ration cards**

R Sedhuraman

New Delhi, October 19

The Supreme Court today expressed shock over the criteria for determining the poverty level of people, observing that even an income of two dollars a day per person was not much these days.

A Bench comprising Justices Dalveer Bhandari and Deepak Verma made the remark upon being informed by senior counsel Colin Gonsalves that all those who spent more than Rs 17 per day in Delhi or Rs 11 in villages were being treated as above poverty line (APL) families for the purpose of being covered under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

The Bench said even the \$2 cap per person per day suggested by a planning commission committee headed by Arjun Sengupta for deciding the below poverty line (BPL) population was not “too much”.

The court also expressed displeasure over the bogus ration cards and the vast differences between the number of BPL families estimated by the Centre and the states and asked the Centre to reconcile the figures. Those holding bogus ration cards should be given a two-week deadline through newspaper advertisements for surrendering these and those who failed to comply should be prosecuted, the Bench felt.

During four hours of arguments on a PIL over the PDS, procurement and wastage of foodgrain, the Bench said it had not placed any restrictions on the government for the procurement of rice and wheat under the minimum support price (MSP) scheme meant for farmers.

“There was no suggestion by the court that procurement should be curtailed” due to lack of storage facilities available with the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other government agencies that resulted in rotting of foodgrain, it said.

“Procure as much as necessary, but preserve the foodgrain properly,” the Bench told Additional Solicitor General Mohan Parasaran. Taking note of the fact that the procurement season began this month, the Bench said, “Whatever is procured should not be allowed to rot.” The Bench also wanted to know how much foodgrain got wasted in other countries due to lack of warehouses as compared to that in India.

When the ASG said only 7,000 tonne rice and wheat stored in Punjab and Haryana had become rotten, and not 70,000 tonne as reported, the Bench wanted to know why even that much was allowed to go bad when people were faced with starvation. Further, the figures for other states had not been provided.

The apex court also felt that some states were unable to provide 35 kg of rice and wheat to each BPL family as the number of such families according to them was much higher than the estimate of the Centre.

At this, the ASG said the Planning Commission was in touch with the states to reconcile the figures relating to the number of BPL families. The court was, however, not convinced. This job had been going on since 2008, it noted, and wanted to know how much more time this would take. Reconciliation was likely to be completed in another six months, the Centre said. The arguments would continue on Thursday.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

More power to the people

Kalyani Shankar

The Lokpal Bill offers fresh hope for citizens fighting corruption in high places. Even the office of the Prime Minister is not exempted from its purview. But will political parties pass the Bill?

The Lokpal Bill has popped up once again in the public domain with the Government declaring its intention to introduce it during the winter session of Parliament. It is the 10th time the Bill will go to Parliament and one can only hope that it is passed this time around. With corruption featuring big time on the national radar after the Commonwealth Games, it is high time the Lokpal came into existence. But going by previous experience, unless there is sufficient political will, the Bill will fall through once again.

The Lokpal Bill was first recommended by the Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Morarji Desai in 1966. He suggested a two-tier system with a Lokpal heading a team of Lokayuktas at the State level who are independent of each other.

The initial response to the Bill was encouraging and the Lok Sabha first passed it in 1969. But the Bill could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha because elections were called. Several attempts have been made by various Governments in the years 1971, 1975, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005 and 2008 to pass it. But just as in the case of the women's reservation Bill, it has not seen the light of day. Except in 1985 when it was withdrawn the Lok Sabha was dissolved at all other times before the Bill could be passed.

Seventeen States have constituted Lokayuktas. Odisha has been the first

to institute a Lokayukta in 1971 and abolished it in 1993. Varying degrees of power are vested in the institution. While some include Chief Ministers under the purview of the Lokayukta, others do not even include legislators. Most of these States have their own story to tell.

Interestingly, it is nobody's case that the appointment of Lokayuktas in various States has resulted in reduction of corruption. Karnataka Lokayukta Justice Santosh Hegde had threatened to resign only because he was powerless to deal with the influential Reddy brothers of Bellary who control the mines in the district. It took the intervention of BJP leader LK Advani to persuade him to retract. Even in the case of Uttar Pradesh Lokayukta Justice Narendra Kishore Mehrotra, the Supreme Court had to step in to stop Chief Minister Mayawati from installing large statues. Politics today is ruled by money power and muscle power.

It is indeed welcome news that the Lokpal Bill may be introduced in the winter session. The main bone of contention of whether or not the Prime Minister should be included within the purview of probes by the Lokpal has now been resolved. Both Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Mr Manmohan Singh have supported authorising him to probe allegations against the Prime Minister and his office. The proposed Bill also has his ministerial colleagues and Members of Parliament under its purview. The Lokpal has no jurisdiction over complaints against the President of India, Vice-President, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha and Supreme Court and High Court judges. The posts of Attorney General, Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners as well as chairman and members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission also do not come under the purview of any probe by the Lokpal.

The Lokpal Bill proposes a three-judge body headed by a sitting or retired Chief Justice of India selected by a collegium headed by the Vice-President and including the Prime Minister. Critics feel that this highly political body may not be effective as no one can expect the

collegium to go against politicians.

Why do we need a Lokpal? With increasing instance of corruption in high places and misuse of public money, the Lokpal is being seen as a vital step to put an end to this scourge. Following the 2G spectrum scam and the Commonwealth Games scandal, it has become imperative on the part of the Government to put up a show of transparency with the public getting disenchanted with corrupt leaders.

There is increasing concern among eminent citizens about the scale of corruption. Significantly, a group of eminent persons including former Central Vigilance Commissioner P Shankar, Justice Hegde and former Election Commissioner JM Lyngdoh had written to the Prime Minister urging him to pass the Bill. All of them had headed anti-corruption agencies and have first-hand experience of the loopholes of the law.

Moreover, there is a need to set up independent institutions like the Lokpal with the requisite powers to investigate and prosecute politicians and corrupt bureaucrats. At present, the Central Vigilance Commission, Central Bureau of Investigation and other bodies do not have that kind of powers. They have also lost credibility in the public eye. Existing institutions like the CVC are meant for officials only while the CBI is seen as a handmaiden of the ruling Government.

Lastly, even a common citizen would have access to the Lokpal. At a time when it is difficult to have access to even a Member of Legislative Assembly or a Member of Parliament, this will provide a boost to the common man's fight for justice. It may also prevent delayed justice as the Lokpal must decide a case within a given time frame. The citizen does not have to spend money by way of a high legal fee.

However, unless all political parties come together on the Lokpal Bill, it is not likely to be passed in Parliament. It is not enough just to make accusations of corruption against the ruling party, one must also be

seriously concerned about possible solutions. MPs should be as serious about passing this Bill as they were when they voted to give themselves a raise.

Also, the office of the Lokpal, when it is set up, should be made powerful enough to deal with corruption in high places. The Right to Information Act and its use by citizens is a shining example of how a common man can use this tool to get justice for himself. If it can work, why not the Lokpal Bill?

SOCIAL JUSTICE

All that glitters is not gold

Sunanda K Datta-Ray

Ambanis and Mittals are no Buffetts and Gates. But we can't blame them for the appalling poverty that prevails in India

Now that Durga Puja's *son et lumiere* has faded, comment might be permitted on what this annual exercise of expensive competitive showmanship reveals of popular taste. That no doubt explains why no one voices the real charge that should be levelled at the super-rich who should be in the dock not for spending too much but for the waste and crass vulgarity of their spending.

Given its Brahmins and Dalits, India has always been a land of contrasts. It has also always epitomized the concentration of wealth. But no one salivated earlier over how rich the rich were, how they acquired their money or how they spent it. Mr Mukesh Ambani's 400,000 sq ft mansion is a talking point because it's news in the West and because the public and private domains are no longer separate.

Their overlapping not only exposes the rich to scrutiny but also distracts attention from the Government's neglected responsibilities. India lags behind many sub-Saharan countries in almost all the indices of modernity not because of the Ambanis, Mittals, Mallyas and Modis, but because our politicians are on the make and our civil servants are on the take. It's their job to create systems that enable people to raise their standard of living; it's not the job of those who have either escaped the rigours of the system or learnt how to manipulate it to their advantage.

The spotlight is on the rich also because political democracy creates its own fantasies. Universal suffrage fosters the illusion of participative

decision-making. The notion of equality before the law is taken seriously. Tub-thumping politicians whip up populist sentiment to pander to the gallery and distract attention from their own misdemeanours and extravagances – marble monuments and statues, for instance. With the media forever on the lookout for titillating titbits, it's news when Mr Ambani buys a Rs 642-crore luxury jet for his wife's birthday.

The information revolution places a premium on immediacy. The past is another country. Those who gloat over the number of Indians in the *Forbes* list of billionaires forget that time was when India occupied the Number One global slot. Few asked how His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad and Berar, reckoned the world's richest man, had accumulated his wealth or questioned how he spent it.

Something called social consciousness and responsibility provides the phoney justification for inquisitiveness. The logic is that extremes of wealth and riches are intolerable and that the rich owe a debt to the poor. Conspicuous consumption is condemned for the same apparent reason. But whatever lofty moral arguments might be invoked, the underlying reason for condemning lavish spending is fear: the rich must for their own sake take care not to provoke the envy and enmity of the poor who are always the majority. The French and Russian Revolutions are history's warnings against unbridled and careless extravagance.

These are Western notions and, significantly, much of the knowledge about even our own rich that excites India's media comes from the West. A society in which the caste system is firmly entrenched does not recoil in horror when an import ban is temporarily suspended to benefit one polyester tycoon. But the Western media thought the manipulation outrageous and reported it. Western society has evolved notions of social consciousness and responsibility. Western Governments have achieved an egalitarian ethic and devised a social welfare net. In the fifties, the Western media went to town on what it considered immoral spending

like the jewel-studded 18-carat gold faucets on Sir Bernard Docker's 860-ton yacht. Now the stories are about similarly ostentatious Indians, and India's media picks them up.

That is how Indians know that the most expensive home in Britain is the £117- million Kensington townhouse that Mr Lakshmi Mittal (who spent £34 million on his daughter's five-day wedding junket at the Palace of Versailles built by France's King Louis XIV) bought for his son. Another tycoon, Mr Bhupendra Kumar Modi, paid nearly £10 million for one of Singapore's most expensive penthouse flats in Marina Bay. Mr Vijay Mallya, who spent £1.1 million last year on buying five relics of Mahatma Gandhi, reputedly has 26 residences around the world and is planning a new home in Bangalore that will soar to 30 storeys against Mr Ambani's 27.

Such details tell us a great deal about the quality of India's wealthy. Not for them the example of the 38 US billionaires who pledged at least 50 per cent of their wealth to charity through a campaign started by Mr Warren Buffett and Mr Bill Gates. Not for them the candour of the oil investor, Mr T Boone Picken, who famously said, "I like making money more, but giving it away is a close second."

Wealth may not generate wit or wisdom in India but that doesn't mean the wealthy can be blamed for Mumbai's slums or our shameful public services. The most we can accuse them of is not investing enough in schools, vocational training, hospitals and recreational facilities. Instead, many prefer to store their wealth abroad. Some salt it away in concealed accounts. Mr Ratan Tata prefers to acquire automobile and steel corporations in Britain, South Africa and Singapore, and has reportedly donated \$50 million to Harvard.

The solution does not lie in redistributing the wealth already created but in encouraging others to generate more while the Government also spends more on amenities like potable water, sanitation, housing and

hygiene, and effective free and compulsory primary education throughout the country. India's self-image is that of a superpower but a country does not become one only because a few people are filthy rich. It's equally facile to argue that India isn't a superpower because 800 million Indians survive on around Rs 70 a day. The British working class lived in abysmal squalor when Britannia ruled the waves.

The solution lies in unleashing the collective creativity of the Indian people. Deng Xiaoping's remedy was to "let some people get rich first and then when they get rich, they will move the whole society and the rest will follow." It became China's slogan. Perhaps it will work in India too but if it does, it will also mean garish glitter down the line. Taking the totality of Indian society, the Ambanis, Mittals, Mallyas and Modis are only more of the same.

-- sunandadr@yahoo.co.in

