

PM's speech at the 19th Conference of CBI and State Anti-Corruption Bureaux

"Let me begin by saying that I consider this to be a very important conference, which gives police officers directly responsible for anti-corruption efforts, an opportunity to discuss new ideas and approaches to best practices. I understand that from this year the conference will be an annual feature instead of the biennial event that it has been so far. This is a welcome development in view of the rapid changes that are taking place in processes of governance and administration in our country, and the newer modi-operandi being adopted by those indulging in corrupt practices.

We have just seen some CBI officers receive medals for their achievements. I congratulate them for this distinction. I hope that their example will be emulated by others in times to come.

I understand that the theme for this conference is Economic Development: role of Anti-corruption Agencies. This happens to be an area which is well worth exploring. The nature of the challenges that our country's anti-corruption agencies face varies with the level of economic development. These challenges get even more complicated if the pace of economic development is rapid, as it has been in our country in the last two decades or so. In these twenty years, the responsibilities that our anti-corruption agencies are expected to discharge have not only multiplied manifold, they have also become wider in scope, and should I say, become more complex and more specialized.

The economic reforms initiated in the early 1990s greatly reduced many of the old forms of corrupt practices, associated with controls and the license-permit raj. They resulted in faster economic growth and new areas of economic activity. This in turn led to newer opportunities for corruption, ones associated with specialization and expansion of our economy. As our economy grows and becomes more integrated with the evolving global economy, the big challenge before our anti-corruption agencies is to keep pace with these rapid developments.

Today, different sectors of our economy follow developmental models that are increasingly becoming more and more sophisticated. Therefore, in many cases, it would be difficult for the investigating agencies to reach the right conclusions without a firm grasp of the complexities involved in the formulation and implementation of economic policy.

It is for this reason that our investigation agencies need to continuously upgrade their skills and techniques to match the newer methods of corruption. Regular in-service training and frequent exchanges with the top anti-corruption agencies in the world over, would help in this process. I am told that the CBI Academy has gradually evolved into a center of excellence. I would like all State Anti-Corruption Bureaux to utilize its services optimally for training their officials. I also believe that collaboration between the CBI and the state anti-corruption agencies in the area of capacity building would benefit both.

While good training and competence are essential, in many cases they might not be sufficient. I would urge the CBI and other anti-corruption agencies to feel free to engage professionals who have the expertise which can assist them in conducting an impartial enquiry in complex cases. Also, institutions

established with special focus on economic offences should perhaps be more broad-based and need not be confined only to persons with a policing background. An open mind in this regard could help in imparting credibility to our investigations and securing, also, higher conviction rates.

Our government stands firm in its commitment to do everything possible to ensure probity, transparency and accountability in the work of public authorities. While addressing this conference last year, I had mentioned some of the steps that we had taken or were proposing to take towards that end. Today, I would like to mention two recent initiatives that form part of our relentless pursuit of minimizing corruption in our economy and our polity.

We have recently put in place an institutional architecture to facilitate a shift to a system in which benefits from the government would get transferred directly to the bank accounts of individual beneficiaries of various social sector schemes. This would cover benefits like scholarships and pensions, and also some of the non-cash subsidies that the government provides. The aim is to eliminate wastage and leakages, and improve transparency and accountability in transfer of government assistance to the people. We plan to leverage the Aadhar numbers that have already been provided to about 20 crore people for this task.

We are also considering amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act, not only in view of the judicial rulings on its provisions, but also with the purpose of filling certain gaps in the legislation and bringing it in line with current international practice. A clear and unambiguous definition for the term 'corruption', covering both the supply and demand sides, is being sought to be provided. Experience has shown that in a vast majority of cases, it is difficult to tackle consensual bribery and the supplier of the bribe goes scot free by taking recourse to the provisions of the Act. This would be taken care of in the proposed amendments. Experience has also shown that big ticket corruption is mostly related to operations by large commercial entities. It is therefore also proposed to include corporate failure to prevent bribery as a new offence on the supply side. We are also examining how the Act can be amended to protect honest public servants more effectively.

While reiterating our government's commitment to fighting the menace of corruption in every possible way, I would like to stress upon the need to protect honest public servants and keep the morale of the executive intact. I have said this in the earlier conferences also, but I think this is something that is worth repeating. The mindless atmosphere of negativity and pessimism that is sought to be created over the issue of corruption can do us no good. It can only damage our nation's image and hit at the morale of the executive. We need to ensure that even while the corrupt are relentlessly pursued and brought to book, the innocent are not harassed. The importance of making a distinction between bonafide mistakes and colorable exercise of power in investigation of corruption cases cannot be over emphasized. This is the point I have emphasized in each and every conference that I have been participating in the last eight years, and I would like to repeat it once again.

Conferences like the present one should also be occasions to remind ourselves of the abiding principles that should guide us in the discharge of our responsibilities- hard work, fairness, honesty,

fearlessness and perseverance. I hope that you will go back from this conference even more determined to uphold these values. I hope you will not be discouraged by cases where the investigation is not successful or a seemingly successful investigation failing to secure a conviction. I would urge you to introspect on every such case so that you can continuously upgrade your skills and capabilities.

These were the few thoughts that I wished to share with you today. I wish you well in your professional endeavors. I am sure you will leave no stone unturned in fighting a menace that is holding back our society and our country. I thank you.

Jai Hind.”