

## **Fighting against Corruption**

### **Why in news?**

Recently Odisha government declared that all public servants are mandatorily required to file their property returns with the Lok Ayukta.

### **What is the existing mechanism to fight corruption?**

- In India, politico-bureaucratic nexus is the cause for systematic corruption & the preventive aspect of it is often neglected.
- Lokpal and Lok Ayuktas Act, 2013 which fights against corruption is existing for more than half a decade.
- But its implementation is uneven and the deadline to file the property declarations is constantly deferred.
- Initially it was set at September 15, 2014, but later this date was extended for six times.

### **What causes corruption?**

- Information asymmetry is the primary culprit behind illegal wealth acquired by bureaucrats and political functionaries.
- Now Odisha government stated that all political and bureaucratic functionaries have to publicly declare their assets at the end of every year.
- This baseline data-base of assets provides significant insights into the asset ownership pattern of officials at different positions.
- It also creates transparency between the citizens and those in power at every level, reduces information asymmetry.
- Moreover lack of accountability is another cause for corruption.

### **How accountability can be promoted?**

- According to Robert Klitgaard, systemic corruption is due to monopoly (M), discretion (D), accountability (A) which can be denoted in formula as  $C = M + D - A$ .
- But people's participation (P) is also critical in preventing, detecting and reducing corruption in the system.
- Hence this formula can be rearranged as  $C = M + D - A - P$ .
- Odisha declaration can enhance people's participation and more the people's participation; less is the likelihood of corruption.

- People's participation can also be increased if more information about assets of public officials is published regularly.
- The Odisha government has adopted technology and online transactions to reduce discretion.
- In the last one year alone, state government has either dismissed, removed or compulsorily retired 100's of non cooperative government servants.

### **What more can be done?**

- Though this declaration is a good preventive step but this cannot alone deter the corrupt.
- Currently monitoring practices rely only on inspections, raids, intelligence reports which has to be a institutional approach in identifying targets of those inspections.
- Randomised audits using technology and artificial intelligence without any human bias in the selection of auditee can be another logical step.
- The anti-corruption exercise should promote and safeguard whistle-blowers & the existing **Whistle Blower Protection Act, 2014** needs to be operationalised.
- Hence Odisha Lok Ayukta should nurture a safe environment for whistle-blowers by maintaining their anonymity.
- It can also notify a separate framework for protection of whistle-blowers.
- Those who enjoy power may try to find ways to escape through family or proxies and they should be subjected to the **Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, 1988**.

### **What are the takeaways from this?**

- According to the UN estimates, developing countries lose approximately \$1.26 trillion every year due to corruption, bribery, theft and tax evasion.
- Moreover, government can lose the trust of citizens if the officials and the political masters are not held accountable for wrongdoing.
- Hence public disclosure of information about the officials' assets, protecting whistle-blowers and certainty of punishment can create conducive environment for clean and efficient governance.

**Source: Business Line**



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