

More Anti-corruption Bills to Be Introduced in India's Parliament

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- The Indian government has prepared seven anti-corruption bills to be considered in Parliament in its forthcoming session
- Civil society leaders who led anti-graft protests in the summer are threatening to restart agitation if suitable legislation for instituting an ombudsman is not introduced
- Corruption is hurting growth and discouraging both domestic and foreign investment
- Civil society, business leaders and the government agree on the need to introduce transparency in government, end discretionary decision-making, make the judicial process more effective, create a public attitude of zero tolerance for corruption and bring back Indian money parked in tax havens abroad
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Mumbai, India, 13 November 2011 – The government has announced a series of measures to tackle corruption and is set to propose for consideration seven bills in the forthcoming session of Parliament. Ashwani Kumar, Minister of State for Planning, Science, Technology and Earth Sciences of India, said in a BBC television debate today at the World Economic Forum's India Economic Summit.

These include bills to protect whistleblowers and a bill to prevent bribery by foreign officials. "Legislation cannot be made under public frenzy," he argued, referring to widespread civil society protests in the summer, saying the protests had turned "we the people" into "we the mob".

The civil society collective that led anti-corruption protests in the summer – informally termed Team Anna, after the Gandhian "Anna" Hazare who became the face of the agitation – will restart agitation if the ruling Congress party does not introduce a bill to create an ombudsman that takes into account all of their concerns, said activist Kiran Bedi, Founder and Secretary-General, Navjyoti India Foundation.

"There is a huge trust deficit," Bedi said, demanding that the government must include provisions in the "Lokpal Bill" to include all government officials, including law-makers and judicial officials under the ambit of the law. It must make bidding of all valuable contracts transparent and all political donations public.

Adi B. Godrej, Chairman, The Godrej Group, Godrej Industries, and President Designate, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), said CII has framed a "code of business ethics" that many businesses are supporting. He said India is suffering from not just corruption in business-to-government dealings, but also petty corruption that almost every citizen has to face. This is hurting the economy and preventing Indian and foreign companies from investing in India.

Godrej said corruption can be significantly reduced by making government processes and decision-making transparent and non-discretionary. Punishment for corruption must be swift and certain, he said, adding that it is more important in the long run to create an economic environment where such acts do not pay; this can be achieved by ensuring reasonable levels of taxes and

relatively quick legal redress.

A recent Transparency International survey revealed that two in four Indians said they paid a bribe in the previous year, against an average of one in four globally. However, 74% said corruption could be beaten, against just 49% elsewhere. "When the people see laws are enforced, commitment at the top is real, they will feel safer in saying no to corruption," said Huguette Labelle, Chair, Transparency International.

Labelle said businesses can play a significant role if they decide on a zero-tolerance policy to bribe-giving and publicly report everything they pay to the government. India has ratified the UN Convention on Corruption, and it can find a place among the top 10 in Transparency International's rankings within three to four years, provided the right institutions are created and allowed to function.

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