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# THE GOLD STANDARD FOR A PRIME MINISTER

Relevant for: Ethics | Topic: Human Values - Lessons from the lives and teachings of great Leaders, Reformers and Administrators

[India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru](#), is now moving through an eclipse that B.R. Ambedkar experienced and yet emerged from more luminous. During his life, Ambedkar was vilified by both the left and the right, and decades after his death, he was at best ignored. Later jurists and scholars joined his followers to dust up his legacy and recognise him as a guide in political, social and constitutional matters.

That Nehru has lost state patronage is to be welcomed, for that is the only way that a great leader would be able to stand on his feet. Since his family continued to be a part of the party and the government, any celebration of his life and work till recently was suspect. A genuine admirer of Nehru would have been mistaken for a courtier.

Democracy demands of a leader, especially one who is called to lead the government, to possess three virtues to redeem his pledge. First, he must have a track record of service with humility. The spirit of democracy militates against our notions of 'the leader'. What it requires of him is to submit to people's will while being firmly anchored to due process. Nehru's constant engagement with the masses and his deep sense of national destiny helped him to be a class apart from his contemporary world leaders, especially in the developing world. A less competent leader would be driven either by the mob or become a dictator.

Is it right to turn NMML into a museum for PMs?

It is always tempting for a leader to flex his muscles lest he be dismissed as a weakling. Democracy affords a leader two choices: either he can assert his position even at the cost of due process to convince others and himself that he's in control, or he can submit to institutional requirements and traditions not so much as constraints on his right to rule but as a sacred obligation to be honoured. Hence, the commitment to the institutions of state forms the second virtue of a leader. That Nehru understood the indispensability of institutions above personalities is not the only measure of the man; he also recognised the need for a strong Opposition for democracy to succeed.

The third virtue is the quality of the leader's legacy. Can the generations after him fall back on his ideas, traditions and exhortations that he preached and practised? It is fashionable today to ridicule Nehru's non-alignment policy and his belief in a mixed economy, but he formulated these policies not as a figment of his imagination; he tailored them to suit India's position at the time. Though this is not the place to delve into the merits of these policies, one must surmise that Nehru would have admitted to a certain wear and tear of these policies. He was also pragmatic enough to alter or jettison his policies if national interest so warranted.

Thus, Nehru was the complete Prime Minister that none of his successors can hope to be. Having witnessed more than a dozen of his successors in office over the past five decades, one is alive to the fact that no one comes even a distant second to Nehru.

Over and above any virtue, there is the matter of temperament that gives a leader his character. A complex office like that of the Prime Minister of India requires not one but two divergent temperaments, wherein lies the difficulty of being a successful Prime Minister. One, it has a front-office function wherein the incumbent must become the face of his government and engage with the masses to explain his policies to draw their support and legitimacy, and also

nudge his officials to translate people's aspirations into policy outcomes. One must be an extrovert, articulate and full of vigour to hit the campaign trail every now and then to plead with people why he and his political formation need and deserve their understanding, affections and support. Two, the back-office function of the Prime Minister amounts to the invisible and hence unsung drudgery of reading dozens of files and making crucial decisions. Only an introvert leader (an oxymoron) who is contemplative and familiar with the complexities of governance will be able to discharge this duty.

#### In defence of Nehru

These two halves of the job expect the incumbent Prime Minister to be simultaneously an extrovert and an introvert. If a Prime Minister fails in his front-office functions, it would produce a political disaster, and a back-office failure would result in paralysed governance or misrule. India's history since Nehru is replete with instances of Prime Ministers who were of either temperament, not both. Nehru remains the only Prime Minister to have discharged these two functions with aplomb.

Among Nehru admirers, there circulates an anecdote which testifies to his dexterity of being a part of the masses while supping with intellectual giants like Arnold Toynbee and Albert Einstein. Nehru as Prime Minister maintained a tradition of having 'personal guests of the Prime Minister' who would stay at the Prime Minister's official residence, the Teen Murti House, in New Delhi for some time. The guest would meet Nehru at breakfast and, possibly, at dinner, and he would have his own engagements. These worthies included historian Toynbee and British physicist and Nobel laureate M.S. Blackett, who advised Nehru on setting up a defence research establishment in the country.

Blackett visited India as many as eight times during Nehru's stint as Prime Minister. On one occasion, during the late 1950s, being a personal guest of the Prime Minister, Blackett met Nehru at breakfast. It was disheartening to the great physicist that he found Nehru to be distracted, weak and melancholic. Though he answered his guest's questions, Nehru was truly out of his wits, or so his guest thought.

Blackett was sceptical that Nehru could solve the problems of a vast and populous country like India, despite his intellect and commitment to national interest. It so happened that Blackett met Nehru at dinner on the same day. For every minor query, he found Nehru launching into a mini lecture, brimming with enthusiasm.

Blackett wondered aloud: how could a man who was so weak to engage in an informed conversation at breakfast be so vigorous at supper to expound on every question? Pat came the reply: "Oh, I addressed a public rally in the evening!"

A great leader has something timeless about him and he remains consequential. He cannot be deprived of the credit for the services he rendered and the values he stood for, even if his ideas and policies become passé and even if the rulers of the day find his memory inconvenient or unprofitable. Above all, people's collective memory will not allow him to fade into oblivion. Jawaharlal Nehru is one such leader that modern India produced.

*D. Shyam Babu is Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. Views are personal*

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## **MAHATMA GANDHI IS ONE OF THE GREATEST REVOLUTIONARIES THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN, ONLY HIS REVOLUTIONS WERE BLOODLESS AND PEACEFUL; VP**

Relevant for: Ethics | Topic: Human Values - Lessons from the lives and teachings of great Leaders, Reformers and Administrators

Vice President's Secretariat

**Mahatma Gandhi is one of the greatest revolutionaries the world has ever seen, only his revolutions were bloodless and peaceful; VP**

**Gandhi Ji yearned to build self- sufficient 'Adarsh Villages'; It is time we honor his wishes & go back to our villages;**

**Policy makers of India have to place gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of our development agenda;**

### **Addresses Commemorative Event of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi**

Posted On: 19 NOV 2018 7:03PM by PIB Delhi

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that Mahatma Gandhi is one of the greatest revolutionaries the world has ever seen, only his revolutions were bloodless and peaceful. He was addressing the Commemorative Event of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, organized by FICCI – Aditya Birla CSR Centre for Excellence, here today.

The Vice President said that six decades had passed since Mahatma Gandhi left his earthly abode, yet, his teachings remain fresh in the memory of his countrymen. He congratulated FICCI and Indian Industry for organizing such an event to celebrate the life and times of the Mahatma. He expressed hope that many more such events would happen so that the Mahatma's great vision for the world is recalled, relived and taken to the generation after generation.

Shri Naidu observed that Gandhiji's principles of liberty, dignity and equality were not limited by space and time, they have universal applicability and timeless value. He preached peace, non-violence, tolerance and harmony, and in the process, miraculously inspired India's great struggle for freedom and gave new impetus to civil rights movements all over the world, he added.

The Vice President opined that the designing and implementing programs and policies for

development should be done by keeping the vision articulated by Mahatma Gandhi for an India free from poverty, discrimination and social evils in mind. He said that Gandhi Ji was an ardent believer in the principle of self-reliance and added that he constantly spoke about “Swadeshi”. He yearned to build self-sufficient ‘Adarsh Villages’ and he said that the soul of India rested in its villages. It is time we honor his wishes & go back to our villages, Shri. Naidu added.

The Vice President recalled that Gandhi ji firmly believed that Cleanliness was next to Godliness. He felt that sanitation was more important than political freedom and today, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has become a mass movement of such scale and energy that it would have made the Mahatma himself very proud, he added.

Shri Naidu said that Gandhiji believed in equality & relentlessly spoke of women empowerment. He reminisced that Gandhiji himself was influenced by iconic women like Annie Besant & Sarojini Naidu. He urged the policy makers of India to place gender equality and women’s empowerment at the centre of our development agenda.

The Vice President remarked that *Antyodaya* or the uplifting of the poorest, most deprived groups of people, was a mission close to the Mahatma’s heart. “Gandhiji’s idea of development was of Sarvodaya, the development of all through Antyodaya. His philosophy of Antyodaya influenced leaders like Shri. Deen Dayal Upadhyay”, he added.

The Vice President urged one and all to strive together to realise Gandhiji’s dreams and usher in a ‘Ram Rajya’ where all are equal and there is no discrimination of any kind. He quoted the Mahatma who said that “Ramrajya of my dream ensures equal rights alike of prince and pauper”.

The Chairperson, FICCI, Smt. Rajeshree Birla, the Chairman, KVIC, Dr. Vinai Kumar Saxena, the Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Shri Parameshwaran Iyer and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Following is the text of Vice President’s address:

“I am happy to be here today on this momentous occasion as we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation. Six decades have passed since this pious soul left his earthly abode. Yet, his principles, his sacrifices and his teachings remain fresh in the memory of his countrymen.

For decades, Gandhiji has directed India’s collective conscience and served as our moral compass. I firmly believe that the wisdom he imparted will help India navigate its way through the complexities of the modern world for centuries more to come.

Let me congratulate the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry for organizing such an event to celebrate the life and times of the Mahatma. Many more such events should happen so that the Mahatma’s great vision for the world is recalled, relived and taken to the next generation.

Gandhiji’s principles of liberty, dignity and equality are not limited by space and time. They have universal applicability and timeless value. He preached peace, non- violence, tolerance and harmony, and in the process, miraculously inspired India’s great struggle for freedom and gave new impetus to civil rights movements all over the world.

*“All my actions have their rise in my inalienable love of mankind.... I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and*

*Indians of other faiths .... I have ceased to hate anybody". This, in brief, sums up Gandhi's philosophy of life.*

Mahatma Gandhi is one of the greatest revolutionaries the world has ever seen, only his revolutions were bloodless and peaceful. He struggled against injustice by practicing justice, he struggled against violence non-violently, he opposed discrimination by embracing one and all.

He firmly believed that 'an eye for an eye would end up making the whole world blind'. His resoluteness and steadfastness when it came to standing by his principles of truth and non violence inspired great world leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela among many others.

He often said that *"non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. it is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man"*.

Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights hero of the United States of America, who adopted non-violence as the weapon of choice to help millions of African Americans fight for their rights once remarked, *"Christ gave us the goals and Mahatma Gandhi the tactic"*. He viewed Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and peaceful resistance as the only logical and moral approach in the struggle for justice and progress.

Nelson Mandela often cited Gandji ji as one of his great teachers and acknowledged that Gandhi's ideas had played a vital role in South Africa's transformation, aiding in the overthrow of apartheid.

Friends, Gandhiji envisioned a self-reliant India, a country that occupies a place of pride and dignity in the world order. Over time, it has been the endeavor of various governments to fulfil the dreams of our forefathers of a strong, vibrant and inclusive India.

It is commendable that the current government has launched an array of ambitious nation building initiatives with a view to fulfill the Mahatma's vision.

While designing and implementing programs and policies for development, it will serve us well to keep the vision articulated by Mahatma Gandhi for an India free from poverty, discrimination and social evils in mind.

Gandhi Ji was an ardent believer in the principle of self-reliance. He constantly spoke about "swadeshi". He yearned to build self- sufficient and harmonious 'Adarsh Villages'. He believed that the soul of India rested in its villages. To him, Khadi was not just a political icon or a symbol of national pride, it was also a way to empower the rural economy.

Today we see a disturbing trend of distress migration from rural to urban areas. Our rural economy is weak and fails to provide enough opportunities for livelihood. It is time India honors the Mahatma's wishes and goes back to its villages. Real growth will happen in India when we are able to empower rural India, especially our farmers, our weavers and our craftsmen.

Gandhi ji firmly believed that Cleanliness was next to Godliness. His statement that sanitation was more important than political independence clearly reflected the huge importance he attached to cleanliness. He also stated that a lavatory should be as clean as a drawing room.

He always lead by example and practiced cleanliness himself first before preaching it. During the last few years, the whole of our country united for the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, a mass movement of such scale and energy that it would have made the Mahatma himself very proud.

We have together built close to 9 crore toilets in the last 4 years! Cleanliness and good sanitation are essential prerequisites for development. At this juncture, I applaud the contributions made by the private sector companies and organizations like FICCI towards the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

All through his life, Gandhi ji insisted on acquiring better and higher skills. He said, *"If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning."* He himself practiced the pursuit of skill in whatever he did. Today, when we talk about the gap between what industry demands and what our education system provides, the necessity for skills training becomes evident.

We sit on a huge demographic opportunity today. 65% of our population is less than 35 years old. In order to reap this demographic dividend, we have to undertake massive skilling drives to make our people, especially the youth more employable and more productive. We also need to teach our young people the dignity of labor, that every job is important, has its own relevance and is dignified.

Gandhiji was an ardent believer in equality and relentlessly spoke of women empowerment. Gandhiji himself was influenced by iconic women. His mother Pultibai, his wife Kasturba and others like Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu influenced him greatly.

Gandhi ji said that *'Women is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity'*. Even while Indian women continue to lead in different walks of life ranging from sports to space, manufacturing to entrepreneurship and arts to innovation, we are yet to fully instill a sense of gender equality in the nation.

I urge all the planners and policy makes of our country to place gender equality and women's empowerment at the center of every single social and economic development plan.

Gandhiji also stood for principles of inclusion, diversity and equity. Gandhi ji lived his life to empower his countrymen to fight social and economic exclusion. Bapu always asked us to think of the last person in the queue, the poorest person, and serve the underprivileged.

His famous Talisman comes to mind now. He said *"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man /woman whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him /her?"* This quote expresses his deep concern for the oppressed, suppressed people of India who do not have access to the basic necessities of life.

*Antyodaya or the uplifting of the poorest, most deprived groups of people, was also a mission close to the Mahatma's heart. Gandhiji's idea of development was of Sarvodaya, the development of all through Antyodaya. His philosophy of Antyodaya greatly influenced leaders like Shri. Deen Dayal Upadhyay. Antyodaya was at the core of Shri Upadhyay's philosophy of Integral Humanism. The philosophy of Antyodaya is still one of the guiding principles of India's socio- economic development policies.*

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Let us all strive together to realise Gandhiji's dreams and usher in a *'Ram Raja'* where all are equal and there is no discrimination of any kind.

“Ramrajya of my dream ensures equal rights alike of prince and pauper”, observed the Mahatma.

I congratulate FICCI for this is timely initiative to undertake a series of initiatives to blaze forth the message of Mahatma. It was at your 4th AGM in 1931 that Gandhi ji said “*The Industry should regard themselves as trustees and servants of the poor*”.

I must also applaud the efforts of Aditya Birla group for espousing the trusteeship concept in the core values of your organization. Smt Rajashree Birla, the noble initiatives being held under your guidance are extremely appreciable. I am confident that today’s donation by your group for distribution of Charkhas will surely make a difference and impact the livelihoods at grass root level. I pray that India be blessed with the wisdom of Gandhi today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

Jai Hind!”

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## 'CORRUPTION NO LONGER AMONG TOP 3 HURDLES TO DOING BUSINESS IN INDIA'

Relevant for: Ethics | Topic: Challenges of corruption

The perception among U.K. businesses that corruption is a major barrier in doing business in India has halved, according to the latest edition of the U.K. India Business Council's Ease of Doing Business report compared with what it was in 2015.

### 'Halved since 2015'

"Since the first report was launched, there has been a considerable year-on-year fall in the number of companies that viewed 'corruption' as a major barrier – from 34% in 2016 to 25% in 2017, halving since 2015, where it stood at 51%," the report said. "This decline shows a major improvement, indicating that the current government's efforts to mitigate corruption appear to be delivering tangible and much-desired results.

"Those identifying 'corruption' as a major barrier has declined far more dramatically over the four-year course of this survey among those currently doing business in India [decline of 27% in the last two years] where it is no longer considered a 'top-three' barrier compared to those not currently active in India," the report added.

The report noted that initiatives such as Aadhaar, electronic submission of government documents, acceptance of electronic signatures, and the push to file taxes online, have all reduced face-to-face interactions where corruption is most likely to take place.

"The extent of digitalisation, however, varies markedly across sectors, as does corruption, with those engaging in infrastructure projects still reporting significant issues relating to corruption," the report added.

'Taxation issues' and 'price points' overtook 'corruption' as major barriers identified by 36% and 29% of respondents, respectively, the report said. However, the proportion of respondents identifying 'taxation issues' was 3% lower in 2018 than 2017, which, the report said, suggests that businesses may be starting to adjust to the GST.

"Those currently doing business in India cite 'taxation issues' as a consistent barrier, whilst those looking to enter the Indian market understandably rate 'identifying a suitable partner' as their most salient issue after a considerable decline in reports of 'legal and regulatory impediments' from 2017 to 2018," the report said.

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## A DIFFERENT WAY TO FIGHT

Relevant for: Ethics | Topic: Human Values - Lessons from the lives and teachings of great Leaders, Reformers and Administrators

For Gandhi, satyagraha was the only way to stop terrorism. Even in a changed world and context, the Gandhian response is not to be taken lightly.

Do Mahatma Gandhi and his legacy have anything to offer us in the face of attacks by terrorists? Gandhi himself was deeply concerned with the question as to how non-violence could displace violence in political life. In his own day, he was faced with revolutionary nationalists who believed that imperial rule in India could best be fought through targeted violence against British officials and institutions. Gandhi was strong in his condemnation of such a strategy.

We can see this in his reaction to the assassination by an Indian student called Madan Lal Dhingra of a retired Indian civil servant, Sir Curzon Wylie, when he came to speak to a group of Indian students in London in 1909. Vinayak Savarkar, who was a friend of Dhingra, argued that he acted as a Hindu patriot. Gandhi was horrified by the killing. He stated that Dhingra acted in a cowardly manner, and that he had been “egged on by this ill-digested reading of worthless writing”. Wylie had gone as a guest of the Indian students, and he had been betrayed. If the British left India because of such acts, murderers would become rulers.

Gandhi sought to provide a different way to fight British rule — namely through nonviolent satyagraha. He argued that if the established nationalist leaders failed to provide a nonviolent outlet for the nationalist fervour of young Indians, they might well be attracted to violent methods. In other words, his form of protest would provide an outlet for radicalised Indians to protest against what Gandhi projected as the “terrorism” of the state as well as provide a counter to the violence of revolutionary nationalists. In a letter of 1919, he maintained that: “The growing generation will not be satisfied with petitions etc. Satyagraha is the only way, it seems to me, to stop terrorism.”

He wrote, similarly, in the same year: “If you do not provide the rising generation with an effective remedy against the excesses of authority, you will let loose the powers of vengeance and... violence will spread with a rapidity which all will deplore... In offering the remedy of self-suffering which is one meaning of satyagraha, I follow the spirit of our civilisation and present the young portion with a remedy of which he need never despair.”

According to Gandhi, means determine ends. He held that unleashing violence was like letting a genie out of a bottle; once released, it was not easy to put back.

Revolutionaries who had learned to settle matters using violence frequently found it hard to adapt to more peaceable means after a change of power has occurred. It was also a less democratic method. Violence tended to be the method preferred by small and secretive cells that could ignore the need for mass mobilisation in their political strategy. It tended to involve mainly the able-bodied and males, with women, the elderly and children having marginal roles. The need for arms and training similarly excluded many. Almost anyone could, by contrast, participate in nonviolent protest. It was a method, moreover, that encouraged dialogue and negotiation, and did not alienate potential allies.

It was thus a far more effective force for building a future democracy. Following this, Gandhi set about organising and leading a series of satyagrahas in India from 1917 onwards in a way that attracted many erstwhile radicals. Many became convinced and principled advocates of

nonviolence. Gandhi built a mass base through what he called his “constructive programme”, that is, painstaking activity in which his followers worked at the local level, helping people in their everyday needs. In this way, they gained the sympathy of the masses.

Despite this, the tradition of revolutionary nationalism survived. During the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-22, many revolutionaries participated in the nonviolent campaign with enthusiasm, but once Gandhi withdrew civil disobedience in 1922, they — disillusioned with his leadership — reasserted their earlier methods, namely targeting the British to both undermine British morale as well as inspire Indians in general. Gandhi was left appealing to the British to make concessions to the mainstream Congress so as to marginalise the revolutionaries. He thus argued at the Round Table Conference in London in 1931, that if the British did not change their attitude towards the nonviolent Congress, what he called “terrorism” would come to the fore.

He noted the distrust that the British had of the Congress, and went on to say: “I invite you to trust the Congress. If you will work [with] the Congress for all it is worth you will say goodbye to terrorism.” Although the British made certain concessions to the Congress, it was done in a grudging and often half-hearted way; and the revolutionaries were not, as a result, marginalised in the way that Gandhi had hoped. Many participated in the 1942 Quit India Movement, making it the most violent of Gandhi’s major protests.

In the end, we may say that the Indian nationalist movement combined both nonviolent and violent streams, and together they worked in an uneasy symbiosis to eventually remove British rule in 1947. By itself, revolutionary nationalism could not have achieved this — mass nonviolence organised by Gandhi provided an essential element in the undermining of imperial rule over three decades.

The lesson from this is that political violence associated with small secret groups is unlikely to undermine the power of a strong state such as India under both British and independent rule. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J Stephan have provided convincing evidence in their book *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* that over the course of the past century, nonviolent forms of resistance to oppressive regimes have in general been more successful than violent methods. In other words, for there to be any profound change, mass nonviolent mobilisation and protest is generally essential.

This, of course, is easier said than done. As a rule, it requires long years of patient organisation in constructive work that gains mass sympathy for a cause — the protest comes only as a culmination. This is the Gandhian response to political violence, and it is not one that is undertaken lightly.

Today, of course, we are in a very different political world. Terrorist organisations are international in their reach, as we saw in Mumbai in 2008. Nonviolence in one country can hardly prevent such attacks. We don’t know how Gandhi might have reacted to such a situation. He was, however, always inventive in his responses — coming up with inspired new strategies in ever-shifting situations.

We should remember, too, that Pakistan had its own great leader in nonviolence — Abdul Ghaffar Khan — and his influence there is by no means dead today. Malala Yousafzai is in this tradition. Nonviolent resistance has been seen in Pakistani politics, as, for example, in the movements against both Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf. Powerful and enduring nonviolent movements in both India and Pakistan — with a feeling of fraternity between both — would almost certainly go a long way in stopping such terrorism. At present, however, we are a long way from achieving any such outcome.

**Hardiman is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Warwick and author of Gandhi, in his times and ours.**

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# GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS MUST DO MUCH MORE TO BE TRANSPARENT

Relevant for: Ethics | Topic: Challenges of corruption

Transparency is the bedrock of a democratic State. And since India is proud to be one, the government must take the Central Information Commission's (CIC) transparency audit of ministries and departments seriously. According to CIC, more than one-third of government ministries and departments do not disclose basic information about their decision-making process, foreign visits of senior officials, minutes of departmental meetings, transfer policy and grievance redressal mechanism. "It has been found that out of 838 public authorities, 158 public authorities got grade A, 157 public authorities got grade B, 118 public authorities got grade C, 133 public authorities got grade D and 272 public authorities got grade E," the report said.

The report is disconcerting because of two reasons. One, the lack of public information affects the quality of governance. Second, it also makes information expensive for citizens, giving way to corruption. For example, how would a citizen know what a department is supposed to deliver if she isn't aware of its key deliverables?

If knowledge/information is power, then the lack of it can be misused by interested parties such as touts or lobby groups, who have access to information that is not made public on purpose. Transparency leads to accountability. Opaqueness creates its own hierarchy.

These days in India, e-governance and dashboards, which give information on the progress of schemes and projects, are buzzwords in government circles. In such a scenario, keeping legitimate information beyond the reach of the public is not just wrong, but unhealthy for a democracy. On many platforms, including at the inauguration of the new CIC office last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly stressed that transparency and accountability are necessary for a democratic and participative governance, as they help build trust and improve impact of schemes. An empowered citizen, he added, is the "strongest pillar" of democracy. Government departments that are shying away from being open must pay heed.

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