

## DG Desk

Dr R K Pachauri, February 11, 2011

I am very happy to have seen four comments from colleagues on my write up of 11th February on the intranet. The important thing to remember is that we should never accept the unfortunate existence of corruption as something incurable. Several politicians have the habit of glibly saying that corruption is a global phenomenon. It is a global issue only with respect to societies which have deep flaws or serious sickness. It is truly a cancer which has to be dealt with effectively and firmly.

I believe in the power of example, and we as an institute have to show the rest of India and the world that we are not focusing on short term gains, and that we maintain ethical standards of the highest order within the organization. In all our work where we are involved with governments, civil society and communities, we should always highlight the need for raising ethical standards and promoting honest transactions. Several societies have been through periods of extensive corruption. Some have reformed themselves and others have gone into a state of decay. We in India have to rise to meet the challenge, and I hope all of us collectively can do that.

An area which is crucial to the welfare of any society is the subject of effective governance. Unfortunately, we really have no contemporary models which could be labeled as excellent or close to ideal. The US is a vibrant democracy, where fortunately in day to day transactions things get done even where government decision making is involved. Most importantly, there is a high level of honesty in routine decision making and the absence of petty corruption. However, the continuing preoccupation with quick and easy profits has led to an erosion of ethical values at least in corporate decision making. At the same time, government legislation and action is heavily dominated by the narrow interests of lobbyists and business groups which are able to influence the government at every level in arriving at decisions which suit some powerful interest or the other.

In the case of Switzerland, the canton is an effective decentralized unit for governance, which has allowed enormous authority and power being exercised at the level of local government, so much so that some of the best universities in Switzerland are actually run by local cantons. As a result, therefore, the federal government has limited authority and, therefore, yields a substantial power in decision making to the local level. This system works very well, and I would say is a model that we could learn from greatly in this country.

I am raising the issue of governance only because we know for sure that the potential of this society is being sapped by corruption, ill-informed and tardy decision making, a situation which cannot possibly be allowed to continue very much longer. We are not likely to see rebellion on the streets like what is taking place in Egypt today, but I think the strength of democracy lies in the opportunity that it provides for legitimate protest and demonstration, which could very well increase in the near future. One could be cynical and say that protests and demonstrations in India would at best lead to some symptomatic treatment of the main problem, but no structural changes which are now long overdue. We have 63 years of experience as an independent nation, and we, therefore, have enough evidence on the basis of which we can bring about radical reform for restructuring the delegation of powers to decentralized units of authority. We should also take in hand the creation of capacity and capability which would improve the quality and speed of decision making. Most importantly, there is need for urgent reform of our civil services, which the political leadership has shied away from largely because they find the current system pliable and capable of manipulation for their own needs. Any new institution that is created is also very soon taken over by the same bureaucratic forces which have caused the problem to start with. This is true in the case of manning of Indian regulatory

agencies as well as the institutions established to deal with the right to information. Government in our country has truly become what the late Prof. Raj Krishna called "knowledge proof".

While TERI cannot possibly get into some of these issues, as members of Indian society, perhaps we can do the little that is possible in improving the system that we deal with on a day to day basis.