

'India Inc must clean up its act to rid country of graft'

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Until Corporate India cleans up its act, corruption-free India would remain a fantasy. This was the consensus at a panel discussion on why Corporate India is lagging behind civil society in the debate on corruption.

The debate organized by IIM-Calcutta Alumni Association began on Saturday with an exhortation from Anu Aga, member of National Advisory Council and former chairman of Thermax, that business chambers should acknowledge that companies indulged in corruption and should therefore engage with the government to reform the system.

While echoing Aga's sentiment, civil society stalwart Arvind Kejriwal said that the involvement of black money in elections was just one of the reasons for business people being under pressure to pay bribes.

To him, the fundamental problem faced by everybody, whether in the corporate sector or not, is exactly what Team Anna has been trying to combat through Lokpal: the lack of "certainty and swiftness in punishing the corrupt".

Sociologist Dipankar Gupta said that Corporate



At an IIM-C Alumni Association debate, NAC member Anu Aga said business chambers should acknowledge that companies do indulge in corruption and should therefore engage with the government to reform the system

India — as also the middle class as such — was compromised by a "patron-client relationship" it had entered into with politicians and bureaucrats.

Citing the example of Sweden, he said the way out of this relationship was to expand the middle class by making greater investments in education and health. "As long as the middle class remains small, there will be rampant corruption. But once it expands and jobs and services improve, patronage will die out."

Does this mean that corporate leaders cannot help bring down corruption till the middle class grows big enough to reduce patronage? Bharat Wakhlu, group resident director of Tatas, said that a spiritual approach could help businessmen combat corruption even in the existing circumstances. Referring to a "crisis of val-

ues" in Corporate India, Wakhlu said entrepreneurs should resist the temptation of choosing the "easy wrong over the hard right".

In much the same vein, Pradeep Gupta, chairman of Cybermedia, said that if scams were taking place despite economic reforms, it was because greed and vested interests were driving corruption. He drew consolation from the fact that while collusive corruption at high levels had remained unaffected, extortionate corruption faced by common people had reduced.

Journalist Paranjoy Guha Thakurta said that the increase in the scale of corruption in the last 20 years showed that newer forms of graft had opened up as the economy grew faster. Citing examples of crony capitalism, he said that Bellary mining was a convergence of crime, business and politics.