

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION
Fr Varghese Paul, SJ

Sometimes back a friend told me a joke. An official of the Gujarat Government went to Japan to solicit foreign direct investment in the state. He was the honoured guest of a Japanese businessman. He was greatly impressed by the palatial bungalow, posh cars and the beautiful gardens of the businessman. Our official was curious to know where he got so much fund to build the palatial building and buy the most expensive cars. So he asked the businessman:

“Friend, how did you raise so much fund to pay for all these things?”

The Japanese businessman took our curious official to the terrace of his bungalow and asked him pointing to nearby river:

“Friend, do you see a bridge up there over the river?”

“Yes”, the Gujarati official acknowledged.

“I got 20% cut in building the bridge,” said the Japanese businessman.

The Gujarati official was very much impressed by the Japanese affability and affluence. Two years later the Japanese businessman returned the visit. He was the honoured guest of the same officials of Gujarat government. The Japanese businessman was greatly impressed by the affluence of his Gujarati host. He asked his host:

“Brother, I have read and heard about the poor and backward people as well as the Adivasis and the Dalits in Gujarat and in the whole of India. So I did not even dreamed about such posh bungalow, Mercedes Benz cars and so many servants! How on earth you managed to earn so much wealth in your life?”

The Gujarati official took his guest to the terrace of his posh, multi-storey bungalow and said:

“Brother, look at that Sabarmati River.”

“Yes, I see the river; but there is not much water flowing”, the Japanese businessman guest observed.

“Do you see a bridge across the Sabarmati River?”

“No, I do not see any bridge across the Sabarmati River as far as I can see!”

“Well, you would not see the bridge because I got 100% cut on the bridge!” the Gujarati official said as a matter of fact way.

I laughed at the joke of my friend. There is no truth in the joke. But it certainly points a finger at the realistic situation of Gujarat today.

No work is done in Gujarat without the money passing hands from the importunate victim to the decision making government officers. In Gujarat I often see full-page newspaper advertisements and propaganda of good governance and effective administration. I see attractive advertisements on the back of public transport buses that ply in Ahmedabad city and in the whole state. The advertisements of good governance and of efficient administration of Gujarat government will certainly impress you.

According to full-page advertisements in a number of newspapers Gujarat government is progressive and marching forward in building up the 21st century Gujarat. All municipalities and metro-cities in the state have plans to have world class modern amenities and facilities. On the other hand, you are surrounded by many things in Gujarat which bring you down to the world of reality from the palaces of promises and imagination. As an example I quote here from the letter of a teacher. Mr Manilal Suthar writes from Palanpur:

“The sky has poured heavy rains. Many people are in great distress. The leadership has failed to understand the people’s woes and to help them! Who need such self-seeking leadership? How reasonable is the demand of the Chief Minister when he asks people to send him e-mail for help? The electricity is in short supply. The phone is dead. Many areas in the city are covered with water logging. Most village people are illiterate. How can they send e-mail to the Chief Minister? What is the size of the intellectual capacity? How can our leaders make such nonsensical requests? I do not understand...

“I am not writing this out of my frustration and disappointment. But unable to do anything in this drastic situation, we come to respected elderly people like you with our complaint. We can no longer tolerate this situation, Father Varghese.”

It is a year and a half since another teacher-friend Mr Frederic Christian has retired from teaching. Since then he has been regularly visiting government offices and going pillar to post to get his pension sanctioned. Those who listen to the teacher’s plight can get an idea of the extend of corruption in the administration of our ‘good governance’!

When I see the advertisement of good governance, I am reminded of a recent international meeting. I attended the World Assembly of the International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP) at Accra, in Ghana from June 19 to 26, 2005. One of the speakers in the Assembly was Dr Gilbert Keith Bluwey who spoke to us on the theme “The Role of Journalists in Promoting good governance in Africa.”

The Professor of politics and International Relations in Accra University, Dr Bluwey defined good governance as “a system of rule through representative institutions which ensure transparency, accountability, fair allocation of resources and just apportionment of punishment and reward. It also includes respect for the individual - for human rights.”

According to Dr Bluwey, “ ‘Representative Institutions’ means that the bodies that make and enforce laws, rules and regulations over the people, are elected by the people under terms approved by the people, operated by conditions determined by the people and for periods prescribed by the people. Obviously, our mind goes to Parliament and the Executive, as well as to the local government bodies. The judiciary, which is usually not elected, is however appointed

by the representatives of the people and adjudicated only those laws passed by the representatives of the people.

“Transparency means that the activity of every organ of state and of every public official is open to scrutiny by every individual regardless of his/her status; that information on all government operations, except in the rare cases of national security, is freely available to all who care to know.

“Accountability means that power and all public resources are used as prescribed by the rules and regulations and are openly accounted for both as prescribed by the laws and on demand by the citizenry.

“The fair allocation of resources means that every person, group of demographic collectively gets its due allocation of state resources. That there is no discrimination on grounds of political, ethnic or religious affiliation; of sex, social status, or professional affiliation in the allocation of public resources for any purpose. Indeed, merit, defined as equality, need and availability of resources, is the sole yard-stick for the allocation of resources.

“In the same way, justice, the strict application of the law in the apportionment of punishment and reward, which also means upholding the principle of the rule of law, is a cardinal element of good governance.

“Finally, respect for the individual means that the individual person is the centre of all government actions and all state officials must, at all times, act to enhance and not to obstruct the free attainment of his objectives – his/her self-actualisation.”

Dr Bluwey concluded saying that the journalists belong to the Fourth Estate of the Realm. “You are therefore a crucial arm of the state system but neither part of nor under the control of government. It is your duty to provoke critical thinking on public policy: to promote popular control over public decision-making and to ensure popular direction of official action.”

Dr Bluwey, holds that “a journalist everywhere is a front-line defender of human rights and a promoter of good governance.” Today we need dedicated journalists who are committed to promote good governance and uphold human rights so that like traffic light they be a controlling force against corruption and misgovernance.

We need very badly today a government which is transparent and accountable. We need today a government which ensure fair allocation of resources and just apportionment of punishment and reward. We need today a government which has respect for individual and for human rights. In short, we need today a government which not only advertise but also ensure good governance.