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A Story of Indian Corruption

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INDIAN DECADE?
Inside Asia's other giant



Corruption is rife in India. Sadly, politicians seem to think they're just 'interpreting' the rules.

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There's no denying that corruption in India is a perennial, monolithic phenomenon.

Last month, for instance, A Raja of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)—who seemed to find his way to the position of Telecoms Minister through the hobnobbing of overzealous PR agent Nira Radia—finally gave way to pressure and resigned. And yet his resignation in the wake of [the 2G scam](#) was 'not an acceptance of guilt,' according to the UPA government. Indeed, as hordes of supporters showed up at Chennai airport in mid-November to welcome him back on his post-resignation trip home from Delhi, Raja waved to the crowd as if he'd won the country some acclaim. He continues to state that he was just following the rules set by his predecessors.

After all, this kind of thing is no big deal for a politician, at least not in India.

Corruption here is all tied to 'tweaked' interpretations of the rules of governance and administration. As noted at a CATO Institute book forum last October, the current situation in India is a result of what happens when the laws of a land 'grow so voluminous and vague that they oppress those who live under them, (and) society can become as unlivable as if it were lawless.'

And then there's also the old adage: 'Show me the man and I can show you the law under which he can be arrested.' In the context of India, one might read it instead as 'show me the law and I can show you how it can be interpreted.' These interpretations depend, of course, on what we're seeking to achieve.

Another recent case in point: Ashok Chavan, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, [lost his job last month over the Adarsh scam](#) in which he and a bunch of his cronies reportedly cast their eyes over a bit of prime property in Mumbai and decided to share the booty. Here again, rules were interpreted to suit their interests, in a city where the builder-politician nexus has kept the price of houses beyond the reach of many regular Indians.

Meanwhile, Pune's Lavasa Township, billed as India's newest hill station, is still [battling to clear its name over environmental violations](#). The construction company in charge, the Lavasa Corporation, has stated it's gone by the book in its work. But it's still being widely accused of unethical practices and corruption. In a petition filed by the corporation in the Bombay High Court, Lavasa said that the project was initiated with the intention of developing a hill station in Maharashtra and that it had the necessary environmental clearances. Only time will tell what the outcome will be, but I'm not optimistic about Lavasa's chances.

What's interesting in all these cases is that the accused, even after resignations taking place in some cases, still claim they've played their respective 'games' by the rules. It's strange how we curse a policeman who demands a bribe, but let off a politician or a bureaucrat who loots public money. We care for the money in our pocket, but are careless of the money that our government holds in trust for our common good. A change in attitude is long overdue.

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