

## **It Is About Time We Started Asking Questions**

■ **Dr. M.N. Buch**

Recently Rahul Gandhi visited Bhopal for a day on purely Congress Party work. He did not come by a normal commercial flight, the fare of which he could have reimbursed as a Member of Parliament. He came by a special aircraft and for his personal protection a bullet proof armoured vehicle had been sent in advance from Delhi by train. Naturally he was accompanied by his SPG escort and more than one thousand policemen were deployed for his protection and general bandobast. He travelled in a convoy of several cars, piloted and escorted by the police and barricades were erected for crowd control. I cannot think of the Chairman of the Labour Party in Britain travelling in that country in such style and at such great expense. In Delhi the Sonia Gandhi family maintains a life style which undoubtedly must cost a great deal of money, certainly more than can be afforded by the emoluments earned by her and Rahul Gandhi as Members of Parliament. The question which the people of India must ask is, "Where is all this money coming from?"

I am not targeting Rahul Gandhi or the Congress Party because every party and every leader does exactly the same thing. The BJP President Rajnath Singh travels by special aircraft and helicopters as do Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav and leaders of the parties in the Southern States. The Congress Party is supposed to be the richest political party in India, followed by BJP and CPI (M). If we take the population of India as being 120 crores, including adults and minors, if a party were to collect five rupees per head that would still come to only Rs. 600 crores. Considering the life style of our leaders, the cost of their travel, the huge amounts spent during elections, it is obvious that parties and party leaders are accepting money from business houses, whereas their followers are extorting money from smaller businessmen. Why should a business house give any money to any politician unless he is convinced that this is a form of investment which can be encashed at huge profit, to the advantage of the politicians also for overlooking the malpractices of the business houses?. One is told that the House of Tata refuses to pay bribes and I am prepared to accept that the family of Jammalal Bajaj, mainly Rahul Bajaj, would also be principled in this behalf. But that is not true of most of our business houses and, therefore, party funds are very largely dependent on contributions from black marketeers, people indulging in illegal business and business houses, some on the make but most who know that if they are to survive they have to please the politicians. This is the root cause of corruption and surely the question must be asked, "Why are parties and politicians sourcing funds from businessmen and why are businessmen doling out such huge amounts?"

In my family we three brothers were in the IAS (the middle one died when he was just 52 years) and my wife was also an IAS officer. She, my youngest brother and I are pensioners and no doubt after the Sixth Pay Commission the pension is enough for us to live reasonably comfortably. It is not enough to afford luxury, which is why my wife is unable to replace her eleven-year old car. In some ways we are fortunate because there is a huge escalation in land value and the house which I built in 1975-76 cost me just about rupees three lakhs, including the cost of land, which is now worth crores of rupees. However, I cannot think of acquiring more property at today's prices. On the other hand most of our politicians have acquired assets for which there is no logical explanation in terms of what they earn. For example, a Chief

Minister of Arunachal Pradesh once told me that his Industries and Excise Minister, who belonged to a particular tribe, came from a poverty stricken household but he now owns a hotel in Itanagar, properties in Guwahati, Delhi and Bombay and is an extremely wealthy man. I can give any number of examples from Madhya Pradesh of politicians who could not afford a bicycle now owning several cars, others who could not afford a one room tenement having luxurious bungalows and commercial properties, with their wives being loaded with jewels. Where does all this money come from? Elections cost huge sums of money and it is obvious that political parties cannot afford to give every candidate crores of rupees for an assembly or parliamentary election. A person who has spent rupees five to ten crores to win a parliamentary seat has obviously to collect money by illegal means in order to recoup what he has spent. He becomes corrupt, he corrupts the system by forcing his civil servants to assist in collecting money, the civil servants in turn find that it is lucrative to be corrupt on their own, unscrupulous contractors and businessmen take advantage of the corruption of the bureaucrats and the politicians and, therefore, spurious drugs and liquor are sold and kill innocent people, the roof of a hospital collapses with patients occupying the premises, a Dawood Ibrahim flourishes and scams occur on a national scale.

How do we deal with corruption? Without being judgemental let me just quote a few cases. Both Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav are accused of having assets disproportionate to their known source of income. Whichever party is in power in a coalition it needs their support and, therefore, the cases drag on for years. If they are innocent the matter should have been closed long ago, if they are guilty they should have been punished long ago. Neither happens, the sword of Damocles hangs over these politicians and they vote in a convenient manner so that they can stay out of jail. Whether it is DMK, AIADMK, the Congress, the BJP, Janata Dal, the Reddy Brothers in Bellary or Y.S. Reddy of Andhra Pradesh, corrupt conduct is the handle with which government beats them to extort money, but nothing happens in terms of legal retribution. The final question which people must ask is, "When will the law prevail, the guilty be brought to book and corruption ruthlessly eradicated?"

\*\*\*