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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

India's Anti-Corruption Governance — CPI 2025 and the Long Road Ahead

THE HINDU

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GS2

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MAINS RELEVANCE:

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India improved 5 ranks on CPI 2025 but still scores only 39/100 — what institutional and structural reforms are needed to meaningfully reduce corruption?"

WHY IN NEWS

Transparency International released the **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025**, placing India at **rank 91** (score 39/100) — a five-rank improvement from 96th in 2024 — against a backdrop of a declining global average (42/100, the lowest in over a decade) and increasing erosion of anti-corruption institutions worldwide.

CPI 2025 — INDIA'S POSITION IN CONTEXT

India's improvement from rank 96 (2024) to rank 91 (2025) is a modest but meaningful signal. However, at a score of 39/100, India remains well below the global average of 42 and far from the threshold of 50 that defines the boundary between the "majority-clean" and "majority-corrupt" categories in perception.

India's trajectory on CPI:

Year	Rank	Score
2021	85	40
2022	85	40
2023	93	39
2024	96	39
2025	91	39

The score of 39/100 has remained largely stagnant over 2023–25, suggesting the rank improvement reflects a relative decline of peers more than an absolute improvement in India’s governance quality.

WHAT CPI MEASURES — AND DOES NOT MEASURE

The CPI measures **perceptions** of public sector corruption — as assessed by business executives, country analysts, and citizens through 13 data sources (World Bank, World Economic Forum, Economist Intelligence Unit, etc.). It does not measure:

- Actual corruption incidents or prosecution rates
- Private sector corruption
- Tax evasion, illicit flows, or money laundering volumes

This is both the index’s strength (broad, comparable) and its limitation (perceptions lag reality; bias toward formal sector experiences).

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE FOR ANTI-CORRUPTION IN INDIA

India’s anti-corruption infrastructure is substantial on paper but fragmented in practice:

Institution	Mandate	Limitation
Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)	Supervise corruption in Central Government	Advisory only; no prosecution powers
Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)	Investigate corruption, economic offences	Requires prior sanction for senior officials; “caged parrot” criticism
Enforcement Directorate (ED)	Investigate money laundering (PMLA 2002)	Criticism of selective use for political purposes
Lokpal (since 2019)	Investigate complaints against PM, Ministers, MPs, Group A officials	Slow operationalisation; no state-level counterpart for most states
State Lokayuktas	State-level anti-corruption	Highly uneven effectiveness; weakly empowered in most states

Structural gaps:

Whistleblower protection: The Whistleblowers Protection Act 2014 has not been enforced — the Rules were never notified; amendments diluting the Act were introduced but not passed; no functioning mechanism exists

Electoral funding corruption: Political parties are exempted from CVC/RTI scrutiny; the Electoral Bonds scheme (struck down by SC in 2024) was seen as enabling quid-pro-quo donations

Prior sanction requirement: CBI and state police require government sanction before prosecuting serving officers above Joint Secretary level under Section 17A of the PC Act — creating a protective shield

THE GLOBAL PICTURE — WHY THE AVERAGE IS DECLINING

CPI 2025 recorded the lowest global average (42/100) in over a decade. Contributing factors:

Backsliding on rule of law and judicial independence in several democracies

Rise of executive dominance and undermining of anti-corruption institutions in multiple countries

829 journalists killed globally since 2012 while investigating corruption — a direct attack on accountability

Weakening of international anti-corruption cooperation (UNCAC implementation) during geopolitical fragmentation

Denmark's performance (89/100, top for 8 consecutive years) reflects the value of: strong parliamentary oversight, independent judiciary, free press, transparent public procurement, and high civil service salaries reducing incentive for graft.

WHAT INDIA NEEDS TO DO

Short-term (administrative reform):

Notify Whistleblowers Protection Rules (under 2014 Act) without further delay

Expand online government procurement under **GeM (Government e-Marketplace)** to all states and PSUs — reducing discretionary procurement

Strengthen asset declaration and conflict-of-interest rules for all senior officials

Medium-term (institutional reform):

Empower **Lokpal** with direct prosecution authority and a dedicated investigation wing

Extend **RTI Act** coverage to political parties (aligned with CIC recommendation)

Separate **CBI** from Ministry of Home Affairs — a Director of Public Prosecutions model with Parliamentary oversight

Long-term (structural reform):

Reduce state discretion in land allocation, mining leases, and licences — which are the primary corruption nexus at state level

Implement **One Nation One Register** for property records to reduce title fraud

Reform public procurement law to ensure competitive bidding is the default and single-vendor routes are the exception with mandatory disclosure

UPSC RELEVANCE

CPI 2025 (India rank 91, score 39, publisher Transparency International), CVC, CBI, ED, PMLA 2002, Lokpal (established 2019 under Lokpal Act 2013), Whistleblowers Protection Act 2014, Prior Sanction (PC Act, Section 17A), GeM. Mains GS-2: Anti-corruption institutional framework; civil service reforms; accountability mechanisms; federalism and state-level governance quality. GS-4: Ethics and integrity in governance; whistleblower protection; corruption as an ethical issue in public service.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

CPI 2025 — KEY DATA:

Publisher: **Transparency International** (founded 1993, Berlin)
 Scale: 0–100 (0 = most corrupt; 100 = least)
 Countries evaluated: **182**
 India: rank **91**, score **39/100** (improved from 96th in 2024)
 India vs South Asia: Better than all except **Bhutan** (rank 18, score 71)
 Top: **Denmark** (89, 8th consecutive year)
 Bottom: Somalia and South Sudan (9), Venezuela (10)
 Global average: **42/100** — lowest in a decade; 122 countries below 50

INDIA ANTI-CORRUPTION INSTITUTIONS:

CVC (Central Vigilance Commission): advisory; no direct prosecution
CBI: requires prior sanction for senior officials (Section 17A, PC Act)
ED: enforces PMLA 2002; investigates money laundering
Lokpal: established 2019 under Lokpal Act 2013; covers PM, Ministers, MPs, Group A officials
Whistleblowers Protection Act 2014: passed but Rules not notified (dysfunctional)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

UNCAC (UN Convention Against Corruption): adopted 2003; India ratified 2011
 829 journalists killed globally since 2012 investigating corruption (Transparency International)
GeM (Government e-Marketplace): online public procurement portal; covers central and some state procurement
Prevention of Corruption Act 1988 amended in 2018; introduced Section 17A (prior sanction)
Second ARC (Administrative Reforms Commission, 2nd edition, 2005–09): extensively covered anti-corruption reforms in its 4th Report

Sources: The Hindu, Transparency International

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