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Kerala Launches 'Project Zero' Against Corruption

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Kerala Launches 'Project Zero' Against Corruption

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WHY IN NEWS:

The **Kerala Home Minister** on **May 26, 2026** announced “**Project Zero**” — a statewide preventive anti-corruption initiative. Citizens who upload **verified video evidence of bribery** to the State Vigilance portal will receive a **₹5,000 reward**, with full identity protection guaranteed. The state’s **1969 Vigilance Manual** is being revised, and dedicated **AI and cyber units** will be deployed against digital graft.

PROJECT ZERO — MECHANISM

STEP	ACTION
1	Citizen uploads bribery video evidence to State Vigilance portal
2	Identity protection guaranteed under the whistleblower framework
3	Verified evidence triggers ₹5,000 reward to the citizen
4	VACB (Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau) Kerala investigates
5	AI and cyber units handle digital fraud cases

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY FRAMEWORK (INDIA)

Key statutes

- **Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988** — primary anti-corruption statute
- **PCA Amendment Act, 2018** — criminalised “bribe-giving” (Section 8); introduced “commercial organisation” liability
- **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013** — Lokpal at the Centre; Lokayuktas in states
- **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014**
- **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) Act, 2003** — statutory CVC

Constitutional safeguards

- **Article 311** — procedural safeguards for government servants against dismissal or removal
- **Article 14** — equality before law
- **Article 21** — due process and right to fair trial

KERALA'S EXISTING ANTI-CORRUPTION ARCHITECTURE

- **VACB (Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau)** — Kerala's specialised agency
- **Kerala Lokayukta Act, 1999**
- **Kerala State Vigilance Tribunal**
- **1969 Vigilance Manual** — currently being revised under Project Zero

CENTRAL VIGILANCE COMMISSION (CVC) — FRAMEWORK

PARTICULARS	DETAILS
Established	February 11, 1964
Origin	Santhanam Committee (1962) recommendation
Statutory status since	2003 (CVC Act)
Headquarters	New Delhi
Appointment	Central Vigilance Commissioner appointed by the President; rank of UPSC Chairman
Reporting	Reports to Parliament

CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX (CPI) — INDIA CONTEXT

Transparency International CPI 2024

COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE
Denmark	1	90/100
Finland	2	88/100
Singapore	3	84/100
Japan	20	—
Bhutan	28	—
China	76	—
India	96/180	38/100
Pakistan	135	—

India's rank in **2023** was **93/180**.

COMPARABLE GLOBAL ANTI-CORRUPTION MODELS

AGENCY	COUNTRY	ESTABLISHED
ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption)	Hong Kong	1974
CPIB (Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau)	Singapore	1952
ACRC (Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission)	South Korea	2008

All three have **full investigative and prosecutorial autonomy** — widely considered the gold standard.

REWARD-FOR-EVIDENCE — PRECEDENTS AND RISKS

Precedents

- **MGNREGA whistleblower portal** — citizen reporting under social audits
- **Income Tax Informant Reward Scheme** (1985, revised 2018) — up to **₹5 crore reward**
- **GST Informant Reward** — up to **10% of detected evasion**

Risks

- Frivolous complaints
- False implication of innocent officials
- Threats to whistleblowers

Mitigants

- Video evidence standard
- Identity protection
- Statutory backing under the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014

KERALA-SPECIFIC GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

- Kerala consistently ranks **at the top of the Human Development Index** among Indian states
- **State Lokayukta** functioning since **1999**
- **e-Office** widely adopted for government workflow
- **VACB** has dedicated **Anti-Corruption Court** infrastructure

SANTHANAM COMMITTEE, 1962 — HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Set up by the Government of India to study corruption in public administration
- Recommended both **preventive** and **punitive** measures
- Led directly to the **creation of the CVC in 1964**
- Famously held: *“the demand side of corruption must be strangled”*

DIGITAL INDIA ANTI-CORRUPTION TOOLS

- **CPGRAMS** (Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System) — DARPG portal
- **Sevottam** — service-delivery quality framework
- **e-Vigilance** dashboard
- **DigiLocker** + **e-Sign** for document authentication

CONSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS AND SAFEGUARDS

- **Article 311** — government servant cannot be dismissed without proper inquiry
- **Article 21** — accused has the right to a fair trial and due process

Key Supreme Court rulings

- **K. Veeraswami v Union of India (1991)** — judges of higher judiciary are “public servants” under the PCA
- **State of MP v Shyamlal Sahu (2018)** — clarifications on PCA prosecution standards

WAY FORWARD

- Integrate **Project Zero** with the national CPGRAMS dashboard
- Strengthen due-process safeguards under **Article 21**
- Amend PCA to reduce **sanction-for-prosecution delays** under Section 19
- Replicate the **Hong Kong ICAC** model — preventive + investigative + educational
- Encourage state-level adoption beyond Kerala

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — Governance: Transparency and accountability, citizen charters, e-governance, statutory and constitutional bodies, role of civil services.

Prelims focus: PCA 1988 (and 2018 amendment), Lokpal Act 2013, Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2014, CVC Act 2003, Article 311, CPI 2024 rankings, Santhanam Committee.

FACTS CORNER

Project Zero launched: May 26, 2026 (Kerala)

Reward: ₹5,000 for verified bribery video evidence

Vigilance Manual being revised: 1969 edition

PCA: 1988 (amended 2018 — criminalised bribe-giving + commercial organisation liability)

Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act: 2013

Whistle Blowers Protection Act: 2014

CVC Act: 2003 (CVC established 1964 on Santhanam Committee 1962 recommendation)

Article 311: procedural safeguards for government servants

VACB: Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (Kerala)

Kerala Lokayukta Act: 1999

India CPI 2024: rank 96/180; score 38/100

Top CPI 2024: Denmark, Finland, Singapore (1st, 2nd, 3rd)

Hong Kong ICAC: established 1974

Singapore CPIB: established 1952

Income Tax Informant Reward: up to ₹5 crore

K. Veeraswami v Union of India: 1991 (judges as public servants under PCA)

Sources: [Kerala VACB](#), [CVC](#), [PIB](#)

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