



Lokpal, at last

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The establishment of the anti-graft body is a welcome development

- The selection of Justice P.C. Ghose as the first Lokpal has come after an unjustified delay of five years.
- Nevertheless, it ought to be welcomed as a milestone in the cause of fighting corruption in high places.
- The concept of an institutional mechanism, or an anti-corruption ombudsman, has been around for over 50 years.
- It was finally enacted as a law in 2013, and came into effect on January 16, 2014.
- Some of the credit for driving this legislation must be given to Anna Hazare's movement against what many saw as unreasonable levels of corruption under the previous UPA regime.
- However, since then, barring a report by the Standing Committee of Parliament and a couple of amendments passed in 2016 on the declaration of assets by public servants, there has been very little progress.
- At one point, the government's lack of political will to establish a Lokpal became obvious, leading to the Supreme Court repeatedly asking it to show progress in its efforts.
- Ultimately, it was the court's stern ultimatum to appoint a Lokpal within a timeframe that worked.
- The appointment system is quite long, a two-stage process.
- The government had initially taken the position that it was awaiting the passage of amendments based on the parliamentary committee report.
- In a verdict in April 2017, the Supreme Court rejected the excuse and said there was no legal bar on the selection committee moving ahead even if there was a vacancy.
- Now that the Lokpal has been chosen, victims of corruption have a viable avenue of redress.
- The Lokpal will take over the work of sanctioning prosecution, besides exercising its power to order preliminary inquiries and full-fledged

investigations by any agency, including the CBI.

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