

## **Anti-corruption campaign launched**

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NEW DELHI: An anti-corruption campaign aimed at encouraging people not to pay bribes to officials was launched in India yesterday.

The nationwide "Drive against Bribes" campaign, an awareness and assistance programme, is being run in 48 cities in co-ordination with citizens, civil society groups, media and business houses and government departments. The 15-day drive would train people in using provisions under the Right to Information (RTI) Act - that empowers citizens to ask questions from the government, seek information about how government works - instead of paying bribes to officials. The Act was passed by the parliament last year. Assistance centres manned by 1,500 trained volunteers were providing help to people on how to file applications under the RTI.

"Many people approached the centres today... We are helping them out," Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan, a voluntary group, told reporters, giving as an example of a man whose passport had not been processed for three years because officials demanded a bribe of Rs5,000 (\$108).

Corruption among government officials is rampant in India, which is among the most corrupt countries in the world. Common citizens in India pay bribes totalling \$4bn a year according to a recent study published by the Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies. About 62% of citizens polled in "India Corruption Study," said they had first hand experience of paying a bribe or "using a contact" to get a job done in a public office. According to the survey, police top the corruption index, followed by the lower court judiciary and land administration. It said most Indians accept bribes as "a way of life."