

## Swachh Bharat Mission and CAs

*'Cleanliness is Next to Godliness,' goes the spiritual dictum across all faiths. But this adage has an important economic aspect also, particularly in Indian context. A World Bank report has estimated that India is losing 6.4% of its GDP annually because of poor access to sanitation which leads to diseases and deaths. It is sad to note a UNICEF estimate that some 594 million people in India - nearly 50% of its population-defecate in the open. More than 1,86,000 children under-five die every year from diarrhoeal diseases caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation. A study by the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene reveals that between 2006 and 2012, India reported an annual average of 20,474 dengue cases, with direct medical cost of about ₹3,500 crore per annum. According to government estimates, expenditure on health adds up to ₹6,700 crore annually (approximately ₹60 per capita). As such, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan launched by our Government not only aims at correcting the country's reputation for poor public hygiene and rudimentary sanitation, but also promises a positive economic impact.*

The success and efficacy of this ambitious benevolent initiative is not possible without the contribution of all its citizens. In this scenario, it is welcome that Government has imposed a very nominal Swachh Bharat cess of 0.5% on all services liable for service tax, effective from November 15, 2015 to fund Swachh Bharat programme, as against the 2% proposed in the Union Budget early this year. It will translate into an additional tax of 50 paise only on every ₹100 worth of taxable services, which would yield more than 2,500 crore in the remaining fiscal. This cess will be an additional levy, making the effective service tax rate 14.5% from November 15, 2015. The service tax was earlier hiked from 12.36% to 14%, effective June this year. In budget 2015-16, the government had put the service tax collection target at over ₹2.09 lakh crore.

*"Swachh Bharat Cess is not another tax but a step towards involving each and every citizen in making contribution to Swachh Bharat...Given the impact of cleanliness on public health leading to generation of diseases such as malaria, dengue, diarrhoea, jaundice, cholera etc. the cess will help in improving public health,"* rightly says a Government statement, clarifying that the proceeds from the new cess will be used exclusively for the Swachh Bharat initiative. Everyone would agree with the Finance Ministry statement that *"We are a country of more than 120 crore people. For such a vast and populous country we do have our fair share of cleanliness concerns. In fact, persons entrusted with the job of keeping our country clean struggle constantly... Increased allocation for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan can prevent many of these diseases with consequential benefit to one and all."*

Although the imposition of the cess will marginally increase the cost of doing business and also cause corporates to change their systems again to comply

with this levy, it is a pain worth taking for a good social, economic cause.

Meanwhile, the ICAI and CA fraternity in India is already exclusively contributing to this national cause of cleanliness individually as well as collectively, particularly ever since the Prime Minister nominated ICAI to take forward the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*. It was for the first time that any professional body had been nominated by the Prime Minister for this important national initiative. Ever since it launched its own Cleanliness Mission in Bangalore last year as a nation-wide initiative involving all its members, students and stakeholders across all its 153 branches and 26 foreign chapters, the ICAI has also effectively taken in its stride the Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyan, which aims to provide separate toilets for boys and girls in all government schools throughout the country under the aegis of Ministries of Power, Coal and New & Renewable Energy. The CAs are doing physical verification of construction/repairs of school toilets on a *pro-bono* basis. The first such physical verification was conducted for a school toilet constructed by NTPC in the Karimnagar district in Telangana. The ICAI has been actively coordinating with its members who have come forward for this noble initiative, and Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) for such physical verification of school toilet blocks/ units constructed or renovated by them. So far, more than 2,500 toilet blocks have been assigned to the ICAI members. As of now around 740 members have envisaged interest in this societal mission on *pro-bono* basis, while more and more ICAI members are joining in.

Indeed ICAI's 2,50,000-strong CA fraternity and 8,50,000-strong CA student community, along with other stakeholders can make this Mission a big success, particularly if they take it up as their Social Responsibility and commit to the *Clean India* pledge delivered by our Prime Minister to devote at least one hundred hours every year and two hours every week towards cleanliness. Together, We Can! ■

(Contributed by the Editorial Board Secretariat of ICAI. Comments can be sent to [eboard@icai.in](mailto:eboard@icai.in))