

## CONTROL POLL FUNDS

(The Times of India - 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1996)

Sir, - This refers to Mr. R.W. Apple Jr's interesting piece (January 21) on the American fund-raising system wherein he has pointed out certain flaws and loopholes. While these infirmities do exist, it responds to the credit of the U.S. lawmakers that they have been constantly striving to improve their election campaign financing system to exercise statutory control on the flow of money into politics and the consequent evils of corruption and influence peddling.

Under U.S. law, nominees of major parties are eligible to receive full public funds to finance their election campaigns. Thus, in the 1984 elections, the Reagan and Mondale election campaigns each received \$ 40.4 million for their general election campaigns from the federal government. Similarly, in 1988, these funds amounted to \$ 46.1 million for each of the candidates of the two major parties. The U.S. law also provides for the grant of public funds for paying the cost of national nominating conventions of the two major political parties.

Some other democratic countries have also made statutory provisions for state funding of elections. Thus, for example, the Federal Republic of Germany has enacted a law which provides for the reimbursement of election expenses to the political parties and individual candidates to the extent of DM 5 (Rs. 125) for each eligible voter, the lumpsum amount being distributed in proportion to the votes obtained by the parties in the previous elections.

Our politicians, on the other hand, do not appear to be interested in bringing about any drastic change in the matter because, under the present system, they are able to collect funds, uninhibitedly from any source, however dubious and tainted, without being obliged to account for the origin of the funds collected and the mode of their disposal. The only honourable exception to this sordid state of affairs was the welcome attempt by Mr. V.P. Singh, the former Prime Minister, to introduce a bill in the Rajya Sabha in 1990, aimed at amending the Representation of the People Act 1950 & 1951 with a view to making a beginning in the matter of bringing about the necessary electoral reforms. However, the bill has remained in cold storage with the fall of the V.P. Singh government.

The recent hawala scandal has brought how heavily dependent is the existing political system for its sustenance on the support of black money. We need to enact a comprehensive legislation providing, inter alia state funding of the elections including a statutory obligation on the contestants to render a public account of the origin of the election funds received by them.