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CIVIL SERVICE

ECONOMIC TIMES, MAR 3, 2015

Government cautions its employees against using official e-mail to send derogatory mails

By [Aman Sharma](#),

The government has cited ten examples of “inappropriate use” of the official e-mail service that could invite action against an employee.

NEW DELHI: The government has cautioned its employees against using the official e-mail service for sending personal messages or any content involving language that is derogatory to religion, caste and ethnicity or against national interest as it can invite deactivation of the e-mail account as well as probing questions from investigating agencies.

While banning [Gmail](#), [Yahoo](#) and other private e-mail services for official correspondence, as per a recent notification, the government has cited ten examples of "inappropriate use" of the official e-mail service that could invite action against an employee. "Any case of inappropriate use of email accounts shall be considered a violation of the policy and may result in deactivation of the account.

Further, such instances may also invite scrutiny by the investigating agencies depending on the nature of violation," says the 'E-mail Policy of the Government of India' notified on February 18 and circulated to all the ministries.

It has been specified that the use of distribution lists for the purpose of sending e-mails that are personal in nature, "such as personal functions", would qualify as an inappropriate use of the government's e-mail service.

ECONOMIC TIMES, MAR 3, 2015

KK Sharma to be the next Chief Secretary of Delhi

By [Aman Sharma](#)

Home Minister Rajnath Singh today approved the appointment of Sharma, currently serving as Chief Secretary of Delhi, to be the Delhi government's top bureaucrat

NEW DELHI: Acceding to the demand of Chief Minister [Arvind Kejriwal](#), Home Minister [Rajnath Singh](#) has appointed senior IAS officer, Goa [Chief Secretary](#) KK Sharma, as Delhi's new CS. His formal appointment orders were issued on Monday.

ET was the first to report, on Sunday, that the Union Home Ministry was likely to agree to Kejriwal's second request and Sharma would be appointed Chief Secretary.

Kejriwal wrote a hard-hitting letter to Singh on Saturday, saying that if his first choice in

the Arunachal CS Ramesh Negi could not be appointed to the post, the Centre should appoint Sharma, a 1983 batch IAS officer.

"I would request you that if you cannot appoint Negi as the Delhi CS, then please make Goa's CS, [KK Sharma](#) as Delhi's CS," Kejriwal wrote to Singh. The Home Minister "immediately agreed" with Kejriwal's request as Sharma falls in the Rs 80000 apex pay scale while Negi did not, a senior official in the Home Ministry said.

ECONOMIC TIMES, MAR 3, 2015

Inappropriate use of government email to invite probe

By [Aman Sharma](#)

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It has been specified that the use of distribution lists for the purpose of sending e-mails that are personal in nature, "such as personal functions", would qualify as an inappropriate use of the government's e-mail service. The transmission of e-mails "involving language derogatory to religion, caste, ethnicity, sending personal e-mails to a broadcast list, exchange of e-mails containing anti-national messages, sending e-mails with obscene material" will also invite action from government, the notification said. The government has also warned against creating and sharing e-mails that could be categorised as "harassing, obscene or threatening".

Besides, the government has prohibited creation and exchange of "advertisements, solicitations, chain letters and other unofficial, unsolicited e-mail" on the official e-mail service as well as any unauthorised exchange of proprietary information or any "privileged, confidential or sensitive information".

Use of other officers' user IDs, misrepresentation of the identity of the e-mail sender and the "wilful transmission of an e-mail containing a computer virus" has also been red-flagged.

The new policy, however, takes into account the point that officials should not lose access to their official e-mail ID immediately after retirement given their host of contacts while in service. "Government officers who resign or superannuate after rendering at least 20 years of service shall be allowed to retain the name based e-mail address i.e. userid@gov.in for one year post resignation or superannuation. Subsequently, a new e-mail address with the same user ID but with a different domain address (for instance, userid@pension.gov.in), would be provided by the NIC for their entire life," the notification said.

TRIBUNE, MAR 5, 2015

Absent employees face action

Cracking the whip on employees staying away from work, the government has directed Garhwal and Kumaon Commissioners to appoint officers at the district level to carry out surprise inspections in government offices and take strict action against the absent staff. Chief Secretary N Ravi Shankar has been directed to carry out a campaign against erring employees from March 2015 to March 2016. Chief Minister Harish Rawat, while talking to mediapersons, said officials who had their camp offices in Dehradun but were posted outside would have to report to the department secretary whenever they visit Dehradun. The Chief Minister said ministers should carry out regular surprise inspections to check if employees were present. Rawat has appealed to all employee unions to support the government in the campaign and asked them to take their work seriously. He said the IT department had been asked to prepare a software that could provide information about the location of the employees and to know whether an employees was present on a particular day. Meanwhile, he said officials had been asked to assess damage to crops and vegetables due to untimely rain in the past few days. He said they had written to Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar demanding the repair of roads under the DGBR at the earliest. Rawat said he would meet Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari regarding the repair of roads on the Char Dham Yatra routes. He said they had offered financial assistance to agencies of DGBR and national highways till the time they are released budget by the Centre.

CORRUPTION

BUSINESS STANDARD, MAR 4, 2015

HC stays suspended IAS Pradeep Sharma's arrest in graft case

The court orders that Sharma will not be arrested till the next hearing of the case on March 11

The [Gujarat High Court](#) today stayed the arrest of suspended IAS officer [Pradeep Sharma](#) in a case of alleged sale of a state government land at a cheaper rate to a private company in Kutch district during 2003-2004.

Justice J B Pardiwala ordered that Sharma will not be arrested till the next hearing of the case on March 11 after his pre-arrest bail petition.

The High Court has also sent notices to the state government and the probe agency of the case -- the Enforcement Directorate (ED) -- in connection with the petition which alleged that the authorities had acted against Sharma with a malafide intention coupled with political vendetta.

The authorities, including the state government and the ED, had acted against Sharma as his brother and a Gujarat- cadre IPS officer Kuldeep Sharma was at loggerheads with the state government, said the petition.

Advocate R J Goswami, appearing for the suspended IAS officer, today contended before the High Court that there is no need to arrest his client for the custodial interrogation as the case is based on documentary evidence.

Besides, Sharma has been granted regular bail in all the related cases in the matter, said Goswami.

Sharma moved the pre-arrest bail petition before the High Court as Principle District Judge S C Srivastava of the PMLA (Prevention of Money- Laundering Act) court had on February 25 rejected his anticipatory bail plea.

During March 2012, the ED had registered a case against Sharma under PMLA for

allegedly selling government land at a cheaper rate to Kutch-based Welspun Group when he was the collector of Kutch during 2003-04.

As per the ED's complaint, Sharma had allotted land to Welspun at 25 per cent of prevailing market rates which gave illegal benefits to the company and loss of around Rs 1.2 crore to the state exchequer.

ECONOMIC TIMES, MAR 4, 2015

Send graft cases of IAS officers in time: Centre to states

If the reason stated by the state government seems genuine, the same shall be accepted as a special case, the DoPT said.

NEW DELHI: Noting instances of delay, the Centre has asked all state governments to send corruption cases involving IAS officers to it in time.

The state governments must be aware of the fact that the decision on such proposal requires considerable time. However, it has been observed that at times the state governments are sending the proposal for imposing the penalties to the charged officers in the last one or two months before retirement, the [Department of Personnel and Training](#) (DoPT) said in an order.

This has been viewed seriously by the competent authority, it said.

Even if [the situation](#) warrants that the proposal should be entertained in a lesser time, a [responsible officer](#) of the [state government](#) should submit the proposal to the DoPT in person, stating the urgency of the matter, as well as explaining the delay caused in sending the proposal within the stipulated time frame, the order issued to all states said.

If the reason stated by the state government seems genuine, the same shall be accepted as a special case, the DoPT said.

The DoPT has already introduced a 'single window system' which is effective from March 1, 2014. "It has been further observed that sometimes proposals are being received directly by post, which is leading to wastage of time, and are therefore being returned to the state government for submitting the same in the 'single window system'," it said.

The proposals for imposing the three major penalties i.e. compulsory retirement, removal and dismissal from service are to be sent to the DoPT at least 9 months before the retirement of the officer and in exceptional cases not less than 6 months before the date of retirement, the directive said.

As per rules, the competent authority for imposing the major penalties in respect of [Indian Administrative Service](#) (IAS) officers is the DoPT.

After receiving the complete proposal from concerned state governments, the same requires tentative approval of the competent authority in the DoPT and consulting [Union Public Service Commission](#).

The Commission advice is also served to the member of service for his or her representations if any, and the approval of the competent authority in the DoPT for passing the final order. The whole process involves at least 9-10 month's time, the DoPT said in the order explaining the procedure.

All state governments and central government ministries have been asked to follow the procedure and send such proposal well in time.

DEFENCE, NATIONAL

TELEGRAPH, MAR 4, 2015

Lives on the line

Justice for the armed forces is of utmost importance

Brijesh D. Jayal

Faced with a progressively worsening international security environment and in the larger context of our own approach to this emerging threat, two recent events are worth revisiting. In the run-up to the Jammu and Kashmir state elections, four young people travelling in a Maruti car in Budgam district failed to stop at two successive checkpoints. These were set up by the Rashtriya Rifles in response to specific intelligence reports about the movement of terrorists in a Maruti car. When the car attempted to break through the third checkpoint, soldiers opened fire resulting in the death of two occupants and injuries to two others. The police after investigations concluded that these youngsters had no militant links. Almost everyone, from political parties to human rights voices to the media, was quick to condemn the action of the soldiers. Not one voice of reason looked at the incident from the perspective of the soldiers or the army that has for over two decades been compelled to fight a proxy war within our own borders - not of its choosing or making.

The general officer commanding in chief regretted the incident, accepting full responsibility, and did the right thing by tendering an apology for what can only be considered collateral damage in a proxy war environment. No effort was, however, made by the civil authorities to let the public know why the occupants of the car so blatantly ignored authority by jumping two checkpoints and then attempting to do the same at the third? Or what motivated them to defy checkpoint authority in a secure zone? In the public perception, the soldiers performing their duty were duly damned and life could move on.

Intriguingly, the army then conducted a hurried inquiry and equally quickly announced indictment of one junior commissioned officer and nine soldiers. Investigations to judge the performance of any individual or team in furtherance of duty or tactical operations are routine in the armed forces. These, however, are with a view to professional betterment and accountability. Doing so for extraneous considerations or to mollify sentiment is neither in keeping with the best traditions of the armed forces nor good for the upkeep of morale. The cat was soon out of the bag when, during a subsequent election rally, the ruling party at the Centre took credit for this action of holding the soldiers accountable.

The subtle message to the *jawan* fighting India's proxy war was loud and clear. He was friendless within his own borders and the nation would rather see him die than be quick on the draw in the line of duty, and if, in the heat of battle, he made a professional error of judgment - none, not even his uniformed superiors, would stand by him.

The second incident is more recent and involves the interception of a boat by the Coast Guard in Indian waters. Reportedly, the maritime operation was launched in response to intelligence reports based on intercepts that revealed that a suspicious vessel with four

individuals, suspected to be a terror task force rather than ordinary smugglers, was planning a rendezvous with a Sri Lankan vessel. To the credit of our sailors, they intercepted the vessel in Indian waters, in itself no mean task. Whether the boat was destroyed in the subsequent efforts at capture or it set itself on fire, as announced by the defence minister - based, no doubt, on the briefing by the service - however, has become the matter of a raging public debate.

Surprisingly, rather than a grateful nation applauding the pre-emptive action of our sailors, especially in the backdrop of our shoddy performance during the Mumbai terrorist attack, there was a chorus of reports and voices. Some claimed that the boat was destroyed by indiscriminate Coast Guard firing and criticized sailors for over-reacting, that resulted in the destruction of evidence. One strategic expert opined that the destruction of evidence made our case weak in international fora, conveniently forgetting that the same international audience would suffer no pangs of conscience in safeguarding their own security interests regardless of international opinion, and didn't really shed tears for us after 26/11. With the irresistible temptation to draw political mileage, some accused the government of extracting brownie points by terming it a terrorist attempt. This hollow debate did not go unnoticed by our friends in Pakistan, and they took full advantage of the opportunity to turn the tables on us.

Much like the Budgam episode, rather than the operation be investigated internally to draw professional lessons, the debate appeared to indicate extraneous reasons, catching the defence minister on the wrong foot clearly being one such. It was now the turn of the Indian sailor to wonder whether, when faced with adversity, it was worth risking one's neck and being quick on the draw or he should turn a blind eye and discreetly sail away? In this din of a vibrant democracy, if there were sane voices that felt that our sailors were justified in neutralizing a perceived threat and that collateral damage is the price one sometimes pays in the fog of this proxy war, they were inaudible. Proof, if any were needed, of our being perceived as a 'soft state'.

Regrettably, this chapter, which should have best been forgotten, was reignited recently when a deputy inspector general of the Coast Guard was shown on social media brashly boasting about having ordered the blowing up of the boat. Whether his boast was indeed true and the retraction the next day due to the sobering effect of the morning-after or due to some counselling by superiors, it is hard to say. The result was that the media once again went into overdrive. This cast a shadow even over the prestigious Aero India Show in Bangalore, where India was attempting to showcase its potential as a high technology defence producer in furtherance of its "make in India" campaign and where high-level international government, defence and corporate communities were present and in the full international media glare. It was sad to see that during the defence minister's preview press conference for the event, rather than focus on issues related to the event, some of our reporters persisted in trying to corner the defence minister. The low priority that this nation accords to the looming threat of terrorism or, indeed, to indigenous defence and aerospace manufacturing was not lost on this professional international gathering.

Perhaps in our exuberance to score political points or enhance viewer ratings, the wider implications of these happenings are being overlooked. Today the damaging fallout of these happenings is not restricted to the institution of the two forces involved but extends to the morale and fighting ethos of the men and women of all our armed forces. In addition, forces inimical to our security interests are drawing appropriate conclusions. Having spent countless days and nights manning operational readiness as an air defence pilot, one cannot but wonder what negative impact such instances could have on our young air defence crew.

Historically, 9/11 marks a transformational moment in the march of terrorism. The medium of air affords abundant scope and flexibility to terrorist organizations for disproportionate damage and destruction. With non-state actors for the first time controlling territory, another transformational step has been achieved in this negative march as they could now control airports. As they grow in sophistication and in resources, counter terrorism theorists believe that it is only a matter of time before a real 'big bang' terrorist attack from the air takes place, which in a worst-case scenario could involve dirty bombs or chemical agents.

It is this nightmare possibility that prudent nations must guard against with little or no room for error. It requires the collective effort of every organ of the State to stand solidly behind and support the airmen whose ultimate responsibility it will be to prevent such a disaster. Our air defence radar fighter controllers are our 'eyes' and the air defence pilots our 'swords'. It is this human system, that maintains a round-the-clock vigil to keep our air space secure and safe, and it is these airmen that will neutralize a suspected airborne terrorist threat. Their professional skills are honed through disciplined training, but they know only too well that so were those of the soldiers at Budgam and the Coast Guard sailors.

One worries if unknown to them and indeed unwittingly, these recent happenings are denting their psychological grit to the detriment of swift action. By its very nature, response to air threats needs speedy identification, reaction and instant decision-making. Any hesitation, however momentary, could spell the difference between success and failure. It is this possible fallout of the present episodes and debates that must concern us.

It is time for the institutions of our democracy to pause and reflect. For far too long have we taken the performance and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform for granted without necessarily reflecting on our own institutional obligations to them and their psychological well-being. Their morale is an asset far more precious than all the capital investments that the nation showers on them. It is also an asset that our democratic institutions can either contribute to make or as easily break. For the present we are veering precipitously towards the latter.

The author is a retired air marshal of the Indian Air Force

EDUCATION

STATESMAN, MAR 3, 2015

Panel to be set up for non-teaching staff

The state government will bring a bill to set up a commission for recruiting officers and non-teaching staff in universities and colleges across the state.

The Bill was supposed to be moved on 4 March , but due to absence of the Governor the Bill wont be placed.

So long, the respective colleges and universities recruited officers and non-teaching staff depending on vacancies.

They followed a separate selection process.

Once enacted, such recruitments to the state-aided colleges and universities would be done through the newly formed commission.

Sources in the higher education department said that a centralised recruitment commission is aimed at providing maximum opportunity to the applicants for applying in various posts through a single window system.

However, a section of the academicians alleged that the move is actually aimed at ensuring control over the recruitment process. "It is difficult to supervise recruitment at individual colleges and universities. But once the recruitment process is held centrally it would be easy for the government to interfere in the recruitment process," apprehended a teacher of a state-aided university.

This apart, a separate bill will be brought to revamp the higher education council. The council was set up in 1995 and since then there has been a sharp rise in the number of colleges and universities. So, a need has been felt to restructure the council.

TIMES OF INDIA, MAR 5, 2015

BCI recommends closure of DU law faculty

DU authorities, however, maintained that the needful is being done and the irregularities if any will be sorted out before commencement of new session in August this year.

NEW DELHI: In a fresh trouble for Delhi University Law faculty, a Bar Council of India panel has recommended its closure after it found lack of infrastructure and other irregularities in the functioning of the department.

DU authorities, however, maintained that the needful is being done and the irregularities if any will be sorted out before commencement of new session in August this year.

"We are of the firm view that the Campus Law Centre should be closed down, but seeing the career of the students as well as the reputation of the university, a lenient view may be taken by the Legal Education Committee," says a report of BCI panel, which conducted an inspection of the DU's Law faculty.

Headed by retired Rajasthan high court judge VS Dave, the seven-member inspection committee include vice-chancellor of National Law University Ranbir Singh, Director of Indian Law Institute Manoj Kumar Sinha, and members of the Bar Council of India (BCI) and Delhi Bar Council (DBC).

The panel said faculty was in news last September when BCI, the apex regulatory body for legal education and the legal profession in India, chose to derecognise DU's law course after the varsity failed to seek timely extension of the affiliation of its three centres namely - Campus Law Centre, Law Centre-I and Law Centre-II.

Delhi High Court had also directed the varsity to ensure proper infrastructure in keeping with BCI norms. In its reply to the court, DU had proposed to the shift to a new building which it claimed "had adequate space" for the faculty to run properly.

Besides pointing out infrastructural shortcomings like lack of sufficient number of classrooms, separate library or moot court facility, the BCI panel also highlighted that there was lack of adequate number of permanent faculty.

It also criticised the functioning of the Dean, saying, he did not update the varsity's central office about the issues.

BUSINESS STANDARD, MAR 4, 2015

Nalanda University: What went wrong?

There are competing versions as to why a grand project is today bogged down in controversy

Anjali Puri

The fluttering red and white flags of the Nalanda University, which has established a tiny presence in this town, symbolise heady ideas, ranging all the way from the revival of Bihar's ancient glories to an "Asian renaissance" in scholarship. Underpinning this project, for which vast amounts of public money have been pledged, is also a geopolitical aim, stressing India as the true home of Buddhism, in the face of Chinese efforts to undermine that claim. So, why does a project bolstered by big ideas seem so bogged down in controversy?

There are competing answers. The version that has emanated, over the years, from the government, particularly from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the nodal ministry for the university, is that Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, appointed chairman of the [Nalanda Mentor Group](#) (NMG) in 2007, and later chancellor of the university, has helmed a non-transparent, fiscally lax enterprise short on managerial ability. Leaked intra-government communications and Comptroller and Auditor General reports have criticised generous, tax-free salaries, unsanctioned foreign travels, meetings in luxury hotels, and opaque appointments.

While these critiques reveal a lack of clarity, and perhaps lack of imagination, within the government on how a unique project should be handled, even well-wishers feel that the Nalanda team failed to correct perceptions that it was running an esoteric, clubby venture lubricated by government money. The one single decision that has done the most to shape these negative perceptions is Sen's choice and manner of appointment of Gopa Sabharwal, formerly a reader in sociology at a Delhi University college, to the weighty post of Nalanda's vice-chancellor.

The whiff of arbitrariness, even sleight of hand, around this appointment grew especially strong when it came to be known, a couple of years ago, that Sen had put her at the top of a "shortlist", submitted by him to the government, on which two other, more eminent names were historian [Ramachandra Guha](#) and political theorist Pratap Bhanu Mehta.

Guha says he was astonished to read he was on such a shortlist. "Some years ago," he recalls, "[Amartya Sen](#) and I had an informal conversation in a cafe near Harvard, during which he asked me if I was interested in the job of vice-chancellor of Nalanda, and I said I was not. I then suggested that a scholar of [ancient India](#) or of [Buddhism](#) would be far more suitable."

Guha is also among those who suggest that Sen underestimated how much he personally needed to be involved with Nalanda. "It is quite possible," he says, "that, since he so admires Rabindranath Tagore, Amartya Sen's vision for a new Nalanda was inspired by Tagore's setting up of Visvabharati, a university of the world. If so, he seems not to have recognised that while Tagore based himself in the very town where his university was set up, Sen was directing his own effort from afar."

However, down on the ground in Rajgir, and indeed in the corridors of power in Patna, much of the blame for the drift and acrimony enveloping this project is laid at the door of central officialdom. While Sabharwal declines to comment on this aspect, others say the project has been a casualty of a weak government - on the one hand a favoured child of the Manmohan Singh's PMO, on the other, the "step child" of its nodal ministry.

Against charges that the Nalanda team are poor managers, it is pointed out that the start of construction on the campus was set back by a full year by delays, at the government end, in approving architectural contracts. Even the matter of building a boundary wall around the site became a matter of tortuous deliberations. It took several months, a local official said, to get clearances from the ministry. Did the government undermine Nalanda's freedom? Sen has said, in recent days, that "non-action" by the government on statutes passed by the governing board had that effect. Local staff buttress this argument with examples. They say while an internationally recruited faculty is at work, formal approval of its terms and conditions of hire is pending, because university statutes relating to these are still with the government. "Some faculty may leave if these matters are not sorted out," warned an official.

The poorly drafted [Nalanda University](#) Act, 2010, has not helped. A maladroit clause relating to international representation on the board was recognised, early on, as requiring amendment because it could have had the potential effect of leaving important countries like China and Japan without a place on the board. But both the United Progressive Alliance government, and its successor, have dragged their feet on amending the Act.

This is why, an official says, a formal governing board with the full panoply of Indian and foreign representation has not been appointed, and a board composed of NMG members, essentially interim in nature, has had its term repeatedly extended. A former foreign secretary agrees that not constituting a formal governing board, at the earliest,

was a big mistake by the government, and "created a sense of ad hocism about an important international project".

Bihar is the one stakeholder that comes off well in the Nalanda affair, thanks to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's near-obsessive interest in pushing what he saw as a hugely prestigious project for the state. After acquiring and donating the land for the campus, and providing local support to the university, the state government went on to acquire an additional 100 acres, as a planned corpus for the university to generate revenue.

If much has not been heard about this recently, it is because the state has been watching the twists and turns in the Nalanda saga with disappointment - but not, officials say, much surprise. Indeed, a Bihar official comments that it has been crystal clear to anyone watching, close-up, that "the MEA and the Nalanda team were just not on the same wave length".

That certainly came through loud and clear in a Nalanda governing board member's acerbic and revealing response to the mention, in writer Ashok Malik's column in the Indian Express last week, that the MEA's offer "of a senior civil servant, with a relevant professional background" for the project was turned down by the board.

"This was by no means a formal MEA proposal," the member told *Business Standard*. "It was a private request to create a post-retirement job for a foreign service officer whom we did consider but did not find suitable."

ELECTRICITY

ASIAN AGE, MAR 6, 2015

AAP government forms panel for white paper on power

The AAP-led Delhi government on Thursday constituted a single-member committee chaired former by Delhi Electricity Regulatory Committee (DERC) chairman Bijendra Singh to study the situation of the power sector in the national capital and develop a “white paper” on its basis.

The paper would examine the issues that ail the city’s electricity sector, and also provide a “factual” report on all aspects of the projects and initiatives undertaken during the previous Congress regime, since the past decade. It would focus on what the new government inherited and look for a policy revamp to improve the electricity scenario. The city’s power minister Satyendra Jain said the committee has been directed to look into various aspects of the power sector and submit the paper within a period of three months. “The committee will study the power scenario since 2002 and prepare a white paper, which would provide the government a direction in the sector. The report would also be tabled in the state Assembly for discussion.”

Mr Jain said the committee would be free to associate experts of the energy sector, policy makers and public representatives in the process. “The government proposes to place in public domain all relevant facts related to the privatisation of the electricity distribution in Delhi and whether the specific purpose for which privatization was done has been achieved during the last 13 years,” the AAP minister said.

He said the white paper would focus on how power privatisation was done and why, besides examining the power project agreements. The government also proposes to make public the real situation of electricity generation, transmission and distribution which has been inherited by it. “Residents of Delhi have a right to know about the reality of the power sector and what reforms have been carried out till date.”

Noting that principal secretary (power) would provide all the necessary administrative, secretarial and logistical assistance to Mr Singh, the minister said that the government would also provide all necessary documents to the committee as may be required for the presentation on the paper.

The AAP had issued a white paper on the state of the power sector before the 2015 Assembly elections, which focused on the massive debt owed to discoms in Delhi, the costing of coal-based power, need for a CAG audit of the discoms.

FEDERAL STATE RELATIONS

STATESMAN, MAR 4, 2015

Will federalism at work let populism thrive?

Govind Bhattacharjee

The just released recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission will have far reaching consequences for the states of the Indian Union, with 42 per cent of the central divisible pool of resources now going to them, as compared to the existing 32 per cent provided by the Thirteenth Finance Commission. In terms of resources now available to the states, it is indeed a quantum jump from the recommendations of all previous Finance Commissions which increased the states' share only in low incremental steps.

Divisible pool initially used to comprise only income tax and part of central excise duties. Successive commissions increased the states' share of these taxes. The Eleventh Finance Commission (2000-05) expanded the divisible pool substantially by including in it the net proceeds from all taxes covered under article 270 (income tax, corporation tax, central excise duty, customs duty, service tax and wealth tax) and making 29.5 per cent of this pool sharable with the states. The next two commissions increased this share to 30.5 and 32 per cent respectively. Cess and surcharges are excluded from the divisible pool which is entirely appropriated by the Centre; this remains a sore point with all states. Apart from devolution of taxes, Finance Commissions also recommend grants-in-aid of revenues of states under article 275.

The taxes are divided among the states on the principles of equity and efficiency, effectively transferring resources from rich to poor states on the basis of a formula that factors in population and area of a state, inter-state disparities in income and their fiscal and financial performance. From the sixth commission onwards, Governments have restricted the Finance Commissions to recommending only non-plan grants, plan part being made the prerogative of the now defunct Planning Commission. Plan transfers in most part depended on the discretion of the Central government; only a part was formula-based that progressively went on shrinking with the proliferation of Centrally-sponsored schemes. These discretionary transfers have now been reduced after the replacement of the Planning Commission by Niti Aayog, an expert body without any power of resource allocation.

But the landscape of financial relations between Union and states really started changing after the Twelfth Finance Commission; before that, Finance Commission recommendations were by and large accounting recommendations, a little more here, a

little less there. These failed to address the perennial financial problems of states which had revenue resources that fell far short of their revenue expenditure, let alone capital investment requirements, for which they had to borrow heavily. This led to swelling debt burden of each state and the nominal debt reliefs given by successive Finance Commissions could hardly mitigate the crushing burden of their debt. Unable to manage this on the strength of their own resources, the states had to borrow from the Centre just to be able to repay their debt instalments and interest; many states couldn't even manage that as servicing of their existing debt exceeded their fresh borrowings.

The successive Central Pay Commissions, especially from the Fifth Pay Commission (1996-2006) onwards, increased the salaries of Central government employees forcing the states also to give matching rises to their own employees without having matching resources. This compounded their financial problems. After the sixth Pay Commission recommendations (2006-16), the situations went absolutely beyond the control of most states and they started sinking deeper in debt.

Meanwhile the market rate of interest was going down, but Article 293 of the Constitution did not allow the states to borrow from the market without the Centre's permission if they were indebted to the Centre, which they were. Centre continued to charge higher interest rates which further worsened their indebtedness, making them fall into a vicious debt trap one by one. It was in these circumstances that the Twelfth Finance Commission was constituted. They diagnosed the problem correctly but departing from the incremental accounting approach of previous Commissions, came up with an outstanding out-of-box solution, forcing the states to control their unproductive expenditure by enacting FRBMA (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act), which bound them to contain fiscal deficits within 3 per cent of state income (GDSP) and in return, freeing them from the obligations of borrowing from the Centre. They rewarded states that could generate surpluses in their revenue accounts by giving them a matching relief on their debt burden and more.

As a result, most states, except a few indigent ones, could pull themselves out of their debt traps by generating revenue surpluses. These surpluses financed their capital expenditure, curtailing borrowing to that extent. Their debt burden thus reduced as a consequence and their finances improved. The Thirteenth Finance Commission further reinforced the states' improved financial position and increased their share of divisible pool to 32 per cent. Even West Bengal and Sikkim which had hitherto refused to enact FRBMAs were now forced to enact these legislations so as to avail the benefits that could no longer be ignored for the sake of populism.

But the recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission go far ahead - they have the potential to redefine and redraw the contours of federal finance in India by giving much more fiscal space to states to identify their own priorities and to spend thereon, instead of making them depend on an all-powerful Centre to dole out resources through plan funds as per its own discretion, and in the process, jeopardising the process of growth and development of the country as a whole.

Centralised planning was a negation of the spirit of true federalism. Spirit of federalism is asserted when Centre and states are seen as equal partners in development and not the former as a giver and latter as recipients of common resources. National interest must be supreme in any arrangement of federal transfer of resources, but the aberration of the badly implemented centrally-sponsored schemes, often designed with dubious logic, has so far hideously defeated this objective. The number of these schemes has now reduced from 347 during the ninth plan to 66 now, but these are still far too many. Hopefully, Fourteenth Finance Commission's far-reaching recommendations will now force the centre to consider scrapping some of these anachronisms and give the states the authority to spend taxpayers' money more judiciously, so as to eliminate waste, leakages and corruption.

The recommendations will have the effect of increasing the net flow of funds to the states by an extra Rs 2.21 lakh crore during 2015-16 alone - the biggest jump in the state's share so far. During the award period of the Commission (2015-20), tax share to states will exceed Rs 44 lakh crore. In addition, 11 states with deficits in their revenue account will get grants amounting to Rs 1.95 lakh crore during the period. Local bodies stand to gain significantly, with Rs 2 lakh crore earmarked for Gram Panchayats and Rs 87,000 crore for our almost dysfunctional municipalities - resources enough for transforming them, if used judiciously.

The aggregate level of transfer of Central resources - plan and non-plan combined - is estimated go up only by about 2 per cent over the award period, but most of it will now be based on formula rather than on discretion and not tied to plan schemes of questionable usefulness. The Commission's methodology has been robust and estimates conservative, avoiding a high growth scenario in respect of taxes and GDP, which increases the credibility of their recommendations. By including forest cover as a new environmental factor and by giving weightage to inter-state migration since 1971 in population, it has taken into account changing realities of the time.

For transfers outside the Finance Commission, it has recommended setting up of a new institutional mechanism 'consistent with the overarching objective of strengthening cooperative federalism', by limiting discretion, improving design and giving adequate flexibility to the States. By recommending exclusion of States from the operations of NSSF which was forced upon them, it has given them more liberty to manage their debt. It has also urged the Centre to follow the true spirit of fiscal responsibility by dispensing the concept of 'Effective Revenue Deficit', ingeniously invented by it to circumvent the 3 per cent limit on fiscal deficit. All these recommendations are likely to bring in transparency and accountability in the public finances of union as well as states, heralding a spirit of federalism this country has not seen so far.

There is of course a danger lurking which the Commission ought to have pre-empted. The mistakes that Congress governments at the Centre had made by resorting to unbridled populism at the cost of the nation's growth are now much more likely to be repeated with increased resources available to states. They are already in evidence in Delhi where the new government has announced sops that will cost about Rs 1,700 crore annually. These may be fulfilling their election promises, and Delhi, a Union Territory, may not be under Finance Commission's jurisdiction, but such trends are irresponsible and dangerous. They are likely to be repeated by many states, especially those going to polls soon, like Bihar, West Bengal and UP.

The potential of subverting economic gains for populist purposes assumes serious proportions when political parties enter opportunistic alliances forsaking all principles with brazenness and when looters masquerading as leaders are in positions to drive governance in states. These states will now find increased resources as welcome bonanza to spend on ever more populism, squandering resources through unconstrained sops and doles in an election or pre-election year. A forward looking Commission ought to have provided safeguards against these pitfalls.

-- The writer is a commentator. The views expressed are personal.

FINANCE

TRIBUNE, MAR 3, 2015

A harbinger of more reforms

The 2015-16 budget is practical in approach and undertakes course correction

Charan Singh

The Finance Minister delivered an exceptional first full-year budget of the new government in difficult global conditions and a complex political situation in the country. The budget is carefully drafted, is practical in approach and undertakes course correction without disrupting the economy and investor sentiment.

In fact, the FM's budget speech should not just be an accounting exercise but an important policy document laying down the fiscal policy framework for not only the current year but also beyond - for the medium and long term. The FM has made many long-pending and important policy announcements like setting up a debt management office and having a monetary policy framework. The speech provided a panoramic view of the economy covering issues like social security, employment opportunities for the young demographic nation, and financial sector issues like a bankruptcy law.

The FM identified five main challenges that the economy is facing, mainly low agricultural income, slowing manufacturing output and fiscal discipline. In case, the government is ensuring a committed path and using borrowings for growth purposes, the rule of GFD of 3 per cent of GDP should not necessarily be followed. It is not in most of the advanced and OECD countries, and justifiably defended by the current economic environment.

The budget should lead to higher employment because of emphasis on skill formation and the scheme to build nearly six crore houses spread across the rural and urban areas over the next six years. Housing is a labour-intensive industry and absorbs output from nearly 270 industries. Therefore, a new housing policy is necessary to cater to this significantly ambitious target.

The focus of the new policies should be to convert youth from job seekers to job creators through the spirit of entrepreneurship and special provisions have been announced in terms of a techno-financial incubation facilitation programme to support start-ups. To enhance skill formation and employability, a national skills mission is being launched. In most of the cases, soft skills are required in our young graduates to compete with the best

in the world. Thus, there is need to identify and formulate a skilling strategy for meeting the challenge.

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have strong potential for creating employment. MSMEs have been suffering from numerous difficulties in the past few years, especially pertaining to accessing finance, as most of these are in the informal sector and banks were only able to finance less than 5 per cent of the existing units. The government has proposed to create a Micro Units Development Refinance Agency (MUDRA) Bank to provide finance to these units. To improve liquidity for MSMEs, an electronic trading system has also been envisaged. These measures are certainly useful and in the right direction but it would need to be clarified as to what would be the role of the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD). Similarly, while problems of MSMEs have been discussed and some provisions for better availability of financial resources provided, the issue of delayed payments, especially from government departments and public sector enterprises, were not covered. MSMEs also suffer from difficult and archaic labour laws which need to be addressed to exploit the complete potential of these measures. Accordingly, a new MSME policy can be expected from the government.

After many years of uncertainty, the government has proposed to separate debt from monetary management and set up an independent Public Debt Management Agency (PDMA) to coordinate and undertake both external and domestic borrowings in a single agency. Having taken the debt management function out of the RBI, it was logical that the government assign some accountability and responsibility to the RBI. Accordingly, the government has concluded a Monetary Policy Framework Agreement (MPFA) with the RBI. The MPFA, according to the FM, clearly states the objective of keeping inflation below 6 per cent but whether this would be observed every month or an average of quarter or that of a year was not clarified in the speech. The government may also consider placing the MPFA in public domain to inspire confidence in the markets, as is generally the practice in other inflation-targeting countries.

Indians have special attachment to gold and hold more than 20,000 tonnes. The government's effort to monetise gold holdings through a new scheme would lead to more economic activity in the country, helping people earn interest income as well as develop the gold market in India. But there may be a need to study in detail issues involved in monetising gold, necessary market infrastructure and an implementing strategy so that the

new scheme does not meet the fate of the earlier unsuccessful schemes. There also may be a need to have a regulator for the entities that operate in the gold market as well as a corporation to set gold standards and certify gold purity for gold products in India.

In addition to the setting up of IIMs and IITs, the government may also like to consider replicating excellent institutions that teach commerce, law, economics and liberal arts. This is necessary to consider because most of the engineers trained in the IITs search for finance jobs after joining IIMs. Thus, the implicit subsidy that the government provides in producing engineers from IITs probably gets wasted.

This is a unique budget that has provided policy directions to important issues like debt management, monetary policy framework, gold policy, bankruptcy laws, black money and social security. The clarity in determination on the implementation of the goods and services tax, and support to MSMEs, in terms of finances and skill development are other positive factors. The first full-year budget has met its expectations as the government has clearly delineated its policy on major economic issues. The speech clearly indicates that many more reforms can be expected and probably, is a harbinger of second-generation reforms which have been pending for more than a decade.

The writer is an RBI Chair Professor of Economics, IIM, Bangalore. The views are personal

DECCAN HERALD, MAR 4, 2015

Stress on growth

Alok Ray

The Budget 2015 is the first full-year budget of the Modi government. This government has been singularly lucky in that the economy is currently in a “sweet spot” (to use the phrase of the Economic Survey) with high growth rate of 7.4 per cent (making it the fastest growing big economy of the world, even exceeding China), inflation down to 5 per cent and the Current Account Deficit (CAD) below 1.3 per cent of GDP, mostly due to the fortuitous development of a steep fall in global oil and commodity prices.

Further, this government has come to power with a single-party majority promising to create an investor friendly climate which would attract investment from home and abroad, thereby taking India to an 8 per cent plus growth trajectory. This Budget was awaited with high hopes as it was expected to put up a road map for the future course of the economy over the next four years of the present government.

The basic philosophy of the present government is that growth is the primary mechanism for lifting people above poverty by creating productive jobs. In that sense, pro-growth policies are also pro-poor. However, in a country with a vast number of poor people to start with, growth alone can not be expected to take care of poverty, in the foreseeable future. In addition, even in advanced economies, there will always remain some people (like old, infirm or laid off from jobs) who would need to be protected. Therefore, along with higher growth, we need a social safety net for the vulnerable.

Apart from the economic and social imperatives, the Modi government has felt an additional political compulsion to do something specifically for the poor in the Budget to dispel its 'pro-corporate', 'pro-rich' image. Analysts consider this to be a reason behind its debacle in Delhi polls in the hands of the populist Aam Aadmi Party promising free water and electricity at half-price. Hence, even if the BJP leadership was highly critical of the subsidy and entitlement-based pro-poor policy of the UPA government, it has not dared to prune, in any significant way, the existing schemes like MGNREGA or extension of food subsidy to a larger percentage of population.

In addition to continuing with the existing schemes for the poor, this Budget promises to lay down a policy framework for pushing India to a higher growth path along with taking a few small steps to put in place a rudimentary social safety net for the less affluent. The poor state of infrastructure (rail, road, ports, power) is regarded as the most crucial bottleneck holding up the growth of manufacturing in India without which the rising young population (the so-called 'demographic dividend') can not be absorbed in better paying jobs.

At the same time, rising wages in China is providing India a golden opportunity to develop as a manufacturing hub (Modi's 'Make in India' slogan).

The Budget put a special emphasis on bringing in investment in the infrastructure sector.

The earlier Public-Private-Partnership model has not worked well giving rise to non-fulfilment of targets, litigation and bad debts for banks. The government, therefore, wants to increase public investment in infrastructure by providing additional allocation (Rs 70,000 crore) from the budget, on top of creating an Infrastructure Fund with an initial equity contribution from the government (of Rs 20,000 crore) which would be used as a lever to raise more money (debt) from the market. Also, under the so-called 'plug-and-play model', the major risks like land acquisition, securing environment and other clearances, arranging coal or gas linkages would be taken care by the government before awarding projects to private developers.

Attracting private players

This would make the projects more attractive for private players by cutting down cost and time overruns. In other words, public investment and new public initiatives in infrastructure (even if these cause some increase in fiscal deficit above the initial targets) would attract more private funds into infrastructure (called ‘crowding in’ rather than ‘crowding out’ in economics).

To what extent these moves would be able to fill up the huge infrastructure deficit, only the future would tell. The way the Land Acquisition Amendment Ordinance is being held up in Parliament by the opposition and the slow-moving government machinery (to do the advance groundwork in the Plug and Play model) leaves one a bit sceptical. In addition, the gradual reduction in corporate profit tax from 30 to 25 per cent over the next four years (and making Indian tax rates internationally competitive at ASEAN level) and introduction of an international standard bankruptcy law (to make exit from loss making business easier) are both designed to attract more private investment into India.

It is also important to note that, following the Finance Commission recommendation, the states would have a much higher share of the total national tax revenue along with a reduction in allocation of Central funds to implement centrally sponsored schemes. That means states will have greater autonomy with regard to revenue as well as expenditure. The overall national performance on infrastructure building will therefore also depend on how the state governments will use these funds – on asset creation or populist freebies.

On the social security front, three new schemes for the less affluent are an accidental death risk cover and a pension scheme with defined benefits (depending on contribution and period) with 50 per cent of annual premium to be paid by government for five years. Though baby steps, these are welcome beginnings in a country with no social safety net for the poor unorganised workers. (The writer is former Professor of Economics, IIM-Calcutta)

TELEGRAPH, MAR 3, 2015

A framework for recovery and growth

SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY

Budget-making today is a tough call for a Finance Minister trying to reverse the past decline caused by the UPA’s policies. The Indian economy, for example, decelerated from an 8.4 per cent growth rate in GDP in 2003-04 to 4.8 per cent in 2013-14. The UPA’s decade of economic decline has been wrongly attributed to the global economic meltdown especially during the last six years of the decade.

Therefore, recovery and growth need a different policy today, and require choosing a new framework of objectives, priorities, strategy and resource mobilisation measures in constituting a budget.

The Budget for 2015-16 presented on Saturday to Parliament by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley is a serious attempt to usher in such a new framework. An analysis of how far he has succeeded and what more remains to be done for a successful turnaround is the concern here in this article.

Participatory Notes

The Indian economy has declined because of the peculiar Indian “invention” of that perfidious financial derivative called Participatory Notes or PNs, otherwise known as the crony/crooked facilitator for black money-based portfolio investment. No other country would think of such a derivative.

The Budget does not treat PNs as a time bomb and to seek to abolish this derivative, as the Tarapore Committee had wanted. Actually, PNs have been even more legitimised by enhancing their status to that of FDI inflow.

The Finance Minister ought to have abolished PNs in this Budget to stabilise the economy. I do not know if Mr. Jaitley was even shown this legitimisation of PNs which is in the fine print of the Budget documents.

He has introduced many new measures, such as a vastly increased agricultural credit facility, the new MUDRA Bank to fund the underfunded, especially Scheduled Caste/Tribe entrepreneurs, tax-free bonds for infrastructure development, ultra-large power plants of 4,000 MW, monetisation of hoarded gold by paying interest on gold deposit accounts in banks and ease of doing business in India by a digitisation of procedures. But this is not enough to kick-start the economy since Mr. Jaitley has not embedded such piecemeal measures in the larger picture of economic reform and budgetary restructure.

Looming crisis

Today, for example, there is a budgetary crisis looming on the horizon because the allocations for major heads of expenditure — government employees’ salaries, pensions, police, defence, subsidies, interests to be paid for past loans taken by the government, etc., and which now cover 98 per cent of the current and capital account revenues accruing to government — cannot be reduced without creating a political crisis.

These allocations are revenue expenditures, and hence not asset-building or investments for development projects.

Moreover, in the past, in the revenue budget, these expenditures far exceed the revenue. Thus, the revenue budget has been in huge deficit, and which is covered by taking more loans from public sector banks and creating a surplus in the capital account by trimming investment allocation.

In the Budget, we find this is continued because Non-Plan Expenditure has risen 11 per cent while Plan Expenditure has been stagnant. In a financially healthy economy, it should be the other way around — surplus on the revenue account, i.e., revenue exceeding expenditure, and a deficit in the capital account, i.e., investment exceeding amortisation.

This situation however cannot continue for long because loans from public sector banks to the government to pay for the overall deficit in the Budget have to be paid back. It will require a major recapitalisation of banks to meet the Basel III norms or else the public sector banks may go bankrupt by 2017. A time bomb is ticking here.

Being futuristic

The big picture we have to usher in is an Indian economy growing annually at 10 to 12 per cent by inducing the current household saving rate of 29 per cent of income to rise again to the rate of 36 per cent.

To become a developed country in the foreseeable future, India's GDP will have to grow at 10 to 12 per cent per year for at least a decade. A 12 per cent GDP growth rate per year will mean a doubling of GDP every six years, and that of per capita income, doubling every seven years.

This level of the growth rate can take us to the league of the top three nations of the world, of the United States, China and India by 2020, and then aim to overtake China in the next decade thereafter. That should be a stated goal of every budget and not just a "balancing the books" exercise.

Technically, this is within India's reach, since it would require the rate of investment to rise while productivity growth will have to ensure that the incremental output-capital ratio declines from the present 4.0 to 3.0. Productivity increases can be achieved by cutting transaction cost in the ease to do business and by motivating labour with incentives to work harder.

Further, if we reduce transaction cost by eliminating corruption, then the current incremental capital-output ratio will easily fall from 4.0 to 3.0.

Enthusiating the middle class

This can also be sustained by directly, and not indirectly, enthusing the middle class — which today can be achieved only by abolishing personal income tax.

In this Budget, the middle class has little to cheer about. The morning-after announcement of petrol and diesel price hikes even while internationally, crude oil price continues to be in decline, has only further discouraged the middle class. India's middle class urgently needs some good news.

India has many advantages to achieve a booming economy such as a demographic dividend, agriculture that has internationally the lowest yield in land and livestock-based products, and also, by WTO reckoning, the lowest cost of production, 12 months a year of farm-friendly weather, a highly competitive, skilled and semi-skilled labour force and low wage rates at the national level, the advantages of which have already been proved to the world by the outsourcing phenomenon. We have a young population — the average is 28 years when compared to the U.S.'s 38 years, and Japan's 49 years — that is the base for it to usher in innovation in our production process.

Since the worldview of economic development has now completely changed, economic development is no more thought of as being capital-driven, but knowledge-driven. For application of knowledge, we need innovations, which means more original research, and more fresh, young minds out of the cream of youth to be inculcated with learning and to be at the frontier of research.

The unintended consequences of past policies should not make us squander this “natural resource” of youth we have acquired. Today, using proper policy application for the young, we must realise and harvest this demographic potential.

Thus, these goals have to be at the core of the economic agenda underlying the making of the Budgets. But for all that to happen, more vigorous, market-centric, economic reforms are necessary and need to be at the centre stage of the nation's attention in a Budget and not be overwhelmed by what corporate-driven, media hype expects of a budget.

Looking ahead positively, the nation still has four more annual Budgets to see, and which will hopefully set the stage for India's economic renaissance in the next decade.

(Subramanian Swamy is a former Union Minister of Commerce and Professor of Economics.)

The Indian economy has declined because of the peculiar Indian ‘invention’ of a perfidious financial derivative called Participatory Notes.

After a decade of economic decline, wrongly attributed to the global economic meltdown, recovery and growth need a different policy today, using a new framework of objectives,

priorities, strategy and resource mobilisation measures. The Union Budget is a serious attempt to have such a framework in place

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TELEGRAPH, MAR 3, 2015

Talking again

- The Indian foreign secretary's visit to Pakistan Kanwal Sibal

Our policy towards Pakistan has been marked by flip-flops and lack of coherence because an adequate answer to the complex and enduring challenges that we face from that country has evaded us so far. We have repeatedly reached out to Pakistan in the hope that in its own interest it will see the wisdom of ending its confrontation with India, and we have not been deterred from doing so even when our expectations have been repeatedly belied. Like a gambler we keep placing bets, keep losing, but keep hoping we might win one day.

We are again reaching out to Pakistan, with the prime minister, Narendra Modi, speaking to his counterpart in Pakistan and deciding to send the foreign secretary to Islamabad. The cloak of SAARC and cricket has been given to this initiative, so that it is not too glaring that we are reversing course and resuming foreign-secretary-level talks with Pakistan that we called off in August, 2014, because Pakistan's high commissioner in Delhi met the Hurriyat leaders first.

Of course, if Pakistan had sent us encouraging signals in the intervening months, we would be right in re-connecting with it. Permanent tensions with Pakistan are not in our interest. But we cannot normalize relations unilaterally; Pakistan must want that too, and this should be visible in its actions and not in mere affirmations of peace meant for diplomatic consumption, especially in the West.

In actual fact, Pakistan has not changed its hostile attitude towards India. Nawaz Sharif has been notably aggressive over Kashmir by repeatedly invoking the United Nations resolutions and self-determination, and calling it - very recently again - the "jugular vein" of Pakistan. If so, then it is a territorial, life-and-death issue for Pakistan, not one of "self-determination", as it spuriously claims. He constantly seeks third-party intervention in Jammu and Kashmir, contrary to the Simla Agreement, which he studiously ignores in his references to past India-Pakistan accords. He sees no contradiction in his supposed commitment to peace with India while seeking a solution to Kashmir at India's expense.

Pakistan's forces have been firing regularly in recent months across the international border in Jammu, where villages populated by Hindus are located. Nawaz Sharif, despite past promises, is not moving forward in trying those responsible for the 2008 Mumbai massacre. On banning the Jamaat-udDawa as a terrorist organization, the Nawaz Sharif government has been deliberately deceitful in its statements. Far from placing any curbs on Hafiz Saeed, it is giving him opportunities to hold rallies and spout his usual venom against India. We see no tangible action by Nawaz Sharif against *jihadi* groups in Pakistan that target India. Many elements - including General Musharraf - are poisoning public opinion in Pakistan by alleging Indian support for the Pakistani Taliban and the

Peshawar school massacre. We are accused of interference in Baluchistan from Afghan soil whenever the issue of their support for terrorism in India is raised. In fact, Pakistan refuses to recognise any responsibility for terrorism in India, citing its own combat against terrorism at home, which it claims is "sponsored and supported from abroad". Nawaz Sharif pointedly fails to mention the 2004 Islamabad Declaration committing Pakistan to end terrorism against India from territory under its control. Pakistan is determined to keep agitating the water issue, with its latest move to obstruct another Indian power project permitted by the Indus Waters treaty in acutely power-deficient J&K. For political reasons, Nawaz Sharif has balked at according the status of "most favoured nation" to India, in spite of earlier commitments and benefits that a beleaguered economy in Pakistan would reap in improving trade ties with India. On Afghanistan, Pakistan is pursuing its strategy of countering India's presence and influence there.

In recent weeks, Nawaz Sharif's national security and foreign affairs adviser, Sartaj Aziz, has exhibited Pakistan's unremitting hostility towards India by publicly objecting to American support for India's permanent seat in the UN security council, claiming that this would violate the UNSC's resolutions on matters of international peace and security, such as the J&K dispute, and declaring that India "by no means qualifies for a special status in the Security Council". He also voiced opposition to India's membership of the nuclear suppliers group, arguing that this discriminates against Pakistan and is a case of another country's specific exemption, which would undermine the credibility of the NSG, the fragile strategic stability in South Asia, while weakening the nonproliferation regime. He attacked the nuclear deal between India and the United States, struck for "political and economic expediencies" for its detrimental impact on nuclear deterrence and overall balance in South Asia. He threatened that Pakistan reserves its right to safeguard its national security interests. He has warned against "India's dangerous desire to create a space for war". According to him, the dialogue process can only be advanced if talks are held on basic issues, which obviously means Kashmir as well as water.

Such a broadside by any country on the visit of a foreign leader to a third country as part of their bilateral engagement is most unusual in diplomacy unless it is a protest against something that has been said against it during that visit. To resent improved ties between the US and India to this extent shows an almost pathological antagonism towards India. Those in Pakistan, India and the West that distinguish between Pakistan's civilian government and its armed forces for negative attitudes towards India, and advise India to be more supportive of the former, should note that these statements are being made by civilian leaders. If they are fronting for the military with this kind of virulence, then it is hardly worthwhile courting them with any political gestures so long as they conduct themselves like puppets. Pakistan's fulminations should be contrasted with China's reticence on many elements in the India-US documents issued during Obama's visit that it can view as being directed at it.

The US has always prodded India to resume the dialogue with Pakistan, no matter how Pakistan behaves. During his visit, Barack Obama seems to have pressed Modi to resume contact with Pakistan. According to the US deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, the pursuit of dialogue "is something that the United States has consistently supported,

and we will continue to do so". After Obama's visit, the US ambassador to India has publicly espoused his country's interest in furthering such a dialogue. US officials told the media before Obama's visit that he will raise with Modi the issue of "how the two nuclear-armed neighbours can resume dialogue and reduce their hostilities", which is the usual US excuse for supporting Pakistan and seeking to control India's Pakistan policy.

Pakistan is persuaded that even if the dialogue process is broken by India because of Pakistan's provocations, it will resume talks eventually because, first, it has no choice and, second, the international community will pressure it to do so. It knows well that its intransigence will pay. With India now initiating foreign-secretary-level contact, Pakistan will conclude that its assumptions have been proved right again. It may be that developments behind the scene justify the government's initiative. And maybe the gamble will pay off this time.

The author is former foreign secretary of India sibalkanwal@gmail.com

JUDICIARY

DECCAN HERALD, MAR 7, 2015

Independent judiciary?

Sanjay Hegde

The matter questioning the setting up of the National Judicial Appointments Commission will come up before the SC on March 10.

Every civilised nation needs an independent judiciary to act as a buffer between the citizen's rights and the government's wrongs. But does an independent judiciary mean that new judges should be appointed by older judges only?

Should there be a self-perpetuating elite priesthood of constitutional pundits, who alone can be trusted to be truly independent, and judge without fear or favour according to the constitution.

The constitution provides for superior judges to be appointed by the government in consultation with the Chief Justice. However, for the past two decades, India's judges have been appointed by the judges themselves.

Appointments to the Supreme Court were recommended by collegiums of the five senior-most judges of that Court and similarly, High Court judges appointments were recommended by the three senior-most judges of the concerned High Court. This procedure was the result of a somewhat innovative judgment in 1993, by Justice J S Verma in the first Supreme Court Advocates on Record Case.

The UPA government got a constitutional amendment bill passed through the Rajya Sabha but a fortuitous slip in parliamentary procedure prevented the bill from being tabled in the Lok Sabha.

The process was nevertheless seen as a warning shot fired across the judiciary's bow. At that time, with elections then on the horizon, veteran jurist Fali Nariman told me, "A majority government will see a conformist judiciary". Having lived through the Indira Gandhi era where a strong leader had attempted with some success to mould the judiciary in her likeness, Fali's pessimism was not without basis.

An unprecedented single party majority in the parliamentary elections of May 2014 saw an aggressive government halting the appointment of Gopal Subramaniam whose past conduct as a lawyer was seen as unfriendly.

Soon, despite Chief Justice R M Lodha's spirited public defence of judicial

independence, the constitutional amendment and the accompanying National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act was passed by parliament.

A face-off has been brewing in India between the government and the judiciary since August 2014, when the National Judicial Appointments Bill and 121st Constitution Amendment Act were passed by parliament.

The new structure of the NJAC provides for a six member body comprising of three senior Supreme Court judges, two eminent citizens and the law minister to make recommendations for all judicial appointments to the High Court and Supreme Court. In effect, what the NJAC has done is that the judiciary's 100 per cent say has been whittled down to 50 per cent.

What is worse is the fact that even a name backed by all three of the judicial members can be vetoed by any two of the other members. In actual working, with most occupants having a transient presence, power would most likely devolve on the permanent convenor of the commission who would be the secretary of the department of justice.

Since the three judicial members will not necessarily know members of the bar in all High Courts, a great deal of deference may be given to lists drawn up by state governments and forwarded for the commission's approval. The package as a whole is designed to willy-nilly wrest control of judicial appointments back into the hands of the executive.

Petitions were immediately filed challenging the two Acts. In August 2014, when the constitutional amendment had not been ratified by the states and hence had not come into effect, the court disposed of the petitions as premature and did not entertain them.

It, however, left it open to the petitioners to reiterate their challenge after the law came into being. With 17 of the 29 states having ratified the Act and the President having given his assent in December 2014, it now remains for the government to notify the date on which the NJAC will come into force.

A new set of petitions were again filed in January 2015. For over two months, the petitions were not listed on board for hearing before the court. In the meanwhile, an impasse of sorts came into being. The old order did not fully die and the new was not fully born.

Law Minister D V Sadananda Gowda then told the judiciary that new appointments cannot be made since the constitutional amendment has come into force. He requested the Supreme Court to hear and deliver judgments on the challenges to the constitutional amendment. On the other hand, the NJAC could not be constituted without the nomination of two eminent persons as members.

Eminent members

Chief Justice H L Dattu has so far refused to participate in the nomination of the two eminent members to the NJAC as he feels that such a step may embarrass the institution when it takes up the constitutional challenge. In the meanwhile, the collegium has met to make recommendations on transfers and appointments of chief justices of High Courts from amongst senior existing judges.

It also made a recommendation for the appointment of Justice Amitava Roy to the Supreme Court which the government processed on an urgent basis since the learned judge would have otherwise superannuated from the High Court upon attaining 62 years of age. Some other names too were discussed by the collegium but no consensus seems to have resulted on any other name.

If judges keep retiring and their replacements are not available immediately, the overburdened litigation system in India will collapse, taking with it the nation's calling card of reliance on the rule of law. The judiciary has so far stood firm, primarily out of a sense of occasion and the weight of India's constitutional history. The government backed by majority support in Parliament and outside, saw no incentive to make any gesture of conciliation.

Ultimately, the only way forward was for the SC is to schedule a hearing of the petitions and to ascertain the government's position in court. The matter is now scheduled to be heard in court on March 10, 2015 by a special bench of Justices Dave, Chelameswar and Lokur. India will be expectantly watching to see whether the judiciary this time will stand up to be counted when it matters.

(The writer is advocate, Supreme Court)

HINDUSTAN TIMES, MAR 5, 2015

judicial pay: My Lord, the disparity is painfully glaring
Jai Dehadrai

The contrast between the salary of a judge of the Supreme Court or high court and the median earning of an advocate practising in their courtrooms is stark. This disparity becomes even more troublesome when one considers that lawyers invited for elevation to the Bench are meant to be the most competent and are therefore also the best compensated. The earnings of several top lawyers in Delhi and Mumbai rival the profit figures of some medium-sized companies. Worryingly, if our government continues to keep judicial salaries artificially suppressed, there is a reasonable fear that the best minds from the Bar might be reluctant to make the enormous financial sacrifice. The chief justice of the US Supreme Court has openly acknowledged that inadequate judicial pay increases might eventually lead to a "constitutional-crisis".

This disparity appears to be rooted in tradition. Historically, pleaders were tasked with assisting judges in their pursuit of the truth. The adversarial judicial system encouraged competition among members of the Bar, the best of whom were invited to become

judges. The only difference in those days was that salaries were on par with what leading lawyers earned. Now, even junior-level corporate executives and first-year associates at law firms earn higher salaries than our judges. The question is, how much longer can we smother our judges with the hollow idealism of selfless service at the cost of their dignity?

If India wants an independent and capable judiciary, we must pay for it. Union law minister Sadananda Gowda must address this issue by collecting empirical data to analyse judicial wage compensation. There are over 350 vacancies across high courts. In the subordinate judiciary, over 4,000 judges are needed (2014 figures). This explains, at least to an extent, the issue of delay that plagues our system. Gowda blames the collegium system for these vacancies, instead of acknowledging the truth that low salaries were deterring talented lawyers. Though impossible to quantify, the cost to society attributable to low-quality judges is immense. Low-pay may also lead to instances of rent-seeking and posturing for post-retirement appointments, simply because their savings and pension are insufficient.

Judicial salaries in India are among the lowest in all the common-law countries. Even Pakistan pays its Supreme Court judges a respectable 1 crore Pakistani rupees, in addition to housing and healthcare benefits. The lord chief justice of England and Wales is paid an equivalent of Rs 2.5 crore, whereas the United States is not far behind at Rs 1.6 crore (annually). These figures are somewhat comparable to salaries of partners at law firms in London and New York.

One must also recognise that the Indian judiciary is routinely trusted with deciding commercial disputes running into billions of dollars. Foreign corporations swear by India as a reliable investment destination owing largely to their faith in our apex court's integrity. The Vodafone decision was one such instance. Even in terms of case-disposal, the 30-odd judges decided 73,000 cases out of roughly 77,000 cases instituted before it in 2011. This works out to an impressive disposal rate of over 90%. On the other hand, the high courts have posted mediocre figures, having disposed of only 18 lakh cases, or 60% of their cases. As you may have guessed, vacancies are directly proportional to increased pendency.

By paying our Supreme Court judges a paltry Rs 90,000 a month, Parliament is humiliating the entire legal system. Judicial pay must not be evaluated in isolation by reducing it simply to a cost-benefit analysis. It is an argument about dignity and respect, which will ultimately affect the interests of the people.

Jai Dehadrai is a judicial law clerk to a judge of the Supreme Court. The views expressed by the author are personal.

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

BUSINESS LINE, MAR 2, 2015

Fixing PPPs

Government must find the golden mean between mitigating private risk and enhancing public return

India's tryst with public private partnerships (PPPs) has been far from happy. Touted as the answer to the country's infrastructure needs, PPP projects in virtually every sector have either stalled or ignited controversies, most of which have been over the reason to go for such partnerships in the first place — value for money for the taxpayer. The Centre's response — of taking over such projects — is not sustainable in the long term. In roads, for instance, as many as 125 toll plazas are set to be scrapped by this month-end alone, while toll collection in as many as 65 projects has already been stopped. Most of the road contracts awarded last year were on the EPC (engineering procurement contract) model, where the government bears all the funding and takes on all the risk. But this has also meant a sharp deceleration in infrastructure creation, given resource constraints. While the Budget for 2015-16 presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Saturday plans a massive step-up in government spending on infrastructure — between the Centre and PSUs, total infrastructure spend is slated to increase by Rs. 70,000 crore in the coming fiscal — this sum pales in comparison to the unmet need. Clearly, if this money is to come from the private sector, we need to fix the PPP model. Jaitley acknowledged as much in his Budget speech, stating “the PPP mode of infrastructure development has to be revisited, and revitalised. The major issue involved is rebalancing of risk. In infrastructure projects, the sovereign will have to bear a major part of the risk without, of course, absorbing it entirely”.

That, however, is easier said than done. All infrastructure PPPs have inherent risk, ranging from implementation risks, market risks, finance risks, labour issues and legal disputes over land titles, clearances and so on. Other types of risk are less quantifiable. For instance, airport modernisation in Delhi and Mumbai has stalled the creation of new greenfield airports in these centres because of non-compete covenants in the PPP concessions, while running airports in Hyderabad and Bengaluru were closed, creating political controversy. Compensating the existing concessionaires will make any new project unviable, while the public incurs opportunity costs.

Ideally, these risks have to be balanced between the government, which grants the concessions, and the private sector, in such a way is that each type of risk is allocated to the party that is best capable of managing it economically. Also, given the long-term nature of infrastructure projects and the inevitable environmental changes, disputes are inevitable. The government needs to develop a holistic solution by creating an independent PPP regulator and a clear arbitration/dispute redressal mechanism, alongside creating enablers such as financing institutions, ensuring greater transparency in the award of contracts, and creating institutional capability within the government to oversee PPPs.

RELIGION

STATESMAN, MAR 4, 2015

Freedom of Religion

Faizan Mustafa

India is a secular country with religion occupying the centre-stage. The political structure of secularism is said to be irrelevant and out of place in societies like India where religions are 'totalizing' in nature. Religious freedom is critical in the Constitution's scheme of things. Denial of freedom of religion affects the stability, security and development of a nation.

Freedom of religion is globally recognized as a fundamental human right. This right includes the freedom to have or to adopt a religion, the freedom to change one's religion without being persecuted, and the freedom to manifest one's religion. Apart from Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, freedom of religion is also protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The Prime Minister deserves our commendation for breaking his prolonged silence on freedom of religion and for boldly asserting in unequivocal words that that "every individual" had an "undeniable right to retain or adopt" any faith. Those who had criticized Narendra Modi for his silence, which had resulted in the precious loss of several days in the winter session of Parliament, must come forward and welcome the Prime Minister's bold gesture. The European Union, which has put India in the list of 'countries of particular concern' on religious freedom, has welcomed Modi's statement. It has noted that his remarks were "entirely in line with the Indian Constitution".

RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, has now criticized Mother Teresa for her alleged tendency to convert people to Christianity. The BJP's Adityanath has also made a provocative statement. Therefore, the Prime Minister ought to initiate concrete measures to demonstrate his full commitment to the freedom of religion. What could the salient features of such an agenda be? What would possibly improve India's international standing as a country with substantial freedom of religion? The BJP's 2014 election manifesto had promised a ban on religious conversions. Modi must tell his party and the RSS that a central conversion law will impinge on freedom of religion and will make a mockery of his promise of 'complete freedom of faith'.

The British never imposed any restriction on the right to propagate one's religion and convert others. But outside of British India, a number of princely States did enact anti-conversion laws to protect Hindus against the "onslaught" of Christian missionary activities. Notably, no parallel laws were enacted in the princely states ruled by the Muslims, such as Hyderabad, Rampur, and Junagarh etc.

In the Constituent Assembly, rightist Hindu leaders suggested a ban on conversions. But the proposal was rejected. This section considered the inclusion of such words as "profess, practise and propagate" in the Constitution as a monumental blunder. In 1954, a member of the then ruling party moved the 'Indian Converts Regulation and Registration Bill' in Parliament in an effort to provide compulsory licensing of the missionaries and for registration of conversion with government functionaries. It was opposed mainly by Christians, and the Bill was eventually dropped at the behest of Prime Minister Nehru. In 1960, another Bill was introduced in Parliament the Backward Communities (Religion) Protection Bill. It was aimed at checking conversion of Hindus to "non-Indian religions" which, as per the Bill, included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. It was rejected by Parliament for its apparent affront to specific religious denominations. No further attempt in this direction was made till 1979, when the House witnessed the introduction and imminent collapse of a "Freedom of Religion Bill" seeking official curbs on inter-religious conversion, which was opposed among others by the National Minorities Commission.

During 1967-68, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh enacted laws that were rather strangely titled Freedom of Religion Acts. Ten years later a similar law was enacted in Arunachal Pradesh. The three state laws on conversion had more or less identical provisions. They prohibited conversion by force, allurement, inducement and fraud. Conversion was defined as "renouncing one religion and adopting another". They were applicable to all cases of change of religion. Contravention was a cognizable offence punishable with imprisonment, fine or both. Those who convert a person - by performing or participating in the ceremony - are required to send an 'intimation' of conversion to the District Magistrate. Failure to do so was also made a cognizable offence. Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh enacted similar laws which are wider in scope and provide for more stringent punishment. The law in Rajasthan was blocked by the Governor and the Tamil Nadu law was repealed.

Modi will have to take the lead by getting anti-conversion laws of BJP-ruled states repealed. The Supreme Court has taken a very restrictive and narrow view of freedom of religion. It has held that under this freedom, one is entitled to only the essential practices

of one's religion and what is 'essential or non-essential' is to be decided by the court and not by the sacred texts of the religions concerned. The most important case relating to conversion is that of the Rev. Stanislaw. It was argued that since anti-conversion laws prohibit conversions, they are contrary to the Constitution as they impede the 'propagation' of one's religion. But the Supreme Court upheld their validity. Explaining the ambit of Article 25, the Court held that it does not grant the right to convert another person to one's religion, but to transmit or spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets. Article 25(1) guarantees "freedom of conscience" to every citizen, and not merely to the followers of one particular religion, and that in turn postulates that there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one's own religion. This is because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion, that would impinge on the "freedom of conscience" guaranteed to all citizens of the country alike.

In spite of the provisions of anti-conversion laws being challenged, the court did not set out the impugned provisions in its judgment. It did not discuss definitions of 'inducement' and 'allurement' which was the primary bone of contention. It is shocking to note that the apex court did not revert to the legislative history of Article 25 as the term 'propagate' was included in the Constitution as a compromise to assure Christians that it would include 'freedom to convert'. The decision of the apex court was termed as "productive of great public mischief". Soli Sorabjee, former Attorney-General of India during BJP rule, had favoured a review of the decision. In fact, all considerations applicable to freedom of speech should be applicable to the right to propagate. The right to propagate one's idea is inherent in the concept of freedom of speech and expression.

The Modi government should get this decision reviewed by the apex court. All international reports on the state of freedom of religion refer to this decision and the Prime Minister's international standing will surely go up if his government takes some initiative in getting this decision overturned. Freedom of conscience includes freedom to change the religion or belief. Freedom of conscience means a person is free to entertain any belief. This implies that the state cannot enquire into or take notice of a citizen's religious beliefs.

The Modi government should also seek a review of the apex court judgment on Hindutva wherein the judiciary did not consider the Shiv Sena's promise of "establishing the first Hindu state in Maharashtra" as an appeal in the name of religion. The judgment is contrary to judicial precedents and a blot on Indian secularism. Finally, the denial of the benefit of reservation to converted Dalits is indeed but an 'inducement' to remain a Hindu. Therefore, it goes against the freedom of religion. In the same function where Modi made the critical speech, the issue of protection of the rights of Dalit Christians was

also raised by the organizers. The Prime Minister must amend the Presidential order which denies Scheduled Caste status and reservation to non-Hindus on conversion.

-- The writer is Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR University Of Law, Hyderabad.

SOCIAL SERVICES

HINDU, MAR 2, 2015

Delhi University opens legal aid clinics to all

Delhi University is hosting legal aid clinics to offer free advice on questions of law and consultations on matters like property rights.

Para-legal training

The clinics, which will also impart para-legal training to DU students and teachers, have been set up in association with the Delhi State Legal Services Authority (DSLISA) at the university's Gandhi Bhawan and Campus Law Centre.

Advocate deputed

“DSLISA has deputed an advocate to visit the clinics every Friday between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. and take the queries of visitors. The clinics are not restricted just to the DU fraternity but are open to all,” Nisha Tyagi, Deputy Dean (Academics), Gandhi Bhawan, told *PTI*.

“ Even the literate are illiterate as to the legal nitty-gritty. There are so many issues like property rights, harassment laws, and domestic violence, which a common man wishes to know about, but finds law books too heavy a dose,” Ms. Tyagi said.

DSLISA has set up several such clinics in the past, including in jails.

These clinics are manned by a senior professor, legal aid counsels, and a team of para-legal volunteers.

Advocate RK Bachchan, who visits the DU legal aid clinics, said, “I was surprised to see a greater number of girls visiting these. They have queries pertaining to eve-teasing, dowry prohibition, property inheritance, and domestic violence.” — PTI

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

HINDU, MAR 5, 2015

Centre sets up task forces to plan smart cities

The Centre on Wednesday announced the setting up of task forces that will draw up concrete action plans for the development of Ajmer, Allahabad and Visakhapatnam as smart cities.

The task forces will have representatives from the Ministries of Urban Development and External Affairs, State governments and cities, and the United States Trade Development Agency, said a Urban Development Ministry official. The task forces are being set up following the decision taken at a recent meeting between Urban Development Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker.

TIMES OF INDIA, MAR 5, 2015

Hyderabad best city to live in India: Study

The survey took into consideration parameters such as political and social environment, medical care and health considerations, public services, recreation facilities and natural environment among others in preparing the report.

HYDERABAD: In what is yet another jewel in its crown, the 'City of Pearls' has emerged as the numero uno city in India when it comes to offering the best quality of living standards in Mercer's Quality of Living Report 2015 that was released on Wednesday.

Ranked 138th globally by the Mercer report, Hyderabad beat Pune (145th) to the top spot in India and left India's IT hub Bengaluru (146th), Chennai (151st), commercial capital Mumbai (152nd) and India's political capital New Delhi (154th) behind in the quality of living sweepstakes.

"Indian cities have not made much progress on the quality of living scale, scoring nearly the same as they did last year. However, over time, Hyderabad has emerged as a city of choice due to factors such as improved options for international schools. Additionally, the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport is located 22 km from the city and offers a good range of international flights, which improves its ranking on account of public services," the release said.



NUMBER ONE

- » Hyderabad scores over others due to presence of good international schools and top-class international airport
- » City way ahead on parameters such as political and social environment, medical care, public services, recreation facilities and natural environment

The survey took into consideration parameters such as political and social environment, medical care and health considerations, public services, recreation facilities and natural environment among others in preparing the report, Mercer said in a release.

Elaborating on the reasons behind ranking Hyderabad ahead of traditional business centres like Mumbai and New Delhi, Ruchika Pal, India practice leader (global mobility), Mercer, said: "While other factors have remained constant, considerable population increases in Mumbai and New Delhi in recent decades have lead to an increase in problems like access to clean water, air pollution, and traffic congestion." However, the study pointed out that Indian cities were 'safer' than most others in South Asia.

The study rated Vienna as the city with the best quality of living in the world for the second consecutive time followed by Zurich, Auckland, and Munich at second, third, and fourth place respectively.

Mercer, which is a \$4 billion turnover US player in talent, health, retirement and investments, conducts its quality of living survey annually to help multinational companies and other employers compensate employees fairly when placing them on international assignments, the release said.

A quality-of-living or 'hardship' allowance compensates for a decrease in the quality of living between home and host locations, whereas a mobility premium simply compensates for the inconvenience of being uprooted and having to work in another country. The report provides information and hardship premium recommendations for over 440 cities throughout the world and the ranking covers 230 of these cities.

WILD ANIMALS

HINDU, NAR 4, 2015

Maharashtra Bill banning cow slaughter gets President's nod

The Bill banning cow slaughter in Maharashtra, pending for the past several years, has received the President's assent.

"I am very happy that the President finally gave his assent," said State Finance Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar. "We have been trying hard for the last several years to get the Bill passed into a law. It will not only ensure that animals are not killed, but also stabilise the agriculture situation. Ban on killing the animals will increase the productivity of farms ... Even healthy animals were being killed for money, but it will stop now."

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis too expressed his happiness. "Thanks a lot honourable President sir for the assent on Maharashtra Animal Preservation Bill. Our dream of ban on cow-slaughter becomes a reality now," he said on Twitter.

A delegation of seven State BJP MPs led by Kirit Somaiya, MP from Mumbai North, had met the President in New Delhi recently and submitted a memorandum seeking his assent.

The memorandum said the Bill, passed during the previous Shiv Sena-BJP regime, had been pending for approval for 19 years. — PTI