

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY

Private member's bill urges state poll funding

Context:

Congress MP Rajeev Gowda has moved a private member's bill- Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill in the Rajya Sabha that seeks removal of the limit and state funding of elections as part of reforms to the way polls are financed in India.

Following reports that thousands of crores have gone into campaigning during the Lok Sabha polls, recently, Bengal Chief Minister has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking thorough "electoral reforms" and State funding of elections.

She has called upon the Prime Minister to explore possibilities of public funding of elections and build up a consensus through an all-party meeting.

Previous Government reports that looked at state funding of elections:

The Indrajit Gupta Committee (1998): It endorsed state funding of elections, seeing "full justification constitutional, legal as well as on ground of public interest" in order to establish a fair playing field for parties with less money. The Committee recommended two limitations to state funding, that the:

- State funds should be given only to national and state parties allotted a symbol and not to independent candidates.
- Short-term state funding should only be given in kind, in the form of certain facilities to the recognised political parties and their candidates.

The 1999 Law Commission of India report concluded that total state funding of elections is "desirable" so long as political parties are prohibited from taking funds from other sources.

This report also concurred with the Indrajit Gupta Committee that only partial state funding was possible given the economic conditions of the country at that time.

Additionally, it strongly recommended that the appropriate regulatory framework be put in place with regard to political parties before state funding of elections is attempted.

The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, 2001, did not endorse state funding of elections but concurred with the 1999 Law Commission report that the appropriate framework for regulation of political parties would need to be implemented before state funding is considered.

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008) report of "Ethics in Governance":

It also recommended partial state funding of elections for the purpose of reducing "illegitimate and unnecessary funding" of elections expenses.

Benefits of State Funding in Elections:

As for the question, why should the public pay for political parties, one easy answer is if we want honesty and transparency in governance, this is a small price to pay. Hypothetically, a thousand crores of public money is peanuts compared to the end result of ensuring transparency in elections.

- Public funding of elections will lead the Government to bear the expense of contesting the elections on behalf of the political parties. Political parties have multiple sources of funding and thus accountability and transparency becomes all the more important.
- The key to regulate political funding lies in bringing down election expenditure and ensuring that it provides an opportunity to get the best public men and women to participate.
- Public funding can increase transparency in party and candidate finance and thereby help curb corruption.
- Political parties and candidates need money for their electoral campaigns, to keep contacts with their constituencies, to prepare policy decisions and to pay professional staff. Therefore, public funding is a natural and necessary cost of democracy.
- Public funding can limit the influence of interested money and thereby help curb corruption.
- If parties and candidates receive at least a basic amount of money from the State the country could have a functioning multi-party system without people having to give up their scarce resources.

However, the concerns that needs to be addressed:

- There is a serious question to notice that how a Government that is grappling with deficit budgets can provide money to political parties to contest elections.
- They also warn that state funding would encourage every second outfit to get into the political arena merely to avail of state funds.
- Indian political parties, unlike western democracies, are not mere platforms to put some people into elective public office but are like standing armies that need continuous nourishment.

Thus, there are two aspects to the financing of the democratic process: the financing of elections from the panchayat level to Parliament, and the funding of political parties that is not election-specific but is an exercise in perpetuity for reasons enunciated above.

Way Forward reforms for State Funding:

- Having a regulatory authority to receive authentic reports on political funding, scrutinise them and put them in the public domain.
- We should create a national election fund to which corporates and others can be asked to donate.
- Business houses can make donations to the parties they are beholden to and the funds will be disbursed according to your performance.
- Complete disclosure of political funding and audit of political parties' accounts have to be the first steps towards reforming political finance.
- Holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha as well as the State Assemblies. Citizen activism that keeps a close watch over campaigning.
- A system for partial state funding should be introduced in order to reduce the scope of illegitimate and unnecessary funding of expenditure for elections.
- Political parties should lead by example by coming under the ambit of RTI, especially with respect to their funding.

Conclusion:

- There is a need for an all-party meeting with the single agenda of public funding of elections in India, with the objective of rooting out what has been called the mother of all corruption.
- By providing "floor level fund" to everyone, state fund scheme can be very helpful for smaller and newer political entrants. Transparency in funding is essential to ensuring clean, democratic governance.
- Public funding, if implemented properly, can strengthen lower levels of party units to a situation where they can demand democratisation. It can therefore solve the problem of concentration of power in the hands of few and creation of dynastic politics.
- In recent, newspaper reports which alleged Rs 60,000 crore had been spent in this year's parliamentary elections and maximum expenditure remains unknown and could be much higher saying such reports will not do any good to India's reputations as a democratic country.
- Fearing that this amount may surpass Rs 1 lakh crore in the next general elections, therefore the issue should be addressed immediately.

WORLD RANKING AND REPORTS**India rises in Global Innovation ranking**

- India has jumped five places to rank 52 in the Global Innovation Index 2019, up from the 57 it had in last year's rankings.
- India's rise in the rankings has been a consistent trend over the last few years. It had ranked 81 in 2015, which rose to 66 in 2016, 60 in 2017 and 57 in 2018.
- "The performance improvement of India is particularly noteworthy," the report, brought out by the UN World Intellectual Property Organization, INSEAD and CII, said.

Most innovative

"India continues to be the most innovative economy in central and southern Asia — a distinction held since 2011 — improving its global rank to 52 in 2019.

"India is consistently among the top in the world in innovation drivers such as ICT services exports, graduates in science and engineering, the quality of universities, gross capital formation — a measure of economy-wide investments — and creative goods exports," the report added.

The report also highlighted that India stands out in the world's top science and technology clusters, with Bengaluru, Mumbai, and New Delhi featuring among the top 100 global clusters.

"Given its size — and if progress is upheld — India will make a true impact on global innovation in the years to come," the report said. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, who released the report, said that India's hope of increasing the size of the economy to \$5 trillion cannot happen without significant innovation.

TRANSPORT, COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT**FASTag Lanes**

The government has decided to declare all lanes at toll free plaza on national highways as 'FASTag lanes' from December 1, 2019. In a statement, the ministry of road transport and highways said this lane will also be converted into FASTag-only lane in a time-bound manner.

To ensure seamless traffic and prevent congestion at toll plazas, the government on Friday said it has decided to declare all lanes at toll fee plaza on national highways as 'FASTag lanes' from December 1. However, among all lanes, one 'hybrid lane, will be allowed at every toll plaza to facilitate and monitor over-dimensional or oversized vehicles, where FASTag and other modes of payment will be accepted. After December 1, non-FASTag users will be charged double the fee if they pass through FASTag-only lanes.

FASTag is a prepaid tag that enables automatic deduction of toll charges and lets the vehicle pass through the toll plaza without stopping for the cash transaction.

According to the National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008, a FASTag lane in a toll plaza is reserved exclusively for the movement of FASTag users.

In a letter to the National Highways Authority of India(NHAI) on Friday, the ministry asked the authority to ensure strict implementation of the new fee rules at every toll plaza on the national highways.

The radio-frequency identification (RFID)-based FASTag is affixed on the windscreen of the vehicle. It allows for direct payment of fee from the prepaid or savings account linked to it and enables vehicles to drive through without stopping for transactions.

However, it is found that currently, even non-FASTag users are passing through FASTag lanes and making cash payments. This is leading to crowding of such lanes and overall traffic congestion at the plaza, defeating the purpose of FASTags. As a result, electronic toll collection through FASTags has not grown as much as desired.

To ensure smooth implementation of this decision, the ministry has asked the NHAI to assess the overall requirement of FASTags across the country and make it available in requisite numbers.

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES-WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT

National Data Quality Forum

Context: Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s National Institute for Medical Statistics (ICMR-NIMS), in partnership with Population Council, has launched the National Data Quality Forum (NDQF).

Aims:

- The NDQF aims at establishing protocols and good practices when dealing with data collection, storage, use and dissemination that can be applied to health and demographic data, as well as replicated across industries and sectors.
- The NDQF aims to do brainstorming; piloting and employ advanced modelling techniques in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data analytics along with using technology-based solutions to improve data quality.

Roles and functions:

NDQF will integrate learning from scientific and evidence-based initiatives and guide actions through periodic workshops and conferences.

It will fetch quality data in upcoming health studies and surveys such as National Family Health Survey (NFHS).

Benefits and significance:

Its activities will help establish protocols and good practices of data collection, storage, use and dissemination that can be applied to health and demographic data, as well as replicated across industries and sectors noted a release issued by ICMR.

Need:

Data on health and demographics in India is plagued by incomplete information, overestimation, and under-and over-reporting that lead to hindrance in policy planning.

Challenges present:

- lack of comparability and poor usability of national level data sources.
- discordance between system and survey level estimates.
- increased questionnaire length and questions on socially restricted conversation topics that translate to poor data quality.
- age-reporting errors or non-response and intentional skipping of questions.
- underreporting due to subjective question interpretation and incompleteness.
- paucity of data to generate reliable estimates on mortality as major barriers to quality data.

PoshanAbhiyaan

- The **POSHAN** Abhiyaan(National Nutrition Mission) is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).

- It aims to achieve improvement in nutritional status of Children (0-6 years), Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers.
- The NNM is as an apex body which monitor, fix targets and guide the nutrition related interventions across the Ministries.
- It targets to reduce stunting, under nutrition, anaemia and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
- **Mission 25 by 2022**—Although it targets to reduce stunting by 2%, Mission would strive to achieve reduction in Stunting from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022.
- Behaviour change communication is the key component for converting it into Jan Andolan (People's movement).
- The Government of India and UNICEF have jointly signed the "Country Programme 2018-2022".
- The goal of the country programme is to contribute to national efforts to enable all children, especially the most disadvantaged, to have their rights progressively fulfilled.
- To develop their full potential in an inclusive and protective society.
- UNICEF provides technical support to MWCD for the Programme as follows:-
 - In designing of all guidelines.
 - Preparing Posters and Hoardings
 - Preparation of audio visual.
 - In preparation and designing of Jan Andolan Guidelines and
 - In preparation of Dashboard/Google link for Jan Andolan.
 - Monitoring and evaluation of the programme will be anchored in the principles of results-based management and guided by verifiable data and statistics.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

About Aditya- L1 mission: India's first solar mission.

Context: The Indian Space Research Organization is planning to launch Aditya- L1 mission to study the sun early in 2020.

Objectives: It will study the sun's outer most layers, the corona and the chromospheres and collect data about coronal mass ejection, which will also yield information for space weather prediction.

Significance of the mission: The data from Aditya mission will be immensely helpful in discriminating between different models for the origin of solar storms and also for constraining how the storms evolve and what path they take through the interplanetary space from the Sun to the Earth.

Position of the satellite: In order to get the best science from the sun, continuous viewing of the sun is preferred without any occultation/ eclipses and hence, Aditya- L1 satellite will be placed in the halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the sun-earth system.

Lagrangian points and halo orbit

Lagrangian points are the locations in space where the combined gravitational pull of two large masses roughly balance each other. Any small mass placed at that location will remain at constant distances relative to the large masses. There are five such points in Sun-Earth system and they are denoted as L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5. A halo orbit is a periodic three-dimensional orbit near the L1, L2 or L3.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Keep Calm and Study Hard.