

More than just Nonsense

Political parties argue over corruption issues holding little hope for people to have a corruption free regime, even in the distant future. The Dalai Lama's observation that 'China and India are developing countries but there is a lot of corruption because of lack of moral ethics' may sound alien and abnormal in a situation of 'get rich quick' by any means. To indulge in useless exercise is the hallmark of Indian parliamentary culture. Congress and its main Opposition—Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have long been trying to make it a bi-polar game, be it corruption or anti-corruption, and to some extent they are successful as smaller parties, including left parties look irrelevant. Their shadow-boxing over corruption in high places, not in lower echelons—they are out of target at the moment, for reasons best known to the shadow boxers—rocked the house the other day only to show the public that they are serious about corruption which they are not. Telecom scam is now losing its shine and political leverage for the Opposition because they are now more interested in the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report involving Congress Chief Minister of Delhi in the Commonwealth Games episode.

They are in reality talking non-sense over corruption by prolonging the debate knowing full well nothing concrete will emerge from it in the end. Amidst corruption chorus more and more pressing issues including the draft land acquisition bill do hardly get any serious attention they deserve. The Bill with an 80 : 20 (eighty percent to be acquired by private entities and the remaining 20 percent by the government) has not yet produced any consensus, albeit Jairam Ramesh, rural development minister, who lost his face many a time, as the environment minister over the notorious POSCO deal, made yet another volta face by supporting acquisition of multi-crop irrigated land. His intellectual integrity, otherwise overpublicised, is at stake. It doesn't matter whether it is 80 percent or 20 percent. The point at issue is state intervention in land acquisition and it very much remains in the proposed bill for which Ramesh is knocking at the doors of all concerned. The communist left is conspicuously silent about the whole process of opinion forming in favour of the new draft land acquisition bill that is supposed to replace the bone-chilling colonial hangover—Land Acquisition Act, 1894, that came under severe criticism from different quarters during the anti-land grab agitation throughout the country.

In short agriculture and people dependent on agriculture have no respite from being attacked by the persons in authority. As industry is stagnating despite periodic rise and fall of share indices across the globe and with downgrading of US-credit rating creating panic globally, what all they can talk about with some confidence is recession and more pains in the coming days.

2011 began with food prices as high as they were during the 2007-08 crisis. Erratic weather, speculators, civil wars, trade restrictions, ever rising cost of fuel and the use of food grains to produce bioethanol all played their part in keeping food, including all the major staple food grains, expensive. As another bout of recession seems to be gripping the world economy, crude price in international market has fallen sharply from \$100 to \$77 a barrel and it was quite logical to pass on the benefit to the consumers. No, that is just not happening in India. They are masters in diversionary tactics—so all are busy to debate corruption while maintaining a guarded silence about 'crude politics'. In truth food inflation will continue to rise forcing all sectors of wage earners to move from pillar to post.

As biofuel remains an attractive alternative, more maize, vegetable oil and sugarcane are being utilised to produce biofuel which even the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) have identified as a major factor in keeping food prices high. The commercial interests of the US and Brazil have been making it impossible globally to get rid of biofuel economy by most third world countries. Then biofuel means more land-grabbing conflicts and high food prices as well. It is as plain as anything else.

The hard fact is that persons on the left are not saints. They just dance to the tune of major political formations in parliament and derive comfort from having importance in national politics.

Without a huge mass upsurge things are unlikely to change for the better. And there is not a single party that could take the trouble of launching a sustained agitation. Parties are increasingly losing relevance and yet party-based politics remains the last word in everybody's daily life. Mass movements developing spontaneously under local initiatives having no political affiliation are a desperate attempt to challenge and defy this system of gross inequality but they unlike Latin American social initiatives fail to develop into a bigger tide threatening the status quo.

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