

GOVERNOR: ASSET OR LIABILITY - II

# White elephant institution

By M.J. AUDI

It is crystal-clear that a political party controlling the union government will always use the office of Governor for partisan political purposes. The president appoints the Governor and he holds office during the pleasure of President. The President can take over the administration of any state even without the Governor's report. In a parliamentary democracy, the powers of the President are always exercised by the Prime Minister.

Who are appointed as the Governors? Politicians rejected by the electorate, politicians having nuisance value, unwanted chief ministers, retired civil servants, retired judges, retired generals and so-called intellectuals. But the basic qualification for the appointment of Governor is the patronage of the Prime Minister.

Nothing prevent the Prime Minister from appointing his cook or *chaprasi* as the Governor of a state or as the Ambassador to the United States of America. Every Prime Minister of India has used patronage to boost his or her minions.

The Sarkaria Commission's recommendation that the Governor should be an "eminent" person in some walk of life is utterly unrealistic. The reality pinpoints that we do not yet have objective and rational criteria to determine "eminence" in any walk of life. In our country, "eminence" goes with connections and connections are linked with patronage.

All cats, in the dark, are grey. All persons in the office of Governor are dignitaries and Excellencies. One labours in vain to detect excellence in their Excellencies. Many of them have lowered the dignity of their office. There are numerous examples of Governors using their office to make their sons and daughters industrialists; to give their grandchildren admissions to engineering and medical colleges, violating the prescribed rules and to grab scholarships for their favourites within and without India.

Economically, the Governors have proved to be white elephants on the public exchequer of a poor country. The Raj Bhavans are standing monuments to reckless and extravagant expenditure and vulgar ostentation. The Raj Bhavans are more luxurious than the most luxurious hotels in India.

The Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Ms K. Joshi, lived in a style envied by princes. In 1988, the Government of Andhra Pradesh was forced to express its disapproval of her extravagance by a formal resolution.

In 1989, it was reported that articles worth Rs. 50 lakh were "missing" from the Bihar Raj Bhavan. The then Governor, Dr. G.N. Singh, bought "fruit juice" worth Rs. 400 every day during the summer. His food was always prepared in expensive ghee and monthly consumption was 40 kilos. The food bill of the Governor, his family and personal guests was debited to the "darbar charges" of the Raj Bhavan. His Excellency withdrew Rs. 16 lakh from the Bihar Relief Fund for distribution amongst earthquake victims, but did not furnish receipts for the cash received.

Without the sanction of the state government, a contract was given to construct a building worth Rs. 5.50 lakh inside the Raj Bhavan complex and the contractor was paid Rs. 4.42 lakh. It was found that the contractor was a "fake" one.

The ADC accompanying the Governor on

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tours always took Rs. 10,000 as advance, which was always spent fully but accounts were not always submitted (*The Times of India*, 5 February 1989). When an average Indian finds it very difficult to get treatment in public hospitals, the Governors go abroad very easily for medical treatment at public expense. The Bihar government sanctioned Rs. 1.5 lakh for medical treatment abroad to His Excellency J. Pahadia, the Governor of Bihar. Rs. 50,000 was given to his private secretary for the payment of the "controversial" telephone bills of the Governor at New Delhi.

His Excellency the Governor's daughter travelled to the United States of America as an "attendant" and had a pleasure trip at public expense. All expenses of the Governor in the United States were charged to the Raj Bhavan funds. (*The Times of India*, 20 January 1990)

Presently, there are 25 Raj Bhavans in India. The exact expenditure on th Raj Bhavans is skilfully suppressed from public knowledge. It is estimated at Rs. 40 crore every year. There is one more species of Excellency - Ambassador. Twenty-five Gov-

ernors and six times 25 Ambassadors together cost India Rs. 150 crore every year, on a very conservative calculation. Long ago, Sir Henry Wotton defined Ambassador as a person sent abroad "to lie" for the good of his country. In our times they do it honestly, but none takes them seriously. Hence, Ambassadors and their wives concentrate on giving and attending dinners and cocktails, where the best in winning and dinning is served at the cost of the public exchequer.

People have a right to know in which way India becomes great, how India's national interests are protected or advanced and how India's dignity goes up when a few persons, their families and their favourites roll in luxury. The Sarkaria Commission's recommendation that at the end of his term and irrespective of its duration, the Governor should be given "post-retirement provisions for himself and for his surviving spouse", shows how deep is the malaise of degradation afflicting public life in India.

In a country, where man and dog fight to eke out a morsel of garbage despite forty years of freedom, where millions live and dies on footpaths, where children below fourteen are ruthlessly exploited, where men and women are without employment even after thirty, such expenditure, to use Mahatma Gandhi's phrase, is "crime against God".

The National Front government professes to give India a clean, efficient and corruption-free administration. If its professions are honest and sincere, it should immediately abolish the offices of Governor and Ambassador. So far, Rs. 6000 crore have been wasted upon them. The two offices are a perennial drain on the public coffers.

As regards the Governor, the only pertinent question would be what is to be done when the President's Rule is imposed upon a state? The answer is that President's Rule should be always the last resort. The political party that commands the majority on the floor of the Vidhan Sabha should always rule the state. If President's Rule becomes inevitable, then for six months, the President should appoint an Adviser on a strictly *ad hoc* basis. For the office of Governor is constitutionally needless and useless, politically mischievous and economically expensive.