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Expenses on Ministers shoot up

NEW DELHI, Aug. 23: Overall expenditure on Ministers at the Centre and the States have more than doubled in the last 10 years, although the increase in their strength is slightly less.

According to a UNI study based on figures available for the last 10 years, the number of ministers in the country have gone up from 294 in 1961 to 455 in 1970-71. The expenditure on their salaries, personal establishments, travelling and other expenses has sharply risen from around Rs. 1.2 crores to about Rs. 2.70 crores over the last decade.

The figures do not include Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Territories for which data is not available.

In the DMK-led Government in Tamil Nadu the Ministers have made a voluntary cut of Rs. 500 in their monthly salaries. But other expenses on them have not shown any comparable reduction

One striking feature in the yearly budget for Ministers is the steep rise in travelling expenses.

The total budgetary provision for the salaries, allowances and travel for the Union Council of Ministers in 1960-61 which was Rs. 19,39,40 has gone upto Rs. 30 lakhs for 1970-71. While tour expenses were Rs. 7 lakhs in 1960-61, it would be Rs. 14.40 lakhs in 1970-71. The Council of Ministers in 1960-61 was about 47 excluding 5 Parliamentary Secretaries compared to the present strength of 56.

The State-wise position is as follows:

Andhra Pradesh: Expenditure on ministerial salaries and perquisites has increased three-fold while the strength of the Ministry doubled in the last decade.

Each Minister cost the State Rs 51,566 in 1960 while the figure is around Rs. 78,168 today. The current year's budget provision for Ministers and their establishment including perquisites is Rs. 21.89 lakhs against Rs. 7.22 lakhs in 1961-62.

Assam: There has been a three-fold rise in the expenditure while the strength of the Council of Ministers which was 17 in 1960-61 rose to only 20 in 1970-71.

The budgetary provision for salaries rose from Rs. 1.14 lakhs to 2.20 lakhs, travelling allowance from Rs. 1.29 lakhs to 3.20 lakhs. Other expenses also registered steep rise.

Bihar: There were 23 Ministers in 1960-61 and 24 now. The budgetary provision on the Ministers and their personal staff, however, has shot up from about Rs 14,88,000 to Rs. 23,06,000.

Gujarat: The Ministry's strength has risen from 14 to 17 and the ministerial expenditure, from around Rs. 8 lakhs to around Rs 14 lakhs.

Haryana: The State was carved out of Punjab in 1966. The budgetary provision this year for Ministers' salaries and other amenities is Rs. 4.58 lakhs.

Erstwhile Punjab had 18 members in the Council of Ministers and their salaries and perquisites amounted to Rs. 4.50 lakhs.

Now Haryana itself has 15 Cabinet Ministers and four parliamentary secretaries. The truncated Punjab State has 25 in the Council of Ministers and the budgetary provision on them this year is Rs. 7 lakhs.

Kerala: In 1960-61 the budget provided Rs. 4,33,100 for the 11 Ministers' salaries, establishment, T.A., and other contingencies, but the actual expenditure came to Rs. 5,88,631.

In 1970-71, Kerala budgeted for eight Ministers (mini-Front Government) at Rs. 14,38,000.

Madhya Pradesh: The strength of the Ministry has almost doubled from 22 in 1960 to 39.

The estimated expenditure on Ministers was Rs. 5.19 lakhs in 1960 and the current year's provision is Rs. 10.21 lakhs.

The expenditure on the Maharashtra Ministry, particularly on salaries, has almost doubled during the last 10 years though the strength of the Ministry has increased by four only.

The State is expected this year to spend Rs. 5.03 lakhs on Ministers' salaries alone as against a Budget provision of Rs. 2.88 lakhs in 1960-61. Provision of Rs. 12.55 lakhs is made for travelling allowances this year as against Rs. 4.16 lakhs in 1960-61.

The total actual expenditure exceeded the budget limit by Rs. five lakhs in 1960-61 and, was about Rs. 16.11 lakhs in 1970-71.

Mysore: The expenditure for Ministers and their establishment in Mysore had gone up by nearly seven times from Rs. 4.11 lakhs to Rs. 28.50 lakhs during the last 10 years while the number of Ministers had only doubled.

Orissa: Expenditure on Ministers has gone up three times in the last 10 years.

As against the total expenditure of Rs. 5.29 lakhs in 1960-61, the current year's budget provision is Rs. 15.63 lakhs. The amount under contingencies has risen from Rs 50,000 to Rs. 2.70 lakhs.

Rajasthan: The strength of the Ministry has more than doubled from 14 in 1960-61 to 36 now. The total budgetary provision in the current year is Rs. 30,18,700 while the actual expenditure a decade ago was around Rs. 8 lakhs.

Tamil Nadu: The strength of the Ministry has risen from eight to 13 and the budgeted expenditure on Ministers and their personal staff from Rs. 4.27 lakhs to Rs. 10.57 lakhs.

Uttar Pradesh: The State very nearly equals the Union Council of Ministers in strength — from 22 members in 1960-61 it has risen to 46 now, just 10 short of the Central Council of Ministers.

The budgeted expenditure on the Ministers in 1960-61 was Rs. 5,82,500 and this year, Rs. 10,07,200.

West Bengal: The State had 12 Ministers, 4 Ministers of State and 13 Deputy Ministers in 1960-61 and the provision for their salaries was Rs. 1,62,000. The second United Front Ministry, which was replaced by President's rule this year, had 27 Ministers and 2 Ministers of State and the budget provision was Rs. 1,77,000.

IV What is wrong with Indian Socialism ?

India is wedded to the principle of socialism for the last 25 years or more. During this period we professed to practice socialism. In effect, we have adhered to outmoded socialist dogmas which have done more harm that good.

Why, then, are we not prepared to change our thinking on socialism ? The answer to this is provided by the fact that the type of socialism practised by our leaders in this country has helped to create new vested interests through state capitalism in which the leaders have everything to gain and the public has everything to lose. For instance, the leaders who talk of economic equality, who are prepared to impose ceiling on property, ceiling on income and confiscatory taxation on the public, are themselves enjoying benefits and privileges which are far in excess of what they ever deserve. For instance, a Minister of the Central Cabinet in this country, received by way of salary and perquisites, a pre-tax income of almost Rs 450,000 per annum or about Rs 37,000 per month. This is 848 times the per capita income of this country. What kind of socialism is this which could make such gross injustices possible in a democratic society ?

V. The Choice Before the Country

When the economic policies pursued by this country have failed to improve our standards of living and to assure the requisite economic growth to solve the problems of unemployment and rising prices, the choice before the country is clear.

Socialism practised in India could be termed " a process of distributing poverty." It involves levelling down or destruction of those sections of society who own or control economic resources. But this process does not improve the standard of living of the lower sections of society. The Soviet Union, India and some other countries practiced this process of distribution of powerty. It is only after destroying the upper strata of society that a start was made to improve the economic conditions of the masses. This is an extremely time-consuming process and would take several decades, or even a century, to bring about even a small change in the standard of living of the people, as we have seen at our own cost.

As against this, modern socialism does not seek to "distribute poverty" but it seeks to "distribute prosperity". It seeks to reduce the inequalities of income and wealth by bringing up the poorer sections of society rather than by destroying the relatively rich. At the same time, it tries to reduce disparities in income by progressive taxation, taking care to ensure that it does not become a disincentive for growth. It is therefore much less time consuming, progress could be much faster and the result of economic growth more apparent.

If a choice has to be made at this stage, it must be made by boldly rejecting the dogmatic socialism and substituting it for the concept of 20th Century Socialism.

VI. Comparative Study

A comparative study of several developing nations of South East Asia is revealing. For this purpose, we have to divide the countries into two groups viz., (i) those practising the 19th century outmodes socialism, like India and (ii) those pursuing modern socialism with a pragmatic approach. It could be further sub-divided into (a) the methods employed by the two groups of countries and (b) the results achieved.