

A roadmap for financial sustainability of India Post

India Post is at a crossroads. As private courier services continue to expand their market share with speed and convenience, it must adapt to stay competitive. India Post, a vital lifeline in connecting citizens across the country, needs to undergo a comprehensive review of its services. This reform should focus on introducing innovation, ensuring greater revenue generation for the Department of Posts (DoP), and maintaining affordability for the public. As private courier services continue to gain traction due to their convenience and efficiency, India Post must adapt to remain competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing environment.

Rationalising Postal Tariffs and Eliminating GST on Select Services

The current structure of postal services includes highly subsidised offerings, such as postcards priced as low as 50 paise. While such subsidies aim to make communication accessible, they are often exploited. For instance, during Lok Sabha elections in 2019, political parties used postcards extensively, resulting in significant costs to the public exchequer. Similarly, postcards are frequently misused for commercial purposes, such as reminders by chit-fund companies. These subsidised services, rarely used by the common man, burden taxpayers without corresponding benefits. To address this, printed or rubber-stamped postcards should be discontinued unless they are sponsored. The introduction of sponsored Meghdoot postcards priced at Re1 and printed postcards priced at Rs10 could ensure a sustainable revenue model. Similarly, the tariff for registered newspapers could be rationalised to Rs1, reflecting the increased cost of inputs for small newspaper production. Additionally, while normal postal services are exempt from

GST, applying GST on premium services like Speed Post is counterproductive. It results in a redundant transfer of funds between government departments. Rationalising tariffs for Speed Post to Rs 20 or Rs 30 per 50-gram weight slabs and aligning other domestic and international postal tariffs in multiples of Rs 10 would streamline the system and reduce inefficiencies. International postal rates could follow a consistent structure, with uniform tariff increases per weight slab for air and surface mail.

Generating Revenue Through Sponsored Postal Stamps

To boost revenue, the DoP should introduce sponsored postal stamps. These stamps, carrying advertisements or approved messages, could be issued in bulk to sponsors at a fixed charge per printed stamp. This initiative could attract businesses, encouraging them to utilise postal services over private courier companies. Additionally, a new series of definitive postal stamps and stationery could be launched annually on the first day of the financial year. These stamps should maintain consistent color schemes for specific denominations while showcasing new designs based on a selected theme. Commemorative stamps, previously issued in arbitrary denominations like Rs 12 and Rs 41, should be standardised to denominations in multiples of Rs 10. Furthermore, the practice of printing stamps of different denominations on the same sheet, except for miniature sheets, should be discontinued as it complicates usage. Miniature sheets, being collectible items, should be priced higher than the face value of the stamps they contain. Such measures could not only enhance revenue through philately but also rekindle public interest in postal services.

Replacing "My-Stamp" with Sponsored Stamps

The "My-Stamp" initiative, which allows individuals to print personal images on postage stamps, has been misused. Reports indicate instances of notorious individuals obtaining stamps with their photos, tarnishing the program's credibility. Since no robust mechanism exists to screen applicants' backgrounds, the programme is susceptible to abuse. Discontinuing the "My-Stamp" concept in favor of sponsored stamps could address this issue. Sponsored stamps would not only ensure better regulation but also offer a significant revenue stream.

Enhancing Consumer Convenience with Sticker Receipts

Currently, receipts issued by the Postal Department include a sticker only on the portion retained by the Department, leaving the consumer without one. Adding stickers to consumer receipts would eliminate the need for gum to paste them onto dispatch registers or documents. This small change could save public resources and improve the user experience, especially for organisations that rely heavily on postal services.

Introducing RTI Stamps and Rationalising Postal Orders

Postal orders in low denominations such as Rs 1, Rs 2, Rs 5, and Rs 7 were discontinued due to high handling costs. For example, the handling cost of a postal order in 2011-12 was Rs 37.45, far exceeding its value. To minimise losses, higher denominations like Rs 100, Rs 200, and Rs 500 could be introduced. Furthermore, RTI-specific stamps in denominations of Rs 2, Rs 10, and Rs 50 could replace postal orders for fees under the RTI Act, streamlining the payment process. This

approach aligns with recommendations from the Central Information Commission and addresses the issue of unfeasible copying charges below Rs10 due to the absence of lower-denomination postal orders.

Managing Inoperative and Matured Accounts

Unclaimed deposits in post office accounts often remain unnoticed due to deceased account holders failing to inform legal heirs. This creates a risk of fraud, as unscrupulous individuals may attempt to claim such funds in collusion with postal employees. To mitigate this risk, the Postal Department should send registered letters to account holders who have not operated their accounts or claimed matured deposits for over three years. If no response is received within three months, the funds should be frozen in fixed accounts and made accessible only after rigorous verification. Publishing details of such accounts could help legal heirs claim their rightful amounts, subject to stringent scrutiny. The introduction of successive nominations, as practiced by LIC of India, would further safeguard deposits and simplify inheritance processes.

Expanding Postal Services Through Bank Counters

The closure of post offices in key commercial areas, such as Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi, has caused inconvenience for businesses that rely on Registered and Speed Post services. With banks increasingly adopting government savings schemes, their branches could be utilised for booking postal services. Offering banks a nominal commission for hosting these services would not only enhance accessibility but also integrate postal and banking ecosystems more effectively.

Revamping the Postal Ecosystem for

Macau: The glittering gem in Xi Jinping's China

For the Chinese Communist Party, Macau is a beacon of controlled capitalism, showcasing the potential of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework. When Chinese President Xi Jinping landed in Macau, the world's gambling capital, the air was thick with anticipation. Macau, often dubbed the "Las Vegas of the East," is much more than a beacon of wealth and opulence. For Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it is a sparkling gem in the palm of China's vast and complex economic system—a model of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework that allows capitalist practices to thrive under the watchful eye of a socialist regime. Xi's visit underscored the stark contrasts between theory and practice in the CCP's governance and the lessons it offers not only for China's neighbours but for the world at large. Macau's significance lies in its unique identity. A former Portuguese colony, it returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1999 under the promise of autonomy. Today, its glitzy casinos, luxury hotels, and sprawling Special Economic Zone (SEZ) generate billions annually, contributing substantially to China's GDP. But while the dice roll and fortunes are made on Macau's gaming tables, the CCP's control remains unyielding. The irony is palpable. The CCP, a party built on anti-capitalist ideology, oversees the largest SEZ in the world in Shanghai, nurtures capitalism in Hong Kong, and allows gambling—once condemned as a moral vice—to flourish in Macau. This duality reflects the pragmatic philosophy first espoused by Deng Xiaoping: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, as long as



it catches mice." This approach has been pivotal in transforming China into the world's second-largest economy. Yet it also lays bare the contradictions at the heart of CCP rule. Xi Jinping's Macau visit was not merely ceremonial. It was a reaffirmation of the CCP's ability to adapt and wield capitalist tools while maintaining a tight grip on power. In Macau, Xi emphasised stability and loyalty to the central government. This aligns with his broader strategy of tightening control over regions that might veer toward autonomy or dissent, as evidenced in Hong Kong. The "One Country, Two Systems" model—once lauded as a masterstroke of governance—has increasingly become a tool for consolidating Beijing's authority. Hong Kong's story is a cautionary tale. A vibrant hub of multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs), it has been at the forefront of economic globalisation. However, its recent struggles with political dissent and Beijing's heavy-handed responses reveal the limits of the "Two Systems" promise. The CCP's crackdown on pro-democracy movements

in Hong Kong has sent a clear message: economic freedom does not translate to political autonomy. Macau, in contrast, has largely avoided such conflicts, partly due to its economic dependence on Beijing and the absence of a robust pro-democracy movement. Yet, this does not make Macau immune to the inherent tensions of "One Country, Two Systems." As Xi extolled Macau's success, he also warned against complacency and stressed the need for "long-term stability," a euphemism for unwavering allegiance to the CCP. For the CCP, Macau and Hong Kong are not just economic engines; they are experiments in controlled capitalism. The success of these regions bolsters the party's narrative that socialism with Chinese characteristics can coexist with, and even benefit from, capitalist mechanisms. The underlying contradictions are hard to ignore. The CCP's insistence on ideological purity clashes with its pragmatic embrace of market-driven policies. This duality is reflected in Xi's leadership, which combines Maoist centralisation with Dengist pragmatism. For Maoists, Naxalites, and urban Naxals in India, as well as other ideologues clinging to rigid dogmas, Macau stands as a testament to the power of adaptation. The CCP's ability to evolve, to reconcile its Marxist-Leninist roots with the demands of a modern, globalised economy, has been the cornerstone of China's rise. This is a far cry from the ideological purism that often paralyzes leftist movements elsewhere. India, too, can draw inspiration from Macau. As

the world's largest democracy grapples with its development challenges, it must consider the role of SEZs, MNC headquarters, and even industries like gambling in driving economic growth. While gambling remains taboo in much of India, the success of Macau shows how regulated gaming can become a major revenue source. Similarly, expanding SEZs and creating hubs for MNCs can transform India into a global economic powerhouse. At the heart of this debate is the question of whether ideology should dictate policy. The CCP's approach—that opinion is not an iron rod—offers a compelling case for pragmatism. Yet, the party's intolerance for dissent, as seen in its suppression of Mao's "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign, highlights the dangers of unchecked authority. The CCP's success in economic management is undeniable, but its human rights record and stifling of democratic aspirations serve as stark reminders of the cost of its iron-fisted rule. As Xi Jinping departed Macau, the world was left pondering the paradoxes of modern China. Under his leadership, the CCP has doubled down on centralisation, curbing dissent while championing economic liberalisation. Macau's glittering casinos and towering skyscrapers are symbols of this duality, where capitalism thrives under the shadow of socialism. For Xi, Macau is more than a gem in China's palm; it is a symbol of the CCP's ability to adapt and endure. Whether in the neon-lit streets of Macau or the corridors of power in Beijing, the CCP's experiment in controlled capitalism continues to shape the future of China—and the world.

Karnataka To Get 2 Greenfield Highways



In Karnataka, significant advancements in infrastructure development have been highlighted, with two major greenfield road projects on the horizon. The Union Minister of State for Railways and Jal Shakti, V. Somanna, shared insights into these ambitious ventures, which promise to enhance connectivity and streamline transportation within the state. Somanna revealed plans for a 114 km stretch from Hassan to Hiriyur, which will be developed at an estimated cost of Rs 4500 crore. Additionally, a substantial 700 km Pune-Bengaluru expressway is set to be constructed, requiring an investment of Rs 55,000 crore. The Pune- Bengaluru expressway project, in particular, draws attention for its extensive route that will significantly cut travel time between the two major cities. Within Karnataka, 500 km of this expressway will be laid, including a pivotal 55 km stretch passing through Tumkur. This portion underscores Tumkur's growing importance in the state's infrastructure landscape. Similarly, the Hassan-Hiriyur project will see 40 km of development within the Tumkur district, further emphasizing the region's role in these transformative projects.

Enhancing Connectivity and Infrastructure Union Minister Prahlad Joshi has shed light on another crucial project, the Hubballi-Dharwad bypass, which is currently undergoing extensive widening and upgrading. Expected to be completed by June 2025, this project aims to facilitate smoother traffic flow and improve the overall transportation network in the region. The bypass will feature a railway bridge and Gabbur bridge, set to be finished by September 2025, alongside the construction of service roads and underbridges where necessary. Joshi emphasized the benefits this project will bring to the local community, including compensation for those who may need to relocate due to the construction. In a move to beautify and welcome visitors to Hubballi, plans are in place to install a plaque that reads "Welcome to the attractive city of Hubballi" near Infosys. The initiative, which includes constructing a roundabout and a fountain model, has garnered support from Highway Authority officials and the Hubli-Dharwad Mahanagara Palike. This effort reflects a broader commitment to enhancing the city's aesthetic appeal and infrastructure robustness.

Proposed Developments in Air Travel
Adding to the infrastructural developments, V. Somanna has voiced proposals concerning air travel in Karnataka. He advocated for Tumkur as the location for the state's second international airport, arguing that it would serve as a valuable addition to the region or alternatively, the revitalization of the old airport in Bangalore. His conversations with relevant parties, though not disclosed, indicate ongoing discussions aimed at expanding Karnataka's aviation capacity.

Centre Scraps No-Detention Policy For Classes 5 & 8: Tamil Nadu Declines To Follow



Tamil Nadu has reaffirmed its commitment to the 'no detention policy' for students in Classes 5 and 8. This decision underscores the state's dedication to supporting underprivileged students by ensuring automatic promotions and reducing dropout rates among children facing socio-economic challenges. Tamil Nadu's Education Minister, Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, strongly opposed the Centre's move to abolish the policy, calling it a barrier for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. He emphasized that Tamil Nadu would continue its current model of automatic promotions, allowing students uninterrupted access to education without the fear of detention. The Union government's revision of the Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2019 intro-

duced an amendment permitting schools to hold back students in Classes 5 and 8 if they failed year-end examinations. Following this, at least 18 states and Union Territories abolished the 'no detention policy.' According to the amendment, students who fail their annual exams are given additional instruction and an opportunity to retake the exams within two months. If they fail again, they are retained in the same class. Teachers are tasked with guiding such students and their parents, offering specialized support to address learning gaps. Tamil Nadu has firmly stated that this policy change will not impact state-run schools. Minister Poyyamozhi clarified that the Union government's decision applies only to Central government-owned schools in the state, reassuring parents, students, and educators that the existing approach would remain unchanged. "As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, we have not implemented the National Education Policy and are drafting an exclusive State Education Policy. Since the state follows its own education framework, the Union

Government's move will not apply to our schools," Poyyamozhi told the media. The Tamil Nadu government's steadfast adherence to the 'no detention policy' reflects its commitment to creating an inclusive education system. This policy has been a cornerstone of the state's efforts to provide equal opportunities for students, particularly those from rural and underprivileged areas, to complete their education. By upholding this policy, Tamil Nadu ensures that no child is expelled from school until the completion of elementary education. This approach fosters a supportive academic environment, encouraging students to pursue their studies without the fear of academic failure. Tamil Nadu's decision to retain the 'no detention policy' amidst national-level changes demonstrates its resolve to prioritize educational inclusivity. By focusing on the needs of disadvantaged students and maintaining automatic promotions, the state is fostering a more equitable education system that offers every child the opportunity to learn and grow. This move not only highlights Tamil Nadu's independent stance on education policies but also reinforces its dedication to building a system where all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, can thrive.

Congress Slams NHRC Selection Process As 'Fundamentally Flawed': What You Need To Know

The Congress party has strongly criticized the process of selecting the new chairperson and members of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), calling it "fundamentally flawed." The criticism comes a day after President Droupadi Murmu appointed former Supreme Court judge Justice V. Ramasubramanian as NHRC chairperson. Priyank Kanoongo and Dr. Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi were also named members of the commission. The main opposition party, led by Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, issued a formal dissent

noting the irregularities in the selection procedure. The Congress leaders expressed concerns that the meeting of the Selection Committee, which took place on Wednesday, appeared to be a "pre-determined exercise," which disregarded the essential principle of mutual consultation and consensus. In their dissent note, Gandhi and Kharge emphasized that the selection process lacked transparency and fairness. They argued that the Committee relied solely on its numerical majority to finalize the appointments, rather than fostering deliberation and ensuring collective decision-making. They voiced disappointment over the dismissal of legitimate concerns raised during the meeting, undermining the credibility of the NHRC and its ability to act impartially. The Congress party highlighted that the NHRC is a crucial institution responsible for safeguarding the human rights of all citizens, particularly marginalized communities. The leaders stressed that the diversity and inclusiv-



ity of the commission's leadership were vital for ensuring it remains sensitive to the challenges faced by vulnerable groups. In contrast to the current appointments, the Congress had proposed the names of former Supreme Court judges Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman and Justice K.M. Joseph, emphasizing both merit and inclusivity in their recommendations. The Congress leaders underscored the need for the NHRC's leadership to represent India's pluralistic society, particularly by including individuals from various minority communities. They suggested that Justice Nariman, a respected jurist from the Parsi community, and Justice Joseph, a former Supreme Court judge from the Christian community, would have been ideal candidates for the chairperson role. These appointments, according to the Congress, would have sent a strong message about the NHRC's commitment to protecting the rights of diverse communities in India. The opposition leaders also pro-

posed the inclusion of Justice S. Muralidhar, a former Chief Justice of the Orissa High Court, and Justice Akil Abdulhamid Qureshi, a former Chief Justice of Rajasthan and Tripura High Courts, for the position of NHRC members. They praised both justices for their track record of advancing social justice and constitutional principles. While acknowledging that merit should be the primary criterion for appointments, the Congress leaders stressed that

it is equally important to reflect the regional, caste, community, and religious diversity of the nation. They argued that without this balance, the NHRC risks losing public trust and failing to effectively protect human rights across all sections of society. The Congress party's dissent note concluded with a sharp critique of the majority's "dismissive approach" in the Selection Committee and raised concerns about the impartiality and fairness of the process. The opposition leaders emphasized that the NHRC's ability to function effectively depends on embodying the values of diversity and inclusiveness, which are central to India's constitutional framework. As the new appointments are expected to take effect, the Congress party has called for greater scrutiny of the selection process and reiterated its commitment to ensuring that the NHRC remains a strong and impartial body dedicated to defending the human rights of all citizens, as per media reports.

