

Why is there hue and cry against the MP's salary hike?

- Parimal Nathwani

Regardless of the government's decision on the recommendation of the parliamentary panel on hike in pay and perks of MPs, I can say that hue and cry against hike in salary and allowances of the MPs is unnecessary. I don't say this because I am MP. My concern, in the particular matter is for Lok Sabha MPs who deserve handsome pay and perks.

Expectations of people from the Lok Sabha MPs have gone up drastically compared to past. One parliamentary constituency consists of five to nine assembly constituencies. The MPs have to open an office in each of the parliamentary constituency. As a result the expenses towards salaries of the employees, office rent, electricity bill, property tax, expenses towards water, sanitation and maintenance go up besides expenses incurred on hospitality of the visitors. The allowances received by the MPs can meet just 10-15% of the expenses. Moreover, the MPs need to visit the constituency more than often to retain voters base and to attend different functions. The MPs need to hire/borrow vehicles on such occasions resulting into higher fuel expenses.

Society expects people with clean image to enter into the politics to serve it. In such situation, the expenses incurred by the MPs to remain constantly present among the people as well as in the parliament are quite high compared to the salary and allowances received by them. Public life is uncertain and the price one has to pay to maintain constituency is very high.

The general perception is that the MPs are getting out of the world benefits and luxury. Availability of subsidized meal at the Parliament Canteen is an easy target But majority of the MPs could not afford to run a kitchen at their official residence, so how could they afford to have daily meals in costly hotels/restaurants? Moreover, former MPs also visit the Central Hall of the parliament. Many former and current MPs do not have sound economic condition; therefore, the government has subsidized meal at the canteen. Further, the MPs get subsidized meal only during their stay in Delhi. Majority of the MPs return to their respective constituencies when the parliament session is not in session and do not get these facilities in their respective constituencies.

Without any hesitation, I wish that the MPs must be paid Rs6 lakh to Rs7 lakh per month towards salary and allowances. The MPs get relief in electricity only at their residence at Delhi, which should be clubbed with their residence in the native as well as their offices in the constituency. The system for taking a call on salary and allowances of the MPs has reached its expiry date and there is an

urgent need for new and improved system for the same. The aura of current facilities received by the MPs and MLAs is very bright, but the reality is quite different.

We want non-corrupt IAS, IPS, Customs Officers, Income Tax Officers, Judges, MPs and MLAs but do we give them their dues matching to their profile and need and big decisions taken by them in best of the interest of the country? I firmly believe that it attracts a serious thinking.

Earlier, one elected MP used to visit the constituency only once after five years for election. Now the situation has changed a lot. It's an age of competition. The country was dependent on agriculture, but now focus is on industrial and infrastructural activities. Following economic reforms, the country and consumerism has undergone a major change. Reach of education has increased.

In such situation, the MP cannot afford to visit the constituency and reach out the voters only once in five years. Voters have become more aware. If the representative is not in constant touch and his/her performance is not up to the mark, they reject them for the second term. MP also needs to have an army of workers and offices in several pockets to keep eyes on MPLAD related work etc.

We have accepted parliamentary democracy of United Kingdom. US is another strong and important democracy. If salary and allowances of the MPs in these countries are any indication, we just give peanuts to our elected representatives. Our MPs get Rs6 lakh annual salary. UK increased the basic salary of MPs by 10% on July 16, 2015 to Rs66.42 lakh to Rs73.63 lakh. It is Rs1.13 crore in US. If the difference in basic salary is this much, how wide the gap between the allowances and other facilities would be? If we talk only about UK, a member of parliament gets annually more than Rs7.44 crore towards salary, allowances and perks, while pension and medical benefits are extra. Thus, even if both salary and allowances given to the MPs are taken into account, it is nothing. Criticism has no meaning.

Same is true of our judiciary also. Judiciary gets flaks for sluggish process and lack of transparency etc. However, do we give enough remuneration to the judges so that intelligent and clever advocates of lower court, district courts, high courts and the Supreme Court prefer this job over their private practice? I believe we have failed to do this. Therefore, more than 2.5 crore cases in lower courts, 6 lakh cases in different high courts and nearly 70,000 cases in the Supreme Court are pending. The main reason for such a huge pendency of the cases is vacant posts in different courts of country. If I am not wrong against the current schedule nearly 650 posts of judges are vacant in high courts of the

different states. So how can we think about increasing the strength? The policy of all the governments has remained the same in this regard. I don't know policy of the present government. When compared to the government officials, salary and allowances received by the judges need substantial hike.

The salary of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India is Rs14.40 lakh annually. A top class lawyer of high court or Supreme Court gets Rs2 lakh to Rs3 lakh for appearing in the court. Even if they do so for 15 to 20 matters in a month, they earn Rs50 lakh per month. Who will forgo such as a lucrative practice for a government quarter, red-beaconed car and salary less than even a company executive? Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in UK gets Rs2.45 crore annual salary. The same is Rs1.68 crore in USA. In short, salary level of our MPs and Judges are so low that talented people are not keen to join the same. So to attract talents to politics and judiciary, we need not cry foul over salary, allowances and other benefits of MPs, MLAs and Judges.

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