

CALL FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM

Bribery is a malignant tumour eating away at the vitals of our society. Despite decades of development, countless laws, and anti-corruption drives, bribery remains deeply entrenched in the public and private sectors across India. It weakens governance, erodes trust in institutions, fuels inequality, and severely hampers economic progress. As we strive to become a leading global power, the need to check bribery is not just a matter of legality-it is a national imperative.

Bribery thrives in systems where accountability is low, discretion is high, and transparency is scarce. It begins with the smallest transactions-clearing a file, issuing a certificate, passing an inspection-and extends all the way to high-value tenders, land allotments, and policy manipulation. It impacts the poor and vulnerable the most, forcing them to pay for services that are their basic rights.

What makes bribery so dangerous is not only the financial cost but the moral cost. It normalizes dishonesty and fosters a culture of compromise. When people see that merit can be bypassed and laws bent through bribes, their faith in fairness and justice is shaken. To fight bribery effectively, we must address both supply and demand sides of the problem. On the one hand, stricter surveillance, fast-track courts, and exemplary punishments are necessary to deter corrupt officials. The government has made several positive strides in recent years. Initiatives like Digital India, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), JAM trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile), and the PM GatiShakti platform aim to reduce human interface and bring transparency. The Lokpal Act and various state-level vigilance bodies are also important tools, though their effectiveness remains uneven due to delays in appointments and investigations.

However, legal frameworks alone are not enough. There must be a societal shift in how we perceive and respond to bribery. Bribery is often seen as a "necessary evil" or a "shortcut," rather than a crime. We must stop glorifying those who use their influence to get things done illegally. Families, schools, and institutions must emphasize integrity, even in the face of delay or hardship. Media, both traditional and social, should play a proactive role in exposing corruption and celebrating whistleblowers and honest officers.

Furthermore, civil society has a critical role to play. NGOs, resident welfare associations, and citizen groups should actively monitor public services and raise red flags where needed. Tools like the RTI Act must be used more frequently, and awareness campaigns should make people informed about their rights and avenues for grievance redressal.

Ultimately, the battle against bribery is a fight for the soul of the nation. It is a test of our collective will to build a just, fair, and equitable society. We cannot outsource this fight to governments alone. Every citizen must become a stakeholder in rooting out this menace. It is time to stop tolerating bribery in any form-whether big or small, whether to get things done or to avoid punishment. The choice is clear: either we act now and cleanse our systems, or we continue to compromise our future. Let this be the moment when we decide, together, to choose integrity over convenience-and the rule of law over the rule of bribe.

GST 2.0 begins to reshape markets, families feel early relief

MOHAMMAD HANIEF

India's most sweeping tax reform in nearly a decade has begun to unfold across shop counters, factory floors, and household budgets. The revamped Goods and Services Tax-popularly called GST 2.0-came into effect on 22 September 2025, streamlining the country's indirect-tax structure and promising a rare combination of cheaper essentials, simpler compliance, and sharper levies on luxury and "sin" goods.

The measure, approved at the fifty-sixth meeting of the GST Council earlier this month, replaces the earlier four-tier system of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent with just three broad rates: a five-per-cent slab for essential goods and services, a standard 18 per cent rate for most items, and a steep 40 per cent for high-end or harmful products. Supporters hail it as the boldest fiscal reset since the original GST was introduced in 2017.

Within days of the rollout the reform is already visible in everyday life. Across major cities and smaller towns, prices of staples such as bread, paneer and traditional sweets have dropped as bakers and dairy suppliers adjust to the new five-per-cent slab. Personal-care items-soaps, shampoos and toothpaste-have seen similar reductions. Pharmacies report lower bills for a wide range of medicines after life-saving drugs were exempted from tax and many others moved to the lowest bracket. Perhaps most striking for families is the removal of GST on life and health-insurance premiums, a change long sought by consumer groups. Agents say inquiries for new policies rose noticeably in the week after the announcement, signalling a potential expansion of financial protection in a country where insurance penetration has remained stubbornly low.

The benefits extend to rural India as well. Agricultural implements, fertilizers, pumps and even sewing machines now carry the five-per-cent rate, easing costs for farmers and small entrepreneurs. For those managing thin margins in villages and small towns, the shift promises measurable savings through the harvest and festive seasons ahead.

The reform is equally significant for manufacturers and retailers of consumer durables. Items that once attracted a 28-per-cent levy-including refrigerators, washing machines, air-conditioners and televisions-now fall into the standard 18-per-cent category. Major electronics brands have already trimmed price tags, with some large-screen televisions discounted by tens of thousands of rupees. Automobile makers, from market leaders to niche players, are issuing revised price lists that lower the cost of popular models by



amounts ranging from a few thousand to more than a lakh. Cement, a key input for housing and infrastructure, has shifted to the same standard rate. Builders and contractors say this could reduce construction costs and revive stalled projects, providing a welcome push to the real-estate sector after years of high input prices.

Not every market segment is celebrating. The creation of a 40-per-cent slab for luxury and de-merit goods is reshaping strategy in industries that depend on high-end consumption. Makers of luxury cars, yachts, private aircraft, premium spirits and tobacco products face a much heavier tax burden. Early indications suggest distributors are recalibrating inventories and revising sales forecasts downward as consumers weigh the steeper costs. The government is unapologetic about this tilt. Policymakers argue that taxing luxury and harmful products more aggressively not only discourages undesirable consumption but also offsets the revenue lost from easing rates on essentials. Initial projections suggest the lower slabs could cost the exchequer about ₹48,000 crore annually; a gap New Delhi hopes to fill through higher collections from the top bracket and improved compliance across the board.

Clarity is the other pillar of the reform. The original GST, despite its promise of "one nation, one tax," grew complicated over time as multiple slabs and special exemptions created ambiguity. Businesses often found themselves embroiled in disputes over how a product should be classified: was a particular snack taxable at 12 or 18 per cent, or did a sweetened beverage qualify as a luxury drink? Such disagreements clogged tribunals and courts, increasing uncertainty and costs. GST 2.0 aims to sweep away much of that confusion. By consolidating goods and services into just three categories, the government expects fewer disputes, faster adjudication and a

reduction in the administrative burden on both tax officers and entrepreneurs.

Small and medium enterprises stand to gain the most. Under the earlier regime, delayed refunds and intricate filings tied up working capital and discouraged formalisation. The Council has pledged a streamlined digital filing system and faster refund mechanisms alongside the new structure. Entrepreneurs in the informal and rural economy-where bookkeeping resources are limited-may find compliance less daunting, encouraging more businesses to come within the tax net.

Financial markets have offered an early endorsement. On the first trading day after the announcement, the Sensex and Nifty 50 both posted gains as analysts projected stronger consumer spending and a friendlier business climate. Shares of automobile, housing and consumer-durable companies led the rally, reflecting expectations of revived demand. Economists also point to potential improvements in India's ease-of-doing-business ranking. A simpler, more predictable tax system could attract foreign investment by reducing the risk of sudden disputes and lowering the cost of compliance. Over time, the reform may enhance India's fiscal credibility and align with the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision of a self-reliant, investment-friendly economy.

Yet challenges remain. State governments, which rely heavily on GST revenue, are wary of near-term shortfalls as the lower rates on essentials take effect. Several have sought assurances of timely compensation from the Centre. Any delays could strain state budgets already stretched by welfare commitments and infrastructure projects. Businesses face transitional headaches of their own. Updating billing systems, printing new price labels and retraining staff are costly and time-consuming. Smaller retailers in particular report confusion as they rush to interpret

which items fall into which slab. Consumer groups warn that unless authorities monitor pricing closely, some companies may pocket the tax cuts instead of passing them on to buyers. There is also the question of long-term revenue stability. While the government expects the 40-per-cent slab and improved compliance to make up for the estimated loss, skeptics caution that sustained high taxes on luxury and harmful goods could eventually dampen demand to the point where collections fall short.

For now, though, the most tangible proof of GST 2.0 is in the marketplace. Shoppers in city supermarkets and village bazaars alike are noticing lighter grocery bills. Electronics stores advertise festival discounts that combine seasonal offers with the new lower tax. Auto showrooms report a spike in foot traffic from buyers who had been delaying purchases in anticipation of the reform. The benefits reach beyond urban centres. Farmers buying fertilizer pumps, tailors investing in new sewing machines and families renewing health-insurance policies are all discovering that the new rates leave more money in their pockets. Even state-owned power utilities expect to pass on modest savings to consumers as taxes on key inputs fall, lowering monthly electricity bills.

India's first GST rollout in 2017 was heralded as a landmark in fiscal integration, but its complex structure gradually eroded that promise. GST 2.0 seeks to restore it, balancing the government's revenue needs with consumer relief and social objectives. By reducing the number of slabs, cutting compliance costs and aligning taxation with health and welfare priorities, the reform positions itself as more than a fiscal tool-it is also a social and economic instrument. The months ahead will test whether those ambitions are realised. Much depends on the speed with which refunds are processed, the efficiency of digital filing systems and the Centre's ability to compensate states. If these pieces fall into place, GST 2.0 could well mark a decisive turning point, reshaping India's fiscal landscape and reinforcing its reputation as a competitive, investment-friendly economy.

As the festive season gathers pace, millions of Indians will experience the reform not through policy papers or council meetings but in the everyday relief of lower bills, affordable appliances and accessible insurance. In markets from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, the lighter price tags tell the story of a tax revolution just beginning to take hold.

(The author is a senior analyst in Kashmir)

Social Support Made the Centenary Journey of the Sangh Possible

DATTATREYA HOSABALE

The work of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is now completing a hundred years. In this hundred-year journey, many people have been collaborators and participants. This journey was certainly full of hard work and challenges, but the constant support of the common people has been its most pleasant aspect. Today, when we reflect in this centenary year, many such incidents and individuals come to mind who dedicated everything of theirs for the success of this journey.

In the early days, those young workers, filled with patriotism like warriors, spread across the nation for Sangh work. Be it household workers like Appaji Joshi, or pracharaks such as Dadarav Parmar, Balasaheb and Bhaurao Deoras, Yadvarav Joshi, Eknath Ranade and others, all came under the guidance of Dr. Hedgewar. They accepted Sangh work as a lifelong

vow of national service and continued with it till their last breath.

The Sangh's work has continuously progressed only through the support of society. Since Sangh work aligned with the emotions of the common man, its acceptance in society grew steadily. Once, during his foreign travels, Swami Vivekananda was asked-"In your country, most people are illiterate, they don't even know English, so how will your great ideas reach them?" He replied, "Just as ants do not need to learn English to find sugar, my people of India, with their spiritual wisdom, will immediately understand any social work happening in any corner and silently join in. Therefore, they will understand me." This was proven true over time. Similarly, Sangh's social work, though gradual, kept receiving acceptance and support from common people.

From the very beginning, Sangh workers received blessings and shel-

ter from new families through continuous contact. The families of swayamsevaks themselves became the centres of Sangh work. The support of mothers and sisters has been integral to the completeness of Sangh's work. Leaders like Dattapant Thengdi, Yashwantrao Kelkar, Balasaheb Deshpande, Eknath Ranade, Deendayal Upadhyaya and Dadasaheb Apte, inspired by the Sangh, played vital roles in building organizations in diverse fields of social life. Today, these organizations are not only widespread but are also bringing positive change in their respective areas. Among women, from Mausiji Kelkar to Pramilata Medhe, the contribution of such revered personalities through the Rashtrasevika Samiti has been immensely significant.

The Sangh has from time to time taken up many national issues. All these received support from various sections of society, including, at

times, even from those who appeared publicly opposed. The Sangh has always strived to obtain collective support on issues concerning the larger Hindu society. In the causes of national unity, security, social harmony, democracy, and protection of religion and culture, countless swayamsevaks endured hardships, and hundreds even sacrificed their lives. In all this, society's backing has always been present.

In 1981, when some Hindus were converted in Meenakshipuram, Tamil Nadu, a massive awakening conference was organized, attended by nearly five lakh people. The then senior Congress leader Dr. Karunasinth presided over it. Similarly, in 1964, at the founding of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, renowned monk Swami Chinmayananda, Master Tara Singh, Jain Muni Sushil Kumar, Buddhist monk Kushok Bakula, and Namdhari Sikh Satguru Jagjit

Singh played leading roles. To re-establish that Hindu scriptures have no place for untouchability, at the initiative of Shri Guruji Golwalkar, the Vishva Hindu Conference in Udupi saw the presence and blessings of all religious heads and saints. Just as the Prayag Conference accepted the resolution "Na Hindu? Patito Bhavet" (No Hindu can ever be fallen), the Udupi Conference declared "Hindava? S?dar?? Sarv?" (All Hindus are brothers, all are children of Bharat Mata). In all such initiatives, whether it was the cow protection movement or the Ram Jannabhoomi campaign, Sangh swayamsevaks consistently received the blessings of saints.

Immediately after independence, when the then government banned Sangh work due to political reasons, even in such adverse circumstances, ordinary people along with eminent personalities stood by the Sangh and gave it strength. The

same was experienced during the Emergency. This is why, despite so many obstacles, Sangh work has continued to move forward unhindered.

In all such situations, it was our mothers and sisters who carried the responsibility of supporting swayamsevaks and Sangh work with great skill. All this has become a perennial source of inspiration for the Sangh.

In the future, for the nation's service, Sangh swayamsevaks will, in this centenary year, strive for the cooperation and participation of all sections of society through door-to-door contact. The main goal will be to reach from big cities to the remotest villages, and to all classes of society. With the coordinated efforts of the entire virtuous society, the forthcoming journey of holistic national development will be easier and successful.

(The author is the Sarkaryavah of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh)

Achieving Zero Hunger: A Pathway to a Sustainable Future

DR. BANARSI LAL

Hunger is a global crisis that affects millions of people across the globe. It is a deeply entrenched issue with far-reaching consequences, including malnutrition, poverty and social instability. Achieving zero hunger is an inspirational and achievable goal amidst these challenges. Hunger remains one of the most pressing global challenges, with millions of people facing food insecurity daily. An alarming population and climate change continue to strain agricultural systems, leaving us with the urgent need to find sustainable solutions. In a world of 805 million people, one in nine persons lives in chronic hunger. Every year around five millions children under the age of five die due to malnutrition. Out of ten, four children are malnourished in the poor countries of the world. It is estimated that world produces enough food to feed every person on the earth. No one in the world should have the experience of hunger. Food is a common element for all the human beings on the earth. In India during the marriage ceremonies lot of food is prepared out of which many times lot of food is wasted. Such food can be preserved and distributed among the poor and needy people. A scheme can be launched in which certain

percentage of the salaries can be deducted from the employees of various organisations who voluntarily want to donate for food bank and such money can be utilized to feed the poor people. On this day various aspects of agriculture and food security such as biodiversity, climate change etc. are discussed. People are guided to save the food and eliminate food wastage. There is a need to concentrate on zero hunger. With zero hunger we can save the lives of 3.1 million children per year. Well nourished mothers have healthier babies with strong immune system. With the elimination of under nutrition in the children GDP up to 16.5 per cent can be increased. Proper nutrition in the early age can increase 46 per cent of lifetime earnings. Iron deficiency in the population can boost 20 percent of the workplace productivity. Zero hunger can help to build a safe, prosperous and healthy world.

In the pre-Green Revolution period, much of the increase in food grain production was mainly due to expansion in area under cultivation. India's food grain production has been on the rise despite year-to-year fluctuations since the Green Revolution of the 1960s. After the Green Revolution, increase in production is due to introduction of

yield-increasing technologies, supportive services and infrastructure. The country's total food grain production was 50 million tons in 1950-51 which was 332.22 million tons in 2023-24. The per capita availability has also been risen per day to nearly 514 grams per day despite unabated increase in population. There is dire need to mitigate the problem of malnutrition in India. The country appears to be not only self-sufficient in food grains but also having marginally surplus as well. But the issue whether the present level of nutritional intake is adequate or not is still being debated. India has been regularly exporting rice and wheat since December 2000 and the government started offering grains for exports to prune the excessive stock-holding. India has since become the world's second largest exporter of rice and seventh that of wheat. The subsequent drought and increased domestic grain utilization in its wake slowed down the exports but even then the export surplus has continued to persist. Food-sufficiency does not reflect food security for the entire population of the country though it makes the country food secure at the micro-level. Food security needs to manifest in all its dimensions, covering all regions and all economic strata of society.

Time and again India evolved strategies to tackle rural as well as urban poverty. The real issue is not the availability of food but of its affordability by the poor. The issue is of food and nutrition security based on the access to a diet of high nutritional quality. The modern concept of food security has become rather broad-based, encompassing livelihood security and poverty alleviation as means to ensure economic capacity to buy food. Once that is achieved then the question of adequate nutrition arises. This has attained significance issue because of the problem of malnourishment has been more acute than stark hunger. The concept of food security also needs potable drinking water-something a sizeable chunk of the Indian population still lacks. Food security is meaningless without adequate health cover. There are different levels at which the food security needs to exist-from individual level to household, social, regional and national level. Within the household food security, there are issues related to gender, children and the old. Females and non-working old people tend to be discriminated against in food consumption at the household level. Thus, the debate on the aspects of food security seems to be an unending process and is also undergoing a constant change, depending

on the circumstances under which the definition is sought to be viewed.

Smallholder farmers can enhance their crop productivity and sustainability through the adoption of modern technologies. Technological solutions such as block chains and digitalization in agriculture improve agricultural technology and reduce waste all of which can ensure sustainable and secure food supply. From time to time different approaches have been adopted to overcome the problem of food insecurity. The struggle for ensuring the uniform food security is going to be dynamic as this is a complex issue. This is also because the nature of food security or food insecurity will go on changing socio-economic scenario. The channel between production and consumption is weakening now. Production is undertaken for the market and driven by the market. This might have created uncertainties over local level food availability. Diversification in agriculture and livestock improves livelihood access and food security. The market forces may prompt the grower to reduce the home-consumption component of the produce. Many landless rural people produce milk for sale hardly keeping for domestic consumption. States like Punjab and Haryana are exploiting

natural resources such as water and soil nutrients at a much faster rate than the rate of replenishment leading to rapid drop in groundwater table and deterioration of soil fertility. While some states are under-utilizing even the available utilizable natural resources resulting in vast untapped potential. A holistic and flexible approach is needed towards food production that keeps in view the capabilities of the available production resources including natural resources. If scientific knowledge is efficiently provided to the farmers, then around 40-45% food production can be increased. There is dire need to end hunger and malnutrition across the globe. By using the modern technologies wastage of food can be minimized and food can be ensured to the needy people. Environmentally friendly agricultural methods such as organic and natural farming, agroforestry and crop rotation can increase food production, lessen the impact on the environment, increase climate change resilience and support efforts to end hunger and achieve food security across the globe. The journey towards zero hunger is challenging, but with the right approach, tools and commitment, we can achieve it.

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