

## **The burden of a bandh**

**By Rahul Gupta**

**NEW DELHI:** Did the small scale industry-wallahs manage to gain anything with their call for a day-long Delhi bandh? They didn't, but Delhi lost a lot in terms of money and man hours.

No manufacturing, little trade and very few buses on the road: The Capital may have incurred a loss of more than a 100 crores due to the bandh on Monday. Even the government would have lost quite a few crore in terms of lost revenues. According to the fourth economic census report which was released only last week, the Delhi government earns about Rs 4,000 crores annually through various taxes. By this calculation alone, the government would have lost around Rs 13 crores of taxes on Monday.

But the government is not the only loser. Manufacturers, wholesalers and even transporters have incurred losses. Due to the bandh, all manufacturing activity, even in conforming areas came to a standstill. Delhi has about 1, 29,363 manufacturing units, of which 35,000 are single-man enterprises and do not employ any labour. The president of the Badarpur Area Small Scale Industries Association Subhash Garg points out, "Even if we put the manufacturing activity at Rs 10,000 per day for each unit and take about 1,00,000 units alone, manufacturing still comes to Rs 100 crore every day."

Though wholesale markets - grains, chemicals, groceries, cloth, paper, machinery and even Chandni Chowk opened earlier during the day, there were few buyers. Former MLA Vasudav Kaptan said, "The traders would have easily lost around Rs 20 to 30 crores today."

Fearing violence, bus operators did not ply their buses. And those that dared, did not ferry too many passengers. The loss could be close to a crore for operators, according to Harish Sabharwal, general secretary, Delhi Contract Bus Association. Sabharwal added, "Only about 1,000 km scheme buses were on the roads as these are the first to be damaged. Similarly, only 1,600 Blue Line buses would have plied while only half of the 13,000 contract carriages would have rolled on the roads."

Is a bandh really worth all this?

# For flexibility

If the bandh in Delhi on Monday was by and large peaceful—much to the relief of the inhabitants of the National Capital Territory (NCT)—it was not because the issues that had led to its violent predecessor on November 20 had been settled. It was mainly because of the elaborate arrangements made to maintain peace. Over 40 companies of armed central para-military forces, including the Rapid Action Force (RAF) were deployed. Preventive arrests were made on a large scale. The Delhi Government had declared all schools and educational institutions closed for the day and ran only a skeletal service of Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses. Many Blueline bus operators kept their vehicles off the road on their own. Such arrangements, however, cannot be made too often. Nor can Delhi bear too often the economic burden of a bandh which includes not only the cost of deploying a vast army of police and para-military personnel but also losses in terms of disrupted business and industrial activity.

This is one reason why a prompt solution of the issue of the relocation of industrial units whose presence violates the land-use pattern prescribed by the Master Plan for Delhi, is necessary. Another and far more important reason is the fate of the owners and employees of these units who have been deprived of their livelihoods by Supreme Court's orders enjoining their closure. The point needs to be made because the disaster that has overtaken them so suddenly is more the responsibility of successive Delhi Governments than theirs. Why, for example, were licences granted to these units in the first place? Secondly, why did the present Congress Government of Delhi and its BJP predecessor do little about relocating these though the Supreme Court has been passing orders in the matter since 1996? Indeed, nothing is more shocking than the fact that, in utter contempt of the Supreme Court's orders, the Delhi Government has granted as many as 15,000 new licenses for industrial units in residential areas since that very year. Given this, can owners of units set up prior to 1996 be faulted for believing that come what may, their units are not going to be touched?

Hence it is necessary to balance the twin compulsions of reducing pollution in Delhi with not suddenly depriving nearly two million people of their livelihoods. This would require a certain humaneness and flexibility in the attitudes of all authorities involved in the matter. Besides, it would be wise to remember that a society is threatened as much by crime as by pollution. The surge in crime that Delhi witnessed in late 1998 and early 1999 was to some extent at least due to the unemployment caused by closure of—and lay-offs by—garment factories following import restrictions imposed by the United States and other countries in the wake of the Pokhran blasts in May 1998. Since far greater numbers are now involved, an abrupt closure of the units may well lead to a far bigger surge in crime.

# Jagmohan refuses to bend

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 27. — Resisting the Opposition's pressure in the Rajya Sabha today, the minister for urban development stood firm against the "regularisation" of unauthorised industrial units in Delhi's residential areas.

The Centre was trying to resolve the problem, he was not anti-labour or anti-industry and was prepared to meet local leaders and MPs over the issue, Mr Jagmohan said, urging members to be "constructive, not confrontationist".

The issue at hand was the non-implementation of the Supreme Court's order and the assurances given to it by the Delhi government, said the minister. He pointed out that the Supreme Court had observed that the local authorities had adopted dilatory tactics only to press for "in situ" regularisation. He was not in favour of that.

Amending the Master Plan as desired by local leaders would be to legitimise what was patently illegal and dilute the basics of a plan approved by Parliament in 1990. The plan could be amended to expand notified industrial areas, the Supreme Court could be asked to extend the deadline and the definition of household industry could be changed. Nothing further.

Led by Mrs Ambika Soni (Cong) who raised the issue,

Opposition members attacked the minister for being rigid. Environmental considerations could not take precedence over the right to earn a living, said Mrs Jayanthi Natarajan (TMC). Mr Jibon Roy (CPI-M) highlighted the plight of labourers.

Mr Jagmohan said labourers would be the biggest beneficiary if industry moved to the designated areas in Narela and Bawana. They would be provided plots for proper housing, loans to build their own homes and could avail regular civic amenities.

The interests of those who built homes in accordance with the law could not be ignored — a survey showed 87 per cent of them wanted industrial units to be moved out of residential areas, he said.

What the minister condemned as "urban indiscipline" figured at Question Hour too.

He said a CBI probe had been ordered into the encroachments and illegal construction around the Tughlakabad Fort.

When members said other historical and cultural sites in the city were being similarly destroyed, the minister agreed, citing Hauz Khas as a glaring example. "Influential people" had set up illegal shopping and restaurant complexes there, he said.

Mr Jagmohan said if the House supported him, he would set about stemming the rot.

Stray incidents of roadblocks, violence

# Delhi bandh peaceful, hundreds detained

28/11/2000

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 27. — The Delhi Bandh called today by unions of industrial workers remained peaceful today barring a few stray incidents of violence and roadblocks.

These stray incidents were confined to the west and the north-west districts. In Basai Darapur, about 1,500 protesters pelted stones at policemen and damaged four Delhi Transport Corporation buses.

Mobs of factory workers also blocked traffic in Shabad Dairy, Vishwas Nagar and a few other places in west Delhi.

A day before the Supreme Court is to hear the industries relocation case, this morning the Chief Minister, Mrs Sheila Dikshit, led her Cabinet and a handful of legislators to Parliament House to apprise the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, of the situation in the Capital.

Later in the Delhi Assembly, the Industries Minister, Dr Narendra Nath, said the Delhi Urban Arts Commission is yet to clear its plans to relocate industries to Bawana.

Replying to a call attention motion on the "situation arising out of Delhi Bandh today" Dr Nath said the stipulated land use in Bawana remained unchanged posing a problem in relocation.

Amid slogan shouting by both the Opposition and his own party colleagues, Dr Nath clarified that the Delhi Government was closing only water polluting units in its on-going drive to implement the directions of the Supreme Court.

The order to seal other units was given by the Municipal Commissioner on his own initiative and not on the directions of the Delhi Government, claimed Dr Nath.

The minister alleged that it was due to this order that the Capital witnessed so much violence last week and that these were withdrawn only after Mrs Dikshit asked the Lieutenant Governor to intervene, added Dr Nath.

During Dr Nath's reply, the Opposition members interrupted him and demanded that the Delhi Government clear its stand on the actions of the Sub-divisional Magistrates.

Meanwhile, Delhi Police detained 739 people under the Delhi Police Act since yesterday in addition to 220 preventive arrests last night.

Today, 56 people were arrested under various sections of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

In the Delhi Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition, Professor Jagdish Mukhi, criticised the Delhi Government for misinterpreting the Supreme Court Order in shutting down even non-polluting units in the non-conforming areas.

Congress legislator Mukesh Sharma created a flutter in the House claiming that he was in possession of an affidavit to be filed by the Union Ministry of Urban Development tomorrow in the Supreme Court.

The opposition then demanded that the documents be placed on record and Mr Sharma tabled a copy of the affidavit.