

The license to pollute!

In one of his movies, Shah Rukh Khan said that if you truly wish for something, the entire universe conspires to bring it to you. It seems the road transport industry has been wishing that all the problems and taxes be burdened on it because the transporters are making a lot of money and they need someone to share it with. How else can you explain that the Supreme Court orders an entry tax on trucks so that pollution gets reduced! At the same time while levying this fee, the authorities have overlooked a lot of practical difficulties. They have exempted certain trucks carrying 'essential commodities'. Who will decide whether what is being carried in a truck is classified as essential or not and how will the same be decided? What if the truck is carrying regular goods and places 5 sacks of potatoes? Who will classify this truck? Are the boys at the toll posts efficient or educated enough to decide the difference? There are so many questions related to the issue. But our biggest question is "Will levying a charge reduce pollution from the trucks?"

We feel that this issue has been handled very badly right from the beginning. The NGT, to start with, got involved in the pollution issue and put a ban on trucks over 10 years. Did the NGT have any study report in hand that proved that

trucks over 10 years were polluting? Who decided upon this figure of 10 years and how? How is it that a 9 year old truck is not polluting and a 10 year old is polluting? Moreover is pollution caused by the entire truck or by the engine? Was the transport industry given a fair chance to present its case before the NGT, before it could take a decision that would change the lives of so many fleet owners and

transporters?

This is perhaps the first time in many years that I am writing an editorial and all I can come up with is questions? There are so many critical factors that have not been considered and worse is that the transporters haven't been given a chance to explain themselves. The NGT ends up giving a further date reminding us of another Bollywood star



Sunny Deol "Tareek pe tareek". It seems that after getting into the environment imbroglio, the NGT doesn't know the way out. And adding to the confusion is the Supreme Court order levying an entry tax on trucks. Will that reduce pollution? We don't think so and if anyone believes that this is a solution to pollution, please write to us and we would love to carry your views.

There is no doubt that trucks are polluting, but so are other vehicles on the road. But somehow the transport industry is always a soft target for the Government whenever it wants to collect money or whenever it wants to show that it is doing something. Here again the Government is trying to show the people that it is taking steps to curb pollution, without taking into account whether such a move will really bring down pollution.

So what really can be a solution to this problem? Old trucks have to be scrapped – but in a phased and systematic manner, and not with the stroke of a pen that has no logic or study. The transport industry in India consists mostly of small truck owners that are in working in the unorganised segment. Asking them simply scrap their trucks for no benefits and move to new trucks is not going to be workable and acceptable to the industry. The Government will have to involve the transport industry in the process and come with a solution that enables the country to improve its average fleet size and at the same time does not burden the truck owners. The Government has been providing subsidies and sops to various other industries for

development. It would be nice if for once the Government gave something to the transport industry. The truck owners have to be asked to upgrade their trucks in a phased manner and not something like a truck owner having a 15 year old truck being asked to buy a new truck. That will not compliment his economics or his operations. However instead of operating with a 15 year old truck he can start operating with a 10 year old truck, and the guy with a 10 year old truck can upgrade to a 5 year old truck.

The next big step is to compensate or rather encourage the truck owners to be part of this upgradation process. They have to be given adequate compensation in terms of scrap value or excise benefits or tax holidays so that they volunteer to become part of the change. The new age trucks are certainly less polluting and with trucks moving up the Bharat Stage ladder, the pollution will certainly be lesser. However the manufacturers have been asking for better fuel, which is required to run these trucks. And the government doesn't seem ready with the same. So on one hand we have the Courts and the Government crying for a cleaner air and on the other hand it is not prepared to make available better fuel that would automatically

bring down pollution.

The other area of concern is the manner in which the Bharat Stage norms are being implemented. Why can't we have a single norm being implemented across the country rather than splitting it into different tiers (city wise). What sense does it make if Delhi enforces the sale of Bharat Stage IV trucks and you have Bharat Stage III trucks coming in from other states? Does that really solve the issue of pollution or enforcing Bharat Stage norms?

The Central Government has to stop this practice of having different rules / laws for different states. The transport industry is anyways suffering heavily because of the same. Each state has different rules and documentation, which can be very messy at times. At the same time every state has different prices for fuel. Are we seriously living in a single country or a conglomeration of countries called INDIA?

The Government, Courts and ofcourse the NGT has to get serious about the issue of pollution and not just take steps to show the people that something is being done. The transport industry has been victimised enough and burdening it any further will only break its back and cause harm to the economy.

