



“The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.”

—Winston Churchill



Saving our land

The numbers emerging from official data on land encroachments in Jammu and Kashmir are deeply troubling. More than 18 lakh kanals of land across the Union Territory are under illegal occupation. Out of this, nearly 17.2 lakh kanals belong to the state while over 1.15 lakh kanals are forest land. Against such an alarming scale of encroachment, the recovery of about 29000 kanals so far appears painfully small. Land is one of the most precious resources a region possesses. When such vast tracts of public and forest land fall into illegal hands, it reflects not only a governance challenge but also a collective failure to protect common assets meant for future generations. Encroachments have spread across districts, from Jammu to Rajouri, Reasi, Ramban, Kathua and Udhampur. In many areas, forests and government land meant for ecological protection or public infrastructure have gradually been eaten away by illegal construction and cultivation. Once these spaces are lost, reclaiming them becomes far more difficult. Even urban institutions are not spared. According to data presented in the Assembly, more than 16000 kanals of land belonging to the Jammu Development Authority are currently under encroachment. This is particularly worrying because JDA land is meant for planned development of the city of Jammu. Such land is intended for housing schemes, roads, parks, and other public facilities. When these areas are illegally occupied, the long-term cost is borne by the public through unplanned urban growth and shrinking civic space. Perhaps the most disturbing example is unfolding along the flood plains of the Tawi River. The government has identified 256 illegal occupants along the river's flood plains in the Nikki Tawi area. The encroachments cover more than 328 kanals of prime land. The significance of this location cannot be overstated. Nikki Tawi is often described as the oxygen chamber of Jammu because of its lush green cover. Spread across thousands of kanals between two channels of the river, it plays an important ecological role for the city. It is one of the few remaining green lungs that protect the fragile river ecosystem. Yet, illegal constructions have slowly begun to creep into this space. What begins as small encroachments soon grows into permanent structures. Over time, these alter natural drainage, damage vegetation, and increase the risk of floods. Authorities say eviction drives are underway and that forest boundaries are being re-surveyed using modern technology. These are welcome steps. But the truth is that land encroachment has become a chronic problem in the Union Territory. Removing illegal occupants after years of inaction is always difficult, both administratively and politically. Jammu and Kashmir now needs a clear, consistent and transparent policy. Encroachments must be prevented at the earliest stage. Land records should be digitised and monitored. Accountability must also be fixed wherever negligence allowed public land to be grabbed. Public land belongs to the people. Forest land belongs to nature. Allowing either to be quietly swallowed by encroachments is not just illegal but also a betrayal of the region's future.

Goodbye Maoists

WELCOME INTEGRATION

POONAM I KAUSHISH

Goodbye Maoists. After over six decades of relentless Maoist insurrection which cast a long shadow across North, South, East and West, the dreaded ‘Red Corridor’ is clear of all encumbrances. With over 1858 Maoists killed between 2016-24 and over 2000 cadres having surrendered since 2024 just two districts are now in Maoists tentacles asserted Home Minister Shah.

Primarily due to two factors: One, as top Maoists leaders were killed or arrested the chain of command weakened whereby lower cadres felt abandoned along-with disillusionment due to poor living conditions, constant movement and fear of encounters. Topped by loss of jungle sanctuaries due to police camps, drones and long-duration area domination making old hideouts unsafe with escape routes between Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Telangana narrowing sharply. Two, attractive surrender policy of cash rewards, housing, skill training, job security which made surrender an exit, instead of imprisonment.

Recall, Naxalism emerged from agrarian unrest in West Bengal's Naxalbari in 1970's, a hungrier more violent Naxal movement spread to parts of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa in the 1990's reaching its peak in 2000-2014 due to multiple State abdications and political failures where the State was often absent or coercive.

In fact, late Prime Minister Manmohan Singh underscored Left extremism as the biggest internal security concern 2006. Extremism drew sustenance from Government's failure to establish a credible presence through welfare interventions among marginalised communities. Specifically in forest areas where the State's writ was weak, Maoist groups established parallel governance structures, collecting levies, dispensing justice and tapping people's anxieties displaced by infrastructure projects.

Sadly for years Governments response oscillated between neglect and use of force. An ill-advised attempt to create a citizen's militia against rebels only ended up antagonising the tribal population while committing human rights violations.

The success against Left wing extremism can be measured across three levels. First, States capacity and policies that took the fight to Maoist cadres. Second, concerted efforts to facilitate surrenders and rehabilitation of those ‘waging war’ against the Indian State. Third, splits within Maoist leadership and realization of futility of armed struggle weakened them.

Another factor for the Government's success was more muscular and tougher stances against insurgents --- bullet for bullet approach. Alongside, there was a kernel of discontent among ordinary people who felt abandoned by Authorities specially when tragedy or disaster struck.

Undeniably, one of the reasons for the decisive shift is thanks to Central and State Governments development initiatives: Roads, markets, schools, hospitals, mobile towers, police outposts etc which were set-up up in once-inaccessible areas and direct benefit

transfers which enhanced efficacy of welfare schemes. Besides, better equipped security forces supported by effective intelligence dealt a string of reverses for Maoists.

However, the moment calls for sober reckoning not triumphalism. The squeezing of Naxalites over two years --- arrests, surren-

degradation remain fraught issues. Complaints of human rights abuses must be addressed on priority and Government initiatives evenly distributed. The State needs to double down on participative development, democratic representation and accountability.

Corruption and apathy, often the bane of

head again.

For that both Centre and State need to act together. Remember, nations live or die by the way they respond to a challenge. History shows insurgencies can re-emerge if the causes that fed them remain unresolved. Rehabilitation will decide success. If they get

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Uneven development, land acquisition for infrastructure projects and environmental

capacities must not be allowed to take roots. The next phase in the Red Corridor needs a transformative vision. Issues like forest rights, just and transparent acquisition must be addressed. The marginalised must be made part of India's larger story. As also ensure Naxalism does not return in any form.

The strength of Indian democracy lies in its capaciousness, its ability to turn critics and rebels into stakeholders. New Delhi must put its best foot forward and there should be planned deployment of time -bound resources to States afflicted by decades of Maoist conflict. It is crucial now when the enemy is annihilated for the Government to realize if there is disconnect between its objectives, tactics, resources and ground conditions, all stratagems and measures are rendered redundant.

It needs to deal with distortions in the social system on a war footing to alleviate poverty, ensure speedy development and enforce law and order strictly. Police need re-orientation, equipment which can only be achieved through genuine police reforms and dramatic augmentations in general policing capabilities to ensure Maoists don't raise their

livelihoods, dignity, land/forest rights access, social acceptance, psychological support then insurgency is unlikely to regenerate. Bastar's current skill and rehabilitation push is encouraging.

Governance must replace fear as the real victory is not military, it is administrative legitimacy. If the State is visible only as camps and mining leases, resentment can return. People need to feel police is fair, roads help villages, not only troop movement, schools and health centers function and local tribal voices matter. Tribal rights and mining are the biggest long-term test. If Adivasis feel bypassed, a new grievance ecosystem can emerge. This is where the future will truly be decided. Succinctly what lies ahead is less ‘war’ and more a ‘battle’ for trust, justice and development. A phase that is politically and morally tougher than jungle operations. Hence, the road ahead should be traversed carefully with deliberation and empathy. It must be one of development and democratic promise. The State should not only be efficient, it must also be seen to be, just. What gives? --- INFA

From Punishment to Reform: A Trust-Based Judicial Journey

LALIT GARGG

In India's democratic system, the purpose of law is not merely to punish, but also to create an environment of order, discipline, reform, and trust. With this perspective, the Jan Vishwas Bill 2026, after being passed by the Lok Sabha, has now also been approved by the Rajya Sabha, clearing the way for its implementation as law. Through this legislation, an effort has been made to move away from a system in which minor mistakes or routine violations of rules resulted in imprisonment; now, such violations will attract monetary penalties instead. Undoubtedly, the passage of this bill is an important and historic step—like a new dawn in India's legal environment. This law clearly signals a transition from a punitive system to a reformative one.

This legislation amends about 79 central laws and introduces changes in 784 provisions, with more than 700 minor offences being decriminalized. This will reduce the burden of cases in courts and ease the pressure on the judicial system. For example, even if a driving license expires, it will remain valid for 30 days, and creating a traffic jam on a national highway will attract a fine instead of imprisonment. Similarly, in many other cases, imprisonment has been replaced with financial penalties. Several of these changes are related to business regulations; for instance, earlier, violations under the Drugs and Cosmetics rules could lead to imprisonment, but now only fines will be imposed.

Small business owners, who were often fearful of punishment due to unintentional violations of complex regulations, will now feel relieved and more confident.

One of the major goals of the BJP government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been to simplify India's systems and laws, and this legislation is a constructive step in that direction. This law will not only reduce the burden on the judicial system but will also increase trust among citizens, entrepreneurs, and investors in the government. It can be seen as a practical implementation of the concept of ‘Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.’ By emphasizing reform rather than punishment, this law will free common citizens from complicated legal procedures and corruption-prone systems. For a long time, India's legal system remained punishment-oriented, where even minor violations resulted in criminal cases. This led to a backlog of cases in courts and unnecessary legal complications for ordinary citizens. The Jan Vishwas Bill attempts to change this mindset. The objective of law will now not be to punish, but to reform and maintain order. Determining penalties according to the seriousness of the offence is more aligned with the fundamental principles of justice.

This law will speed up judicial processes and allow greater focus on serious crimes. It is also a major step toward judicial reform because it will save the time and resources of courts, making the justice system more efficient. Another important objective of this law is to create an environment of trust in the business and industrial sectors. Previ-

ously, even minor regulatory violations led to criminal cases, creating fear among entrepreneurs and investors. Now, with provisions for monetary penalties instead of criminal prosecution, compliance burdens will be reduced and ease of doing business will improve. This will encourage small entrepreneurs, startups, and industries, and further improve the investment climate in India. Globally, India's image as a simple and investment-friendly country will also be strengthened.

One of the most significant aspects of this law is that its spirit closely reflects Indian culture. In Indian tradition, reform is valued more than punishment, forgiveness more than revenge, and correction more than condemnation. Our scriptures and traditions acknowledge that human beings are prone to mistakes, but they must be given an opportunity to improve. Harsh punishment for minor mistakes may sometimes be closer to injustice than justice. Therefore, if the legal system incorporates forgiveness, reform, and correction, society can become more humane and sensitive. Indian culture has historically been reformative and harmonious rather than punitive. The Jan Vishwas Bill appears to bring this cultural spirit into the modern legal framework. It represents a move toward trust-based governance and strengthens the relationship between government and citizens. When governments treat citizens as responsible individuals rather than potential criminals, citizens too develop respect for the law and willingly follow it. Trust-based governance is the greatest strength of any democracy. In fear-based governance, people try

to avoid the law, which encourages corruption; in trust-based governance, people follow the law voluntarily, and a sense of responsibility toward the nation and society naturally develops.

India has set a goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047. To achieve this, not only economic development but also judicial, administrative, and legal reforms are necessary. The Jan Vishwas Bill can be considered an important step in this direction. Simple laws, reduced government interference, faster justice systems, and a business-friendly environment are all hallmarks of a developed nation. From this perspective, this law will help India move toward becoming a modern and developed country. It must also be acknowledged that such major legal reforms are not possible without political will. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government has implemented several administrative and legal reforms aimed at making governance simple, transparent, and people-centric, and making the justice system more humane and practical. The Prime Minister expressed hope that this law would help build a trust-based system and empower citizens. The Jan Vishwas Bill is an important step in that direction, demonstrating that the government wants to build a relationship of trust with citizens rather than merely punish them. This law is a thoughtful effort to build a bridge of trust between the government and the people.

In reality, the rule of law should be such that minor mistakes, negligence, or unintentional errors should not become reasons for harsh punishment. Now that significant changes are expected

through the Jan Vishwas Bill, it becomes essential that the public be made aware of its provisions so that people can benefit from it and protect themselves from exploitation and corruption. People become empowered only when they are well aware of the laws and regulations. It is the government's responsibility to inform citizens about the changed legal provisions. At the same time, the government must ensure that replacing imprisonment with warnings and fines for minor offences does not send a message that laws can be violated by simply paying a fine. If such a mindset develops, the purpose of this law will be defeated. Another important concern is that the system of fines should not increase corruption among administrative or judicial officials. People must also understand that a nation progresses only when citizens fulfill their duties along with enjoying their rights.

Certainly, this law can make Indian legal reforms exemplary for the world. It can be said that the Jan Vishwas Bill is not merely a legal amendment, but a symbol of a change in the philosophy of governance. This law signals a shift from punishment to reform, from fear to trust, and from complexity to simplicity. The traditions of forgiveness, reform, correction, and coexistence that have long existed in Indian culture are now being reflected in the modern legal system through this law. If implemented effectively, it will not only simplify the justice system but also establish trust-based governance in India and become an important milestone in the journey toward a developed India.