

Gill hits out at Punjab's policies

Tribune News Service

LUDHIANA, Nov 5 — In a severe indictment of the Punjab Government, Dr Manohar Singh Gill, Chief Election Commissioner, today criticised the state government's policies, which were leading to 'stagnation' rather than development on various fronts.

He also took a dig at the Badal government's policy of supplying free power to the farmers. "I sympathise with the farmers. Above all, the small farmers. But it is my belief that the consumers, including farmers, desire assured power supply at reasonable rates rather than uncertain, often unavailable, free supply. He was equally unsparing in his criticism of the state's industrial policy.

"We continue to offer sops and subsidies to industries in competition with our neighbours without much success. This is clearly a beggar-my-neighbour policy."

"It is time to put a stop to this unhealthy unworkable practice of competition against neighbouring states to attract industry through sub-

sidies. In fact, there should be coordination of policy between the neighbouring states and we should try to attract industry based on our natural resource advantages."

In his address at the annual convocation of Punjab Agricultural University, where he was conferred with the

degree of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) by the Chancellor, Lt-Gen B.K.N. Chhibber, Dr Gill noted that since the mid-eighties, the growth rate in Punjab had been falling and it was now well below the national rate. During the first half of the eighties, Punjab's Gross State Domestic Prod-

uct (GSDP) grew at an average annual rate of 5.9 per cent, about 1 per cent higher than the national average. Punjab's industrial growth rate was significantly higher than the national average and the growth rate in agriculture was more than double the national figure. Since the mid-eighties, however, Punjab's GSDP had stagnated at an annual average of about 4.5 per cent.

The sharpest decline in growth rate had been in agriculture, where the annual rate had fallen to about 3.3 per cent. Although the decline in the industrial rate had been reversed during the nineties, it was still no higher than what it was during the first half of the eighties. "We are falling behind in the country. Let no one imagine otherwise. And we need to seriously think about our economic management," he observed.

Dr Gill said since the late eighties, the revenue balance had turned negative, indicating that Punjab was now borrowing even to finance recurrent

Ministerial temper

Tribune News Service

JALANDHAR, Nov 5 — More than half a dozen SAD-BJP ministers who descended here to file the nomination papers of their party candidate misbehaved with the Executive Magistrate, Mrs Sarojani Gautam, in the presence of mediapersons here today.

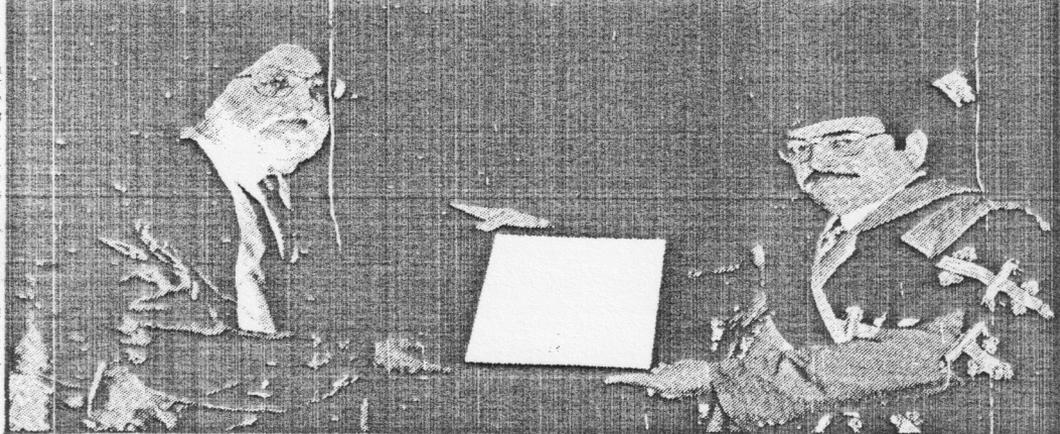
The ministers were agitated that the room in which the papers were to be filed was not fit for their status. While the Food and Supplies Minister, Mr Madan Mohan Mittal, started shouting at Mrs Gautam, who is the Assistant Commissioner of Municipal Corporation here, for failing to get the hall vacated for the ministers and the

party workers.

Interestingly, the ministers passed with fake files for the "benefit" of the cameramen and the TV team, while the actual files of nominations were submitted when the ministers had left.

A visibly upset Mrs Gautam who, in her capacity as Executive Magistrate, is designated to oversee the filing of the nomination papers for the Adampur byelections, said: "It is a serious business to receive the nomination papers of candidates. I cannot personally be held responsible for making arrangements for the ministers".

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Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill being conferred with the degree of Doctor of Science by Chancellor Lt-Gen B.K.N. Chhibber at Punjab Agricultural University's convocation in Ludhiana on Thursday.

— Photo by Inderjit Verma

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expenditure. In tax collection, Punjab fared poorly in comparison to its neighbours. In 1996-97, Punjab recorded a growth rate of 3.9 per cent in tax collection compared to Haryana's 31 per cent, Himachal, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi's 18 per cent, and Rajasthan's 14 per cent. In 1997-98, while Punjab improved to 9.6 per cent, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi recorded 12 per cent, Rajasthan 14 per cent and Himachal 17 per cent.

Punjab also faced a continuous decline in the size of land holdings. Between 1981-91. The number of small farmers cultivating less than 5 acres had increased from 4 lakh to 5 lakh. The problem was further compounded by the decrease in produc-

tivity of wheat and rice. "It is interesting to note that 12 acres of the best managed land provides an income just equivalent to the average per capita income of the state. In other words, 80 per cent of Punjab farmers are unable to meet even the average economic status of Punjab. Unless this situation is quickly remedied, there is bound to be renewed social tension," Dr Gill warned.

Punjab had about 10 towns with a population of over 1 lakh each. The infrastructure in these towns was 'appalling' and an 'embarrassment' for the richest state in the country. "They are like overgrown villages. The state of the roads, the rotten transport system, and the garbage disposal facilities in our premier towns are an em-

barrassment. Ludhiana is one of the richest cities in India. Yet its pathetic infrastructure suggests a complete system failure." Punjab's literacy rate was 58 per cent for men and 50 per cent for women against Kerala's 94 per cent and 86 per cent, respectively. The infant mortality rate per thousand live births in Punjab was 56 and only 17 in Kerala. The birth rate per thousand stood at 27 in Punjab and only 18 in Kerala.

Another index which worried him was the rapid rise in liquor consumption. During 1977-97, the sale of Punjab medium liquor had gone up from 10 million pl to 37 million, and of Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL) from four million to 21 million. Today, sadly, at the annual auctions, it was the duty of the state excise commissioners to enhance revenue. "Should we not have the courage to tax fairly and reasonably. Rather than encourage the peasantry on this downward path?" he asked.

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