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EDITORIAL 01

Questionable intent: On the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024

Maharashtra Bill to tackle extremism liable to widespread misuse

The Bill tabled by the Maharashtra government to tackle unlawful activities by organisations linked to left-wing **extremism** is unnecessary, and perhaps even unconstitutional. When existing laws seem adequate to tackle extremism, and the area affected by left-wing extremism is limited in the State, the only reason such a proposal has been made could be an **oblique** intent to crack down on lawyers, **dissenters** and human rights activists involved in taking up the cause of the marginalised. The Bill may fall foul of constitutional provisions, as it contains **overbroad** terms that may cover individuals and organisations that may pose no threat to public order. The core of the proposed law appears to be the questionable term 'urban Naxal', even though the phrase itself does not find a place in the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024. The Statement of Objects and Reasons talks about 'safe-houses' and 'urban dens' of the Maoist network in cities. It claims



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that existing laws are inadequate and that Naxal frontal organisations are active in the absence of a special law. Given that several provisions in the State's Bill are already found in the central law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, it is indeed a strange claim.

The most serious provisions that allow for declaring organisations unlawful and make it an offence to be a member of or in any manner assisting or participating in meetings of such organisations are too widely **worded**. An organisation, for instance, can be any group or body of persons whether or not known by any name or registration. 'Unlawful activity' includes not only words or actions that threaten public order but also anything that interferes with the administration of law or with its institutions and personnel. In effect, this may cover any organised protest. It not only includes promoting violence and the use of firearms or explosives but also "encouraging or **preaching disobedience** to established law and its institutions". This may be interpreted to include protests against or even condemnation of police excess, custodial violence or any miscarriage of justice. While committing an unlawful activity may **entail** a jail term of up to seven years, even one who is not a member of an unlawful organisation can be jailed for two years on

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the charge of **soliciting** aid for it or three years for promoting a meeting of the organisation. The most **draconian** provisions are the ones empowering the government to seize any house or building where unlawful activities take place, evict its occupants and take over its money and assets. The Bill is expected to lapse as the current Assembly may have already held its last session before elections later this year, but the questionable intent may survive into future regimes too.

SUMMARY

The Maharashtra government's proposed bill to combat unlawful activities by left-wing extremist organisations is deemed unnecessary and potentially unconstitutional. The proposed law may be aimed at cracking down on lawyers, dissenters, and human rights activists involved in the cause of marginalized groups. The bill contains overbroad terms that may cover individuals and organizations that may pose no threat to public order. The core of the proposed law is the term 'urban Naxal', which does not appear in the bill. The bill also includes provisions that declare organisations unlawful and make it illegal to be a member or assist

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in their meetings. The bill also includes provisions that allow the government to seize houses and assets where unlawful activities take place. The bill is expected to lapse before elections later this year, but the questionable intent may persist into future regimes.

Vocabulary

1. Extremism

Synonyms: Radicalism, fanaticism, zealotry

Antonyms: Moderation, tolerance, centrism

2. Oblique

Synonyms: Slanted, angled, indirect, askew

Antonyms: Straight, direct, perpendicular, straightforward

3. Dissenters

Synonyms: Objectors, protestors, nonconformists, dissidents

Antonyms: Conformists, supporters, adherents, advocates



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4. Worded

Synonyms: Phrased, expressed

Antonyms: Unspoken, unsaid

5. Preaching

Synonyms: Sermonizing, evangelizing

Antonyms: Listening, withholding

6. Disobedience

Synonyms: Defiance, insubordination, noncompliance

Antonyms: Obedience, compliance, submission

7. Entail

Synonyms: Involve, require, necessitate

Antonyms: Exclude, omit, and preclude

8. Soliciting

Synonyms: Requesting, asking, seeking

Antonyms: Refusing, rejecting, dismissing



9. Draconian

Synonyms: Harsh, severe, strict, stringent

Antonyms: Lenient, mild, gentle, lax

10. Overbroad

Synonyms: Excessively, immoderately

Antonyms: Moderately, temperately

EDITORIAL 02

Trade tact: On India's trade policy focus

More support and greater certainty in trade policy can bolster exports

India's goods exports rose for the third successive month this June, growing 2.55% to \$35.2 billion. Imports grew 5% to \$56.2 billion, **receding** from May's seven-month peak of nearly \$62 billion. The trade deficit, despite rising 9.4% from last June, has cooled slightly from the previous month. The oil **deficit**, which had hit a record \$13 billion in May, remains a worry despite narrowing to \$10 billion. Petroleum exports fell 18.3% to \$5.5 billion, and were below May's tally by almost the same extent. With oil prices **virtually**

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unchanged over the last two months, this signals a drop in export volumes, just as a sharper 19.6% rise in June's oil imports suggests a domestic demand spike. Overall oil imports have risen over 23% in the April to June quarter, with global prices about 9% higher than a year ago. The oil deficit accounts for almost half of the first quarter trade deficit of \$62 billion in the first quarter, which is 10.9% over that of last year.

The value of gold imports fell 38.7% in June to \$3.06 billion, the lowest so far in 2024-25. But silver imports, which have been rising sharply, jumped 377% in June. The government must investigate concerns about disruptions in India's bullion market due to concessional duty imports through the GIFT City under the free trade pact with the United Arab Emirates. Alongside, a **sustained** decline in India's gems and jewellery exports, which contracted for the seventh successive month in June, needs attention. The import bill, beyond oil and gold, has risen about 3% so far this year, from a 10% dip in the same quarter last year, with growth accelerating to 7% in June, indicating a recovery in **discretionary** domestic demand — a good **omen** for the economy. India's trade policy focus must stay on boosting exports rather than checking the deficit which has been termed a natural **corollary** of growing faster than the world. It is notable that at least 19 of India's top 30 export sectors have grown over May and June, from just 13 in April. **Waning** global inflation, and likely interest rate cuts can fuel demand, and the International

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Monetary Fund has raised its trade volume growth hopes to 3% in 2024 from 0.3% last year. For exporters to fully tap this opportunity after a rough year, and create more jobs in the process, the Centre must provide adequate resources as well as certainty for the sector, be it for the duty **remission** scheme or the interest equalisation scheme. Sudden policy shifts such as the recent **scrapping** of the latter scheme for all exporters, except for smaller firms (which have been promised support for only two more months), are certainly avoidable.

SUMMARY

India's goods exports and imports have seen a 2.55% growth in June, reaching \$35.2 billion and \$56.2 billion respectively. However, the trade deficit has slightly cooled, and the oil deficit remains a concern. Petroleum exports fell 18.3% to \$5.5 billion, while gold imports fell 38.7% to \$3.06 billion. The government must investigate concerns about disruptions in India's bullion market due to concessional duty imports through the GIFT City under the free trade pact with the United Arab Emirates. The import bill has risen about 3% so far this year, indicating a recovery in discretionary domestic demand. To fully tap into this opportunity and create more jobs, the Centre must provide adequate resources and



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certainty for the sector, such as the duty remission scheme or the interest equalisation scheme.

Vocabulary

1. Bolster

Synonyms: Support, reinforce, strengthen

Antonyms: Undermine, weaken, diminish

2. Receding

Synonyms: Retreating, withdrawing

Antonyms: Advancing, approaching

3. Deficit

Synonyms: Shortfall, lack, deficiency

Antonyms: Surplus, abundance, excess

4. Virtually

Synonyms: Nearly, almost, essentially

Antonyms: Actually, completely, fully

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5. Sustained

Synonyms: Maintained, prolonged, continued

Antonyms: Abandoned, discontinued, ceased

6. Discretionary

Synonyms: Optional, voluntary

Antonyms: Mandatory, compulsory

7. Omen

Synonyms: Portent, sign, prophecy

Antonyms: Coincidence, chance, normalcy

8. Corollary

Synonyms: Consequence, result, outcome

Antonyms: Cause, origin, antecedent

9. Waning

Synonyms: Diminishing, declining, decreasing

Antonyms: Waxing, increasing, growing



10. Remission

Synonyms: Reduction, alleviation, easing

Antonyms: Exacerbation, worsening, intensification

11. Scarapping

Synonyms: Abandoning, discarding

Antonyms: Retaining, keeping

