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Our Head Office : 110/1A & 110/2B, Ansec House, Tank Road, Yerwada, Pune, Maharashtra - 411006



Courtesy:- Business Today, Hindustan Times

Introduction

Recent protests have emerged across India from private transport operators opposing a newly enacted law replacing the colonial-era Indian Penal Code. This legislation imposes severe penalties, including a 10-year imprisonment or a substantial Rs 7 lakh fine, on drivers involved in serious accidents who fail to report to the authorities. Concerns about potential violence against drivers transporting injured individuals to hospitals have sparked criticism, calling for the repeal of the law and emphasizing the need for stakeholder consultations before implementing such significant changes.

Rajendra Kapoor, President of the All India Motor & Goods Transport Association, expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of prior consultation and urged discussions with government officials. Protests initiated by the association have led to road blockades in various states, disrupting vehicle movement and fuel supply. The ongoing disruption has also highlighted a perceived lack of public awareness regarding the new law's details and implications, resulting in lengthy queues at petrol pumps and intensifying the debate on the necessity and implementation of stringent road safety measures. With tensions escalating, transport operators increasingly demand open dialogue and reconsideration of the law's provisions.

While the central government is yet to initiate discussions with various stakeholders, state governments are actively working to prevent the strike from adversely affecting the public. In Maharashtra, authorities have urged the police to ensure an uninterrupted supply of petrol, diesel, and LPG cylinders amid the ongoing protests.

Meanwhile, in Gujarat, demonstrators have obstructed highways in Kheda, Valsad, Gir Somnath, Bharuch, and Mehsana districts. The protesters resorted to burning tires on certain routes, causing significant traffic disruptions.

Chhattisgarh witnessed over 12,000 private bus drivers declaring a strike, resulting in commuters being stranded at bus stations in Raipur, Bilaspur, Durg, and Rajnandgaon. Simultaneously, in West Bengal, truck and commercial vehicle drivers staged a blockade on National Highway number 2 near the Dankuni toll plaza in the Hooghly district. Travelers are advised to stay informed about the evolving situation, consider alternative routes, and plan accordingly to minimize disruptions.

Implications

- 1. Supply Chain : The ongoing strike is resulting in significant disruptions to the supply chain, causing shortages of vital goods such as petrol, diesel, kerosene, vegetables, and fruits due to interrupted transportation.
2. Impact on Citizens Lives: Citizens are directly impacted by the strike, encountering constraints in accessing essential resources and daily necessities.
3. Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) as a Trigger: The strike stems from discontent with the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), replacing the colonial-era Indian Penal Code. BNS enforces stricter penalties for hit-and-run accidents, including up to 10 years in prison and a ₹7 lakh fine for fleeing drivers.
4. Appeal for BNS Withdrawal: Truck drivers are urging the withdrawal of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), expressing concerns about its potentially disastrous impact on their profession. They argue that while the law has benefits, its negative aspects could lead to harassment, extortion, unnecessary detentions, and legal consequences.
5. Balancing Benefits and Drawbacks: Truck drivers recognize the potential advantages of the law but emphasize the need to address its drawbacks to prevent adverse consequences.

Concerns Transport Operators

- Private transport operators express concerns that the law may discourage drivers and lead to unjust punishments.
There are worries about potential mob violence targeting drivers transporting the injured to hospitals, underscoring the necessity for repealing the law.
Rajendra Kapoor, President of the All India Motor & Goods Transport Association, urges the government to consult stakeholders before making decisions, highlighting the absence of prior discussions and consultations.
The association advocates for discussions and consultations on the issue, conveying dissatisfaction with the decision-making process.
Rajendra Kapoor underscores the importance of prior meetings and consultations to prevent a misleading situation, noting a lack of awareness among people regarding the new law.

SPECIAL ADVISORY
"Private Transport Operators Protest, 01 Jan 2024"

SITUATION AS OF 2219 Hr , 02 JAN 2024

In response to the ongoing strike by truck drivers, the government has promptly taken action to address the concerns raised by the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC). A significant development from the meeting, led by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, is the decision to temporarily suspend the implementation of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita 106/2. This particular provision, which imposes ten years of punishment and fines for hit-and-run cases, will be put on hold pending further discussions. The Union Home Secretary has assured that concerns related to the new law will be openly considered, and negotiations between the government and AIMTC are currently underway with a commitment to finding an amicable resolution to the issues raised by transport workers.

Advisory on After-Effect

1. **Extended Negotiation Duration:** Considering the ongoing and dynamic nature of discussions between the government and the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC), it is expected that a comprehensive dialogue might extend over a considerable period. The resolution of concerns and the finalization of agreements may surpass initial expectations, potentially leading to renewed protests.
2. **Supply Chain Disruptions:** The temporary cessation of trucking operations during the strike has likely caused interruptions in the supply chain. Gradually restoring normalcy in the transportation of goods and commodities will necessitate a phased approach, potentially resulting in delays in the delivery of essential products.
3. **Clearance of Parked Vehicles:** As truck drivers resume their duties following the advisory, organized efforts will be required to clear parked vehicles from critical transportation hubs.
4. **Communication and Transparency:** Following the stop press advisory, it is imperative for both the government and AIMTC to uphold transparent communication channels. Providing regular updates to truck drivers, stakeholders, and the public will aid in managing expectations and reducing uncertainty in the logistics and transportation sector.
5. **Resumption Challenges:** Even upon reaching an agreement, the full-scale resumption of operations in the trucking industry may encounter challenges such as logistical coordination, vehicle mobilization, and adaptation to any revised regulations resulting from the negotiation process.

Business Implications

- Operational Disruption
- Financial Impact
- Legal Compliance Challenges
- Reputation Management
- Employee Productivity
- Supply Chain Resilience Testing
- Market Competitiveness
- Collaboration Opportunities
- Strategic Adaptation
- Long-Term Planning

Advisory

The situation will take 2 to 3 days to normalize. For those, who are in the transportation business the government actions and subsequent meetings will have to be carefully monitored. For other dependent businesses there is a need to manage and be prepared for such contingencies by optimizing supply chains, their security and stocking policies.

Important Tally numbers

- Fire: 101
- Police: 100
- Ambulance: 102
- Tourist Helpline: 1363
- Senior Citizen Helpline: 14567
- National Emergency Number: 112
- Women Helpline: 1091, 7827170170

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