



Avoidable row over direct cash scheme

There is trouble brewing on the question of the Union government declaring that the implementation of its plan to transfer cash directly to the bank accounts of intended beneficiaries of subsidies will take effect from January 2013. A dispassionate look at the issue suggests that the Election Commission has been browbeaten by the Opposition into seeking an explanation from the government about the timing of the announcement, which has coincided with the campaign for the Assembly election in Gujarat.

Due diligence by the EC would have revealed to it what it has now heard from the government in reply to its query which followed a complaint from the BJP — that the policy announcement on cash transfer was made in the last Budget Session of Parliament by Pranab Mukherjee, then finance minister. The government has also noted that its recent statement was only as regards implementation.

The Election Commission has been browbeaten by the Opposition into seeking an explanation from the government about the timing of the announcement

It is far from clear how the model code of conduct is invoked here. Under this code, governments are not supposed to announce a new policy or scheme roughly a month and a half before an election. In effect, no inducements should be offered to the electorate on poll eve. This is an important guideline. It provides for a level playing field for the Opposition.

In the present case, however, the merits and demerits of the policy have been debated for the past two years. The government has stuck to its view that transferring cash direct through the Aadhar mechanism would prevent subsidy pil-

ferage of thousands of crores of rupees. There is no newness here. When the implementation schedule was proposed last month, the Opposition parties merely called it "populism". The BJP escalated its Opposition only after AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal called the scheme an act of "bribery", without saying why. The idea of going to the EC on the ground of violation of the model code of conduct is clearly an afterthought even if four of the 51 districts chosen for implementation in the first phase fall in Gujarat. People have long known that the government favours the new scheme and its opponents — the BJP and the Left parties — are opposed.

The trouble with us is we have become too politicised a society and cannot look beyond our nose. The culprits are political parties, not the people.