

## People are affected, there may be riots, warns Supreme Court

Krishnadas Rajagopal

*Refuses govt plea to stay cases filed against demonetisation in other courts*



New Delhi November 18:

Foreboding “riots”, the Supreme Court on Friday refused the government’s plea to stay cases filed in High Courts and lower courts across the country against inconvenience caused by demonetisation, saying “how can we shut our doors to people when there is an issue of such magnitude”.

Noting that people have started becoming “frantic” for money, braving queues for hours, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India TS Thakur observed that the very fact that cases are being filed in courts all over is a signal that the problem is “serious and of magnitude”.

“They are going to the courts for relief. We cannot shut our doors to the people,” Chief Justice Thakur said.

The Bench said the government can file a transfer petition to shift all the cases filed in other courts to Delhi.

“This is very serious. This will require great consideration. People have become frantic, people are affected... There may be riots,” the Bench, also comprising Justice Anil R Dave, voiced its apprehension to Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi.

“That is completely wrong. People are patiently standing in lines,” Rohatgi, for the government, protested.

“There is suffering. There is difficulty and you cannot dispute that,” Chief Justice Thakur observed.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal submitted that 47 people have died post-November 8, in after-effects of demonetisation.

“Would we be issuing notifications by the day, by the hour, if we were not concerned about people’s problems? The length of the lines are reducing by the day,” Rohatgi claimed.

Chief Justice Thakur asked why the government has a problem in dispensing enough cash. “Tell us, is there any deficiency in ₹ 100 notes? They have not been demonetised. Why are they not been made available at least?” the Chief Justice asked.

The government acknowledged that there was a shortage of ₹ 100 notes as the now defunct ₹ 500 and ₹ 1,000 notes had formed 80 per cent of the currency in circulation before November 8.

“₹ 100 notes are not available; as ₹ 500 and ₹ 1,000 notes was over 80 per cent of the currency,” Rohatgi submitted.

But the Attorney General, in the same breadth, denied any “cash crunch”. He submitted that there was only trouble dispensing the newly-printed currency across the country — to post offices, ATMs, and banks. Chief Justice Thakur queried why the government chose to reduce the limit of exchange of currency notes to ₹ 2,000 from ₹ 4,500 despite the Supreme Court asking the Centre to do its best to alleviate the common man’s sufferings.

Rohatgi replied that debit cards can be swiped for cash at petrol bunks and a withdrawal limit of ₹ 2.5 lakh has been allowed for wedding purposes. Besides, farmers would get ₹ 50,000.

Sibal said: “People with Mercedes can afford to swipe their cards at petrol bunks, not farmers. And many who line up are illiterate... A family walked 20 km from Bastar to an ICICI Bank branch.” Sibal said ₹ 23-lakh crore worth notes have to be printed and ₹ 14-lakh crore worth currency was frozen as from November 8.



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Rohatgi at this point directed the government’s attack on Sibal, accusing him of attempting politics in court.

“I saw your press conference,” Rohatgi told Sibal.

“Was my press conference held in court? Then why are you bringing it here?” Sibal countered.

The Bench has asked both the Centre and Sibal to produce facts and figures on November 25, depicting the ground realities and sufferings caused to the people due to demonetisation.

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