Transfer of Infrastructure Assets to Monopoly Capital with the Neo-Liberal Tool of 'Asset-Monetization'

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'Creation through Monetization', the theoretical slogan for the monetization of revenue generating brownfield infrastructure assets by leasing out to private players, has been announced proudly by our Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on August 23rd 2021. The central government specifies it as a great innovation in the history of budgetary revenue 'owing to its ability to mobilize funds without losing ownership rights on the assets, without imposing any additional taxes and without taking any loans'. Moreover, the government also says that this programme facilitates the recycling of key infrastructure assets and also taps private sector efficiencies in operations and management of infrastructure.

The government continuously disseminates the 'benefits' associated with the 'Asset-Monetization'. In this context, Niti Aayog prepared and released two volumes describing the details of the pipeline. The first instalment of 'Asset-Monetization', to monetize brown field infrastructure assets as high as Rs. 6 lakh crores, will continue for four years from 2021 to 2025. The current year target is to the tune of Rs. 88,000 crores and the lease period will be 30 years. It is known to all about the serious effects of Covid-19 pandemic which threw the lives and livelihoods of majority into further critical conditions. Even, the Economic Survey, 2021 clearly mentioned it. But this serious issue became a non-issue for the government and shows the State's disconnection from the People's welfare. The policies that throw the lives of majority into miserable conditions are being powerfully popularized as heroic and boldsteps. The government used the context of disastrous Covid-19 pandemic to hurriedly formulate and establish all the relevant questionable policies regarding the 'Asset-Monetization'.

It is also hastening the process of identifying brown field infrastructure assets in the country, identifying how many could attract Monopoly Capital with high revenue possibilities, recognising the assets that can be rented out immediately, formulating the concessions and incentives that appeal to Monopoly Capital and moving amendments needed for the existing laws. This clearly reveals the fact that the miserable lives of people are not at all an issue for the government as it is totally disconnected from the People's welfare. In fact, the People's crisis is an opportunity for the government to formulate and implement pro-corporate, anti-people policies as quickly as possible. Because the people are totally distracted to resist them. It is appropriate to quote Naomi Klein, the Canadian author of the book 'The Shock Doctrine, the rise of Disaster Capitalism' wherein she explains the behaviour of the governments in this way- wait' for crisis, declare extra-ordinary policies, suspend some or all democratic norms and push corporate wish list through as quickly as possible'. This can be clearly seen in the process of pushing 'Asset Monetisation' programme. Moreover, it is part and parcel of the process of transferring

entire wealth of our nation to Powerful Monopoly Capital in the shortest possible time. Therefore, progressive organisations are seriously protesting this organised loot and legalised plunder.

In fact, 'Asset Monetisation' is a new, innovative Neo-liberal policy tool strongly formulated by the Comprador Bourgeoisie governments to transfer very crucial infrastructure assets to Monopoly Capital so as to strengthen crony capitalism. The creation of relevant basis for this tool was started as early as in 2014. Though the present government abolished planning commission in the same year, it is functioning in a more planned and systematic way with the strong aim of transferring entire wealth of our nation to Monopoly Capital.

What are the Government Actions to Transfer Infrastructure Sector to Monopoly Capital?

The process of strengthening Monopoly Capital in infrastructure sector which is pivotal for internal safety, security and development, has been started as early as in 2014. The initiation of 'Infrastructure Investment Trusts' [InvITs] is part of it. These trusts will make investments in infrastructure projects. They utilises as high as 80% of mobilized funds on brown field infrastructure assets and 20% on the projects which are at the stage of construction. The infra-structure assets that are already existing are known as Brownfield Infrastructure while Greenfield are those new ones that have to be built from the ground up. The present Asset Monetisation will lease out these brownfield infrastructures. Though this programme is declared on August 23, 2021, the foundation was created in 2014 itself. Further, Kelkar Committee Report, 2015, recommends 'Asset-Monetization' as the best alternative to Public-Private Partnership. Thus, it gives a theoretical basis for the lease programme.

The Real Estate Investment Trusts [REITs] have been started in 2019. The government stated that InvITs and REITs play a crucial role in taking brownfield infrastructure on lease. It proposed abolition of capital gains tax for these trusts to attract investors. Moreover, the shareholders who receive dividends should pay Income Tax while the trust itself is exempt from paying tax. To attract private investments for 'Asset-Monetization', the government has also proposed to bring these trusts under the purview of Insolvency and Bankruptcy code to protect them and also to provide them tax benefits under section 54EC of the Income Tax Act, 1961. All this is truly loss to the treasury but the loss is inevitable to strengthen Monopoly Capital in the infrastructure sector. These two trusts could mobilize as high as 9.7 billion dollars by July 2021. The only remaining process is to take assets for lease.

National Infrastructure Pipeline for Infrastructure

To achieve the target of US $5 trillion worth economy by 2025, it is necessary to accelerate the development of infrastructure. Its goal, declared openly, is to increase the wealth of billionaires. However, this process is closely related to the strengthening of Monopoly Capital, establishing and reinforcing its domination over our infrastructure. To realize this, brown field infrastructure is readied for the Monopoly Capital to 'ease' their lease. For this, the Greenfield infrastructure should be built.It is 'risky' for the private players

to make investments in Greenfield infrastructure. So, the government took up this responsibility of building these projects from scratch, develop them into a brownfield infrastructure and lease them to monopoly capital and raise the wealth of the rich.

With this goal, National Infrastructure Pipeline is announced in December 2019 to build Rs. 111 lakh crore worth of infrastructure over a period of six years. The share of public investment on infrastructure in Gross Domestic Product during 2008-2012 is to the tune of 7%. Subsequently, it has declined to 5.8% during 2013-2017. In order to raise its share, the government allocated Rs. 10.2 lakh crore in 2018 and Rs. 10 lakh crores in 2019 to this sector. In fact, this sector acquired significance in our country only from the view point of the Global Infrastructure needs.

The Global Infrastructure Outlook, 2017, states that this sector requires 94 lakh crore dollars during 2016-2040. As high as 50% of this amount should come from Asia and China, India and Japan should play a key role in it.

The question is how to mobilise the Rs. 111 lakh crores for National Infrastructure Pipeline? It is decided that 83 to 85% of the financial resources should be mobilized from traditional sources of finance-budget and non-budget financial resources and loans. The remaining 15-17% financial resources should be mobilised through alternative 'innovative methods' like Asset-Monetization. For the purpose of infrastructure finance, Development Finance Institution, DFI is established and National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill [2021] is passed in March 2021. Its equity capital is Rs. 20000 crores and is expected to create credit to the tune of Rs. 5 lakh crores over a period of three years.
The list of Central Government infrastructure assets prepared by Niti Aayog to accelerate the process of 'Asset-Monetization' are as follows: (Table)

The assets are categorised as Core and non-core for the purpose of 'Asset-Monetization'. The core assets are centred on commercial goals. This consists of Roads, Railways, Airport, Ports, Networks related to electricity generation and distribution, Pipelines, Warehouses, etc. The non-core consists of Land Parcels and buildings.

The 'Asset-Monetization' programme is expected to raise 70% of targeted revenue from 1) Roads 27% 2) Railways 25% 3) Electricity 15%. The assets identified for lease immediately are

1. 26,700 km of roads belonging to 22 stretches
2. 400 railway stations
3. 90 passenger trains
4. 28,600 km transmission lines

In addition, Bharat Fibre Network, Towers of BSNL, MTNL, Warehouses, Infrastructure assets related to Ports, Civil Aviation, Sports Stadium, Mineral Resources are identified.

Land Details

The widely circulated discussion between Montek Singh Ahulwalia, Deputy Chairman of erstwhile planning commission and Ajay Shah, economist in National Institute for Public Finance and Policy about the 'Asset-Monetization' has to be examined. Ajay Shah argues that assets will be utilised efficiently only when they are sold. But Montek Singh Ahluwalia

argues that as valuable land is involved in infrastructure. Therefore, it is advisable to lease the assets. However, in the entire discussion people doesn't exist and the government appears as a commercial entity functioning with the sole aim of benefiting Monopoly Capital. Further, Ajay Shah states that the warehouses of Food Corporation of India in Mumbai own 120 acres of valuable land which is lying idle. Therefore, it has to be sold; this is the best way to reduce public debt, he added.

Further, the Government Land Information System [GLIS] reveals that the Central Government owns land to the extent of 15,531 Sq. Km in 72 parcels and one third of it is lying idle. Thus, a strong background is prepared to sell the valuable land owned by the government. In fact, it is the Nation's land and people's land.

Sl.No	Asset Class	Details/Value
1	Roads	1,32,499 KM Highways
2	Power Transmission	i. 171,950 KM Transmission lines ii. 262 Sub-stations with 4,44,738 MVA transmission capacity
3	Power Generation	i. Thermal 60,224 MW ii. Hydro 4912 MW iii. Solar/Renewable 7071 MW
4	Airports	137
5	Ports	Handling Capacity 1535 MMTPA
6	Telecom Towers	69,047 towers
7	Optical Fibre Cables	5,25,706 KM laid under Bharat net
8	Railway Stations	7325
9	Railway Tracks	1,26,366 track KM [67,956 KM route length]
10	Natural Gas Pipeline	19,998 KM
11	Petroleum pipeline	14,623 KM
12	Warehouses	818 lakh MT
13	Sports Stadiums	5 National Stadia and various regional centres

Asset Leasing

This process was started long back under various names. However, the recent announcement is the process of its aggressive implementation.

During 2009-2010 and 2014-2015, the NHAI has given around 2400 kilometre National Highway for lease on the basis of Operate-Maintain-Transfer [OMT]. The model of Toll-Operate-Transfer [TOT] is introduced in 2016 in which the right to collect toll will be given for 15 - 30 years. Moreover, this structure provides for escalation of toll rate with inflation. Out of 5 rounds of TOT covering a stretch of 2395 km, 3 round involving 1400 kms have been completed and raised Rs. 17000 crores. Similarly, in June 2020, the Maharashtra Road Development Corporation sold toll rights of Mumbai-Pune Expressway and Old Mumbai-Pune Corridor. Furthermore, in 2018, toll rights of 682 kms of roads which have 85% of commercial traffic and belongs to 9 Highway structures of Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat have been sold. In 2006, the Airports of Delhi and Mumbai are given for 30 year lease on the basis of Operate-Maintain-Develop. The leasing of six brownfield Airports – Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram, Mangalore and Lucknow have taken place in 2019 for which the concession period is 50 years. Public Private Partnership

has been continuing in Telecom sector. BSNL and MTNL have given their towers and mobile sites for lease. Similar trend can be seen with Bus Terminals, Railway lines and Railway stations. Adani Group has already entered into the leasing business of Airports, Ports, Electricity, Gas, Oil and Coal.

All these assets are people's wealth. Tamil Nadu Government is seriously opposing 'Asset-Monetization'. It is opposing the privatisation of Salem Steel Plant. Among the assets recognised for monetization, 4 Airports, one Heritage Train and some important Highways belong to Tamil Nadu. The land and the assets belong to the people of Tamil Nadu.

One of the six Airports won by Adani Group is the Trivandrum Inter-national Airport which belongs to Kerala. Kerala government is opposing its privatisation and has approached the Apex Court in this regard. Now the case is in Supreme Court.

Is there any decline in Public Debt?

In the name of reducing public debt and achieving development, government aggressively implemented - 'Make in India' to attract foreign investment; implemented privatisation of public sector undertakings; permitted Monopoly Capital to enter into the fields of Defence, Minerals, Coal; implemented liberalization of financial institutions and asset monetisation. What are its consequences? The wealth of corporate forces massively increased which also strengthened their domination on the entire wealth of our nation. But, is there any decline in the public debt? No, its on the rise.

The wealth of a nation belongs to its people. It is the responsibility of the elected government to protect it and to use it for the welfare of the people and to hand it over to the next generation safely. Contrastingly, the elected government considers the wealth of our nation as its individual private property. This phenomenon is popularized aggressively. Consequently, the process of transferring total wealth of our nation to Monopoly Capital has been hastened both with traditional methods as well as innovating new Neo-Liberal policy tools.

The ratio of tax revenue and Gross Domestic Product is at its minimum as the government is seriously minimising the corporate taxes and in addition providing various tax concessions and incentives. Moreover, the burden of indirect taxes including GST is already heavy for the majority who are living in miserable conditions. Hence, there is no scope to raise them further. Thus, debt is the only source remaining for the government. Consequently, it is on the rise continuously. The share of public debt in Gross Domestic Product is as high as 60.5% in 2020-21 and has been further increased to 61.7% in 2021-22. Foreign debt is to the extent of 11.5 billion dollars. Thus, the share of public debt has crossed the danger limit.

Experience of Other Countries

It is stated that the basis for our current Asset Monetization is the programme implemented in Australia in 2013 in the name of Asset Recycling. Only three states of Australia out of 8 states implemented it. It is strange to notice that Abu Dhabi and Kuwait have taken the infrastructure for lease. Australian Competition and Consumer

Commission Chairman, Rod Sim, warns our country over this measure, indicating their bitter experience.

UK experienced serious problems and uncertainty due to the privatization of its Railways. Therefore, they are initiating the programme of re-nationalisation of Railways. Also the democrats in US are initiating measures to ensure that infrastructure is built by the government only.

In fact, Infrastructure is the key sector for any country. It is enough to ensure the destruction of a country's infrastructure instead of waging a war against it. Hence, the transfer of significant National Infrastructure Assets to corporate forces has to be condemned and protested seriously.

Indian Experience in the Past

'Asset-Monetization' is already taking place but under different names. Temple lands, properties of Cooperative Banks, Housing Boards, assets of Municipalities and their shopping complexes have simply been transferred to the exploitative class. Will it come back to the people again? No, it won't. This helped in strengthening the modern feudal or neo-zamindari class that works as the compradors to the Monopoly Capital. What is the public's gain or government's gain from the Public Private Partnership programme?

Conclusion

For decent, safe and secured lives of people, the sectors of Health, Education, Transportation and Electricity must be in the Public Sector only. One of the demands of the present ongoing farmers' struggle that is continuing since a year is the abolition of Electricity Amendment Bill, 2020. Contrastingly, the present monetization programme intends to transfer the assets related to Electricity sector to Monopoly Capital in the name of lease. This is the exploitation tool of imperialists. The factor behind the brutal incident that happened in 2012 in Delhi, known as the Nirbhaya incident, is the lack of Public Transportation system. This was clearly revealed by justice Verma committee. What about the Hajipur incident that occurred last year in Telangana in which three women were raped and murdered owing to the lack of Public Transportation system? This is the factor that caused the deaths of many pregnant women who could have been saved had there been public transportation to move them to hospitals in time. With these state of affairs can we reduce maternal mortality rate?

One important dimension which is highly harmful to they out has well as to the society due to the transfer of transportation sector to powerful corporate forces. In the case of transportation of drugs and human trafficking, is it possible for the intelligence officials to enter check them strongly in the ports, airports controlled by powerful corporate forces? On September 11, 2021, as high as 3000 kg hero in worth Rs. 21000 crores seized by Directorate of Revenue Intelligence at Mundra port in Gujarat run by Adani group. The government, port owners and media were silent for more than a week. The Governments that care for the welfare of the people should make infra-structure facilities accessible to all. Contrary to this, the present government is announcing various policies, constructing

Green Field infrastructure, handing over brown field infrastructure for lease, attracting corporate forces, offering them concessions and incentives only for the benefit of Monopoly Capital. With the present scheme of 'Asset-Monetization' the majority oppressed people will be deprived of the access to basic infra structure facilities which are very much essential for survival. Because, the government builds Greenfield infrastructure with a view to transfer them to Monopoly Capital by converting them into high revenue yielding brown field infrastructure, this Framework will not create the basic infrastructure facilities needed by the majority and consequently they will be thrown out of accessibility.

Since 2014, the government has aggressively aggravated the programme of transferring the entire wealth of our nation to corporate forces and Monopoly Capital in a systematic and organized manner by passing new laws, by amending existing laws and by inventing new methods to make this process legal. The present ongoing farmers' struggle is against this transfer of cultivable land to corporate forces. This movement is strong and stable. Similar struggle can be seen against the privatization of Visakha Steel Plant in Andhra Pradesh. The exploited class should be strongly united and consolidated to extend sustained support to the ongoing movements. This is the only way to end the exploitation and to build the structures which ensure decency and equality in the lives of all the people.