

'Unlike Centre, Chhattisgarh's put money in people's pockets'

As the Congress prepares to launch protests against economic slowdown, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister **BHUPESH BAGHEL** tells Archis Mohan that his state has escaped its effects as his government has pursued policies that have put money in the pockets of workers, farmers, housewives, and tribals. Edited excerpts:

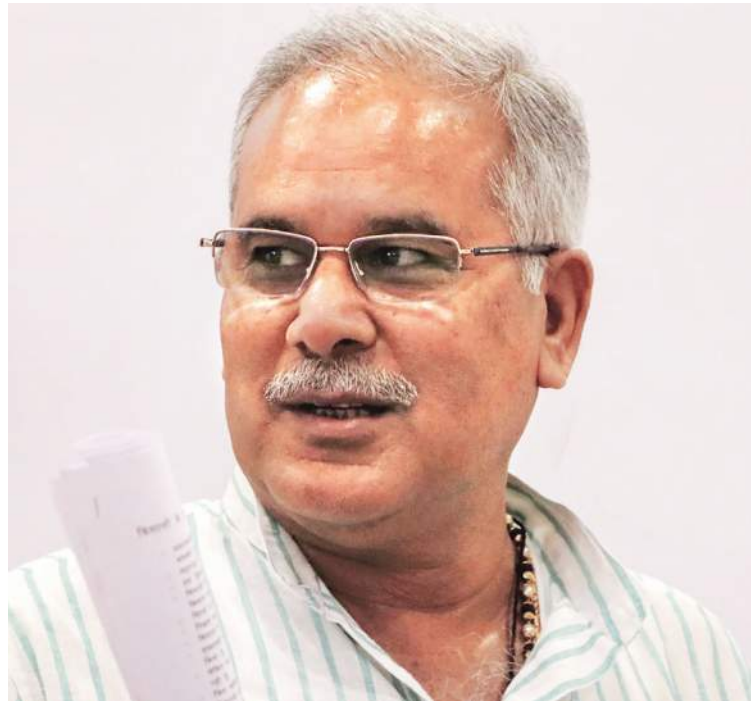
It is nearly a year since your government was formed. What do you think are its achievements?
Our two principal promises in the election were farm loan waiver and purchasing paddy from farmers at ₹25 per kg (₹2,500 per quintal). We won 68 seats, a three-fourths majority. We have delivered on both of our promises.

The biggest achievement has been a drop in Naxal violence by 40 per cent. We had said we will have a dialogue, not with the Maoists but with our people — with tribals, with traders and businessmen, with social activists and journalists. The result is that we now have a better understanding of their needs. Our slogan is *vishwas* (trust), *vikas* (development), and *suraksha* (protection).

To win trust, we returned 4,200-acre land of 1,700 farmers in Bastar, purchased tendu leaves at ₹4,000 (from ₹2,500) per standard sack, and launched the chief minister's Suposhit Yojana to increase nutrition levels. The CM Haat Bazaar clinic scheme has meant OPD has increased 10 times in Bastar. This year, not a single death has been recorded because of gastroenteritis. We have opened 105 schools in the heart of the Naxal territory, which were closed for the past 13 years. Naxals are finding it difficult to recruit people, as a letter that we intercepted from a Naxal recruiter to his commander has revealed, which is evidence that our policies have worked. Farmer suicides have dropped.

Your party (the Congress) is planning protests on economic slowdown. What is the situation in your state?

Chhattisgarh has escaped the ill-effects of slowdown. Purchasing power has increased in the state. We have spent ₹20,000 crore to purchase paddy at ₹25 per kg. This money, the benefit of loan waiver, halving of electricity bills up to 400 units, 35 kg



rice per family each month, ₹4,000 for tendu leaves sack — all these decisions have put money in the pockets of workers, tribals, farmers, housewives, all sections of the society.

Q&A

The country could have escaped the slowdown if the Narendra Modi government had adopted this Chhattisgarh model. There is money in people's hands in the state, which has increased sales of textiles, footwear, motorcycles and cards, fans, coolers and air-conditioners. Sale of submersible pumps in Chhattisgarh has increased twofold. There is an 84 per cent increase in the sale of gold and jewellery.

The point to remember as policymakers is that farmers and workers do not keep money with themselves. They spend. Money given to corporate sector is used by them to first repay their loans and only then think about setting up new projects. The Modi government has given corporates tax cuts worth ₹1.74 trillion.

It has been nearly two months now, but there is no positive impact in the market. We implemented our policies in December and automobile sector saw an increase of 36.5 per cent in sales by March in Chhattisgarh. In the past quarter, revenue from land registry in Chhattisgarh increased from ₹92 crore to ₹152 crore.

Chhattisgarh government has launched a new industrial policy.

We have announced several steps, including turning leasehold land to freehold and setting up of a gems and jewellery park. The focus is on non-core sectors, like food processing and those associated with minor forest produce, including pharmaceuticals since we have jungles.

You have threatened protest if the Centre does not buy paddy at ₹2,500 per quintal? What if it does not agree?

The Centre announces the procurement policy, not the states.

We procure with the support of marketing federations. If we need rice, the Centre allots it to us. Now, the Centre says it will not procure rice from Chhattisgarh if we give bonus to farmers. This is not based on any law passed in Parliament, but a circular from June 2014 after the Modi government assumed office at the Centre. The Centre relaxed this order (for Chhattisgarh) in 2017 and 2018, so why can't it do now? Is it that only elections are important? Chhattisgarh's case is different. They relaxed it then, given Chhattisgarh's unique situation. How has the situation changed now?

However, I am an optimist. I have met union food minister and also written to the PM. I raised the issue during the NITI Aayog meeting. In Chhattisgarh, paddy is the only crop. Our irrigated area is a mere 31 per cent, and 44 per cent is jungle. Our farmers cannot be compared with Punjab and Haryana. There each acre yield is 20 quintals, while its just 8 quintals in Chhattisgarh.

The biggest achievement (of this bonus) is the 40 per cent drop in Naxal violence. Either give plough in the hands of the youth, or give them guns. If we don't motivate them to hold the plough, naxals will give them guns.

Nyay, or minimum income guarantee, was the Congress manifesto promise. We hear that Rahul Gandhi wanted it to be implemented in Chhattisgarh. What is the situation now?

We are waiting. As soon as the high command (of the Congress) orders, we will implement it.

Before forming the government, you had demanded transparency in mining contracts. Now activists have alleged...

Tell me one mine where work has started in the past 11 months, *aarop lagane se kya hota hai* (it is easy to fling allegations).

India offers visa on arrival for UAE citizens

India has granted visa-on-arrival facility to the citizens of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with an aim to enhance people-to-people contacts and trade relations, officials said on Sunday. The visa-on-arrival

facility for the nationals of the UAE came into effect from Saturday.

It will be available for a period of up to 60 days with double entry for business, tourism, conference and medical pur-

poses, a government official said. This facility is aimed at further strengthening people to people contacts and trade relations as well as strategic ties between the two countries.

PTI