



## How Chhattisgarh has stalled a historic judgment

The Salwa Judum judgment was delivered 10 years ago, but nothing has been done to implement it.

### The judgement:

1. Ten years ago the supreme court delivered a historic judgment banning Salwa Judum, a vigilante movement started in 2005 and sponsored by the Chhattisgarh and Central government, ostensibly to fight against the Maoists.
2. The judges also ruled that the use of surrendered Maoists and untrained villagers in frontline counter-insurgency operations as Special Police Officers (SPOs) was unconstitutional.
3. It directed that the existing SPOs be redeployed in traffic management or other such safe duties. Other matters, especially prosecution of security forces and others involved in human rights violations, and rehabilitation of villagers who had suffered violence, were left pending since the State had been asked to submit comprehensive plans for this.

### Follow up:

1. Ten years on, nothing has been done to implement the judgment. Instead, the State government has merely renamed the SPOs. They are now known as the District Reserve Guard (DRG).
2. Conversations with DRG members have revealed that most of them are captured or surrendered Maoists and are given automatic weaponry as soon as they join the police force. Some of them get one three months of training, and some not even that.
3. They commit the most excesses against their former fellow villagers, suffer the most casualties in any operation, and are paid much less than the regular constabulary, all the reasons the judges had outlawed their use.



## The heavy footprint of a light rail

A part of the land that has been earmarked for acquisition for the light rail in Kerala are wetlands.

### Highlights:

1. A light rail is a symbol of modernity that would surely appeal to the vanity of a society's establishment. What is less evident though is the cost at which it could come.
2. These are not just the upfront costs of installing one but also the hidden environmental impact, which can vary enormously according to geography and the project's spread.
3. A light rail project has found favour with the Government of Kerala. It's unique selling proposition, apparently, is that it will reduce very substantially the travel time between the two extremities of the State, namely the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram in the south and the town of Kasargod in its north.
4. So far, the project has mostly drawn criticism from environmental groups but there are also economic considerations that must be brought to the table when judging its desirability.
5. It may seem odd to say this as the economy is embedded in nature and we cannot ignore environmental costs. However, there are instances when the environmental impact of alternative projects is the same but the economic returns vary significantly and vice versa.

### Environmental costs

1. What are the environmental costs of yet another rail line in Kerala? The land here is of an undulated topography combined with an often rocky surface that is prone to crumble when dislodged.
2. Excessive quarrying and construction have already left it vulnerable to torrential rain, as seen in the devastating landslides recorded across the State in recent years.
3. Therefore, the first thought that comes to mind when contemplating another railway, light though it may be, is how it will impact the stability of the earth's surface along its course.



4. So far, we have only considered the consequences of the land use at stake. However, natural capital comprises not only the earth's surface, and the services it renders to us, but also the ecosystem as a whole.
5. It has been pointed out that a part of the land that has been earmarked for acquisition for the project are wetlands, including paddy fields. This should concern us. Paddy is the staple food of Malayalees. Its production in Kerala has been in decline for over half a century.
6. Part of this is explained by economic factors but some part of it is due to the lack of an assured water supply. A double whammy of building over paddy fields and shrinking water bodies threatens food security.

### **Taking into account alternatives**

1. It is not anyone's case that the government should not develop transportation. The point is that it should take into account all alternatives.
2. Kerala already has a railway line that is two-laned for the most part. There is an international airport in every urban conurbation. It is well connected by road, with one of the higher road densities among States.
3. But of the highest promise are the possibilities of transportation over water. There is at present an ongoing project for transportation through inland waterways.
4. Finally, nothing prevents the government from developing a sea-borne ferry service connecting Thiruvananthapuram with Kasargod, and all the ports in between. This would leave the land untouched.

### **Mixed bag**

Restoring the health of every constituent sector is a must for long-term growth in exports.

### **Highlights:**

1. India's merchandise exports reached an all-time quarterly high of \$95 billion in the three months ended June, providing welcome cheer on the economic front.
2. That the record was notched up during a quarter when the second wave of the pandemic hit its peak, and amid varying degrees of lockdowns, is all the more noteworthy.



3. Exports last month surged 47% from June 2020 to \$32.5 billion. Even discounting the fact that the year-earlier period provided an anomalous base as the economy had just begun reopening from a protracted nationwide lockdown, growth in shipments was still a robust 30% when compared with the pre-pandemic June of 2019.
4. Propelling the surge from the 2019 levels were non-rice cereals, which quadrupled; iron ore, which more than doubled; and organic and inorganic chemicals that rose 62%.
5. Engineering goods exports had the biggest jump in dollar terms, adding \$2.73 billion in value, or 42% over June 2019, as the rising vaccination coverage and economic recovery in key developed markets including the EU and the U.S. bolstered demand.
6. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was enthused enough by the export performance to posit that shipments of goods to overseas markets could touch the \$400 billion mark this fiscal, a figure which, if achieved, would represent an annual record.

### **Key sectors struggling:**

1. Trade data, however, reveals that a significant driver of the export growth has been the runaway rally in commodity prices that have benefited from the accelerated reopening of major economies, as well as an increased appetite for raw materials and grains in China.
2. On the other hand, the crucial job-generating export sectors including readymade garments, leather and leather products and tea all posted double-digit declines from June 2019 levels, reflecting the deeper structural problems that dog each one of them.
3. If the tea industry has been facing a long-term downtrend exacerbated by inadequate product variety, lack of marketing-savvy and sharp competition from rivals including Sri Lanka and Kenya, the leather goods segment has been put on the ropes by a combination of short-sighted policy measures, WTO-mandated withdrawal of export incentives and a pandemic-induced slowdown in orders.



4. For a segment that provides large-scale employment, the recent imposition of import duty on a key raw material has thrown the sector's very viability into question.
5. With the Government dragging its feet on notifying the rates applicable under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) scheme, exporters are still unsure of how to price their products while bidding for orders.
6. A container shortage and heightened congestion have also sent freight rates out of Indian ports soaring. Policymakers need to look beyond headline numbers and expedite action to restore the health of every constituent sector if economically enduring long-term growth in exports is to be ensured.