**Comments: “Draft bills relating to surface and groundwater” are Postmortem Reports!!!**

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**I. General Observations**

**Any ‘Act’ or ‘Law’ can be implementable only with good governance. The four pillars of Indian Constitution are corrupt to the core. This has grown leaps and bounds with regional party culture. Nobody can stop this with “vote for note culture”. As long as we don’t change this system any number of Acts or Laws will not improve the quality of life in India but serve only as postmortem reports. We had “Garibi Hatao” but the policies of governments made more than 75% of the wealth concentrating in the hands of few business houses. UPA government formulated Acts/Laws/Rules; NDA government replaced/replacing them with another set; & Future government will again replace them with other set. The vicious circle repeats itself and in this process the Precautionary Principle lost in din. The casualty is the public money. We need a permanent structure to tackle and resolve the issues!!!**

The drafts (1) “National Water Framework Bill, 2016” and (2) “Model Bill for the conservation, Protection, regulation and Management of groundwater” are highly “Hypothetical-Theoretical Exercises” only, which are far from the “Practical Issues”. They are not looking like “Acts” but looking like “Postmortem Reports”.

We need an institutional Framework Act but not a postmortem reports. Some of these I discussed in my book “Irrigation and irrigation projects in India: Tribunals, Disputes and Water Wars Perspective – 2016, BS Publications, Hyderabad”. In line with my recommendation, Hon’ble Ministers for Finance and Water Resources expressed the need to create a permanent body to tackle the intra-state and inter-state disputes unlike the present river based tribunal system filled with judges. The Acts must be in this direction.

Water is a renewable resource. The two primary sources are snow melt and precipitation. They are highly variable in both space and time. The presence of natural variability/repetitive cyclic variation part of climate change complicates the scenario further. Also, they are further modified by ecological changes of a location and or a region. Any methodology suggested relating to both the groundwater and the surface water must take these in to account. Without such a mechanism, the bill becomes anfractuous system. There are no such proposals in the two drafts. We have seen this practically with watershed system in the 7th five-year and 8th five-year plans. Here thousands of crores of rupees spent has gone in to pockets of bureaucrats-politicians nexus. With these Acts, such a system should not become a repetition of watersheds.

With severe intra-state and intra-region disputes under regional setups, the theoretical exercise fails in almost all proposals in 100%. With the biased awards by tribunals become the issues more complicated. Take the case of Brijesh Kumar Tribunal award on Krishna River water sharing. This is a “technical fraud” enacted by the tribunal favouring one state at the cost of another state. These need, thus, first the study of agro-climate of a location-region-nation.

The major drawback is ineffective central supervision on projects. Take for example, the cases of projects initiated by the two newly formed states, namely Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Telangana dumped the projects near to completion and took up new and with revised plans in an adhoc manner [goes on changing] and projects relating to lakes & drinking water by spending lakhs of crores of rupees. Same is the case with Andhra Pradesh government wherein to meet the real estate water needs they cut-short the main project and other ongoing projects and built new project wasting public money without understanding its repercussions on people of dry region of the state.

Unfortunately media is under the control of these two governments and the top central leaders without going in to the facts about these projects [recently Parliamentary Committee also did the same], they started praising such projects. The main issue here is, if the projects initiated by the previous governments are implemented, the credit goes to then Chief Ministers. To avoid this, they are prepared to waste public money. Centre never asked these two governments to submit a white paper on these or released a white paper for public comments. As a result both the governments started media war. Unfortunately even the media never asked them to release white paper but presents the war of words. Under this disguise both the ruling bosses are minting money. To kill the opposition on these, they are openly purchasing the opposition MLAs, MLCs & MPs – speakers, whole heartedly supporting such unethical actions and courts stopped intervening on such vital issues. Unfortunately, with all these there is no mechanism to bring to the notice of the public on such vital issues by independent bodies as media rarely encourage such. We in fact needed Acts to curb such actions by rulers. Without such actions, the Acts like these two have zero value. This is true with almost all states in India.

Let me present few practical scenarios. Similar cases could be seen elsewhere also:

**1.** **Two drinking water Reservoirs/Lakes in Hyderabad in Telangana State**

Himayatsagar and Osmansagar Lakes spreading over 10,000 acres providing drinking water to around 12.5 lakh people since 1960 and between 1930 to 1960 drinking as well irrigation needs were met. To protect the quantity of flows in to the lakes, in 1989 a GO 50 was issued; and in 1994 another GO 192 was issued to protect the quality of flows in to the lakes. By merging these two GOs, in 1996 GO 111 was issued to protect the quantity and quality of flows in to the lakes. Here buffer zone was defined as 10 km radius from the full tank levels. Also, specified living zones for people in that buffer zone in which 90% of the area was classified as agriculture.

Within few days of issuing the GO, the very same government permitted a polluting industry against GO111. Environmental groups approached the Supreme Court. The Hon’ble bench delivered a land mark judgment on 1st December 2000 asking the government to close all those polluting industries located in the prohibited zone; and accordingly they were closed. Here, the bench observed that GO111 is valid under Environmental Act of 1986 and stipulated “Precautionary Principle”.

Yet the very same government with the tacit support from the NDA-I government at the center at that time established Shamshabad Airport by encroaching 2200 acres in to Himayatsagar buffer zone & full tank level; and later allowed Outer Ring Road Phase-I obstructing water flows in to the lake. Environmental groups filed PILs in the Andhra Pradesh High Court on these. The Andhra Pradesh High Court benches dumped the GO111 & Supreme Court order of 2000 in to dustbin. This encouraged private players to establish activities against GO111 and Supreme Court order of 2000. I approached CBI in person on these issues in 2006, but after hearing for few hours they took copies of my submissions and said, sorry we can’t help you. Then I filed a PIL in the Andhra Pradesh High Court in 2007 [W.P.No.9386/07] on behalf of environmental groups. On this the government submitted a list containing violations against the GO111; and later Municipal Administration & Urban Development Department of Government of Andhra Pradesh issued a Memo No.14046/I1/07 dated 12-10-2007. This was submitted to the court and the court directed the government to circulate this widely. This was published in media. The government also submitted that they will bring out “Lake Protection Authority” with reference to court’s direction on the same W.P. on 02-02-2010; but they issued GO 157 dated 08-04-2010 establishing “Lake Protection Committee”, a toothless organization in place of Lake Protection Authority. The government approached the court asking permission to amend the GO111 but withdrew the same with the remarks from the bench. Later bench asked the government to appoint the Lake Protection Authority or otherwise court itself will do that. But by the next hearing the judge on the bench got promotion as judge of the Supreme Court and since then the case was wrapped up under cupboard.

Now, the government initiated to separate full tank level from buffer zone in favour of violators for a hefty price. This is clear from the way the Chief Minister of the state utilized hospitality in the premises of the top violator of GO 111 and at the same time praising him. This gave wrong signal.

Now city based NGO approached National Green Tribunal [NGT]. NGT in its interim order on 17-03-2016 ordered the government to identify all the unauthorized constructions. The government submitted the list in which 12,442 structures are illegal. They include both the government as well as private constructions. These are several times higher than those submitted to the Andhra Pradesh High Court in 2007 with my PIL. As per the Memo cited above, several agencies were identified to see no further violations. But they simply watched the violations. This resulted water flows reduced by more than 50% and water quality deteriorated with the time. Now they are planning to establish STPs against precautionary principle stipulated by the Supreme Court.

Note**: From the above narration, it is clear that the main culprit is government. Same is the case all over India. As long as bureaucrats-politicians nexus use government orders to collect bribes, it is rarity to achieve the targeted goals of any Law or Act. This needs good governance and not new laws or Acts!!! We have seen the recent scenario of NGT versus MoEF&CC, the later trying supremacy over the former.**

**2. Inter-state and Intra-state sharing of Krishna River Water**

To understand the deficiencies in intra-state and inter-state river projects, let me present the case of Krishna River.

In resolving the water sharing issue of Krishna River among the three riparian states, namely Maharashtra, Karnataka and undivided Andhra Pradesh Justice Bachawat tribunal was appointed by the central government in April 1969. The basics depended upon the water availability. At the time of assessing the tribunal has 78 years data, which was agreed by the three riparian states, was used to distribute the water available in three out of four years as the minimum level [75% probability level]. Accordingly each state has built the projects to utilize the allocated water. After 2013 two new problems joined the scene. They are [1] bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in to Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh states; and [2] the second tribunal, Brijesh Kumar Tribunal award that changed completely the first tribunal award affecting the water availability to projects in the downstream states.

In the case of former, there should not be any problem in sharing of the water as such as the water was allocated region-wise to three regions in undivided Andhra Pradesh and project-wise in each of the three regions, both in terms of allocated and surplus water. This was released to press by the then Irrigation Minister in 2013 before bifurcation.

Now the Telangana government along with Karnataka and Maharashtra governments [now all the three are upper riparian states] started building/built several illegal projects to create water war zone as the NDA-II government least bothered on this and allowed the illegal projects as a political game plan. Here the Telangana government decision clearly indicates: Surplus Godavari water is for north Telangana and deficit Krishna water to south Telangana and thus create water war zone in the south with the neigbouring AP.

In the case of second tribunal with its unfettered powers rejected the objections raised by the lower riparian state and accepting upper riparian states request of raising water sharing level to Mean level instead of 75% probability level of the first tribunal without providing any succor to the lower riparian state during the deficit years at 75%, 65% and Mean [58%] levels. Though the tribunal has 114 years data but used only 47 years data – with 114 years data series the probabilities change as 75%, 55% & 41.5% levels respectively. Thus, the award used only partial water availability data representing high rainfall period. Also, for raising the Almatti Dam height in Karnataka the tribunal used a part of 47 years data only and tried to show even with the raising Almatti Dam height lower riparian state gets more than its share. This is a mathematical manipulation by the tribunal. The tribunal did not say at what probability level this is possible. Also, the tribunal allocated water to illegal projects in Karnataka saying that we should not deprive the drought prone areas. Drought prone areas are seen in the three riparian states in the shadow zone of Western Ghats. With such a “Technical Fraud”, the award was presented. None from the Central Ministry of Water Resources bothered on this fraudulent report. I brought to the notice of three consecutive Chief Justices of Supreme Court, two consecutive Prime Ministers of India and as well President of India. Nobody paid any attention on such a vital issue of fraud. Finally I put all these in my recent book “Irrigation and Irrigation Projects in India: Tribunals, Disputes and Water Wars Perspective, BS Publications, Hyderabad, 2016”. The institutions and organizations working in this area, leaving aside the concerned government agencies, in this country haven’t intervened even after knowing the fact that the Brijesh Kumar Tribunal Award is “Technical Fraud”. However, Telangana Think Tank supported this. To justify their actions, Telangana government says 1204 TMC of water flows through Krishna River every year. He used Brijesh Kumar Tribunal Award that represents the high rainfall period. This is not available every year but available only in few years, basically because:

In 25% of the years undivided AP gets less than 811 TMC

In 35% [45%] of the years undivided AP gets less than 856 TMC

In 42% [58.5%] of the years undivided AP gets less than 1005 TMC

In more than 75% [95%] of the years undivided AP gets less than 1204 TMC

The % values in brockets refer to high and low rainfall period combine [114 years data series]. If we take into account the water allocated to additional projects plus there by the use under groundwater the probabilities will further come down. 150 TMC of storage to be used in deficit years in undivided AP not included here. The excess water associated with cyclones beyond Nagarjunasagar is not taken in to account. Because of this only 227.5 TMC was allocated for surplus water projects to get at least one in two years. Even this may not be possible with new Karnataka projects and under Brijesh Kumar Tribunal allocations.

According to Bachawat Tribunal, even 811 TMC will not get in 25% of the years. Even by adding the amount that comes from interlinking of Krishna and Godavari, there is little scope to fill this deficit. Since 2001 being the below the average 66-year part of 132 year cycle in precipitation, last two years are drought years and the water availability from 2001-02 to 2004-05 are 1836, 1239, 1252 & 1934 TMC while the value at 75% probability level is 2060 TMC + 70 TMC of return flows in which Water allocated to Karnataka + Maharashtra is 1260 TMC plus 59 TMC of return flows. During the same period water entered in to the Sea was: 111, 13, 12 and 23 TMC. Even in the two previous years the water availability was 2305 and 2185 with water entering the Sea was 365 and 252 TMC, which was not useful to undivided AP. In all these years under Brijesh Kumar Tribunal award, none of these years get even 811 TMC.

While the case is pending in the Supreme Court on the second tribunal award, government of India extended the term of such a fraudulent tribunal. Also, Telangana government started building lift irrigation projects left and right for drawing water at dead storage level in the reservoir without proper approvals by spending more than lakh crore as it became another upper riparian state like Karnataka and Maharashtra.

According to first tribunal award, groundwater use will not form part of the allocated water. Under all projects 15 to 20 of water goes for recharging ground water. This is over and above the allocated water. With illegal projects and with the second tribunal allowing additional water to projects in Karnataka state, this ground water recharging component goes up at that rate in addition.

When we talk of surplus water, it is taken as amount entering the Sea. This is not true always as in the case of Krishna River with the Prakasham barrage capacity is small, during cyclonic activity the water entering the barrage is released in to sea after crossing certain level. This is not corrected in the water availability data series.

Now the central government appointed Krishna River Management Board [KRMB] project-wise management of water in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. We must not forget the fact that the major share of water to these two states has to come from upper riparian states. Without bring the upper riparian states within the purview of this board, this will be a futile exercise. Already Telangana government expressed its opposition to this board. The upper riparian states built illegal projects left and right. Following their footsteps Telangana state is also started building the projects without showing where from they get such water after utilizing already defined projects in terms allocated and surplus water.

This is more or less the same with all the River basins but the degree will change depending upon who is heading the tribunal and who is ruling the states & center. Therefore, first all these issues must be resolved by a technical committee but not by retired judges without any political interference. Without that it will be a futile exercise. This comes under Chapter IV: Integrated River Basin Development and Management. Here, one important component that plays vital role is the natural variability in precipitation, a main component of climate change. This is rarely accounted by tribunals or other agencies. This is lacking in the Brijesh Kumar Tribunal award of 2013. For example Kurnool precipitation analysis showed drought in 45% of the years on an average. The same is 70% of the years during the below the average part of the cycle and 30% of the years in the above the average part of the cycle. In the Krishna basin, undivided Andhra Pradesh precipitation during the below the average precipitation period [prior to 1935] of 66 years, 24 years presented drought [< 90% of the average precipitation] and in 12 years presented floods [> 110% of the average precipitation]. In the above the average period of 66 years that ended by 2000 presented vice versa pattern. From the year 2001 onwards it is so far the pattern repeating the pattern that existed prior to 1935. This goes against the postulation of Brijesh Kumar Award and effect severely the lower riparian state at the cost of upper riparian states. In such scenarios, the above Acts will have no effect!!!

**Therefore, first such issues must be resolved, without such action any number of Acts will help Advocates and Judges only. This needs establishment of water availability data series.**

**3. Improving the groundwater in urban areas**

The draft model for the conservation, protection, regulation and management of groundwater is a futile exercise. First and the foremost thing in this are improving the groundwater availability. Already several areas became dead zones. Now, bureaucratic-politicians nexus invented a new system “catch where it rains”. Under this system proposed water harvesting pits in urban areas.

In the traditional agriculture, farmers used to maintain bunds around their piece of farmland. This used to serve in-situ water conservation in the crop root zone. This recharges the top around one meter soil. This system helps the crop to cope up with longer dry spell periods. Farmers used to practice intercropping and mixed cropping with short duration-shallow rooted cereal crop along with long duration-deep rooted legumes/pulse crops. In good monsoon both crops will provide good yields and in bad monsoon years with long duration dry spells in the crop growing season the long duration-deep rooted crop will survive. This system will not help much, in realistic terms, recharging of groundwater, more particularly in poor monsoon years.

In urban areas with the land being occupied by concrete jungle, the better way to improve the ground water is through urban lakes but not through water pits. However, bureaucrats-politicians nexus emphasizing the water pits over the lakes as lakes are being converted in to real estate ventures. The best way is cleaning of the lakes starting from upstream zones and filling them with the treated domestic sewage water [using STPs].

In rural areas as well in urban areas the groundwater levels have fallen drastically. The basic mechanisms involved in the recharging groundwater are being destroyed with the growth of population. Also, groundwater is contaminated in urban areas.

**II. Specific Observations**

**[A] Draft National Water Framework Bill, 2016 [Draft of 16 May 2016]**

Chapter II: Right to Water for Life

**3. Right to Water for Life**: Around 80% of the bottled water supplied in Hyderabad for drinking is illegally operating. Nobody or no Agency has control over them. Also, water is supplied by private tankers from agriculture bore-wells. In all these no quality controls. This is a business running in to hundreds of crores each year. Even the government supply is contaminated by sewage in some parts of the city. Also, more than half the water supplied has not accounted due to pilferage & leakages. Even the newly laid pipelines leak due to poor quality pipes as the agent has to pay more towards percentages. All these issues were now and then highlighted by the environmental groups & media for the past more than a decade but governments failed to take any action on such scenarios. This is true with all the urban areas.

The other important issue is there is a need to have sustainable supply to drinking water. If no such system exists, the money spent on them only benefits the criminals. From day one pipelines leak but no action; break pipelines and divert water but no action. Here politics play critical role. Mission Bhagiratha of Telangana State is no exception to this. The government wanted to spend 40,000 crores on the drinking water supply. By completing the existing irrigation projects would have provided sustainable supply as well the cost would have come down by more than two-thirds. People without the knowledge on such issues, simply make positive statements to appease the ruling politicians. How many people knew the reality on existing schemes operated in this area by the past governments, NGOs, religious groups, etc?

**The new Acts provide a means of garnering more bribes only. The governments are sincere they could overcome this hurdle through the existing Laws.**

Chapter III: Basic principles

**5. River Rejuvenation:** It talks of “theoretical” exercise, forgetting the fact of “practical” exercise aspects. In fact this clause should have covered the points that relate to practical aspects, which are of diverse in nature. This clause is divided in to two sub-clauses. The first sub-clause is divided in to three aspects, namely 1(a) Aviral Dhara, 1(b) Nirmal Dhara, & 1(c) Swachh Kinara [used Hindi words in English draft]. However, they are part of theoretical exercises only. We have seen the fate of Swachh India programme. It only helped pocketing the money.

UPA government provided funds to states to improve the river flows under the same three groups. Funds were provided for building sewage treatment plants. This was a big failure all over India. STPs were built in a haphazard way. This has led no change in the quality of river flows. The third 1(c) is used to create real estate business along the river banks. People quote Sabarmati River in Ahmadabad city in Gujarat state as an example forgetting the fact that good water from Narmada project is used to flush out polluted water from Sabarmati in to the Sea. Same was planned for Musi River in Hyderabad city in Telangana state. There is no good water resource like Narmada project to flush out the pollution from Musi River in to the Sea except part of sewage treated using STPs released in to Musi but after mixing with untreated sewage and industrial effluents [untreated plus partially treated]. The polluted water from the river Musi dumped in to Krishna River water and enroot the polluted water is used in agriculture. The food products produced from such polluted water is supplied to Hyderabad city and thus creating innumerable health hazards.

Under Ganga Rejuvenation programme UPA initiated Ganga Action Plan spent around 20,000 crores and now NDA initiated the same with a different name, Namami Ganga Programme with lakh crores. Supreme Court observed “Ganga would be cleaned even in 200 years?”. It is all political game with public funds.

Same is the case all over India. This is the problem associated with poor governance.

**This problem could be solved by [1] using treated industrial effluents at the site and [2] treated domestic sewage starting from the upstream catchments putting it in to local tanks and finally the treated water only reaching the river. Also, government must stop sewage entering the rainwater drains. This process will help in building greenery and recharging the groundwater.**

Same is the case with other clauses in this chapter.

Chapter-IV: Integrated River Basin Development and Management

The second bill is part of this chapter [clause 18]. Flood mitigation and management [clause 20] and Drought mitigation and management [clause 21] need first detailed study of agro-climate. See the following books of mine on these issues:

**Reddy, S.J**., 1993: ‘Agroclimatic/Agrometeorological Techniques: As applicable to Dry-land Agriculture in developing countries’, [www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com), & Google Books, 205p – book review appeared in Agric. For. Meteorol., 67:325-327 [1994].

**Reddy, S.J.,** 2002: ‘Dry-land Agriculture of India: An Agroclimatological and Agrometeorological perspective’, 429p, BS Publications, Hyderabad, India

**Reddy, S.J**. 2008 & 2010: ‘Climate Change: Myths & Realities’, 176p & 114p, [www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com) & Google Books.

**Reddy, S**.J., 2016a: ‘Irrigation and Irrigation Projects in India: Tribunals, Disputes and Water Wars Perspective’, 154p, BS Publications, Hyderabad, India.

**Reddy, S**.J., 2016b: ‘Climate Change & its Impacts: Ground Realities’, [in press], Hyderabad, India

Chapter-VI: Sectoral Use of Water

It primarily relate to the good governance.

Chapters- VII & VIII – discussed the implications in the above referred book of mine [2016a].

**[B] Draft Model Bill for the Conservation, Protection, Regulation Management of Groundwater, 2016**

For this we need to know the present scenario of groundwater at local, region and national level. This is highly variable with the space and time, particularly with the growth of urban areas and population. This is not a static but it is dynamic.

To be operative the proposed bill, we need good governance. Under the present system of democracy where money & politics play vital role, they are rarely implementable but these acts help to generate more bribes to bureaucrats-politicians. We can see this all over India as majority of them are in operation in one way or the other. Ruling parties are using the system to get power. The primary objective of this draft appears to be to help business/industrialists over other sectors by controlling the groundwater mechanism.

Chapter 2 – Mandatory Principles for Protection, Conservation and Regulation of Groundwater --- here political games will supersede the Act. Already wells – bore-wells were dug and are in operation. The depth of water table is going down and down year by year. When governments tries to implement certain guidelines, opposition parties counter it by bring in regional politics. Again, when they come to power, they try to implement the same. So, what we need is policy guidelines irrespective of state like use of [1] micro-irrigation practices, [2] less water consuming crops, etc. Drinking water wells/bore-wells are in the government control.

Chapter 3 – Right to Water, Legal Status and Groundwater use & Chapter – 4 --- Groundwater Protection Zones and Groundwater Security plan --- these will help ruling parties to play vote bank game. The centre must provide clear guidelines without any ambiguity. Already some guidelines, in fact are existing locally.

Chapter 5 – Institutional Framework --- This is a futile exercise.

Chapter 6-12 – Duties of groundwater users, water harvesting, recycling and reuse, and waterlogging and others --- though they are important chapters, they primarily relate to good governance only. The present governments unable to implement the existing norms even 10%.

Chapter 13 – Miscellaneous -- In undivided Andhra Pradesh State, since 2001 WALTA Act is in operation for drilling bore wells but nobody or no agency followed them. I had an opportunity to meet farmers who dug more than 90 bore-wells in a TV discussion Show – may be they wanted to appear in Limka book of records or some other book of records --, the governments did not stop them while digging so many bore-wells that would affect the other nighbouring bore-wells. On the contrary Chief Minister of the state invites him for dinner. The government while permitting activities in forest areas, least bothered on its impact on aquifers.

The central government should consider to bringing out a simple guidelines. Creation of committees will serve only political interests. For example, in undivided Andhra Pradesh, a committee was created to control tree felling but this committee always was silent on government felling the trees for their real estate ventures. This is seen in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which is also seen all over India. Even the MoEF&CC is also doing the same.

**We have state and central groundwater departments. They should be assigned the task of mapping the groundwater and then give the responsibility of all the issues stated in the draft to them with full powers without any political interference. We know the fact on sand mafia. They are in the hands of ruling junta.**

**In Conclusion:** Let me present a classical case of Judges Recruitment. India has established an excellent system of recruitment of government servants of higher hierarchy, namely Union Public Service Commission [UPSC]” – through which I also joined the Central Service in 1969. Judges wanted power to recruit Judges, known as Collegiums system and at the same time Politicians wanted their say in that. Power is in Judges Hand and thus they ruled in their favour.

Food Security Bill of 2013, an excellent system, so far not implemented all over the country in its totality. States are unwilling to procure minor millets for PDS.

We have established excellent environmental Laws but with the change of governments at the centre, these are modified or weakened to meet the political agenda.

All this is happening because we have got ambiguous constitutional mechanism. Unless this is set right, any amount of new Laws or Acts will not survive. To achieve this goal we need good governance. Some argue that something is better than nothing but this in reality a dangerous proposition.

The Central Government through these Acts trying to postmortem the damage only. However, they help Advocates and Judges.

The government must establish a permanent technical body to look in to the disputes settlement/ redressed as stated by the Finance Minister few days back at a press meet.