Lack of Governance in addressing Illegal Hoardings

Why in news?

Illegal hoardings put up by politicians have claimed the life of a young woman in Chennai.

What are the recent havocs caused by Illegal hoardings?

- Many hapless citizens' lives were ended by civic neglect, police indifference, and, in Tamil Nadu especially, a political culture that dominates public spaces through exaggerated displays of cutouts, crude arches and flags at the cost of safety.
- In 2017, a young engineer, died under similar circumstances in Coimbatore and another youth, was electrocuted in Udhagamandalam when he touched a party flag that was in contact with a wire; both instances involved ramshackle structures placed along roads.
- Recently a banner put up on a road divider by a functionary of ruling to celebrate a wedding fell on a young woman riding a two-wheeler, sending her off-balance and under a tanker lorry.
- There are disturbing aspects to the official response to these incidents.

What are the orders issued by high court in this regard?

- Even two years ago, the Madras High Court had ruled in a case that "the erection of arches, placards and display boards, banners with poles, etc., abutting into public streets and pavements, which obstruct free and safe movement of traffic or free and safe movement of pedestrians or obstructs visibility of drivers is patently illegal."
- Political parties of all hues and miscellaneous groups see no need for restraint, even after many directions from the Madras High Court to stop endangering public safety goes to show that there are no serious consequences.
- Evidently, they are not persuaded by the orders issued in February this year by a division bench, impleading 11 political parties and reminding them of its many earlier orders that prohibit threats to public safety through banners and boards.

What measures needs to be taken?

- The government must fix accountability and make individual members of the executive liable for lack of public safety.
- Inquiry must go into the reported reluctance of the police to proceed against the ruling party member who was responsible for the banners being put up.
- The Revenue Department and the local body must explain their failure to prohibit the dangerous structures, when there are clear orders in force, and acts of omission and commission should attract strong action.
- Considering the long history of illegal political banners and religious displays, often involving theft of electricity, the court can bring about compliance with the law through a special panel, similar to the Supreme Court's committee on road safety headed by a retired judge.
- Strong action is needed against recalcitrant politicians and lumpen groups who use banners as displays of power or fealty.

Source: The Hindu

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