

Fin Min warns tax officials on resolution against revenue dept

Taxmen's clamour for autonomy and lesser government interference has not gone down well with New Delhi, with FM Arun Jaitley calling it an act of "insubordination".

ET reported on Thursday that a week ago tax officials took an unprecedented step to assemble in Mumbai and pass a resolution questioning the directives and functioning of department of revenue (DoR), headed by Revenue Secretary Hasmukh Adhia. The resolution backed by officers of the income-tax department, including several members of the Indian Revenue Service, also said the post of revenue secretary should be abolished

Reacting sharply to the development, the finance ministry issued a statement on Thursday afternoon, saying, "The Union Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley takes a serious view of the resolution by officers of Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax) against Department of Revenue."

"The Ministry of Finance has learnt through a newspaper item which appeared today that some officers of Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax) Mumbai Branch have passed a resolution against the Department of Revenue," the finance ministry statement said. "The finance minister," added the release, "has taken a serious view of such a resolution by officers of Organised Group 'A' service to advise the government on what role it should play. This is an act of insubordination. Officers indulging in acts of indiscipline would be subject to conduct rules."

Responding to the government's statement, a senior officer of the tax department, said, "We don't believe expressing our views should be described as 'insubordination'. We have not done anything illegal. We have simply quoted existing rules and regulations of the government to point out the role that the Department of Revenue should play. We are in no way advising the government on what it should do."

The ministry, however, appears to be in no mood to entertain such views. Its stand on the matter is strong and unequivocal: "No department of the government has absolute autonomy. It has to serve the larger goal of the government. The supervisory powers of next higher authority ensures that there is no misuse of power by anyone in the government," said the government release.

Since the allegations against the revenue department have been voiced by the officers association — and not individual employees — it's unclear whether and how the government will throw the rule book.

According to the conduct rules, "No government servant shall, in any radio broadcast, telecast through any electronic media or in any document published in his own name or anonymously, pseudonymously or in the name of any other person or in any communication to the press or in any public utterance, make any statement of fact or opinion which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the central government or a state government."

Tax officers, though surprised by the government's unusually strong reaction, said other zones of the I-T department were preparing to move similar resolutions following which it would be pursued before the central unit of the officers' body.

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