

The US Shutdown: What it means to us?



The federal government in US has shutdown sending about 800,000 government employees home without pay, and another one million will join them. Museums, parks and even the Statue of Liberty have been closed to the public.

This system of budget controls is peculiar to US because the Congress (House of Representatives with 435 members and the Senate with 100 members) failed to pass the budget before October 1 – the beginning of the financial year. It is due to the conflict between the Republican-dominated members of the House of Representatives and the members of the Democrat-dominated Senate. Many Republicans identify themselves with the Tea Party Movement that opposes the healthcare reforms of the Democratic President Obama.

The Tea Party is named after the colonial Boston Tea Party formed in 1773 when a group of men disguised as Indians dumped a shipment of imported British tea in the Boston harbour as a protest against the payment of taxes forced on them. Though it is not a political party, it was started as a grass root conservative movement with an anti-taxation, anti-government and anti-debt, message. Hundreds of Tea Party groups sprung across the US in 2009, following the election of President Obama. They

opposed his approach to issues like healthcare reform as they involved very high expenditure.

The Tea Party supported like-minded members of the Congress and candidates in pre-election provinces leading up to 2010 mid-term elections. The number of members of the party increased significantly, creating a sizable voting bloc in the House of Representatives.

The US system is peculiar in the sense that the government is not formed by the party with a majority but by different parties controlling the House of Representatives, the Senate and the presidency.

US federal departments and agencies are bound by the Antideficiency Act which basically states that they cannot spend money that they do not have.

The budget has not been approved as yet; hence the shutdown, but some services such as social security (pension) payments, US postal services, active military, NASA Mission Centre, air traffic controllers and border protectors, are regarded as essential and they will continue to operate.

The stalemate of the Congress and the government shutdown are likely to end with the Continuing Resolution which will provide money for government services until a broader budget agreement is reached. An agreement on the

budget is far from over, and Continuing Resolutions have become the lifeblood of the government.

President Obama met with the leaders of the Congress on Tuesday (October 2) – the second day of the shutdown – to discuss possible resolutions to the deadlock but no immediate resolution has emerged as neither party was willing to give in. The Republicans want to tighten government funds that would cripple Obama's Affordable Care Act, and the President and the fellow Democrats refuse to cut funding for the program.

Nancy Pelosi, an ex-Speaker and now the House Minority Leader asserted that "For the good of the order and the good of the American people, we should take the debt ceiling discussion off the table. The US will always honour its full credit. Closing the government is bad but the combination of that and not raising the debt ceiling is cataclysmic. Let's take that off the table," She also asserted that Obamacare is a "dream come true" for many people in our country ... can fully realise the promise of our founders of life, liberty to pursue their happiness ... No matter how hard some try to stop it, the Affordable Care Act is up and running."

For the rest of the world, the shutdown is bad news as the leaders of the most powerful nation provoked a crisis that has suspended public services, and decreased the economic growth which will affect some countries receiving aid.

The parliamentary system now in force in many democracies provides for the executive and legislature to be controlled by the same party or a coalition that has a majority. A parliament can, of course, refuse to pass a budget but it will trigger a failure of the government and a new election. This happened in Australia when the budget of the Whitlam government was blocked by the Opposition, resulting in the fall of the government and sacking of the Prime Minister by the Governor-General.

In the US, government shutdowns have become an accepted negotiating tactic. Its system allows different branches of government to be controlled by different parties; a structure devised by the nation's founders to encourage compromise and deliberation, but lately it had just the opposite effect.

The following quotes sum up the situation caused by the shutdown:

"Globalisation ... every country is in it together," writes David Blanchflower in the Independent in the UK. "Americans sneeze and Brits catch the flu."

"Canadians can only pray their country won't be collateral damage," writes John Ibbotson in Canada's Globe and Mail. Anything that drags down the American economy drags the Canadian economy with it."

"Constant –shutdown, permanent-emergency governance is so destructive no other serious country engages in or could tolerate it." James Fallows writes in the Atlantic. "The United States can afford it only because we are, still so rich, with so much margin for waste and error."

As the writer of this article, I think that the shutdown is just "A storm in a teacup."

Nevertheless, America, which is a great democratic country that preaches the virtues of democracy and good governance practices to other countries, should set again a good example by getting together to surmount this political impasse aimed at achieving political gains, as quickly as possible, and accept the Obama healthcare program because healthcare is a fundamental need for everyone in a country, and, more so, to those in the lowest rung of the society.



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Kikki

We were a family that read a lot and of course had read of Enid Blyton's Kikki, the talking parrot.

So, when we acquired a beautiful green and yellow plumaged parrot, it was quite natural to call it Kikki.

The parrot was kept in a wire cage, in the front verandah. We fed it with rice, sweets, biscuits and even pieces of meat. In spite of all our attempts to make it talk, Kikki only made funny noises, such as my grandpa did while gargling his throat.

One day, much to our dismay, we discovered that Kikki had a rare incurable disease. Kikki started shedding its feathers progressively. Finally, she looked like a plucked chicken. Imagine

yourself, being totally naked in a wire cage!

Being in the front verandah, open to the view of all passersby, Kikki was ridiculed by the bread delivery boy, and all other sundry delivery boys, who would stand for hours ruminatively digging their respective noses while gazing at this nude bird. Often they would dig a tasty flake of snot from their nose and swallow it absentmindedly.

We were bombarded with suggestions regarding the treatments. This varied from the use of bear oil, to spraying red chili powder on its body.

Kikki tried hard to hide its nudity by placing its bare wings in front of its nether region.

Finally, my sister solved the problem. She stitched a blue satin coat, which was tied around Kikki's neck.

In spite of all our loving care, Kikki stopped squawking and refused food.

Emily Nanda (Aunty Emily) an untrained village midwife suggested that Kikki was pining away due to lack of companionship. We excitedly bought another parrot (announced as female by the dealer) and put it in Kikki's cage.

In spite of the companionship, Kikki passed away. It was later that we learnt that Kikki too was a female.

Since both birds at that time had not been given proper sex education, and since the homosexual act had still not been passed, they did not avail themselves of an opportunity, which present day 'birds' enjoy!

Kikki was given a full Christian burial. My cousin threw a shawl over his shoulders, and led the funeral procession. Two of the younger brothers, swung coconut shell crucibles containing smoking incense. The corpse of the parrot was carried in a small shoebox. The remaining members of our family sang the appropriate liturgical psalms in Latin, including Liberame & Dies ire Dies ira.

The final resting place was heaped with a built up earth dune, and a small cross erected at the head end.

Of course the rest of the village children thought we were quite crazy. I must however confess, that we did this entire ritual innocently, and with a deeply spiritual spirit.

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