

Left TUs call strike on 20 Dec

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Dec. 1. — Left trade unions have called a 24-hour general strike in the state on 20 December in protest against the Centre's "discrimination" against West Bengal in releasing flood relief funds.

All frontal organisations of the Left parties will take part in the strike to "expose" the NDA government's "anti-people and inhuman" attitude, the CITU state secretary, Mr Chittabrata Majumdar, told a press conference today. The Centre has not yet released any money for the flood-hit state, he said.

Mr Anil Biswas criticised the four Union ministers from the state for not "saying a word" against the Centre's apathy towards the state.

"They should either join MPs and MLAs from the state who will stage a dharna in Delhi on 7 December to force the Centre to release funds for repairing damages caused by the floods or quit the NDA government," the CPI-M state secretary said.

Mr Gurudas Das Gupta said it is evident that the Centre is deliberately withholding funds for West Bengal. "The Prime Minister has immediately announced Central relief for the cyclone-hit people of Tamil Nadu, but he continues to remain indifferent towards the flood-hit people of West Bengal," the former CPI MP and Aituc leader said.

Power staffs stir: Power employees, including officers and engineers, have called a token strike on 12 December, a press release issued by the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers said today.

The NCCEE members demanded that the Electricity Bill 2000 should be scrapped. They are also against the Centre's move to privatise state electricity boards.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 DEC 2000

Citu threatens to thwart Great Eastern handover

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Nov. 1: A day after it decided to hand over the state-run Great Eastern Hotel to a French company, the CPM-led government has run into trouble with the party's labour arm, Citu.

"We will not allow the government to hand over the hotel to any private organisation," said Piyush Kanti Roychowdhury, a Citu office-bearer.

"We had organised a Bharat Bandh on May 11 in protest against the Centre's move to privatise public sector undertak-

ings. How can we support our own government which has decided to hand over the hotel to Accor Asia Pacific?"

The Great Eastern Hotel union will hold a meeting in the Durbar Hall tomorrow to decide on future action, the Citu leader said. Slamming tourism minister Manab Mukherjee for "initiating the privatisation move", Roychowdhury said: "He (Mukherjee) was never interested in running the hotel and immediately after he became the tourism minister, tried to hand it over to private owners."

Mukherjee pleaded helplessness, saying: "I only hope that everybody realises the circumstances which compelled us to take such a decision."

Asked if they had consulted state Citu leadership on the protest, Roychowdhury said: "Of course. Rajdeo Goala himself had held a meeting at the hotel in May to oppose privatisation," he added. Goala, a member of the CPM's Calcutta District Committee and Citu leader in-charge of the hotel, is in Punjab and will return next week.

The Citu leader did not rule

out the possibility of a joint movement with the Intuc.

Citu and CPM sources said chief minister-designate Buddhadev Bhattacharya convinced the tourism minister to put the Cabinet meeting on the agenda of Tuesday's session decision. Bhattacharya knew the decision would anger Citu and, therefore, had it taken in Basu's presence.

The Congress' labour arm, Intuc, has demanded that all 520 hotel employees be provided with alternative jobs in other

government departments. "We are government employees and we have the right to demand jobs in any other government department," said Ataur Rahaman, Intuc leader at the hotel.

Rahaman said the tourism minister had promised an attractive package for employees opting for voluntary retirement. "But we can not accept it because a Rs 15-crore package for 520 employees is inadequate."

He said they were awaiting the official notification and added that the Intuc would oppose the move to privatise the

hotel at any cost.

But the Intuc refused to join hands with Citu for the protest. "It is their government, their trade union and their ministers who have taken the decision in consultation with them. We don't think it will be wise to join hands with Citu," Rahaman informed.

State Citu president Niren Ghosh, general secretary Chitrabrata Majumdar and other leaders held a closed-door meeting at the Sramik Bhavan headquarters today to discuss the issue. Ghosh declined to comment when contacted.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 NOV 2000

RSS wants govt to take hard stand on WTO

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI, 12 MARCH

IN A clear signal that the BJP government's functioning will come under closer scrutiny and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will have to be more mindful of the concerns of Nagpur, the RSS leaders said the regime will have to do some hard bargaining at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). "If the government agrees to proposals which will hurt the nation's interests, we will oppose them," RSS general secretary Mohan Bhagwat said.

Although the RSS leadership

appreciated the compulsions of the government, they emphasised on the need for tough negotiations in the trade forum. "We have to honour the commitments made by the previous regimes. But the government should not allow anti-national policies," agency reports quoting the Sangh general secretary said.

The new chief of the RSS, known for his rigid views on matters economic, shares the perception of hardliners like Dattopant Thengdi that there was a need to apply some crucial correctives in the liberalisation policy. While Mr Thengdi has been openly crit-

icising some of the major initiatives of the Prime Minister, Mr Sudarshan — the new hands-on chief — will seek greater dialogue with the BJP leaders. This may complicate matters for the Prime Minister, as it could put serious constraints on the decision-making process.

It remains to be seen how Mr Vajpayee copes with the shift in power equations within the Sangh. In terms of standing, both Mr Vajpayee and Mr L.K. Advani were at par with Prof Rajendra Singh. But Mr Sudarshan, who is junior to the two BJP leaders,

does not exactly share the same rapport with the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, agency reports quoting the RSS general secretary said the organisation will strike for reconciling conflicting interests. "RSS will bring together people from different faiths under the umbrella of Hindutva to sow the seeds of nationalism and patriotism," Mr Bhagwat told reporters in Nagpur. "Even Muslims and Christians were originally Hindus, but are professing different faiths now."

PRESSURE GROUP

The RSS will first mobilise Hindus to come together for projecting the real image of the community which had "eclipsed" due to unforeseen circumstances, Mr Bhagwat said.

The next step, he said, will be to rope in people from other regions as well. "A few Muslims and Christians are already associated with it."

To a question on the RSS stand towards Ram temple at Ayodhya, Mr Bhagwat said the decision of the saints in this regard will be acceptable to his organisation because it were they who had raised the issue.

He said Kashi and Mathura issues did not crop up at the three-day meeting of the governing body of the RSS.

The governing body cautioned the government against "fissiparous, anti-national and secessionist forces raising their ugly heads" in the north-east. It called upon the government to declare Tripura a disturbed state if such tendencies continued.

Expressing concern over insurgency in Tripura, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, the RSS said it was part of a "systematic attack on Hindus."

Third party cannot meddle in our affairs, says PM

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, FEB. 12. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has rejected, once again, any American role in resolving the India-Pakistan tensions. Without mentioning the U.S. by name, the Prime Minister has categorically noted that India would "not allow others to meddle in our bilateral relations or problems".

Mr. Vajpayee chose to reiterate this formulation at a conference of Persons of Indian Origin here this morning. Indeed prime ministerial aides were keen to draw attention to the operative paragraph towards the end of Mr. Vajpayee's speech.

It was explained that the Prime Minister was responding to various suggestions emanating from a number of American officials that Washington would necessarily have to take some initiative to sort out the "Kashmir issue". In recent days the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, the Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright, the Defence Secretary, Mr. William Cohen, and others have talked of "Kashmir" and of American interest in sorting out tensions between India and Pakistan. The cumulative message from Washington has not given any comfort.

Politically, the Vajpayee Government is not positioned to be seen as making any concessions on an American role in the India-Pakistan stand-off. The Prime Minister is under pressure, on the one hand, from the "nationalist" hard-liners of the RSS variety, and the Congress(I), on the other. A Congress(I) delegation called on the Prime Minister this evening to register its disapproval of the Government's apparent willingness to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty during the U.S. President's visit to India in the third week of March. Any suggest-



The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, at the inauguration of the international conference on "Contribution by people of Indian origin to their countries" in New Delhi on Saturday. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, is also seen.

— Photo: Shanker Chakravarty.

ion of the Vajpayee regime's countenancing an American role would provoke serious domestic backlash.

In fact, a section of the prime ministerial aides does not share the enthusiasm and excitement of the Foreign Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, over Mr. Clinton's visit to India; this group believes India's diplomatic gains from the Clinton visit would most probably be neutralised by his visit to Pakistan, which, according to it, appears imminent. Moreover, these aides believe that should the Clinton visit generate too much expectation and too little outcome, it could even set back the economic ties between the two countries.

The operative part of the Prime minister's formulation, inserted this morning at the last minute, reads: "Today's India is a self-confident India, marching ahead to economic prosperity and social justice and equality. Today's India is ready to play its part in shaping a new and equitable in-

ternational order. While we will not brook interference in our internal affairs or allow others to meddle in our bilateral relations or problems, we are ready to engage with any country in a cooperative framework."

Mr. Vajpayee invited the Persons of Indian Origin to become India's spokesman and "to strongly articulate India's case to the various constituencies in your adopted countries". The Prime Minister wanted them to spell out "on a more sustained basis" India's stand on "Kashmir, our strong secular tradition and State-sponsored terrorism, which has actually become a menace to global peace and security."

The Prime Minister noted with satisfaction that "perhaps there is no other nation in the world that has such a widely dispersed diaspora" and observed that Indian civilisation was founded on the principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — the entire world is one family".

THE HINDU
13 FEB 2000

India for ties based on faith: Vaipayee

K RAVI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SAMBALPUR, Feb. 10.

Mr Atal Behari Vaipayee today expressed distrust towards Pakistan, saying proposing talks and indulging in proxy war (simultaneously) cannot be the basis for friendship.

Addressing an election rally here, Mr Vaipayee said, India was all for friendly relationship with neighbouring countries but such relationships were built around mutual faith and trust. "Doodh ke jale ko chhach bhi phoonk kar poena padta hai," he remarked while referring to his Lahore bus trip and the subsequent Kargil war. Indulging in proxy war by sending and training terrorists across the Border and then wishing to hold talks amounts to hoodwinking people. We will not be fooled by such acts, he said.

The Prime Minister noted that the entire nation was united during the Kargil war and Pakistan had to go back. Mr Vaipayee also stressed on accountability and weed-

ing out corruption at all levels. Each penny has to be accounted for, he said, while reaffirming that the corrupt, irrespective of the position they hold, would be punished.

When we were in the Opposition, there was a talk about whether the Prime Minister should be brought under the ambit of proposed laws to check corruption and we demanded that the Prime Minister should be included in its purview. This was not because we were in the Opposition, but because we were sincere in rooting out corruption, he said.

Catching "machili" (small fishes) and leaving out the "magarmach" (crocodile) will not help clear the waters, he said. Almost as an answer to the Congress's projecting stability as its main election plank, the Prime Minister said, either people used to ask us how long will your government last, now they ask what programmes have you drawn up next.

His speech was mostly about the need to transform Orissa, which had the potential into a developed state. He strongly refuted the ruling Congress allegation of neglect by the Centre and that it had not rushed adequate assistance for cyclone-affected people. Give us a chance to govern Orissa for five years and we will change the state,

he said.

He assured people of this western Orissa district that the B.J.P.-BJD alliance was committed to strengthen the Western Orissa Development Council and accord top priority to welfare and upliftment of women and tribals. Mr Vaipayee pointed out that Mr Jai Oram, the state B.J.P leader, had been specifically picked to be the Minister of Tribal Welfare. Earlier, the Prime Minister addressed an election meeting at Baurkela and said the Centre had pushed adequate financial assistance to Orissa for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction work in cyclone-hit areas.

The crisis was treated as a national calamity and not a single person was allowed to die of starvation or epidemics, he claimed. Rs 300 crore had been released from the National Relief Fund for Calcutta Relief and rehabilitation work had been defered, he said. A no-survey, no-plan, no-out and no-estimate approach had been taken up.

BJP leaders were also present at the day during the Prime Minister's two meetings in Baurkela and Sambalpur today. This was the first time during the current Assembly election campaign that alliance partners shared the stage.

PM to meet TU leaders

Deepak Razdan
New Delhi, January 19

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee will himself intervene to check the "strike fever" spreading in the country and will hold talks with Central trade union leaders on Jan 31 to avert a nationwide strike in public sector unions.

Mr Vajpayee, in the meantime, held a high-level review meeting late this evening on the ongoing power strike in Uttar Pradesh and the strike by port and dock workers elsewhere in the country. The meeting was attended by several Union Ministers and senior officials.

The PM's month-end meeting with the Central TU leaders comes after several efforts to arrive at a settlement between the trade unions and the Government have failed. The unions' main demand relates to wage revision frequency but their leaders are equally agitated on the issue of disinvestment in the undertakings.

Apart from the present strike by power and port workers, telecom and postal unions have also announced agitations. If the Jan 31 talks at the Prime Minister's level do not satisfy the unions, a major strike could follow in due course.

A day-long nationwide strike in the public sector units has been already called by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) on Feb 2. This strike may have a limited success since the largest unions -- the Bharatiya Janata Party-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and the Congress-affiliated Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) -- are not joining it.

However, if the talks at the level of the Prime Minister do not succeed, the possibility of a nationwide strike of the level of a Bharat Bandh is not ruled-out. The unions have had various referenda already on the issues and they are in the process of finalising their

action plans now.

Incidentally, the INTUC does not want to support the Feb 2 strike, as INTUC president G. Sanjeeva Reddy told the Hindustan Times this evening. It does not feel a one-day strike would be "beneficial" to the interests of the workers.

According to the INTUC president, the Jan 31 meeting with the Prime Minister has been fixed by the BJP-controlled BMS. But other Central trade unions were expecting to join the talks. Mr Reddy said he personally expected a settlement at the Prime Minister's meeting.

The Central trade unions representing nearly two million workers finalised their strategy on Dec 12 last. A crucial meeting among the major unions would be held here on Jan 21.

The main demand of the PSU workers is that their wage revision should be every five years, while the Government wants it done only once in 10 years.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
20 JAN 2000

Economy is on upswing: CII survey

Business Times Bureau

NEW DELHI: After two years of poor growth and depressed stock markets, corporate India now seems flooded with good news and positive sentiment. While the stock markets have scaled new peaks in recent weeks, a corporate survey shows that the manufacturing sector is well and truly on the growth path.

The survey, conducted by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), indicates that the scorching growth of IT and software companies apart, sectors like cement and steel have also turned the corner and registered impressive growth during April-November 1999.

Of the 86 sectors covered by the CII survey, growth in 46 exceeded 10 per cent, with 16 sectors reporting a 20 per cent-plus growth. The survey covers member companies of the CII and 87 affiliated associations. In most sectors, the companies surveyed account for 65 per cent of the total production of that sector.

These conclusions are likely to be of some interest in the stock market since they may be reflected when more companies declare their performance results for October-December 1999 over the next few days.

While colour TVs, refrigerators, clocks and other consumer durables had an impressive run even during the slowdown of 1997-99, cars and auto components showed signs of recovery in the early part of this financial year.

The upturn now in steel and cement is seen as significant as these sectors have a substantial impact on the rest of the economy and are often the last ones to recover after slow growth. Steel

has grown 11.5 per cent in April-December 1999 and cement by 18 per cent, indicating that construction activity may have revived.

Within automobiles — another sector that impacts

large sections of the economy — cars have raced to a 44 per cent growth in production and motorcycles remain strong at 25 per cent. But the more significant trend is the 68 per cent growth in medium and heavy commercial vehicles. It probably signifies that the economy is on the move, more goods are being transported and people are investing in trucks.

A contrary signal, however, is the slow, even negative growth, of capital goods such as textile and electrical machinery.

This probably signifies that while manufacturers are using their existing capacity to the full to meet demand for goods, they are not investing in fresh equipment and machinery.

If this trend persists, it could mean the recovery is not sustainable.

Another negative signal is from scooters, that have seen production fall by 7 per cent. Scooter companies do seem to be responding to this and have brought out flashy and more powerful models — as evident at the Auto Expo currently underway here — to counter motorcycles.

It has also been a dismal year for tea so far, with the survey showing a 6 per cent fall in production. But there are signs of tea exports improving this year.

But there is some cheer for traditional sectors like sugar and vanaspati which have grown rapidly compared to last year's depressed performance.

Exports present a mixed picture. While some sectors like steel, medium and heavy commercial vehicles have shown impressive growth and software remains strong, exports of paper, malted food and processed fruits and vegetables have slowed down.

Software production grew 60 per cent in April-December 1999, the most striking non-news of the economy.

Jaswant questions U.S. reforms model

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 9. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, today declared that the Vajpayee Government is irrevocably committed to fundamental economic reforms that improve the quality of life and reduce the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

At the same time he noted that questions will be raised about globalisation if these reforms are not accompanied by the creation of wealth. In this context he stressed that reforms are essential to improve the quality of life in terms of provision of drinking water, health and education. Simultaneously, the social challenges of ensuring infrastructure requirement will have to be brought about since the people's requirements have to be met in terms of transport and communications.

Mr. Jaswant Singh, however, questioned the model of globalisation as projected by the United States and indicated that similar economic theories had in the past century been thrown overboard. He was also critical of the attempt by the U.S. as the world's only super power to debunk the concept of nationalism. He was sceptical of the thesis that nationalism has no relevance and that the nation-state has no role to play. In this regard he pointed out that the U.S. itself is almost chauvinistic in its nationalism while telling the rest of the world that this is not a worthy concept.

The External Affairs Minister who was inaugurating the Partnership Summit organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) was speaking on the theme of managing globalisation in the new millennium.

Addressing a galaxy of corporate leaders, economists and bureaucrats, he urged them to examine the entire concept of globalisation in depth. He expressed concern that globalisa-

tion has not resulted in economic equality of opportunity. It had also not helped in eliminating political discord. It was thus not possible to simply move forward on the economic front and presume that management of political discord will follow as a result.

Mr. Jaswant Singh highlighted the role of the Internet in globalisation which had become the most efficient global weapon. It

Internet revelation

NEW DELHI, JAN. 9. The Internet revolution played a role in the drama surrounding the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC-814. A passenger with a laptop computer on board the plane managed to send a message to a Chinese website about the hijack.

The message was in turn sent to the Indian mission in Beijing which quickly faxed the information to the Ministry of External Affairs. Relating this incident today at the CII Partnership Summit, the External Affairs, Mr. Jaswant Singh, said the full impact of the role of the Internet and the knowledge-based industry dawned on him at that point.

Observing that this incident had a profound impact on him, Mr. Singh said, that the knowledge-based industry now has no frontiers. It has left governments, organisations and systems behind, he pointed out.

was not possible for any Government to control this institution, and there were no frontiers for the knowledge-based industry, he pointed out.

At a special session on the knowledge-based economy, the Information Technology Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, assured that his Ministry's intention will be to facilitate and not to regulate

the industry. Seeking to set at rest criticism about the creation of the IT Ministry, he said a "saffron carpet" would be laid out for the IT industry.

In this context he disclosed that steps will be taken in the forthcoming Budget to implement several recommendations of the IT task force's second report on computer hardware. The non-Budget recommendations, according to Mr. Mahajan, would also be implemented within a six-month time frame.

Responding to the suggestions made by the Infosys chairman, Mr. N. R. Narayanamurthy, to quickly implement the IT task force proposals, he said that 44 out of 108 recommendations of the first report are already fully implemented. Another nine are partly implemented, 38 are being carried out and the remainder will be completed within the next three months.

As far as the third report is concerned, he said the longterm proposals for the industry would be implemented by the end of the year. Thus the entire task force proposals will be fully in place by the time the new millennium begins in 2001.

Earlier, the Infosys chairman suggested the creation of an education development finance corporation with a corpus Rs.1,000 crore. The aim would be to ensure that every student in the country is provided funds for educational purposes. He suggested 30 per cent equity holding by industry and 49 per cent by Government with the balance coming for the public. Secondly, he felt IT companies should focus on creation of brand equity and acquisition abroad.

On the Government's role in promoting the industry, Mr. Narayanamurthy said limits should be removed on acquisitions, and data communication links should be enhanced and physical bonding removed.

THE HINDU
10 JAN 2000

Latest data confirms economic recovery: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said the latest data showed that the economic recovery was continuing and that the macro-economic fundamentals were strong. Drawing from the latest estimates of the Central Statistical Organisation received a few days ago, the Prime Minister said the

targeted date of 2004. "I am asking the Planning Commission Deputy Chairman to advance the time schedule by one year," he said.

The Prime Minister also made significant announcements about the ports, telecom and civil aviation sectors. The programme for corporatisation of major ports and private participation in the ports had been finalised and the

of public sector undertakings. Transparency in disinvestment, quick implementation of decisions and a wider consensus on the whole issue needed to be debated, said the Prime Minister.

The fourth area of concern highlighted by Mr. Vajpayee related to financial sector reforms. After the unions took the Confederation of Indian Industry



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, along with the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, at the Economic Advisory Council meeting in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

recovery, led by good performances in the services, manufacturing and construction sectors, was broad-based giving good reason to believe that the year would end with the GDP growth in the range of six to 6.5 per cent. He was speaking at the first meeting of the reconstituted Economic Advisory Council.

While pointing out that the gains made since his Government came to power for the second time were positive and satisfying, the Prime Minister warned against complacency and drew attention to a number of residual problems particularly the state of finances at the Central and State levels.

A number of initiatives taken by his Government had begun to yield results. Despite the less than modest achievement in improving the state of highways, the Prime Minister was confident that the task of four-laning 6,000 km of the "Golden Quadrilateral" would be finished before the tar-

Government would shortly consider a proposal for leasing out some important airports to encourage private investment in this sector. In the telecom sector, a sub-group, strangely headed by the Minister for Information and Broadcasting, would submit a report on issues related to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India by the middle of this month.

Mr. Vajpayee also urged the Council to deliberate on the four issues of critical importance. The first was the unacceptably high fiscal deficit which should be pruned keeping in mind the constraints of a Government working in a Parliamentary framework with a federal system.

The second was state finances which were under pressure due to shortfalls in revenue collection and increase of expenditure caused by the implementation of the Pay Commission's recommendations.

The third issue related to the restructuring and disinvestment

to task for recommending the closure of "weak" banks, the Council and the Prime Minister steered clear of the issue but Mr. Vajpayee did draw attention to problem of weak commercial banks and the high level of non-performing assets.

Speaking to newsmen after the meeting, the noted economist, Mr. M. Narasimhan, said the economists wanted NPAs to be managed through asset reconstruction companies and by reforming the legal structure.

Among those who attended the meeting were Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Dr. Kirit Parekh, Dr. Ashok Gulati, Dr. R. Mohan, Mr. N. K. Singh, Mr. Jagdish Shettigar and Dr. Amaresh Bagchi.

The Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, the RBI Governor, Dr. Bimal Jalan, and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Mr. K. C. Pant, were special invitees.