

# Call for united struggle to end 'anti-worker policies'

By Our Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI, DEC. 9.** The need for an all-India general strike in protest against the Supreme Court observation on the right to strike was endorsed and reiterated by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) at its 11th conference, which began here today.

Expressing concern over the "concerted and brazen" attempts made by the Central and State Governments, particularly Tamil Nadu, to deprive workers of their "hard-earned rights and privileges", the CITU felt that it was high time that trade unions, irrespective of their political affiliations, put up a united struggle to end "anti-worker policies."

The CITU president, E. Balanandan, in his presidential address, said that the conference would chalk out an action programme to counteract the "evil machinations" of the BJP Government which, he said, was acting at the behest of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation. These international agencies, he alleged, were mainly working for the interests of the transnational corporations and systematically intensifying the bondage of weaker nations.

Mr. Balanandan said: "The jobless growth model of capitalism was now changing to a job killing mode." Downsizing, outsourcing, shifting of industries to low-wage areas, reduction of welfare amenities and attempt for direct wage reduction were becoming the order of the day exploding the myth that "capitalism would be the panacea for evils of the economy," he added.

In his welcome address, the chairman of the reception committee, N.Sankariah, said the re-



The CITU president, E. Balanandan, hoisting the flag on the occasion of the trade union's eleventh all-India conference in Chennai on Tuesday. — Photo: R. Ragu

surgence of the "right wing, reactionary and communal forces," during the last five years of the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre, had thrown up a formidable challenge to the unity of the working class and the people by their "fascistic and genocidal onslaughts." The threat to national unity from "secessionist forces aided by imperialist powers" was assuming alarming proportions.

Leaders of other trade unions, who felicitated the CI-

TU on the occasion, supported its call for a mass working class movement to protect the rights and privileges of the working class.

The general secretary of the AITUC, Gurudas Dasgupta, said the nation was in peril as the economic growth was halted, development affected and the unemployment and poverty rate on the rise and this was solely due to liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation. So it was imperative for trade unions to unite as they alone

could halt this trend. He also called for a greater coordination between the CITU and the AITUC to put down "imperialist forces."

A. Subramaniam of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha regretted that in the name of disinvestments many profit-making public sector units were being "sold for a song." Privatisation would not solve the unemployment problem as multi-national companies, which accounted for 33 per cent of production units were providing employment to just five per cent.

C. Kuppusami of the Labour Progressive Federation said that it was time to re-launch the swadeshi movement as the unrestricted arrival of foreign goods was affecting the rural economy.

The president of the World Federation of Trade Unions, K.L. Mahendra and the vice-president of the Trade Union Common Centre, Sivasankar, were among those who felicitated the CITU.

Earlier, the conference had a colourful start with Mr. Balanandan hoisting the CITU flag and later paying floral tributes to a martyr column along with other State-level union leaders. About 2,300 delegates from all over the country, including 40 foreign delegates, are participating the five-day conference, being hosted by Chennai for the second time. The national conference was earlier held here in 1979.

## Trade unions should come together: AITUC leader

By Our Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI, DEC. 9.** The general secretary of the All-India Trade Union Congress, Gurudas Dasgupta, today appealed to all trade unions to "consider seriously" its suggestion for a "single, independent trade union" for the whole country at the central level and industry-wise single trade unions to enable the working class to face increasing attacks on its rights and interests.

"Independent means independent of political parties, employers and the Government," he told a press conference.

The highly-fragmented condition of the trade union movement in the country as a result of the unions' political-party affiliation served the interests of employers and weakened worker interests, he said. The AITUC supported the demand for recognition of trade unions solely on the basis of secret ballot, he said.

Mr. Dasgupta called upon the Congress presi-

dent, Sonia Gandhi, to spell out her party's stance on the economic policies pursued by the BJP-led Government at the Centre, and whether her party supported "privatisation of the public sector the way it is being implemented and dilution of labour laws." If the Congress placed itself "in the same bandwagon of economic policies" of the BJP which were leading to industrial closures, fall in the prices of farm produce and massive unemployment, it "cannot emerge as an alternative to the BJP in the next elections solely on the anti-communalism plank."

Advocating massive government investment, even at the risk of increasing the budget deficit, to expand infrastructure, education, health, employment and economic growth, Mr. Dasgupta said the Government should rely on taxing the rich and enforcing strict compliance with the tax regime to wriggle out of the present financial crisis, stop imports that affected domestic production and reduce expenditure on armaments.

# Differences in Citu over defensive stance

Aloke Banerjee  
Kolkata, November 24

THE CITU'S open declaration that workers' movement in West Bengal would go on the defensive is receiving flak not only from the other Left trade unions, but from within Citu itself.

A section of top and middle-level Citu leaders, who attended the conference, criticised newly elected president Shyamal Chakrabarty's public statement in favour of a defensive labour struggle. The CPI-backed Aituc and the RSP-affiliated Utuc felt that Chakrabarty's statement would alienate the workers from the Left TUs.

Differences in the top echelons of the Citu had come up immediately after its state conference, when its newly elected hardliner general secretary Kali Ghosh argued in favour of "direct action" of the workers while a soft-liner Chakrabarty insisted on a defensive mode of movement.

Citu's newly elected president agrees with the state government's views that a strong labour movement would send wrong signals to the potential investors and might jeopardise efforts to rope in investment.

Though Ghosh's followers found no fault with the government's thrust on rapid

industrialisation, they felt that a public announcement in favour of a defensive struggle would intensify the attacks on the workforce.

"Workers' dues in the state are sky-rocketing. A slogan for defensive struggle at this stage will only encourage the unscrupulous owners to further deny the workers' due such as PF, gratuity and bonus," a secretariat member of the Citu told *Hindustan Times*. "We were always taught that workers' agitation should intensify along with economic crisis. We are baffled by the new slogan," said a Kolkata district committee member.

"When the attacks on the

working class is increasing, we should prepare them for a relentless battle. Instead, the Citu asked the workers to be defensive. This will definitely demoralise them and break their backbone," said Aituc state secretary Ranajit Guha. "This is the time to demonstrate firmness and not a defensive attitude," Guha said.

The Utuc secretary Sunil Sengupta felt the workers in general would refuse to accept the Citu's call for a defensive battle.

"Though we do not urge the workers to turn violent, we must definitely urge them to intensify their struggle," Sengupta said.

## Young blood running out

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, November 24

CITU LEADERS are worried about the decline in the number of youths joining the organisation.

"Though there has been an increase in the membership figure, the number of youths joining Citu has gone down. This is largely due to unemployment and the new on hi-tech industrial units. Industry has therefore become less

labour-intensive, bringing down the number of youths joining trade unions," Citu president Shyamal Chakrabarty said.

"Lack of employment opportunities in the organised sector is drawing youths to the unorganised or informal sector. So in future, Citu would play a major role in this informal sector and we expect more youths to come to our fold," Chakrabarty said.

According to Chakrabarty said.

arty in the last 20 years there has been a fall in the recruitment of youths in the organised sectors. In other words, there has been little employment in the manufacturing sector.

"This is an worldwide phenomenon and not restricted to Bengal alone. Lack of recruitment has no doubt brought down the number of young people participating in trade unionism in this sector,"

Chakrabarty said.

Balancing workers' rights with govt's demands on agenda

# Tightrope for Citu top two

## OUR BUREAU

Nov. 23: After criticising Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government over four days for its attempts to curb Citu's militancy and pave the way for industrialisation, delegates at the union's conference have chosen two pro-industry leaders and tasked them with reconciling conflicting goals.

New Citu president Shyamal Chakraborty and general secretary Kali Ghosh today gave an idea of the task on their hands while announcing that the labour arm of the CPM would not dither to go into a confrontation with the government to safeguard workers' interests.

In a statement of intent, they also announced that the Citu has almost finalised a decision on a strike in the jute industry, where workers have not got bonus and

other statutory dues for some time. The date of the strike will be decided on November 28.

"We are very concerned at the plight of the workers in tea gardens, jute factories and engineering units. As of now, the appalling condition of the workers of scores of closed tea gardens in north Bengal is weighing heavy on our minds. We expect the government to do something fast and provide them relief. We will consider confronting the government if it fails to mitigate their sufferings," said Ghosh, who stepped into the shoes of Chittabrata Majumdar. After 13 years on top, Majumdar relinquished office because of ill health and will now be the union vice-president.

"But direct action or confrontation is the last recourse," both Ghosh and Chakraborty said. With the duo at the helm, a con-

frontation with the government is less likely. Former transport minister Chakraborty, now a CPM state secretariat member, is known to be a votary of industrialisation and responsible trade unionism and aligned with the progressive faction of the CPM. He is not expected to get into an ideological tussle — like his predecessor, the late Niren Ghosh — with the government.

Ghosh, too, is a middle-roader who, unlike Majumdar, is perceived to be flexible in approach and networks well with the hardliners within the Citu. "We in the Citu have to be united against closures and lock-outs and rise in protest against communal and imperialist forces," Ghosh said.

If the critique of the government at the conference is anything to go by, the Ghosh-Chakrabo-

erty duo would encounter resistance to efforts to supplement Bhattacharjee's industrialisation drive from the Citu units in the industrial belts of North 24 Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly. Delegates from these districts had launched the most severe attacks on the government. Top CPM leaders like Jyoti Basu and Anil Biswas, however, have made their support for Bhattacharjee clear.

Ghosh and Chakraborty are expected to feel the heat as they would be increasingly called upon to cap the growing anger in the ranks over the plight of the workers and make them toe the government's pro-industry line, Citu insiders said.

For now, the Citu leaders are continuing with the rhetoric of protest. "We will have to be offensive, if necessary," Chakraborty told a news conference.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 NOV 2003

24 NOV 2003

# HO-12 CITU session begins 2/11

By Malabika Bhattacharya

**KOLKATA, NOV. 20.** Having been admonished by the West Bengal Government and facing growing anger in its ranks over job cuts, the CPI (M)-affiliated CITU began its three-day session here to chart a course of action that it will help address major issues.

The session has already assumed a different dimension — disturbing for the CITU leadership — thanks to the Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's open condemnation of the "controversial" CITU leader, Tarakeshwar Lohar, whose handling of local labour concerns are believed to be chiefly responsible for the brutal killings last week at Dalgan in North Bengal. "He (Tarakeshwar Lohar) has tarnished the party's image by exploiting the labour," Mr. Bhattacharjee had said.

The Chief Minister is not alone in condemning a section of the CITU. Nirupam Som, Industries and Commerce Minister, has warned the CITU that the Government will not tolerate militancy.

For the CITU, the times are troubled and threatening to impact its bases, influence and politics.

The priorities for the CITU and the Government are

different. While the former wants investments to come in heavy industries so that it can conduct its labour movement as before, the Government feels that such industries are losing relevance in the present economic context and has chosen to place its accent on information technology

and other sunrise industries where the scope for labour movement is almost nil.

The public mood also appears to be loaded against the CITU and favours faster flow of investments in modern industries for the benefit of the State's economy.

## Unions should change strategy: Basu

**KOLKATA, NOV. 20.** The former West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, today advised the workforce to strike a balance between realising its demands and maintaining productivity in the context of desperate efforts by the State to woo investors.

"In view of newer forms of attacks on the working class in the shape of liberalisation and globalisation policies pursued by the Centre, the unions too need to change their strategy and see that productivity is maintained while realising their demands", Mr. Basu said inaugurating the three-day conference of the State unit of the CITU.

With the domestic industry facing competition from abroad following abolition of protective regime, modernisation and application of latest technology was a must for survival, he said.

"In every factory, the working class would have to take this into account under a liberalised economy. It is a worker who suffers most in the event of a closure of a factory", he said, adding that the Left Front Government was constantly telling the workers they should not be "indifferent" on the question of productivity.

Mr. Basu said the working class in the country was facing newer threats as an attempt was on to snatch the workers' right to strike and organise agitations.

The CITU State secretary, Chittabrata Mazumdar, said the union would continue to hold protest-movements if workers' interests were jeopardised. — PTI

# Citu admits distance from roots

## OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Nov. 17: The Citu leadership today admitted that despite more members, its strength in the organised sector has been on the decline over the past decade because of shutters coming down on factories and other industrial units.

Announcing a three-day state conference of the Citu in the city from Thursday, state secretary of the union Chittabrata Majumdar said the number of its members has increased from 10.9 lakh to 12.77 lakh in the past three years. And while replying to questions on the Dalgaoon massacre, he said a distance has developed between the leadership and the workers.

"We had pointed out in our

last state conference in Haldia three years ago that trade union leaders will have to move closer to the workers. We will thrash out the issue this time too," said Majumdar.

The eighth state conference will be inaugurated by former chief minister Jyoti Basu. Citu president M.K. Pandhe will be among the speakers.

Majumdar was on the offensive while referring to accusations that militant trade unionism was a prime reason why entrepreneurs shunned Bengal. "What do you mean by militant trade unionism? A cycle factory shifted from Howrah's Salkia to Haryana because they could hire cheap child labour and make them slog for 12 hours. We will definitely protest against this kind of exploitation," he said.

Over the past decade, Majumdar said, investments in the state have mostly been in the information technology sector and were of little help to the large number of jobless workers. "Very few of those who lost their jobs because of factories and other industrial units closing down were re-employed in the new units," he added.

The leader of the CPM's trade union arm reminded reporters that developed countries provide social security to the unemployed.

A delegation of the CITU-led Hindustan Motor and Hyderabad Industries Workers' Union urged the state government today not to allow the management to sell parts of the factory premises.

The delegation submitted a

memorandum to industries minister Nirupam Sen and land and land reforms minister Abdur Rezzak Mollah.

The union leader, Shantasri Chatterjee, said Sen assured them that the government would "do nothing that will come in the way of the workers' interests". He alleged that wages were irregular and expressed fears that the "management might sell a portion of the land to realtors".

## Tolerance plea

State CPM secretary Anil Biswas today urged people not to fuel "regionalism" in the wake of the attacks against the Hindi-speaking community following violence in a train in Bihar.

"We should not indulge in regionalism. We are all Indians," he said.

# Manufacturing to create jobs: McKinsey

Kolkata, November 15

SENIOR PARTNER of McKinsey & Co Rajat Gupta on Saturday said the manufacturing sector was important for an agrarian economy like India to transform itself into a developed economy.

Present at an interactive session organised by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry here Gupta said although much hype had been created

about the success of software, it was the manufacturing sector which had the potential to create huge job opportunities in the country.

Stating that the creation of jobs was the biggest challenge in the coming days, Gupta said the country needed micro and small enterprises and not large ones. This would raise the standard of living of the people.

He said development

models based on centralised planning and foreign aid had met with limited success, adding that the private sector did have an important role to play in the process.

The management consultant, whose career spanned over 30 years in undertaking assignments abroad, said only creative enterprises were able to generate wealth for the country's people.

Gupta said the ideal

growth rate of the country should be 10 per cent, adding that anything below that would not be able to create the number of jobs needed in the next few years.

Gupta said this growth was not unrealistic given the extent of capital formation in the country due to high savings rate.

Addressing the issues of concern, he added that the government did have a vital role to play in areas of



Rajat Gupta

education and public health.

According to Gupta it was also the role of the pri-

ivate sector to involve themselves in this endeavour which, according to him, would also serve their interests in the long-run.

He also spoke about the existence of a large informal sector in developing countries, which was outside the legal framework.

Gupta said this big informal sector should be brought within the legal system in order to generate more wealth.

PTI

# Probe opens can of worms at Dalgaon

Pramod Giri/Rahul Das/  
Daraen Yawar  
Dalgaon (Jalpaiguri), Nov 7

THE TELLTALE signs of the pressure building at the Dalgaon tea garden in Jalpaiguri district before it reached bursting point on Thursday showed up a day later even as the exact cause of the incident remains debatable.

Insiders said that the massacre was not only the outcome of feuding within the Citu over three controversial appointments, a tussle for a change in the guard was also to blame. The district CPI(M) leaders also partly to be blamed for ignoring public sentiment and harbouring criminals in the Citu-affiliated Jalpaiguri Chia Kaman Mazdoor Morcha.

The Dalgaon Tea Estate, set up in 1896 and currently run by the Tantias of Kolkata, has had never suffered the problem of management-workers' feud barring some petty problems.

Workers who went on the warpath on Thursday against their own leadership were unhappy about the highhandedness of the leaders, especially secretary Tarakeswar Lohar.

Lohar and his men even managed to get away with the murder of at least four Citu members of the garden's workforce who had dared challenge his authority.

Thursday's incident has boosted the morale of the local people who have been grumbling about him. Rajen Barak, 22, a permanent labourer said Lohar used to bully workers who questioned him.

"Whatever happened will perhaps work for the best," said a neighbour sitting beside Barak, who's in hospital for fever.

A day after the incident, signs of the impending massacre slowly surfacing. Lohar, pushed to the corner for ignoring the legitimate claims of children of workers who were qualified for the posts and had applied also.

On Wednesday, Lohar hired bodyguards for his safety.



**TWO FACES OF THE VALLEY:** Police rummage through the debris of the massacre at Dalgaon garden. For workers of Happy Valley Tea Estate, it's festival time at the Darjeeling Mall.

Rabin Ray, a Jalpaiguri CPI(M) leader, said: "I got information in the morning that a mob was preparing to attack Lohar. I informed the management but by the time the police reached the spot, it was all over."

The CPI(M) district unit apparently also was aware of the simmering trouble between two groups of the CPI(M) — Citu and SFI.

The Tantias had in fact informed the police on Thursday morning about possible violence.

Though the garden management claimed none of the three people appointed as clerks in the tea garden was an outsider, the police as well as local people and several CPI(M) leaders alleged the three were appointed were outsiders. The reason they were

appointed was Lohar had influenced the management to do so.

These correspondents learnt that the names of the appointees are Saugat, Kunal and Subrata Sengupta.

Dalgaon garden senior assistant manager Satyendra Ojha clarified that the recruitment of workers was purely a prerogative of the management.

Several groups of youths in the garden were watching and waiting for an opportunity to strike out at Lohar.

These youths were backed by local Left Front leaders hostile Lohar. Sources said, lately Lohar had become very unpopular and youths of the garden like Anil Lakra, Manan Lakra, Ratiram Lakra and Chalitar had whipped up the support of local people against Lohar's bid to appoint

outsiders. These four had easily got the support of educated youths in the tea garden who had applied for the vacancies.

"Lohar was extorting money from workers every time they got their weekly wages. His men used to beat up those who refused to cough up," a Kolkata-based Citu leader said.

CPI(M) state secretary Anil Biswas is now saying that action would be taken against party-men found guilty. But the CPI(M) bigwigs are mostly silent as to why no action was taken against Lohar or his men for all these years.

Lohar's house boasted of a dish antenna, tiled floors, and bathrooms and exquisite furniture. It was actually a residential complex with three concrete

houses in it. In contrast, the houses of other staff of the garden were all thatched huts.

The decay in the Citu is not confined to Dalgaon garden alone. Six months ago, Citu leaders of Changmari tea garden were beaten up by workers amid similar charges against the leaders. Disillusioned with Citu, the workers have deserted lock, stock and barrel. Till date, Citu leaders dare not enter Changmari garden. Like in Dalgaon, in Changmari estate Citu was the only union among the workers. With the management downsizing its labour force, more trouble is expected to come up.

# Unions bicker on strike call

*From 'Work' 11.8*  
**MONOBINAGUPTA**

**New Delhi, Oct. 7:** The squabble among trade unions is getting nastier.

The Indian National Trade Union Congress (Intuc) and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) remain as adamant as ever on not finalising a date for an all-India strike to protest against the August 6 Supreme Court ruling stripping government employees of their right to strike.

"We are not an irresponsible organisation to rush into a strike," says Intuc leader Chandidas Sinha.

BMS general secretary Han-subhai Dave adds: "We have decided not to go on strike. You cannot respond to the Supreme Court judgment against strikes with another strike call."

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (Citu) has not managed to persuade either union to have a rethink. The BMS is openly attacking Citu for taking "unilateral decisions".

"Communists have a typical way of functioning. They first go to the media and announce decisions without consulting other

trade unions. Next they try to involve them," says Dave. The BMS is angry that Citu told the media it would participate in the strike without having consulted it first.

But employees' organisations have stepped up pressure on central trade unions to finalise a strike date. The Confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers and the All India Government Federation issued a joint statement last week urging unions to hold the strike in the first half of January.

"Once the budget session (of Parliament) begins, the whole attention will be on the budget. It will not be of much use to have an all-India strike then," a trade union leader said. But Sinha is not impressed. "We cannot jump into a strike because the federations want it. As a responsible trade union we have to consider all the aspects of making such a move," he said.

Sinha said workers are no longer keen to launch into a protest. "The moment you give a strike call they apply for leave so that they do not have to forego a day's salary," the Intuc leader said.

THE TELEGRAPH

OCT 7 1950

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# Job backlash burns 19 to death

9-9 News  
Group  
- CITU  
AVIJIT SINHA

Jalpaiguri, Nov. 6: A mob of several hundred tea garden workers attacked the house of a union leader in north Bengal this morning and burnt to death 19 people in a chilling turn to a dispute over jobs.

Tarakeshwar Lohar, a leader of the union affiliated to the ruling CPM's labour arm, Citu, and the target of the attack, was unharmed and was later taken into police custody. His family of wife, daughter and son-in-law were reported missing and it was not clear if they were among the dead.

"Charred bodies of 19 persons, including two women, were found from Tarakeshwar Lohar's house. Preliminary inquiry reveals that the incident took place over a dispute regarding filling up of three clerical posts," Chayan Mukherjee, the inspector-general in charge of law and order, said in Calcutta.

A group of 50 people descended on Lohar's single-storey house in Dalgaon tea estate, 70 km from the district headquarters, Jalpaiguri, just before 8 am, ransacking the approach and chopping down trees on the way. They were fired on from inside the house and one of them, a garden labourer, suffered an injury, which incensed the mob.

Swelling all the time, the mob had grown to several hundred. Witnesses later said 800 to 1,000 people had gathered. Provoked by the firing, they stormed the house and attacked the inhabitants, described as Lohar's security guards, with sharp weapons, finally torching the house. The gas cylinder and a couple of motorbikes inside the house blew up.



A charred body being taken away from the house. Picture by Biplab Basak

"We came to know that the labourers, about a thousand in number, have torched the house of Lohar. We immediately informed the police who rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control," said S. Ojha, the senior assistant manager of the garden of RNT Plantations Ltd.

Earlier in the morning, while managers were getting ready to go to work and the siren had sounded, they received informa-

tion that labourers were gathering in a football field for a meeting.

"I was in office when I came to know of the meeting. We took it casually as meetings are held regularly," R.S. Lodha, the senior manager of the garden, said.

Police said after the meeting, the mob headed towards Lohar's house. Garden sources said Lohar was a formidable force who used to have full control over lab-

ourers. "He was a known leader. We are still puzzled how this incident happened," Ojha said.

The sources traced the root of the trouble to an incident before Diwali when Lohar, a leader of the Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union, used his influence to have three outsiders employed as clerks — or garden babus, as they are known in the tea industry.

Enraged that candidates from inside the garden had been

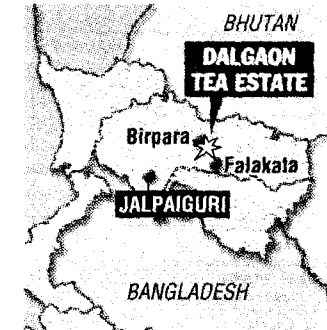
denied, the labourers accused Lohar of taking bribes.

"While the management of the tea estate and local people wanted that locals get the jobs, Lohar wanted people from outside to be employed," Chayan Mukherjee said.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee described the incident as "terrible" and, in reply to a question, said it did not appear to be political.

Reports were, however, coming in that the massacre was a result of feuding within Citu, which will put the chief minister and his party in an awkward position. Even the CPM's allies in the Left Front are pointing fingers at Citu.

Agriculture minister Kamal Guha, of the Forward Bloc, said: "The incident possibly took place because of the Citu's internal strife. Today's incident indi-



cates the delicate situation prevailing in the tea estates of north Bengal. The chief minister must immediately discuss the matter with those associated with tea gardens."

Over 100 people, including 25 women, have been arrested.

Although garden managers said they did not know what caused the incident, it was clear that Lohar had been expecting trouble. "He had hired some local goons who used to guard him," said Bhupinder Singh, the IG of police (north).

This would explain why there were so many people in the house this morning. After Diwali, as the resentment among the workers over the hiring of outsiders flared, Lohar was removed from his leadership position and replaced by Robin Rai, who, incidentally, was missing today.

Tempers flared at the meeting in the football field this morning — it is not clear who had called it — over the same subject and the younger labourers, some said to be drunk, got so worked up as to launch the vicious attack.

"Some labourers used to work as his (Lohar's) sycophants and bully others. This had infuriated the labourers," Singh said. (See Page 9)

*Palazzo Group*

# TUs threaten strike to snatch strike right

*23/8*

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 22: All central trade unions in the country cutting across party lines today condemned the Supreme Court's recent judgment banning strikes by government employees and threatened to do just that if the Centre did not step in and ensure that workers are not denied their fundamental rights.

"We express deep shock and concern over the recent judgment of the Supreme Court and declare that the verdict is completely unacceptable. The central trade unions reiterate the right to strike as sacrosanct and believe it is not subject to any judicial interpretation. Workers can exercise this right as and when necessary," the unions said in a statement after a meeting attended by the Intuc, the Aituc, the HMS, the AICCU and other smaller all-India unions, as well as the BJP-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS).

The union leaders decided to hold a national convention of all central trade unions on September 26 to chalk out "the future course of action". The convention will discuss how best to oppose the court's opinion.

Trade unions all over the country have been asked to take appropriate steps to negate the "pernicious impact of the Supreme Court judgment and protect the workers' right to collective bargaining".

The NDA government has been warned that if it persists in being "insensitive and anti-working class", nationwide strikes would paralyse the country. "We want the Union government to do its bit to ensure that the court judgment is not honoured as it goes against the fundamental rights of citizens," said M.K. Pandhe of the Citu.

"The apex court judgment is completely misleading and confusing and we will not accept it under any circumstances. We will try our best to reverse the judgment and, as a first step, we will go on a countrywide strike in December with active participation of all state and central government employees," said All-India State Government Employees' Federation general secretary Sukomal Sen.

The BMS nominee did not sit through the entire proceedings. The organisation condemned the court's thinking but stopped at that. The BMS representative said he would have to place the detailed action plan to his colleagues before agreeing to it.

The meeting of union leaders felt the Tamil Nadu government's repressive measures against its employees had set a dangerous precedent. The apex court's ruling and the comments made while delivering the verdict could trigger a series of repressive measures by other state governments and corporations, the union leaders said.

# Vajpayee offers sops to farmers to win support

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 27 JULY

PRIME Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee announced sops for farmers on Sunday. Addressing farmers here, Mr Vajpayee said the ceiling on the loan to farmers at an interest lower than the prime lending rate (PLR), is being raised to Rs 2 lakh.

The 200% jump is one of its kind and comes ahead of an electoral season where the BJP has planned to reap a major vote harvest with the support of farmers.

The Prime Minister made it clear that more sops could pour for farmers. "In future, we will take many such unprecedented decisions."

The unabashed assertion was more in line with the championing of the kisan cause by the Chaudharies like Charan Singh and Devi Lal. It was yet another reminder that the NDA government's decision to persevere with reforms will not mark a complete break from pragmatic politics.

It was only early this month that the BJP leadership working in concert with the agriculture ministry prevailed over the finance ministry to offer loans to farmers at a subsidised rate of interest. The measure was tom-



**MAN OF THE MOMENT:** Union agriculture minister Rajnath Singh adjusts the gold headgear that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee received at a farmers' rally in New Delhi on Sunday — PTI

tommed at the BJP's recent Raipur national executive as a major accomplishment.

With Mr Vajpayee coming out in the open to endorse the low interest rate regime for the farm sector, the stage seems to be set for more concessions for the politically crucial constituency. It is also a piece with the move to freeze the kerosene prices.

In an attempt to showcase his regime's concern for the farming community, the Prime Minister quantified the financial outgo for the latest scheme. "Farmers will

benefit by around Rs 2,500 crore by these interest rate cuts," he said.

Defending the decision, the Prime Minister said: "How will a farmer work when cost of credit is too high? Cars are available at much lower interest and there is tax exemption on purchase of consumer goods."

The Prime Minister said, now that the relief has been announced, it must be ensured that its benefit reaches the targeted populace. Giving a call against giving bribes, he said, "karze ke liye dakshina nahin deni chahiye."

*The Economic Times*

28 JUL 2003

FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2003

## INCONVENIENCING THE PUBLIC

THE GENERAL STRIKE called by some of the central trade unions to protest the privatisation and labour policies of the Centre — and some State Governments too — has become an annual affair. As usual, the nationwide strike evoked partial response in most States and was 'near total' in West Bengal and Kerala. The banking and financial sectors were virtually crippled as five of the major unions controlling the bank employees joined the stir. The transport and essential services were, by and large, spared, though buses and lorries in West Bengal and Kerala did not ply. Whether the trade unions that called for the strike achieve their goals or not, they have succeeded in inconveniencing the public yet again. There was a general strike last year on the same issues and a repeat this year, if only to remind the Union Government that the labour unions have not lost track of the issues they have raised. What is more, there is the threat held out of an indefinite strike if the Centre does not respond to the charter of demands, quite oblivious to the sufferings of the public. What is significant is that the central trade union affiliated to the Congress did not join hands with the others, though it has taken the same stand on reforms and privatisation. The strike had very little impact in most of the States, except for the Central Government undertakings.

None of the issues that the trade unions have raised for this strike — privatisation of profit-making public sector undertakings, interest rates for provident fund or labour law reforms, besides the ills of globalisation and liberalisation — is new; nor will the debate end. With a general election due in 2004, it is doubtful that the BJP-led NDA regime at the Centre will push ahead with reforms in the next 12 months. Even disinvestment decisions taken by the Union Cabinet have been reviewed time and again, though the impression that the Ministers give is

that they have been <sup>22/5</sup>deferred, not abandoned. Except for a few inevitable decisions on disinvestment, the Government has yet to deal with the critical public sector units. On labour reforms, precious little has been done and the Centre is unlikely to pursue this track in the run-up to the elections. It is perhaps only after the next general election that any Government at the Centre can take up the next instalment of critical reforms in the financial and labour sectors, which will be the most sensitive, and also imperative to prepare the country and the economy for the competitive and globalised regime that lies ahead. <sup>110-10</sup>

It may be a legitimate demand for the labour unions to protect their interests and jobs. Some of the labour reforms in the pipeline may be more beneficial to the employers and industries than the employees. The trade unions have been expecting this package of reforms for some time now and stepping up their campaign against measures that could render them jobless or arm the employers with special powers of retrenchment. Given the fiscal constraints of Governments — both at the Centre and in the States — it is inevitable that most of the State undertakings will have to be privatised or corporatised through a process of disinvestment. Some of them may have to be closed. It is in this context that the unions are seeking protection and a halt to the reforms process. But they must realise that the process must go on, sooner or later. The Centre, for its part, will do well to initiate a dialogue with the central trade unions not only to take them into confidence, but also to make the process less painful for employees. It is unfortunate that Governments do not believe in consultations and consensus, especially in such sensitive areas. It is only such an approach that can ensure a smooth reforms process, which is stable and acceptable to all the players. <sup>9 - from [unclear]</sup>

23 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

# Nationwide trade union strike today

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 20. The stage is all set for a nationwide strike by the central trade unions tomorrow to protest the economic policies of the Government. Being described as the biggest "manifestation of the indignation of the masses of the country against the anti-national and anti-people policies of the NDA Government", all public sector banks and Central Government employees have announced their decision to participate in the strike.

Addressing a press conference here today, the general secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), M.K. Pandhe, said the strike would

reflect the determination of the Indian working class and its fighting organisations to take the struggle to further militant heights, if the Government did not mend their "unscrupulous manner of selling national wealth for a song and ruining the entire economy to serve their promoters abroad." "It is just a warning and many more actions are yet to come," Mr. Pandhe said.

Representatives of the trade unions had on Monday met the Union Labour Minister on his invitation and made clear their decision to go ahead with the strike.

The eight-point charter of demands, wants the Centre to withdraw its decision to priv-

atise profit-making public sector undertakings, no change in the labour laws in favour of the employers, the immediate enactment of a comprehensive legislation for agricultural labour, the widening of the social security schemes for all, including workers in the unorganised sector, and the restoration of 12 per cent interest rate on the Provident Fund deposits.

Besides, the major trade unions, oil and electricity, the coal and mine sector employees, public sector banks and Central Government employees have also decided to participate in the strike. Ports and docks too will not function.

21 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

# Modi skips CII function

TIMES NEWS NETWORK. 11/1

**Ahmedabad:** Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi made his stand vis-a-vis the CII clear on Saturday by staying away from the inauguration of the Petrominex show. This despite the state government paying over Rs 50 lakhs for the joint show with the CII.

Convinced that the CII bosses had ambushed him in the now famous meeting in Delhi, where he was questioned on the state's law and order situation by Rahul Bajaj and Jamshyd Godrej, Mr Modi ensured that his industry as well as his petrochemical ministers also did not attend the show. However, state government officials were asked to go for the function.

Later in the day, Mr Modi is believed to have given a mouthful to former CII president Rajesh Shah, who was in town for the show. Mr Shah is

the son of BJP man and West Bengal governor Viren Shah. In the evening, Mr Modi had his statement at a different function released berating Mr Bajaj and Mr Godrej for hurting the sentiments of five crore Gujaratis.

Although CII bosses are now posing that nothing has gone amiss and that the chief minister could not attend the function because of other engagements, the fact is that the ranks of the organisation are now split on how to deal with Mr Modi.

And those caught in the crossfire are CII's Gujarat office-bearers. On the one hand, they cannot publicly dissociate themselves from CII's national policy, and on the other, they cannot antagonise the local government.

Sources said CII Gujarat president Nitin Shukla, who heads Shell's operations in the state, is planning to put in his papers. He, however, parried questions on the subject.

# PM urges States to resolve river disputes in farmers' interest

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, JAN. 13.** Development and security are the twin themes that the Bharatiya Janata Party has chosen as its election planks this year, when several States are scheduled to go to the polls.

Addressing a farmers' rally here at the Talkatora Stadium, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, made this clear today while emphasising that what the BJP would like to see was equitable development.

Economic reforms and liberalisation were not mere slogans and they were not meant only for industrialists — reforms could bring about development at the grassroots, Mr. Vajpayee said at the rally organised by the party's 'kisan morcha,' farmers' wing.

The mega project of interlinking rivers was billed as the route to solving the problem of irrigation and availability of water.

Mr. Vajpayee said it was surprising that even after over 55 years of Independence, farmers were rain dependent. Referring to the unsolved river disputes among States, he said they should be resolved in the "national interest and in the interest of farmers."

It was the huge stock of foodgrains — result of hard work of farmers — that had come to the rescue of the country last year, which saw the worst drought in decades.

The Centre was able to provide foodgrains to all the needy States and despite drought, grain worth Rs. 6,000 crores was



**The Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, being greeted by the national president of the BJP Kisan Morcha, Shivankar, at a function in New Delhi on Monday. The BJP president, Venkalah Naidu, looks on. — Photo: Rajeev Bhatt**

exported. He warned that summer could see a water crisis and an acute fodder shortage.

The Prime Minister and several speakers before him — the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, the Human Resource Development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, and the morcha president, M.R. Shivankar — spelt out the various schemes the Vajpayee Government has introduced over the years for farmers. Dr. Joshi emphasised the need to use bio-technology to get maximum gains.

The Kisan Credit Card, a crop insurance scheme, higher pro-

urement prices for grain, a recent increase in the price of sugarcane, and waiver of interest on loans taken by farmers in drought-affected areas — these were all cited as proof that the Vajpayee Government was farmer-friendly. Mr. Vajpayee also said that he had sanctioned Rs. 15,000 crores for roads, which would help farmers transport their produce.

The speakers stressed that for 45 years, the Congress Government had done nothing or very little and that it was the Vajpayee Government since 1998 which had begun worrying

about farmers. However, Mr. Vajpayee did invoke the name of the former Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, to say that he had given the slogan 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan.'

Mr. Vajpayee admitted that there was need for a more honest and efficient administration so that people could get what the Government intended them to get.

The Kisan Credit Card, for example, was not decorative or meant to see and show — it was meant to provide an avenue of instant credit for farmers in times of need.

CII MEET / GROWTH IMPRESSIVE, SAYS JASWANT

# Come out of paralysis, banks told

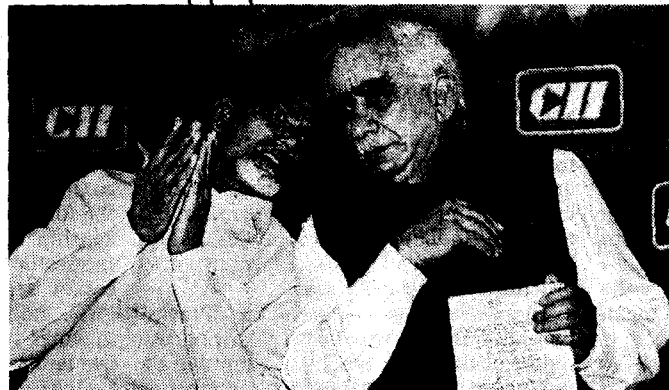
By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JAN. 8. The Union Cabinet will decide tomorrow on a proposal by the Union Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, for opening a Serious Frauds Office to tackle problems associated with corporate governance.

It will signal the announcement of a series of decisions by the Government of India touching upon various economic sectors from January 9 till the first week of February, Mr. Singh said at the ninth Partnership Summit of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) here today.

Delivering the valedictory address, he said the Government had already taken important decisions on the steel industry — which he would leave to the Boards concerned to announce — and on debt swapping and debt amortisation.

Responding to a plea by the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, for introducing an open sky policy to connect India to the world, Mr. Singh said the Union Cabinet had decided not to further defer decisions on Indian Airlines. Things would be happening soon as the Ministries of Finance and Civil Aviation had cleared 90 per cent of the plans. Calling for a change in the mindset, he said Air India must



The Union Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, and the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, at the valedictory session of the 9th Partnership Summit 2003 in Hyderabad on Wednesday. — Photo: H. Satish

learn to work less for itself and more for India.

Mr. Singh exhorted banks to emerge from the paralysis caused by the 'C-3 factor' — the CBI, the CVC and the CAG and take bold decisions on lending money to citizens. He offered to take the brunt of the consequences if things went wrong due to these decisions.

Transparency had been introduced in the budget-making exercise, he said and regretted that attention had been focussed on the ups and downs of tax rates rather than on important aspect of administrative reforms in the finance and revenue departments. For the first time in 50 years, certain

functions of the Department of Revenue were being outsourced.

India had achieved a growth of six per cent and 5.9 per cent in the first two quarters in the face of a severe drought, global economic downturn and geopolitical instability. Manufacturing, exports and imports were on the rise while inflation had been pegged down to three to four per cent bracket in spite of drought. "It will be difficult to find countries that can replicate this achievement," he added.

There was need to reduce the wide gap between policy formulations and actual delivery. The passage of 13 Bills on economic reforms in Parliament after 26

debates in both the Houses this last session was an outstanding achievement. Parliament had recognised the importance of the Bills and had shown that it could deliver when the occasion arose.

On the formulation of the CII president, Ashok Soota, that 10 million jobs must be generated annually if India were to achieve a 10 per cent growth, he said the Government would give high priority to health, housing, tourism and infrastructure, both physical and social. India must become a health destination of the world since quality treatment was already available here at a fraction of the cost elsewhere.

Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, in his keynote address, said India, as a country, was not poor and the problem was one of poverty in thinking.

The country could be transformed if proper policies were framed and inefficiency was tackled. Indians had performed exceptionally well internationally and the Indian diaspora of 20 million annually generated \$ 160 billion, which was more than twice the GDP of a country like Malaysia.

The Andhra Pradesh Minister for Major Industries, K. Vidyadher Rao, and the Chairman of the Partnership Summit, Sanjiv Goenka, described the four-day event a big success.

NEW DELHI

9 JAN 2003