## Natwar Singh discusses By Atul Aneja . NW Ana w

MANAMA, DEC. 25. India is set to give a fresh direction to its relationship with key Persian Gulf states, with the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh beginning a six-day visit to Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain today.

Mr. Natwar Singh arrived in Muscat last night and held talks today with his counterpart, Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah. covering economic, energy and security issues. He also called on Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and delivered a message from the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. During his stay, Mr. Natwar Singh is expected to sign an extradition treaty and hold discussions with the Ministers of Defence, Oil and Gas and Trade and Industry.

India's economic relation-ship with Oman gained momentum after work on the construction of a large fertilizer plant in Oman began last year. India pitched in with about \$ one billion for the project, fence ties have also grown over the years, which have included a recent visit by Indian warships to Oman — a strategically significant nation because of its proximity to shipping lanes passing through the Gulf of Hormuz.

Mr. Singh also conveyed India's interest in a joint venture for the development of Oman's Musandam Peninsula. The visit to Oman comes amid a concerted effort by New Delhi to shore up ties with the six-na-tion Gulf Cooperation Council that includes Oman. India and the GCC held their first conference in Mumbai in February, where both sides charted out a blueprint for future cooperation, especially in the economic and commercial arena.

## Free trade area pact

India is looking at having a free trade area agreement with the GCC. It has also lauded the GCC's efforts for achieving economic integration, from which it could also benefit. GCC countries have already established a common customs union, and are working to-wards achieving a common market and monetary union with a common currency. India and the GCC initiated a collective political dialogue in September 2003.

Despite the economic focus, Mr. Singh is likely to discuss Bahrain's controversial proposal at the just concluded GCC summit, of placing a fiveyear ceiling on the stay of expatriate workers in any Gulf country. The move, if ap-proved, would have a serious impact on many of the 3.5 million Indians in the Gulf.
During his stay in the UAE,

Mr. Singh will establish contacts with the new leadership following the death of its President, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan

Al Nahyan.
In Dubai, he will chair a meeting of the 15 Indian heads of mission from countries of the Gulf and the rest of West Asia.

26 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

## Politics as usual in India's Arafat delegation Basu's condolence garage sent them. The leaders of

Statesman News Service

to go but couldn't because but couldn't decide who to going after obtaining a Arafat's funeral is politics cial delegation for Yasser Mrs Sonia Gandhi wanted of protocol. The BJP was send. And Mr Lalu Prasad NEW DELHI, Nov. 11. asked to name its leader, of the country. India's officourt clearance to be out as usual.

and UPA chairperson, Mrs The Congress president Sonia Gandhi, "opted out"

leaving tonight for Cairo to attend the funeral of the Palestinian leader, Yasser cal problems," officials said. The official Indian delegation will be led by the of the official delegation Arafat, because of "logistipersonally hand over a letexternal affairs minister, Mr Natwar Singh, who will

Arafat's widow, Suha. While nobody would admit as much, Mrs Gandhi's cial delegation to a formal caused some embarrassing presence as part of an offiter from Mrs Gandhi to Mr

(OLKATA, Nov. 11. — Mr Jyoti Basu today condoled the death had once visited Kolkata. The people of Kolkata have always of Arafat and said that though the PLO had lost its founding which will in the long run emerge victorious despite the loss suffered in the demise of Arafat," he said. — PTI victorious in their struggle. In his condolence message, Mr Basu said he personnally knew the Palestinian leader who expressed solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle ather, the Palestinian people would ultimately emerge

protocol "difficulties", because she holds no official Going as leader of the Coning lower in the protocol rung than the external afgress would have meant beposition in the government.

fairs minister, who leads the delegation.

ficial delegation, because opposition party, in the of-There will be no member from the BJP, the principal BJP leaders could not nom-

member, Mr Sitaram Yechuri. The minister of state for external affairs, Mr E Ahamed, who is in Jeddah, is likely to join the team in and CPI(M) Politburo Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad Cairo, officials said Singh) and the Lok Sabha the Opposition in both the (Mr LK Advani) were asked by the MEA to nom-

Rajya Sabha (Mr Jaswant

## Meeting cancelled

However, the railway

inate a member for the del

egation.

minister and RJD leader

leader Left Front leaders over lunch today was cancelled in view of the passing away of Palestinian, leader Yasser Arafat in Paris scheduled meeting with Dr Manmohan Singh gation. He was permitted by a CBI court today to Mr Arafat's funeral. Also in the delegation are the parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Lalu Prasad, will be part of India's official deleleave the country to attend

## Natwar to, head Indian team w

New Delhi: Congress president Sonia



dent Sonia
G an d h i
dropped her
plans to attend the funeral of
Palestinian
leader Yasser Arafat in

Cairo on Friday and the Indian delegation would be headed by external affairs minister K Natwar Singh.

ter K Natwar Singh.

The delegation includes railway minister Lalu
Prasad, parliamentary affairs minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, minister of state for external affairs E Ahamed and CPM leader Sitaram Yechur official sources said on Thursday. Party sources had earlier said that Sonia Gandhi was planning to go for the funeral, but no reason was given for the change.

India described Arafat as an "enduring symbol" of Palestine nationhood and said he would be remembered as its "sincere and steadfast friend" and his demise was an irretrievable loss to the world. en No observer for Iraq polls: Left

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, October 28

THE LEFT leaders have told the UPA government that India should neither send observers nor any civilian staff for the polls in Iraq, but if a request came through the UN, it could consider training their staff in election work.

The Left conveyed their unanimous view on the issue when they met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh over breakfast this morning. CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet and CPI leader A.B. Bardhan led the Left parties at the meeting.

at the meeting.

RSP leader Abani Roy told newspersons they had agreed that there is "no question of sending anyone from here to Iraq". "But if Iraqis come here for training, we don't have any problem because it will be an UN request," he added.

CPI secretary D. Raja said if a Parliament resolution had barred sending troops



**Manmohan Singh** 

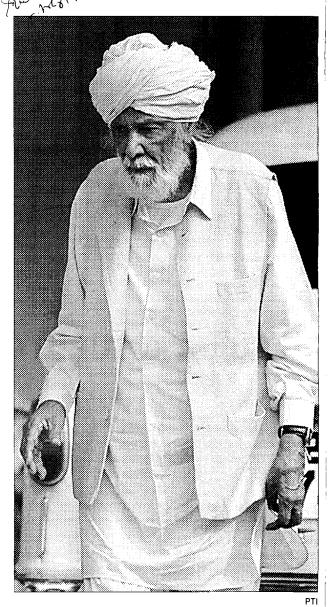
to Iraq, how could civilians be sent. "Nothing should be committed by the government," he said. Raja claimed that the UPA government's view was similar to those of the Left parties.

National security adviser J.N. Dixit briefed the leaders on several foreign policy issues, including recent talks with the leadership of Myanmar and Iran, and developments in Israel and Afghanistan, in the presence of the Prime Minister.

Expressing satisfaction over the recent India-Pakistan talks, the Left parties had yesterday demanded a review of the Indo-Israel strategic ties in view of the increasing attacks on the Palestinian people.

Giving their parties' views on foreign policy issues, a joint statement of the Left leaders asked the government to express India's concern for the release of pro-democracy leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi from house arrest in Myanmar. On Indo-US relations, the Left wanted India to keep off the US missile defence programme.

The Left leaders said other than Iraq issues, no other subject came up for discussion at the breakfast meet. They said they did not raise the issue of disinvestment in PSUs on which they had demanded discussions with the government yesterday. Their view was that disinvestment of shares in 35 profit-making PSUs would go against UPA's common minimum programme.



CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet leaves the PM's residence after a breakfast meeting on Thursday.

THE HIDUSTAN TIMES 29 nct 2004

## Joint Indo-Israel air exercises in '05

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 14

THE defence relationship between New Delhi and Tel Aviv has deepened further

with India and Israel agreeing

in principle to hold joint air ex-

ercises involving US-made F-

16s and Russian-built Su-30 MKI fighters.

While the modalities of the first ever Indian Air Force and Israeli Air Force exercise will be decided by the executive steering group under the bilateral Defence Cooperation Group, Air Chief S. Krishnaswamy discussed the issue with his Israeli counterpart during his visit to Tel Aviv last week.

The IAF chief interacted with Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz and Israel's military top brass during his weeklong trip. He also also flew a one-hour sortie on a twinseater F-16 I fighter piloted by Major Jonathan from Ramon air base, south of Tel Aviv last Wednesday.

According to sources, both sides were keen on pushing the interaction between the two air forces and were all for exchanging operational tactics with each other. The joint exercise will be slated for 2005 after IAF Sukhoi-30 MKIs have done their tour of France.

Though Israel is smaller than Kerala in geographical area, its air force is one-and-ahalf times more potent than the Indian Air Force.

While IAF has a force level of 36.5 fighter squadrons, the Israelis have more than 30 fighter squadrons including 349 F-16s, 79 F-15s and 140 Kfir fighters.

Apart from undertaking joint exercises, New Delhi is also looking at Tel Aviv for help and hardware for its indigenous AWACS project. The AWACS project with the initial sanction of Rs 1,800 crore was cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) last week.

According to a Defence Ministry official, some critical equipment on board the indigenous AWACS will be an "off-shoot of the India-Israel PHALCON AWACS" deal. This essentially means that Israeli defence contractors will be involved in helping the Indian project in areas such as radar and communications.

While Air Headquarters is thinking of renaming the PHALCON AWACS, as the PHALCONS were only made for Chile, the indigenous AWACS will feed into the three airborne command and control platforms that Israel is scheduled to deliver by 2007. Basically, the Indian effort is part of the exercise to match the activities of its western neighbour which is on the verge of sealing an AWACS deal with Sweden.

## Freedom clincher: secret statement

K.P. NAYAR

Washington, Sept. 12: Three men, at different levels of the Indian government, combined secrecy, duplicity and unconventional diplomacy to secure the release of three Indians held in captivity in Iraq, it can now be reported.

Although Kuwait Gulf Link s(KGL), employers of Antaryami, Tilak Raj and Sukhdev Singh, paid ransom, it was not the key to ending the hostage saga.

Acceding to a firm demand from the hostage-takers, India issued a statement in Arabic in Baghdad expressing unstinted support for the aspirations of those fighting the American occupation of Iraq. The statement never saw the light of day in New Delhi and is still being kept under wraps by the ministry of external affairs.

Drafts of this statement, which helped restart negotiations with the kidnappers,

went back and forth between Baghdad and New Delhi on the one hand and between Baghdad and Kuwait on the other.

The statement finally released in Baghdad was the outcome of a demand by the hostage takers that India should condemn the US attack on Iraq and the subsequent occupation. The demand made the political leadership in South Block sweat, notwithstanding its carefully cultivated image of not being pro-US.

pro-US.
Career diplomats

The inside story

were in favour of giving serious consideration to this demand by the kidnappers, but the political leadership developed cold feet lest anything on those lines annoyed Washington.

A statement was drafted by Talmiz Ahmad, India's ambassador to Oman, who was sent to Baghdad. Ahmad lost no time in getting South Block's permission to fly in Zikr-ur-Rahman, an MEA translator,

who was his close aide when Ahmad was ambassador in Riyadh.

Rahman's networking in the closely-knit, secretive royal palaces in Riyadh and in the sources of theocratic power in Mecca far exceeded his official position at the Indian embassy in Riyadh. Translators are a cadre in MEA whose services are under-acknowledged.

Ahmad's brief as negotiator in Baghdad was an impos-

sible one. No negotiations with the terrorists and not even a hint

that India would pay any ransom.

He instinctively realised that what he needed was someone like Rahman: low profile, with a deep understanding of the Bedouin ways of life.

Instead of a top official, if a mere translator was talking to the kidnappers, it would keep up the farce in New Delhi that India was not bargaining with terrorists

Rahman's first challenge was to undo the damage done by external affairs minister Natwar Singh's public allegation that the kidnappers were bandits and criminals.

The kidnappers may or may not have been criminals. But it is believed that they decided to demand India's condemnation of the US in order to salvage their reputation tarnished by this public allegation.

shed by this public allegation.
Soon, it became clear that India was averse to an outright condemnation of the US. The outcome of drafts that furiously went back and forth between Baghdad and New Delhi for several days was a final statement that drew heavily on aspects of the Parliament resolution against the war in Iraq. It expressed support for the aspirations of the Iraqi people for freedom and self-rule.

The stage was thus set for resuming talks that led to the release of the Indians, though the turning-point statement still remains a secret in Delhi.

\* 1 SEC 2004

## Long wait ends for hostage kin

## Release is Guruji's gift, says Sukhdev's brother, Harvinder

**HT Correspondents** Makrona Kalan / Una, 🥿 September 1

THE RELEASE of the seven hostages in Iraq on Wednesday led to festivities in the hometowns of the three Indian truckers - Sukhdev Singh, Tilak Raj and Antaryami.

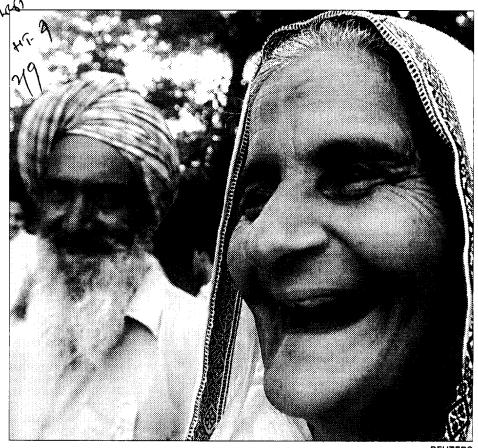
No sooner had TV channels started flashing the news than villagers in Makrona Kalan made a beeline for Sukhdev's house to congratulate his relieved family. "The hostages' release is a gift of Guru Granth Sahib," Harvinder Singh, Sukhdev's brother, told HT.

"Our ardas has paid off, we're thankful to Wahe Guru for ensuring our son's safe re-lease," echoed his father Sher Singh, sharing the joy with his wife, Jaspal Kaur. In Purhiran village, resi-

dents got a double reason to celebrate — the 400th anniversary of the Guru Granth Sahib and the safe release of Tilak Raj. Tilak's mother, Kishni Devi, thanked God their ordeal had finally ended, while his sister Taro couldn't hold back her tears. And the news is sure to do his stepfather, Shamsher Singh, who suffered a stroke on Tuesday after hearing of the killing of 12 Nepalese hostages, a world of good.

In Dehlan, Antaryami's father Ram Murthi said his son's release had coincided with such an auspicious oc-casion. "Guru ke Granth nu mera parnaam (my gratitude to the Guru's Granth)," he said. "As today is the 400 anniversary of the Granth Sahib, I knew something good would happen," he said between congratulatory calls that had him busy.

But the best was vet to come. When he picked up the phone for the umpteenth time, his son was on the other side, telling him they were all safe and may be taken to Kuwait before returning home. The whole house erupted in celebration then.



Sher Singh and Jaspal Kaur, Sukhdev Singh's parents, at Makronan Kalan village in Punjab after hearing the news of their son's release.

## CRISIS CHRONOLOGY

July 21 Three Indian drivers taken hostage along with 3 Kenyans and one Egyptian by "Holders of Black banner" an unknown Iraqi militant group

July 22 External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh speaks to Iragi counterpart Hoshyar Zebari. One of the hostages, Tilak Raj, tells a TV channel they were forcibly sent to Iraq

July 23 The captors offer a 48-hour deadline to their Kuwaiti employer, KGL, to meet their demands; Govt sets up a Crisis Management Group under

Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed

July 24 India appeals through TV networks in Iraq, Kuwait and some other Gulf countries for release of hostages



July 25 Captors name tribal chieftain Sheikh Hisham al-Dulaimi to mediate with Kuwaiti employers

July 26 Captors do not execute hostages as per deadline

July 30 Captors issue 24-hour deadline and threaten to behead the hostages one by one if demands are not met

Aug 8 KGL pulls out of talks saying abductors making fresh "last minute" demand

Aug 27 KGL agrees to halt operations in Iraq

Aug 28 KGL claims negotiations are in the wrapping-up

Aug 31 Government confirms safety of the hostages

Sept 1 Hostages are freed

## ভারতীয় বন্দী:কথা ত্রতীয় বন্দী:কথা বললেন রাষ্ট্রদূত্রী সবাসবি কথা বলবে কে জি এল

দিল্লি ও বাগদাদ, ৯ আগস্ট (পি টি আই, এ পি, এ এফ পি)— ভারতীয় পণবন্দীদের মুক্তির সম্ভাবনা ফের ধাক্কা খেল। গোটা পরিস্থিতি আজ নতন দিকে মোড় নিয়েছে। শেখ দুলেমির সঙ্গে আর কথাবার্তা চালাতে নারাজ কে জি এল। দুলেমির বিশ্বাসযোগ্যতা নিয়েই প্রশ্ন তুলেছে তারা। কে জি এল মুখপাত্র রানা আবু জানে বলেছেন, আমরা জানতে পেরেছি শেখ দুলেমিকে মধ্যস্থতার ভূমিকা অপহরণকারীরা দেয়নি। দু দুবার আলোচনা ভেস্তে যাওয়ার পর আমাদের এবার অন্য পথের কথা ভাবতে হচ্ছে। কুয়েতে ভারতের রাষ্ট্রদৃত শ্বাস পবন সিং আজ কে জি এল সংস্থার তাবড কর্তাদের সঙ্গে এক ঘণ্টা বৈঠক করেন। কর্তারা শ্বাস পবনকে প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছেন, পণবন্দীদের মুক্তির জন্য যা যা করতে হবে, সব কিছু করতে তৈরি তাঁরা। বিদ্রোহীদের সঙ্গে সরাসরি কথা বলতে চাই আমরা। নাহলে, অন্য কাউকে প্রতিনিধি করে পাঠাক তারা। কুয়েতি সংস্থার মতে, 'হোল্ডার্স অফ দ্য ব্ল্যাক ব্যানার্স' বা কালো পতাকার বিদ্রোহীদের আসল দাবি কী, সেটা বোঝাতেই শেখ দুলেমি ব্যর্থ হয়েছেন। তা ছাড়া, পণবন্দী সমস্যা মেটাতে তিনি কতটা আন্তরিক, সেই প্রশ্নও ওঠে। তাঁর প্রকৃত উদ্দেশ্যও বোঝা যাচ্ছে না। শনিবার জানা গিয়েছিল, কে জি এল ইরাক থেকে ব্যবসা গুটিয়ে নিতে এবং বিপুল মুক্তিপণ দিতে রাজি হয়েছে। ফলে, দু'পক্ষের রফা হতে চলেছে। রবিবার বিদ্রোহীরা হঠাৎ আরও অর্থের দাবি জানায়। এতে আলোচনা ভেস্তে যায়। কে জি এল গোটা ব্যাপারটা থেকে হাত শুটিয়ে

নিতে চায়। কুয়েতি সংস্থা আজ বলেছে, বিদ্রোহীরা সরাসরি কথা বলতে চাইলে কে জি এল প্রতিনিধিরা বাগদাদে যাবেন। 'কালো পতাকা'-র কোনও জবাব এখনও তাদের কাছে পৌঁছয়নি। এদিকে মধ্যস্থতাকারীর ভূমিকায় উপজাতি নেতা দুলেমির ওপরেই ভারত এখনও ভরসা রাখতে চায়। দিল্লিতে বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিং সাংবাদিকদের বলেছেন, দুলেমি বরফ গলাতে পারবেন বলে ভারতের আশা। আলোচনা এতটা এগোনোর পর তাঁকে বদল করাটা কি ঠিক হবে? অন্যদিকে ভারতীয়দের মুক্তির আশা বারবার ধাক্কা খাওয়ায় অন্তর্যামী, তিলক রাজ ও সুখদেবের পরিবারে নতন করে আতঙ্ক ছডিয়েছে। বিশেষ সূত্রের খবর, কুয়েত অ্যান্ড গালফ লিঙ্ক ট্রান্সপোর্টের (কে জি এল) কর্তারা লক্ষ লক্ষ ডলার বাগদাদে নিয়ে গেছেন। তৈরি রাখা হয়েছে এক বিমানও। এর জন্য দৈনিক বিপুল খরচ হচ্ছে। ৭ পণবন্দী মুক্তি পেলেই তাঁদের কুয়েতে নিয়ে আসা হবে। এই আশায় সব ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়েছে। বার বার তাতে জল ঢেলে দেওয়ায় কুয়েতি কর্তারা এবার বেশ বিরক্ত। দিল্লিতে বিদেশমন্ত্রক জানিয়েছে, কে জি এল এবং দুলেমির বৈঠক ভেঙে যাওয়ার খবর তাঁরা পেয়েছেন। এই খবরে স্বভাবতই উদ্বেগ ছড়িয়েছে। তবে ভারতের তরফে মুক্তিপণের টাকা দেওয়ার কোনও প্রশ্নই ওঠে না। পণবন্দী সমস্যার সমাধানে কৃটনৈতিক ও অন্যান্য পদ্ধতির সাহায্য নেওয়া হবে। কুয়েত ও বাগদাদের দৃতাবাসের সঙ্গে প্রতি মুহুর্তে যোগাযোগ রাখা হচ্ছে। পরিস্থিতির দিকে সতর্ক দৃষ্টি রেখেছে ভারত।

## ও অর্থ দাবি, পিছোল কেজিএল

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৮ অগস্ট: শেষ মুহুর্তে ইরাকি জঙ্গিরা ্মারও বেশি মুক্তিপণ দাবি করায় আজ অালোচনা থেকে সরে গিয়েছে কুয়েতি প্রিবহণ সংস্থা কে জি এল। কাল প্রায় চুড়াঙ্গ কথা হয়ে গেলেও আজ অপহরণকারীরা আরও বেশি টাকা চাইছে ংলে জানান মধ্যস্থতাকারী শেখ হিশাম ত্যাল দুলাইমি। তার পরেই বেঁকে বসে কে জি এল।

তারা একটি বিবৃতিতে বলেছে, দুলাইমির মধ্যস্থতায় যে জঙ্গিদের অনুমোদন ৰেই', গত দু'দিনে তা স্পষ্ট হয়েছে। দুলাই মিও কবুল করেছেন, তাঁর সঙ্গে জঙ্গিদের কোনও যোগাযোগ নেই। গণ্মাধ্যমের সাহায্যেই বার্তা পৌঁছে দিতেন তিনি। এই অবস্থায় জঙ্গিদের সরাসরি আংলোচনায় বসার ডাক দিয়েছে কে জি এল। বিকল্প মধ্যস্থের প্রস্তাবও দিয়েছে: তারা। তবে ইরাকি জঙ্গিগোষ্ঠী 'ইসলান্ত্রিক সিক্রেট আর্মি-দ্য হোল্ডার্স অফ ব্ল্যাক ব্যানার্স'-এর হাতে পণবন্দি তিন ভারতীয়কে মুক্ত করার ১৮ দিনের উদ্যোগে আজ নতুন করে জট পাকিয়ে গেলা সে বিষয়ে সন্দেহ নেই।

কে জি এল স্পষ্ট করে না জানালেও দুলাইমি আজ ফালুজার মার্কিন হামলায় ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত প্রায় ২৫০টি ইরাকি পরিবারকে অর্থ সাহায্যের দাবি নতুন করে তোলেন বলে খবর মিলেছে। কে জি এলের বক্তব্য, এটি সম্পূর্ণ রাজনৈতিক দাবি। যদ্ধদর্গতদের অর্থসাহায্যের দায় তারা নেবে না।

রাতে বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহ বলেন, "কাল দুলাইমির সঙ্গে কে জি এলের কথা চূড়ান্ত হয়ে গিয়েছিল। দুলাইমি তা অপহরণকারীদের জানিয়েছেন। টিভি থেকে আমরা জানতে পেরেছি, অপহরণকারীদের উত্তরের জন্য অপেক্ষা করছেন তিনি। এ ব্যাপারে বেশ খানিকটা সময় লাগতে পারে। তাই আমাদের আশা রাখতে হবে।" ইতিমধ্যে খবর পাওয়া যায়, কে জি এল আলোচনা খেকে সরে

"আমাদের কাছে এ রকম কোনও খবর নেই। আমরা দু'পক্ষের আলোচনায় উৎসাহ দিচ্ছি।" অপহৃতদের দ্রুত ও নিরাপদ মুক্তির জন্য কেন্দ্র সব রকমের চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছে বলেও তিনি জানান।

জাইনে আজ জানান, অমিতাভ বচ্চন, ধর্মেন্দ্র, আশা পারেখরা বন্দিদের মুক্তির আবেদন জানালে দ্রুত কাজ হতে পারে বলে দুলাইমির দাবি। এই খবর পেয়ে পণবন্দি অন্তর্যামীর বাবা রাম মূর্তিও সংবাদমাধ্যমে এই



১ অগস্ট: আশা জাগিয়েও মুক্তি অধরা। বন্দিরা মুক্ত, কেনীয় মন্ত্রীর এই ঘোষণায় বিভ্রান্তি। মধ্যস্থতায় নারাজ দুলাইমি। ২ অগস্ট সব দাবি মেনেছি, বলল কে জি এল। খোঁজ অন্য মধ্যক্তের।

ু জগস্ট: দুলাইমিকেই মধ্যস্থ চাইল জঙ্গিরা। ৫-৬ অগস্ট**েকে জি এল**-দুলাইমি আলোচনা। ্ অংফ আলোচনা চূড়ান্ত, মুক্তির পথ পরিষ্কার, বলল বিদেশমন্ত্রক। ৮ অগস্ট: টাকার দাবি বাড়াল জ্ঞান্তিরা পরিস্থিতি ফের বিশ

এসেছে। এ বিষয়ে নটবর বলেন, তারকাদের আবেদন জানানোর অনুরোধ করেন। এ দিকে, মুম্বইয়ে অমিতাভ বলেছেন, "এক বার কেন, একশো বার আবেদন করতে রাজি আছি। তবে, বিদেশমন্ত্রকের অনুরোধ ছাড়া কিছু বলা আমার এক্তিয়ারে পড়ে না। এ বিষয়ে কোনও অসাবধানী মন্তব্য সমস্ত প্রক্রিয়া পণ্ড করে দিতে পারে।" একই মত আশা পারেখেরও।

অমিতাভ সাউথ ব্লকের বার্তার অপেক্ষায় থাকলেও সলমন খান অবশ্য আজই আবেদন করেছেন। স্টার নিউজকে তিনি বলেন, ''আমি অপহরণকারীদের তিন ভারতীয়কে ছেড়ে দেওয়ার আবেদন জানাচ্ছি। ওরা গরিব, পেটের দায়ে ওখানে গিয়েছিল।" প্রীতি জিন্টাও বলেছেন, ''অপহরণকারীদের কাছে অনুরোধ, ওদের যেন ছেড়ে দেওয়া হয়।"

তবে, চিত্রতারকাদের দিয়ে প্রচার করানোর বিষয়ে বিদেশমন্ত্রকের বক্তব্য, চার-পাঁচ দিন আগেই দুলাইমি এ কথা বলেছিলেন। তার সঙ্গে আজ**কে**র ঘটনার কোনও সম্পর্ক নেই। তাই এ বিষয়ে মাথা ঘামাচ্ছে না বিদেশমন্ত্রক। তাদের মতে, মুক্তির বিষয়টি যখন জড়িয়ে আছে আর্থিক দরাদরির উপরে, তখন তারকাদের আবেদন অপ্রাসঙ্গিক।

আজকের জটিলতায় দুশ্চিস্তায় পড়েছে কেন্দ্র। অপহাতদের পরিবারে ফের হতাশা নেমে এসেছে। বিদেশ প্রতিমন্ত্রী ই আহমেদের নেতৃত্বে আজ সঙ্কট মোকাবিলা গোষ্ঠীর বৈঠক চলে প্রায় ছ'ঘন্টা। তার পর বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়, "আমরা রিপোর্ট পেয়েছি দুলাইমি ও কে জি এলের যোগাযোগ হয়েছে আজ দুপুরে।"

বাড়তি টাকার দাবি নিয়েই সরকার চিস্তিত। এর আগে জঙ্গিরা যে কয়েক লক্ষ ডলারের দাবি রেখেছিল, বিস্তর দরাদরির পরে তা মেনে নেয় কে জি এল। কিন্তু নতুন দাবি ওঠা মানে তা মেটানোর দায় প্রায় পুরোটাই বর্তাবে কে<del>য়ের</del> উপরে। কারণ কে জি এলের বক্তব্য, তারা যথাসম্ভব করেছে।

## KGL pulls out of hostage talks **ABDUCTORS MAKE FRESH DEMANDS**

## SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, Aug. 8. — The after their captors made fresh 'last minute" demands in a urged the negotiators to Kuwaiti employer of the three ht pulled out of negotiations setback to prospects of their ndian hostages in Iraq tonig release, but the government

tion is threatening to turn into appeared unsure of how to the end of a six-hour meeting Group this afternoon, the government deelined to even deal with the latest demands of the kidnappers. In fact, at acknowledge that fresh demaof the Crisis Management A potentially tragic situaa farce as the government 'remain engaged'

nds had been made. "The government has not been ting forth new demands to the informed of the militants put-Kuwait Gulf Link Transport Limited, the employer of the after the meeting said little captive truckers," a CMG source said. A statement issued beyond advocating patience.

government's lack of a As the negotiations between set of demands, it was clear were unwilling to let go of the "golden goose" that promises to fulfil their demands, and would keep up the "pressure Sheikh Al-Dulaimi, appeared nappers and their mediator tactics". It was also clear that KGL and the mediator to have stalled after the fresh that the shadowy Iraqi kid-

coherent policy to deal with such crises was hampering the three hostages, taken captive along with three Kenyans efforts to ensure the release of and an Egyptian on 21 July.

nature of the new demands Prospects of their early was unclear, sources indicatrelease, which rose after the cidnappers' initial list of demands had been met yesterday, suffered a fresh setback with the captors slapping the new conditions. While the exact ed that the amount of money to be paid "as compensation" was the sticking factor.

going fine. We were expecting Rana Abu-Zaineh said over telephone from Kuwait: "Till last night, everything was spokesperson

to receive the hostages, but mind at the last minute and put in a new demand." She, the abductors changed their however, declined to spell out the demand, but said it did

Ms Zaineh was quoted by a news agency late tonight as had "pulled out of the negotiannouncing that the company not concern the company. ations'

Emerging from the marathon CMG meeting, ext-Natwar Singh told reporters that "from a TV interview given a short while ago, we and the KGL are still awaiting ernal affairs minister Mr K understand that Al-Dulaimi a response from the abductors. He said all efforts were on to secure their release.



## Dulaimi wants Bachchan, Asha Parekh to appea

Parekh have said that if the government asks them to Sheikh Hisham Al-Dulaimi, the negotiator of the Iraqi teryear Asha Parekh make an appeal to facilitate the demanded that Amitabh Bachchan or actress of yes militant group holding three Indian nostages, today VEW DELHI, Aug. 8. — In a curious development. release of the captives. Both Bachchan and Asha appeal for the release of the hostages, they are willing to do so.

"If there is an official request, I am ready to do so, not just once but 100 times over. However, I don't want to political problem and lots of people are involved... I'm do anything that would jeopardise their release. It's a why not? I am most willing. If it saves someone's life eopardise the whole process," Bachchan said. Asha request had no relevance at present. - SNS & PT However, the Centre said tonight that Mr Dulaimi's Parekh said: "If the government asks me to do so, will be ready to speak to them (the abductors), really a non-entity and hence I don't wish to



THE STATESMAN

AUG 200 s

NEGOTIATIONS IN FINAL STAGE: KGL

## Hope, dawns on hostages

SNS & AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, Aug. 7. — The way has reportedly been cleared for the release of the three Indian hostages in Iraq. Emerging out of a meeting of the Crisis Management Group late tonight, minister of state for external affairs Mr È Ahmed said face-to-face negotiations took place between Sheikh Hisham Al-Dulaimi and senior representatives of the Kuwait and Gulf Link (KGL) transport company today. Mr Ahmed said: "It must be appreciated that unless we have authoritative and clear confirmation that the hostages have been released, we must wait with patience and with hope.

patience and with hope.

"What I can confirm, however, is that all indications at this juncture point to a positive outcome to the crisis." As the hostage crisis entered its 18th day today, TV reports from Kuwait City also quoted KGL officials as saying that negotiations with the abductors were in "the final stages".

Mr Ahmed hinted that the hostages — Antaryami, Tilak Raj and Sukhdeo Singh — may be handed over tomorrow. "You (media) have waited for 17 days, please wait for another day," Mr Ahmed said.

Asked if the government would send a plane to Baghdad to bring back the hostages, he said: "Even before they have been released, you want me to send a plane." Mr Ahmed said as soon as the government gets information of their release, "appropriate steps will be taken".

Sheikh Al-Dulaimi, the Iraqi tribal leader, is negotiating with the abductors — Holders of the Black Banners — for the release of the seven hostages, including the three Indians who are employed by the KGL.

Earlier, Mr Ahmed had said that the government was committed to "bringing our three brothers (Antaryami, Sukhdeo and Tilakraj) home safe". Three Kenyans and an Egyptian truck driver are also being held hostage. Last Sunday, a report about the hostages' release had raised hopes among their families in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, but the news was found to be untrue.

Mr Ramamurti, father of Antaryami, said tonight that he was conveyed about the "progress" in negotiations. He received a call from the ministry of external affairs late tonight informing him that the talks had concluded. "We were, however, not told about the timing and modalities of the release," he said and added: "Unless there is some official confirmation, we will not believe he is released."

## Talks to release hostages in final stages

XX KBy Atul Aneja

MANAMA, Aug. 3. Talks to end the stages, with negotiators discuss-13-day-old hostage crisis in Iraq appeared to be in the final ing the details of a deal.

transport company, whose seven employees including three Indian drivers have been kidnapped, triggered a flurry of contacts with Sheikh Hisham Al Dulaimi, an Iraqi tribal leader who is mediating to end the A statement this afternoon by a representative of the Kuwaiti

The spokesperson of the Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL), Rana Abu Zaineh, appeared this afternoon on a conditional offer to Mr. Al Dulaimi to rejoin the talks. "We want Mr. Al Dulaimi to join the talks," she said but added that "he should not be the only one to do so." Ms. Rana told *The Hindu* over telephone that Mr. Al Arabiya television and made hostage crisis.

n-Brigade of the Islamic Secret Ar-Bi. May, seeking his intervention the during the talks. With negotiath thous floundering on Sunday, the KGL declared on Monday that it the KGL declared on Monday the KGL declared on Monday that it the KGL declared on Monday th was ready to meet "the demands that have been made"

and hoped that the kidnappers would agree with its offer. Collective efforts

evision as a medium of communication, Mr. Al Dulaimi Persisting with Al Arabiya telappeared on the satellite chan-

agreement and hope the hostages will be released." But the Iraqi negotiator reminded the "Kuwaiti people" not to forget the people of Fallujah and "stand up and offer (them) their nel two hours after KGL had made its statement today. He said that he had no objection to participating in the talks and expressed optimism about the outcome. "When collective efforts are made, I am sure that we will be able to reach an

help and support."He hoped that the two countries, which had fought a bitter war in 1990, turn a new page in their would "forget the past" and relationship.

Diplomatic sources told *The Hindu* that with a dialogue between KGL and Mr. Al Dulaimi encountering difficulties, there was intense behind-the-scenes activity to find alternative means to reach out to the kidactivity to

the firm once again. "We are now in the closing stages of the pany immediately after the KGL tablishing direct contact with Al Dulaimi reverted to the comstatement was read out, re-esnegotiations. There is not much to be discussed as most of the details were ironed out two days ago. We are closing the deal."

## Payment issue

bombardment over the past few months. Ms. Rana said a few more representatives of KGL would now travel to Iraq for suming his mediation. The Iraqi negotiator had been handed over a letter by the kidnappers belonging to the Black Banners face-to-face talks, as had been Talks between Mr. Al Dulaimi night over the payment of "compensation" for the people of Fallujah who had suffered on account of extensive American demanded by Mr. Al Dulaimi and KGL broke down on Sunday last night as a condition for re-

## অন্য মধ্যস্থের খোঁজ

## ্রতালোচনা শুশুরু হয়েও ফের জটিলতা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২ অগস্ট: তিন ভারতীয় ট্রাক চালক-সহ ইরাকে অপহৃত সাত পণবন্দির মুক্তি নিয়ে ফের আলোচনা শুরু হয়েও নতুন করে জটিলতা দেখা দিয়েছে। অপহৃত সাত জন যে কুয়েতি পরিবহণ সংস্থার কর্মী, সেই কে জি এল আজ রাতে জানিয়ে দিয়েছে, পণবন্দিদের মুক্তির জন্য তাদের পক্ষে যা যা করা সম্ভব ছিল সবই করা হয়েছে। জঙ্গিদের যথেষ্ট টাকাপয়সাও দেওয়া হয়েছে। এর পরে কী হবে, সেটা নির্ভর করছে জঙ্গিদের উপরেই। ভারতের বিদেশ প্রতিমন্ত্রী ই আহমেদ বলেছেন, আলোচনা খুবই স্পর্শকাতর স্তরে রয়েছে। এই অবস্থায় বেশি কিছু বললে হিতে বিপরীত হতে পারে।

অপহরণ-কাণ্ডে মধ্যস্থতাকারী ইরাকি উপজাতি নেতা শেখ হিসাম আলদুলাইমি গত কাল জানিয়েছিলেন, অপহরণকারীদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা থেকে তিনি সরে দাঁড়াচ্ছেন। কিন্তু আজ আবার দুলাইমি আলোচনার টেবিলে ফিরেছেন। কে জি এল-এর সঙ্গে দুলাইমির নতুন করে বনিবনা করিয়ে দেওয়া এবং অন্য মধ্যস্থতাকারীরও সন্ধান চালিয়ে যাওয়া— মূলত এই দু'টি কাজেই আজ বেশি শুরুত্ব দেওয়া হয়েছে। তবে আলোচনায় কে প্রকৃত মধ্যস্থতাকারী, তা নিয়ে রাতের দিকে বিভ্রান্তি সৃষ্টি হয়েছে। আল-আরাবিয়া চ্যানেলে একটি চিরকুট দেখিয়ে দুলাইমি অবশ্য দাবি করেছেন, জিপ্নরা তাঁকেই মধ্যস্থতাকারী হিসাবে চেয়েছে।

ওমানে নিযুক্ত ভারতের রাষ্ট্রদৃত তালমিজ আহমেদকে পাঠানো হয়েছিল বাগদাদে ঘাঁটি গেড়ে বন্দি-মুক্তি সংক্রান্ত বিভিন্ন জট ছাড়াতে। বিদেশ মন্ত্রক সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, আহমেদ কে জি এল এবং দুলাইমির সঙ্গে কথা বলে ফের দু'পক্ষকে আলোচনার টেবিলে বসাতে সক্ষম হয়েছেন। এই অবস্থায় নতুন করে কোনও ভারতীয় যাতে সীমান্ত পেরিয়ে ইরাকে না-চুকতে পারেন, সে জন্য কুয়েত এবং জর্ডনের কাছে বাড়তি সাহায্য চেয়েছে দিল্লি। পণবন্দিদের মুক্ত হওয়া নাহওয়া নিয়ে চরম বিভ্রান্তির পরে আজ দিল্লি পরিকার জানিয়ে দেয়, অপহৃতদের উদ্ধার করার ব্যাপারে আরও কিছুটা সময় লাগবে। অপহরণ-কাণ্ড সংক্রান্ত সক্ষট মোকাবিলা গোষ্ঠীর প্রধান বিদেশ প্রতিমন্ত্রী ই আহমেদের কথায়, "আমাদের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি ইতিবাচক। সমস্ত চেষ্টাই চলছে। কিন্তু আমাদের ধর্য ধরতে হবে।"

কুয়েতি সংস্থার সঙ্গে মতবিরোধ তুঙ্গে ওঠায় কাল আলোচনা বন্ধ করে বেরিয়ে আসতে চেয়েছিলেন দুলাইমি। ভারতের বিশেষ প্রতিনিধি তালমিজ আহমেদ কাল রাতে দুলাইমি এবং কে জি এল-এর সঙ্গে কথা বলে পরিস্থিতি সামাল দেন। আজ দুপুরে ই আহমেদ বলেন, "বাগদাদ ও কুয়েতের ভারতীয় দৃতাবাস সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে, আল-দুলাইমির সঙ্গে কে জি এল-এর যোগাযোগ ধরে রাখা গিয়েছে। আজ সকালেও আলোচনা চলেছে।"

কিন্তু এখন কেবল দুলাইমির উপরে ভরসা করে এগোতে চাইছে না দিল্লি।
বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের একটি সৃত্রের খবর, বিকল্প মধ্যস্থতার পথ তৈরিও আহমেদকে
পাঠানোর অন্যতম লক্ষ্য। তালমিজ আহমেদ কুয়েত, বাগদাদ, সানা, জেড্ডা,
রিয়াধে বহু বছর কাজ করেছেন। উপসাগরীয় অঞ্চলে তাঁর চেনা-জানা রয়েছে।
তিনি ইরাকের ধর্মীয় নেতাদের মধ্যেই কয়েক জনকে মধ্যস্থতায় রাজি করাতে
চাইছেন। ইরাকে অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের প্রতিনিধিদের মাধ্যমে এই কাজ করা হবে না
বলে সাউথ ব্লক সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে। রাজনৈতিক নেতাদের এই প্রক্রিয়ায় না-ডাকার
কারণ একটাই— জঙ্গিদের কাছে এখন সরকারি নেতাদের কোনও গুরুত্ব নেই।

🗨 অন্তর্যামীর বাড়িতে বীরভদ্র.... পৃঃ ৫

April marcela par a property.

## Fresh efforts to end hostage crisis

## Disagreement over compensation Captives 'repositioned'

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, AUG. 2. After narrowly failing to secure the release of seven persons including three Indian truck drivers who have been taken hostage in Iraq, a fresh effort was mounted today to end the 12-day-old crisis.

Considerable ground was covered today to revive active negotiations between the Iraqi mediator, Sheikh Hisham Al-Dulaimi, and the Kuwait Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL) whose employees have been taken hostage.

Talks between the two parties had broken down on Sunday night when Mr. Al-Dulaimi declared that he was ending his mediation to free the hostages, after blaming the company for not responding adequately to a key demand.

An Iraqi group —Black Banners Brigade of the Islamic Secret Army — has kidnapped

three Kenyans and an Egyptian Abu Zaineh, told Al Arabiya telbesides the three Indians.

Abu Zaineh, told Al Arabiya television this afternoon that "we

## KGL to review stand

Sources in the security establishment told The Hindu that Sunday night's negotiations broke down mainly on the question of "compensation" for the people of Fallujah who had suffered on account of intense American bombardment in recent months. The kidnappers had earlier asked the KGL to arrange for the payment, but the company was reluctant to do so, pointing out that the compensation for the Fallujah victims was a political demand and its fulfilment was outside its do-main. Besides, KGL was appre-hensive that this demand, if met, would set a negative precedent, affecting its overseas operations in the future. Sources said that the Kuwaiti firm had now agreed to review its position. Its spokesperson, Rana Abu Zaineh, told Al Arabiya television this afternoon that "we have agreed to the demands that have been made and hope that the kidnappers would agree to what we have offered." Ms. Rana told *The Hindu* over telephone that KGL was now awaiting a response from Mr. Al-Dulaimi to her offer.

Indicating that talks could now get back on track, Mr. Al-Dulaimi told Al Arabiya television later in the evening that he would want KGL to send one more representative of sufficient stature to Baghdad for negotiations. He also demanded that the kidnappers send him another letter seeking his mediation.

Anticipating the revival of face-to face talks, the hostages have been "repositioned" from their original location to another place, which would be more suitable for their release, the sources said.

The Indian negotiator, Talmiz Ahmed, has been sufficiently empowered to take on the spot decisions so that the hostage crisis can be defused as quickly as possible.

## 'Crisis at sensitive stage'

Amit Baruah reports from New Delhi:

"We are at a sensitive stage in the evolution of this crisis and must treat changing developments with caution and calm," the Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, said tonight about the state of play in the ongoing hostage drama involving three Indian nationals in Iraq

in Iraq.

He said it would not be proper to make details public. "The negotiator, Sheikh Dulaimi, has confirmed to KGL that the hostages are in good condition. This is very reassuring news to us and to the family members," he said.

## বন্দিরা মুক্তি

কেনিয়া: ওরা মুক্ত

মিশর: খবরটা ভুল

## ভারত: কথা চলছে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১ অগস্ট: টানা ১২ দিন বাদে ইরাকি জঙ্গিদের কবল থেকে তিন ভারতীয় ট্রাক চালক-সহ সাত পণবন্দি মুক্তি পেলেন কি না, তা নিয়ে আজ সন্ধ্যা থেকে শেষ রাত পর্যন্ত বিভ্রান্তি থাকল।

সন্ধ্যা সাড়ে সাতটা নাগাদ কেনিয়ার বিদেশমন্ত্রী চিরাউ আলি এমওয়াকওয়ের জানিয়ে দেন, সাত পণবন্দি ছাড়া পেয়েছেন এবং বাগদাদে মিশরের দূতাবাসে তাঁরা পৌঁছেও গিয়েছেন। এই খবরে যে স্বস্তি মিলেছিল, তা অবশ্য দীর্ঘস্থায়ী হয়নি। কারণ, বাগদাদে মিশর ও ভারতের দূতাবাস, কুয়েতি পরিবহণ সংস্থা কে জি এল এবং অপহরণ-কাণ্ডে মধ্যস্থতাকারী ইরাকি উপজাতি নেতা শেখ হিসাম আল-দূলাইমি— সংশ্লিষ্ট এই সব পক্ষ থেকেই জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে, সাত জনের মুক্তির কোনও খবর নেই। অপহরণকারী সংগঠন 'ব্ল্যাক ব্যানার্স'-এর আলোচনায় কিছু জটিলতা দেখা দিয়েছে এবং আগামী কাল ফের কথা শুরু হবে বলে বিদেশ মন্ত্রক সত্রের খবর।

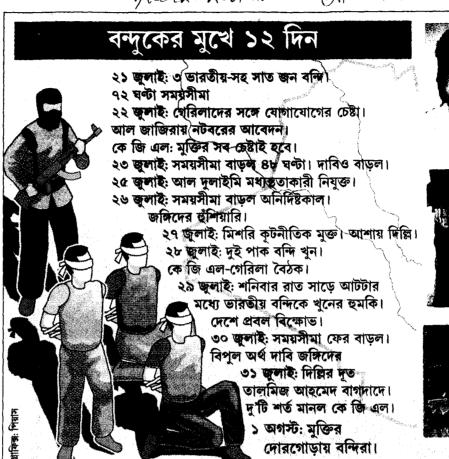
তবে বেশি রাতে সংবাদসংস্থা জানিয়েছে, আলোচনা থেকে সরে দাঁড়িয়েছেন আল-দুলাইমি। তিনি বলেছেন, "আমি জানি না, এর পর কী হবে।" এই খবরের সত্যতা স্বীকার করে কে জি এল বলেছে, আল-দুলাইমিকে ফের আলোচনায় ফেরানোর জন্য চেষ্টা চলছে।

বিভিন্ন টি ভি চ্যানেলে সন্ধ্যায় পণবন্দিদের মুক্তির খবর ছড়িয়ে পড়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে হিমাচলপ্রদেশ ও পঞ্জাবে মানুষ আনন্দ উৎসব শুরু করে দেন। ভারতীয় তিন ট্রাক চালকই ওই দুই এলাকার বাসিন্দা। কিন্তু এর পর থেকেই বিভিন্ন সূত্রে পরস্পরবিরোধী খবর আসতে থাকে। কেন্দ্রীয় বিদেশ প্রতিমন্ত্রী ই আহমেদ কিছু পরে সাংবাদিকদের জানান, বন্দিরা সত্যিই ছাড়া পেয়েছেন কি না, সে ব্যাপারে সরকারের কাছে নির্দিষ্ট তথ্য নেই। বেশি রাতে ই আহমেদ বলেন, "বাগদাদ বা কুয়েত, আমাদের কোনও দূতাবাসই মুক্তির খবরের সত্যতা সমর্থন করেনি।"

রাতে সংবাদসংস্থা এ এফ পি জানায়, বাগদাদে অবস্থিত মিশরীয় দৃতাবাস থেকে বিবৃতি দিয়ে জানানো হয়েছে, সেখানে কোনও বন্দিই পৌঁছননি, এ ব্যাপারে (কেনিয়ার বিদেশমন্ত্রীর যা বলেছিলেন) যা বলা হয়েছে, তা সত্য নয়। মধ্যস্থতাকারী আল-দূলাইমিকে উদ্ধৃত করে সদ্ধ্যায় রয়টার্স জানায়, "জঙ্গিদের সঙ্গে কোনও সমঝোতা এখনও হয়ি, আলোচনা চলছে। কিছু জটিলতা দেখা দিলেও আমরা আশাবাদী।" অপহরণকারীদের দেওয়া একটি চিঠি দেখিয়ে আল-দূলাইমি বলেন, কুয়েতি সংস্থা কে জি এল-এর মনোভাবে অসস্তুষ্ট জঙ্গিরা তাঁকে আলোচনা থেকে সরে দাঁড়াতে বলেছে। সংবাদসংস্থা এ এফ পি-ও জানায়, কুয়েতি সংস্থার সঙ্গে মতে বালাচনা থেকে সরে দাঁড়াতে বলেছে। ক্রানিয়েছেন। কে জি এল-এর মুখপাত্র রানা আবু জানেই-ও জানিয়েছেন, বন্দিরা এখনও ছাড়া পাননি। কে জি এল-এর কর্মী ভারত ও কেনিয়ার তিন জন করে ছ'জন এবং মিশরের এক জনকে ইরাকের ফালুজা শহরের কাছে গত ২১ জুলাই অপহরণ করে ইরাকি জঙ্গি সংগঠন 'ব্ল্যাক ব্যানার্স'।

বিভিন্ন সূত্রে পাওয়া খবরে জানা গিয়েছে, জঙ্গিরা দাবির বহর বাড়িয়ে চাপ দিয়ে চলেছে। সরকারি ভাবে না-বললেও জানা যাচ্ছে, জঙ্গিরা মুক্তিপণের অঙ্ক নিয়েই দর ক্যাক্ষি করছে। কী নিয়ে জটিলতা, কিছুটা ইঙ্গিত দেন আল-দুলাইমি। তিনি বলেছেন, কুয়েতি সংস্থা জঙ্গিদের দাবি মেনে ইরাক থেকে চলে য়েতে রাজি। কিন্তু ক্ষতিপূরণের অঙ্ক ফোলুজায় মার্কিন হানায় নিহতদের পরিবারকে দেওয়ার জন্য) নিয়ে টানাপোড়েন চলছে। বাগাদাদে জঞ্জিদের সূক্তে ক'দিন ধরে জোরকদমে যে আলোচনা চলছিল, তা আজ বিকেলের দিকে একটা নির্দিষ্ট পরিণতিতে পৌছে যাচ্ছে বলে কে জি এল্-এর মুখপাত্র

## পেলেন কি, বিপ্রান্তি চরমে



## টানা উৎকণ্ঠাব পর ক্ষণিক আনন্দ, ফের বিযাদ

উনা, ১ অগস্ট: এক মুহূর্তে স্বস্তি, পর মুহূর্তে উৎকণ্ঠা, পলকে হাসি, পলকে কান্না, আজ দিনভর ইরাকে জঙ্গিদের হাতে পণবন্দি ৩ ভারতীয়ের গ্রামে ছিল এমনই মিশ্র আবেগের টানাপোডেন।

'ভারত সরকার জিন্দাবাদ', 'সনিয়া গাঁধী জিন্দাবাদ'
'মিডিয়া জিন্দাবাদ'—চারিদিকে শুধু বাঁধভাঙা উল্লাস
আর কানফাটানো চিৎকার। শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে ভাংড়া
নাচ। ১২ দিনের প্রতীক্ষা আর মানসিক যন্ত্রণার পর ঘরের
ছেলেরা যে আবার ঘরে ফিরতে চলেছেন, এই একটি
মাত্র খবরের জিয়নকাঠিতে তিলকরাজ-অন্তর্যামীদের
প্রাণনাশের আশস্কায় সিটিয়ে থাকা উনা এলাকা মুহুর্তে
প্রাণ ফিরে পেয়েছিল। কিন্তু ধৈর্য্যের পরীক্ষার যে এখনও
আনেক বাকি কিছুক্ষণের মধ্যেই তা মালুম হল।
টেলিভিশনে জানানো হল, বন্দিরা এখনও মুক্ত নন,
মুক্তির ব্যাপারে কথাবার্তা চলছে। 'হয়েছেন' আর
'হবেন'-এর এই ব্যবধানেই মাতোয়ারা গ্রামের ছন্দপতন
ঘটল ক্ষত। স্তব্ধ হয়ে গেল অকাল দীপাবলি পালনের

আয়োজন। স্বস্তি ঘুচে আবার উৎকণ্ঠা। গোটা গ্রাম আবার আশা নিরাশার দোলাচলে।

বাড়ির সামনে গ্রাম ভেঙে আসা লোক, টেলিভিশন মাধ্যমের প্রতিনিধিদের ভিড়, হইচই, তার উপর 'হবে কি হবে না'-র এই ন যযৌ ন তস্থৌ দশা, কী বলবেন, কী ভাবে বলবেন, কিছুই বুঝে উঠতে পারছিলেন না অন্তর্যামীর স্ত্রী। এত দিন সব আশা হারিয়ে শুধু ঈশ্বরকে ডেকেছেন। আজ প্রথমে মুক্তির খবর পেয়ে ভেবেছিলেন, "শ্বয়ং অন্তর্যামীর কৃপাতেই অন্তর্যামীর প্রাণে বাঁচলেন।" সব কিছুর পর এ আবার কী ঝামেলা! ঘরের লোক শেষ পর্যন্ত সুস্থ ভাবে ঘরে ফিরবেন তো, সেই চিন্তাতেই উথাল পাথাল অন্তর্যামীর ঘরণী-সহ গোটা গ্রামের হৃদয়। সংবাদমাধ্যমের সামনেই আকুল স্ত্রীর স্বীকারোক্তি, "ওর সঙ্গে খুব ঝগড়া করতাম। এ বার ফিরে এলে আর কোনও দিন করব না, সত্যি বলছি, যা খেতে চাইবে তাই খাওয়াবো, সুখবর এলে আপনারাও মিষ্টিমুখ না করে যাবেন না।"

রোপারের মাকরুলা কালানে সুখদেবের গ্রামেও উনারই ছায়া। উৎকণ্ঠা ভেঙে উল্লাস, পর মুহুর্তেই দুশ্চিস্তা। সারা দিন 'হবে কী হবে না'র রোদ-বৃষ্টি খেলা। টানা ৬০ ঘন্টারও বেশি সময় ধরে উনা-চণ্ডিগড় জাতীয় সড়ক অবরোধ করে রেখেছিলেন ক্লুব্ধ মানুষ। দাবি ছিল, ইরাকে জঙ্গিদের হাতে পণবন্দি এলাকার দুই ট্রাক চালক তিলকরাজ ও অস্তর্যামীর মুক্তির ব্যাপারে সরকারের প্রক্রিক্ষতি। বন্দিরা মুক্তি পাবেন এই আশায় অবরোধ তুলে নিতে অনুরোধ জানিয়েছিলেন অস্তর্যামীর বাবা রামমৃর্তি। সেই অনুরোধ মেনে নিয়েই বিক্লোভকারীরা অবরোধ তুলে নিয়েছেন।

तिवात अकाटल উनाग्न श्रार्थनात्रक व्यस्त्रभीत वावा

অপহত তিন ভারতীয় পণবিদ্দি

🛡 উপরে. মধ্যন্ত

ञाल मुलाইभि ।

ডেরায় অন্তর্যামী

वॉफिटक. शितिमार्पत

কাল রামমূর্তির বাড়িতে প্রধানমন্ত্রী সচিবালয় থেকে ফোন আসে। তারপর ছেলের মুক্তির আশায় বুক বেঁধেছিলেন তিনি। আজ প্রথমে মুক্তির খবর পাওয়ায় ডেবেছিলেন ভাগ্য বোধহয় সদম্ম হল, কিন্তু তার পরও উৎকণ্ঠা, প্রতীক্ষা। প্রিয়জন এ বার ঘরে ফিরুক, প্রার্থনা একটাই। কথায় বলেনা, সব ভাল যার শেষ ভাল।

## Uncertainty over hostages release

407 407

## Mediator withdraws from talks

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, AUG. 1. Negotiations to seek the release of seven persons, including three Indians who had been taken hostage in Iraq, appear to have hit a lastminute snag, with the Iraqi mediator, Sheikh Hisham Al Dulaimi, announcing his withdrawal from the talks.

"I am withdrawing because I have reached no agreement with the [men's employer] Kuwaitis," Mr. Al Dulaimi said.

He said he had received a letter signed by the commander of the Islamic Secret Army asking him to withdraw from the negotiations if no agreement was reached by 6 p.m. (8.30 IST). Quoting from the letter, he said the kidnappers would then take "appropriate measures with regard to the hostages."

Mr. Al Dulaimi denied agency reports from the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, quoting the Kenyan Foreign Minister, Chirau Ali Mwakwere, that all the hostages, including three Kenyans and an Egyptian, had been released and brought to the Egyptian Embassy in Baghdad. "This is all news to me," AFP quoted him as saying

## 'False statement'

The Iraqi negotiator said the Kuwaiti transport company, Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL), was "not responding to us." KGL had agreed to cease its operations in Iraq, as had been demanded by the kidnappers, but was "still arguing" about the payment of compensation to the families in Fallujah that had suffered due to American aerial bombardment of the city. Asked to comment on the Iraqi mediator's remarks, the KGL spokesperson, Rana Abu Zaineh, told *The Hindu* that she hoped that "Mr. Al Dulaimi would reconsider his statement and continue with the negotia-

tions." Asked to comment on whether the hostages had been freed, she said: "This is a false statement by the Kenyan Foreign Minister."

The captives' release had earlier appeared imminent when Mr. Al Dulaimi made a statement this afternoon that a breakthrough could be achieved during the day.

Speaking on Al Araybia television, Mr. Al Dulaimi, in response to a question said that an "agreement" with the kidnepores he

ment" with the kidnappers belonging to the Black Banners Brigade of the Islamic Secret Army was likely. Asked specifically whether the hostages would be released today, Mr. Al Dulaimi said: "Yes, we hope so."

## Company was optimistic

Striking an equally optimistic note, the KGL spokesperson had said that the talks were in their final stages and the settlement with the kidnappers could be reached at any time. Asked wheth-

er the kidnappers would need to extend the deadline that they had set for executing a hostage by another 24 hours, Ms. Rana had said: "I do not think so, unless there are some procedural matters that may have to be cleared."

Indicating that an end to the hostage crisis was near, the Kenyan Foreign Minister was quoted as saying that, "They're (the kidnappers) ready to release them right away. It's a question now of where." Mr. Mwakwere said that Kenya's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia was on his way to Kuwait to receive the Kenyan hostages in the event of a possible release.

Mr. Al Dulaimi had told Al Araybia television during the day that KGL did not have to pay compensation for the losses suffered for the people of Fallujah. He had pointed out that the demand for compensation was "political" and was "out of the purview of the company."

## No confirmation: India

By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 1. The Government announced tonight that it had no confirmation of the release of the three Indian hostages being held by militants in Iraq. The Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, said he, like others, had seen "breaking news" on television channels that the Indians had been freed.

"Neither our Embassy in Baghdad nor our Embassy in Kuwait have been able to confirm this and I would appeal to [the] media to please check with the Crisis Management Group before putting out such news," Mr. Ahamed said in a statement." The Government is

hopeful that the deadline would be extended and the hostages will be freed," he said. "The Government and the people of India have been monitoring the developments in this crisis with great concern. Our hopes of a successful and happy conclusion have all along been sustained by our confidence in the traditionally close and friendly relations between India and Iraq," Mr. Ahamed said.

The Minister, designated as the pointman to handle the crisis, said that India's Ambassador to Oman, Talmiz Ahmad, had arrived in Baghdad today. "He will be monitoring the situation on a continuous basis and giving us his evaluation [of the situation]."

# Execution deadline extended by a da

## Last chance, warn captors

## SNS & Agencies

hours, as Delhi decided to rush a senior MEA official, "familiar region", to Baghdad immediate-— The Iraqi kidnappers tonight extended the deadline to kill one of the seven hostages by 24 with the language and the NEW DELHI/ DUBAI, July 30 ly to assist in the negotiations.

8.30 p.m. (IST) tomorrow to give Link transport firm, employers of A statement issued by the kiddeadline had been extended till a "last chance to the company and the countries concerned to nationals". The Kuwait and Gulf the seven, including three Indians, Antaryami, Tilak Raj and nappers in Baghdad said the save their employees and their Sukh Deo, also confirmed this.

sion of the deadline. But we have not received any authentic conirmation as yet. If it is true, we really appreciate the gesture and ment group, said it was "waiting, The minister of state for external affairs, Mr E Ahmed, said: "We have heard about the extennope the kidnapped Indians will watching and hopeful" of a sucer meeting of its crisis manage-The government, after anothbe released as early as possible.

An Al-Arabiya TV grab shows Sheikh Hisham Al-Dulaimi, the tribal chief negotiating nappers were not aware of the tomorrow. The Kuwaiti firm an Iraqi tribal chief trying to negotiate with the captors for the release of the seven confirmed that a meeting hostages, said he would meet a representative from the KGL between him and a company Sheikh Hisham Al-Dulaimi cessful outcome.

carry out their threat. He made a ing efforts to seek the release of the hostages. statement on Al-Arabiya TV this morning, saying the Indian and Egyptian embassies were mak-

External affairs minister Mr Natwar Singh said in Bangkok there was "no question" of sending Indian troops to Iraq. He said the government was doing its "very best" to resolve the crisis.

After the CMG meeting, the hostages would not return to "This measure is being taken said: "We have clarified that the Iraq." The government has also travel to Iraq through the borminister of state, Mr E Ahmed, ders of Kuwait and Jordan. emporarily in view of the predecided that Indians will not vailing security situation

وفاوضاك حول ازمة الرعائن

More reports on page 4

## Aziz survives attack

SLAMABAD, July 30. — Paki

PM-designate Aziz, survived stan's finance minister and Mr Shaukat an apparent

suicide attack on his motor

died. In December, there were sident Musharraf, who blamed persons, including the attacke cade this evening, police said two failed attempts to kill Pre-Nore recently, ultras targeted He was travelling through a killed. Geo TV reported two bazaar in Fateh Jang near Al-Qaida for the bombings. Islamabad. His driver was he corps commander of

He pleaded with the abductors to leave room for further negotiations in the matter and not to

Sheikh Dulaimi said the kid-

representative was likely soon.

planned meeting when they set

the earlier deadline yesterday.

the release of the hostages, appealing to the abductors on Friday. — AFP

THE STATESMAN

## Hostage Dilemma

India isn't occupying Iraq.
Why kidnap our people?

People will do many things for money, including drive trucks into Iraq's dangerous territory. Three Indian truckers have been kidnapped by a fringe militant outfit operating in Iraq, which has demanded that India pull out its people from Iraq. Trouble is, apart from some contract workers, medical professionals and aid workers, India has very few people in Iraq. None are combatants, India is emphatically not part of the allied occupation forces. The fact that there's nothing to pull out makes it difficult for the government of India to reject or agree to the kidnappers' demand. What makes things even tougher is the fact that most Indians who are working in Iraq have been recruited from other Gulf nations where approximately five million Indians work. The three kidnapped truckers worked for a Kuwaiti company which, in turn, was a contractor. Halliburton and its subsidiary Kellog, Brown and Root, operate through long contracting chains and it's impossible for New Delhi to keep tabs on every individual expat in the Gulf to ensure that nobody ends up in Iraq. Many Gulf expatriates are lured into dangerous jobs in Iraq by the promise of higher pay. It is impossible for New Delhi to keep tabs on all footloose workers, or to even advise them individually on the risks they're taking. Yet, when a crisis like this blows up, democratic governments have to do their best to get the captured people out and assuage society's concerns.

Staunching the flow of workers to Iraq is near-impossible. Advisories can help, but will not deter the desperate or the needy. The government should, nevertheless, try to dissuade Indian companies from sending white collar workers to Iraq, or to countries where trouble is spilling over. New Delhi should also discourage workers who are not insured against risk from travelling to the region. The situation in Iraq is bound to get grimmer as the provisional government struggles to maintain law and order. New Delhi must come to terms with the fact that if workers ignore risks, they will have to pay a price; there is precious little it can do. India is not part of the occupation of Iraq, Indians are advised not to work there, they do so at their own peril. Once this message goes through, it will make it clear to all that kidnapping Indians in Iraq has no payoff. This will serve as the best deterrent to such misfortunes befalling our unwary expatriates.

THE HIMES OF INDIA

100

## actors threaten to behead hostage **Two Pakistanis executed** (2) (3)

SNS & Agencies

ti firm quit the ich the Holders ivision. "We will ) if our demands Iraqi militants one of the seven hostages tomorhostages unless the Kuwaiti country, according to a staten Islamic Secret Army, of which of the Black Banners is a divisi BAGHDAD, July 29. — today threatened to behead slit the throat of one of the row at 7 p.m. (8.30 p.m. IST

In a videotape given to foreign news agencies, the kidnappers did not say which hostage — among the three Indians, three said. are not met," the statement

one Egyptian

Kenyans

threatening to kill. But the footage showed a masked man pointing an M-16 automatic rifle at the head of an Indian hostage, who was wearing orange clothing and appeared very frightened. Groups of kidnappers have before killing them. The clothing mimics the orange jumpsuits worn by prisoners in US often dressed hostages in orange clothing detention camps.

The group accused the Indian government of losing its "credibility" and "deviating from ing the hostages "fighters supporting the infidel occupation". (Mahatma) Gandhi's path of peace", brand-

Earlier this week, the kidnappers stayed a

ever, brought an element of urgency back Jordan. Efforts were on to persuade the Kuwaiti company employing the men to increase their efforts for their release, into the negotiations, with frantic calls being made to embassies in Baghdad, Kuwait and including the three Indians - Antaryami, would be successful. The latest threat, howthreatened deadline to start executing the that last-ditch efforts were on to save the hostages from Monday. In New Delhi, the government announced hostages. A formal advisory was issued today asking Indians to refrain from visiting Iraq there. After the militants issued the deadline "in view of the seriousness of the situation

In Una, Himachal Pradesh, Antaryami's father Mr Ram Murthi said he would rather "We are left with no hope. We cannot rely on the government or on God," said a discourt death than see his son's dead body. traught Mr Murthi

Tilak Raj and Sukhdev Singh.

the government's crisis management group (CMG) held an emergency meeting tonight. It was headed by minister of state for external affairs Mr E Ahmed and attended by Officials said the government was confident that negotiations with the kidnappers

senior MEA officials.

victims has blamed President Musharraf, saying sending troops to Iraq. The Pakistan government has advised its nationals working in Iraq to pull out. Those who intend to go on a pilgrimage like ISLAMABAD, July 29. — Two kidnapped Pakistanis, engineer Raja Azad (49) and driver Sajad Naeem (29), have been executed in Iraq. Both hail from PoK. The family of one of the he could have saved their lives by ruling out Karbala ought to defer their plans, the government announced. — PTI More reports, photograph on page 2

THE STATESMAN

111

ann)

7 1

## ছাড়া পেলেন মিশুরের কুটনীতিক, আশায় দিল্লি

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিয়ি, ২৭ জুলাই: ইরাকে অপহাত মিশরের এক কুটনীতিক অক্ষত অবস্থায় ছাড়া পাওয়ায় অন্য পণবন্দিদের মুক্তির ব্যাপারেও আশার আলো দেখা দিয়েছে। অপহরণ-কাণ্ডে মধ্যস্থতাকারী শেখ হিসাম আল-দুলামি আলোচনা শুরু করলে তা ফলপ্রসূ হবে বলেই আশা করছে দিল্লি। ওই তিন ট্রাক চালক যে কুয়েতি পরিবহণ সংস্থার কর্মী, সেই কে জি এল আগেই জানিয়েছে যে, তারা অপহরণকারীদের সঙ্গে কথা বলছে। দুলামি কিন্তু অভিযোগ করেছেন, কে জি এল বা সংশ্লিষ্ট দেশের দৃতাবাসগুলি পণবন্দিদের মুক্তির ব্যাপারে যথেষ্ট উদ্যোগী হচ্ছে না।

এ দিকে, দুই পাক নাগরিকের মুক্তি
চেয়ে আজ ন্যাশনাল আ্যাসেঘলিতে
সর্বসম্মত প্রস্তাব পাশ করেছে পাকিস্তান।
ভারত, কেনিয়া, পাকিস্তান, মিশর ও জর্ডন
মিলিয়ে ডজন খানেক বিদেশি এখন ইরাকি
জঙ্গিদের হাতে বন্দি। এর মধ্যেই তিন
ভারতীয় ট্রাক চালকের পরিবারের জন্য ১
লক্ষ টাকা করে আর্থিক সহায়তা দেওয়ার
কথা ঘোষণা করেছে কানাডার একটি
রেভিও চ্যানেল বি বি সি টরন্টো।

তিন ভারতীয়-সহ সাত পণবন্দির বেঁচে থাকার সময়সীমা জঙ্গিরা কাল 'অনির্দিষ্ট কালের' জন্য বাড়ানোর পরে আজ বিদেশ প্রতিমন্ত্রী ই আহমেদের নেতৃত্বে সঙ্কট মোকাবিলা গোষ্ঠী বৈঠকে বসে। জঙ্গিদের মনোভাবকে 'আপাতত সস্তোষজনক' বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। বন্দি-মুক্তির ব্যাপারে মূল আলোচনা যে কুয়েতি সংস্থা এবং জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠীর মধ্যে হবে, বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের কাছে তা স্পষ্ট। আজও ওই সংস্থার পক্ষ থেকে কুয়েতে ভারতীয় দৃতাবাসকে জানানো হয়েছে, পণবন্দিরা নিরাপদেই আছেন।

সংবাদসংস্থার খ্রব্র, মিশরের কুটনীতিক মহম্মদ মামদো কুতব কাল রাতে মুক্তি পান। বাগদাদে মিশরের দৃতাবাসে পৌছে কুতব বলেছেন, "ঈশ্বরকে ধনাবাদ। আমার সঙ্গে ওরা ভাল ব্যবহারই করেছে।" মুক্তির জন্য টাকা বা অন্য কোনও সমঝোতার দরকার হয়নি। তিনিবলেন, ইরাকের অন্তর্বর্তী প্রধানমন্ত্রী আইয়াদ'আলাওয়িকে গত সপ্তাহে কায়রো সফর করতে দেওয়ায় ক্ষুব্ধ জঙ্গিরা মসজিদে প্রার্থনা সেরে বেরনোর সময় শুক্রবার কুতবকে অপহরণ করে।

ক্রিরাকারী এবং ভারত সরকারের মধ্যে মধ্যস্থতার কাজ শুরু করার আগে আল-দুলামি বলেছেন, অপহরণকারীদের সঙ্গে তাঁর সরাসরি যোগাযোগ আছে বলে যেন মনে করা না হয়। দলামির কথায়, "এটা মানবিকতার প্রশ্ন বলেই আমি হস্তক্ষেপ করে সময়সীমা বাড়ানোর আর্জি জানিয়েছিলাম। উপজাতি ও ধর্মীয় নেতা হিসেবে এবং সর্বোপরি মানবতার নামে আমি অপহরণকারীদের কাছে আবেদন করেছিলাম।" 'মধ্যস্থতার কাজে একক ভাবে দায়িত্বপ্রাপ্ত' বলে নিজেকে উল্লেখ করে দুলামি বলেন, কুয়েতি সংস্থাটি যদি এই ঘটনার মানবিক দিকটি নিয়ে ভাবিত হয়, তা হলে তাদের উচিত, এগিয়ে এসে আলোচনা শুরু করা। কিন্তু কে জি এল বা দৃতাবাসগুলির পক্ষ থেকে কেউ পা বাড়াচ্ছে না বলে তাঁর অভিযোগ।

আজ অভিনব ছমকি দিয়েছেন জর্ডনের অপহত দুই গাড়ি চালকের আশ্বীয়-স্বজনের। অপহরণকারীদের দাবি মেনে ওই দু'জনের মুক্তির ব্যবস্থা না-করলে তাঁরা যে সংস্থার কর্মী, সেই সংস্থার মালিক ও অন্য কর্মীদেরই হত্যা করবেন বলে জানিয়েছেন আশ্বীয়েরা। এ দিকে ওই দুই পণবন্দির মুক্তি নিশ্চিত করতে ইরাকে আর কাজ না-করার প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছে জর্ডনীয় সংস্থাটি। এ দিকে, বাগদাদের উপকণ্ঠে জঙ্গিদের হাতে নিহত এক তুর্কি গাড়ি চালকের দেহ তাঁর দেশে ফিরিয়েনিয়ে যাওয়া হয়েছে। আরও এক অপহত গাড়ি চালক মারা গিয়েছেন বলে আশক্ষা।

অপহাত দুই পাক নাগরিককে নিয়ে উদ্বিগ্ন পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী খুরশিদ মেহমুদ কাসুরি বলেছেন, "ন্যাশনাল অ্যাসেম্বলিতে আলোচনা না-করে ইরাকে সেনা পাঠানোর সিদ্ধান্ত হবে না।" অপহরণকারীদের উদ্দেশে আবেদনেও কাসুরি বলেছেন, রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের সুরক্ষা বাহিনীর আওতায় পাকিস্তান এখনও ইরাকে সেনা পাঠায়নি এবং এই ব্যাপারে কোনও সিদ্ধান্তও হয়নি। তবে জঙ্গিদের দাবির কাছে মাথা নত নাকরতে মিত্র দেশগুলিকে আবেদন করেছেন মার্কিন বিদেশস্চিব কলিন পাওয়েল।

এ দিকে, বাগদাদে আজ জঙ্গিদের মর্টার হানায় এক ইরাকির মৃত্যু হয়েছে। ১৪ জন বিদেশি সেনা এই ঘটনায় আহত হয়েছেন। তবে তার মধ্যে কোন দেশের কত জন আছেন, তা জানা যায়নি।

## Negotiations with abductors progressing well: Minister

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 27. The Government today maintained that negotiations with the abductors of the three Indians held hostage in Iraq since last Wednesday were proceeding well. According to the Union Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, the transport company which had employed the seven persons taken hostage by a group called "Holders of the Black Banners" today "reconfirmed that the three Indians are safe, unharmed and are being treated well.'

## Company's assurance

Further, the Minister said the company - Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company - reiterated that it was prepared to take all possible steps to secure the release of the hostages. This apart, there was no official word forthcoming on the hostage sit-

Much of India's negotiations for the release of the hostages is apparently being conducted through the Kuwait-based transport company. The Crisis Management Group set up within the Ministry of External Affairs to monitor the hostage



Sheikh Hisham al-Dulaimi, a tribal dignitary named to negotiate the hostages' release, at his office in Baghdad on Tuesday.

situation met for three hours today. Also, the Ministry is in constant touch with its diplomatic missions in Kuwait and Iraq, and is keeping the family members of the hostages informed of all the developments

## Dulaimi's charge

AFP reports from Baghdad: The Iraqi tribal chief, named as a negotiator by the kidnappers of the seven persons, including three Indians, has urged their employer and embassies to make contact and negotiate for the men's freedom.

"The kidnappers accepted

my appeal to delay [their] ultimatum (to execute the hostages], but this company and the relevant embassies have not come forward," Sheikh Hisham al-Dulaimi said from his Bagh-dad office. "If the Kuwaiti company were concerned with the humanitarian aspect of this case - and I think it is - then it would come and negotiate," Mr. Dulaimi said, expressing fear for the lives of the seven persons in the absence of a deal.

"I am the only authorised mediator," he said.

The kidnappers of the three Indians, three Kenyans and Egyptian named Mr. Dulaimi as the go-between yesterday, a day before releasing a statement in which they stayed their threat to start executing their hostages.

Among the other demands, the kidnappers want the Kuwait Company to halt its operations

in Iraq.
Mr. Dulaimi, leader of the M'hamda Dulaimi tribe -- one of the largest in the restive Sunni Muslim province of Al-Anbar also campaigns on behalf of the victims of abuse at prisons run by the United States but insists that he has no direct contact with the Sunni insurgents fighting the U.S. military.

THE HANDY 98

\*\*\*\* 27/7

## Iraqi militants extend deadli

**By Atul Aneia** 

MANAMA, JULY 26. The Iraqi kidnappers of a group of seven persons, including three Indians, have deferred the deadline for executing the captives amid complex negotiations being held through multiple channels.

The negotiations have entered a new phase with the abductors appointing a tribal leader, Shaikh Hisham al-Dulaymi, as their mediator. The Al Jazeera television, citing a new video, said that militants belonging to the "Holders of the Black Banners" had extended the deadline in deference to a request by Mr. Al-Dulaymi. The video released on Manday video released on Monday showed a masked member of the group reading out a state-ment as two armed and masked men stood at his side, behind the kneeling hostages. "In response to a demand from Shaikh al-Dulaymi, the high command... has decided to ex-

tend the deadline to complete

negotiations with the consent-ing parties," the statement said. The group also warned "the Indian Government not to attack Muslim religious leaders."

Authoritative sources told The Hindu that the talks could be long-drawn, but a positive result was expected. The talks were meant to address the kid-nappers' "real" demands about which the negotiators were now fully aware.

## Delicate stage

The CNN quoted Egypt's Ambassador to Iraq, Karim Sharaf, as saying that the talks with the hostage-takers had reached a delicate stage. "We are dealing with a volatile group that is very sensitive and that is monitoring the media," he said.

A representative of the Ku-wait and Gulf Link Transport Company, which is conducting talks with the kidnappers on a separate track to free its emplovees, has welcomed the announcement by the militant group to extend its deadline. "The extension is in the interest of the negotiations," said Rana Abu-Zaineh, the transport company's Manpower Planning Manager.

## More abductions

As the negotiations with the kidnappers continued, there was no let-up in the flurry of abductions that have rocked Iraq in recent weeks. Two Jordanian drivers have been taken captive, while another group claimed it had seized two Pakistanis and an Iraqi driver employed by a Kuwaiti firm. The Associated Press Television News said that on Monday it had obtained a tape which contained a warning to the Jordanian company that its two drivers would be killed within 72 hours unless it stopped doing business with the U.S. military.

Government hopeful: Page 11

## India hopeful of early solution HOSTAGE CKISIS: In By Our Special Correspondent The Government received this afternoon confirmation NEW DELHI, JULY 26. India is that the abductors had ex-

hopeful of an early resolution of the hostage situation in-volving three Indians in Iraq in the wake of a second extension of the deadline set by the abductors for beheading one of the seven hostages.

spokesman said the three Indian hostages — held captive since last Wednesday by a group called 'Holders of the Black Banners' — were safe Briefing mediapersons here, the External Affairs Ministry Banners' - were safe

was to expire at 8 p.m. tonight (IST). At first, the abductors had set a 72-hour deadline has been extended indefinitely and is "open-ended." Talking to *The Hindu* late tended the deadline which which was later extended by 48 hours. Now, the deadline

agement Group set up within the Ministry to address the sit-uation, the Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahathis evening after chairing two meetings of the Crisis Man-

While maintaining that the Government was in constant touch with the families of the three Indian hostages — Antaryami, Sukhdev Singh and Tilak Raj -- and sharing all informastand it in good stead. dad, said: "We welcome the stopen-ended extension of the deadline by the hostage-take-rs. This will contribute positively towards a peaceful tresolution of the crisis."

of the negotiations stating that "I would like to keep my comments to the very minimum be-cause it is a delicate matter involving human lives." came up for discussion at the was reluctant to divulge details weekly meeting of the Left par-ties wherein the Communist positively," the MEA spokes-man said. "We hope that the ceeding well and the appeal issued by India on Sunday in India was hopeful that its standing in the Arab world, in Arabic had been "received appeal and other efforts will nelp resolve the crisis." Also, general, and its close ties with raq, in particular, would

Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the All-India Forward Bloc were of the view that the Government should reiterate that no Indian should go to work in Iraq tion with them, the spokesman

under the present regime.
In a related development, the Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh, today urged the Government to secure the safe release of the three Indians held hostage in Iraq.

Two of the hostages are from Himachal Pradesh and one is from Punjab

The hostage situation also

## All foreign troops should leave Iraq: Kharaz

return to that country," asserts XO Kamal Kharazi, the Foreign troops will have to leave Iraq before peace and stability can NEW DELHI, JULY 26. "All foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who is here on a twoday visit to "renew and deepen relations with India.

ence a semblance of order only ind Iraq is able to raise its own national army and police force A veteran diplomat, Dr. Kharazi believes Iraq will experilied forces — leave that country when the "foreign troops" meaning the American and al o keep order.

## nterior Ministers' meet

rior Ministers from the neighnd of help — training and quipment — could be providto Iraq to set up an effective Talking to The Hindu, the uave and articulate Minister ouring countries to see what isclosed that Teheran would e hosting a meeting of the Inolice and army.

e says. Pointing out that Iran "This is the age of multilaterın invasion of Iraq, Dr. Kharazi ism; we have to strengthen it," as always against the Ameri-

cious of Israeli intentions. "It As a neighbour of Iraq, Dr. Kharazi says, Iran has an interest in ensuring the "territorial integrity and unity of Iraq." On has been Israel's consistent policy to create insecurity and to promote disintegration in the this count, Iran is rather suspi-

ernment and the consolidation

of President Hamid Karzai.

External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh welcoming his iranian counterpart Kamal Kharazi at the Hyderabad House

In New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

thing that can happen in Iraq is

Iran believes that the best the national election, due by the end of the year, when there

turmoil and problems to that country and instability to the re-

gion. Just as it did in Afghanistan, Iran was keen on playing a role in stabilising the situation

notes that the United States'

unilateralism has only brought

order. "Our preference will be

in Iraq. Iran had played a key

role first in the ouster of the Ta-

liban regime and then in the stabilisation of the interim gov-

for a democratic and represenshould be a new constitutional

tative constitution, which will accommodate different ele-

ments and groups," says Dr. Charazi. He would not be drawn into naming preference for any particular group, but says the new constitution must be a representative arrangement.

## Not for weapons option

Kharazi asserts that it is Iran's use nuclear technology for On global concerns over legitimate interest to want to Iran's nuclear programme, Dr. peaceful purposes.

is not looking at the weapons "Unlike India, which is interested in nuclear weapons, Iran option," notes Dr. Kl arazi. Nobody could deny Iran its right to use nuclear energy.

International Atomic Energy Teheran has been cooperating with the inspectors from the of nuclear technology. "We are Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, who are satisfied that there is "no diversion"

committed to cooperate with the IAEA.

Iran's nuclear programme. He is equally dismissive of Dr. Kharazi blames the U.S. for creating suspicions about

said there was no evidence. "In fact, we have been fighting the ated with Osama bin Laden in carrying out the "9/11" attacks. The Americans themselves the American allegation that some Iranian elements cooperoin Laden group.

## Fies with India

Iran gas pipeline, according to him, will create trust. confiregime, should find ways of deepening the relationship. achieving an eight per cent growth. The much-talked about and Iran, with a \$3-billion trade countries are committed to dence and security in the region. "We had [a] good relationship with the previous new government. Change of Dr. Kharazi says that India There is a commonality as both government, and we will have [a] good relationship with the government is India's internal matter; but relationship between the two countries rests on enduring interests," says Dr

## পুণবন্দিদের মুক্তি শীঘ্রই, আশ্বাস কুয়েতি সংস্থার, আশাবাদী নটবরও

নয়াদিয় ও বাগদাদ, ২৫ জুলাই: তিন জন ভারতীয় সহ সাত
কর্মী ইরাকে পণবন্দির মুক্তির ব্যাপারে কুয়েতি সংস্থা কে জি এলকে আশ্বস্ত করেছে অপহরণকারীরা। ভারতের বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর
সিংহও তাদের মুক্তির ব্যাপারে আশবাদী। আজ কে জি এল এবং
সংশ্লিষ্ট দৃতাবাসগুলির সঙ্গে রফায় আসতে গেরিলারা এক জন
উপজাতীয় প্রধানকে মধ্যস্থতাকারী হিসেবে নিয়োগ করেছে। ভারত
সরকারের বিশেষ সঙ্কট মোকাবিলাকারী গোষ্ঠীও কথাবার্তা
চালাচ্ছে। এর আগে আজ ওই তিন ভারতীয়ের মুক্তির জন্য বিভিন্ন
টি ভি চ্যানেলের মাধ্যমে অপহরণকারীদের কাছে নতুন করে
আবেদন জানিয়েছিল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। এই তৎপরতার মধ্যেই
অবশ্য ইরাকে আজ অন্য একটি কুয়েতি সংস্থার হয়ে কর্মরত দুজন
পাক নাগরিক নিখোঁজ হয়েছেন। ওঁদের অপহরণ করা হয়েছে
বলেই আশক্ষা পাক বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের।

কুয়েতি সংস্থার এক মুখপাত্র সংবাদসংস্থাকে জানিয়েছেন, ব্ল্যানার্স নামে গোষ্ঠীটি বন্দি সাত জনকে মুক্ত করার ব্যাপারে প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছে। কারণ, তারা বুঝতে পেরেছে, "এই সংস্থা ইরাকে অন্য কোনও ভাবে সক্রিয় নয়। ইরাকিদের স্বার্থেই নিরপেক্ষ ভাবে পরিবহণের কাজ করা হচ্ছে মাত্র।" অপহরণকারীরা ইরাকি উপজাতীয় নেতাদের জাতীয় সংগঠনের মাথা শেখ হিশাম আল দুলিয়ামিকে এ ঘটনায় মধ্যস্থতার দায়িত্ব দিয়েছে।

ভারতের বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহও বলেন, "আমি নিশ্চিত ওই ট্রাকচালকদের ছেড়ে দেওয়া হবে।" আজ ইরাকের জাতীয় টি ভিসহ উপসাগরীয় অঞ্চলের বেশ কয়েকটি টেলিভিশন নেটওয়ার্কের মাধ্যমে অপহরণকারীদের কাছে ভারতীয়দের মুক্তির আবেদন জানাতে গিয়ে বিদেশ প্রতিমন্ত্রী ই আহমেদও বলেছেন, ভারত কোনও ভাবেই ইরাক সংক্রান্ত কোনও বিষয়ে আমেরিকার পক্ষনেয়নি। ইরাকের সার্বভৌমত্বের দাবিকে আন্তর্জাতিক স্তরে তারা সমর্থন করেছে, ইরাকিদের জন্য মানবিক সাহায্য পাঠিয়েছে। এর

পরে নিরপরাধ ট্রাক চালকদের ছেড়ে দেওয়াই উচিত। বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহ বলেছেন, অপহরণকারীরা কোনও রাজনৈতিক সংগঠনের সদস্য বলে মনে হয় না। অর্থ আদায় করার জন্যই তারা এই কাজ করেছে। পণবন্দিদের নিরাপদে মুক্ত করে আনার ব্যাপারে সব রকম চেষ্টা করা হচ্ছে বলে তিন জনের পরিবারকে প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও বিদেশমন্ত্রী দু'জনেই।

এ দিকে কুয়েতরই অন্য একটি সংস্থা আল-তামিমি গ্রুপ-এর কর্মী দুই পাক নাগরিককে এ বার অপহরণ করা হয়েছে বলে সন্দেহ করা হচ্ছে। দুই পাক নাগরিকের এক জন ইঞ্জিনিয়ার, অপর জন গাড়িচালক। শুক্রবার বাগদাদের দিকে গাড়িতে রওনা হওয়ার পরে তাঁরা আর ফেরেননি। পাক বিদেশ দফতরের মুখপাত্র মাসুদ খান বলেছেন, "আমরা খোঁজ নিচ্ছি। ওঁদের অপহরণ করা হয়েছে বলেই আশক্ষা।" তবে পাক সরকার নির্দিষ্ট ভাবে না-জানালে তারা তদন্ত করবে না বলে ইরাক সরকার জানিয়েছে। রাজা আজাদ খান ও সাজ্জাদ নঈম নামে অপহাত দু জনেরই বাড়ি পাক-অধিকৃত কাশ্মীরের রাওয়ালকোট জেলায়। তাঁদের অপহরণের কথা জানিয়ে কেউ পাক সরকারের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করেনি। তবে আজাদের খ্রী স্বামীর মুক্তির জন্য আবেদন জানিয়েছেন।

ভারতীয় পণবন্দির মুক্তি কামনায় এবং অপহরণের ঘটনার প্রতিবাদে মোগায় আজ মিছিল করেন ট্রাক চালকেরা। অপহৃত সুখদেব সিংহের রোপারের বাড়িতে তাঁর পরিবারের সঙ্গে কথা বলেছেন সারা ভারত সম্ভ্রাসবাদী-বিরোধী ফ্রন্টের চেয়ারম্যান মনিন্দর সিংহ বিট্টা। অপহৃতদের মধ্যে এক জনের স্ত্রী ইতিমধ্যে অসুস্থ হয়ে হাসপাতালে ভর্তি হয়েছেন।

অন্তর্যামীর বাবা গত কালই দিল্লি এসে রাষ্ট্রপতি, প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও বিদেশমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করেছিলেন। প্রধানমন্ত্রী আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন, অপহ্যতেরা তাঁর নিজের সন্তানের মতোই এবং তাঁদের মুক্তির জন্য সরকার যথাসাধ্য চেষ্টা করছে। — পি টি আই. রয়টার্স, এ এফ পি

## Hostage deadline: Time's running out

Baquba: The hostage crisis in Iraq one of the seven kidnapped trucktruckers-three Indians, three ers drew near. The Indian embassy failed to establish contact with the armed group holding the seven involving three Indians deepened on Sunday as the deadline to kill Baghdad said they had still Kenyans and an Egyptian

"Massive efforts are being made to The embassy said it had failed to secure the release, not only of the establish direct contact with the Egyptian hostage, but also all those kidnapped in Iraq," Iraqi interior ministry spokesman Colonel Adkidnappers of its three nationals. nan Abdul Rahman said.

line to kill the first of the truckers The clock ticked down on a 48unless their Kuwaiti employers damages paid to victims of viohour delay of a threatened deadleave Iraq, prisoners are freed and lence in the city of Fallujah.

day, but the extension was announced by the "holders of the Black Banners" group on Friday The initial threat to execute the first man was to expire on Satur-/ia Al-Jazeera



Sukhdev Singh, one of the three Indians held hostage in Iraq, in Ropar All India Anti-Terrorist Front chairman M S Bitta consoles parents of district's Makrauna Kalan village on Sunday Arabia network and television stations in Kuwait and Oman, he said

Minister of state for external affairs E Ahamed made an appeal through television networks in Iraq, Kuwait, Oman and some other Gulf countries on Saturday night for release of the hostages.

firm decision against sending troops to Iraq, raised its voice in-Ahamed said India had taken a In a broadcast made over Iraq national television channels, Al

itarian assistance to Iraqi people try's sovereignty, provided human ternationally for the Gulf counand upheld the Arab cause.

war Singh assured father of one of day that the government would do its utmost to secure safe release and return of Indians. External affairs minister K Natthe hostages Antaryami on Satur-

Antaryami's father Rama Murthi also met President A P J Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and requested them to ensure his son returned safely from Irag.

The Kuwait-based company, which employed Antaryami, Tilak Raj and Sukhdeo Singh as truck with the kidnappers to free them drivers, said it was negotiating as soon as possible.

In a statement, Kuwait and Gulf Link transport company's chairman and MD Saeed Dashti said the measure to ensure the release of company was ready to take any the hostages. He said the company had no presence whatsoever in Iraq and it was only transporting material and equipment urgently needed by the Iraqi people. Agencies the hostages were innocent people and urged their captors to free

THE TIMES OF MIDEA

6 1111 2004



HOPING FOR FREEDOM: The seven foreign truck drivers, including three Indians, being held hostage by an Islamic group calling itself "The Black Banners" at an undisclosed location in Iraq on Wednesday. — AFP

## Government moves to get hostages released

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 22. The Government today stepped up efforts to secure the release of the three Indians taken hostage by a militant group in Iraq on Wednesday even as the United States Embassy in Delhi said it was in touch with its mission in Baghdad to facilitate contact between the Indian Government, the Iraqi Government and the multinational force there.

With Parliament in session, the Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamad, was reluctant to divulge details of the hostage-related developments to the media. "I will make a statement in Parliament tomorrow," he said adding that all possible steps would be taken to "secure the early release of our nationals."

A control room has been set up at the Ministry for monitoring the situation. The Indian Ambassador to Iraq, Brij Tyagi — who was in the Capital — has since left for Baghdad.

Besides the diplomatic channels, the Government is said to be getting in touch with various agencies to establish contact with the militant group. And, again the message being sent across is that India has always maintained that the sovereign power of the people of Iraq should be respected.

should be respected.

The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, has asked the Home

Ministry to get details of the family members of the three hostages to enable the Government to remain in touch with them. Sources said the Prime Minister's directive was conveyed to officials in the Home Ministry by the Prime Minister's Office.

The External Affairs Ministry had apparently contacted the families by evening.

Two of the hostages, Antaryami, 33, and Tilak Raj, hail from Himachal Pradesh while Sukhdev Singh, 26, is from Punjab. Sukhdev and Antaryami joined the Kuwait-based Universal Transport Company less than a year ago with the former taking up the job in April this year.

## CPI (M) demand

In a related statement, the

Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said the Government should immediately ensure the safety of the hostages by announcing that Indian citizens would not engage in such activities in Iraq. "Such a decision will be in conformity with the stand taken earlier by the Government not to allow Indians to be hired by private security agencies for work in Iraq," the Polit Bureau noted while demanding that all efforts be made by the Government for the release of the hostages.

Editorial on Page 10; Parents' agony: Page 12

## Natwar Singh's appeal

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JULY 22. India today condemned the abduction of three of its nationals in Iraq and said it was making all efforts to seek their early release.

The External Affairs Minister,

The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, here in connection with the SAARC Council of Ministers meeting, told reporters that the hostages were "not combatants" but "innocent persons.

Mr. Singh spoke to the Iraqi Foreign Minister, currently in Cairo, and appealed to him to ensure the hostages' safe release. The Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, spoke to Mr. Singh twice to brief him on the latest developments.

## 'Demands unacceptable'

"Our government is not there. No one can accept their

demands. We condemn it in the strongest terms and hope this issue gets over quickly," Mr. Singh said.

The threat issued by the abductors would increase the anxiety and would not do any good, he added.

Ruling out the possibility of sending troops to Iraq in the light of the latest development, he said, "the question does not arise." FRIDAY, JULY 23, 2004

## YACT DECISIVELY ON HOSTAGE ISSUE

NEW DELHI MUST do whatever is necessary to secure the release of three Indian workers taken hostage by the Iraqi resistance as they are likely to be killed if the demands of their captors are not met. The resistance has demanded that India and other countries whose nationals are being held hostage withdraw their citizens from Iraq. However, the demand apparently pertains mainly to the personnel of companies that render logistical support to the forces in neo-colonial occupation of this West Asian country. The guerrillas have adopted the tactic of striking at the support systems of the occupation since they are vastly overmatched by the foreign military contingents. As the unfortunate victims of circumstances and of the failure of governments to warn all their nationals against working in Iraq in support of the occupation, the hostages deserve all the assistance that can be officially provided. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has reiterated on several occasions that India will have no truck with the occupation. In its Common Minimum Programme, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) also promised that it would end the employment of Indian mercenaries in Iraq. The Iraqis made clear by their action that they see little difference between those who fight on the side of the occupation and those who convey supplies for the foreign troops or provide other kinds of support. The UPA Government should accept the logic inherent in such an approach and show greater earnestness in stopping Indian nationals from working for the occupation in any capacity. If it immediately comes out with a policy statement asking all Indian nationals to leave occupied and war-torn Iraq and committing itself to strict enforcement of this decision, perhaps the lives of the Indian hostages can be saved.

The Bush administration is likely to criticise any move to withdraw Indians from Iraq as a surrender to terrorism much as it did after the Philippines pulled out its minuscule military contingent in response to an earlier hostage

crisis. However, the principle that governments should not succumb to the demands of terrorists does not apply in this case for several reasons. The occupation forces and their Iraqi quislings alone categorise as "terrorists" the guerillas who are recognised as resistance fighters by the rest of the world. The resistance also appears to represent the true aspirations of Iraqis since its warriors live amidst the people of the country while the members of the interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi hide behind the protective shield of the occupiers. As support for Washington's disastrous Iraq policy dwindles by the day, within the U.S. and internationally, it appears all the more certain that foreign armies will not restore stability or establish a democratic order. Any association with the occupation or its puppets will be detrimental to India's long term interests since the resistance apparently embodies the will of the Iragis.

Unlike the former soldiers of the Indian army who were recruited for service in Iraq, the three transportation company employees currently held hostage might not have been fully aware of the risks they were running. The terms of their contracts with Kuwait-based companies might have restrained them from refusing dangerous assignments. New Delhi and its diplomatic missions in the countries bordering Iraq must take extra care to ensure that the lives of poorly educated manual workers are not endangered by the actions of unscrupulous or insensitive employers. Indian embassies scrutinise visas granted by the governments to which they are accredited and check the antecedents of prospective employers to see that workers are not cheated. However, in the peculiar circumstances of the present day much more needs to be done to ensure that those who seek jobs in the countries of West Asia are not unwittingly lured into Iraq. Among other measures that could be taken are the holding of special camps to educate the workforce about regional perils and the monitoring of crossing points into the war-torn country.

Three Indians among six taken hostage in Iraq

MANAMA, JULY 21. Three Indians are among six persons taken hostage by a militant group in Iraq. The captors have announced that the hostages will be beheaded unless their governments declare that all their citizens will be withdrawn from Iraq.

The Indians who have been abducted are Antaryami, Tilak Raj, and Sukhdev Singh. They apparently worked for a Kuwait-based transportation company involved in ferrying supplies to United States forces in Iraq. The others kidnapped are two Kenyans and an Egyptian.

When contacted The Hindu, a spokesman for the Indian embassy in Baghdad said that the mission had received instructions from New Delhi on how to tackle the crisis, but did not give further details. The Indian Ambassador to Iraq, B.B. Tyagi, could not be contacted as he was already in India.

The militant group, which calls itself "The Holders of the Black Banners," said in a statement that it would behead a hostage every 72 hours unless the governments to which they belonged withdrew their citizens from Iraq and the companies they worked for closed their branches. The deadline started at 8 p.m. (10.30 p.m IST) today, it said. It also aired its threat in a videotape broadcast by the Dubai based Al-Arabiya television.

"We have warned all the countries, companies, busi-



FACING THREAT: The six hostages with their captors at an undisclosed location in Iraq in this picture handed to the Associated Press on Wednesday.

nessmen and truck drivers will be targeted by the fires of again transporting, goods, my." Analysts point out that that those who deal with the Mujahedeen," the state- weapons and military equip-American cowboy occupiers ment said. "Here you are once ment that backs the U.S. Ar-

Iraqi guerillas are now focusing on weakening the structure that supports the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and is also seeking to discourage foreign investment in the country.

None of those countries whose citizens are kidnapped is part of the 160,000-member U.S.-led occupation force in

The kidnapping follows the release of Filipino hostage Angelo de la Cruz after Manila abided by his captors' demands and withdrew its 51member force from Iraq.

An Egyptian driver of a Saudi Arabian company has also been released after the firm announced that it was withdrawing from Iraq.

More than 60 foreigners have been taken hostage in Iraq in recent months.

New Delhi's initiative: Page 11

## India values ties with Israel, who says Natwar

Press Trust of India Thiruvananthapuram, July 11

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS minister Natwar Singh on Sunday said India "greatly valued" its relationship with Israel, but this would not affect the rapport New Delhi traditionally has had with the Palestinians.

has had with the Palestinians.

In a brief chat with reporters after delivering a lecture on *New Dimensions of Nehruism* here, he said it was during P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure that India raised its level of representation in Israel

representation in Israel.

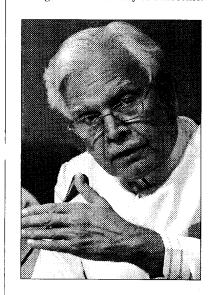
Recalling that in 1992 Israel opened its first representative office in Bombay, Singh said: "Now we have an embassy and an ambassador in Tel Aviv. We greatly value our relationship with Israel. But this will not and should not affect our relations with Palestine."

Stating that India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wanted the Non-Aligned Movement to be alive to changing situations, Singh asserted that the NAM now needed drastic reforms, in view of the changing international agendas.

"NAM needs drastic reforms. It requires reinventing, just like Tony Blair reinvented the Labour Party. And we should not mix 'non-alignment' with NAM," he said, delivering the lecture on Nehruism, organised by the Nehru Centre here.

He said Nehru gave India an independent foreign policy, which was not dedicated to any dogma or doctrine. In his days, India's point of view prevailed in the Third World. "Our policy has the flexibility to

"Our policy has the flexibility to deal with problems as and when they arise. Nehru laid the foundation for a just and pluralistic state and put peace high on the international agenda. There is renewed interest in Nehruism now," he said. He also reiterated that India valued its ties with the Jewish state despite being a traditional ally of Palestine.



TE UNUSTANTIMES

, tan 20 d

## र्त्राक कुना

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৬ জুলাই 🆳 হ্রাকে ভারতীয় সেনা পাঠানোর সম্ভাবনা পূরোপুরি খারিজ করে দিল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহ আজ লোকসভায় ঘোষণা করেছেন, ইরাকে ভারতীয় সেনা পাঠানোর প্রশ্নই ওঠে না। ক্ষমতা হন্তান্তর ও নতুন 'সার্বভৌম' সরকার আসার পরেও কেন সেখানে ভারতীয় সেনা পাঠানো হবে না তার ব্যাখ্যা দিতে গিয়ে প্রয়োজনীয়তা। লোকসভায় ইরাক নিয়ে আজ এক বিশেষ বিতর্কে অংশ নিয়ে জবাবি ভাষণে নটবর বলেছেন, ''আমরা ইসলামিক বিশ্বের ভাবাবেগকে আজ আরও একটি কারণ উল্লেখ করেছেন। তা হল, ইসলামি দেশগুলির মঙ্গে সুসম্পর্ক বজায় রাখার সংসদে এই প্রথম জানিয়ে দেওয়া হল যে ভারত নটবর ইরাকে রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের কর্তৃত্বের অভাবের পাশাপাশি অবহেলা করতে পারি না।" নতুন সরকার গঠনের পরে ইরাকে সেনা পাঠাবে না।

উভয়পক্ষেরই সংযত হওয়া দরকার।

একই সঙ্গে ভারত এই প্রথম বাগদাদের আবু ঘাইব জেলে ইরাকি বন্দিদের উপর মার্কিন সেনার অভ্যাচারের প্রসঙ্গে প্রকাশ্যে নিন্দা করল। নটবর সিংহ আবু ঘাইব-এর ঘটনার উল্লেখ করে বলেন, ইতিমধ্যেই মার্কিন সেনেট কমিটি এ নিয়ে কড়া ভাষায় নিন্দা করেছে। গোটা বিশ্বের জনমতের সঙ্গে একমত হয়ে

ি বাহ্ব বিশিল্প বিশিল্প ইরাকি সরকারের সমর্থক বামপন্থীরা ঋবশ্য ভাতেও সন্তুষ্ট না আগ্রাসনের নিন্দা করে ও ইরাকে সেনা পাঠানোর হয়ে প্রকাশ্যেই নটবরের কড়া সমালোচনা আরম্ভ করেন। সেই প্রসঙ্গের উল্লেখ করে নটবর আজ লোকসভায় বলেন, ওয়াশিংটন থেকেই ডিনি টেলিফোনে সি পি এম সাধারণ সম্পাদক হরকিষেণ সিংহ সুরজিতের সঙ্গে কথা বলেন। তাঁকে আশ্বস্ত রাখুন।" এ কথা জানিয়ে নটবর যথেষ্ট আবেগের সঙ্গে করতে নটবর বলোছিলেন, "আমার উপর ভরসা সংসদে বলেন, "আমি এ নিয়ে সমঝোতা করে বসব, এটা ভাবাই অসম্ভব।" বন্দিদের যে ভাবে নির্যাতন ও অত্যাচার করা হয়েছে তা অত্যম্ভ ঘৃণ্য কাজ। এ ছাড়া ইরাকে মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনী ও ইরাকি গেরিলাদের মধ্যে বেড়ে চলা সংঘর্ষের ফলে <u>কারবালা, নজাফ ও অন্যত্র যে ভাবে ইসলামের</u> ধৰ্মস্থানগুলির পবিত্রতা নষ্ট হচ্ছে, তাতে ভারত বিশেষ বিদেশমন্ত্ৰী হিসাবে নটবর সিংহের ইরাকে সেনা না ভাবে উদ্বিগ্ন বলে তিনি জানিয়েছেন। নটবর বলেছেন, ওই সব ধৰ্মস্থান যাতে ক্ষতিগ্ৰস্ত না হয় সে জন্য

ইরাকে সেনা পাঠানোর জন্য আমেরিকার তরফে ২০০৩ সালের ২৮ মে আমেরিকা প্রস্তাব পাঠায় উত্তর ইরাকে শাস্তিরক্ষার দায়িত্ব ভারতীয় সেনাবাহিনীর হাতে তুলে দিতে তারা আগ্রহী। তার পরেই ওই বছরের ৩ গুন মার্কিন প্রতিরক্ষাসচিব ডোনাল্ড রামস্ফেল্ড তৎকালীন প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজকে চিঠি লিখে করেছিলেন। বাজপেয়ী মঞ্জিসভার নিরাপক্তাবিষয়ক বিরোধীদের চাপে নতি স্বীকার করতে বাধ্য হয়। ১৪ ঙুলাই ভারতীয় সংসদ সৰ্বসন্মতভাবে ইরাকে মার্কিন এক ডিভিশন সেনা ইরাকে পাঠাতে অনুরোধ একাধিকবার অনুরোধ পেয়েও ভারত সাড়া দেয়নি। নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করার পরে কমিটি তা পাঠানোর নীতিগত অবস্থান ঘোষণার অন্য তাৎপর্য রয়েছে। মন্ত্রী হওয়ার অক্স দিন পরেই ওয়াশিংটনে গিয়ে নটবর মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব কলিন পাওয়েলের সঙ্গে বৈঠকে করেন। ওই বৈঠকের পরেই নটবর সংবাদমাধ্যমে জানিয়ে দেন, রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে নতুন প্রস্তাব গ্রহণের পরে ইরাক পরিস্থিতির भतिवर्ज्न राग्नाह्य। कल, रेजात्क त्रमा भाठात्नात्र নটবরের ওই বেফাঁস মম্ভব্য কংগ্রেসকে এতটাই বিব্রত করে যে সে দিনই সনিয়ার ইঙ্গিতে কংগ্রেস মুখপাত্র সাংবাদিকদের জানিয়ে দেন, ইরাকে সেনা পাঠানো নিয়ে নতুন ভাবনাচিন্তা করার কথা উঠছে না। বিষয়টি নিয়ে ভারত নতুন করে বিবেচনা করতে পারে।

মতোই ভারতও বলে এসেছে, রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের হাতে ইরাকের নিয়ম্বণ না তুলে দেওয়ার আগে সেখানে কোনগুভাবে অংশ গ্রহণের প্রশ্ন ওঠে না। ইরাকে ক্ষমতা মার্কিন সেনাবাহিনী নিজের হাতেই রেখে দিয়েছে, তাই বিরোধিতা করে প্রস্তাব পাস করে। ফ্রান্স, জার্মানির হন্তান্তর পর্ব শেষ হলেও নিরাপদ্রার দায়িত্ব যেহেতু ইরাকের পরিস্থিতির মৌলিক পরিবর্তন হয়নি বলেই অনেক দেশ মনে করছে। আজ সি পি আই সাংসদ পি কে বাসুদেবন নায়ারের আনা প্রস্তাবের ভিত্তিতে ইরাক নিয়ে আলোচনায় এ কথাও বার বার উঠেছে।

সাদ্দাম হুসেনের পতনের পরে ইরাকের পরিস্থিতি যখন মার্কিন নেড়ত্বাধীন মিত্র বাহিনীর নাগালের বাইরে চলে যাচ্ছিল, তখন নয়াদিল্লির কাছে ওয়াশিংটন একাধিকবার সেনা চেয়ে পাঠিয়েছিল। কিন্ধু এখন তা বন্ধ হয়নি। কদিন আগেই ২৮ জুন জাকার্তায় আসিয়ান আঞ্চলিক ফোরামের বৈঠকে অংশ নিতে গিয়ে নটবর তবে ওয়াশিংটনের সঙ্গে নয়াদিল্লির এ নিয়ে যোগাযোগ সিংহের সঙ্গে মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব কলিন পাওয়েলের সেইরকম কোনও অনুরোধ যে সরকারের কাছে আসেনি, সেটাও অবশ্য খোলসা করে দিয়েছেন নটবর। এক দফা কথাবাৰ্তা হয়েছে

> 2004 7 JUL

## 'India keen on closer ties with **√West Asia'**

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JUNE 14. India is focusbuilding a closer relaing on building a closer relationship with West Asia and the newly-elected Government has begun to take concrete steps in that direction, the Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, has said.

Mr. Ahamed, who is on a visit to Saudi Arabia told *The Hindu* over telephone from Jeddah that the United Democratic Front Government was fully aware of the importance of building a multi-faceted relationship with the region. He said that India could ill-afford to ignore a region with a population of 1.3 billion, and, with which, cordial relations had existed for centuries. Mr. Ahamed was received by Saudi Arabia's King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz on his arrival, marking the new Government's first high-level contact with Saudi Arabia.

During their meeting, Mr. Ahamed handed over to the Saudi monarch, a letter from the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. From Saudi Arabia, the Minister of State will travel to Jordan, a country of prime strategic importance because it shares common borders with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Syria. Mr. Ahamed's visit to Saudi Arabia comes at a particularly sensitive moment, as eight Indians had been killed in a recent Al-Qaeda attack in the eastern Saudi Arabian city of Al Khobar.

THE HINDU

15 JUN 200.

## India to take 'new look' at sending troops to Iraq

U.N. resolution has changed situation: Natwar

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

washington, JUNE 11. India has said that it will take a "new look" at the question of sending troops to Iraq in the context of the "changed situation" — the United Nations Security Council having unanimously endorsed a new Resolution on Iraq.

"We are a coalition Government, so the matter will have to be discussed by the Government and by the Cabinet Committee on Security. There is the resolution of the last Parliament on this issue, in which they had given our opinion that we are against sending troops to Iraq. Now the situation has changed," the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, said at a press appearance with the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, here on Thursday evening.

"There is a Resolution unanimously passed in the United Nations and there are Arab members in it. We'll look at it very carefully. But I must empha-

sise that this matter will have to be placed before the Government at the highest levels, so it would be premature for me to say yea or nay," Mr. Singh remarked.

Mr. Singh, who is in Washington to represent India at the state funeral of the former U.S. President, Ronald Wilson Reagan, was at the State Department for talks with Gen. Powell. The first question to the Minister was whether India would consider providing troops under a U.N. umbrella in the context of the latest Security Council Resolution.

"...we have been following events in Iraq with very great interest. And we were delighted that the United States and the United Kingdom tabled the Resolution in the Security Council that was unanimously adopted. That's a welcome step. And we've always been in favour of the United Nations being involved in a central responsibility along with their friends and oth-

er members of the Security Council," Mr. Singh said.

"With regard to the question you asked about Indian troops, nobody has asked us ... we'll look at the Resolution very minutely. We are not in the Security Council. And we'll take a decision when the time comes," he added.

Addressing the media after their meeting, Gen. Powell said both he and Mr. Singh discussed the "full range" of bilateral and regional issues. "...the most important issue we touched on was the fact that the United States and India have a very good, strong relationship right now and we intend to not only keep it strong but to build on that relationship, to move forward."

For his part, Mr. Singh said there was a "very frank, wide ranging, lively, occasionally amusing discussion on every single aspect of our relationship," and the Secretary of State was informed of India's intention "to continue the policies that we have followed for 57 years."

Mr. Singh said there was a discussion on the situation in various parts of the world and how this affected India and the U.S. "And there was broad agreement, except on one or two areas," Mr. Singh said.

ment, except on one or two areas," Mr. Singh said.

The new Government was "determined" to work closely with the U.S. to take the partnership forward in all areas. "Both our countries have clear commonalities in shaping a democratic and pluralistic world order, free of terrorism," Mr. Singh said.

Asked about the continuing problem of terrorism in Kashmir, Gen. Powell said: "I think we have seen that the rate has gone down. And we continue to monitor that rate, and we continue to express our concern about the infrastructure that remains behind."

Editorial on Page 12; Photograph on Page 13

## ইজুরায়েলের দূতের মতে, সম্পর্ক ঠিক পথে এগোচ্ছে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: বামপন্থীরা মুখে যা-ই বলুন, ভারতের সঙ্গে গত কয়েক বছরে দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কের যে-ভাবে উন্নতি হয়েছে,, তার কোনও পরিবর্তনের আশঙ্কা নেই ইজরায়েল সরকারের মনে। প্যালেস্তাইন-প্রীতির উর্বর মাটি কলকাতায় বৃহস্পতিবার তাঁদের আশার কথা শোনালেন ভারতে ইজরায়েলের রাষ্ট্রদূত ডেভিড ড্যানিয়েলি।

বস্তত, এ দিন তিনি প্রথম সফরে বামপন্থীদের দুর্গে এসে মহাকরণ-সহ বিভিন্ন মহলে যে-অভ্যর্থনা পেয়েছেন, তাতে তাঁর মনে হওয়া স্বাভাবিক, দিল্লিতে বাম নেতৃত্বের প্যালেস্তাইন-প্রীতি (এবং মুদ্রার অন্য পিঠ ইজরায়েল-বিরোধিতা) নেহাতই 'টোকেনিজম' বা লোক-দেখানোর জন্য।

গত সোমবার সংসদে সুসম্পর্ক গড়ার জন্য রাষ্ট্রপতির বক্তৃতায় ইজরায়েলের নাম একক ভাবে উল্লেখ করার জন্য প্রকাশ কারাতের মতো বামপন্থী নেতারা সরকারের কড়া সমালোচনা করেন। বামপন্থীদের আশঙ্কা, সুসম্পর্কের জন্য ইজরায়েলকে আলাদা ভাবে চিহ্নিত कर्ताल भारलकारेनिएनत সংগ্রামে ভারতের সমর্থন লঘু হয়ে যাবে। বৃহস্পতিবার প্রথম কলকাতা সফরে এসে মৃদুভাষী ইজরায়েলের রাষ্ট্রদূত কৃটনীতিকের স্বভাবসিদ্ধ ভাষায় বলেন, "দু'দেশের সম্পর্ক দু'দেশের সুবিধার ভিত্তিতেই এগিয়েছে। আগের গতিতেই সম্পর্ক এগোবে বলে আমাদের আশা।"

এই আশার উপরে ভরসা রেখেই
নিকট ভবিয়াতে দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্ক কেমন
ভাবে এগোতে পারে, তার রূপরেখাও
পেশ করেন ড্যানিয়েলি। ১৯৯২ সালের
জানুয়ারিতে দু দৈশের মধ্যে কূটনৈতিক
সম্পর্ক স্থাপিত হওয়ার পরে বাণিজ্য বেড়েছে দ্রুত হারে। মাত্র ১১ বছর আগে
শূন্য থেকে গুরু করে চলতি আর্থিক
বছরে দ্বিপাক্ষিক বাণিজ্যের পরিমাণ
২০০ কোটি ডলার ছাড়িয়ে যাবে বলে
মনে করেন ড্যানিয়েলি।

তিনি যখন এ দিন মহকরণে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্যের সঙ্গে দেখা করতে যান, তখন বামপন্থী নেতা নন, বাস্তব বোধসম্পন্ন প্রশাসক বুদ্ধদেবেরই দেখা পান তিনি। এক ঘণ্টার আলোচনায় মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তাঁকে বলেন, ইজরায়েল থেকে কৃষি ও সেচ-প্রযুক্তির শিক্ষা চায় পশ্চিমবঙ্গ। ২০০০ সালে যে-প্রযক্তির খোঁজে তেল আবিবে গিয়েছিলেন তৎকালীন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জ্যোতি বসু ও শিল্পোনয়ন নিগমের চেয়ারম্যান সোমনাথ চট্টোপাধ্যায়। কমিউনিস্টদের দীর্ঘদিনের ইজরায়েল-বিদ্বেষ উপেক্ষা করে বসুই প্রথম বামপন্থী নেতা, যিনি ইজরায়েল গিয়েছিলেন। ওই সফরে তিনি প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইহুদ বারাক ও নরমপন্থী ইজরায়েলি নেতা সিমন পেরেজের সঙ্গে সাক্ষাৎ করেছিলেন। চার বছর আগে ওই দুই বিশিষ্ট বামপন্থী নেতা যে-ভাবে রাজনীতি সরিয়ে রেখে প্রযুক্তি ও লগ্নির খোঁজে ইজরায়েল গিয়েছিলেন, এ দিন ঠিক সেই বাস্তববোধের পরিচয় দিয়েই বুদ্ধবাবু বুঝিয়ে দিয়েছেন, উন্নয়ন আগে. রাজনীতির বুলি পরে।

ড্যানিয়েলিকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জানিয়েছেন,
তাঁরা কৃষিতে উৎপাদনশীলতা বাড়াতে
উন্নত প্রযুক্তি ও সেচের উপায় খুঁজছেন।
প্রাস্টিক থেকে কৃষি প্রক্রিয়াকরণ, বিভিন্ন
ক্ষেত্রে তিনি যে ইজরায়েলের সঙ্গে সহযোগিতায় আগ্রহী, তা-ও স্পষ্ট করেই
বলেছেন বুদ্ধবার্।

বণিকসভা ইন্ডিয়ান চেম্বার অব কমার্স আয়োজিত এক আলোচনাসভায় এর পর ছয়ের পাতায় সম্পর্ক ঠিক পথে

উদ্যোগপতিরা ড্যানিয়েলিকে অনুরোধ করেছেন ইজরায়েল থেকে এ রাজ্যে সেচ বণিকসভার প্রযুক্তিবিদ পাঠাতে। সেক্রেটারি জেনারেল নাজিব আরিফ তাঁকে মনে করিয়ে দেন, ২০০০ সালে দু'জন সেচ প্রযুক্তিবিদ এ রাজ্যে এসে তাঁদের প্রযুক্তি ব্যবহারের প্রশিক্ষণ দিয়ে গিয়েছিলেন। আবার যাতে তেমন প্রশিক্ষণের ব্যবস্থা করা যায়, তারও আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন ড্যানিয়েলি। ফুল ও ফলের চাবে ইজরায়েল যে-দক্ষতা অর্জন করেছে, তার থেকে যে এ রাজ্যের অনেক কিছু শেখার আছে, সে-কথা বারবার উল্লেখ করেছেন বণিকসভার অনেকেই। ড্যানিয়েলি জানিয়েছেন, তাঁদের জনসংখ্যার মাত্র ২.৫ শতাংশ মানুষ কৃষিপণ্য উৎপাদনে যুক্ত হলেও উৎপাদনশীলতা এত বেশি যে, দেশের চাহিদা পূরণ করে রফতানির জন্যও প্রচুর উদ্বৃত্ত থাকে। ড্যানিয়েলি বলেন, মহারাষ্ট্রে তাঁদের প্রযুক্তি ব্যবহার করে আখ চাষিদের ইতিমধ্যেই উৎপাদন किছুটা বেড়েছে। ড্যানিয়েলি জানিয়েছেন, চলতি বছরের শেষের দিকে টেলি-যোগাযোগ ও সফটঅয়্যার নিয়ে ইজরায়েল থেকে ভারতে আসবে একটি বাণিজ্যদল। তবে ওই দল কলকাতায় আসবে কি না, তা তিনি বলতে পারেননি।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

1 1 JUN 2201

ing man

## NO NEED FOR A REVIEW

WHILE THE UNITED Progressive Alliance Government has been cautious in stating that it needed to study a resolution on Iraq currently under debate in the United Nations Security Council, there are indications that it will abide by the wise policy followed by its predecessor and refuse to send Indian troops to serve with the forces in neocolonial occupation of the West Asian country. Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh has pertinently observed that when the issue came up in 2003, the Congress party opposed the proposal that Indian soldiers should serve under the command of the United States. The draft U.N. resolution envisages that the interim Iraqi government, which is set to acquire notional sovereignty before June 30, will be granted formal command of the security forces to be made up of citizens of the country. However, irrespective of the language of the resolution or the formal status of the local forces, substantive power and control over military operations will be retained by a U.S. that has by far the largest and most powerful contingents in Iraq. Given that reality, there can be no question of any change in India's principled position even if the foreign military contingents in Iraq are to be redesignated as a multinational force. In sticking to such a position the UPA Government will be fulfilling the commitment made in the Common Minimum Programme to maintain the independence of India's foreign policy on all regional and global issues while pursuing a closer engagement and relations with the U.S. New Delhi must also move expeditiously to implement its promise to withdraw Indian mercenaries currently serving with the occupation forces and ban further recruitments for this purpose.

Washington's claims that the interim government is representative of the Iraqi people and

that it will be endowed with a fair measure of sovereignty have no credibility. "President" Ghazi al Yawar, "Prime Minister" Iyyad Allawi and most of the "Ministers" were either members of, or closely associated with, the discredited Governing Council that served as a puppet of the occupation forces. The Iraqi people showed nothing but contempt for the Governing Council and their attitude towards an interim government made up of the same faces is not likely to be any different. The notion that such a regime will exercise a real measure of sovereignty is laughable when the first task before it is to negotiate, from a dependent's position, the terms under which the occupation forces will continue to operate in Iraq. It is also very likely that Americans will continue to enjoy legal immunity, determine accounting practices, control the treatment of prisoners, and oversee the functioning of Ministries; over a hundred "advisors" have been embedded in various layers of the Iraqi administrative machinery for this purpose.

These conditions are not likely to change. It was with great reluctance that the Bush administration roped in the U.N. to help clear the comprehensive mess created in Iraq. U.N. envoy Lakhdar Brahimi did consult a wide range of Iragis as he tried to set up a more truly representative government. However, he was relegated to the role of an ineffectual bystander as Washington resorted to sleight of hand and essentially recast the Governing Council as the new government. As it is, the Iraqis had little faith in a world body that had imposed devastating economic sanctions on them for over a decade at the behest of the U.S. Now the U.N. has just participated in another charade enacted to protect American interests. India has nothing to gain and much to lose by getting embroiled in this situation.

THE HINDU

JUN One.

SPEAKING UP FOR PALESTINE

WHERE CONTINUITY WILL broadly mark the pursuit of India's relations in the South Asian neighbourhood, a fundamental course correction is needed in policy towards West Asia, as acknowledged by the Common Minimum Programme. This must end the National Democratic Alliance Government's pronounced pro-Israeli tilt and reaffirm solidarity with the beleaguered Palestinians and their just cause. Diplomatic ties with Israel were established during the Narasimha Rao regime after prolonged consultations for the pursuit of normal, mutually beneficial bilateral relations. However, over the past six years the NDA Government injected a serious distortion by ignoring the Palestinian cause while seeking to build a "special relationship" with the Zionist state. This was a negation of national sentiment and reduced India's stand on Palestine and Israel to a state of voiceless impotence. The country was unable to join the international community in denouncing the Ariel Sharon regime's war-mongering and crimes against humanity. This shameful interlude in India's longstanding, traditional relations with the West Asian region is set to end. There have been in the past few days broad enough hints of this from the External Affairs Ministry under Natwar Singh's stewardship. New Delhi must straightaway signal the policy shift by joining the civilised world in condemning the latest Israeli atrocities in the occupied southern Gaza Strip, which have left scores of Palestinians dead and thousands homeless. New Delhi must launch a campaign to mobilise world opinion against such unacceptable rogue state behaviour.

The weeklong siege of the Rafah refugee camp on the tip of Gaza climaxes a series of state-sponsored terrorist actions against the Palestinians and their undisputed leader, Yasser Arafat, whom Israel has attempted to isolate and if possible eliminate. The wanton destruction of hundreds of homes of refugees in the Rafah camp has been described as a war crime and violation of the Geneva Conventions. In the deadliest incident during the operation, an Israeli tank and helicopter gunship opened fire on unarmed protesters. Taking the cue from the Bush administration, which cited Saddam Hussein's non-existent weapons of mass destruction as a pretext to launch its war against the Iraqi people, the Sharon Government cited the existence of a warren of arms-smuggling tunnels in Gaza for its brutal operation. While the failure to unearth any tunnel exposes the Israeli lie, the massive scale of the destruction caused in Rafah has provoked worldwide condemnation. A critical United Nations Security Council resolution asking Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law and end its military campaign has been followed by the sharp remarks of a member of the Sharon Cabinet who has said that the military's destructive action reminded him of the Holocaust. Israel has destroyed 3,000 Palestinian homes in the occupied territories in the past three and a half years, including 1,000 in the Rafah area, according to Amnesty International.

The uproar caused by the latest actions of the Sharon Government may signal a turning point, resulting from a rather strange political alignment. Three months ago Mr. Sharon said he would unilaterally disengage from the Gaza Strip, a plan rejected by his own party. Support for the pullout now comes from the Labour party of the former Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, who led a massive rally in Tel Aviv late last month. Mr. Peres has watched as the past three years of violence nearly wiped out the peace agreements he helped work out a decade ago. His support for Mr. Sharon's pullout plan reflects the deep disquiet among a growing number of Israelis who have watched the rightist regime push the country to the brink and destroy the road map for peace drawn up by the quartet of the U.S., the U.N., the European Union and Russia.

## Ambassador reiterates Nam demand

## Palestine puts Delhi claim to litmus test

## PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, May 30: The new Congress-led government's claim that it would play a "pro-active" role in volatile West Asia is being put to test.

Palestine has proposed that India use its influence among developing nations to get itself nominated as the Non-Aligned Movement (Nam)'s special representative for the region so that it can work with world players to find a permanent solution to the Palestine-Israel problem.

"If India desires to play the role of a big nation, it cannot expect to do so by locking itself inside a room. It has to go out and try to deal with the problems in the world. And what problem can be bigger than the one in the Middle East:" Palestinian envoy to Delhi Osama Musa asked **The Telegraph** during an interview.

Musa, like many others, has been watching with interest India's close relations with Israel in the past few years. "What India does with Israel is its sovereign decision. But for peace in the Middle East, it can do a little more," he said.

The US and Russia, along with the United Nations and the European Union, all have "special envoys" for West Asia. Their job is to interact with important countries in the region, including Palestine and Israel, with the focus on bringing lasting peace to the violence-prone area.

Musa wants India to play a similar role.

Musa: Old cry

But India on its own cannot appoint a special envoy. What it can do is raise the issue at the Nam and get a decision in its favour from the developing world.

The proposal that Palestine has put forward to Delhi is not new. It had sounded the earlier government, too, but did not get a favourable response. So on Monday, when Musa met South Block officials, he again decided to make the suggestion.

But many observers believe there will be no major shift in India's policy on West Asia, particularly in its dealings with Israel and Palestine. The United Progressive Alliance, in its common minimum programme document, said the government would continue to support the demand for an independent Palestinian homeland. Successive governments, including the previous BJP-led coalition, had supported this demand.

However, some Congress leaders claimed that the UPA government would play a "proactive" role in West Asia. It remains to be seen whether the Congress-led government limits itself to rhetoric or not.

Musa said India's support for Palestine remained unaltered under the B.P.-led government.

under the BJP-led government.

"The BJP government gifted us a prime piece of land in Chanakyapuri (with an estimated market value of nearly \$10 million) free of cost. It continued to give us other aid, which included medicines and vehicles. We know India is not a rich country like the United States or some other western nations. And, therefore, such gestures from Delhi are even more dear to us," the ambassador said.

"People of India are known

"People of India are known for their sense of fairness and justice. Ours is a just struggle, it's a fight to end the Israeli occupation and get back our own territory. No matter which party or coalition comes to power in Delhi, there cannot be any change in India's stand on the Palestinian cause. This is mainly because of the widespread support that we enjoy from the Indian people," Musa added.

# Israel clears Phalcon sale to India

lion Phalcon Airborne Warning and by Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon, Control System (AWACS) to India, the Israeli security Cabinet, headed JERUSALEM, Feb. 29. — Clearing the decks for the sale of the \$1.1 bil Press Trust of India

Gen. Amos Yaron, had with Indian The final terms for the deal were Indian and Israeli negotiating drafting the agreement according to agreed upon during the discussions Israeli defence ministry director, officials in New Delhi in December teams are said to have finished

some \$350 million after the deal is

Sources here said Israeli air force

on the deal, which will be conclu-"final technical details" with India Commander-in-Chief, Major-Qeneral Dan Halutz, is working out the

ted and integrated on the Russian-designed IL-76 plane made by Be-riyev Aircraft Design Bureau, a Under the AWACS deal, the Israeli Phalcon radar is to be moununit of Irkut Aerospace Corporaded in the coming weeks.

within several weeks.

"We hope to sign the contract with Israel, latest by April," a senior official of Irkut Aerospace Corporation told PTI in Irkutsk, Siberia. Irkut also produces Sukhoi Su-30MKI war planes for India.

The payment for the planes for the Phalcon system is to be spread over a number of years.

Pak slams deal

The Indian Air Force had tried Russian A-50 AWACS planes dur-



Mr Ariel Sharon (centre) at the Cabinet meeting where the decks were cleared for the Phalcon sale. — AFP

today approved the deal.

receive an advance payment of

which Israel Aircraft Industries will

THE STATESMAN THE ET ATTAIN

MAR 2004

## Ofeq-5 spy photos, from Israel with love

TEL-AVIV/NEW DELHI, Feb. 11. — Israel is favourably inclined towards providing India with high resolution pictures of Kashmir from its photo reconnaissance Ofeq-5 satellites.

Israeli officials have said that sharp cuts in the defence ministraell officials have said that sharp cuts in the defence ministry and the close strategic relations with New Delhi have led to a review of its policy of limiting the access of its Ofeq-5 photographs to itself, the *Middle East Newsline* has reported. Performance data about Ofeq 5 is reportedly classified and the pictures have a resolution of 50 cm. India had submitted a request to buy pictures, either delivered directly or via Israel, in exchange for a fixed fee during the September visit of Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon, the report said Minister Mr Ariel Sharon, the report said.

A tripartite India-USA-Israel conference, to strengthen the "strategic triad", is scheduled for 16 and 17 February at Herzliya, north of Tel Aviv.

Mr Shalom, after meetings with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr George Fernandes, sought a probe into Pakistan's nuclear imbroglio, saying Tel-Aviv was very concerned over apprehensions of some nuclear knowledge and equipment

falling into wrong hands.

Deliveries of the Phalcon Early Air Warning and Control System to India will begin "shortly", the visiting Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and foreign minister, Mr Silvan Shalom, said today, with "differences" over its supply having been sorted out with the USA. He also sought a probe into the proliferation of nuclear weapons from Pakistan and said no headway had been made on inaugurating ties with Islamabad. Under the AWACS deal worth Rs 9,000 crore, Israel will supply the radars to be mounted on the Russian IL-76 platform, considerably enhancing the Air Force's surveillance capability. — SNS &PTI

## Indo-Israeli defence exchange to go up

Itataaman Naws Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 1. — India and Israel have decided to increase defence cooperation and will do joint work in three crucial areas — electronic warfare, new sensor systems and unmanned aerial vehicles.

Speaking to reporters, the Defence Research and Development Organisation chief, Dr VK Aatre, said several areas have been identified. Electronic warfare systems to find, fool or destroy enemy sensors are essential in modern warfare and the DRDO and the Israelis would work on them together. There is also an infra-red sensor development programme for the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft or Tejas with Elbit, the Israeli firm. The two firms will jointly fund the project and share the risk. Both countries will also work together to

Unmanned Aerial Vehicle systems in the coming years. This is perhaps the first time the DRDO is as deeply involved with military R&D people of another country. The development of the combat UAV is still a long way off.

Thr missile programme is going ahead with the launch of the 3,000 km range Agni III in the first part of next year if all goes well. The missile has had teething problems with the propulsion, or engines, sources said. Speaking about other missiles, he said Agni I and II had been cleared and the Aakash. the long-range surface to air missile, had problems in the past but they were being sorted out. The fullfledged trials were to be held in coming months and user trials were planned in 2004. The same would roughly apply to the Nag anti-tank missile, for which preliminary orders have already been placed. The *Trishul*, he said, has had problems and it is now an R&D driven project. If, after a demonstration for the air force, it is considered successful, it could become a user-driven project for the air force again. The new *Astra* air to air tactical missile is going through trials and if it didn't have problems, it would be ready for full trials.

The success story has been the *BrahMos* supersonic missile. The Navy has already asked for a large number of ship-fired missiles and plans to have it on the Sukhoi-30 of the air force are being worked out.

He said the LCA could get an initial operational clearance in 2006 and limited series production would begin at Hindustan Aeronautics soon after. The plane should be cleared by 2008. Flight testing is going on and should complete 200 flights by March next year.