

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2004

## FARM WORRIES

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THERE IS NO need for alarm over the reports of a 10.5 per cent decline in kharif grain output this year. Year after year, the initial estimates are revised upwards by as much as two million to three million tonnes by the time the crop arrives in the market. Moreover, there is expectation that the rabi crop, which is to follow, will more than make up for the shortfall in kharif output, given the pick up in rainfall in the delayed monsoon season. In any case, economists had expected that agriculture production might not match last year's output because 2003 was an unusual year of plentiful rain. After the traumatic years of ship-to-mouth existence in the mid-1960s, declines in agricultural output have tended to create apprehensions of food scarcity, especially in drought-hit areas. But the country has come a long way from those PL 480 days when food aid was needed to avoid mass starvation. The drought of 1987-88 and those of 2000 and 2002, though of varying intensity, were successfully tackled by the government of the day without large-scale starvation deaths. Today, the situation is even better with more-than-adequate foreign exchange reserves to facilitate import of food if required.

But the problem lies elsewhere. The past few years have witnessed the recurrent phenomenon of starvation deaths bringing much grief and shame to a country that has been exporting agricultural produce from overflowing granaries to world markets. The National Democratic Alliance Government, in particular, took pride in this export achievement even as it failed to reach the food to the needy who did not have the means to buy even the subsidised grain. This major livelihood issue has cost the country

many a precious life and governments of different political hue their position in power. The United Progressive Alliance Government has come to office on the promise of urgently mitigating the plight of the rural poor. More than 100 days of the new Government have passed, but so far it has decided only on the financial allocation for the food-for-work programme it intends to launch in 150 districts of the country. The other major promise of a meaningful employment guarantee at minimum wages for at least 100 days in a year to millions of the rural poor is yet to be honoured. Both these schemes are intended to address mass hunger and livelihood concerns and early implementation is both an economic and political imperative.

The larger question, however, remains — that of neglect of agriculture in the last decade and more, leading to mass scale impoverishment of the agrarian population, particularly those working on small and marginal farms. Since the launch of economic reforms, successive governments have not invested enough in agriculture and this failure has resulted in this crucial segment of the economy remaining increasingly dependent on the monsoon. What is required is a bold and holistic look at the agriculture sector covering all the components — technological improvements, credit needs, marketing support, storage facilities, and so on. In other words, there is need for a second Green Revolution with necessary policy support, institutional link-ups, and increased investment. Growth and development of agriculture are important not only to feed the one billion-plus population. Agriculture needs to grow so that the overall Indian economy can grow and overcome mass deprivations

THE HINDU

23 SEP 2004

# Govt accepts shortfall in agricultural output

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 18. - Despite a late revival of the south-west monsoon, the government yesterday finally accepted that there would be a shortfall in agricultural output during the current kharif season due to deficiency in rainfall in a number of areas.

Speaking at the two-day national rabi conference yesterday, the agriculture secretary, Ms Radha Singh, in her inaugural address said the area sown under kharif crops at present is 957 lakh hectares which is 59 lakh hectares less than the area sown last year. Much of this shortfall is confined to areas under coarse cereals and pulses, mainly in Rajasthan.

The agriculture secretary said as kharif production is likely to suffer there is need to increase the production of rabi crops.

Ms Singh also announced the government's intention to cover 252 districts in the country under the national agricultural technology programme. An estimated investment of Rs 11,000 crore

would be required for this initiative. A major part of this is likely to be mobilised through private investment.

Ms Singh today also said that to overcome hurdles of intellectual property and improve seeds management, a new bill will be introduced in the winter session of Parliament.

"The New Seeds Act, 2004 has been approved by the Cabinet and will be introduced in the next session of Parliament", said Ms Singh.

This would help in overcoming several of the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and regulatory hurdles that were being encountered in the earlier Acts of 1966 and Rules of 1968.

The rabi conference, according to officials, is an important forum for discussing the performance of the kharif season and finalising strategy to increase production in the rabi season. It is being attended among others by state agriculture and horticulture secretaries, vice-chancellors of agricultural universities and senior officers from various Union government departments.

19 SEP 2004

# The Savarkarist syntax

By Anil Nauriya

*A great danger lurks in presenting Savarkarism merely as a matter of being "different" from Gandhism.*

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**U**NDERLYING THE glorification of Savarkarism by the BJP-RSS-Shiv Sena are changes in the nature and objectives of the major political parties, the cynicism induced by the growing nexus between crime and politics, and the collapse of a compact that had facilitated post-independence politics.

The first principle of Savarkarism defines the nation on the basis of religious community. This is reflected in Savarkar's declaration on August 15, 1943: "I have no quarrel with Mr. Jinnah's two-nation theory. We Hindus are a nation by ourselves and it is a historical fact that Hindus and Muslims are two nations" (Indian Annual Register, 1943, Vol. 2, p. 10).

The second Savarkarist principle condones killing to make religious community-related points. The German *versus* Jew analogy is made in Savarkar's writings when speaking of his notion of the Hindu nation and those outside it. The killer aspect of Savarkarism is noted by Sardar Patel. In his February 27, 1948 letter to Nehru, Patel held the fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha under Savarkar responsible for assassinating Gandhi. The same trigger-happiness was evident in the Gujarat carnage (2002) and its aftermath. Whether a murder may be treated as a crime seems to depend, for Savarkarism, upon the self-perceived religious community interests of the killer.

A third key principle of Savarkarism is an extension of Savarkar's mercy petitions affirming loyalty to the imperial regime and effectively ending his career as a freedom fighter. The Raj had scotched the violent or "terrorist" movement and loyalty was seen by Savarkar as an exit policy. This approach finds contemporary resonance in the previous Government's excessive deference to the United States. This deference was reflected, for instance, in the serious consideration given to the despatch of Indian troops to Iraq. The Anglo-centric world is more comfortable with this ideology, whatever it may say about the Gujarat killings, than with the India of Gandhi and Nehru. The colonial rulers had tilted towards the Pakistan movement for precisely the same reason.

Such features make Savarkarism attractive to the BJP-RSS-Shiv Sena, although these organisations now make loud claims of Savarkar's alleged rationalism. The claims to rationality also need scrutiny, considering stark contrarities like Savarkar's support for the two nation

theory while seeking to disclaim responsibility for partition, support for Shuddhi combined with an advertised atheism, and mercy-seeking accompanied with valour and militancy claims. Savarkar's exclusion of Christians and Muslims from his definition of nation is acknowledged in contemporaneous Hindu Mahasabha publications [eg. *Veer Savarkar's 'Whirl-wind Propaganda'*, A. S. Bhide (ed.), Bombay, 1941].

After Gandhi's murder there was an implicit compact on the basis of which politics was conducted. This was that while the Government would not be vindictive, there would be no glorification of the politics of assassination promoted by Savarkarism. Even the Hindu-specific parties, realising a political, whilst denying a legal, responsibility for the enormity, refrained for several decades from publicly eulogising Savarkar although they did not abandon their Hindu Rashtra objectives. The approver's evidence was politically reprobatory, whatever tortuous course the law took.

The Trial Court Record and the Kapur Commission of the Sixties indicate also that the Government had additional material. Morarji Desai, then Bombay's Home Minister, was asked in the trial by Savarkar's lawyer about his reasons for directing "a close watch on Savarkar's house and his movements" after the bomb incident 10 days before the murder. Desai countered: "Shall I give my reasons? It is for Savarkar to decide whether I should answer. I am prepared to give my reasons." Upon this, Savarkar's lawyer said: "I withdraw my question". [See J.C. Jain, *The Murder of Mahatma Gandhi: Prelude and Aftermath*, Chetana Ltd, Bombay, 1961, p. 104]. Savarkar personally gave an assurance to the Police Commissioner of Bombay on February 22, 1948 of non-participation in politics if "released on that condition." [For text see K.L. Gauba, *Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi*, Jaico, Bombay, 1969, pp 208-9] By introducing Savarkar's portrait in Parliament's Central Hall in February 2003 the NDA Government, egged on by the Advani faction, destroyed a 55-year old political compact.

The Savarkar debate has furnished insights into the changes in the Congress, the BJP and within the media

in the last few decades. Even within Maharashtra, the pre-independence Congress, which included the Socialist tradition, had strongly resisted Savarkarism. The battle was joined soon after the Savarkarite faction took control of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937-38. The May Day march in 1938 was attacked by the Mahasabha in Pune.

The socialist leader N.G. Goray wrote: "Who attacked the May Day procession? Who assaulted men like Senapati Bapat and [Gajanan] Kanitkar? Who tore up the National Flag? The Hindu Mahasabhaites and the Hedgewar Boys did all this.... They have been taught to hate the Muslims in general as Public Enemy Number 1, to hate the Congress and its flag which is pro-Muslim, to hate socialists and communists who are anti-Hinduism.... They have their own flag, 'the Bhagwa', the symbol of Maratha Supremacy. And their leader is called 'Rashtra Dhureen', i.e. Fuehrer!" (*Congress Socialist*, May 14, 1938).

Savarkar's politics came in for severe criticism in Maharashtra. Bapat sharply criticised Savarkar for his slogan "Hindustan Hindu ka..." on August 22, 1944. Although some have repeated the Hindutva line of Savarkar's unquestioned iconic status in Maharashtra, it was not accidental that there was no Savarkar portrait in the State Assembly until after one was placed in the Central Hall of Parliament in 2003.

Congress defensiveness in the face of BJP-RSS-Shiv Sena tactics reflects internal changes since 1969 and particularly since the Emergency years (1975-77) when the RSS and the hoodlums in the Youth Congress found convergences. As a part-consequence many Congress men and women now have little knowledge of or respect for their own legacy. Some former RSS members attained important positions within the Congress particularly after 1971. One former RSS figure from Maharashtra was Indira Gandhi's Cabinet Minister. In contrast, the BJP would reserve such positions for key ideologues. The Congress has been as ready to shield some of its members from responsibility in the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 as it has been to compromise on the BJP's and Uma Bharati's alleged responsibility in the

Hubli case. The Karnataka unit is being criticised within the Congress for so much as setting out some facts in a newspaper advertisement.

The BJP's internal changes are of a different order. During 1974-84, approximately the period of its transmutation from the Jan Sangh, this group had begun to transit from Hindu nationalism to Indian nationalism. This dynamic was reversed by the Advani group with ideas of State and nation derived apparently from Savarkar. The Hawala case setback to the Advani group necessitated a return to Vajpayee. That served also, accidentally or otherwise, certain coalitional purposes. The Advani faction's politics now seeks reassertion of dominance.

The BJP's transformations may be compared in part with those in the Hindu Mahasabha during 1937-38 when control passed from Pandit Malaviya to Savarkar. The Gujarat killings (2002), the ensuing cover-up, the distribution of trident knives in Rajasthan, and the hold-up of Parliament reflect this process. Media management, even after the NDA Government demitted power, remains an integral, if little studied, part of this struggle. Typically, the Uma Bharti reportage was often economical with the facts of the Hubli case, just as trident-knives were distributed in Rajasthan without the media pressing for BJP accountability, and Savarkarism was often discussed in the absence of vital facts or by trivialising them.

A newspaper associated with a house that had supported Gandhi's constructive work programme and the freedom movement editorialised: "Let Our Icons Be." Later there was some recognition of the real issues. But one observer may not have been surprised at the initial nonchalance. Alan Campbell-Johnson joined a lunch at Birla House a week after Gandhi's assassination. Describing the experience as "almost eerie," he wrote of the conversation: "All this accent on brokerage I found in strange contrast to the scenes and sentiments in these very rooms a week ago." (Campbell-Johnson, *Mission With Mountbatten*, New York, 1985, p. 284).

A great danger lurks in anaesthesia administration to the nation by a media so unreflective as to present Savarkarism merely as a matter of being "different" from Gandhi, and fearful to the point that even in its electronic puppetry it lampoons Manmohan, Laloo, and Vajpayee but never Advani.

THE HINDU

18 SEP 2004

Intense media excitement has led to a massive number of misconceptions about Census 2001

# Making India's people count

■ ASHISH BOSE

**W**HILE interacting with the print and electronic media on data on religion in the 2001 Census, I came across at least three misconceptions which need clarification. It has been reported that data on religion were collected for the first time in India in 2001. Not true. Ever since the first regular census of India in 1881, data on religion were collected through the census questionnaire. The 2001 Census also had a question on religion. What is new in 2001 Census is the cross-tabulation of data on religion by other variables like literacy, 0-6 age group sex ratio, work-force status.

## CENSUS SENSATION

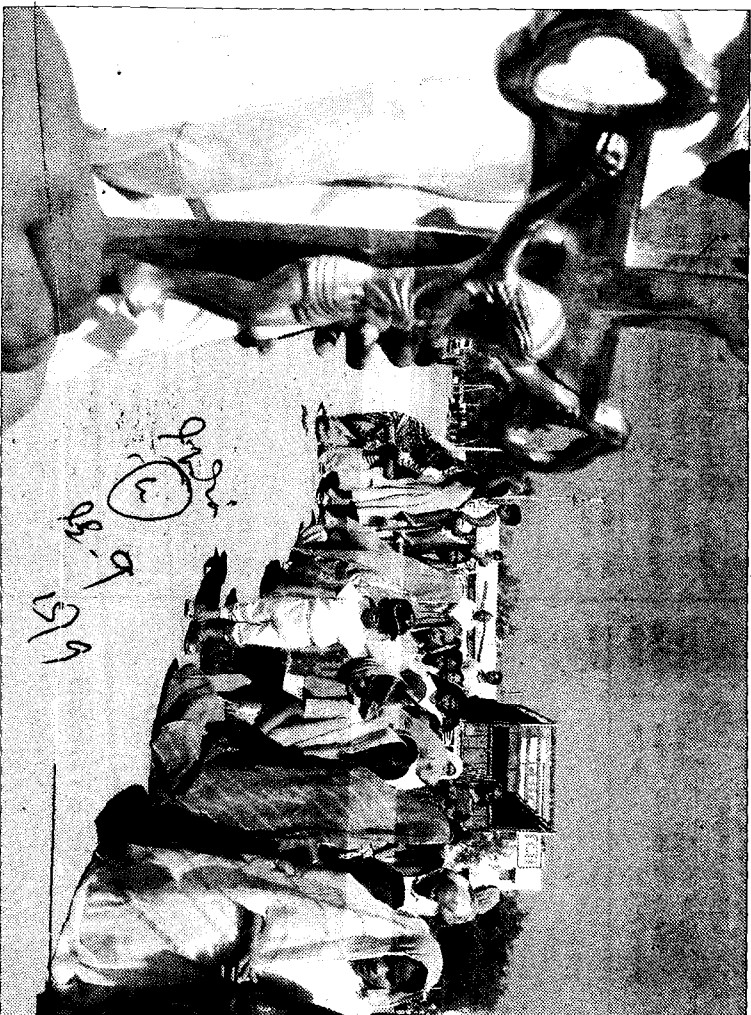
### PART-I

was: you should have the courage to face facts. I, therefore, congratulate the Census Commissioner for 2001 on making available at least some tables giving such cross-classification. I always thought that the Christians have the highest literacy rate. It turns out that the Jains have the highest literacy rate.

The second misconception about the data on census is that the 2001 Census was a religion-based census. Absolutely untrue. As in all past censuses, there was one question on religion in the questionnaire. I was asked by the media if the census would divide religious communities and disturb communal harmony. My answer was that it would promote communal harmony if we have a better understanding of the demographic and socio-economic condition of the population belonging to different communities.

I have been complaining for decades that the religion data presented are not of much use unless such cross-tabulations are done. For example, one could not answer from census data a simple question like: Which religious community has the lowest female literacy rate? These data were suppressed by the Home Ministry because religion data were considered sensitive. But surprisingly, other data sets like the National Sample Survey (NSS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) sponsored by the Government of India did collect data on religion and these were cross-classified by demographic and socio-economic variables.

I had gone to the extent of suggesting to the census authorities that the question on religion be dropped unless data could be suitably cross-classified but successive Governments took the view that such data were sensitive and should not be presented. My reply



**I'd suggested that the question on religion be dropped unless data could be suitably cross-classified but govts took the view that such data were sensitive and should not be presented. My reply was: you should have the courage to face facts. I congratulate the Census Commissioner for 2001 on making available at least some tables giving such cross-classification. I always thought Christians have the highest literacy rate. It turns out that Jains have the highest literacy**

rate. This shows a lack of understanding of Indian census data. There is no information on income level in the Indian Census because such data are not collected. The Census of USA does collect data on income but not on religion. I would not recommend collection of data on income in the Indian Census. It will ruin the Census, apart from collecting questionable data.

But that does not mean the Census should not present data on religion, having collected the data. Why should we not know how many Hindus and Muslims there are in this country? Secularism does not mean ignorance. And it is not the business of the Census department to analyse data and do regression analysis. This job is best left to researchers, not politicians or even journalists,

though credit must be given to a national daily which pointed out a serious error in the calculation of the Muslim growth rate, which the Census Commissioner had to admit and issue corrected figures. This brings me to the role of the Census Commissioner who has been unfairly accused on manipulating census data. Let me begin by narrating the sequence of events which have led to so much

of confusion and controversy. I received an invitation from the Census Commissioner and Registrar General, J K Bantia on the September 2, to preside over the function on September 6, at Vigyan Bhawan, when the First Report on Religion — Census 2001 would be released. He also added: "You will be very happy on that day as the cross-tabulations you have been asking for all these years have been given in this report".

I was indeed happy to preside over the function but felt disturbed by the power-point presentation of the Registrar General and the press release which said that the Muslim growth rate during 1991-2001 decade was as high as 36 per cent. My statistical intuition told me that this figure cannot be correct. So at the cost of being impolite, I asked the Registrar General if he had adjusted the figure for Jammu & Kashmir where the Census enumeration did not take place in 1991 because of disturbed conditions.

His answer was "no". I then commented that in that case the figure for Muslim growth rate was exaggerated. RGI then suggested that we should sit together and work it out. Next morning, the media had a sensational news to report: the Muslim population had grown by 36% and Hindu population by 20%. Some politicians were quick to comment: this is a threat to national security. Some even went to the extent of saying that the Hindu population had decreased and the Muslim population had increased very fast, meaning that India will become Pakistan very soon. How soon? One newspaper said after 247 years. Another said after 100 years. I am exhausted answering questions from the print and electronic media about the implications of the census data on religion.

(To be concluded)  
The writer is a leading demographer and heads a four-member panel to analyse the recent census.

9 2004/09/14  
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# Hunger forces woman to sell son for Rs 6000

11-9-2004

By Dipak Mishra/TNN

**Hajipur (Bihar):** Faced with the threat of starvation, 22-year-old Dheeran Devi sold her two-month-old son for Rs 6,000. Now, she wants her child back.

"Please get back my infant... I am ready to beg," Dheeran's husband Lalbabu Paswan, a rickshaw puller suffering from tuberculosis, told TOI on Monday. Their neighbours in Pokhra locality here, however, have condemned Dheeran. "I have heard of women selling their bodies to feed their children not of women selling their children to keep their bodies alive," fumed Sara Devi, a mother of nine.



**Dheeran's husband Lalbabu Paswan and daughter**

But Vaishali district magistrate (DM) H R Srinivas refuses to condemn the "majboor" woman. "It's sad, a case of exploitation of a woman," he said. Dheeran, according to the DM, was the sole bread earner in the family after TB rendered her husband too weak to pull a rickshaw. Lalbabu was heavily into liquor and gambling. He used to forcibly take away all the money his wife earned as a cleaner in private clinics. "It was an artificial scarcity," DM Srinivas said.

was said.

But Dheeran's tragedy points to the failure of government programmes aimed at benefiting families like hers. There are barely 2000 beneficiaries of the food-for-work programmes; Annapoorna Yojana and Antyodaya Yojana in the district which is represented by Union minister Ram Vilas Paswan and has a population of over 14 lakh. "Had these programmes reached the ground level, Dheeran would have perhaps not sold off her baby," admitted an official.

The last two months have been tragic for the family. Their two-year-old son died from a liver disorder. "She disappeared last Monday with the baby and surfaced five days later without him. When I inquired, she told me she sold the child for Rs 6,000 because she didn't want him to die of hunger and disease like the other son," Lalbabu recalled.

The couple also has a six-year-old daughter. After the word spread about Dheeran's 'misdeed', she disappeared again, fearing action from the police.

The incident has shocked the locality dominated by municipality workers.

# What's the purpose of census?

**Q:** When and how did the census begin in India?

**A:** In a general sense, the idea of a population census is remarkably old in India. Kautilya's 'Arthashastra', for instance, prescribed the collection of population statistics for purposes of taxation. However, the modern series of Indian censuses began under the British, driven again by a similar impulse. From the time of the East India Company, there had been a growing need for population statistics to be collected for tax purposes and for the company to get an idea about the country. But it was in 1865 that the Government of India and the Home Government agreed in principle that a general population census would be taken in 1871. The actual collection of the data for this census, referred to usually as the 1872 census, was done from 1867 to 1872. The first complete census of the Indian population was, however, conducted in 1881. Since then the census has been regularly conducted every 10 years and it remains the largest exercise of its kind anywhere in the world, given the fact that over a billion people have to be physically counted.

**Q:** How is the census organisation structured?

**A:** After Independence, Parliament passed the Census Act in 1948. The legislation was needed not only to empower the Census Commission to carry out its job, but also to make it mandatory for all Indians to provide the required information when asked for it. In 1949, the government decided to establish a single organisation under the home ministry with a Registrar General and ex-officio Census Commissioner to head it. But there was a crucial difference in the situation before and after 1951. Till 1951, the census organisation in India would come into being just on the eve of the census and be wound up as soon as census operations were over. After 1951, the organisation has been maintained as a permanent body even in the inter-censal period.

**Q:** What kind of information does the cen-

sus collect?

**A:** The census does more than just a headcount of the population. It collects data on occupation, how many people live in rural or urban areas, whether they live in pucca or kuccha houses, which religion they subscribe to, migration, fertility rates, sources of drinking water, availability of electricity and a host of other sociological and economic aspects. In fact, the 2001 census went a step further and collected data on how many people possessed things like TVs, cycles,

transistors and whether they were availing of banking services and so on. Till the 1931 Census, data was also collected on castes, but that has been stopped since then. Another new feature of the 2001 Census is that it gives data on socio-economic parameters like literacy and sex ratios for religious groups. In the past, information on religious groups was limited to their population size.

**Q:** What purpose does such a huge exercise serve?

**A:** For administrators, the advantages of having accurate data on many crucial parameters of the population are obvious. It is also not difficult to see that social scientists and researchers gain immensely from the data collected by the census. What might be less obvious is that it can be extremely useful for businesses to have this data. For instance, data on the number of pucca and kuccha houses would be of great help to the cement or steel industries in identifying potential markets. The census also provides those undertaking sampling, whether for market research or for opinion polling, with a basis for determining the size and composition of their samples.

**Q:** Who can access census data?

**A:** Anybody. The broader aspects of the data are available on the census site, while more detailed publications, which can take years to be prepared, are available for sale either as printed documents or in floppies and CDs.



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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2004

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## CENSUS FOLLIES

FALSEHOODS AND TENDENTIOUS allegations are a dime a dozen in politics. It is hardly surprising that statistics — this time in the form of the First Report on Religion Data of Census 2001 — have become a weapon in the hands of political parties with a divisive agenda. Naturally, the Bharatiya Janata Party is not going to be mollified by the explanation that the growth of the Muslim population by 36 per cent over the last decade was the function of a gross methodological goof-up: Census 2001, unlike Census 1991, included Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir but the growth rates were released without making the adjustments every numerate undergraduate knows is elementary! The adjusted data (after leaving out Assam also since it was not part of the 1981 Census) show that the growth of the Muslim population has decelerated from 32.9 per cent during 1981-1991 to 29.3 per cent during 1991-2001. But communal formations will still point to the higher fertility rate of Indian Muslims and try and conjure up over-the-top scenarios of Hindus becoming a minority and Muslims the majority in India at some point in the future. Actually, demographers expect the population to stabilise soon and the proportion of Muslims in India to settle around 14 per cent as fertility rates for all groups are on the decline. Those who predict a Muslim-majority India in about another 100 years on the basis of the current growth rates of different groups fail to mention that in such a scenario, the country will have no standing space for its people.

At the centre of this debate is the salience and usefulness of religion as a key category for understanding demographic patterns. True, in the mass of census data there are other linkages such as those between female literacy and population growth. The data establish a negative relationship between an increase in female literacy and population growth for all religious groups.

But the decision to release religion-wise data without taking into consideration other socio-economic parameters such as income disparities and social backwardness unwisely played into the hands of those who were waiting to make a tendentious use of data to serve disintegrative ends. Indeed the unseemly haste shown in releasing the religion-wise data is in contrast to the unexplained delay in providing access to data relating to age, distribution of workforce, and education levels (going beyond literacy). The release of religion-wise growth rates without making elementary adjustments for the exclusion of Jammu and Kashmir in the 1991 Census speaks poorly of the competence and professionalism of the Office of the Census Commissioner.

This also raises questions whether such key data-gathering institutions are beginning to lose their autonomy and whether they are being manipulated by vested interests. Another dubious aspect of this episode is the attempt to present the proportion of children in the 0 to 6 year age group in the population of different religious groups as a proxy for the fertility rate. Data on the child-woman ratio, a much better measure of the fertility rate, are readily available in the census. It makes little sense for the proportion of children in the population of religious groups to be culled out as an indicator of the fertility rate. Regional imbalances in development, rather than religion-specific causes, might hold greater explanatory value for demographic variations among different religious groups. Surely, religion is only one among several categories that can aid in the understanding of demographic patterns. By treating Hindus and Muslims as monolithic groups, the Office of the Census Commissioner has inexplicably sidelined fundamental socio-economic categories and factors that every demographer knows to be the key to a study of demographic patterns and change.

13 SEP 2004

THE HINDU

13 SEP 2004

# CON-CENSUS

## Political Correctness, Incorrectness And Religion

By SAUBHIK CHAKRABARTI

India's first religion-based statistical head count, a part of Census 2001, has shown yet again what is wrong with India's version of the last refuge of scoundrels, that is, politics. The BJP's president, Venkaiah Naidu, played the "Hindu card", expressing "concern" that the majority community's rate of growth is falling and that of the largest minority's, rising. The Congress, via its somewhat nervous spokespersons, shuffled the deck and sort-of-played the "secular card". The party criticised Naidu, who had missed the clarification by census authorities that the 1991-2001 Muslim population growth rate dampens when Jammu and Kashmir's data are subtracted from 2001 figures. This, to maintain consistency with 1991, when the state was not part of the census exercise.

### Left hypocrisy, Right hysteria

But the Congress seemingly didn't have anything else to say on census numbers, presumably because commenting on the Muslim community's rising fertility-cum-low socioeconomic indices profile wouldn't have been politically correct.

There were other, wholly predictable, characters in this politically correct-politically incorrect script. Imam Bukhari of Delhi's Jama Masjid said he saw a "conspiracy" in census numbers that do not indicate Muslims are keeping up in terms of educational achievements or economic activity. The VHP also saw a "conspiracy", in the rising population growth rate of Muslims.

One fallout of this politics was the reported "withdrawal" of the data by census authorities — a perfect demonstration of our point. Community-specific census data are released in other democracies as well. Only, it seems, in the world's largest democracy does the mention of religion in any public policy context bring out hypocrisy (from the Left) and hysteria (from the Right).

The Right's "concerns" are actually easily dealt with. If the declining population growth rate of Hindus is a matter for worry, surely the fact that 82.7 crore Indians are Hindus according to

the latest census should be more than enough assurance. To talk of India's majority community losing that status at any time in the foreseeable future is simply silly. Whites in the United States face a much more real prospect of being outnumbered by a current minority, the Hispanics.

The VHP can rest easy. Or actually, if it claims to champion Hindus, it should rest on the community's laurels. For, the



census data clearly show modernisation is winning the battle with "tradition". Population growth rate falls when incomes and literacy rise.

The VHP, of course, does not have anything to say on the Muslim community's problems in terms of low work participation and low average literacy. But neither do those on the Left of the political spectrum. This hypocrisy is harder to deal with.

### Wishing away the problem

Imam Bukharis can be ignored, just as the VHP can be. But how does one respond to apparently "sensible" people saying that one should not expect all communities to have similar fertility rates. That in all countries with a sizeable Muslim presence, the community's population growth is faster than that of non-Muslims. This is simply wishing the problem away. Whether Muslims elsewhere have higher-than-average fertility rates is not the point when discussing Muslims in India.

We are discussing Indians who are Muslims, not Muslims who just happen to be in India. This attempt to brush community-spe-

cific problems under a pan-Islamic carpet is an old tactic. Ironically, its greatest beneficiaries are those on the extreme Right. But introspection has never been a strong point of the Indian Left.

Happily, this pan-Islamic carpet has big enough holes for the Left's argument to fall through. Although it is true that officially self-designated Islamic countries and Muslim communities in other countries tend to have

There's clearly a case for asking whether Indian Muslims are not being made a victim of their community leaders' conservatism. Do these leaders want modernisation? Are those who equate secularism with unquestioned state funding of madrassas actually afraid that modern schooling opportunities will erode their support base? Whether Indian politics, oscillating between scare stories about Muslims and scared to talk about Muslims, suits these leaders just fine, since that takes away the responsibility from them to do anything meaningful about those they claim to represent?

### Taboo topic

The day after the census data was published, news reports from France said five Sikh children were denied entry into schools, a part of the school uniform code — no outward religious symbols — ordained by the French government.

Now that's what one would call an assault on religious sensibility and community tradition. That's a policy any sensible person, of the Right or the Left, should fight. In India, the issue is very different — whether Muslim children are being educated as well as children from other communities. Any Indian school student can wear his or her religion's marker and state policy is, as it should be, liberal and non-interfering. But for a vast majority of Muslim children in India the choice is between madrassas and poorly-run Urdu medium schools.

Arguably, the finest schools in India are run by Christian missionaries. Sikhs have schools that offer modern syllabi and good educational standards. Hindu charitable organisation that run schools have similar profiles. Even the RSS-run schools do not ignore modern education. Indeed, the Sangh's schools have now woken up to the need to improve their standards of teaching English. Why should India's Muslims be subjected to pedagogic pathology? Pervez Musharraf said on national TV that his country must, at some level, choose between modernisation and madrassas.

You can say that in Pakistan. You can't say it in India.

The author is Resident Editor, The Statesman, New Delhi



# Census take II: J&K excluded

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, Sept. 9. — The Census Commission today excluded the data of Jammu and Kashmir and Assam in the 2001 Census figures to show that the Muslim growth rate has actually declined over 1991 figures. Future copies of the census report as well as the commission's website have been accordingly revised on these lines.

The corrective exercise after Monday's publication of the Census figures on the basis of its first report on religion-wise break-up of literacy that showed a 1.5 per cent increase in the Muslim population's growth rate from 34.5 per cent in 1991, the commission today released two sets of figures classifying them as "unadjusted" and "adjusted". "Adjusted" figures released show the growth rate of Muslims at 29.3 per cent as against 32.9 per cent in the 1991 census and not 36 per cent as brought out earlier. Monday's "unadjusted" figures showed that the Muslim community was growing at a rate of 36 per cent against 34.5 per cent in 1991.

Denying that the revision of data was done "under pressure", Census Commissioner Mr JK Banthia said there were several ways to interpret data and "the simplest is not to make any interpolation." He said since no census was conducted in Assam in 1981 and in Jammu and Kashmir in 1991, the commission has

## Literacy let-down

NEW DELHI, Sept. 9. — The acclaimed increase in literacy rate to 64.8 per cent at the national level as shown in the latest census figures and touted as one of the biggest achievements of the Indian education system in the last decade is all set to vanish in thin air. Suspecting massive fake enrolment at the primary level in the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* scheme, the Union HRD ministry is gearing up to launch a nationwide exercise to unearth these fake entries and arrive at more realistic literacy figures at the national level. — SNS

Details on page 4

deleted entire data for these two states from all the census figures conducted since 1961. Under the "adjusted" data, Hindus recorded a decline of 2.8 per cent in growth rate from 22.8 in 1991 to 20 in 2001 and Sikhs' growth rate also declined by 8.6 from 25.5 in 1991 to 16.9 in 2001.

He denied that the commission had withdrawn data posted on the Internet after the controversy broke, saying "there was only a temporary suspension to include the adjusted figures." Mr Banthia also took umbrage at a section of the media ascribing "ulterior motives" to the commission's interpretation of the data. "A hundred-year-old organisation is being destroyed because of this," he said.

"New prints showing the adjusted figures will be available from Monday," said deputy registrar general Mr RG Mitra.

# Census muddle

ON Avoid controversy, draw sober lessons

The Census suddenly making "unavailable" copies of its 2001 report suggests that it has woken up belatedly to the flawed claims it makes, which have the potential of stirring a political storm. The obvious one is a claim that while the Hindu population's growth rate fell from 25.1 per cent during 1981-1991 to 20.3 per cent during 1991-2001, the Muslim growth rate actually rose, from 34.5 per cent to 36 per cent during the same period. That has set all sorts of alarm bells ringing in predictable circles, although RSS spokesman Ram Madhav acted well and with uncharacteristic maturity, saying that growth rates should be seen in national perspective and not as an issue of Hindu-Muslim divide. There was another surprise — the growth rate of Jains, it turns out, shot up from 4.6 per cent to 26 per cent. It happens that the 1981-1991 census did not include the population of Jammu and Kashmir, while the 1991-2001 did. If one excludes the state for both decades, the Muslim growth rate has not only not risen, but fallen faster than the Hindu growth rate, to around 29.3 per cent. The Jain mystery has a simple enough explanation: more people, who were earlier classified as Hindu, register themselves as Jains. That is also true of the Lingayats in Karnataka and the Sarna community in Jharkhand.

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If one corrects for greater assertion of different identities within the "Hindu" fold in recent times, as evidenced by the census finding that many "new religions" have arisen, then the drop in the Hindu growth rate is also overestimated. Overall population growth is still unacceptably high for major communities, and highest among Muslims. There could be a number of reasons for the latter, some of which the Left would like (anti-Muslim discrimination and greater poverty among Muslims), and others that the Right would approve (theological resistance to family planning). Given prevalent religiosity in India it would be a very good idea for government to involve priests and clergy of all communities in promoting family planning. Such an approach has succeeded in Iran, dramatically lowering birth rate and equipping it adequately for the future.

# Revised data shows drop in growth rate of Muslims

9/10

10-1  
10/9

By Anita Joshua

**NEW DELHI, SEPT. 9.** Criticised for its methodology that resulted in the reflection of a high growth rate of Muslim population in the country in the 'First Report on Religion Data', the Office of the Census Commissioner today revised its data from 1971 onwards. This showed a drop in the growth rate of the community over the last decade.

The new analysis has been made by excluding the population of Jammu and Kashmir and Assam; both of which were left out of the census exercise once each since Independence.

As per the "adjusted data", the growth rate of Hindus was 20

per cent in 1991-2001 and that of Muslims 29.3 per cent. Monday's report pegged the growth rate of Hindus for the last decade at 20.3 per cent against 25.1 per cent in 1981-91, and that of Muslims at 36 per cent compared to 34.5 per cent in 1981-91.

As per the readjustment, Hindus now constitute 81.4 per cent of the country's population and Muslims 12.4 per cent. If the population of J&K and Assam are factored in, Hindus make for 80.5 per cent of the population and Muslims 13.4 per cent. In the case of other religions, there is only a marginal difference of 0.1 percentage point in the proportion of those registered under "Other Religions and

Persuasions."

## Change in growth rate

However, the readjustment has affected the growth rate across the board with that of Christians coming down to 22.1 per cent from 22.6 per cent, Sikhs 16.9 per cent from 18.2 per cent, and Buddhists down to 23.2 per cent from 24.5 per cent. Only the growth rate of Jains remains unaffected at 26 per cent. Even in the case of 'others...', it has gone up from 103.1 per cent to 111.3 per cent and that of those who did not state their religion from 75.1 per cent to 76.3 per cent.

The "adjusted data" was released after doubts were raised about pegging the growth rate of Muslims at 36 per cent in 1991-2001 without taking into account the fact that no census was conducted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1991. And, since Assam was left out of the census exercise in 1981, the data was re-worked right back to the 1971 census to establish the proportion and growth rate based on the actual data gathered.

# Farmers' distress: causes & cures

96 10-10  
By M.S. Swaminathan

*Education, social mobilisation and regulation  
are necessary to arrest the expansion  
of the agrarian crisis.* 1099

**A** NATIONAL Consultation was organised by the National Commission on Farmers and *The Hindu* Media Resource Centre for Sustainable Development on September 4, 2004 to identify short- and long-term measures to face the challenge of the expanding agrarian crisis.

The discussions revealed the multi-dimensional nature of farmers' distress. The deficiencies in institutional factors — those related to credit, insurance, supply of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers (including bio-fertilizers), and pesticides, and marketing — are becoming serious. Social factors such as the non-empowerment of elected local bodies, the exploitative attitude of moneylenders and merchants, and gender discrimination are aggravating the deprivation of small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labour.

Compounding the crumbling of institutional and social support systems are other factors such as the disconnect between research, education and extension organisations and rural realities, irregular power supply together with violent voltage fluctuations, land degradation, unsustainable exploitation of ground water and consecutive droughts. Policies relating to imports of farm commodities and economic liberalisation have added fuel to the fire.

The agrarian crisis has its roots in the collapse of the rural economy. The centrality of basic livelihood security concerns is missing in most government policies. A systems approach is missing in dealing with the problems of farmers' distress. There is no coordination among various government departments dealing with the different components of the agrarian crisis. Unemployment leading to out-migration of the asset-less is growing. The minimum support price mechanism is not operating for most commodities. At every level of the livelihood security system, there is a tendency to make profit out of poverty. Something is terribly wrong in the countryside, as revealed by the verdict of the general election of 2004. The following are some of the suggestions at the Consultation.

The precise causes of farmers' distress are many and varied. Market collapse and low prices for farm commodities, as for example pepper, are major factors in places such

as the Wayanad district of Kerala. Tribal families are suffering more. Harassment by private moneylenders and absence of producer-oriented marketing systems are causing serious hardships. The moneylender is often the merchant too and there is, therefore, double exploitation. The sale of spurious and poor quality inputs such as seeds, pesticides and microbial fertilizers is rampant in all the States. In Tamil Nadu, a major constraint is water. In Orissa, massive unemployment in rural areas and the absence of adequate opportunities for non-farm employment are causing misery to the economically and socially under-privileged.

The Andhra Pradesh Government is to be congratulated for setting up a Cabinet Sub-Committee comprising the Ministers of Agriculture, Home, Revenue and Cooperation for studying the tragedy of farmers' suicides in all its dimensions.

The report of this Sub-Committee contains useful recommendations worthy of immediate implementation. Media representatives such as P. Sainath of *The Hindu*, T.A. Shaji of *The New Indian Express*, Narasimha Reddy of *Eenadu*, Parvathi Menon and Asha Krishnakumar of *Frontline* and television channels like *NDTV* have been rendering valuable service in awakening political and public consciousness of the deepening agrarian crisis.

It is fortunate that farmers leaders such as Malla Reddy, general secretary, Andhra Pradesh Ryuthu Sangham, P.A. Mohammed, secretary, South Indian Farmers' Coordination Committee, Jagdeesh Pradhan of Orissa and M.S. Ganesan, V. Jesuraj and Muthuvel of Tamil Nadu and numerous journalists and farmers are articulating the urgent steps needed to revive the rural economy and mitigate acute distress.

Financial institutions led by NABARD and the State Bank of India are responding to the challenges arising from the collapse of cooperative credit institutions and are slowly bringing about credit reform. They are also increasingly supporting the growth of self-help groups capable of undertaking market-dri-

ven micro-enterprises supported by micro-credit. They are beginning to respond to the needs of women farmers and women agricultural labour. They are also taking steps to arrest the decline in the credit-deposit ratio in villages. There is, however, an urgent need for a comprehensive rural credit reform.

The insurance sector is yet to respond effectively. There is an urgent need for a well designed, transparent, and low transaction cost integrated health and crop and livestock insurance system. This is a priority need. This could be in the form of group insurance covering self-help groups operating at both the production and post-harvest phases. Panchayati raj institutions need to be involved more in proactive distress avoidance — in identifying hotspots and initiating distress mitigation measures.

The revamping and revitalising of farm research, extension and education systems are urgently needed. They must all become farmer-centric. There is need for launching ecological and trade literacy movements based on the principles underlying Mission 2007: Every Village a Knowledge Centre. The National Alliance for Mission 2007 should pay priority attention to the farmers' suicide and distress hotspots. Education, social mobilisation and regulation will all be necessary to arrest the expansion of the agrarian crisis and prevent a further collapse of the rural economy.

The needed reform in credit, insurance, input supply and marketing, though urgent, may take some time to develop and implement. Meanwhile, the following two steps should be taken jointly by the Central and State Governments:

(a) Operation rescue in distress hotspots. Steps may be initiated this rabi season, starting in October-November 2004, to launch in all seriously affected areas an integrated farming systems movement. The State Governments concerned could constitute within the next fortnight an inter-disciplinary task force, consisting of senior representatives of agricultural and veterinary universities, home science colleges, state de-

partments, financial institutions, NGOs, the private sector and panchayati raj institutions. This task force could draw up and introduce on a watershed or block basis a crop-livestock (and fish where appropriate) production system. Such a system should pay concurrent attention to the improvement of soil health and water conservation and management, efficient cultivation, commerce, and consumption. Both skilled on-farm and non-farm employment opportunities should be identified and the necessary capacity building and support services should be organised. The aim should be to convert the suicide hotspots into livelihood security bright spots.

(b) A second urgent task is the establishment in the distress hotspot area a community-managed nutrition security system. Such a system could have the following components:

A food guarantee scheme, which combines the principles of the employment guarantee commitment made in the Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance and the food-for-work programme;

A food-for-nutrition programme for pregnant women, infants and old and infirm persons;

A food-for-social development programme involving the provision of food and cash for preparation of noon meals, operation of community grain banks, and other skilled work.

It would be useful to start this programme on October 2, 2004 in the hotspot areas of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and Orissa with an initial allocation of about 100,000 tonnes of foodgrains for establishing community grain banks operated by self-help groups under gram sabhas. The Maharashtra programme could be started after the State elections.

A major lesson from the agrarian crisis is the need for a systems analysis of macro-economic policies. The increasing trend to privatise water will be disastrous for the poor. Safeguarding and strengthening the livelihood security of the families of resource-poor farmers and farm labour should be the bottom line of all investment and trade policies. Then alone will we see the revival of the rural economy.

(Dr. M.S. Swaminathan is Chairman, National Commission on Farmers.)

10 SEP 2004

THE HINDU

# বাদ ছিল অসমও, সংশোধিত সেঙ্গাস রিপোর্ট পেশ হচ্ছে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৯ সেপ্টেম্বর: পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, অসম, বিহার, জম্মু ও কাশ্মীরের বিভিন্ন জেলায় অনুপ্রবেশ-সমস্যা মুসলিম সংখ্যা-বৃদ্ধির হারকে কী ভাবে প্রভাবিত করেছে তার বিস্তারিত পর্যালোচনা করে একটি সংশোধিত সেঙ্গাস রিপোর্ট তৈরি হচ্ছে। সংখ্যালঘু কমিশন এখন রিপোর্টের জেলাওয়াড়ি পর্যালোচনা করেছে। সেঙ্গাসের মূল পরিসংখ্যানের কোনও ছেরফের না হলেও সংশোধিত রিপোর্টে বিশ্লেষণী মন্তব্য কিছুটা পরিমিত হবে। তাছাড়া ১৯৮১ থেকে ১৯৯১ পর্যন্ত জম্মু-কাশ্মীর ও অসমের জনগণনাকে যে বাস দেওয়া হয়েছিল, তা বর্তমান রিপোর্টে 'ভুলক্রমে অনুলিখিত' থেকে গিয়েছে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। সংশোধিত রিপোর্টে এই বিষয়টিরও উল্লেখ করে দেওয়া হবে।

এই উদ্যোগের পাশাপাশি বি জে পি-শিবসেনার প্রচারের জবাব দিতেও শুরু করেছে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। বেঙ্গাইয়া নায়াড়, অরুণ জেটলি বিষয়টি নিয়ে প্রচারের বাড় তুলেছেন। এর প্রতিক্রিয়ায় গত দু' তিন দিন কংগ্রেস এবং বামেরা যা বলে আসছিলেন, আজ তারই প্রতিধ্বনি করে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল বলেছেন, "এর থেকেই বোঝা যাচ্ছে ওরা ভেদাভেদের রাজনীতি করছে।"

সরকারি সূত্রের খবর, এই রিপোর্টটি প্রকাশিত হওয়ার পর ব্যাপক চাপের মধ্যে পড়ে গিয়েছেন স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী। রেজিস্টার জেনারেল অব সেঙ্গাস দফতরটি সরাসরি স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রকের আওতাধীন হওয়ায় ওই মন্ত্রকের বিরুদ্ধেই গাফিলতির অভিযোগ উঠেছে। প্রশ্ন উঠেছে,

রিপোর্টটি প্রকাশিত হওয়ার আগে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী নিজে দেখে তার ছাড়পত্র দিয়েছিলেন কি না। যদি দেখেন সেক্ষেত্রে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কাশ্মীর-প্রসঙ্গটি বাদ পড়ল কী করে? এই রিপোর্ট বাজপেয়ী জমানাতেই তৈরি হয়ে গিয়েছিল। সরকারি সূত্রের খবর, শেষ মুহূর্তে এই ত্রুটিগুলি চোখে পড়ায় তা আর ভোটের মুখে প্রকাশ করতে চাননি তৎকালীন স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী। প্রশ্ন উঠেছে তা হলে এখনই বা কেন অহেতুক তাড়াতাড়ো করা হল? এই রিপোর্ট-কান্ডের জেরে আমলাদের মধ্যে চলছে পারস্পরিক দোষারোপ।

সেঙ্গাস কমিশনার জে কি বাহিয়া রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করার পরই বলেন এর থেকে রাজনৈতিক দলগুলি যেন ফায়দা তোলার চেষ্টা না করে, কিন্তু তার এই আবেদনে কাজ হয়নি। দেশ জুড়ে শুরু হয়েছে রাজনৈতিক চাপান উত্তোর। তাই তড়িৎসিদ্ধি সরকার রিপোর্টের বিশ্লেষণী মন্তব্য ও তথ্যকে নতুন করে ব্যাখ্যার কাজে নেমেছে বিষয়টিকে কিছুটা লঘু করে দিতে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রীকে অবিলম্বে ব্যবস্থা নিতে অনুরোধ করেন। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী সংখ্যালঘু কমিশনকে বলেন বিষয়টি আবার খতিয়ে দেখে প্রয়োজনীয় ফুটনোট দিয়ে ত্রুটি সংশোধন করে নেওয়ার জন্য। কমিশনের পক্ষ থেকে একটি কমিটিও তৈরি করা হয়েছে। তা ছাড়া সংশ্লিষ্ট বিশেষজ্ঞদেরও চিহ্নিত করে তাঁদের কাছে গোট। রিপোর্টটি পাঠানো হয়েছে। এদেরই মধ্যে এক জন ইন্ডিয়ান ইন্সটিটিউট অব ইকনমিক গ্রোথ-এর জনসংখ্যা ও সেঙ্গাস বিভাগীয় অধ্যাপক আশিস রসু। তাঁর

বক্তব্য, কাশ্মীর বা অসমের প্রসঙ্গটি মুসলিম জনবৃদ্ধির সংক্রান্ত তথ্যের সঙ্গে ফুটনোট হিসাবে দিয়ে দেওয়া হলে এই রাজনৈতিক ঝড় উঠত না।

এই রিপোর্ট বিশ্লেষণ করে মূলত যে সব সিদ্ধান্তে পৌঁছানো গিয়েছে:

- মুসলিম জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির প্রকৃত হার ৩৬ শতাংশ নয়, ২৯ শতাংশ।

- জঘনিয়ন্ত্রণ ব্যবস্থা মুসলিম সমাজে শিথিল এ কথা ঠিকই, তবে সর্বত্র নয়। পরিসংখ্যান অনুযায়ী উত্তরপ্রদেশ, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, বিহার, অসমে জনসংখ্যাবৃদ্ধির হার বেশি। তুলনায় দক্ষিণ ভারতের তামিলনাড়ু, কেরলের মতো রাজ্যে মুসলিম সংখ্যাবৃদ্ধির হার হিন্দুদের তুলনায় কম। এ সব ক্ষেত্রে মুসলিম মহিলাদের সাক্ষরতার হারও তুলনামূলক ভাবে বেশি।

- বিহারের কাটিহার, কিয়ানগঞ্জ, পশ্চিমবঙ্গের মুর্শিদাবাদ, দিনাজপুর, অসমের ছ'টি জেলা, নাগাল্যান্ড-সহ দেশের বেশ কিছু সীমান্ত-রাজ্যে অনুপ্রবেশের বাড়বাড়ন্তের ফলে সেইসব জেলার জনসংখ্যার চরিত্র বদলে গিয়েছে। এ ব্যাপারে বাজপেয়ী জমানায় তৎকালীন স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণীকে অসমের রাজ্যপাল একটি বিস্তারিত রিপোর্টও জমা দিয়েছিলেন।

সেঙ্গাস রিপোর্টে এ ছাড়াও যা যা জানা গিয়েছে:

- মহিলা জুগ হত্যার ঘটনা দেশের মধ্যে সব চেয়ে বেশি ঘটেছে পঞ্জাবে।

- জৈন সম্প্রদায় শিক্ষার প্রসারে তুলনামূলক ভাবে অন্যান্য সম্প্রদায়ের থেকে এগিয়ে।

- জেলাওয়াড়ি বিশ্লেষণে দেখা যাচ্ছে পাণ্ডিদের জনসংখ্যা সাম্প্রতিক অতীতে সব চেয়ে কমে গিয়েছে।

# বিতর্কের মুখে সেন্সাস রিপোর্ট খতিয়ে দেখার নির্দেশ কেন্দ্রের

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৮  
সেপ্টেম্বর: মুসলিম সংখ্যাবৃদ্ধির হার  
নিয়ে বিতর্কের মধ্যে পড়ে কেন্দ্রীয়  
সরকার জনগণনা রিপোর্টের বিশ্লেষণ  
ফের খতিয়ে দেখার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে।  
জনগণনা আধিকারিকের ডেপুটি  
রেজিস্ট্রার জেনারেল আজ  
জানিয়েছেন, ধর্মভিত্তিক এই  
জনগণনার রিপোর্টে তথ্য ও বিবৃতি  
ছাড়াও কিছু বিশ্লেষণী মন্তব্য রয়েছে।  
মুসলিম সংখ্যাবৃদ্ধির হার সংক্রান্ত  
বিশ্লেষণ নিয়ে কিছু সমস্যা দেখা  
দিয়েছে। তাই জাতীয় সংখ্যালঘু  
কমিশন স্থির করেছে ওই অংশটিকে  
ফের খতিয়ে দেখা হবে।

দু'দিন আগে ধর্মভিত্তিক  
জনসংখ্যার রিপোর্টটি প্রকাশিত হওয়ার  
পর থেকেই দেশ জুড়ে রাজনৈতিক  
তোলপাড় শুরু হয়েছে। তার প্রেক্ষিতে  
প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ সংখ্যালঘু  
কমিশনকে গোটা রিপোর্টটি খতিয়ে  
দেখতে নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন। কাশ্মীরকে এ  
বারের গণনায় ধরা হয়েছে বলেই  
মুসলিম জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার বেড়েছে  
কি না, তা-ও খতিয়ে দেখা হবে। এই  
রিপোর্ট থেকে চটজলদি যেন কোনও  
তত্ত্ব তৈরি না করা হয় সে ব্যাপারেও  
সতর্ক থাকতে চাইছে সরকার।

সংখ্যালঘু কমিশনকে পর্যালোচনার  
নির্দেশ দেওয়ার পাশাপাশি প্রধানমন্ত্রী  
এই রিপোর্টটির বিষয়ে কেন্দ্রীয়  
গোয়েন্দা সংস্থার ডিরেক্টর অজিত  
দাভোলের সঙ্গে কথা বলেছেন। এই  
রিপোর্ট তৈরির পিছনে কোনও  
রাজনৈতিক উদ্দেশ্য রয়েছে কি না,  
সেটাও দেখতে বলেছেন তিনি।  
ইতিমধ্যেই বিভিন্ন মহল থেকে বলা  
হচ্ছে, গত সরকারের সময়েই এই  
রিপোর্ট তৈরি হয়েছিল। কিন্তু  
লোকসভা ভোটের আগে ভারত উদয়  
প্রচারকে তুলে ধরতে আগ্রহী বি জে পি  
শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব মুসলিম সংখ্যাবৃদ্ধির  
বিষয়টিকে তুলে ধরে প্রচারের লক্ষ্য  
গুলিয়ে দিতে চায়নি। এই অভিমতের  
সত্যাসত্য গোয়েন্দা সংস্থাকে খতিয়ে  
দেখতে বলা হয়েছে।

প্রসঙ্গত, বাজপেয়ী সরকারের  
আমলে অসমের তৎকালীন রাজ্যপাল  
জি সিংহ একটি রিপোর্ট দিয়েছিলেন  
তৎকালীন স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ  
আডবানীকে। তাতে রাজ্যপাল জি  
সিংহ বলেছিলেন, অসমের মতো  
সীমান্ত রাজ্যে জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির কারণ  
মুসলিম সম্প্রদায়ের সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধি ও  
অনুপ্রবেশ। পরে আডবানী  
বঙ্গালোরের একটি সংস্থাকে দিয়ে

জনগণনা বিষয়ে একটি পূর্ণাঙ্গ  
রিপোর্টও তৈরি করান। পরে তিনিই  
ধর্মের ভিত্তিতে জনগণনার নির্দেশ  
দিয়েছিলেন জনগণনা কমিশনকে।

সংখ্যালঘু কমিশনের পক্ষ থেকে  
আজ জানানো হয়েছে রিপোর্টের  
পরবর্তী বিশ্লেষণের জন্য তারা একটি  
চার সদস্যের কমিটি তৈরি করেছে।  
কমিশনের চেয়ারম্যান তারলোচন সিংহ  
বলেছেন, “সমস্ত পরিসংখ্যান বিশ্লেষণ  
করা হবে। তার পর কিছু সংশোধনী  
পদক্ষেপ করা হতে পারে। সেই  
পদক্ষেপের আগে সমস্ত ধর্মীয় নেতার  
সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বসা হবে।”

এ দিকে, গতকালের পর আজও  
এই রিপোর্টকে কেন্দ্র করে বি জে পি  
প্রচারের বাড় তুলেছে। এ দিন দলের  
পক্ষ থেকে জনগণনা রিপোর্টে  
জনসংখ্যা বিস্ফোরণ নিয়ে জাতীয়  
বিতর্কের আহ্বান জানানো হয়েছে।

বঙ্গালোরে দলীয় বৈঠকের ফাঁকে  
বি জে পি মুখপাত্র অরুণ জেটলি  
বলেছেন, “জনসংখ্যার এই রিপোর্ট  
গভীর উদ্বেগ তৈরি করেছে। এটা খুবই  
লজ্জাজনক যে জনবিস্ফোরণে উদ্বিগ্ন  
না হয়ে কয়েকটি মেকি ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ  
রাজনৈতিক দল বিষয়টিকে একদম  
গুরুত্ব দিচ্ছে না।”

# Plunge in Hindu growth rate could be an illusion

Rema Nagarajan  
New Delhi, September 8

IF THE inclusion of Kashmir in the 2001 census created the mirage of a surging Muslim growth rate, the steep fall in the Hindu rate too isn't above suspicion.

The census figures suggest the growth rate of Hindus fell from 25.1 per cent in 1981-91 to 20.3 per cent in 1991-2001. But census officials say the "apparent decline" could have been partly the result of large communities, who had earlier been recorded as Hindu, insisting on separate identification this time.

For instance, the census officials say, a large number of Jains who had probably identified themselves as Hindu during the 1991 census clearly labelled themselves Jain and not Hindu in 2001. This is also the probable explanation for the sharp rise in the Jain growth rate — from 4.6 per cent in 1991 to 26 per cent in 2001.

Similarly, many in the large Veerashaiva/Lingayat community in Karnataka seem to have insisted on a distinct identity in the 2001 census, spurred by a rejuvenated exclusivist movement. The Sarna community in Jharkhand

## It figures

In 1981-91, many Jains, Lingayats, Sarnas, etc may have been tagged Hindu but this time they probably insisted on a separate identity. The Jains' growth rate jumped from 4.6% to 26%; that of 'other' religious groups' from 18% to 103%

also did so, following the growth of powerful community-based movements. "There are similar examples from other parts of

the country. Various social and political movements before each census affect the quality of the figures," a census official said. The Census of India records that a large number of new "religions" were encountered at various centres, which required additional classification.

Census officials said that during census 2001, respondents were allowed to look at the information collected from them by enumerators and sign the form after verifying that it was to their satisfaction. This was the first time the procedure was followed. "Earlier, many enumera-

tors might have recorded Jains as Hindus. But with the respondents verifying and signing the forms this time, they would have insisted on being registered as Jains and not Hindus. This could be one of the reasons for the jump in the Jain growth figures and the decline in the Hindu stats," a census official said.

Earlier, the column recording the growth rate of "other" religions had shown a persistent decline: from about 46 per cent in 1971 through 26 per cent in 1981 to 18 per cent in 1991. In 2001, this jumped to 103 per cent.

■ See also Page 4

# Census goofed on Muslim growth

9/19

## J&K Omission In 1991 Glossed Over

By Shankar Raghuraman  
TIMES INSIGHT GROUP

**New Delhi:** If the Census statistics on the growth of India's Muslims seemed to reinforce stereotypes about the community, a closer scrutiny of the numbers tells another story. The report, released on Monday, suggested that while the growth rate of the Hindu population has fallen between 1991-2001 compared to the previous decade, Muslims have actually multiplied faster in the last decade. This truth is quite different.

In ten years, both Hindus and Muslims have seen a significant fall in population growth rates. The false impression about a rising Muslim growth rate is created by the fact that the 1991 census did not include Jammu & Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, whereas the latest one does.

Adjust for that and the Muslim growth rate drops, while that for Hindus is only marginally affected. Excluding the Muslims of Jammu & Kashmir from the 2001 figures, the growth of the Muslim population from 1991 to 2001 was 29.3%, significantly lower than the near-33% growth figure of 1981-'91. The adjusted Hindu growth rate comes to 19.9%. The census report is a basic tool for policy-makers at all levels.

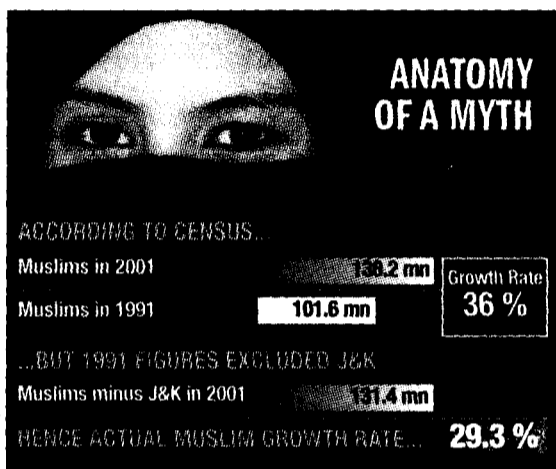
When contacted, Registrar General and Census Commissioner J K Banthia confirmed that the growth rates released on Monday were misleading.

"It is true that the Muslim growth rate will come down to 29.3% if Jammu & Kashmir is excluded and the Hindu growth rate will decline to 19.9%," he said. Strangely, however, his organisation's press release made no mention of this crucial information.

The 32.8% figure for growth in Muslim population in 1981-'91 itself is based on excluding both Assam and Jammu & Kashmir from the figures for 1981 and 1991. This is necessary since the 1981 census excluded

Assam and the 1991 census excluded Jammu & Kashmir. Hence the two states needed to be kept out to make the figures comparable. Incidentally, the corresponding figure for the Hindu growth rate between 1981 and 1991 was 22.8%.

That suggests a completely different picture from what the data released on Monday portrayed. Not only has Muslim population growth slowed down by 3.5 percentage points, it has fallen faster than the Hindu population growth rate which



lost 2.9 percentage points in the same time. The census numbers also convey the impression that there has been a sudden explosion in the Jain population over the last decade. It suggests that Jains have grown 26% over the last decade against a very meagre increase of 4.6% between 1981 and 1991. Again, this is almost certainly not a reflection of the real situation on the ground.

The same data, for instance, shows that the 0 to 6 age group among Jains is barely 10.6% of the total Jain population. This is by far the lowest among all religious groups. It stands to reason that if there had been a sudden increase in the Jain population in the last decade, there should be a significantly higher proportion of young children in this religious group.

It is likely that the dramatic change in the growth rates for the Jain population are a result of faulty declarations or improper data collection. The abnormally low growth rate for 1981-1991 would indicate that the flaw lies in the 1991 data rather than the 2001 figures.



BJP ADVOCATES TWO-CHILD NORM

# Census papers go missing

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/BANGALORE, Sept. 8. — Copies of the 2001 Census report have disappeared from the Census commissioner's office in New Delhi, a day after the findings of the first religion-specific Census triggered a political storm. It was also the day, the Sangh Parivar sprung a surprise by backtracking from Muslim bashing and softened its rhetoric on the uneven population growth of various communities.

While there were indications that the report has been withdrawn following alleged anomalies having been highlighted in the media over the compilation of certain data, there was no official confirmation of it.

Census officials claimed that only limited advance copies of the report had been published for the media and Union home ministry (under whose jurisdiction the Census Bureau falls). Hence the unavailability.

The Census Bureau had two days ago said that in terms of growth of different religious communities, Hindus showed a decline over the previous decade: their population growing by 20.3 per cent during 1991 and 2001, compared to 25.1 per cent during 1981-91. The Muslim population grew by 36 per cent during 1991-2001, compared to 34.5 per cent during 1981-91.

Data on religion as collected during the 2001 Census for the country as a whole and for each state and Union Territory was released by Mr JK Banthia, the Census commissioner.

In Delhi, the RSS spokesman, Mr Ram Madhav, said the sharp increase in growth rates should be seen in the national perspective and not as an issue of Hindu-Muslim divide.

In Bangalore, the BJP tried to present

## Venkaiah reaction perverse: Cong

NEW DELHI, Sept. 8. — The Congress today criticised the BJP and the Sangh Parivar for their "perverse" reaction to the Census data on religion. The AICC spokesperson, Ms Jayanti Natarajan, said the BJP president, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu's reaction that "the Census data indicates a threat to the unity and integrity of India in the long run" was "shocking". The firebrand Miss Uma Bharati, on the BJP's part, today alleged that the Congress under the leadership of Mrs Sonia Gandhi, has a "mindset" similar to that of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who had equated India's national flag with Hindus alone and not the entire country. "Congress has a Jinnah mindset," she declared at the party-sponsored *Vijayotsava* to celebrate her release from jail, adds PTI from Bangalore. — SNS

Details on page 4

the same argument in socio-economic terms. The party called for a national debate on the sharp increase in population of "all communities" and said it was high time to discuss the incentives and related aspects to encourage a two-child norm in the country.

Senior BJP leader, Mr Arun Jaitley, said the figures revealed by the Census report were distressing as they would impact the social and economic development of the country. He said it was necessary to meet the target of a stable population growth by 2026.

Mr Jaitley was surprisingly muted when it came to the minorities' issue. He said higher population meant greater poverty and stress on limited resources. He also criticised "pseudo-secular parties" for finding fault with the BJP for raising the all-important issue.

গণনা হয়েছে কাশ্মীরেও

# সেঙ্গাস তথ্য নিয়েই ভোটে সেনা-বিজেপি

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি ও মুম্বই, ৭ সেপ্টেম্বর: ধর্মভিত্তিক জনগণনার রিপোর্টটি প্রকাশ করে সেঙ্গাস কমিশনার জে কে বাহিয়া সোমবারই বলেছিলেন, এই রিপোর্ট থেকে রাজনৈতিক দলগুলি যেন ফায়দা তোলার চেষ্টা না করে। জনসংখ্যা-বিশেষজ্ঞরাও সাবধান করে দিয়ে বলেছিলেন, এই রিপোর্ট থেকে চটজলদি কোনও তথ্য তৈরি করা ঠিক হবে না। এই কথার ব্যাখ্যা মিলেছে আজ সরকারি ভাষ্যেও। ১৯৮১ থেকে '৯১ পর্যন্ত জনগণনায় জম্মু ও কাশ্মীর বাদ পড়েছিল জঙ্গি উপদ্রবের জন্য। এ বারে কাশ্মীরকে গণনায় ধরা হয়েছে বলেই মুসলিম জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার বেড়েছে বলে স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক সূত্রের খবর।

কিন্তু বাহিয়ার সাবধান-বাণী উচ্চারণের কয়েক ঘণ্টার মধ্যেই মুসলিম ও খ্রিস্টানদের সংখ্যাবৃদ্ধির হার নিয়ে ভোটের ময়দানে নেমে পড়েছে বিজেপি ও সঙ্ঘ পরিবার। শিবসেনাও সার্ব জানিয়েছে, মহারাষ্ট্রে আসন্ন ভোটে তারা এটাকেই প্রচারের অন্যতম বিষয় করবে। বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ বলেছে, 'হিন্দু রাজ্য'কে 'মুসলিম রাষ্ট্র' পরিণত করার 'চক্রান্ত' রূপে হিন্দু সম্প্রদায়কে 'ঐক্যবদ্ধ' হতে হবে। 'হিন্দুত্ব'কে মূলধন করে ফায়দা তুলতে বিজেপি যখন ব্যস্ত, তখন জনগণনার এই রিপোর্ট ঘিরে বিজেপি-র রাজনীতির কড়া সমালোচনা করেছে কংগ্রেস ও বামেরা।

বাজপেয়ীর জমানাতেই ধর্মের ভিত্তিতে জনগণনার নির্দেশ দিয়েছিলেন তৎকালীন কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী। মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার গঠিত হওয়ার পরে সেই রিপোর্ট প্রকাশিত হল। হিন্দু ও মুসলিম উভয় সম্প্রদায়ের ক্ষেত্রেই জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ আইন সমান ভাবে বলবৎ হওয়া উচিত বলে দীর্ঘদিন ধরে দাবি জানিয়ে এসেছে বিজেপি। কাল প্রকাশিত রিপোর্টে দেখা যাচ্ছে, মুসলিমদের জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার হিন্দুদের তুলনায় প্রায় ১৬ শতাংশ বেশি।

এই রিপোর্টের প্রেক্ষিতে বিজেপি সভাপতি বেঙ্কাইয়া নায়ডু আজ বলেছেন, "জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণের ক্ষেত্রে দুই সম্প্রদায়ের মধ্যে ভারসাম্যহীনতা খুবই অস্বাভাবিক।" তাঁর বক্তব্য, জনসংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির মধ্যে এই ভারসাম্যের অভাব ভবিষ্যতে গুরুতর সমস্যা তৈরি করবে।" বেঙ্কাইয়ার এই মন্তব্যের জবাবে কংগ্রেস মুখপাত্র আনন্দ শর্মা বলেছেন, বিজেপি আসলে 'সাম্প্রদায়িক' এবং 'ভেদাভেদ'-এর ভাস খেলতে চাইছে। বাম দলগুলিরও অভিযোগ, এই সুযোগে বিজেপি আবার সাম্প্রদায়িকতাকে উস্কে দিতে চাইছে।

কাল প্রকাশিত রিপোর্টে দেখা যাচ্ছে, দেশের ১০২ কোটি ৮০ লক্ষ নাগরিকের মধ্যে ৮২ কোটি ৭০ লক্ষই হিন্দু। মুসলিমদের সংখ্যা ১৩ কোটি ৮০ লক্ষ। এ ছাড়া, ২ কোটি ৪০ লক্ষ খ্রিস্টান, ১ কোটি ৯০ লক্ষ শিখ, ৭৯ লক্ষ বৌদ্ধ ও ৪২ লক্ষ জৈন আছেন। ১৯৯১ থেকে ২০০১, এই দশ বছরে হিন্দুদের সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার ২৫.১% থেকে কমে হয়েছে ২০.৫%। অন্য দিকে মুসলিমদের সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার ৩৪.৫% থেকে বেড়ে ৩৬% হয়েছে। সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার বেড়েছে খ্রিস্টানদেরও, ২১.৫% থেকে হয়েছে ২২.৬%।

মুসলিমদের সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির হার বাড়ার অনেক কারণ আছে বলে কালকেই জানিয়ে দিয়েছিলেন বাহিয়া। তার মধ্যে একটি অবশ্যই শিক্ষার, বিশেষত নারী-শিক্ষার অভাব। এ দেশে মুসলিম জনসংখ্যার ৫৯% সাক্ষর। জাতীয় গড়ের তুলনায় যা ৫% কম। উত্তর ভারতে আবার ছবিটা আরও খারাপ। তার মধ্যেও গোবলয়ে আরও বেশি সংখ্যক মুসলিম নিরক্ষর। দক্ষিণে সাক্ষরতার হার বেশি হওয়াতেই সব মিলিয়ে সংখ্যাটা ৫৯ শতাংশে দাঁড়িয়েছে।

গুজরাত নির্বাচনের সময় থেকেই বিজেপি জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণকে রাজনৈতিক প্রচারের বিষয় করে তুলেছিল। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নরেন্দ্র মোদী প্রকাশ্যে জনসভায় বারবার বলতেন, "হাম দো, হামারা পঁচিশ নেহি চলেঙ্গে।" বলা হত, জন্মনিয়ন্ত্রণ আইন বলবৎ হওয়ার ফলে হিন্দুর সংখ্যা ক্রমশ কমেছে, পক্ষান্তরে বেড়ে যাচ্ছে মুসলিম সম্প্রদায়। হিন্দু আবেগকে জাগিয়ে তুলতে বিজেপি নেতাদের প্রায়শই বলতে শোনা যেত, এর ফলে ভবিষ্যতে বিপন্ন হতে পারে হিন্দু সম্প্রদায়। মহারাষ্ট্র ভোটেও জনগণনার রিপোর্টকে অস্ত্র করতে চলেছে বিজেপি-শিবসেনা। আজ মুম্বইয়ে শিবসেনা নেতা ও ঠাকরের ভাইপো রাজ ঠাকরে স্পষ্টই এ কথা জানান। বেঙ্কাইয়া আজ বলেন, "জনসংখ্যার এই বৃদ্ধিতে বাংলাদেশি অনুপ্রবেশকারীদেরও ভূমিকা রয়েছে।" রাজ ঠাকরেও বলেন, সারা দেশের সঙ্গে বৃহত্তর মুম্বই শহরে মুসলিমদের সংখ্যা বাড়ার কারণ অবৈধ ভাবে বসবাস করা বাংলাদেশিরা। জনগণনা রিপোর্টে এদের অনেককে ভারতীয় মুসলিম বলে ধরা হয়েছে।

# Party Won't Rest Until Tainted Ministers Resign & Savarkar Plaque Is Reinstated BJP ill at ease with Census figures

Our Political Bureau  
BANGALORE 7 SEPTEMBER

BJP president Venkaiah Naidu is elated over the unconditional withdrawal of criminal cases against Uma Bharti and the "amends" made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the Congress on the Veer Savarkar-issue. However, Mr Naidu warned the Congress-led UPA regime, saying BJP would not rest satisfied with this victory alone.

Declaring that BJP would continue its campaign against tainted central ministers till they were dropped, Mr Naidu said the chapter on Savarkar issue will be closed only after the Centre "atones for its sin and restores the Savarkar plaque at the Cellular Jail." He also expressed concern over the growing demographic imbalance, revealed by the religion-based break-up of India's population in the 2001 Census.

"It should be a matter of concern for all, who want India's unity and integrity maintained, that the population of Hindus has declined to 80.5% with the growth rate coming down from 25.1% to 20.3%, even as Muslim population shot up to 13.4% with growth rate rising from 34.5% to 36%," he said, promising a detailed response shortly.

Mr Naidu is in the city to participate in

BJP's Vijayotsav, celebrating Ms Bharti's release, to be attended by former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha L.K. Advani, and also to participate in the party's national office-bearers' meeting on Wednesday, which will discuss the proposed Tiranga Yatra.

He said the country was waiting for the UPA regime's response with regard to its tainted ministers, facing charges of heinous crimes ranging from murder, extortion, kidnapping to fraud. "The Prime Minister has been dodging the demand under one pretext or the other. By doing so, he has earned a bad image not only for his own government but also for India's democracy," Mr Naidu said.

On the Veer Savarkar issue, Mr Naidu criticised the Congress for maintaining double standards of praising the freedom fighter in Maharashtra and condemning him outside. "People cannot be fooled by this kind of duplicity," he said.

He pointed out that Congress president Sonia Gandhi herself had objected to the unveiling of Savarkar's portrait in the Parliament and petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar had reiterated that his views on Savarkar were in tune with Congress' thinking, a day after Dr Singh's assertion that Savarkar was a great freedom fighter.

## CENSUS & SENSIBILITY

Our Delhi Bureau  
7 SEPTEMBER

THE census report on religion shows that Muslim population grew at the fastest rate of 36% during 1991 to 2001 over the 1981-91, while Sikhs showed the slowest rate of 18.2%. Hindus showed a modest growth rate of 20.3%.

In terms of growth of different religious communities, Hindus showed a decline over the previous decade, their population growing by 20.3% during 1991 and 2001 as compared to 25.1% during 1981-91. The Muslim population grew by 1.5% to 36% during 1991-2001, compared to 34.5% during 1981-91, according to "The First Report on Religion" here.

The report, prepared by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, was released by Census Commissioner J K Bantia here on Monday. He also presented a copy to chairman of Minorities Commission Farooq Khan Singh.

Out of the total population of 102.8 crore in the country as at the 2001 cen-

sus, the Hindus were 82.7 crore in number and constituted 80.5% of the total population while the Muslims stood at 13.8 crore comprising 13.4% of the population, the report said. Bantia described the increase in Muslim population as "high growth" for which he said there were several reasons.

"Low literacy rate and low participation in work among the Muslim females were some of the reasons for the high growth," Bantia told reporters after releasing the report.

He said among Buddhists also there has been a "sizeable decline" in the growth rate from 35.3% during 1981-91 to only 24.5% during 1991-2001.

Though there was a slight increase in the growth rate of the Christians from 21.5% to 22.6%, there was "noticeable decline" of Sikh growth rate from 24.3% in 1981-91 to only 18.2% during 1991-2001. Most prominent in the 2001 Census data released was the growth rate of Jains (26% during 1991-2001 as compared to their growth of only 4.6% during the previous decade 1981-91, the report said.

# Sense and Census

The new data must inform policy making.

But first they need to be read right

INDIA is one of the few countries in the world with an unbroken chain of regular decennial census operations spanning three centuries. It has learnt to use this data in ways that help solve problems rather than create them; to unite the nation, not to divide it. The first ever census data on religion — culled from the 2001 census operations which incidentally had involved some two million enumerators — has highlighted a broad spectrum of significant trends.

But, first, it is important to read the figures right. Demographer Ashis Bose was quite correct when he told this newspaper that understanding census data is a tricky and complex business even for the experts, and that politicising this process does not help, indeed it should be completely avoided no matter what the political exigencies of specific political actors may be. What makes a community like the Jains register a growth rate of 24 per cent even as a community like the Sikhs witnesses a sharp decline? Can the alarming shrinkage of the Parsi community be arrested in any way? Can the disturbing sex ratios in northern India be addressed in a meaningful way? What about the 1.5 per cent increase in the growth rate of

Muslims in India? It is clearly the result of several complex factors including the dismal status of the community in general and Muslim women, more specifically. A recent baseline study indicated that 59 per cent of Muslim women have never attended school and that 60 per cent of them were married by the age of 17 — as compared to 55 per cent Hindu women. Muslim women had also registered a pathetic work participation level of 14 per cent in that study. All three parameters — literacy, age of marriage and employment levels — are known to have a crucial bearing on family size and contraceptive practices within a community.

Interestingly, the cross-border migration from Bangladesh into India over the '90s emerges as a contributory factor to this growth rate. This is highlighted by the fact that there is a sharp rise in numbers in the border regions of eastern and north-eastern India, although the actual number of Bangladeshis in India still remains largely a matter of conjecture. These clearly are important developments that now need the attention of politicians, administrators, policy wonks and, most importantly, community leaders.

# Census shows growth shift

## Restraint call follows data

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 6: Indian Muslims are growing faster than any other religious community to make up 13.4 per cent of the country's billion-plus population. Hindus constitute an overwhelming majority of 80.5 per cent of the population but their growth rate has dropped sharply over 10 years to the 2001 census.

According to the census, of the total population of 102.8 crore in the country, there were 82.7 crore Hindus, 13.8 crore Muslims, 1.9 crore Sikhs, 2.4 crore Christians, 79 lakh Buddhists and 42 lakh Jains.

As census commissioner J.K. Banthia released a set of statistics on India's religious composition, there was a call to political parties not to draw political mileage out of the "sensitive data".

"This report is not meant for political slogans," National Minorities Commission chairman Tarlochan Singh said, apprehensive that it was only a matter of time before the census report was used to hit out at the minorities for the high "growth rate".

Demographer Ashish Bose endorsed Singh's appeal, asking people not to rush to conclusions but leave interpretation of the data to profession-

als. Singh later announced the creation of a cell to study the report and declared that the commission would convene a meeting of religious leaders to urge them to inspire people to take corrective measures.

This is the first time in Independent India that the census commission has placed religion data in the context of social parameters that can give an insight into the life of people across communities and regions.

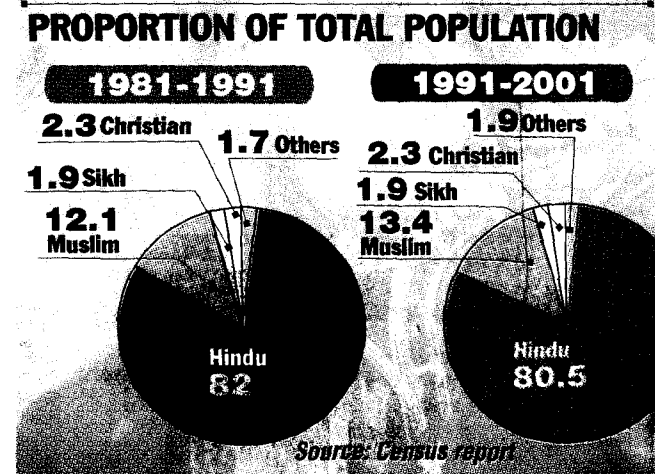
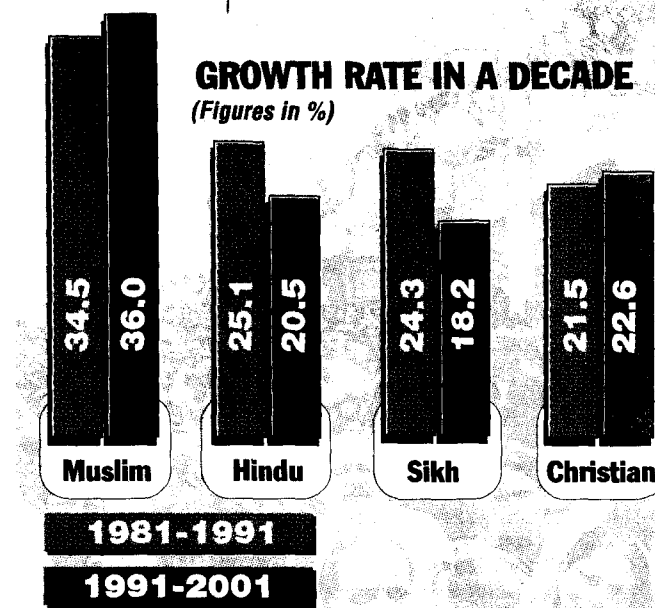
Muslims have a literacy rate of 59 per cent — 5 per cent below the national average of 64 per cent — but Banthia suggested that this figure would drop several points in the Hindi heartland. Literacy rates in the community are much higher in the south, pushing up the overall percentage.

At 65 per cent, Hindus are higher on the literacy scale but still far below Christians (80 per cent) and Sikhs (69 per cent). The disappearing Parsis lead the pack with close to 97.8 per cent literacy, with the Jains following close at 94.1 per cent.

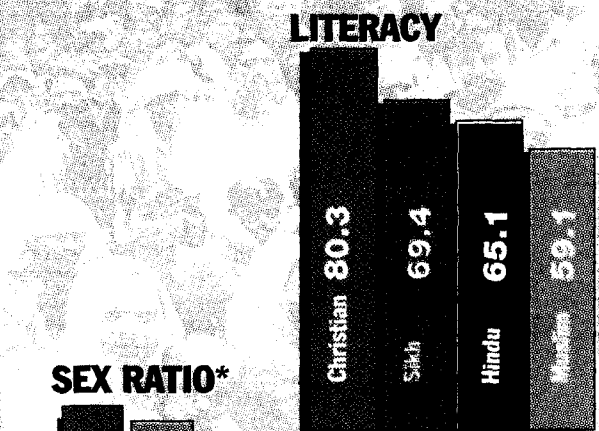
Banthia said the statistics collected during the headcount had confirmed theories about the influence of female literacy on fertility rates.

Female literacy leads not only to empowerment but can also be an effective strategy for population stabilisation.

Here, Hindus as well as Muslims are faltering, espe-



## THE CHANGE IN 10 YEARS



cially in the countryside. Hindu women have a literacy rate of 53 per cent compared with 50 per cent among Muslims, standing in sharp contrast to an impressive 76 per cent in the Christian community.

Percentages are far lower in rural areas — 43 per cent

among Muslim women and 46 per cent among Hindus.

One area where Muslims are ahead of Hindus is in the attitude towards the girl child, reflected by the sex ratio (females for 1,000 males).

Hindus had a sex ratio of 925 as against 950 among Mus-

lims and 964 among Christians. Among Hindus in urban areas the sex ratio is sharply lower at 898, despite expected higher levels of education.

In a gender neutral society, the sex ratio should be close to 1,000, a balance that has been drastically altered mostly in

northern India through female foeticide. Punjab as a state and Sikhs have one of the lowest sex ratios. Census officials were surprised by the data on Sikhs among whom the sex ratio was as low as 786 — again, higher in rural and lower in urban areas.

Source: Census report

# Mani position on Savarkar refuels dispute

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 5 SEPTEMBER

LESS than 24 hours after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sought to put an end to the Savarkar controversy by observing that Mani Shankar Aiyar's views on the freedom fighter were his own and not that of the UPA government, the petroleum minister re-ignited it by claiming that his views on Savarkar were in conformity with that of the Congress.

Mr Aiyar's latest assertion, aired on a private news channel on Sunday, is expected to trigger a fresh round of war of words between the BJP-Shiv Sena combine and the Congress-led coalition. It also made it clear that the minister remained unapologetic about his views on the Sangh icon and about his decision to order the removal of the plaque containing his quotations from the freedom struggle memorial built in the Port Blair-based Cellular Jail.

Mr Aiyar's remarks can only make things more difficult for the Congress-NCP alliance in Maharashtra as it goes about crafting a strategy to retain power in the

state. The state unit of the Congress and its ally, the NCP, are keen that the issue, which has the potential of transforming into a full-blown controversy, in view of the awe in which Savarkar is held by the people across the state, is given a proper burial at the earliest.

The Congress general secretary-in charge of Maharashtra,

Ms Margaret Alva gave vent to this anxiety when she said on Sunday that the Savarkar controversy was "over" after Dr Singh's clarification. The re-assertion of his views on Savarkar by the petroleum minister, however, will ensure that the

controversy remains alive, much to the dismay of his party colleagues from the poll-bound state of Maharashtra and the NCP.

Mr Aiyar, in his interview reiterated that the decision to remove the plaque containing Savarkar's sayings was prompted by his realisation that Savarkar, unlike Madan Lal Dhingra and Bhagat Singh, was not a "martyr," and that efforts had to be made to undo the damage inflicted on the memory of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.



AIYAR: TOUGH STAND

# Not isolated on Savarkar: Aiyar

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**PRADEEP KAUSHAL**  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 5

A DAY after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh distanced himself from the stand taken by Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar on the Savarkar issue, the latter claimed today that he was not isolated on the matter in his party.

"I don't think I am at all distanced from the Congress party. The Congress party's policy was established when the leader of our party Sonia Gandhi took the lead in getting the entire Opposition together to boycott the ceremony when Savarkar's portrait was hung in the Central Hall (of parliament)," Aiyar told NDTV 24x7.

He said, "My personal views I think are entirely within the framework of the policy approach of the Congress party on this issue."

Aiyar acknowledged that Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was a freedom fighter, but said: "He was a patriot to the Hindu nation and I am a patriot to the composite nation."

The Congress leader sought to give a new spin to the removal of the Savarkar plaque at the Swatantrata Jyoti memorial in Cellular Jail in the Andamans by contending that the issue was not of its removal. Rather, it was a question of installing Mahatma Gandhi's plaque, he clarified. When asked if he had removed the Savarkar plaque, Aiyar said, "No, I put in Gandhiji's."

He went on to explain that Savarkar's plaque was one of the three faces — the two other being Madan Lal Dhingra, Bhagat Singh and a bunch of inspiring, though unattributed, quotations. He said, "I had to put Gandhiji in where the BJP put Gandhiji out. And all I did was to bring it in and the only place where it could be brought."

He said the removal of the plaque was not an insult to

## Savarkar issue is over, says Alva

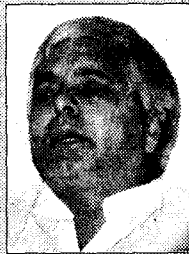
**MUMBAI:** The Congress on Sunday said the Veer Savarkar issue was over and no party should politicise it in order to gain mileage during the forthcoming Maharashtra polls.

"The issue of insult of Veer Savarkar is over," AICC general secretary and incharge of party affairs in Maharashtra Margaret Alva said referring to the statement of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the issue.

The Prime Minister had yesterday said: "As far as Savarkar controversy is concerned, these are (Mani Shankar) Aiyar's personal views and not of the Government... It is an unnecessary controversy." Speaking after inaugurating the Media Centre and Control room of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) here, Alva said, "No party should make the freedom fighters and national flag an issue in the election campaign."

—PTI

## 'I don't remember writing in praise of Savarkar'



**PATNA:** RJD president and Railway Minister Laloo Prasad today said he did not remember when he wrote a message in appreciation of V.D. Savarkar and he still held the view that Savarkar was not a true patriot as he had sought pardon from the British rulers on three occasions for getting him released from jail.

"I do not remember writing in praise of Savarkar. We politicians sign and write so many things, this might have been one but I do not remember. I still hold the view that Savarkar was not a true patriot as he had written on three occasions to the British to get him released from jail during the freedom movement," he told reporters here. "My views on Savarkar is not individual or out of context. History says so. The BJP and the RSS cannot tear off the pages of history," he added. Senior BJP leader and former Union minister Ram Naik had on September 3 released copies of the message issued by Laloo, then Bihar chief minister, on December 24, 1992 praising Savarkar on his 99th birthday. The RJD chief alleged BJP, Shiv Sena and RSS were raising an "unnecessary" hue and cry over Savarkar "just to improve their position in the coming Assembly polls in Maharashtra."

—PTI

Savarkar. Aiyar said the removal of the plaque was not an "insult" to Savarkar. On the contrary, it was an insult to Gandhiji with the memorial making no mention of him and he had "only rectified that insult."

"The issue is the insult to the father of the nation involved in having a Swatantrata Jyoti which makes no mention of Babu," he said, adding:

"There was absolutely no reference to Savarkar by anyone at the official function of the lighting of the Jyoti."

He said, "It is unbelievable that Mr Ram Naik, my predecessor, and people of his ideological persuasion think that we can have a Swatantrata Jyoti which completely obliterates Gandhiji's role in the freedom movement and makes no reference to it."

## Pawar praises Savarkar, kicks off campaign in Mumbai

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 5

Launching his party's election campaign in Mumbai, NCP chief Sharad Pawar today heaped praise on Veer Savarkar for his contribution to the freedom struggle.

In a bid to counter the offensive launched by Shiv Sena and BJP on the Savarkar issue, Pawar dared both parties to publicly endorse Savarkar's revolutionary ideas. He chose to dwell on Savarkar's anti-casteist views in an effort to prevent the saffron combine from appropriating the Hindu Mahasabha icon. Speaking before a predominantly Dalit crowd, Pawar recalled that Savarkar had once chosen a dalit to perform rituals at a temple. He wondered if the leaders of the saffron alliance had a "similar mindset."

"Savarkar had written that the cow was mere an useful animal and could serve as food for human beings once it outlived its utility. Do Sena-BJP leaders have the guts to propagate such thinking," Pawar asked at the rally organised by the Mumbai unit of NCP.

Pawar, however, refrained from speaking against his colleague and Union Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyer, whose remarks had triggered off the controversy.

The rally organised at Kamgar Stadium in Central Mumbai saw a lackluster response though almost the entire top leadership of the party had turned up. Apart from Pawar, ex-deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal and his successor Vijaysinh Mohite Patil were also present. Their speeches lasted barely a few minutes each.

# Security first, higher FDI in telecom later

JAYANTARoy  
CHOWDHURY

New Delhi, Sept. 1: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has asked the home and defence ministries to address security concerns that have been raked up to stall moves to liberalise foreign direct investment (FDI) in the telecom sector.

Top officials in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said a cabinet note seeking to raise the FDI limit in telecom to 74 per cent would be brought after these two ministries had worked out ways to address security concerns that had been raised by the Left leaders at the last meeting of the Left-UPA coordination committee.

An earlier draft note has been put on the backburner as Singh wants all security concerns to be vetted by the ministries that deal with them.

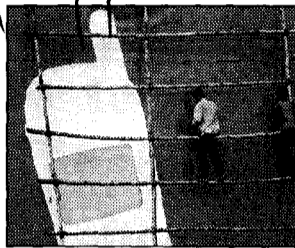
The Left had voiced fears that control of a vital sector like telecom, which has security ramifications, could pass into the hands of foreign owners if the government allowed FDI up to 74 per cent.

Countries, which allow a majority foreign ownership in telecom, have strong security systems. Both the UK and the US have invested billions in setting up apparatus to monitor telephone, mobile, satellite and internet communications.

In comparison, India has a weak monitoring system and this has led to fears, which are shared not only by the Left, but also the Opposition and security agencies within the government.

The last time that the matter came up before the previous BJP cabinet, security issues raised by the Intelligence Bureau ensured that the move was placed in the cold storage.

Several alternatives are now being considered to address these concerns. These include specific proposals to



SAFETY KEY

limit managerial and board control to Indians only, giving up to 25 per cent stake to foreign institutional investors within the 74 per cent foreign stake being allowed and giving the government veto powers over the boards of privately-owned Indian firms on certain security-related issues.

The FII stake control plan assumes that these investors do not normally take part in the management of a company but are merely interested in returns on investment and hence are sleeping partners. Telecom firms are expected to induct these FII partners by issuing fresh capital.

While the Left favours this route in addition to safeguards like limiting managerial control to Indians, the government is likely to still push the proposal to hand over 74 per cent control to a foreign partner, while insisting that Indians remain at the helm of affairs in telecom firms, regardless of ownership.

Singh's Congress-led government will, however, be going ahead with the plan to raise FDI in aviation to 49 per cent.

However, the PMO has reconciled itself to totally abandoning, at least for the time being, plans to raise FDI in insurance from the current level of 26 per cent.

Both the Left and the BJP have made it clear they would vote against any legislation brought to amend the Insurance Regulatory Development Act to raise the FDI cap.



# The unbee

The row over V D Savarkar re  
of harnessing historical figure  
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Congress have consistently m  
the context in which Savarkar

KUMAR KETKAR

**T**HE controversy over Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is neither political nor ideological. It only shows just how low and hypocritical the debate has become.

The Sangh Parivar has declared that it would unleash 'nationalistic fervour' in the name of Veer Savarkar. The maverick Mani Shankar Aiyar defiantly announced that he would not apologise for removing a plaque containing a poem penned by the controversial revolutionary.

Aiyar enjoys controversy. He probably feels he is doing an ideological service to the party, which gave up any discussion on issues long time ago—be they about history or political theory. The Sangh Parivar, which thrives on jingoism and lies, loves to hate Aiyar or Arjun Singh. Together, they all perpetuate ignorance about India's past.

The Sangh cunningly conceals the fact that Guru Golwalkar and his swayamsevaks were consistently dead against Savarkar when he was politically active. Savarkar too was totally opposed to the RSS and its ideology of so-called cultural nationalism. The RSS believed in worship of the cow; Savarkar publicly endorsed cow slaughter, saying the cow was just an animal without any attributes of divinity. Savarkar in fact tried to propagate his version of the scientific temper and condemned what he regarded as idiotic practices of yagnas and pujas. He often made tremendous fun of the self-styled pundits who duped innocent people in the name of religion.

The RSS was born almost a decade after the Hindu Mahasabha. Many people wrongly think that Savarkar founded the Hindu Mahasabha. In fact, he did not. He was in the Andamans's hellish Cellular Jail in 1915. He was still in jail when the RSS was formed in 1925.

Those who founded the RSS kept a calculated distance from the Hindu

## BHARATI CORPORATION INDIA

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## OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER ROOM NO. 224, S.B.S. PLAZA NEW DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION CIVIL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT CORRIGENDUM

Sub: 9-B Suspense Stock during - 2003-04.  
S.H.: Procurement of 43 gr. O.P. Cement (ISI Mark)  
Tenders for the above said supply were invited with documents and opening of tender as 26-08-04 a dates as extended as under.  
Last date of receipt of the application: 2-09-04.  
Last date of sale of tender documents: 6-09-04.  
Last date of opening of tender: 8-09-04.  
All other terms & conditions remain un-changed.

## राजस्थान सरकारी कार्यालय, सर पदमपत मातृ एवं शिशु स्वास्थ्य जयपुर

क्रमांक: लेखा/नीलामी/२००४-०५/४६२०-२७

### नीलामी सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि इस संस्थान में पं निस्तारण खुली नीलामी प्रक्रिया के माध्यम से दिनांक २२.९.०४ नीलाम किया जाना निश्चित किया गया है। इच्छुक बिडर्स (बोली त भाग ले सकते हैं।)

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३. बेबी इनक्यूबेटर	एमएस को, मुंबई

### नीलामी शर्तें

- प्रत्येक बोली लगाने वाले व्यक्ति/फर्म को पुस्तक मूल्य के धरोहर रशि जमा करानी होगी।
- साम् अधिकतम बोली लगाने वाले के पक्ष में छोड़ा जावेगा
- सूच्य बिडर्स को बोली की २५ प्रतिशत राशि उसी समय ज स्की जमा धरोहर राशि समायोजित कल्वा सकता है। शेष जिस स्थिति में होगा उसी स्थिति में उठाना होगा। नीलामी सम्पूर्ण जिम्मेदार स्वयं बिडर की होगी।
- नीलामी मूल्य पर बिडरों कर/स्थानीय कर एवं सर्वार्ज बिडर नीलामी के दिन प्रभावी दरों के अनुसार को जावेगी।
- सामान के नीलामी में लगाई गई अधिकतम बोली पर साम अधिकार नीलामी कमेटी के पास सुरक्षित रहेगा जो सर्वमान्य

## Air Force Station Jodhpur

- Commanding officer, Air Force Station application for registration of approved Manufacturers / Authorised dealers for local purchase for the year 2005-2006
- For Local Service Contracts:
  - Supply of Cleaning / Packing material, Waste, Muslin White, Polythene Sheets, Sulphur
  - Suppl of Paints, Chemicals and Ferrous
  - Stitching of Uniforms and Overalls.

7/10-12  
2/18

# Government geared to tackle truckers' strike

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 20.** With truckers going ahead with their plans for a countrywide strike from 6 a.m. tomorrow, the Union Government today set up a control room to monitor the situation round-the-clock. It advised the State Governments to gear up the law and order machinery to ensure that the truckers were not coerced into joining the agitation.

The State Governments have been asked to take steps to ensure that the supply chain of at least essential items is not disrupted. They have also been told to stockpile essential commodities. The Government would lend all possible support to those who stay away from the strike, official sources said.

"There is no change in our plan. We are going ahead with the strike from tomorrow," said a spokesman of the All-India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC), which had given the strike call against the imposition of 10 per cent service tax on transporters.

## Ministry's clarification

Appealing to the truckers not to go ahead with their strike plan, the Finance Ministry today issued a statement terming the strike move as "unwarranted and against the interests of the general public." It also "clarified" that the service tax had not been imposed on the truck owners or operators but on booking agents. "In fact the Finance Minister, in his Budget speech, categorically mentioned that the tax would only be on transport agents and there is no intention to levy ser-

vice tax on truck owners or truck operators," the statement said.

The All-India Confederation of Goods Vehicle Owners' Association was not taking part in the strike, the Ministry claimed, adding that the Government appreciated the 'positive' role of associations that had understood the true intent of the levy and were, therefore, not joining the strike.

On the AIMTC's contention that the new levy was violative of the agreement reached between the transport sector and officials of the Finance Ministry in 1997, the Ministry said that this was not totally true.

"It is not a violation of the said agreement, as the pro-

posed levy is only on the booking agents and not on road transport operators."

In the context of the 1997 agreement, it said that the AIMTC then was not against the levy of service tax, but only wanted the mode of collection to be changed in such a manner that the tax would not be collected from the road transport operators.

The official statement also pointed out that the Government had agreed to set up a committee comprising representatives of the transport industry, including members of the AIMTC and Finance Ministry officials, to look into the "genuine" procedural problems.

## 'ESMA will be invoked'

By Our Special Correspondent

**VILLUPURAM, AUG. 20.** In the wake of the nationwide strike call given by the All-India Motor Transport Congress against the levy of service tax, the Union Minister for Shipping and Surface Transport, T.R. Baalu, has warned that the Essential Services Maintenance Act would be invoked if the truck movement was stopped.

Addressing a press conference at Ulundurpet near here today, Mr Baalu said the proposed strike from Saturday was not acceptable to the Centre, and therefore, efforts had been taken at the Cabinet Secretary level to avert it.

The Minister said one-third of the truckers had agreed to

ply their vehicles as usual, and if anyone prevented them, they would be booked under ESMA. Adequate security would be provided to those operating the trucks, and the State Governments had been directed to ensure the unhindered movement of trucks.

## Sethu project

The Minister said the concept paper on the Sethu Samudhram project was ready, and Cabinet approval was awaited for launching the "Sethu Samudhram Corporation Ltd." The ports located on the east coast were ready to finance the project. For obtaining environmental clearance, a public hearing would be held soon.

# Left, Right on same side of bandh war

## Congress lends lone voice of dissent

OUR BUREAU

**July 24: Sworn rivals are speaking in one voice, united in their defence of the right to hold bandhs.**

Only the Congress has struck a discordant note.

A day after Bombay High Court fined the BJP and the Shiv Sena for calling a bandh last year, parties cutting across the political divide slammed the verdict. The Sena led the way, with its chief Bal Thackeray promising: "We will move the Supreme Court against the High Court's directive."

The Congress alone welcomed the ruling, though cautiously. "Political parties must not disrupt civil life while organising public protests," party spokesman Anand Sharma said. "They should act with responsibility and ensure that the normal life of citizens is not disturbed. All parties must draw appropriate lessons from the court ruling."

But Left parties termed the decision to impose a fine of Rs 20 lakh each on the BJP and the Shiv Sena an effort to "throttle democracy". Their Bengal rival, Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, said she was determined to go ahead with the August 2 state bandh her party has called, "come what may".

"Organising bandhs and strikes are inherent and inalien-

## DIVIDED ON EVERYTHING ELSE, NOT ON STRIKE



We will challenge the Bombay High Court order



In a democracy, political parties have the right to protest... through demonstrations, bandhs and dharnas



Organising bandhs and strikes are inherent and inalienable rights of the people

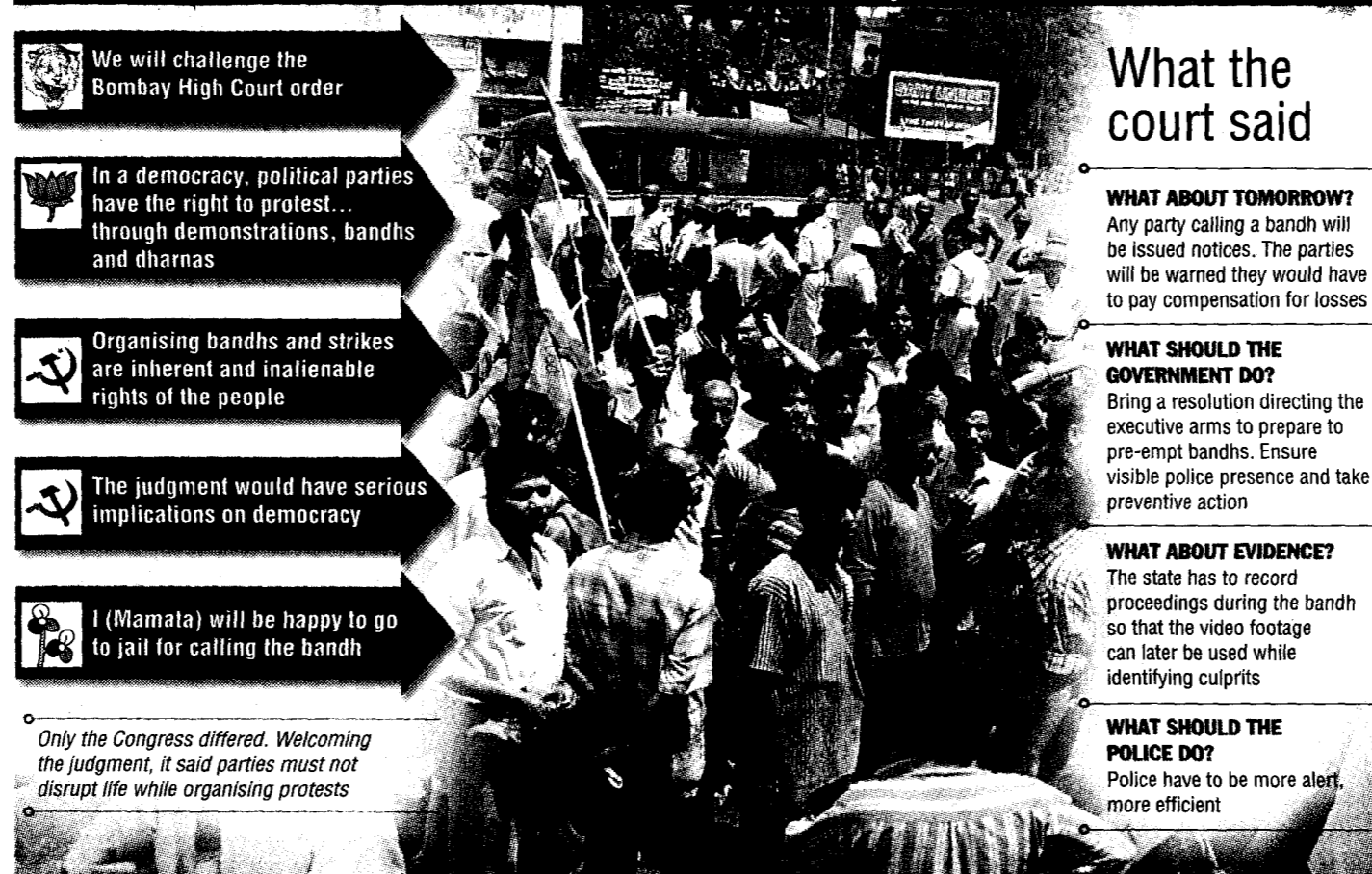


The judgment would have serious implications on democracy



I (Mamata) will be happy to go to jail for calling the bandh

Only the Congress differed. Welcoming the judgment, it said parties must not disrupt life while organising protests



## What the court said

### WHAT ABOUT TOMORROW?

Any party calling a bandh will be issued notices. The parties will be warned they would have to pay compensation for losses

### WHAT SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT DO?

Bring a resolution directing the executive arms to prepare to pre-empt bandhs. Ensure visible police presence and take preventive action

### WHAT ABOUT EVIDENCE?

The state has to record proceedings during the bandh so that the video footage can later be used while identifying culprits

### WHAT SHOULD THE POLICE DO?

Police have to be more alert, more efficient

## Ban architects support fine

R. VENKATARAMAN

**New Delhi, July 24:** The architects of two Supreme Court judgments banning bandhs by political parties and "strike in any form" by government employees today welcomed Bombay High Court's decision to penalise the BJP and the Shiv Sena for calling a bandh.

Both Justice V.N. Khare, a former chief justice, and Justice M.B. Shah said it was a "good beginning and a correct step in the right direction".

The Sena and the BJP had called the bandh on July 30 last year in protest against a series of blasts in the city. The high court had yesterday slapped a fine of Rs 20 lakh each on the two parties based on the two apex court judgments.

Justice Khare's verdict had come in a case involving a political party in Kerala. In his ruling, the judge had said no party could resort to bandhs and force others to participate in it.

In his ruling, in the case of about two lakh Tamil Nadu government employees dismissed by the Jayalalithaa regime for going on strike, Justice Shah had said employees and trade unions representing them had "no legal, fundamental, moral or justifiable and equitable right to strike".

In a democracy, government employees are part and parcel of the governing body and owe duty to society, the bench had said.

Justice Shah, now the president of the National Consumer

Dispute Redressal Commission, said "in the name of democracy and democratic right to protest, you cannot damage public and private properties and infringe upon the fundamental rights of others".

"Think of the daily wagers, hawkers, *thela-wallahs*... they have to earn their daily bread... perhaps that evening meal, the only one meal they earn after a whole day's work.... You cannot take away that right... that inalienable fundamental right to life in the name of anything, leave alone democracy," he said.

As a judge in Bombay High Court, before his elevation to the Supreme Court, Justice Shah had delivered a verdict, much before the Kerala case, banning processions by political parties.

Both the judges said a citizen could file an FIR with police for "criminal trespass, criminal intimidation and also claim damages for personal or public property". The Indian Penal Code has provisions for such a complaint, they pointed out.

Justice Shah, however, added that after filing an FIR, the question of proof would arise and it would be difficult to prove who the actual culprit was in a procession or a bandh situation.

"So, law has to evolve itself and evolution is always slow... it is only a beginning and slowly regulatory laws like restricting a procession or place of protest to a particular time of the day or evening and earmarking a place are all part of it," the judge said.

able rights of the people in a democratic polity which are enshrined in the Constitution," CPM Bengal secretary Anil Biswas said. "Any move to curb these rights either by the judiciary or the administration is nothing but an attempt to strengthen the autocratic forces in the country."

Biswas said legal experts were being consulted on whether to move the Supreme Court.

The CPM politburo has urged the Centre to enact a law to pro-

tect the rights of people. "The right to organise strikes, bandhs or hartals was enjoyed by the Indian people even during British rule," it said in a statement.

CPI state secretary Manju Majumdar said the high court order was "dangerous". "The judiciary is clearly encroaching on democratic rights; this may have a terrible fallout," he said.

The CITU, the CPM's labour arm, joined the chorus and said it would launch a movement to mobilise public opinion against

the judgment. General secretary M.K. Pandhe said: "We do not know for what purpose the BJP-Sena organised the bandh, whether it was for a wrong cause, it is the democratic right of the people to organise protest actions."

Mamata, who can never see eye to eye with the Left, said the judgment would not come in the way of the August 2 strike. "I will be happy to go to jail for calling the bandh. This is a legitimate tool to voice our protest against the anti-democratic practices of

the CPM," she said.

Trinamul has called the bandh to protest the introduction of the Block Level Pre-litigation Conciliation Board Bill by the Left Front government.

BJP spokesman Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said: "In a democracy, political parties have the right to protest the anti-people policies of a government through demonstrations, bandhs and dharnas.... If the right to protest is curtailed, it amounts to an attack on democracy." (See Page 6)

# Your antacid could cost 30 times more

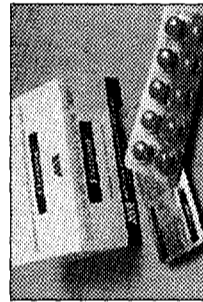
Press Trust of India  
New Delhi, July 23

COME YEAR 2005, a catastrophe is set to hit the developing nations including India, experts warn, as the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement tightens its noose on the pharmaceutical sector.

The transitional period of ten years given to the developing nations to conform to the TRIPs agreement ends on December 31, 2004, open-

ing up the pharmaceutical sector to 'product patent' regime which gives exclusive rights to the inventor to use and sell his product, patented since 1995 for 20 years.

Contrary to this, India had been following a system of 'process patent', which gave right to the domestic pharmaceutical companies to manufacture a product patented elsewhere by employing slighter changes in the process of manufacture which do not amount to infringe-



ment. This permitted the local companies to develop cheaper 'generic' variants of the original drug suiting the country's economic needs.

B.C. Kela, convener of National Working Groups on

Patent Laws, says majority of Indians will not be able to afford these life-saving drugs.

"Almost 80 per cent of the Indian population will be deprived of the latest life-saving drugs as the MNC, majority of them from the US and Europe, invade the developing world with self-dictated prices and monopoly in marketing," he says.

Besides the price rise, there is a threat of the decimation of the domestic pharmaceutical sector itself, experts

warn. No R&D works could be carried out with regard to the patented drugs for a period of 20 years and this will certainly kill the growth of the domestic companies," says Kela.

Gajananand Wakankar, executive director, Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association says, "Today a ranitidin antacid tablet costs 30 times more in the US compared to India. So one can have a rough idea on how the prices are going to soar."

Experts are not aware of any study or estimate made by the government assessing the impact of product patent regime in health sector. "It's not yet clear what will be the quantum of medicines that will come under the regime," says the Drug Controller General of India, Ashwini Kumar.

"Mass suicides like those of farmers in the recent times may be triggered by the price rise," warns Vandana Shiva, a social activist.

# Court slaps penalty for bandh

ANAND SOONDAS

Mumbai, July 23: For the first time ever, a court of law has penalised political parties for holding a bandh.

Bombay High Court today fined the Shiv Sena and the BJP Rs 20 lakh each for a bandh they called last year to protest against a series of blasts in the city.

In its unprecedented judgment, the court critically commented upon the "ramifications" of a bandh by way of the economic loss inflicted on people and severely reprimanded the two parties.

Justices A.P. Shah and S.U. Kamdar said the Sena and the BJP had to own up responsibility and pay Rs 40 lakh as "compensation" for causing public loss. The court said the compensation would go into a fund that would be spent on toning up public utility services.

On July 30 last year, the day the bandh had been called, Mumbai shut itself reluctantly. Children played cricket in the courtyards and company executives discarded their ties. Though there were whispers that a bandh would not help nab the terrorists who bombed the city, no one protested.

Even the Congress-led Democratic Front government kept quiet, sensing that if they got in the way of the bandh, it might be construed as unpatriotic. The immediate trigger for the bandh was a blast in Ghatkopar that killed four and injured about 50. More bomb explosions had taken place before that.

A group of people — some non-government organisations and individuals — decided not to remain mute spectators and filed a public interest litigation

## STRIKE AND PAY

● WHY BANDH  
Blasts in Mumbai

● WHEN BANDH  
July 30, 2003

● WHO CALLED  
Shiv Sena & BJP

● WHO PROTESTED  
Individuals and NGO

### Court verdict

Rs 20 lakh fine each on Sena and BJP

against the two political parties. "We sat down and thought that we had to protest against this senseless form of protest," said theatre personality and ad guru Alyque Padamsee, a signatory to the PIL that led to the judgment today.

After the court order, Padamsee said: "Since the executive seems to be paralysed in this country, I am glad that the courts are acting. In fact, I recommend all concerned citizens file a class

action PIL whenever they feel injustice is being done."

James John, an activist with Agni, the NGO that was a party to the PIL, said the powerful had to be taught some lessons in democracy. "We should not let any political party ride roughshod over the interests of the public it actually promises to protect."

There were others who lent their names to the protest — theatre personality and social activist Gerson da Cunha and

former top bureaucrat B.G. Deshmukh.

The PIL said the city lost an estimated Rs 50 crore because of the bandh that had been forced on the people. It also pointed out that the strike went against a Supreme Court judgment that prohibited enforced bandhs.

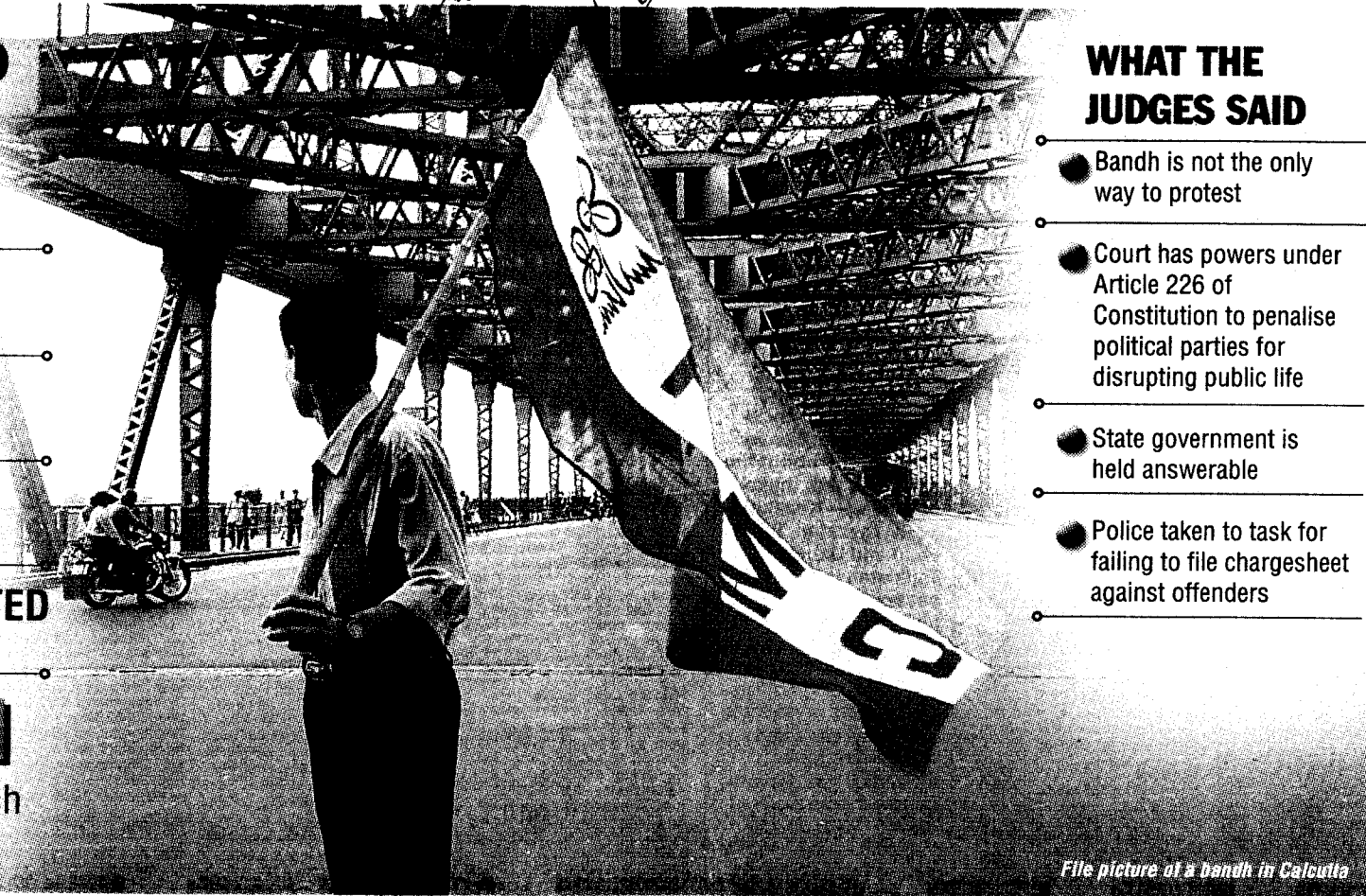
Rattled by the court order, the Sena said the bandh had been spontaneous and no one had enforced it. Spokesman Subhash Desai said the Sena also contend-

ed that "in a democracy, industrial and political actions do result in disruption of services causing inconvenience to people. But the Supreme Court has held that only if a bandh is forced on the people will it be violative of the fundamental rights enshrined in Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution. In this case, the bandh was rather spontaneous."

Hinting that it was the right action to take in the circum-

## WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

- Bandh is not the only way to protest
- Court has powers under Article 226 of Constitution to penalise political parties for disrupting public life
- State government is held answerable
- Police taken to task for failing to file chargesheet against offenders



File picture of a bandh in Calcutta

## Mamata firm, fine or no fine

### OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, July 23: Buoyed by the Bombay High Court judgment, the two petitioners who had earlier moved Calcutta High Court seeking a ban on bandhs today said they would again approach it to slap a similar fine on the Trinamul Congress for calling a bandh on August 2.

While the judgment came as a shot in the arm for Supradip Roy and Idris Ali — the crusaders who had taken the battle against bandhs to the Calcutta court — Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee, behind the August 2 bandh call, remained undeterred by the day's events in Mumbai.

Mamata, who declared herself a 'wounded tigress' while announcing the bandh on Wednesday, did not show any signs of being affected by the court's decision. "We will go ahead with our bandh," she said.

"In a state where the government goes against the interests of the people, the only remedy is to paralyse the state through a bandh. Let them (opponents of bandh) move court against me, I am not bothered. What will they do to me? Arrest me? Hang me?"

The ruling CPM, which is as guilty as Trinamul of playing bandh politics, shied away from responding to the Bombay High Court judgment. "We refuse to comment on the issue on the basis of reporters' statements," said Left Front chairman Biman

Bose who himself is embroiled in a controversy for trashing Justice Amitava Lala over rallies holding the city to ransom.

Although four petitions have been moved in Calcutta High Court seeking a ban on bandhs, the court has repeatedly expressed its inability to stop them.

In 1997, Supradip Roy had moved the court asking it to prevent a bandh called by the Trinamul Congress. Justice Shyamal Sen, while declaring the bandh illegal, said the court was in no position to impose any penalty on those violating its order.

"The Bombay High Court's judgment is excellent," Roy said today. "I hope this will serve as a precedent to the high court here. We may have to consider moving court again asking it to impose a penalty on Trinamul for calling a bandh on August 2."

On the three other occasions that the high court had been moved to bring an end to bandhs — in 2001, 2002 and 2004, all by petitioner Idris Ali against the Trinamul Congress and the SUCI — the court had similarly expressed "helplessness".

In 2002, Justice A.N. Roy had observed: "The machinery (to combat bandhs) is with the administration and not with the judiciary. So we are mere spectators in this regard."

In all these instances, the bandhs against which the court had been moved had gone ahead unhindered.

# Peace this pipeline

Building interdependence with Pakistan has future dividends for both us and them

**I**t is an incontrovertible fact that our economic growth is critical for human development; and that access to energy at affordable costs is vital for that process. Given our current growth levels, it is obvious that our energy needs would continue to skyrocket. Compared to the import of a mere one-third of our oil consumption less than two decades ago, we are already importing more than two-thirds of our needs and this would touch a figure in excess of 90 per cent in the next decade. Our imports of natural gas are beginning to grow at a similarly high rate. The bulk of oil and natural gas resources of the world lie in the region to the west of us, beyond Pakistan. It is also a fact that the most economical method of transporting natural gas from Iran and Central Asia is by overland pipelines, especially when the end product is required in north and western India.

This is precisely why Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar is arguing for beginning a dialogue with Pakistan on the issue, as reported by the *Sunday Express*. There is no disputing that geography poses a serious challenge to ensuring an uninterrupted flow of oil and gas through Pakistan. The often fractious nature of India-Pakistan relations and the presence of terrorist groups in that country threatening to blow up pipelines doesn't make things any easier. Many Pakistanis believe that they should not allow the transit of energy to India since it

would strengthen their 'enemy' and many Indians feel that we cannot trust Pakistan and allow it a veto over our economic well-being. But this is the type of thinking that has been harming the interests of people on both sides of the border.

Of course there will be risks to the security of energy flows through overland pipelines. But offshore transportation by tankers and pipelines, too, carries its own share of risks. What is critical is not the likely risks, per se, but satisfactory measures to address them. Contrary to conventional wisdom, such measures can be instituted far more effectively in the case of overland pipelines, since Pakistan would have to enter into multinational agreements that include the producer country, international financial institutions, other transit countries like Afghanistan, and so on, besides establishing an international organisation to manage, monitor, inspect, maintain and repair such pipelines. Iran, for example, would have as much interest in ensuring that its gas reaches the large market in India uninterrupted as we would, in having it delivered safely. India and Pakistan need to look at the issue of energy pipelines in a broader and comprehensive manner. There can be no denying that they help build interdependence and create long-term stakes in peace for development in the region. The time is ripe, then, to initiate a serious dialogue towards this end.

# The seeds of suicide — I

By P. Sainath

**GUNTUR & NALGONDA (A.P.):** It's a well-known brand of seed ... And the reverse of its packet states "Germination rate 65 per cent." What does it mean, we ask the residents of Rentapalla in Guntur district. "It means one-third of the seeds will not work," scoffs one farmer. "When we pay, we pay for 100 per cent," he laughs. "Not for 65 per cent."

In short, if this village pays for 1,000 bags of seed, they are only getting 650.

"Would you," asks another farmer, "go to a pharmacy and buy a medicine of which one-third should not be expected to work?" Then why buy these seeds? "What choice do we have?" Most companies and dealers follow the same practice.

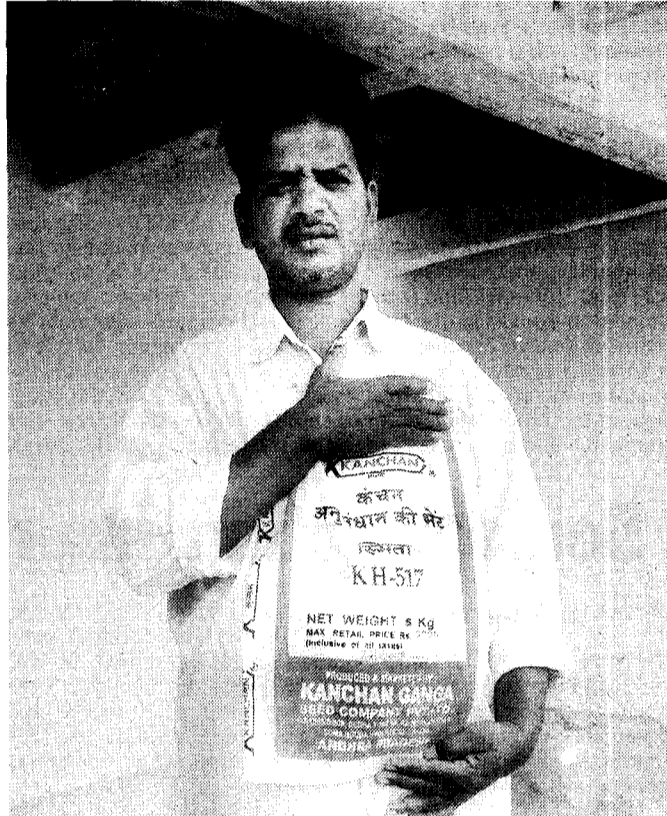
"This is a post-1998 system," says Malla Reddy, general secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Ryuthu Sangham (APRS). "When the multinationals entered the field, controls and regulation were dropped. Before that, seeds were certified by State authorities. Germination was up to 90 per cent. It was the MNCs who started this practice."

## Receipts of seeds

In Rentapalla, farmers give us the bills and receipts issued to them by seed and pesticide dealers. Even apart from the very high prices, these are unique in two respects. One, they explicitly add on an interest rate of 2 per cent a month (24 per cent) on the goods sold. Two, they extract a signed undertaking from the farmer absolving the dealer of any responsibility for failed or spurious seeds.

Both clauses are clearly printed on the bills and receipts. They are part of the 'legal' transaction. Take for instance the bill issued by Vijayadurga Agencies at Sathenapally in Guntur district. It carries (in Telugu) a clear disclaimer. This includes the caution that these seeds should be sown "after ascertaining that they sprout well." The onus of testing them is on the farmer.

The note also asserts: "Seeds billed herein belong to the respective companies. They are sold only on being certified as fit after carrying out all technical scrutiny." Why then should the farmer be responsible for test-



**Abba Reddy at Chalmada village displays a bag that contained fake seeds which were a factor in the suicide of his relative Prathap. The bag and brand may have been genuine but the seeds were not. Such substitution is not uncommon. Yet, the worst punishment a dealer in spurious seeds can get is Rs. 500.**

ing them? But the note goes further. Too many things depend on nature, it says. "Therefore no guarantee can be given."

The farmer then signs below the last line which says, "I purchase the seeds agreeing to the above points."

Stockists like Vijayalakshmi Pesticides add their own clauses for the farmer to sign on. "I am aware that these pesticides are poisonous and I purchased the items billed herein for the purpose of agricultural operations."

## The new moneylenders

Dealers are well aware of what other purposes the "purgu mandhu" (literally insect medicines) have been used for. The overwhelming majority of farmers who have committed suicide in Andhra Pradesh have done so by consuming pesticide. Hence the clause freeing the dealer of any responsibility. A further line tagged on says: "Agreed to pay interest at two per cent a month on this bill amount."

Meet the new moneylenders

of the countryside. The seed, pesticide and fertilizer dealers. "This man is a new sahucar," says Malla Reddy of the APRS. "He is at once a merchant, a moneylender, a scientist, an agro-technologist and an expert. He can also be the man who buys the crop of the farmers he sells products to. At low prices, of course."

The power this group wields is a vital factor in the ongoing crisis and continuing suicides of farmers. With soaring input costs and the collapse of formal credit, their writ binds the dependant farmers. This group gains in many ways, of which three stand out.

First, the seeds and pesticides dealer inflates prices on the plea that he is extending credit to the farmer. "You end up paying Rs. 230 for Rs. 200 worth of pesticide," says P. Bhiksham at G. Edavalli village of Nalgonda district. "But you sign on a bill which still says Rs. 200."

Second, the two per cent interest a month is tagged on to the bill amount. "There have

been repeated crop failures," says farmer Kobbanna Venktrao at Sathenapally, Guntur. "So repayments get delayed. That's when you learn what 24 per cent interest means. Their seeds have often been responsible for our crop failure. But there is no punishment for that. We suffer the crop failure, but pay them penalty rates of interest."

Third, they might have to sell their crops to the same man who sells them seeds and pesticides — at a rate fixed by him. That rate can be "well below the minimum support price," says K. Veeranjanyulu, a farmer in Rentapalla. "More so, if the farmer is small and cannot bargain. Last season, the market rate for chilli was Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 2,200 a quintal. Some small farmers sold to their dealers at Rs. 1,500 a quintal."

"The way it all works," says Vinod Rao, also a farmer in Rentapalla, "is this. For every Rs. 5,000 we spend, the seed fellow gets Rs. 1,000 of it. Often more." This equation imposes a deadweight on the farmer's input costs.

The unfairness of it rankles. "All gains are the dealer's, all losses are ours," says one peasant here. The APRS has tried hard to tackle the situation.

## Role of MNCs

"There have been lots of crop failures due to fake seeds," says APRS district secretary Narasimha Rao. "Our experience is that it is very difficult to bring the big MNCs to book for bad or failed seeds. They never respond. So we try to compel the dealer here to compensate the peasant where a blatant wrong has been done. But the farmer is very vulnerable to his pressure. So it is not easy."

The clamour is growing for amending the Seed and Pesticides Acts at the Centre to bring some regulation to this field. The new Andhra Pradesh Government is also readying its own Seed Act at the State level. The changes won't come a day too soon for P. Bhiksham. "The old Sahucar was bad," he says. "But at least he was lenient at crop time. He was part of the village and needed the crop to succeed. With these people, they are more ruthless. You can die but they have to get their money. I tell you, the old sahucar was better."



# India's population is 102.8 crores

By Gargi Parsal

**NEW DELHI, JULY 10.** India's population has reached 102.8 crores with 53.2 crore males and 49.6 crore females at an annual growth rate of 1.94. On the eve of Population Day, the Registrar-General of India, J.K. Banthia, declared that India's population was all set to exceed China's by 2035 when it would touch 146 crores. India turned 100 crores in May 2000.

The 2001 census shows Uttar Pradesh to be the most populous State with a population of

166 million, followed by Maharashtra (97 million), Bihar (83 million) and West Bengal (80 million). Lakshadweep has the lowest population of 61,000.

The Scheduled Caste population has touched 16.6 crores (16.2 per cent) and the Scheduled Tribes 8.4 crores (8.2 per cent). The child sex ratio (0-6) slipped from 945 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 927 in 2001. The average literacy rate for above seven population stood at 64.8 against 52.2 in 1991. The census said 75.2 per cent of the male population

against 53.6 per cent of females are literate.

Releasing the final Census 2001 statistics here at a seminar on Census Data Dissemination, the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, said the census 2001 results were important because the basic population data including that of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, were being used for a fresh delimitation of the Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies. The last delimitation exercise was based on the 1971 census data.

Mr. Patil said the Government was considering implementation of the Multi-Purpose National Identity Card (MNIC) to facilitate Government interface with citizens. Already, a pilot project was on in 13 States and the Union Territories covering a population of 30 lakhs. The Citizenship Act, 1955 was recently amended to provide for the compulsory registration

of all citizens and provision of national identity cards to them.

The idea was to create a National Population Register which will have both, the National Register of India Citizens and the Register for Non-Citizens (National Register of Residents). "Every person will be given a unique national identity number. But the success of the programme would depend on timely and complete updating of the registers which depends on total registration of births and deaths."

Registration of births and deaths was made compulsory three years ago, but certain State Governments, with a weak demographic record, lacked the commitment to carry it out. Only about 60 per cent of births and 50 per cent of deaths were registered in the country. "Governments all over the world consider registration as one of the essential tools to know the precise areas of in-

terventions and resource distribution. MNIC would enhance not only the security cover of the country but facilitate the national-level e-governance programme which is an important agenda of the Common Minimum Programme."

Underscoring the need for "imaginative and urgent steps" to bring down the population growth rate, he said there was no denying that huge populations were unsustainable and had an adverse impact on the environment.

S.C. Gulati of the Institute of Economic Growth said that attention should be paid to promoting institutional deliveries and fertility in the Muslim-dominated districts, on checking migration from rural to urban areas and the substantial population growth in the border States and districts in the North-East and Jammu and Kashmir.



# যাত্রী-ভাড়া একই রইল, বাড়েনি পণ্য মাসুলও, চলবে ১৫টি নতুন ট্রেন

গৌতম হোড় ● নয়াদিল্লি

৬ জুলাই: বিরোধীশূন্য লোকসভায় বাস্তববাদী রেলবাজেট পেশ করলেন বানু রাজনীতিক লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব। তাঁর প্রথম রেলবাজেটে লালুপ্রসাদ যাত্রীভাড়া ও পণ্যমাসুল বাড়াননি ঠিকই, আবার রেলের স্বার্থও পুরোপুরি বিসর্জন দেননি। আধুনিকীকরণ এবং রেলসুরক্ষার দিকেও সাধ্যমতো নজর দিয়েছেন। তবে রেলের দীর্ঘমেয়াদী সংস্কার ও আধুনিকীকরণের জন্য কোনও ব্যবস্থা বা দিশানির্দেশ দেননি। বিধানসভা নির্বাচনের দিকে তাকিয়ে বিহার এবং নিজের নির্বাচনকেন্দ্র ছাপরার জন্য দরাজ হয়েছেন ঠিকই, কিন্তু তাঁর পূর্বসূরিদের মতো দৃষ্টিকটু পক্ষপাত করেননি। সবমিলিয়ে তাঁর বাজেট পুরোপুরি মধ্যমপন্থী।

তাঁর এই প্রথম রেলবাজেটে লালু ১৫টি নতুন ট্রেন চালুর কথা ঘোষণা করেছেন। তাঁর পূর্বসূরি নীতীশ কুমার যে সম্পর্কক্রান্তি এক্সপ্রেস চালুর কথা বলেছিলেন, সেগুলিও চালু করার ঘোষণা করেছেন তিনি। এ ছাড়া ন'টি ট্রেনের যাত্রাপথ বেড়েছে, বারোটি ট্রেনের যাত্রার দিন বেড়েছে। সামান্য বেড়েছে পার্সেলের মাসুল।

যাত্রীভাড়া ও পণ্যমাসুল না বাড়িয়েও লালুপ্রসাদ খরচ মেটাবেন কী করে? লালুর হিসাবটা দাঁড়িয়ে রয়েছে একটা আশার উপর। তা হল পণ্য পরিবহণ অনেকটাই বাড়বে। গত আর্থিক বছরে পণ্য পরিবহণে যেখানে ২৭ হাজার ১১৫ কোটি টাকা পাওয়া গিয়েছিল সেই তুলনায় বর্তমান আর্থিক বছরে ২৮ হাজার ৭৪৫ কোটি টাকা মিলছে। যাত্রী পরিবহণ থেকে বাড়তি ৪৮০ কোটি টাকা পাওয়ার আশা করছেন তিনি। অন্য খাতেও আয় বাড়বে বলে আশা করছেন রেলমন্ত্রী। পার্সেলের বাড়তি মাসুল থেকে ৫০ কোটি টাকা পাওয়া যাবে বলে তাঁর আশা। গতবারের মতো ব্যয়সঙ্কোচ করে ১০০ কোটি টাকা বাঁচাবার কথা বলছেন লালুপ্রসাদ। সেই সঙ্গে এ বার প্রায় ১০০ কোটি টাকা কম পেনশন দিতে হবে। চলতি আর্থিক বছরে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারকে ডিভিডেন্ড দিয়েও রেলের হাতে ৮৭৩ কোটি টাকা থাকবে। এই হল রেলমন্ত্রীর হিসাব।

লালু জানিয়েছেন, তাঁর বাজেট গরিব, মধ্যবিত্ত ও বড়লোকদের জন্য। নিজস্ব ভঙ্গিতে সকলের স্বার্থ মেলাতে চেয়েছেন তিনি।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ার পরে গ্রামই যে তাঁর অগ্রাধিকার হবে তা স্পষ্ট করে দিয়েছিলেন মনমোহন সিংহ। আর লালুপ্রসাদও তাঁর রেলবাজেটে সাধারণ মানুষ ও গ্রামের স্বার্থের কথা পুরোদস্তুর মাথায় রেখেছেন। গ্রামের কৃষিজ পণ্য শহর ও দেশের বাজারে পৌঁছে দেওয়ার জন্য নতুন রেক্সিজারেটেড ট্রেন চালুর কথা ঘোষণা করেছেন। যাতে করে দুধ, শাকসবজি, ফলমূল গ্রাম থেকে দেশের বৃহত্তর বাজারে পৌঁছে দেওয়া যায়। এতে করে রেলের পণ্য পরিবহণের পরিমাণ অনেক বেড়ে যাবে। ঠিক একইভাবে পণ্যের উপর মাসুল না বাড়িয়ে বরং কিছু ছাড়ের কথাই বলেছেন রেলমন্ত্রী। সড়কপথ থেকে পণ্য রেলে নিয়ে আসতে চান লালু। সে জন্যই তিনি 'আক্রমণাত্মক বিপণন'-এর কথা বলেছেন। তারই সঙ্গে জোর দিয়েছেন রাজস্বের ক্ষতি বন্ধ করে দেওয়ার উপর। সাধারণ মানুষের জন্য রেলমন্ত্রী একগুচ্ছ সুযোগ-সুবিধার ঘোষণাও করেছেন। তার মধ্যে রয়েছে— ● অসংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রের কর্মীদের জন্য সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা তহবিল। রেলের মালবাহক, হকার,

ভেঙার, সাইকেল স্ট্যান্ড, স্টলের কর্মী এবং নির্মাণ কাজের সঙ্গে জড়িত কর্মীরা এতে উপকৃত হবেন। তারা স্বাস্থ্যবিমা যেমন পাবেন তেমনই ৫০০ টাকা পেনশনও পাবেন। ● সাধারণ লোকের কাছে পর্যটনের সুবিধা পৌঁছে দিতে 'ভিলেজ অন হুইলস'। ● স্লিপার ক্লাসে যাত্রীদের সুবিধার জন্য খাবার টেবিল, জলের বোতল ও ম্যাগাজিন রাখার ব্যবস্থা, আয়না ইত্যাদির ব্যবস্থা। ● অসংরক্ষিত টিকিট তিন দিন আগে থেকে দেওয়া হবে। ● রেলের জন্য শুধু মাত্র খাদি হস্তচালিত তাঁতের ব্যবহার। এতে গ্রামীণ কর্মসংস্থান বাড়বে বলে রেলমন্ত্রীর আশা।

পাশাপাশি লালু রেলের উন্নয়ন ও সুরক্ষার উপরও গুরুত্ব দিয়েছেন। বাদ দেননি যাত্রীসুবিধার বিষয়টিও। পাঁচটি খাতে রেলমন্ত্রী ২৬৯৬ কোটি টাকা ব্যয়বরাদ্দ করেছেন। এতে নতুন লাইন পাতার জন্য রয়েছে ৯৪৭ কোটি টাকা। গেজ পরিবর্তনের জন্য রয়েছে ৭৬০ কোটি টাকা। ডবল লাইনের জন্য ৪৭৯ কোটি, বৈদ্যুতিকরণের জন্য ১২৫ কোটি, মেট্রোপলিটান ট্রান্সপোর্ট প্রজেক্টের জন্য ৩৮৫ কোটি টাকা। এ ছাড়াও ৭১৭ কোটি টাকা দেবে রেল বিকাশ নিগম। রেল সুরক্ষা নিধি থেকে পাওয়া ২৭৫০ কোটি দিয়ে লাইন নবীকরণ, ৫২৮ কোটি দিয়ে সেতুর কাজ এবং ৮১৩ কোটি টাকা দিয়ে সিগনাল ও টেলি যোগাযোগ ব্যবস্থার উন্নতি করা হবে। রেলের আধুনিকীকরণের ব্যাপারেও বাজেটে বিস্তারিত বলেছেন লালুপ্রসাদ। তাতে রয়েছে রেলের ম্যানেজারদের প্রশিক্ষণের জন্য স্ট্র্যাটেজিক ম্যানেজমেন্ট ইনস্টিটিউট, কম্পিউটারচালিত ট্র্যাফিক কন্ট্রোল, পণ্যবাহী ওয়াগনের যাতায়াত সম্পর্কে তথ্য ব্যবস্থা, রেলে তথ্যপ্রযুক্তির প্রয়োগ-সহ একগুচ্ছ ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া।

আরও তিনটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ঘোষণা করেছেন রেলমন্ত্রী। প্রথমত, লোহার ছাঁট বিক্রি বন্ধ করা। এই ছাঁট বিক্রি নিয়ে রেল-মাকিয়াদির দৌরাত্ম্য দীর্ঘ দিনের। লালুর এই ঘোষণার ফলে তা বন্ধ হতে পারে। লালুর ঘোষণা, ছাঁট দিয়ে রেলের প্রয়োজনীয় জিনিস তৈরি হবে। দ্বিতীয়ত, রেলের চাকা তৈরির কারখানা খোলা। এখন টাকা বিদেশ থেকে আনতে হচ্ছে। এটা বন্ধ করতে কারখানা হবে লালুর ছাপরাতে। এবং তৃতীয়ত, পণ্য পরিবহণ বাড়াতে 'রোল অন রোল অফ' পরিষেবা বাড়ানো। এই পরিষেবা হল, পণ্যসহ ট্রাক রেলের ওয়াগনে উঠিয়ে দেওয়া এবং সেই ট্রাক গন্তব্যস্থলে নামিয়ে দেওয়া। এর জন্য বিশেষ ধরনের ওয়াগনও তৈরি হচ্ছে। যাত্রীসুবিধার জন্য ট্রেনে পরিবেশপন্থী নতুন ধরনের টয়লেট হবে। স্টেশনে পরিচ্ছন্ন টয়লেট, পরিষ্কার স্টেশন, টিকিট কেনার সুবিধা করে দিতে বাড়তি বুকিং উইন্ডো, প্লাটিফর্ম বাড়ানো, ফুট ব্রিজ ইত্যাদির জন্য লালু বাড়তি ২১৫ কোটি টাকা বরাদ্দ করেছেন।

তবে এই রেলবাজেটে আদ্যন্ত জড়িয়ে রয়েছেন 'রাজনীতিক' লালুপ্রসাদ। যিনি বাজেট পেশের সময়ও মাথায় রেখেছেন বিহারের আসন্ন বিধানসভা নির্বাচন। বিহারের জন্য একাধিক প্রকল্পের কথা তিনি ঘোষণা করেছেন। ছাপরায় রেলের চাকা তৈরির নতুন কারখানা, জামালপুরের রেল কারখানাকে বেশি করে ব্যবহার করার কথা বলেছেন। আর গ্রাম এবং তফসিলি এবং অনগ্রসরদের জন্য ব্যবস্থা নিয়ে ভোটের আগে লালু নিজেকে রাজনৈতিক দিক দিয়ে সুবিধাজনক জায়গায় নিয়ে গেলেন বলে বিরোধীরা মনে করছে।





# Rail Minister Pampers Home State; Unemployed Youth, Coolies And Licensed Porters Benefit

## Lalu follows Nitish tracks but scraps 3 projects

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 6 JULY

**R**AILWAY minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, on Tuesday, broadly stuck to the road map laid out by his predecessor and political rival Nitish Kumar. But he departed from the script in one place, where his budget chose to remain silent on the rural rail connectivity programme; the project for in-house generation of power for the Railways; and the establishment of a new process for RPF recruitments — some of the key initiatives aimed at ensuring the fiscal health of the Railways and introducing trans-

of “new Sampark Kranti trains” — despite the touch of drama — were promises made by Mr Kumar in his budget. That he did not have his way with the railway babudom became clear when he failed to specify the dates from which the Sampark Kranti trains, connecting Delhi to various state capitals, would become operational. The traffic establishment of the Railways has doubts about the viability of these new trains. Due to these reservations, the minister merely stated that “the frequency of the trains will be decided depending on their patronage.”

The three major aberrations — no fresh allocations for rural con-



parency in its functioning.

While the budget gave a big “thank you” to the electorate — never mind the huge fuel bill — by refraining from hiking fares, it had some special elements aimed at satisfying Mr Yadav’s own political constituency. Although low on populism, his budget promised full concessions in the second class for unemployed youth appearing for government job interviews; Rs 5 crore for improving the shelters of licensed porters and financing free passes for coolies; and a social security net for licensed porters. He said OBCs would get special attention in Group C and D jobs and announced a drive for clearing the backlog of reserved vacancies for his own caste brethren.

Mr Yadav could not make any major political statements against the previous government as the budget was mainly a reiteration of the commitments and promises made in Mr Kumar’s interim budget. Even the announcement

nectivity, setting up the power project and taking measures for RPF recruitment — must be worrying for those who expected Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to keep the railways firmly on the reforms track. While the decision will increase the scope for individual discretion in appointments — this job was assigned to the Railway Recruitment Board by the previous government — the decision to abandon the power project will hinder efforts to improve the financial health of the Railways.

An MoU was signed between the railways and NTPC to generate 2,000 MW from a joint venture project. The project planned to set up power plants to meet the railways’ energy requirement. The project was to be commissioned in five years’ time. Apart from capacity addition, the tie-up was viewed as something that would help Indian Railways save close to Rs 1,000 crore per annum on its energy bill.

## Bihar package stays in car shed

Team ET  
6 JULY

**I**N the end, he acknowledged that he was the railway minister and not just the Union minister for Bihar. While presenting his maiden railway budget, Lalu Prasad Yadav, on Tuesday, more or less resisted the two eternal temptations of railway ministers: to play parochial and populist.

Though Mr Yadav refused to unleash a “Bihar package,” he pampered his home-state with some projects and trains. The most notable project that he has gifted to Bihar is for his Chhapra Lok Sabha constituency in the form of a new rail wheel factory. This should be seen as a thanksgiving for his voters who stood by him in his bitter fight against former civil aviation minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy. The factory is to come up in Parsa, a Yadav-dominated Assembly constituency of Chhapra. In this segment, an overwhelming 75% of the electorate voted for Mr Yadav in the just concluded polls.

The political touch of Mr Yadav came in



the form of new sets of concessions on humanitarian grounds. These include a 75% concession for widows of policemen and para-military personnel killed in action against terrorists, a 50% concession for the deaf and dumb on first, second and sleeper classes as well as in season tickets. The same facility has been extended to an escort of

these sections. Patients of haemophilia can avail a 75% concession. By making provisions for the free travel of unemployed youth to attend interviews of government jobs, Mr Yadav, who started his career as a student leader of Patna university, tried to appease one of the biggest constituencies: the youth. Mr Yadav also tried to give a healing touch to the lowest rank in the Railway family; the porters (coolies).

He has earmarked Rs 50 crore to provide shelters at stations to coolies who often end up without a place to take rest. Even though coolies are not railway servants, Mr Yadav announced that the existing facility of one set of privilege pass for licensed porters from the station of working to any station of Indian Railways and back in second/sleeper class has been extended to the spouse of the porter too.

He has also extended the reach of the existing social security scheme for the unorganised sector workers to include porters, vendors, hawkers, people working in stalls, cycle stands and construction workers.

## Recruitment board cannot hire RPF

Team ET  
6 JULY

**T**HE more things change, the more they remain the same. Five years after Nitish Kumar scrapped the recruitment of Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel by an in-house group and routed it via the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB), Lalu Prasad Yadav, on Tuesday, transferred it back to the RPF kitty.

The railways had done away with direct recruitment in the face of a huge controversy and court-cases, with allegations of corruption in the recruitment procedure. However, Mr Yadav decided to revert back to the old and failed procedure, saying that this “will expedite the availability of manpower and strengthen the force.”

However, many felt that when the procedure was tried in the past, by which the railway security officers’ committee was handed over the right to recruit the new entries, the main causality was transparency. Some of them recollected how applicants then challenged the procedure in the court, resulting in a messy affair, prompting the Railways to abandon the procedure and hand over the recruitment procedure to the RRBs.

## PARTY-ING SHOTS

### Political parties react differently

Team ET  
6 JULY

**T**HE railway budget tabled in Parliament on Tuesday evoked a mixed response from political parties, with the Opposition dubbing it as “nothing new” and “anti-development,” while UPA allies said it was moving in “the right direction.”

“There is nothing new in the budget. Railway minister Lalu Prasad has only repeated what had been stated in the earlier budget of running 18 new trains,” JD(U) leader Prabhunath Singh said. However, BJP parliamentary spokesman V.K. Malhotra termed the budget as “anti-development.” People will have to face the brunt since parcel rates would be increased, Mr Malhotra said.

He also took a dig at Mr Yadav’s idea to introduce kulhars (earthen cups) against plastic cups and khadi for the upholstery. “This is nothing but a drama,” the party spokesman said.

## UPA allies’ states to get more attention

Team ET  
6 JULY

**U**NION railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav has not ignored the allies of the UPA in his budget. He has doled out goodies for their states. The RJD leader brought smiles to the Left, NCP and DMK. The Left bastions of Kerala and West Bengal, besides Tamil Nadu, figure among the seven states where the minister has promised funds for ongoing works. He has identified them as states where there has been a “perceived sense of neglect” about railway development work.

The 12 new trains introduced, around five involve Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, while half the 12 increase in frequencies of trains connect West Bengal, Maharashtra and Kerala from various destinations. The new trains include Chennai-Nagercoil, Chennai-Kumbakonam, Chennai-Hubli and Chennai-Tenkasi-Sengottai express. The frequencies of New-Delhi-Sealdah Rajdhani express, Bangalore-Mumbai Chalukya Express, Sealdah-Alipurduar Kanchankanya Express, Sealdah-Amritsar Akal Takht Express, Pune-Howrah Azad Hind Express and Patna-Ernakulam Express are proposed to be increased in the budget.

A pilot project is being proposed at an estimated cost of Rs 2 crore linking Howrah and Delhi in the major parcel corridor of New Delhi-Howrah-Guwahati.

# পিএফের টাকা ফেরত পান না অর্ধেক কর্মীই

## ৮১০০ কোটি টাকার গাফিলতি চাকতে তথ্য গোপনের চেষ্টা

প্রজ্ঞানন্দ চৌধুরী

প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুবিধাপ্রাপ্ত প্রতি ১০০ জন কর্মীর মধ্যে ৫০ জনই টাকা ফেরত পান না। প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড-কর্তৃপক্ষ ওই সব সদস্যের টাকা দীর্ঘদিন ধরে 'দাবিহীন' বলে চিহ্নিত করে ফেলে রেখেছেন। পি এফ দফতরের সাম্প্রতিক এক বিশেষ অডিট রিপোর্টে প্রকাশ, এই দাবিহীন তহবিলের অর্থ জমতে জমতে ৮,১০০ কোটি টাকায় গিয়ে ঠেকেছে। যদিও ২০০২-'০৩ সালের হিসাবপত্রে মাত্র ৬৩৪ কোটি ৫৬ লক্ষ টাকা দাবিহীন বলে দেখিয়েছেন কর্তৃপক্ষ। ওই রিপোর্টেই বলা হয়েছে, পি এফের মোট সদস্যের অর্ধেকের টাকাই এই খাতে পড়ে রয়েছে। অর্থাৎ দেশের প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুবিধাভোগী মোট শ্রমিক-কর্মীর অর্ধেকই তাঁদের গচ্ছিত টাকা ফেরত পান না।

ওই বিশেষ অডিট রিপোর্টে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের যে-চিত্র প্রকাশিত হয়েছে, দফতরের বার্ষিক হিসাবপত্রের সঙ্গে কয়েকটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ক্ষেত্রে তার আকাশপাতাল ফারাক রয়েছে। এর একটি হল "অনক্রেমড ডিপোজিট" বা 'দাবিহীন তহবিল' নিয়ে। প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের নিয়ম অনুযায়ী তিন বছর ধরে কোনও কর্মীর টাকা জমা না-পড়লে এবং তিনি জমা টাকা তুলে না-নিলে ওই টাকা 'দাবিহীন' বলে চিহ্নিত হয়ে তহবিলে জমা পড়ে। ২০০২-'০৩ আর্থিক বছরে এই খাতে ৬৩৪ কোটি ৫৬ লক্ষ দেখিয়েছিলেন পি এফ-কর্তৃপক্ষ। যা প্রকৃত অঙ্কের আট শতাংশও নয়। তার আগের বছর, ২০০১-'০২ সালে দাবিহীন বলে মাত্র ৩৮১ কোটি ৯১ লক্ষ টাকার কথা উল্লেখ করা হয়েছিল হিসাবপত্রে।

তা হলে কেন এত দিন ওই তথ্য গোপন করা হয়েছে, তার কোনও সদুত্তর দেননি প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড-কর্তৃপক্ষ। কেন্দ্রীয় পি এফ কমিশনার অজয় সিংহ শুধু স্বীকার করেছেন, "বিশেষ অডিট রিপোর্টের সঙ্গে এ ক্ষেত্রে ব্যালান্স শিটের ফারাক রয়েছে। আমরা বিষয়টি খতিয়ে দেখছি।"

পি এফ দফতর সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, 'দাবিহীন' তহবিলে যে-অর্থ জমা রয়েছে, তার অধিকাংশই দৈনিক মজুরির ভিত্তিতে নিযুক্ত বা ক্যাঙ্ক্যাল কর্মীদের। যাঁদের ১৯৯০ সালে গোড়ায় আইন পরিবর্তন করে সামাজিক সুরক্ষার আওতায় এনেছিল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। এর আগে নিয়ম অনুযায়ী কোনও ছেদ ছাড়া ন্যূনতম ২৪০ দিন কর্মরত থাকলে তবেই কোনও কর্মী প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুবিধা পেতেন। প্রায়ই দেখা যেত, কর্মীদের এই সুবিধা থেকে বঞ্চিত করার জন্য নিয়োগকারীরা টানা ২৪০ দিন কর্মীদের কাজ দিতেন না। আইনের এই ফাঁকের ফলে লক্ষ লক্ষ কর্মী পি এফের সুবিধা পেতেন না।

এই ব্যবস্থার অবসান হয় ১৯৯০ সালে। ওই বছর কেন্দ্র ১৯৫২ সালের 'এমপ্লয়িজ প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড অ্যান্ড মিসেলেনিয়াস প্রভিশনস অ্যাক্ট' পরিবর্তন করেছিল। সংশোধিত

### যে টাকার দাবি নেই

বার্ষিক হিসাবপত্র অনুযায়ী

২০০০-০১

৩৫১ কোটি ৬২ লক্ষ

২০০১-০২

৩৮১ কোটি ৯১ লক্ষ

২০০২-০৩

৬৩৪ কোটি ৫৬ লক্ষ

বিশেষ অডিট রিপোর্ট অনুযায়ী

৮১০০ কোটি (২০০২-০৩)

এই আইনের আওতায় নথিভুক্ত সংস্থায় কোনও কর্মী এক দিনের জন্য নিয়োগ হলেও প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুবিধা পাবেন বলে স্থির হয়েছিল। এর ফলে স্বাভাবিক কারণেই রাতারাতি দেশে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুবিধাপ্রাপ্ত কর্মীর সংখ্যা বহু গুণ বেড়ে যায়।

কিন্তু যে-সব কর্মীর সামাজিক সুরক্ষার আওতায় আনার জন্য সরকার ওই আইন পরিবর্তন করেছিল, প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড-কর্তৃপক্ষের গাফিলতিতে সেই কর্মীদের একটা বিরাট অংশ ওই সুবিধা থেকে বঞ্চিত হয়ে চলেছেন। বরং নতুন ব্যবস্থায় তাঁদের বেতনের একটা অংশ কেটে নিয়ে পি এফ জমা দেওয়া সম্ভেও সেই টাকা তাঁরা ফেরত পাচ্ছেন না। পি এফ দফতরের কেউ কেউ মেনে নিয়েছেন যে, সুবিধা দিতে গিয়ে লক্ষ লক্ষ শ্রমিক-কর্মীকে কার্যত আর্থিক ক্ষতির মুখে ঠেলে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

ওই সব কর্মীর বেতন থেকে টাকা কেটে রাখা হলেও তাঁরা চাকরি ছাড়ার পরে তা ফেরত দেওয়ার ব্যাপারে কার্যকর ব্যবস্থা নেননি পি এফ-কর্তৃপক্ষ। এর ফলেই ওই সব কর্মীদের টাকায় 'দাবিহীন' তহবিলের পরিমাণ দ্রুত স্ফীত হয়ে উঠেছে বলে পি এফ দফতর সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে।

বর্তমান আইন অনুযায়ী দৈনিক মজুরির ভিত্তিতে নিযুক্ত এবং ক্যাঙ্ক্যাল কর্মীদের বেতন থেকে টাকা কেটে নিয়োগকারী পি এফ দফতরে জমা দেন। নিয়োগকারীও সমপরিমাণ টাকা দেন। কিন্তু দৈনিক ভিত্তিতে নিযুক্ত এবং ক্যাঙ্ক্যাল কর্মীদের অনেকেই এক জায়গায় বেশি দিন কাজ করেন না। কিছু দিন কাজ করার পরে তাঁরা অন্যত্র কাজে যোগ দেন। অনেক সময় ওই সব কর্মী জানতেই পারেন না যে, তাঁদের বেতন থেকে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের টাকা কেটে নেওয়া হয়েছে। পি এফের সদস্য নম্বর বা অন্য সব তথ্যের সন্ধানও তাঁরা অন্ধকারে থাকেন। পি এফ দফতর সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, প্রধানত ওই সব কর্মীর টাকাই দাবিহীন অবস্থায় 'অনক্রেমড ডিপোজিট অ্যাকাউন্ট'-এ জমা পড়ে থাকে।

এক দিকে কর্মীদের মধ্যে তহবিলের জটিল নিয়ম নিয়ে অজ্ঞতা, অন্য দিকে নিয়ম সরলীকরণের মাধ্যমে এই টাকা ফেরত দেওয়ার ব্যাপারে পি এফ-কর্তৃপক্ষের কার্যকর উদ্যোগের অভাব, দুইয়ে মিলিয়ে প্রতিশ্রুত সামাজিক সুরক্ষার ছিটেফোঁটাও পৌঁছচ্ছে না লক্ষ লক্ষ অস্থায়ী কর্মীর কাছে।

এই পরিস্থিতিতে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড-কর্তৃপক্ষ 'দাবিহীন' তহবিলের প্রকৃত চিত্র কেন গোপন করে এসেছেন, সেই প্রশ্ন উঠতে শুরু করেছে। কন্ট্রোলার অ্যান্ড অডিটর জেনারেল (সি এ জি) যে-বার্ষিক হিসাবপত্র অডিট করে থাকে, সেই নথিতে কী করে এমন গুরুতর অসঙ্গতি থেকে গিয়েছে, প্রশ্ন উঠেছে সেই ব্যাপারেও। সংসদ-সহ গোটা দেশের লক্ষ লক্ষ কর্মীর কাছ থেকে এই তথ্য গোপন করা হল কেন, এমনতর কোনও প্রশ্নেরই অবশ্য উত্তর মেলেনি পি এফ-কর্তৃপক্ষের কাছে।

## মিলছে না বাজেটের

## সাহায্য, সুদ কমে

## দাঁড়াচ্ছে ৮ শতাংশে

দীপেন্দ্র রায়চৌধুরী • নয়াদিল্লি

৫ জুলাই: শেষ মুহূর্তে রাজনৈতিক চাপের কাছে সরকার নতিস্বীকার না-করলে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডে সুদের হার ৮ শতাংশে নামতে চলেছে। এখন হার ৯.৫ শতাংশ। সুদের হার পড়ার কারণ, বিজেপি জমানার মতোই অর্থমন্ত্রক এ বারও বাজেটে পি এফ বাবদ অতিরিক্ত অর্থ বরাদ্দ করবে না। তহবিলের টাকার ৮০ শতাংশ যেখানে বিনিয়োগ করা হয়, সরকারের সেই স্পেশাল ডিপোজিট স্কিমের সুদের হারও বাজেটে ৮ শতাংশ থেকে বাড়ানো হবে না। অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম এ কথা শ্রমমন্ত্রী শিবরাম ওলাকে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন। সুদের হারে এই পরিবর্তন সরকারের সঙ্গে বামপন্থীদের প্রথম প্রকৃত সংঘাত তৈরি করতে চলেছে। বিমানবন্দরের বেসরকারীকরণ নিয়ে বামেরা সরব হলেও বিষয়টির উত্তাপ ততটা ছড়ায়নি। কিন্তু সিটি ও এইটাকের নেতারা জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, সুদের হার কমানো হলে তাঁরা বরদাস্ত করবেন না। সিপিআইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক এ বি বর্ধন আগেই বলেছেন, সুদের হার শূন্য দশমিক এক শতাংশও কমানো চলবে না।

শ্রম মন্ত্রক আশা করছিল, চিদম্বরম স্পেশাল ডিপোজিট স্কিমে সুদের হার ৯ শতাংশ করতে পারেন। কিন্তু এখন আর সেই আশাও নেই। চিদম্বরম যখন বাজেট পড়বেন তখন তিনি যদি ওই প্রকল্পে সুদের হারে পরিবর্তনের কথা উল্লেখ না-করেন, তা হলে সুদের হার ৮ শতাংশই থেকে যাবে। শ্রম মন্ত্রক সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, অর্থমন্ত্রীর কথার ভিত্তিতে তাঁরা পি এফ বোর্ডের পরবর্তী বৈঠকের (১৬ জুলাই) জন্য কাগজপত্র তৈরি করতে শুরু করে দিয়েছেন। মন্ত্রক সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, অবস্থার পরিবর্তন হতে পারে শুধু রাজনৈতিক কারণে (অর্থাৎ সমর্থক বামপন্থীরা অনড় হলে)।

অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম শ্রম মন্ত্রককে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন যে স্পেশাল ডিপোজিট স্কিমে সুদের হার ৮ শতাংশে ধরে রাখা ছাড়া আর কোনও সহায়তা তাঁর পক্ষে দেওয়া সম্ভব নয়। শ্রমমন্ত্রীকে তিনি বলেছেন, এর পর তাঁরা কত শতাংশ সুদ দিবেন এবং কী ভাবে তা দিবেন সেটা তাঁদের ব্যাপার। শ্রম মন্ত্রক সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, আরও বেশি সুদ দিতে হলে তাঁদের আরও বেশি সুদ পেতে হবে। তার একমাত্র উপায় শেয়ার বাজারে টাকা খাটানো। কিন্তু সেটা করে বেশি আয় করা যেমন সম্ভব, তেমনিই আয়ে ষাটতিও হতে পারে।

এ ব্যাপারে কংগ্রেসের টেড ইউনিয়ন শাখা ইনটাকের বক্তব্য হল, টাকা লাভজনক ভাবে বিনিয়োগ করে যতটা আয় করা যাবে, ততটাই সুদ দেওয়ার রীতি চালু করা হোক। কিন্তু বামপন্থীরা তাতে নারাজ। তাঁদের মতে শেয়ার বাজার হল ফাটকার জায়গা। কিন্তু সুদের হার পড়ে গেলে তাঁরা কী করবেন? এইটাকের সাধারণ সম্পাদক গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত জানিয়েছেন, "আমরা ১২ তারিখে সমস্ত কেন্দ্রীয় টেড ইউনিয়নকে আলোচনায় আমন্ত্রণ জানিয়েছি। সুদের হার কমানো আমরা মেনে নেব না। সিটির অন্যতম সম্পাদক এবং পি এফ ট্রাস্টি বোর্ডের সদস্য ওয়াই এস বরদারাজন বলেছেন, "সুদের হার কমাতে সরকার মানুষের রায়কে সম্মান জানাতে ব্যর্থ হবে।" উভয় নেতাই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, সুদের হার কমাতে তাঁরা সংঘাতের পথে যেতে বাধ্য হবেন।

# Field study opens Singh's eyes

IANNS  
Hyderabad, July 1

HE IS an economist born into a farmer's family. Yet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh admitted he had never before learnt so much about farmers' economic woes as he did today. And from people who spoke a language he didn't understand.

The barriers of language and status fell apart as tearful widows and children of Andhra Pradesh's dead farmers lined up to tell the Prime Minister how failed crops had driven their husbands and fathers to end their lives. With Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy as a translator, Singh got a "first-hand" account of their sufferings since the death of the breadwinners in their families.

Ishtamma summed it up best when the economist-politician asked her what help she might need. The widow simply replied, "You know better." At the end of his two-and-a-half hour visit to Kurnool's Somayajulapalle village, the Prime Minister acknowledged that he now did.

Ishtamma's husband Chinna Narayana had taken a Rs 100,000 loan, the



Manmohan Singh with a Kurnool farmer's widow on Thursday.

villagers told Singh. Serial crop failures had swelled his debt burden, driving him to suicide four years ago. When the widow told him her three teenage sons were working in hotels, the Prime Minister asked her to send them to school.

Many of the women broke down before Singh, the first VIP to visit the village and comfort them in six years. Some asked

for jobs; the others for houses. A moved Singh tried to console some of them by placing his hand on their heads and promising to help in every way he could.

Parvatamma, whose husband had drunk poison recently, was perhaps the luckiest among the widows: she received a cheque for Rs 150,000 and will see a house built for her in three days.

## Rescue Package

**Rs 2 LAKH** (Rs 50,000 from Centre and Rs 1.5 lakh from AP govt) for each family where a member has committed suicide. PM asks public sector banks to provide jobs to at least one member of such families

**Rs 1.65-CR** package for the village: 100 houses under the Indira Awaas Yojana; construction of a minor irrigation tank, roads and drainage; upgrading the village school; a water supply scheme

Shivamma, mother of three, asked for a government job for her son-in-law. At this, Reddy turned to Singh to say: "Sir, you know the position (of government jobs). We shall ask the bank to arrange a loan to create jobs."

The Prime Minister announced banks will help provide a job to at least one member of each family one of whose members had committed suicide.

# Andhra farmers' reality bewilders PM

Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD, July 1. — Dr Manmohan Singh was today bewildered after his interaction with the families of those farmers who committed suicide after being caught in debt traps in Andhra Pradesh. He immediately increased the relief package for them by Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh. This was his first trip to the state after becoming the Prime Minister.

By the end of his visit to the state, Dr Singh also announced a package of Rs 45 lakh for the development of Dharmapur, a backward village in Mehboob Nagar district.

"How is she living?" Dr Singh asked anxiously after Mrs Eshwaramma narrated how her husband committed suicide in 1998, leaving her with an outstanding debt of Rs 7-8 lakh.

When he heard this amount, the Prime Minister blinked in disbelief. She replied that she was "managing" with a PCO booth. Dr Singh asked chief minister Dr YS Rajashakar Reddy, who was helping in translation during Dr Singh's interaction with the families, about what else Mrs Eshwaramma wanted. When she asked for a job for her son, Dr Reddy said he would try to get him a government job or else would certainly get him a self-employment project.

Setting protocol and practice aside, Dr Reddy escorted Dr Singh down the dais where the family members of the 51 farmers who committed suicide were seated and introduced them to the distinguished guest.

Later, Dr Singh walked into the tent at Somayajulapalle in Kurnool district, where some affected families were lined up,



A villager breaks down while talking to Dr Manmohan Singh. — PTI

with his characteristic genial smile. But after meeting four families, his forehead was

Nagamani, narrated how they were staying at their paternal aunt's home after their father committed suicide. Their mother had died much earlier.

Ms Lakshmi Devi broke down while narrating her story of having an outstanding debt of Rs 1.5 lakh. She is finding it impossible to repay as her tomato crop on a two-acre land is not selling for much since tomato prices crashed two years ago. Her husband had killed himself in 1998. Dr Singh sighed and patted her head and asked: "What do you need from us?" She said she needed a house and he directed the district collector to accord immediate sanction to her under the Indira Awas Yojana.

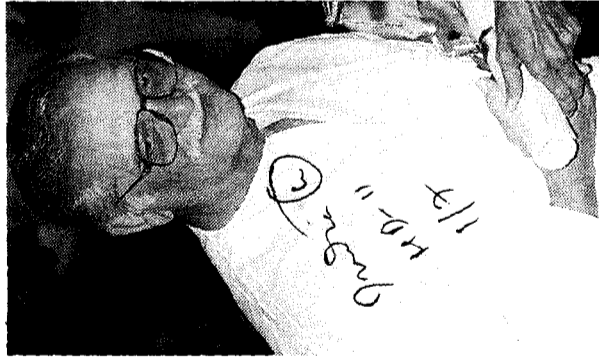
Ms Boyamma, who was there with her daughter in law, said she still has a debt of Rs 80,000. Her husband committed suicide when he failed to trace water

after sinking four tube wells. Dr Singh asked her: "In the last four years, did you get any help from the government?" She replied in the negative. Dr Singh asked Dr Reddy to explain further.

Dr Reddy said the earlier TDP government did nothing. "Sir, they did not give any money to them." Dr Singh said: "Now we are giving you a loan of Rs 1 lakh."

Soon after, the Prime Minister told the gathering that the relief package has been extended, that one in every victim's family would get a job, and there would be homes for all such families and education for their children. All these would be monitored directly by the PMO.

Dr Singh announced a few schemes for the village and haltingly said: "I understand your misery, pain and trauma, which cannot be compensated."



President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam presents the Padma Vibhushan award to the former Chief Justice of India, M.N. Venkatachaliah, in New Delhi on Wednesday. Others receiving the Padma awards from right are: actor Anupam Kher (Padma Shri), Bengali film director Soumitra Chatterjee, (Padma Bhushan) lyricist Gulzar (Padma Bhushan).

## President gives away Padma awards

**NEW DELHI, JUNE 30.** The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, today conferred Padma awards on 86 eminent personalities from various walks of life.

The second-highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan, was given to the former Chief

Justice of India, M.N. Venkatachaliah, while the other two awardees — poet and novelist Amrita Pritam and astronomer and astrophysicist Jayant Vinti Narlikar — did not turn up. Gulzar, lyricist and writer; Gopichand Naran, Urdu schol-

ar; M.V. Kamath, journalist; T.N. Seshagopalan, music composer; and N. Rajam, violinist, were among the 17 who received the Padma Bhushan. Yoshiro Mori, who was chosen for the award for promoting India-Japan friendship, was absent.

The cricket captain, Sourav Ganguly, and the vice-captain, Rahul Dravid, singer A. Hariharan, actor Anupam Kher, Tamil filmmaker Bharati Rajaa, Mohiniattam exponent Bharati Shivaji, cartoonist Sudhir Tailang and athlete K.M. Beenamol

were among the 74 Padma Shri awardees. The President presented a medal and a certificate to each awardee. Mr. Kalam came down the podium at least 14 times whenever the recipients were elderly or had difficulty in walking. — PTI

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