

# 'Bourgeois UPA driving Left into corner'

UPA & VK

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 30

**T**HE Left parties today called for a political and economic alternative through greater unity among themselves, slamming the Congress-led UPA Government for "marginalising" them and pursuing economic reforms.

Senior leaders of the CPI(M), RSP and Forward Bloc suggested keeping the doors open to regional parties and agreed on a "higher level of unity" among them and to work for expanding their spheres of influence in the Hindi heartland and western parts of the country.

CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan and his CPI(M)

counterpart Harkishen Singh Surjeet and other Left leaders said their support to the UPA was a "political necessity" but such backing was not for ever as it can be reviewed if the alliance deviated from the common minimum programme.

Bardhan said although Congress has accepted the inevitability of the coalition at the Centre, "many of its leaders remain in old mindset and were trying to expand their political space ignoring other allies of the UPA and the Left parties".

RSP's Abani Roy alleged the Congress' design was to weaken the Left in Bengal and charged the party with hobnobbing with the Trinamool.

Bardhan said despite some corrective steps taken by the UPA regime, particularly in ed-



**CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan with his CPI(M) counterpart Harkishen Singh Surjeet at the CPI's 19th party congress in Chandigarh on Wednesday. PTI**

ucation, foreign policy and agriculture, "we are under no illusion. The UPA government is a bourgeois government... It seems to believe that continuing with economic reforms with

**I** More rungs, 'working class' cadre

**SHAFI RAHMAN**  
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 30

**T**HE CPI is planning to add new rungs to its organisational ladder and effect more radical changes in social composition of the "proletarian" party with induction of "working class" members. At its 19th congress, the party will discuss a proposal to create more posts.

To start with, it will roll out a red carpet for a new deputy general secretary. Andhra Pradesh CPI leader Sudhakar Reddy is the most likely candidate for the new post as the party plans to give him a national profile and experience in Delhi politics. "Conscious ef-

fort must be made for preparing a second rank leadership of comrades, mainly at the central and state levels, who will be ready and equipped to assure the leadership at proper time... Young comrades should be prepared for this," says the organisational report to be presented by general secretary A.B. Bardhan on Friday.

The party is also worried about its social composition — a perusal of the last session's credential report shows that of 660 delegates, only 192 were from the working class. "Party must make efforts to recruit members from SC, ST and backward class sections of the society and all minorities," says the report.

# BJP accuses UPA of variant voices

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 29 MARCH

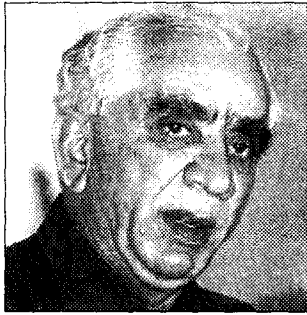
**T**HE BJP on Tuesday accused the UPA government of speaking in different voices on the sale of F-16 fighter aircraft by the United States to Pakistan — a proposal which, the party alleged, would provoke arms race in the sub-continent.

"This government is speaking in discordant voices. There is no unified, co-ordinated approach," charged former external affairs minister Jaswant Singh, adding, "the government of

India, first of all, needs to clarify what the PMO meant when it let it be known that the prime minister had expressed great disappointment about this deal to President George Bush. Why this great disappointment when, just hours later, the ministry of external affairs officially conveyed a

different message on the issue?"

Mr Singh, while speaking to newsmen on the US offer, sought to highlight the differences between the PMO, on the one hand, and the Union defence and external affairs ministries on the other, and again, between the Congress and the Left parties, which are the ruling coalition's main prop.



JASWANT SINGH: BLAME GAME

"If the Prime Minister says that we don't know what is being offered, it is a worrisome development. This amounts to saying 'I don't know what is happening,'" the senior BJP leader maintained. "We

want to express our dissatisfaction over the manner in which the present government has responded to the American offer to Pakistan. The feeling becomes more acute when we're told that the government knew that this was in the pipeline," Mr Singh pointed out.

# Don't buy F-16s, LF tells govt

## 'It will fuel arms race'

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, March 28

THE CPI(M) on Monday was critical of the government's positive reaction to the US offer to sell F-16s to India even as New Delhi kept up with its criticism of the US's decision to supply Pakistan with the fighter jets.

The CPI(M) cautioned the Centre that the deal would "fuel" an arms race between India and Pakistan.

The party politburo said, "The game of the Bush administration is clear. It intends to draw India into a strategic military relationship just as Pakistan has been involved in one for decades."

Commenting on defence minister Pranab Mukherjee's statement calling the US offer to sell F-16s to India a "positive development," the party said the government should be wary of such offers. First, India was accessing defence equipment from a number of countries and experience showed the US could not be relied upon to be a dependable supplier.

Second, the US was trying to draw India into its global strategic plans by asking the country to join the missile defence system. India should reject the proposal outright as joining the system would be tantamount to becoming a junior partner of the USA.

The party said India should not get involved in a strategic military alliance with the US at the cost of pursuing an independent foreign policy and forging closer ties with all major countries including China. An independent policy was also required

to ensure the success of the India, Pakistan and Iran gas pipeline project.

Meanwhile, keeping up the criticism of the US's decision to supply Pakistan with F-16s, the defence minister termed the decision as "ill-timed and inappropriate." "The US decision to supply F-16s to Pakistan at this point is inappropriate and ill-timed since the two countries are engaged in a composite dialogue on improving bilateral relations," Mukherjee told reporters in Kolkata on the sidelines of the annual general meeting of the Indian Chamber of Commerce.

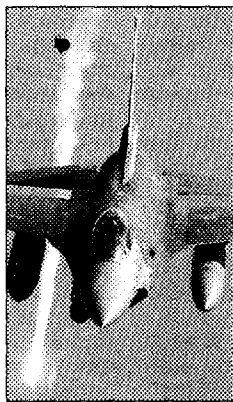
Mukherjee said the F-16s were not for use for fighting terrorism but for waging a full-fledged war. Pakistan's track record proved that it has never fired a single shot towards any other country except India, he said.

Asked to comment on the US offer of selling military hardware to India, Mukherjee said that such an offer had never been made before.

He said that India would consider the offer to procure defence equipment keeping in view the requirements of the three services.

The Congress has called upon the US Congress to keep Pakistan's track record as a nuclear proliferator in mind before clearing the sale of the fighter jets.

"The US decision to sell F-16 is not only disappointing but also a matter of serious concern... It violates the long-stated policies of the US government as Pakistan is known for nuclear proliferation", party spokesman Anand Sharma told reporters.



# PMO nips Modi claim

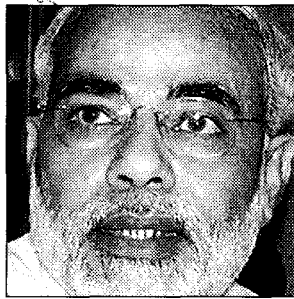
OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 26: Narendra Modi's second attempt to embroil Manmohan Singh in the controversy over foreign trips has not gone down well with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Aware of the efforts of the Gujarat chief minister and the BJP to use for political ends Singh's statement in Parliament against the US for denying Modi a visa, the PMO moved fast to nip a rerun in the bud.

Modi claimed on Thursday night that he had called off his UK trip on the "advice" of the Prime Minister following a phone call from Singh. The following morning, the PMO denied that Singh had called Modi.

The chief minister's office gave the impression that he was informed by the Prime Minister that there were intelligence reports from central



Modi

agencies of a "threat" to his life from radical Islamic groups which have a strong presence in the UK.

The official version from Gandhinagar was that if Modi still wished to go ahead, the Prime Minister advised the Gujarat police chief to set up a control room and coordinate with the British high commission and the Indian security establishment.

According to the Prime Minister's media adviser, Sanjaya Baru, Singh did not phone Modi. He also denied that the

Centre had any information on any kind of terrorist threat to Modi.

Baru said it was home minister Shivraj Patil who called Modi to tell him that as the Gujarat chief minister was going on a private visit, the UK government was not in a position to provide him with any kind of security.

Patil informed Modi that there were apprehensions of a law and order problem and, therefore, it was advisable for him to reconsider his decision to visit London.

Making it clear that the decision to call off the trip was Modi's, Baru said that thereafter, the chief minister rang up the Prime Minister to inform him that the trip had been called off.

Modi stuck to his guns and insisted that Singh had advised him to postpone the trip. A spokesperson for the chief minister described as "highly unfortunate the denial of the facts" by the PMO.

# Natwar to remind Yangon on oil deal

**PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

**A**TURNAROUND by Yangon on its earlier commitment to allow Indian oil and gas companies to carry out on-shore exploration in Myanmar will be high on External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh's agenda during his four-day visit to the country starting Thursday.

It's learnt that Myanmar has retracted from its earlier position to allow a consortium of Oil India Ltd, Gas Authority of India Ltd and Indian Oil Corporation to place bids for exploration activity in blocks RSF5,

RSF6 and RSF9. This was conveyed as late as March 7 while the bids were to be placed by mid-March. The fax from Myanmar's Ministry of Energy on March 7 said its government had decided to reserve on-shore exploration for Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, a state-owned company. In other words, doors have been shut to foreign companies to pick up on-shore blocks.

The denial came as a rude shock to the Indian consortium which had finalised its bids after an official delegation of Myanmarese energy representatives headed by a deputy minister met the Petroleum Secretary here on February 18-19.



**Madagascar Foreign Affairs Minister with External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI**

Subsequently, India which has apparently been evinced interest to bid for exploration in the RSF6 block, pany. The Myanmarese dele-

gation, which was accompanied by Myanmar's envoy here, agreed to this and made an offer last month. A technical team then visited Myanmar to seek more clarifications and returned on March 5. But two days later, sources said, they were stumped by this fax from Yangon shutting out exploration to foreign companies.

Singh will look to draw Yangon's attention to its earlier commitment and underline India's interest in furthering oil and gas exploration activity in Myanmar. Sources said the reasons for Yangon's turnaround are still unclear though there are doubts over MOGE's financial links with

other East Asian countries. ONGC Videsh Ltd has picked up stakes in A1 and A3 blocks for off-shore exploration. But here again, problems have cropped up in the A3 block where Daewoo too is involved. In this context, India will re-emphasise its willingness to iron out differences and strengthen the bilateral relationship as envisioned during Myanmar Head of State Than Shwe's visit last October. Besides this, India is said to be working out a defence package for Yangon. Sources said New Delhi will show its inclination to help Yangon in rooting out camps of N-E insurgents on its side of the border.

# Left Gives In To Pranab Magic, LS Passes Patent Bill

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 22 MARCH

THE Patents (Amendment) Bill, which was seen as a test case of the Manmohan Singh government's ability to stay firmly on the reforms path, was passed by the Lok Sabha late on Tuesday evening. Some deft political management by defence minister Pranab Mukherjee, who held detailed negotiations with the Left leaders on Monday night, saw the latter jettison their reservations on the Patents (Amendment) Bill and ensure its passage after a discussion lasting over five hours.

If the Opposition expected the ruling alliance to unravel itself under the weight of contradictions, it was disappointed. By managing to get the Left parties on board, the government's floor managers not only succeeded in removing the roadblocks in the Bill's passage, it also managed to turn the tables on the BJP and its allies, which had decided to oppose in an attempt to expose the differences on the Bill between the government and its main prop, the Left par-

ties. The Bill was passed by a voice vote, after the BJP and its allies staged a walkout from the House in protest against the government's refusal to accept their proposal to refer it to a standing committee.

In his reply to the discussion, commerce minister Kamal Nath



EXPERIENCE MATTERS

pointed out that the joint parliamentary committee (had already deliberated the second amendment of the Bill for two years and, therefore, there should not be any differences on it now.

The third amendment, now sought to be passed, had been first moved by the NDA government in December, 2003. As the Bill had been in the public domain for two years, the minister said he saw no reason why it should be referred to the standing committee again.

He also rejected the charge that the Bill, when passed, would benefit the MNCs. "We are not multinational-driven, but nationally-driven," Kamal Nath quipped, adding that the UPA government would to everything to protect national interests. Having been rebuffed in its gameplan, the BJP and its allies would in the coming days be expected to train their guns on the Left parties for endorsing what it describes as an "anti-people, anti-poor" move.

"The CPM's role on the entire

issue has been dubious," BJP spokesman Vijay Kumar Malhotra alleged here on Tuesday afternoon. "It's oft-repeated warning to the UPA government not to take its support for granted has become a joke," he added.

In keeping with the deal hammered out on Monday night between Mr Mukherjee and the leaders of the Left parties, the government on Wednesday announced the setting up of an expert committee to deliberate on the two contentious clauses of patentability of micro-organisms and definition of a new entity as chemical/medical.

The committee will submit its report within a month, and it remains to be seen whether the government will be in a position to incorporate its recommendations in a piece of legislation which had been passed only a month ago.

The remaining 10 amendments accepted by the government as part of the deal worked out on Monday night were only minor in nature, and in no way lessen the import of the Bill in its present form.

The Left parties, it is clear, were pushed into a corner. The promise to constitute an expert committee is only a face saver, nothing more.

Participating in the discussion, Rup Chand Pal (CPM) struggled to explain the Left's volte-face, describing it as "a paradox of history". The Left parties, he told the House, had been consistently attacking WTO and TRIPS, but the fact of the matter is that "we cannot wish them away".

"We have not changed our position," he argued, even as he sought to emphasise that the Left parties, in their discussions with the government, had convinced it that the amendments being pressed by them were in keeping with the UPA's Common Minimum Programme and were in national interest.

## Expert panel to sort out communist dilemma

THE government has decided to get back to the Left parties on the outstanding contentious amendments in the Patents Bill within a month's time.

An experts committee, on which the two sides agreed last night as a mechanism to refer the contentious issue of micro-organisms, will submit its report to the commerce ministry before the end of the Budget session in the second half of May. The government on Tuesday secured Left support to the Patents Bill, but not before segregating the amendments that the latter wanted to be part of the Bill.

The committee, to be set up by the commerce ministry, will comprise lawyers specialising in patent laws as well as experts in the area. Government circles on Tuesday maintained that the committee would look into whether the amendments suggested by the Left were TRIPs compatible or not.

Left reservations are primarily on the status of micro-organisms at a time when the WTO itself is reviewing its patentability. According to the Bill, micro-organisms are patentable if they qualify the patentability criteria. Organisms as they are found in nature are not patentable. The industry has been saying that since the WTO itself is reviewing patentability of micro-organisms, India should not provide for it in haste — an argument that is being backed by the Left.

## Political exigency led to support, say CPI, RSP

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 22 MARCH

PUTTING itself on the back, big brother CPM on Tuesday managed to rein in its reluctant Left allies to support the Patents Bill. However, the smaller Left Parties did not share the CPM's air of bonhomie and candidly admitted they were supporting the Bill because of "political exigencies". The CPI and RSP, which had "serious reservations" about the new patent regime even

should have no reason to oppose the Bill.

In the House and outside, the CPI expressed apprehension about likelihood of increase in prices of pharma products. Participating in the debate, C.K. Chandrappan asked if the government could give an assurance that the medicinal requirements of people would be met at cheaper rates by domestic products. He said: "My party will support this Bill with all these fears in mind."

The RSP felt there were "grey areas" in the Bill even now. Party MPs said the RSP was in principle



after the agreement reached between the Marxist party and the government, had refused to support the Patents (amendment) Bill in the meeting of the Left Parties on Tuesday morning. While the CPI said it would abstain from voting on the Bill, the RSP wanted to oppose it.

Things changed as the day went by with the CPM leaders holding separate meetings with the CPI and RSP and harping on Left unity to get their Left partners to vote in favour of the Bill. By Tuesday afternoon, the CPI agreed to support the Bill and later the RSP which felt it would be isolated if the CPI and the Forward Bloc was toeing the CPM's line. The CPM's plea was that since the government had agreed to most of the amendments sought jointly by all four Left Parties, they

opposed to the product patent regime which it felt will create a "catastrophic situation". It also wanted the government to make a suo moto statement on referring micro-organisms to an expert committee. The party which admitted that the Left had scored on several points, said it would support the Bill because of "political compulsions".

The CPM, which described its agreement with the government as a "big achievement for the Left", justified its support to the new patent regime by saying that the government had accepted its suggestions and was adhering to the Common Minimum Programme.

The CPM, which has been critical of the WTO and the TRIPs agreement, also said it cannot wish these away.

# Left springs surprise, supports patents bill

**New Delhi:** Left parties, known opponents of the WTO and Trips, sprang a surprise in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday by coming out in strong support of the Patents Bill, saying most of its amendments on the contentious measure have been accepted by the government. Amid thumping of desks from treasury benches, CPM's deputy leader Rupchand Pal said the Left parties have decided to support the bill as the Congress-led coalition has "accepted almost all our amendments."

Participating in a discussion on the bill, he charged the BJP with not listening to the Left on issues like Patents Bill as that party was busy in its "communal agenda" while in power. Elaborating on its support which he himself described as "paradox of history," Pal noted that the Left parties had been consistently attacking WTO and Trips, but the fact of the matter was "we cannot wish them away. We have not changed our position," he said emphasising that the Left parties in their discussions with the government convinced it that the amendments being pressed by them were in keeping with the common minimum programme of the UPA coalition and were in national interest.

Taking a dig at the BJP-led NDA which had de-

## LS passes bill

**New Delhi:** The crucial patents (amendment) bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday after commerce and industry minister Kamal Nath assured the house that adequate safeguards have been provided in the bill to protect the interest of Indian pharma industry and the poor people. PTI



manded referring the matter to Parliamentary standing committee, he said the saffron party should have some introspection as "people have already thrown you in the dustbin of history."

Earlier, commerce minister Kamal Nath rejected the demand of Bachi Singh Rawat and Uday Singh (both BJP) of referring the bill to parliamentary standing committee and "not rushing it through given the possibility of its major impact on the country." He said the Joint Parliamentary Committee has already deliberat-

ed on the bill for two years and, therefore, there should not be any differences now on it.

Pawan Kumar Bansal (Cong) said government had held extensive discussions with all political parties, including BJP which has failed to come out with a single amendment. He dismissed as "sweeping" BJP's charges against the government on the bill which, he said, was need of the hour. "No one should entertain any fear of any adverse impact on the country."

Ramjilal Suman (Samajwadi) said the bill would impact on the country's drug market. Alok Kumar Mehta (RJD), Lal Muni Prasad (BSP), C Kuppaswami (DMK) and C K Chandrappan (CPI) supported the bill. PTI

# পেনশন বিলের বিরোধিতায় কক্ষত্যাগ করলেন বামেরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২১ মার্চ: পেনশন বিলের ক্ষেত্রে অনমনীয় অবস্থান নিচ্ছেন বামেরা। আজ লোকসভায় পেনশন বিল পেশের সময়েই নিজেদের প্রতিবাদ নথিভুক্ত করে তাঁরা কক্ষত্যাগ করেন। ক্ষেত্রে বামেরাদের সমর্থনে সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল মোর্চার সরকার তৈরি হওয়ার পরে এই প্রথম বামেরা কক্ষত্যাগ করলেন।

এ দিকে সরকার আজ পেটেন্ট বিল আলোচনা করে পাশ করিয়ে নেওয়ার পরিকল্পনা করলেও সফল হয়নি। বিল নিয়ে আলোচনা কাল পর্যন্ত মূলতুঁবি হয়েছে। এ ক্ষেত্রে সরকার প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েও তাঁদের আরও দুটি সংশোধনী মনোনীত বলে আজ অভিযোগ করেন সিপিএম নেতারা। রাতে সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি হুমকি দেন, তাঁদের সংশোধনী মানা না হলে তাঁরা বিলের বিরুদ্ধে ভোট দেবেন। কাল ফের বিলটি পাশ করানোর চেষ্টা হবে বলে সরকারের তরফে জানানো হয়েছে। সমাজবাদী পার্টিও বলেছে, কাল বিল পাশ করানোর চেষ্টা হলে তাঁরা বিরুদ্ধে ভোট দেবেন।

আজ সভায় পেনশন বিল পেশের সময়ে বামেরা বাধা দেন। সিপিএমের বাসুদেব আচারিয়া এবং সিপিআইয়ের

গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত জানিয়ে দেন, তাঁরা এই বিলের বিরুদ্ধে। তাঁদের বক্তব্য, বর্তমান সরকার ক্ষমতায় আসার আগেই এই 'পেনশন রেগুলেটরি অথরিটি' তৈরি হয়েছিল। কাজেই এত দিন পরে তা নিয়ে আর্ডিন্যান্স জারির কোনও প্রয়োজন ছিল না; সরকার আগেই তা বিল হিসাবে পেশ করতে পারত। এ ভাবে সরকার সংসদকে এড়িয়ে যাচ্ছে বলে তাঁরা অভিযোগ করেন। বামেরা জানান, পেনশনের টাকা ফাঁটকা বাজারে খাটানোর রাজ্য তৈরি হবে বলেও তাঁরা এর বিরোধিতা করছেন। রাজনৈতিক মূত্রে খবর, সিপিএম নেতারা বিষয়টি নিয়ে বিল পেশের পর্যায়ে কক্ষত্যাগ করতে প্রথমে খুব একটা উৎসাহী ছিলেন না। কিন্তু সামগ্রিক অবস্থার প্রেক্ষিতে বামপন্থীরা একযোগে সভা ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে যান।

বিজেপিও ফাঁটকা বাজারে পেনশনের টাকা বিনিয়োগের বিরোধিতায় এগিয়ে এসেছে। দলের মুখপাত্র বিজয় কুমার মলহোত্রা বলেন, "মানুষের কষ্টার্জিত টাকা শেয়ার বাজারে জলে যাক, এটা আমরা মানতে পারছি না।" পেনশন রেগুলেটরি অথরিটি তাঁদের জমানাতেই তৈরি হওয়ায় তাঁরা বিষয়টি নিয়ে অন্য আপত্তি তুলছেন না।

বিজেপি আজ পেটেন্ট বিল নিয়ে বামপন্থীদের আক্রমণ করে। বিলটির বিরোধিতার প্রক্ষে তাঁদের মনোভাব চূড়ান্ত করতে কাল ফের এক দফা বিরোধী জোটের বৈঠক বসছে। কিন্তু তার আগেই মলহোত্রা বলেন, "সরকারের সঙ্গে বামপন্থীদের কী সওদা হয়েছে আমরা জানি না। কিন্তু বামেরা প্রকাশ্যে যে অবস্থান নেন, তার সঙ্গে পেটেন্ট বিল সমর্থন করার সিদ্ধান্ত সম্পূর্ণ নয়।"

তবে সিপিআই নেতা গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত আজ লোকসভায় পেটেন্ট বিল সংসদীয় কমিটির কাছে পাঠানোর দাবি করেন। সিপিএমের নেতা রুপচাঁদ পাল বলেন, "আমরা সরকারকে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পরামর্শ দিয়েছিলাম। কিন্তু জানি না সরকারের মনে কী আছে! যে সংশোধনী আমাদের কাছে দেওয়া হয়েছে, তা খুঁটিয়ে দেখতে সময় লাগবে।" সভার বাইরে বাসুদেব আচারিয়া ও মহম্মদ সেলিম জানান, সরকার এর আগে বামেরাটির মধ্যে সাতটি সংশোধনী মানলেও পরে আবার দুটি সংশোধনী থেকে পিছিয়ে গিয়েছে।

লোকসভায় বিল নিয়ে আলোচনা করতে না পেরে শাসক জোট তাদের ক্ষেত্রে উগরে দেয় বিরোধীদের উপরে।

লোকসভার নেতা প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় বিজেপিকে মনে করিয়ে দেন যে ১৯৯৯ সালে রাজসভায় কংগ্রেস সমর্থন করেছিল বলেই তৎকালীন এন ডি এ সরকার আগের পেটেন্ট বিলটি পাশ করাতে পেরেছিল। প্রণববাবুর বক্তব্য, "আমরা ডবলিউ টি ও-র সঙ্গে দর কমান্বয় করে ১০ বছরের মেয়াদ নিয়েছিলাম। সেটা শেষ হয়ে যাচ্ছে। এটা ভারতের আন্তর্জাতিক প্রতিশ্রুতির বিষয়।" উত্তরে বিরোধী দলনেতা লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী জানান, সরকারের উচিত বিলটি সংসদীয় কমিটির কাছে পাঠানো। বিজেপির তরফে সরকারকে প্রতিশ্রুতি দেওয়া হয়েছিল যে সংসদীয় কমিটির কাছে গেলে তার দ্রুত নিষ্পত্তি করা হবে।

**ইস্কো নিয়ে।** সেলের সাথে ইস্কোর সংযুক্তিকরণ ঘরাহিত করতে আজ বাম সংসদদের একটি প্রতিনিধি দল প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করেন। এর আগে এক সময়ে রাজ্য সরকারই এক বেসরকারি শিক্ষাপতিকে ইস্কো নিতে অনুমোদন করেছিল। কিন্তু ইম্পাতমন্ত্রী রামবিলাস পাসোসয়ান তখন ইস্কো বাঁচানোর জন্য সেলের সঙ্গে সংস্হাটির মিলনের প্রস্তাব দেন। বিষয়টি নিয়ে এখনও মন্ত্রিসভায় আলোচনা হয়নি।



# Government introduces third set of amendments to Patents Act

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 18.** The Government today introduced the third set of amendment to the Patents Act, 1970 in Parliament to meet India's obligations under the agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) and avoid any retaliatory action under the disputes mechanism of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Bill replaces the patents amendment ordinance promulgated on December 26, 2004, to meet the deadline of January 1, 2005 to meet the commitment under the TRIPs agreement.

With this amending legislation, product patents will be introduced in drugs, food and chemicals sectors. All other fields of technology are already covered by product patent protection, in contrast to the earlier system of process patents.

In the statement of objects and reasons, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Kamal Nath, has described the time frame for this set of patent amendments through an ordi-

nance as being "most crucial." Any slippage in meeting the deadline of January 1, 2005 had the potential of inviting a retaliatory action under the WTO disputes mechanism. Having availed itself of the entire ten-year period provided under TRIPs agreement, India had no legal basis to defend its default on the deadline, he said.

The past record of delayed implementation would also not have helped the Indian case, he said. This default would also have created a legal vacuum for "mailbox" applications for patents as there would not be any mechanism to deal with them after January 1, 2005. "Finally there would have been an erosion of India's credibility in the international field."

Among the key features of the Patents Amendment Bill, 2005 are modifications of provisions relating to exclusive marketing rights, as they were part of transitional arrangements. It has also introduced a provision for enabling grant of compulsory licence for export of medicines to the countries, which have insuf-

ficient or no manufacturing capacity to meet emergent public situations, a clause allowed under the Doha declaration on TRIPs and Public Health. In addition it has modified provisions relating to opposition procedure with a view to streamline the system by having both pre-grant and post-grant opposition in the Patent Office.

The Bill seeks to amend and strengthen the provisions relating to national security to guard against patenting abroad of dual use technologies. It also seeks to modify and clarify the provisions relating to patenting of software related inventions, when they have technical application to industry or in combination with hardware.

The other significant features of the Bill are amendments to provisions relating to the Intellectual Property Appellate Board to extend its jurisdiction to revocation of patents and also amend some provisions to harmonise them with the Patent Cooperation Treaty to which India is a signatory. The processing time for patent ap-

plications is also sought to be reduced as well as to simplify the procedure.

The Patents Act has already been amended in March 1999 and June 2002 to meet the country's obligations under the TRIPs agreement, which forms part of the agreement establishing the WTO. The statement of objects and reasons said, given the importance of this issue, the Government undertook broad-based and extensive consultations involving different interest groups on aspects critical to changes, which were necessary in the Patents Act.

Before carrying out the second amendment to the Patents Act in 2002, a joint committee of both Houses of Parliament examined all aspects and recommended various provisions to provide necessary and adequate safeguards for protection of public interest, national security, bio-diversity and traditional knowledge besides public health and nutrition. These recommendations were incorporated in the second amendment.

## Government accepts many Left amendments to Patents Bill

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 18.** The Communist Party of India (Marxist) today announced that the Government had so far agreed to incorporate seven of the 12 amendments suggested by the Left parties in the Patents (Amendment) Bill, introduced today to replace the Ordinance.

"The discussions are on and as of now seven of the 12 amendments we had suggested have been agreed to by the Government. Of the rest, three more are likely to be accepted," the CPI (M) leaders, Rupchand Pal and Nilotpal Basu, said at a press conference. They said the opposition shown by some Left party MPs when the Bill was being introduced was due to a "communication gap." They

would continue the discussions over the weekend.

Mr. Pal said the introduction of the Bill to replace the ordinance was a legislative procedure. He, however, criticised the BJP's stand on the Bill. The party "had no moral right to oppose since it is their Bill."

On the suggestions agreed to, Mr. Pal said they included restricting the scope of patentability to modify definitions to describe "inventive step," "new invention" and "pharmaceutical substances;" hearing and extension of time for filing of pre-grant opposition, facilitation of pharmaceutical exports to the least developed countries; and compulsory licensing. For instance, under compulsory licensing, a country can have access to patented products in

case of a natural calamity or, in case of an urgent need, can approach the patent-holder by payment of royalty, he said. There is, however, no agreement on royalty with the Left parties stating that it should be "nominal" and the Government saying that it should be "reasonable." Another argument that in case of the least developed countries, which do not have production capacities, India, which has a strong pharmaceutical industry, could export to these nations under certain conditions.

Similarly, in order to take advantage of the flexibility available under the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), the Left parties suggest that if patent is granted for which an application was filed during the transitional period of 1995 and

2005, the patent regime should be applicable from the prospective date and should not have retrospective effect.

The CPI leader, S. Sudhakar Reddy, told *The Hindu* that just as Britain and France had taken steps to protect their national interest, India too should take steps. He said that since payment of royalties would become inevitable, the effort was to minimise its impact.

The All-India Forward Bloc general secretary, Debabrata Biswas, welcomed the amendments being brought in the Bill and urged the Centre to keep all options open to protect the country's biodiversity and public health. The party said that it would insist that in order to make the law compliant with TRIPs, Section 5 of the principal Act would have to be deleted.

# Patent ordinance to lapse without support of Left

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 15 MARCH

**T**HE fate of the patents ordinance appears uncertain with the Opposition and the UPA's allies, particularly the Left, refusing to support it in its present form. The ordinance will lapse on April 25 if the government fails to win over the Left's support for passage of the Patents (Third Amendment) Bill. The BJP appeared determined to complicate matters for the government with its parliamentary wing seeking the Bill's scrutiny by a joint panel.

On his part, commerce minister Kamal Nath said he would table the Bill soon and seek the Parliament's direction. Taking a tough stand against the legislation, the Left on Tuesday demanded four major amendments. The Left is not convinced by the government's claims that it had accommodated some of the suggestions made by the Left parties and said none of the major amendments sought by them have so far been accepted. CPM MP Nilotpal Basu has also written to the Rajya Sabha chairman saying his party would oppose the Bill if it is taken up in the House.

The Left has conveyed to defence minister

Pranab Mukherjee, who is also chairman of the group of ministers on patents, that it will oppose the proposed Bill unless the government accepted the four amendments, which include a provision to make patented pharma products available at cheaper prices.

The Left also wanted a royalty-based in-licensing system as well as reserving the term invention for a "new" product or process involving an inventive step and capable of industrial application. This will help limit the number of applications and discourage frivolous claims. It has also asked the government to ensure that molecules discovered between 1995 and 2005 should not fall under the clause that every international application under the treaty designating India shall be considered if a corresponding application has been filed here.

Apprehensive that the government has not entirely explored the flexibility provided in the TRIPs agreement to protect domestic interests, the Left has been demanding that the Bill be referred to a parliamentary panel for wider debate. The Left had also pointed out that despite the TRIPs agreement allowing exports by manufacturers who produce through a compulsory license, the Indian Act did not explicitly provide for it.

**Left parties will oppose proposed Bill unless govt accepts four major amendments, including provision to make patented pharma products available at cheaper prices**

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# Government is with you, Manmohan assures Somnath

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 16.** The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today called on the Lok Sabha Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee, and conveyed to him that the Government was with him on the issues he had raised recently.

The meeting assumed importance in the wake of reports that the Government had distanced itself from the suggestion of the Speaker on the Presidential reference.

Dr. Singh, along with Pranab Mukherjee, Leader of the Lok Sabha, and Ghulam Nabi Azad,

Parliamentary Affairs Minister, met the Speaker at his residence this morning over breakfast.

The Prime Minister conveyed the Government's position to Mr. Chatterjee since there was some misinformation that it did not agree with the Speaker's stand, sources in the Speaker's office said.

The meeting, fixed at the request of Dr. Singh, lasted 40 minutes.

On Tuesday, responding to questions from television networks that the Government had apparently decided not to make a Presidential reference, Mr. Chatterjee was quoted as stat-

ing that he was not bothered about what the Government was to do.

Today's message was that the Government was in agreement with the issues raised by the Speaker. There was no reference to the upcoming meeting of Speakers of the State Legislatures called by Mr. Chatterjee on Sunday.

## Speaker's prerogative

Later at the regular briefing, the Congress said there was no question of the party offering any suggestion to Mr. Chatterjee on whether or not to hold the meeting.

"The Speaker is the head of the legislature and it is his prerogative to convene a meeting of presiding officers," the party spokesperson, Anand Sharma, said. The Communist Party of India joined issued with the

Bharatiya Janata Party/National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for attacking the office of the Speaker and suggested that it could move a no-confidence motion him.

It said that while the Speaker in his wisdom had called a meeting of leaders of different parties to discuss in camera the situation arising out of the Supreme Court judgment with regard to the Jharkhand Assembly, the BJP walked out.

It said the NDA suggestion to Speakers of Assemblies, where it was in power, to stay away from the Sunday meeting was tantamount to "dilution of the status" of the office of the Speaker — asking them not to act according to their own conscience but submit to the party directives openly.

Photograph on Page 12

# Govt mends fences: No differences with Speaker

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, March 16.

— After a meeting between Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and Lok Sabha Speaker Mr Somnath Chatterjee, the government today said there were no differences with the Speaker.

“The UPA government is totally in support of the Speaker,” parliamentary affairs minister Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad said in an apparent effort to mollify Mr Chatterjee in the wake of the BJP-led NDA announcing plans to move a no-confidence motion, which

has since been virtually dropped.

Mr Azad had accompanied the Prime Minister and defence minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee to the breakfast meeting with Mr Chatterjee. The Speaker has convened a meeting of presiding officers of state Assemblies on 20 March.

Mr Azad said there were no differences between the legislature and the government and that it was the media which had given the impression that there were differences.

He said the Speaker had never made any demand for a presidential reference but only made a sug-

gestion in that regard.

Mr Azad said the Speaker, as the head of presiding officers, was well within his right to convene a conference of Speakers and the coming meeting cannot be construed to “showing any disrespect to the judiciary.”

**‘SC has crossed the *lakshman rekha*’**

Asserting that he was not a “dummy” Speaker, an unfazed Mr Somnath Chatterjee today said the Supreme Court had crossed the *lakshman rekha* set by the Constitution about powers of judiciary and legislature.



**DAMAGE-CONTROL:** Dr Singh with the Speaker in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Maintaining that the Constitution has expressly debarring courts from regu-

lating procedures of the legislature or Parliament, he asked in a frank and fre-

ewheeling interview to PTI why could he not decide what courts could do.

“Can I ask what the Supreme Court’s list of business should be? This will be palpably wrong,” he said in the interview.

The 75-year-old Marxist veteran strongly denied charges that he was seeking to trigger a “judiciary vs legislature” confrontation and that he was doing this because the Supreme Court order in the Jharkhand Assembly case went against anti-BJP parties.

He also ruled out his resignation in the context of the BJP-led NDA’s moves for tabling a no-

confidence motion, which it had since dropped.

The Speaker said: “It would be a very sad day for legislatures at the highest level that they can be directed in any manner on matters solely within their constitutional supremacy. I am supreme in my area and the courts are supreme in theirs. But to put this matter as ‘legislature vs judiciary’ is an artificially created controversy.”

Stretching the Supreme Court’s order in the Jharkhand case, he asked: “Why can’t I decide what the court has to do or judiciary”, Mr Chatterjee said: “It is a baseless accusation against me.”

Expressing anguish over criticism that he was “behaving in a manner aimed at destroying Parliament or judiciary”, Mr Chatterjee said: “It is a baseless accusation against me.”

the Supreme Court’s list of business should be? This will be palpably wrong.”

Mr Chatterjee said he had the highest respect for the Supreme Court.

“Therefore, I felt it appropriate that the matter should go back to the Supreme Court, probably to a larger Bench, for a review and a fresh decision. But it is entirely for the President to make the reference.”

Expressing anguish over criticism that he was “behaving in a manner aimed at destroying Parliament or judiciary”, Mr Chatterjee said: “It is a baseless accusation against me.”

# Bitter Patents bill stings UPA once again

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

**T**HE hurriedly-issued Patents Ordinance has stung the UPA once again, as both the opposition BJP and Left allies revolted on the day the amended Patents Bill was to pass muster in Parliament.

BJP spokesperson VK Malhotra said yet again that the amended Patents Bill was "not in the national interest" and demanded another round of discussions. The Left, which held consultations on the proposed amendments as late as March 10, was unprepared for a debate on Tuesday.

The Bill now looks all set to hang fire until Budget session closes in two weeks. Both allies and opposition have asked for a Standing Committee or Joint Selection Committee of Parliament to discuss the proposed changes.

The government has indicated it is ready for additional debate.

"We have had discussions. They have given their response on some issues today as decided on March 10. We are going to meet again for further discussions," commerce and industry minister Kamal Nath told reporters on the Left's opposition on Tuesday. He said he hoped the Bill would be introduced before this session ends.

India installed a WTO-compatible product patent regime on December 30 last year by way of a 'Patents Ordinance,' pending approval for a bill to amend the 1970 Patents Act by Parliament.

Discussions on the proposed changes began after January 1, the WTO's deadline for India to install product patents for pharmaceuticals and certain agrochemicals.

However, in two months, the Left parties have stayed with their caveats on issues that stalled a consensus before December 30.

The Left and BJP have separately asserted that prices of essential drugs will escalate and patents on extracts of traditional or agricultural products such as neem and basmati will proliferate after the amendments.

The domestic and MNC pharma players, have also taken sides in the debate, in attempts to preempt provisions that could hurt their interests.

Fears are, modified versions of patented drugs will stay in the market even after patents on original drugs have expired. On the other hand, established players have asserted that drug patents will incentivise improvements on existing and known innovations. The government has maintained a studied silence on most provisions, but denied taking sides.

Several health sector NGOs have also stressed that the government's December Ordinance and the proposed amendments to the patents bill go far beyond changes needed to meet World Trade Organisation TRIPS requirements.

MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2005

## NOT MUCH DIGNITY IN DEFEAT

THE CHANGE OF course in Jharkhand with the de-induction of Shibu Soren and the induction of Arjun Munda as Chief Minister is the United Progressive Alliance's attempt at damage limitation. But this has come after the coalition ruling at the Centre suffered a considerable erosion of moral authority and was also facing certain political defeat. The pro tem Speaker could throw up his hands and plead that the conditions in the House did not allow him to conduct the floor test according to the Supreme Court's directive, but it was obvious to the whole country that with the numbers against them, the UPA legislators were not allowing the vote to go through. The Supreme Court's worst fears of a fraud being perpetrated on the Constitution had thus come to pass and the continuance of Mr. Soren would have been wholly untenable. In Jharkhand, as in Goa, making a play for power was not just indefensible in terms of political and constitutional morality. It was bad political strategy as well, since in the unstable conditions sitting in the opposition could have worked to the advantage of the Congress-led UPA. The National Democratic Alliance's action in herding the MLAs together and keeping them in virtual captivity was disquieting, but it paled before the more grievous impropriety wrought by the Governor. It is some consolation that constitutional propriety has at last prevailed over unscrupulous hankering after power.

The Centre's claim that it had nothing to do with the Jharkhand Governor's decision or the happenings in the Assembly will find few takers: even if one were to discount opposition charges that the botched attempt to keep Mr. Soren at the helm was a conspiracy hatched in Delhi, at the very least it shows up grossly incompetent political management. In Goa, the Central Government stepped in and imposed President's Rule to undo the mess created by the Congress party; and in Jharkhand a transparently reluctant Mr. Soren was persuaded to resign. After the two episodes, the impression has gained ground that the UPA Government headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh is more virtu-

ous than the UPA as a political grouping chaired by Ms. Sonia Gandhi, and that within the UPA the worst are the likes of Mr. Soren and Praptasinh Rane in the States. The sequence of events in Jharkhand vindicates the Supreme Court's action in ordering the floor test, though the question remains if it could not have achieved the same object through an order that was less hands-on and less intrusive into the domain of the Assembly's practice and procedure. While the issue of the court's powers in relation to the Assembly remains, the sordid sequence of events in Jharkhand may not provide quite the right backdrop to press for its resolution.

The Governor should have got it right the first time when it was obvious that the NDA rather than the UPA had the numbers, and it can be argued with justification that it was no mere error of judgment but gross partisanship that coloured his action. Public confidence that he would do right by his constitutional office has been lost and he ought not to be allowed to continue. Chief Minister Arjun Munda has been asked to demonstrate his majority support before March 21, but even if he wins the trial of strength the going may not be easy for him. His publicly displayed group of 41 legislators (in a House of 81) includes five independents whose support has come at a considerable cost — all of them have had to be made Ministers. With the strength of the Ministry fixed at 12, just six spots are left for the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Janata Dal (United) MLAs who will probably be accommodated in other offices including chairmanships of government corporations. What type of governance he will be able to provide in these circumstances remains to be seen. He needs to put up one from the NDA ranks as Speaker (who cannot vote except to break a tie) but after winning the vote he will be able to nominate an Anglo-Indian legislator whose vote he can count on. Overall, however, with the independents holding the balance and the opposition in a position to play the poaching game, the situation holds within it the seeds of instability.

# পাইপ লাইন নিয়ে কূটনৈতিক দায়িত্ব মণিকেই

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল ● নয়াদিল্লি

১২ মার্চ: দায়িত্ব পেলে তেল-কূটনীতিকেও যে অন্য মাত্রায় নিয়ে যাওয়া যায়, তা দেখিয়ে দিতে চান একদা বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের ডাকসাইটে ব্যক্তিত্ব মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার। প্রথম প্রথম এজিয়ারের প্রশ্নে বিদেশমন্ত্রকের সঙ্গে বিতর্ক থাকলেও সম্প্রতি প্রধানমন্ত্রী ক্যাবিনেট বৈঠকেই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন যে গ্যাস ও পাইপলাইন সংক্রান্ত পুরো বিষয়টি দেখভাল করবেন পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার স্বয়ং।

জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপ প্রসঙ্গে পাকিস্তান ও বাংলাদেশের সঙ্গে দিল্লির যে মতবিরোধ, তার জন্য গ্যাস পাইপলাইন প্রকল্প বার বার ধাক্কা খাচ্ছে। এ জন্য মণিশঙ্কর নিজে ভারত-বাংলাদেশ-পাকিস্তানের মধ্যে ত্রিদেশীয় কূটনৈতিক সম্পর্কে স্বাভাবিক করে তুলতে তৎপর। মণির ভাষায়, “এখানে মূল প্রশ্নটা অর্থনৈতিক। উন্নয়নের প্রশ্ন। অর্থনৈতিক উন্নতির কথা ভাবাটাই বোধ হয় আজ সবচেয়ে জরুরি।”

তার বক্তব্য, গ্যাস পাইপ লাইন নিয়ে ইরান ও পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে যেমন ভারতকে বোঝাপড়ার প্রক্রিয়া এগিয়ে নিয়ে যেতে হবে, তেমনই বাংলাদেশ-মায়ানমারের সঙ্গেও। মণিশঙ্করের স্বপ্ন, বঙ্গোপসাগরকে প্রাচ্যের ‘উত্তর সাগর’ বা ‘নর্থ সি’তে পরিণত করা। অতীতে এই সাগর ও সংলগ্ন অঞ্চলে প্রভূত পরিমাণে তেল ও গ্যাস মেলে, যা ওই এলাকার অর্থনীতির চিত্রটাই আমূল বদলে দিয়েছিল। মায়ানমার থেকে বাংলাদেশ হয়ে ভারতে তেল ও গ্যাস আনার পরিকল্পনার মধ্যেও মণিশঙ্কর পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তথা পূর্ব ভারতের সমৃদ্ধির স্বপ্ন দেখছেন। বাংলাদেশ-মায়ানমার ও ভারতের প্রতিনিধিদের নিয়ে গঠিত হয়েছে এক যুগ্ম ওয়ার্কিং গ্রুপ। এই গোষ্ঠী পারস্পরিক মতপার্থক্যগুলি নিরসনের চেষ্টা করছে। খোঁজা হচ্ছে তেল ও গ্যাস আনার এক ‘শর্টকাট রুট’।

মণিশঙ্কর বলেন, “ভারত যদি তেল ও গ্যাস আনায়, তবে যে সব দেশের মধ্য দিয়ে এটি আসবে তারা ‘ট্রানজিট ফি’ পাবে।” কাজেই কেন্দ্রীয় পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রীর



এই ‘শান্তির পাইপলাইন’ রচনার পিছনে আছে অর্থনীতিরও শক্তপোক্ত যুক্তি। এই কাজে পশ্চিম করিডরে ইরান-পাকিস্তান-ভারত, এবং পূর্ব করিডরে মায়ানমার-বাংলাদেশ-ভারত উপকৃত হবে। অটল বিহারী বাজপেয়ী যখন প্রধানমন্ত্রী ছিলেন তখন থেকেই এই পাইপলাইন নিয়ে কথাবার্তা শুরু হয়।

কর্মসূত্রে পাকিস্তানে থাকায় মণিশঙ্করের সঙ্গে সে দেশের সম্পর্ক খুবই ভাল। তা ছাড়া, তিনি ও পাক বিদেশমন্ত্রী কাসুরি লন্ডনে একসঙ্গে পড়াশোনাও করেছেন। মণি জানান, “এখনও লাহোরে গেলে ওর বাড়িতেই উঠি।” এখন দু’দেশের

মধ্যে শান্তি প্রক্রিয়া ফের নতুন উদ্যমে শুরু হওয়ায় পাইপলাইন বসানোর কাজেও গতি আসবে বলে প্রত্যাশা।

মণিশঙ্কর দায়িত্ব গ্রহণের পর এ নিয়ে ইরানের সঙ্গে কথাবার্তা অনেক এগিয়ে গিয়েছে। ইরানের বিদেশমন্ত্রী ও তেলমন্ত্রী ভারত সফর করেছেন বলে মণিও ইরান ঘুরে এলেন। কিন্তু ভারত-ইরান সম্পর্ক উদ্ভিন্ন রেখেছে আমেরিকাকে। ভারতে মার্কিন রাষ্ট্রদূত ডেভিড মালফোর্ড মণিকে উদ্বেগ জানিয়ে বলেছেন, এ ঘটনায় ভারত-মার্কিন সম্পর্ক যেন ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত না হয়। কেন না, মার্কিন-ইরান সম্পর্কের জটিলতা ঐতিহাসিক। এ বিষয়ে মণির বক্তব্য, “আমেরিকার উদ্বেগ সম্পর্কে ভারত ওয়াকিবহাল। আবার ভারতের শক্তি সম্পর্কেও আমেরিকা অবহিত। ফলে, আমরা একজন অন্যের অবস্থা বুঝি বলে এ নিয়ে সমস্যা হবে না।”

ইরান থেকে তেল পাকিস্তান হয়ে না এলে সমুদ্র পথে ভূগর্ভস্থ পাইপলাইন করতে হবে যা অনেক বেশি খরচে। একই ভাবে বাংলাদেশ রাজি না হলেও সমুদ্র পথেই তেল আনার ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে। ভারত-বাংলাদেশ গ্যাস পাইপলাইন বসাতে সক্রিয় ছিল যে মার্কিন সংস্থা ইউনোক্যাল, এন ডি এ জমানায় দু’দেশের মধ্যে এ নিয়ে কোনও অগ্রগতি হচ্ছে না দেখে তারা ভারত থেকে অগ্রিম তুলে নিয়ে চলে যায়। এখন এ কাজে গতি এনেছেন মণিশঙ্কর। গেইল-এর প্রধান প্রশান্ত বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় এবং ও এন জি সি-র প্রধান সুবীর রাহাও এই প্রকল্পে এখন খুবই সক্রিয়।

ANADABAZAR PATEJKA

13 MAR 2005

## **Over to the Court And UPA Should Bow Out In Jharkhand**

**T**HE Centre has decided that there is no need for a presidential reference on the Supreme Court's ruling on Wednesday infringing on the rights of Jharkhand's legislature. But that does not mean that the court can choose not to reckon with the validity or otherwise of its directives on establishing whether the Jharkhand chief minister enjoys majority support. The court has been denied that luxury by the actions of the pro-tem Speaker of Jharkhand, who has refused to comply with the apex court's directive to conduct the confidence vote on Friday, leave alone videograph the proceedings. Pro-tem speaker Pradip Kumar Balmuchu has taken the stand that it is the job of the Speaker, not of the pro-tem Speaker, to conduct a confidence vote. Now, the confidence vote will take place presumably on Tuesday after the Speaker is elected. It is difficult to fault Mr Balmuchu. Now it is up to the Supreme Court to decide how it should react to the Jharkhand House's failure to comply with its directive. Should it initiate contempt proceedings or would it be more appropriate for the court to revise its own orders on what and how the Jharkhand MLAs should do. It is pertinent to recall that the court has, on an earlier occasion, shown the grace to correct itself in the case of a directive issued to the Election Commission, and challenged by the Commission.

Grace would sit well on the United Progressive Alliance as well. The decent course of action in Jharkhand would be for the UPA to accept that it does not have a majority and for Mr Shibu Soren to resign before the House convenes again. That alone would undo the misdeed done by the governor when he swore Mr Soren in as chief minister, using a piece of discretion that needs to be excised from the Constitution. Chief ministers should be chosen by the collective will of elected legislators, not the partisan benediction of governors. Instead of inviting anyone from the elected legislators to form the government and then prove his majority, the governor should simply call upon the House to elect a leader and then swear him in as chief minister.



# CENTRE FORCES SOREN'S EXIT

*Q. Centre - Soren's exit of UPA & M*

SNS & PTI

RANCHI/NEW DELHI, March 11. — Capping a day of dramatic developments, Jharkhand chief minister Mr Sibu Soren tonight resigned after his failure to prove his majority in the Assembly as directed by the Supreme Court. His resignation paved the way for the installation of a BJP-led NDA government to be headed by Mr Arjun Munda, who will be sworn in tomorrow.

Putting up a last-minute resistance of sorts before Governor Syed Sibtey Razi, who asked him to quit, Mr Soren refused to tender his resignation during the hour-long meeting. He went home and only after some persuasion by some Congress leaders did he announce his resignation at a press conference close to midnight, the deadline set by the Supreme Court for completing the trial of strength.

The die was cast in Delhi shortly before Mr Soren's meeting with Mr Razi when Union home minister Mr Shivraj Patil said after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs that constitutional propriety demanded that Mr Soren resign. Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh was reportedly upset at the constitutional "deadlock" created by the pro-tem Speaker's failure to hold the trial of strength as he set himself on a collision course with the Supreme Court.

In what was one of the final acts of the sordid drama that began after the Jharkhand Assembly polls, the Governor was requested by the Centre to dismiss the government of Mr Soren and appoint former BJP chief minister Mr Arjun Munda to the post.



THORNY ROAD TO POWER: NDA MLAs on way to the Jharkhand Assembly for the trust vote which wasn't. — PTI

At the late night CCPA meeting, the Centre decided that Mr Munda should be given a chance to prove his majority, the Union home minister said.

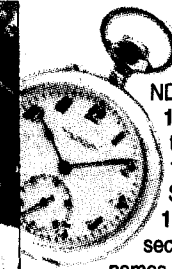
Earlier in the day, pro-tem Speaker Mr Pradeep Kumar Balmuchu played spoilsport in the Assembly. He had adjourned the House till 15 March without calling chief minister Mr Soren to prove his majority. The NDA had 41 of the 81 legislators; the UPA 38 (excluding the pro-tem Speaker) and the lone NCP minister, Mr Kamlesh Singh, who abstained from the day's proceedings in the House citing ill health.

For a change, it was the members of the Treasury Benches who disrupted the proceedings no less than five times on the plea that the pro-tem Speaker has no right to conduct the vote

of confidence.

When the House met at 11 a.m., parliamentary affairs minister Mr Girinath Singh said the pro-tem Speaker is appointed to swear in the members and conduct the Speaker's election, but not the trust vote. Mr Upendra Das of JD-U said the Supreme Court ruling allowing the pro-tem Speaker to conduct the vote should be followed. JD-U's Mr Inder Singh Namdhari said since the matter was placed on the proceedings' list, the pro-tem Speaker had given his consent. "Then why the afterthought?" He wondered if a message had come from Delhi (read Mrs Sonia Gandhi) to stall the confidence motion. His remark led to protracted protests by UPA members.

More reports on page 4



**10.50 a.m.:** All 41 NDA MLAs enter House.  
**10.52 a.m.:** UPA MLAs trickle in one by one.  
**11 a.m.:** Pro-tem Speaker arrives.  
**11.02 a.m.:** Assembly secretary announces names of MLAs who skipped swearing in. They are Mrs Aparna Sengupta, Mr Bhanu Pratap Shahi and Mr Kamlesh Singh. However, none of them turns up.  
**11.03 a.m.:** Girinath Singh tells the House that pro-tem Speaker cannot conduct a trial of strength.  
**11.15 a.m.:** UPA members rush towards the Well following remarks made by Mr Inder Singh Namdhari.  
**11.20 a.m.:** Pro-tem Speaker adjourns House till 11.40 a.m.  
**11.40 a.m.:** House resumes. Enter Mr Shahi and Mrs Sengupta (Forward Bloc), Both sit on the UPA side and are administered oath.

**11.42 a.m.:** Ruckus continues, Speaker adjourns House till 12 noon.  
**Noon:** House resumes but Treasury Bench continues to disrupt House. Adjourned till 12.15 p.m.  
**12.15 p.m.:** House resumes. Ruckus continues. Adjournment No. 4.  
**2.20 p.m.:** Fifth adjournment.  
**3.30 p.m.:** House adjourned for the sixth time after resuming at 3 p.m.  
**10:15 p.m.:** Centre asks Sibu Soren to resign.  
**11:45 p.m.:** Soren resigns.  
**Midnight:** Arjun Munda appointed CM, to take oath on Saturday.

Aparna Sengupta (right) with Forward Bloc MP Debabrata Biswas (left). — PTI



## Centre not keen on presidential reference

NEW DELHI, March 11. — The Centre is "not keen" to immediately request the President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, to send a reference to the Supreme Court regarding the alleged "interference in legislative matters by the judiciary" as it could "precipitate matters" and lead to a bigger confrontation between the government and the judges. While senior Congress leaders seemed to prefer caution at this morning's core committee meeting of the party, attended by Mrs Sonia Gandhi, Dr Manmohan Singh, other Cabinet ministers and party leaders, the Left parties and some of the allies appeared to favour pushing the presidential reference issue. It could be made some time later when the Jharkhand issue is solved one way or the other and tempers cool down. Then, a reference could be a serious constitutional question as opposed to a burning political issue. Senior Congress leaders are talking of two possible ways of sorting out the crisis. First, it could be taken up unofficially, if for example, the Prime Minister met the Chief Justice of India, Mr RC Lahoti, over a cup of tea and thrashed out the issue. The second point

being made is the problem of escalation of conflict if the reference is sent. "The reference is regarding the Supreme Court's directive on the elections in Jharkhand. The order came from the Chief Justice himself and two other judges. Supposing the full Bench discusses the issue and makes the same point, it will be embarrassing for the government," a senior party leader said. If the Chief Justice had not been involved, there could have been some leeway. Law minister Mr HR Bharadwaj also appeared to indicate that the government does not want to raise the stakes and confront the judiciary. In any case, a Cabinet meeting needs to clear such a decision and one hasn't been planned as yet. It could be tomorrow but many Cabinet ministers are going to Ahmedabad for the re-enactment of the Dandi March. There is also a realisation that the Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, who pushed the issue, could be embarrassed if there is absolutely no effort by the Centre. During the meeting, Mr Pranab Mukherjee said that further discussions at the highest level were necessary at this stage. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

12 MAR 2005

# SC order defied, Centre makes Soren quit

■ **JHARKHAND** | Late night CCPA sends marching orders, Speaker's idea of Presidential reference shot down

**KOTA NEELIMA**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

**H**OURS after the Jharkhand pro-tem Speaker defied the Supreme Court's order on the confidence vote, the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) met to seal the fate of the Shibu Soren Government. Soren was called by Governor Syed Sibtey Razi to the Ranchi Raj Bhavan and told to put in his papers. The development came after a day of drama and defiance in the Ranchi Assembly where the NDA which had 41 MLAs was not allowed to vote out the minority Soren government.

The Prime Minister, it's learnt, also met CPI(M) leaders Harkishen Singh Surjeet and Prakash Karat ahead of the CCPA and discussed the Jharkhand mess. He is believed to have told them that the government had to find a way out of the problem.

Earlier in the day, when the Jharkhand Assembly ignored court directions and adjourned until March 15, the Centre decided it would not go in for a Presidential reference and instead "obey the apex court's ruling."

Law Minister H R Bharadwaj told *The Indian*

*Express*: "It is the duty of the government to abide by whatever order is given by the Supreme Court. The order should be obeyed in the Jharkhand case too." On the all-party meeting, he maintained: "It was called by the Speaker and is a completely different issue."

The suggestion to seek a Presidential reference had come from Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee who, after an all-party meeting last evening, suggested such a step to "restore constitutional balance." He said the SC ruling on Jharkhand had led to "a disturbing situation."

Upset over the government's decision to ignore his suggestion, the Speaker has now decided to convene a meeting of state presiding officers on March 20 to discuss separation of powers of the three organs of the state.

Meanwhile, UPA leaders met to discuss the matter during the day. Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh were present at the meeting in which legal and constitutional aspects of the Jharkhand case were discussed.

While the Congress maintained that the leaders took a "general review of the political situation" in the country, it's learnt that they

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



UPA MLAs enter the Jharkhand Assembly where they later disrupted proceedings throughout the day

## Soren hides behind Somnath

■ **Pro-tem speaker doesn't allow vote, puts off session to March 15**

**DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR & MANOJ PRASAD**  
RANCHI, MARCH 11

**W**OEFULLY short of numbers, the Shibu Soren government clung on to power today by citing Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee's criticism of the judiciary's "encroachment" on legislative matters. Defying the Supreme Court order to hold the confidence vote on March 11, pro-tem speaker Pradip Balmuchu convened the House again on March 15, the date earlier fixed by Governor Syed Sibtey Razi.

In five incredible hours inside the legislative Assembly in Ranchi, Soren's front made a travesty of democratic process as the NDA was not allowed to vote out the minority government though its 41 legislators were present in the 81-strong House.

According to the court's directives, 16 video cameras recorded the dramatic proceedings. Balmuchu played out the Speaker's role in the five-hour farce with remarkable histrionic skills. Every time the treasury benches provoked an adjournment, Balmuchu delayed his decision, raised his voice and fol-

lowed the rulebook with a great degree of precision. He ordered each adjournment with a shrug as though he had not authored the script. The House had to be adjourned five times, deferring the tabling of the confidence motion (which was listed Business of the House according to the printed agenda) till late afternoon.

Around 3.40 p.m., the pro-tem Speaker, instead of ending the charade and asking the legislators to vote on the confidence motion, began reading out a carefully worded statement. The statement questioned the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**Infuriated NDA targets Speaker, plans to go back to SC & Kalam**

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

**INFURIATED** by the "cheating" in Ranchi, a belligerent NDA plans to mount a three-pronged attack on the Centre to counter what it termed a "complete breach of the Constitution" and "subversion of democratic institutions" in the Jharkhand Assembly today.

The three steps under consideration,



NDA leaders said, were a no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee for his criticism of the Supreme Court interim order on the Jharkhand trust vote issue; moving the Supreme Court again

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# সুপ্রিম কোর্টের সঙ্গে এখনই সংঘাতে গেল না কেন্দ্র

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১১ মার্চ: বিচারবাহিন্যা ও আইনসভার একত্রিত বিধানে ১৪৩ ধারার আওতায় সুপ্রিম কোর্টের ব্যাখ্যা চাওয়া নিয়ে আপাতত কোনও সিদ্ধান্ত নিল না ইউপিএ সরকার।

সর্বদলীয় বৈঠকে কাল এই বিষয়ে প্রায় ঐকমত্য হয়ে গিয়েছিল। কিন্তু কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার সূত্র খবর, বাড়াবাড়ির প্রশ্নে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের কাছে রাষ্ট্রপতির মাধ্যমে ব্যাখ্যা চাওয়া নিয়ে তারা সিংহের সরকারে চায় না। মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার এই ব্যাপারে দেশের সর্বোচ্চ আদালতের সঙ্গে সংঘাতে যাচ্ছে বলে বার্তা যেতে পারে, এমন কোনও সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হবে না।

কেন্দ্রীয় আইনমন্ত্রী এইচ কে ভরদ্বাজ বলেছেন, “আমরা সুপ্রিম কোর্টকে সম্মান করি। তার সঙ্গে সংঘাতের কোনও ইচ্ছা আমাদের নেই।” তবে আজকের মতো ১৪৩ ধারায় ব্যাখ্যা না চাওয়া হলেও পরে এই কাজ করা হতে পারে। কংগ্রেসের

বিধানসভার ভোটাভূটি নিয়ে নির্দেশ দিয়েছে। এখন রাষ্ট্রপতির মাধ্যমে ব্যাখ্যা চাইলে প্রধান বিচারপতির নেতৃত্বাধীন সুপ্রিম কোর্টের পূর্ণাঙ্গ বৈঠক যদি একই মনোভাবের উপরে মোহর লাগিয়ে ফেরত পাঠিয়ে দেয়, তা হলে সরকার আরও বিড়ম্বনায় পড়বে।

তা ছাড়া, বাড়াবাড়ি নিয়ে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের নির্দেশ পূর্নাবিবেচনা বা উল্টে দেওয়ার প্রশ্ন নেই। রাজ্যসভার সদস্য, সংবিধান-বিশেষজ্ঞ ফলি নরিয়ানের কথায়, “রাষ্ট্রপতির মাধ্যমে ব্যাখ্যা চাওয়া হবে বিচারবিভাগ ও আইনসভার এজিয়ারের বৃহৎ পরিধির বিষয়ে। বিচারবাহিন্যা কত দূর পর্যন্ত আইনসভার কাছে হস্তক্ষেপ করতে পারে, সেই বিষয়ে। এর সঙ্গে বাড়াবাড়ি বিধানসভার অগামী দিনের কাজকর্ম জড়িয়ে নেই।” অতএব তাড়াহুড়ো না-করে এই নিয়ে আরও আলোচনা করার সময় সরকারের রয়েছে। কেন্দ্র সূত্র খবর, প্রধানমন্ত্রী, স্পিকার এবং প্রধান বিচারপতি নিজেরা বসেও আলোচনা

করে নিতে পারেন। নরিয়ানের বক্তব্য, “আইনের ব্যাখ্যার ক্ষেত্রে শীর্ষমণ্ডলে তো সুপ্রিম কোর্টই। তাই রাষ্ট্রপতির মাধ্যমে তার কাছ থেকে ব্যাখ্যা চাওয়ায় তো কোনও অসম্মান নেই।”

বাড়াবাড়ি এখন বারবার বিধানসভার অধিবেশন হুগিত করে দেওয়া হচ্ছে তখন লোকসভাও এই নিয়ে সরব হয়। এনডিএর বক্তব্য ছিল, বিজেপি জোটের সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা থাকলেও কেন্দ্র বাড়াবাড়ি রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসন জারি করার জন্যই এই ভাবে বিধানসভায় হুইটই পাকাবে। বিজেপি-র বিজয়কুমার মলহোত্র বলেন, “আমার মনে হচ্ছে, আস্থাভাট নেওয়া হবে না। প্রধানমন্ত্রী এবং কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রীও কি এই কাজে জড়িয়ে?”

জে ডি ইউ-এর প্রত্ননাথ সিংহ বা শিবসেনার অনন্ত গীতের বক্তব্য ছিল, বিজেপি’র গরিষ্ঠতা উপেক্ষা করে বাড়াবাড়িকে রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসনের দিকে পাঠানো হচ্ছে।

সংসদ গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তও বলেন, “যে সব কাজের সুযোগ করে দেওয়া হচ্ছে, তা আমরা সমর্থন করি না। শিব সোরেনকে সরকার গভীর সুযোগ দেওয়া উচিত হয়নি।” কংগ্রেস নেতা প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় অবশ্য বলেন, “কেন্দ্র বাড়াবাড়ি বিধানসভার ঘটনাবলির সঙ্গে যুক্ত নয়। আমরাও চাই, বাড়াবাড়ি সিদ্ধান্ত হোক বিধানসভায়।”

আজ সকালে এনডিএ-র বৈঠক ডাকা হয়েছিল। অন্য দিকে, প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের বাড়িতে বসেছিল কংগ্রেসের ‘কোর গ্রুপ’-এর বৈঠক। কংগ্রেসের মুখপাত্র আনন্দ শর্মা’র বক্তব্য, “যখনই কোনও পরিধি লঙ্ঘনের ঘটনা হয়েছে, তখন রীতি মেনেই তার সমাধান হয়েছে। রাষ্ট্রপতির মাধ্যমে ব্যাখ্যা চাওয়া হবে কি না, তা মন্ত্রিসভা বিচার করবে। কংগ্রেস একটি জোট সরকার চালাচ্ছে, তাই আলাদা করে নিজেদের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি জানাতে পারে না।”

সরকারের শরিক সিপিআইয়ের

# NDA no-trust threat to Somnath

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

**New Delhi, March 11:** The NDA has threatened to move a no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee for suggesting that a presidential reference be made to the Supreme Court following a ruling to advance the Jharkhand trust vote.

The motion will be the first of its kind if the NDA goes ahead with its threat.

The BJP-led coalition is planning to keep the heat on the UPA by meeting President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam to apprise him of the Speaker's "unconstitutional" behaviour.

The alliance might also get its leader Arjun Munda to move a contempt petition in the apex court against the Jharkhand Assembly's pro tem Speak-

er for "repeatedly referring to Chatterjee's statement" and demand that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Chatterjee make statements in the House.

With the Ranchi tug-of-war raging on, the NDA has met twice under the chairmanship of BJP president L.K. Advani. But the "strategy sessions" were also meant to be demonstrations of solidarity after the BJP found itself isolated at an all-party meeting convened yesterday by the Speaker.

The BJP's representatives walked out after presenting their case while partners, including its most steadfast ally, the Janata Dal (United), stayed on. They lent their voice to the dominant opinion that the jurisdictions of the judiciary and legislature, as spelt out by the Constitution, should be respected.

To belie the perception that there are cracks in the NDA, the meeting passed a resolution that went half-way to enshrine the allies' viewpoint while retaining the core thrust of the BJP's stand.

"The NDA believes that both the legislature and the judiciary are supreme in their own fields," it said, echoing Chatterjee.

"However, the ultimate supremacy is of the Constitution. Both must subserve the purpose and goals enshrined in the Constitution. The role of the central government, the UPA, the governor and the pro tem Speaker of the Jharkhand Assembly is extremely disturbing," the resolution added.

Endorsed by all NDA allies, the resolution said the Constitution envisag-

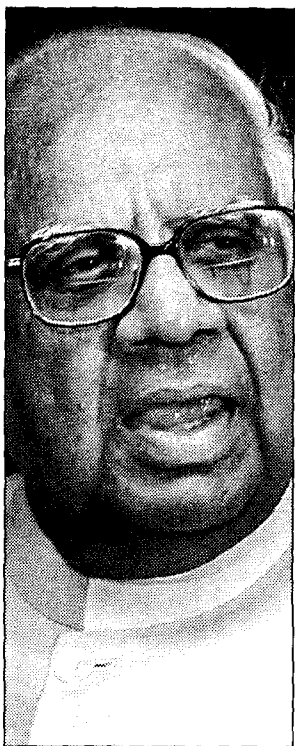
es majority rule. It accused the Centre, the governor and the pro tem Speaker of "conspiring to ignore the principle" by keeping Shibu Soren in office.

BJP sources said the party is "divided" on moving the no-confidence motion although the "hardliners" and some NDA allies are "all for it".

A section of the party believes the motion would be tantamount to a no-trust vote against the UPA government and re-unite the ruling coalition as even Congress-baiters like the Samajwadi Party would support Chatterjee given their proximity to the Left. "The mood is 50-50," said a BJP leader.

The flip view is that such a move would mobilise "public" opinion against the Speaker for "over-reaching" his brief.

## Speaker sets up emergency debate



Chatterjee: Firm

KAY BENEDICT

**New Delhi, March 11:** Speaker Somnath Chatterjee has called an emergency meeting of presiding officers of all states and Union territories in the wake of confusing signals sent out by the ruling Congress on initiating a presidential reference over the Supreme Court's Jharkhand order.

Chatterjee, as chairman of the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India, decided on a March 20 meeting here even as the BJP threatened a no-confidence motion against him for "contempt of court".

After an all-party meeting yesterday that the BJP left midway, the Speaker had proposed the presidential reference on the apex court's order that advanced the Jharkhand floor test and directed its videographing.

"Irrespective of who thinks what, I am not for retract-

ing my statement (of yesterday) nor am I adding a sentence to it," Chatterjee said today. He clarified that his job was to protect the dignity of Parliament and that his conscience was clear.

Chatterjee said he had the highest respect for the Supreme Court but felt the reference should be made as it was the view of all parties at yesterday's meeting.

The March 20 meeting would discuss the relationship between the three organs of the state — Parliament, judiciary and executive. Also on the table would be ways to ensure that they do not set themselves on a collision course in the backdrop of the apex court's order.

Sources said Chatterjee was "greatly disturbed" by the court order and was of the view that the presiding officers needed to discuss its ramifications.

He had convened the all-party meeting after political

parties expressed concern over the order. At its conclusion, the overwhelming view was to make a presidential reference to the apex court.

According to the sources, Chatterjee had yesterday wanted to make a statement in the Lok Sabha on judicial in-

**Irrespective of who thinks what, I am not for retracting my statement nor am I adding a sentence to it**

tervention in the legislative arena.

The draft statement he had prepared did not mention presidential reference. But he did not go ahead with it after V.K. Malhotra, the BJP's deputy leader in the House, suggested that he wait.

The Speaker then suggest-

ed the all-party meeting, to which Malhotra agreed. The statement that was issued after the meeting incorporated the point about the presidential reference in view of the overwhelming opinion in its favour.

As for the Congress not taking a position on the judiciary-versus-legislature issue, a senior minister explained it with the help of a joke.

"A railway lineman," he said, "once boasted to his family that he had lots of power, enough to even stop a train. His wife challenged him and asked for a demonstration. When a superfast train was speeding down the track, he waved a red flag and stopped it. He was elated and so was his family."

"A couple of days later, a railway superintendent came calling and slapped him for stopping the train. When the upset wife asked why, the lineman said: 'That was my power, this is his power'."

# Cabinet nod for President's rule in Bihar 8/3

## ● Lalu, Paswan stay away from meeting

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 7.** The Union Cabinet tonight approved the imposition of President's rule in Bihar, where a fractured mandate has stalled the formation of the next Government. The House has been placed under suspended animation.

With last month's Assembly elections throwing up a hung Assembly, the Governor, Buta Singh, sent in his recommendation to the Centre on Sunday. The Lok Jan Shakti Party chief, Ram Vilas Paswan's firm stand of neither supporting the Rashtriya Janata Dal nor the Bharatiya Janata Party in Government-formation resulted in the deadlock.

The RJD chief and Union Minister, Lalu Prasad, and his colleague, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, did not attend the Cabinet meeting.

Mr. Lalu Prasad said his party could not attend a meeting where the decision was being taken to bring the State under Central rule. He squarely blamed Mr. Paswan for the imbroglio. Mr. Paswan too did not attend the meeting.

However, Mr. Lalu Prasad made it clear that the RJD would do nothing to cause harm to the ruling United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre. "I am sure this development will not cause any embarrassment to the UPA Government which will remain strong and intact," he

told correspondents.

### Lalu meets Sonia

On a brief visit here, Mr. Lalu Prasad met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders, Harkishan Singh Surjeet and Sitaram Yechury.

He called on Ms. Gandhi two hours before the Cabinet meeting and explained the reason for his decision to stay away from it. He assured her that his party would continue to be with the Congress.

Asked whether the RJD would seek the ouster of the LJP from the UPA, Mr. Prasad said: "Why should I demand it. It is better if Paswan goes back to the NDA."

The Congress did not say whether the LJP should leave the UPA following serious differences with another constituent, RJD. "We do not decide the composition of the Council of Ministers... We treat the allies with respect and they decide who should be part of it. The Congress and its allies are committed to the Common Minimum Programme," the party spokesperson, Anand Sharma, said here.

### 'RJD, an important ally'

The Congress said that it was committed to the formation of a secular government in Bihar but the political situation arising out of a fractured mandate was the hurdle. The Governor's recommendation for the imposition of President's Rule was taken keeping in view the constitutional requirement. The RJD was an important ally and differences over Bihar politics could be discussed in the UPA coordination committee.

The BJP president, L.K. Advani, earlier called on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and urged him to appoint a "neutral" adviser to the Governor after it imposes President's rule. The Congress joined issue, with its spokesperson saying that when the party was in the Opposition it never made such suggestions.

More reports on Page 11



**PROBING FOR BODIES:** Army rescue teams, specially called in from Siachen, searching for bodies buried under snow in Waltengo-Naar village in south Kashmir. A snow storm hit the village on February 21 claiming more than 300 lives. — Photo: Nissar Ahmad

# Bihar situation will not affect UPA: RJD

By Our Staff Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 7.** The Union Rural Development Minister, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, today said the developments in Bihar would in no way affect the Rashtriya Janata Dal's equation with the United Progressive Alliance at the Centre. He said fresh elections were the only way out of this situation. "We do not want to weaken the UPA at present," he told reporters after inaugurating a national conference on "Launching of Skill Development Programme for Unemployed Rural Poor Through NGOs," organised by the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) and the Institute of Applied Manpower Research (IAMR) and the Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI).

Mr. Singh said the RJD was not putting any pressure on the UPA chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, to dissociate the Lok Jan Shakti Party from the alliance as Mr. Paswan himself ap-

peared to be on his way out. "The UPA is not dependent on Mr. Paswan's party."

Backing the Bihar Governor's decision to recommend President's rule, Mr. Singh said that while this appeared to be the only solution, he added that it was a temporary provision in the Constitution and had to be followed by elections to seek the people's mandate afresh. "Elections should be held within four months and the RJD will win two-thirds majority while the LJP will be completely wiped out." Mr. Singh said his party would learn from the mistakes it made in the ticket distribution.

## Not in the race

Ruling out the possibility of him being a 'consensus' candidate for the post of Chief Minister, Mr. Singh said he was not in the race. "One, I don't want to be a consensus candidate and second, I will not be acceptable to all because of my principles."

Blaming the LJP chief, for the

present crisis, the Rural Development Minister said Mr. Paswan only spoke for the Dalits but had no ideology while he himself, worked for the Dalits and their rights.

The training programme, which has been taken up under the aegis of non-governmental organisations capable of undertaking training for the benefit of target groups, is one of the major initiatives of the Ministry and CAPART to create productive and market-oriented employment opportunities for the rural unemployed.

Under the present scheme, CAPART has initially identified 50 NGOs — mostly drawn from the backward regions of the country to equip themselves with suitable trainers and other infrastructure for training 2,000 people by each NGO in productive skills, trades and services. The training will ultimately benefit 10-lakh unemployed rural youth in one year in skill upgradation and finding employment opportunities.

# Rane on the run, Centre sacks Goa govt

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 4 MARCH

**T**HE Centre on Friday wilted under the pressure of public outrage and sacked the Pratapsinh Rane government in Goa. The Union Cabinet's decision to throw out the Congress-led regime came hours after it won the trial of strength under controversial circumstances.

Acting on expected lines, protem speaker Francisco Sardinha, who belongs to the Congress, had earlier in the day disqualified UGDP member and former minister Matanhy Saldanha from taking part in the trust vote.

Under similar circumstances over a month ago, the Manohar Parrikar government was dismissed by governor S.C. Jamir minutes after it had won the trial of strength.

While recommending the imposition of President's rule in the state, the Union Cabinet, which held an emergency meeting on Friday evening, did not, however, dissolve the Assembly. It has been placed under suspended animation and the Congress would be hoping that it'd be revived after things stabilise. Given the strained relations between the UPA and the Opposition NDA, such a possibility appears rather dim. According to most political observers, holding fresh elections in the state could be the

only way out to help restore stability.

The BJP, not surprisingly, was guarded in its reaction. "In the present situation, the President's rule was the only alternative. I hope that the Assembly has been kept in suspended animation in the right spirit as the Supreme Court had asked the government in the S.R. Bommai case to take prior permission of Parliament before dissolving the House," Mr Pramod Mahajan, the general secretary in charge of Goa, observed.

"However, I have objections if the House is not dissolved and suspended animation is a mere ploy for getting more and more MLAs to get to their side and ultimately form a government," he contended.

With the Supreme Court, which is hearing a petition



filed by the deposed BJP chief minister Manohar Parrikar, keeping a close watch on the developments in the state and with the NDA on the war path over the role of the governors, the Centre, it is clear, was constrained to take a more prudent route. With Parliament in session, it did want to ratchet up the faceoff with the Opposition. With its role in the states of Jharkhand and Goa coming under all-round flak, the UPA government sought to camouflage its decision to invoke President's rule in Goa behind a garb of morality.

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UPA 9/04

# Manmohan unveils Government's report card

HP-11  
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By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 1.** The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today unveiled the "report card" of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) that seeks to inform the nation about the steps taken by the Government to implement the commitments made in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) and the other initiatives promised in subsequent policy statements.

Christened 'Report to the People-I,' the document was released by Dr. Singh ahead of the UPA-Left coordination committee meeting here this evening.

Briefing mediapersons, the media adviser to the Prime Minister, Sanjay Baru, said Dr. Singh had undertaken this exercise to report to the people and the allies of the work done in the nine months since the UPA took charge.

On the timing of the report,

Mr. Baru said it was conceived as a document to complement the budget. Henceforth, the report will be released at the end of every calendar year so that it can be used as a ready reckoner for discussions. It was also testimony to the Government's commitment to ushering in transparency in public policy.

In the report, the Government claims to have fulfilled more than half the specific promises made in the NCMP. Offering an update on its policies and programmes between May 2004 and February 2005, the report also claims that many of the other promises made were being implemented.

The report seeks to underline that "few governments have in the past ever maintained such a close watch on the pace and effectiveness of the implementation of the promises made in a manifesto as has the UPA Government." Acknowledging the role of the National Advisory

Council in conceptualising and formulating critical development initiatives, the report card sought to explain whatever delay there might have been in keeping all the promises.

According to the report, "nine months is not a long time in the tenure of any government; moreover, the UPA Government was busy in the first two months with the presentation of the Union Budget 2004-05. With just seven full months of working time, it has been able to implement — or begin the implementation of — most of the important commitments made in the NCMP. In its second year in office, the UPA will be able to move beyond these commitments to lay the foundation for sustained long-term economic growth and development, based on a commitment to equity and efficiency and to the welfare of all sections of society, especially the weaker sections and minorities."

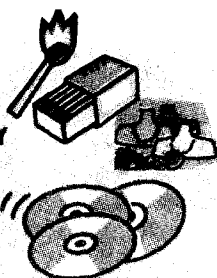
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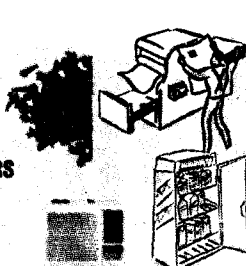


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- ① IT SOFTWARE
- ① NYLON POLYESTER
- ① TEXTILE FIBRES



- ① CLOVES
- ① REFRIGERATORS
- ① TEA
- ① AIR-CONDITIONERS
- ① COKING COAL

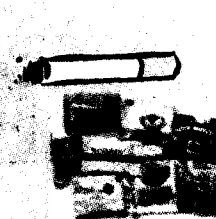


- ① EDIBLE OIL
- ① MOBILE PHONE
- ① TYRES
- ① FOOTWEAR



PRICES UP

- ① CIGARETTES
- ① GUTKHA
- ① PAN MASALA
- ① TOBACCO PRODUCTS



- ① MOSAIC TILES
- ① FLOWERS
- ① BRANDED JEWELLERY
- ① PETROL AND DIESEL (likely from April)



# TAX BRACKETS BUILD BHARAT BUDGET

Statement News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 28. — If it was the turnover tax last year, this year two anti-tax evasion measures announced to check "black money generation" and a significant alteration of the income tax brackets were what passed for big ideas for finance minister Mr P Chidambaram as he presented his Budget proposals for 2005-06. His two-hour Budget speech today had repeated references to the Bharat Nirman infrastructure programme. (Details, PC's mantra: citizen & country, see below)

A 0.1 per cent (Rs 10) is proposed to be levied on withdrawal of over Rs 10,000 in cash on a single day from banks. Banks would be required to report all deposits which are exempt from TDS (tax deducted at source) on interest. Mr Chidambaram said this is being done "since it is felt that large cash transactions become part of black money," observing that the measure had been taken to meet the commitment made in the CMP.

He altered the income tax brackets, brought Customs duty closer to that of the Asean, brought several goods under the Central Value Added Tax (Cenvat) rate of 16 per cent and modified the corporate taxes. "Tax proposals on direct taxes are expected to yield a gain of Rs 6,000 crore. On the indirect taxes side, they are broadly revenue neutral," the finance minister said.

He underlined the government's intention, to undertake major tax reforms to improve the tax to GDP ratio, expand the tax payer base, increase tax compliance and make tax administration more efficient.

Under the new tax brackets, income up to Rs 1 lakh will not attract any tax. Assessee with an income between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 1.5 lakh will have to pay 10 per cent, Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh will be charged 20 per cent and those with income above Rs 2.5 lakh will be taxed at 30 per cent.

Further, the taxable income level attracting a surcharge of 10 per cent has been raised to Rs 10 lakh. Women will enjoy a threshold exemption level of Rs 1.25 lakh while the exemption level for senior citizens has been fixed at Rs 1.5 lakh.

## NAC allocations hiked

NEW DELHI, Feb. 28. — Allocations for the office of the National Advisory Council headed by Mrs Sonia Gandhi, listed together with the PMO, have been increased by Rs 1.73 crore from Rs 14.59 crore last year. "The provision is for salaries, travel expenses, office expenses and other establishment related expenditure of PM's office and National Advisory Council," the notes on the Demand for Grants said. — SNS

While the standard deductions are proposed to be removed, other exemptions would be "cleaned up". To encourage savings, Mr Chidambaram allowed a consolidated limit of Rs 1 lakh for savings which will be deducted from the income before tax is calculated. All prevailing sectoral caps will be removed as well as rebate under Section 88 and Section 80L omitted.

In addition to the sum of Rs 1 lakh, six deductions will continue to receive the same tax treatment — housing loan interest, medical insurance premiums, specified expenditure on disabled dependant, expenses for medical treatment, deduction of interest on loans for higher studies and deduction to a person with disability.

As for perquisites, "benefits enjoyed collectively by the employees and cannot be attributed to individual employee" will be taxed in the hands of the employer. Transport services for workers and staff and canteen services in an office or factory will be outside the tax net. The indirect taxes would be largely revenue neutral, but geared to attract higher investment, particularly in the infrastructure sector and trade. The peak rate for non-agricultural products would be reduced from 20 per cent to 15 per cent. Customs duty on textile machinery as well on refrigerated vans are proposed to be halved. Mr Chidambaram proposed a corporate tax structure under which the I-T rate for domestic companies would be 30 per cent plus a surcharge of 10 per cent. The Securities Transaction Tax has been hiked from 0.015 per cent to 0.02 per cent.

Full coverage: pages 5, 10, 11, 12, 13  
Editorial: Politically Correct? page 8

■ To purportedly check "black money generation" a 0.1 per cent tax will be levied on withdrawal of cash of Rs 10,000 and above from banks on a single day. And there will be no amnesty scheme for black money.

## SENSEX ZOOMS

Cut in corporate tax from 35% to 30% announced by the finance minister gave a major boost to the capital market as stocks zoomed at Dalal Street taking the 30-scrip Sensitive Index to the highest-ever mark of 6,713.86 points — crossing the 6,700-barrier — amidst accelerated buying during the post-Budget period. The gain of 144.14 points or 2.19% was mostly on account of bank, tech and auto stocks. Nifty of National Stock Exchange also closed beyond 2,100 mark at 2,103.25 for the first time with an increase of 42.20 point or 2.02%

## TAX BRACKETS ALTERED

### NEW TAX BRACKETS

Income	Tax
Rs 1 lakh	nil (across the board)
Rs 1-1.5 lakh	10%
Rs 1.5-2.5 lakh	20%
Rs 2.5 lakh & above	30%

Exemptions:  
Rs 1.25 lakh ..... Threshold level for women

Rs 1.5 lakh ..... Senior citizens

■ 10 per cent service charge will be applicable on income beyond Rs 10 lakh instead of present Rs 8.5 lakh

■ Conveyance and canteen allowance to be outside the tax net but all other perks given by employers to employees as a collective benefit will be taxed at 30 per cent. This new tax will be called Fringe Benefit Tax and will be

■ Standard deduction removed "given the higher exemption limits and scaling up of tax brackets." Rs 1 lakh consolidated exemption limit will be allowed to all tax payers before computing taxable income. Sections 88 & 80L removed.

ated buying during the post-Budget period. The gain of 144.14 points or 2.19% was mostly on account of bank, tech and auto stocks. Nifty of National Stock Exchange also closed beyond 2,100 mark at 2,103.25 for the first time with an increase of 42.20 point or 2.02%

levied on employers

■ Six exemptions, including interest payments on housing loan on self-occupied and medical insurance premium, will be continued

■ One by six schemes for filing of income tax returns amended by removing mobile telephone from the list but payment of electricity bill of Rs 50,000 per annum to be included

■ Service tax rate has been retained

## COMPANY MATTERS

■ Corporate income tax for domestic companies reduced to 30%. The 10% surcharge continues

■ Minimum Alternate Tax will continue

■ 100% tax deduction for companies carrying out scientific research

■ Security transaction tax raised from 0.15 to 0.2%

■ Service providers up to Rs 4 lakh gross turnover to be exempted from service tax

■ Membership fee of clubs, associations and other services to be in the service tax-net.

## BASICS

■ To give a boost to the infrastructure sector, Mr Chidambaram has announced a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for financing large road, port and airport projects and raised cess on petrol and diesel for highway development

■ Bharat Nirman has been conceived as a business plan, to be implemented over a period of four years, for building infrastructure, especially in rural India

■ Fiscal deficit pegged at Rs 1,51,144 crore or 4.3 per cent of GDP during 2005-06

■ Revenue deficit proposed to be Rs 95,312 cr or 2.7 per cent of GDP for next fiscal

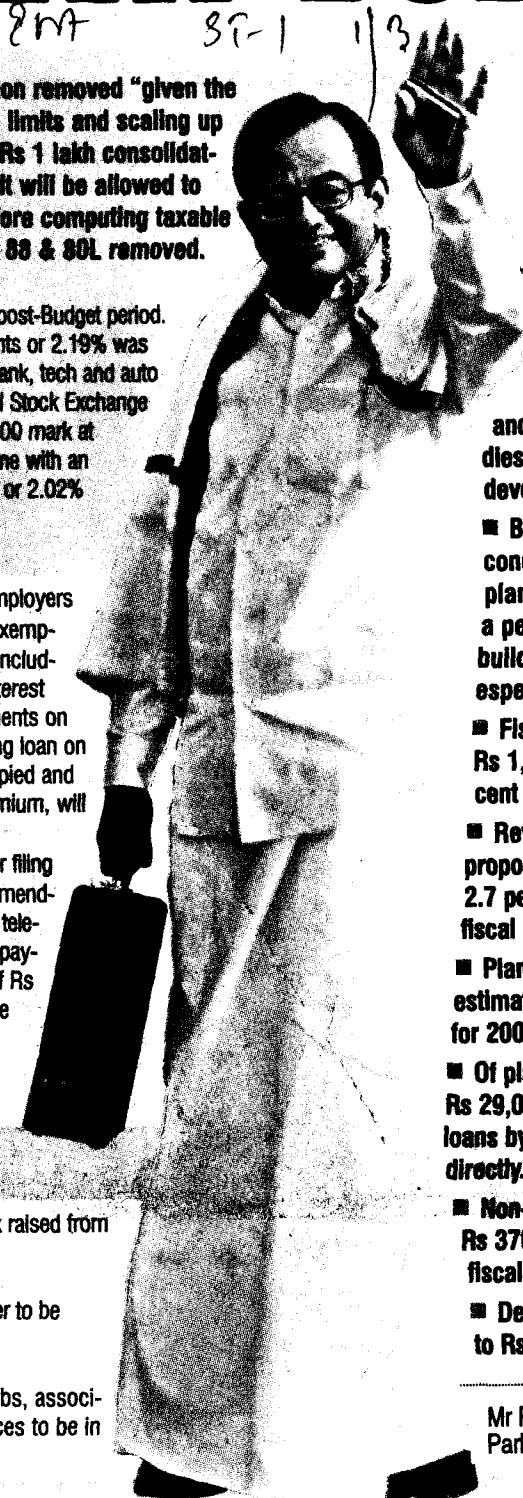
■ Plan expenditure is estimated at Rs 1,72,500 crore for 2005-06

■ Of plan expenditure, Rs 29,003 crore to be raised as loans by state governments directly.

■ Non-plan expenditure at Rs 370.85 crore for next fiscal.

■ Defence allocation increased to Rs 83,000 crore next fiscal

Mr P Chidambaram arrives in Parliament on Monday.





# ধনীদেব কর

প্রথম পাতার পর

হননি। তবে তাঁর বক্তব্য, এ নিয়ে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে আরও সবিস্তার আলোচনার প্রয়োজন আছে।

বিজেপি অবশ্য প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই এই বাজেটের মধ্যে তেমন ভাল কিছু খুঁজে পায়নি। প্রতিক্রিয়া জানানোর তাগিদেই যেন তাদের প্রতিক্রিয়া। কোনও নির্দিষ্ট পথের সন্ধান নেই সেখানে। প্রাক্তন অর্থমন্ত্রী যশোবন্ত সিংহ বলেছেন, “এই বাজেটে বাগাডম্বর আছে, কিন্তু সারবত্তা নেই। এটা কোনও জননায়কের বাজেট নয়, আইনজীবীর বাজেট।” বিজেপি-র জোট-শরিক, পশ্চিমবঙ্গের প্রধান বিরোধী দলের নেত্রী মমতা বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় বাজেটের কড়া সমালোচনা করে বলেন, “কালো-ধন প্রকল্পের কথা বলে চিদাম্বরমজি মানুষকে অপমান করেছেন। কালো টাকা উদ্ধার করতে তিনি যে কালো-ধনের উল্লেখ করেছেন তা কেন একজন সাধারণ ও সংপথে অর্থ উপার্জনকারী দেবেন। কেন ১০ হাজার টাকা ব্যাঙ্ক থেকে তুললে ১০ টাকা সরকারকে দিতে হবে?” অবিলম্বে এই ‘কালো-ধন’ বাতিলের দাবি তুলেছেন ভূগমূল নেত্রী।

এতখানি সরব না হলেও ‘কালো-ধন’ সম্পর্কে চিদাম্বরমের চিন্তাভাবনা নিয়ে সংশয়ে রয়েছেন বামপন্থীরাও। অসীমবাবুর বক্তব্য, কালো টাকা উদ্ধারে সংহত পরিকল্পনার প্রয়োজন রয়েছে। তাঁর ধারণা, কেন্দ্র-রাজ্য যৌথ ভাবে এই পরিকল্পনা হাতে নিলে তবেই তা সার্থক হবে। আপত্তির জায়গাগুলি বামপন্থীরা চিহ্নিত করছেন। চরম সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে বামপন্থীরা যে সরকারের সঙ্গে আলোচনার মাধ্যমে মীমাংসা চান, তার স্পষ্ট ইঙ্গিত আজ সি পি এমের লিখিত বিবৃতিতে দেওয়া হয়েছে। অসীমবাবু আরও নির্দিষ্ট করে এই আলোচনার দাবি তুলেই রেখেছেন। তবে সার্বিক ভাবে এই বিবৃতি ও দলের বিভিন্ন নেতার বক্তব্য থেকে এটা স্পষ্ট যে বাজেটে সামাজিক ক্ষেত্রের দিকে নজর পড়ায় বামেরা খুশি। সি পি এমের বাসুদেব আচারিয়া বা নীলোৎপল বসু বা সি পি আইয়ের গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত বিষয়টিকে ‘সদর্থক’ বলেই বর্ণনা করেছেন।

খাদ্যের বদলে কাজ প্রকল্পে চাহিদা এবং বরাদ্দের মধ্যে ২৯ হাজার কোটি টাকার ফাঁকি নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তুলেছেন অসীম দাশগুপ্ত। এই ফাঁকি ভরতি করার জন্য আর্থিক দায়ভার শেষ পর্যন্ত রাজ্যগুলির কাঁধে চাপবে কিনা তা নিয়ে চিন্তায় রয়েছেন পশ্চিমবঙ্গের অর্থমন্ত্রী। নিশ্চিত কর্মসংস্থান প্রকল্পের রূপরেখা ও তার রূপায়ণ নিয়েও রাজ্যগুলির সঙ্গে কেন্দ্রের আলোচনার দাবি তুলেছেন তিনি। রাজ্যে সফল ভূমি সংস্কারের অভিজ্ঞতার নিরিখে অসীমবাবুর বক্তব্য, কর্মসংস্থানে প্রকল্পের ফলকে দীর্ঘমেয়াদে ধরে রাখতে এর সঙ্গে ভূমি সংস্কারকেও যুক্ত করতে হবে।

গ্রামীণ স্বাস্থ্য প্রকল্পে সন্তোষ প্রকাশ করলেও এ বাবদ বরাদ্দ যে অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি যোগিত হারের থেকে অনেকটাই কম তা-ও মনে করিয়ে দিয়েছেন অসীমবাবু। দেশের মোট জাতীয় উৎপাদন ২৮ লক্ষ কোটি টাকা। কর্মসূচিতে তার ২ থেকে ৩ শতাংশ স্বাস্থ্য ক্ষেত্রে বরাদ্দের কথা বলা হয়েছিল। অর্থাৎ কমপক্ষে ৫৬ হাজার কোটি। কিন্তু চিদাম্বরমের বরাদ্দ ১০ হাজার ২৮০ কোটি টাকা।

গ্রামীণ পরিকাঠামো ক্ষেত্রে চিদাম্বরমের ঘোষণায় সন্তুষ্ট বামেরা। কিন্তু বরাদ্দের বড় অংশই রাজ্যকে ঋণ বাবদ দিচ্ছে কেন্দ্র। এ নিয়ে আপত্তি আছে অসীমবাবুর। আর আই ডি এক এবং এ আই বি পি খাতে ১২ হাজার ৮০০ কোটি টাকার ঋণ, রাজ্যকেই তা শোধ করতে হবে। অসীমবাবুর দাবি, এই প্রকল্পের বরাদ্দকে বাজেট অনুদান হিসাবেই চিহ্নিত করতে হবে।

## পথ প্রশস্ত

প্রথম পাতার পর

প্রয়োজন হবে। ব্যাঙ্কিং সংস্কারের দ্বিতীয় পর্যায় শুরু হবে ২০০৯ সালের এপ্রিল থেকে।

২০০৪ সালের ৫ মার্চ কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ব্যাঙ্কিং শিল্পে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের রূপরেখা পেশ করেছিল। সেই নথিতে বলা হয়েছিল, বিদেশি প্রত্যক্ষ বিনিয়োগ, বিদেশি আর্থিক সংস্থার লগ্নি ও অনাবাসীদের বিনিয়োগ, তিন স্তর থেকে বিনিয়োগ যোগ করে মোট বিদেশি অংশীদারি সর্বোচ্চ ৭৪ শতাংশ পর্যন্ত অনুমোদন করা হবে। বাকি ২৬ শতাংশ শেষার রাখতে হবে ভারতীয়দের হাতে। তবে পুনর্গঠনের প্রয়োজনে ব্যাঙ্কে বিদেশি লগ্নির ভূমিকা ওই নীতিতে ছিল না। অর্থাৎ আগামী দিনে যা হতে চলেছে, তা হল, রূগণ বেসরকারি ব্যাঙ্ক বিদেশি ব্যাঙ্কের হাত ধরে ও বিদেশি মালিকানা পুনর্গঠিত হতে পারে।

অর্থমন্ত্রী বাজেট-বক্তৃতায় ব্যাঙ্কিং সংস্কার নিয়ে যা বলেছেন, তা মূলত কাজের খুঁটিনাটি সংক্রান্ত। ‘স্ট্যাটিউটারি লিকুইডিটি রেশিও’ বা এস এল আর এবং ‘ক্যাপ রিজার্ভ রেশিও’ বা সি আর আর-এর উর্ধ্ব ও নিম্নসীমা তুলে দেওয়ার প্রস্তাব দেওয়া হয়েছে বাজেটে। ব্যাঙ্ক মোট সংগৃহীত আমানতের যত শতাংশ অর্থ নগদ হিসাবে রাখতে পারে, সেটাই নির্ধারণ করে এস এল আর বা বিধিবদ্ধ নগদ অনুপাত। আর সংগৃহীত অর্থের যত অংশ ব্যাঙ্কগুলিকে জমা রাখতে হয় রিজার্ভ ব্যাঙ্কে, তাকেই বলে সি আর আর বা নগদ জমার অনুপাত।

অর্থমন্ত্রীর প্রস্তাব, এস এল আরের সীমা তুলে দেওয়ার জন্য ব্যাঙ্ক নিয়ন্ত্রণ আইন সংশোধন করে এ ব্যাপারে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার ভার রিজার্ভ ব্যাঙ্কের হাতে অর্পণ করা হবে এবং সি আর আরের সীমা উঠে যাওয়ার পরে সংশোধিত হবে রিজার্ভ ব্যাঙ্ক অব ইন্ডিয়া আইন। উল্লিখিত দুটি আইন সংশোধনের জন্য চলতি বাজেট অধিবেশনেই বিল আনা হবে বলে ঘোষণা করেছেন অর্থমন্ত্রী।

## এক হাতে কর কমিয়ে অন্য হাতে ছাড় বিলোপ

প্রথম পাতার পর

মানুষকে করের আওতায় নিয়ে আসা। প্রথম উদ্দেশ্যে চিদাম্বরম যে সফল তা পরিষ্কার। দ্বিতীয় লক্ষ্যটি অর্জন করার জন্য স্ট্যান্ডার্ড ডিউকেশন তুলে দিয়েছেন তিনি।

এর ফলে যে বহু মানুষ রাতারাতি করের আওতায় চলে আসবেন, অনেক বিশেষজ্ঞই সে বিষয়ে একমত।

করের আওতা বাড়ানোর জন্য ‘ওয়ান বাই সিঙ্গল’ নামে যে প্রকল্প চালু রয়েছে তাতেও সংশোধন করা হয়েছে।

মোবাইল ফোন রাখার কারণে এখন থেকে কেউ করের আওতায় আসবেন না। বরং যারা বিদ্যুৎ বিল খাতে বছরে ৫০,০০০ টাকা বা তার

বেশি দিয়ে থাকেন তাঁরা করের আওতায় আসবেন।

আগামী বছর আয়কর খাতে অর্থমন্ত্রী যে রাজস্ব আয়ের আশা করেন, তার থেকেও এর ইঙ্গিত মেলে। চলতি আর্থিক বছরে যেখানে আয়কর খাতে সরকার ৫০,৯২৯ কোটি টাকা আয় করেছে, সেখানে আগামী বছর অর্থমন্ত্রী ৬৬,২৩৯ কোটি টাকা আয়ের লক্ষ্যমাত্রা রেখেছেন। বিশেষজ্ঞদের

যুক্তি, শুধু আর্থিক উন্নয়নের উপর ভরসা করে এতখানি রাজস্ব বৃদ্ধির আশা অর্থমন্ত্রী করতেন না। কর সংস্কারের ফলে তালিকায় অনেক নতুন করদাতা যোগ হবেন, এই আশা তাঁকে বড় ভরসা জুটিয়েছে।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

01 MAR 2005

# A TWO-IN-ONE BUDGET COMBO

P. Chidambaram manages to combine  
political sense with economic savvy

**B**UDGET 2005 is an astute combination of good politics and good economics. By meeting expenditure requirements of the food for work scheme, larger education outlays and greater spending on irrigation and rural development, Union Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram has been able to meet the political demands of the National Common Minimum Programme. Unlike Budget 2004, which was alleged to have paid only lip service to some of the demands of the National Common Minimum Programme, in this Budget the finance minister genuinely meets some of the demands placed before him by the Leftists and Left-of-centre partners within the UPA. Fortunately, though, it is not just good political acumen that characterises this exercise. Chidambaram has managed to deliver good economics as well. The Budget keeps sight of the fact that the National Common Minimum Programme demands large resources. A short-term strategy, for instance, would have been to raise tax rates. This approach would have given him the resources to spend in the current budget but would not have generated resources for later. The finance minister, therefore, has chosen to place his bets on higher tax collections that will come with a simpler tax system and a lower tax rate.

**T**A X reform then forms the heart of this Budget effort. Expectations about significant tax reforms in this exercise had already been raised by both Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's and Finance Minister Chidambaram's references to Budget 2005 as a budget of tax reforms. A rationalisation of direct taxes, both on the front of personal taxes and corporate taxes, as well as the change in rates is welcome. The cut in custom duties is a move toward reducing tariffs to get to ASEAN rates and to increasing the competitiveness of Indian industry. The reduction of duties on crude oil and petroleum products to increase efficiency within industry and reduce the burden on the consumer is welcome. Chidambaram's Budget speech indicated the setting up of a Special Purpose Vehicle for infrastructure, more funds to the National Highway Project, the removal of 108 items from the Small Scale Industries' reservation list and money

for the National Common Minimum Programme's promises of food for work and education.

**M**OST of the reforms in the Budget have, of course, not come as a surprise. While the official secrecy enshrouding the Budget-making proposals remains, there was little in these proposals that had not passed the scrutiny of the public. In fact, there was little on which there was no general consensus. On the direct tax proposals — which are the most radical elements of this Budget — Chidambaram has accepted the recommendations of the Kelkar Task Force, either in full, as in the case of corporate tax — or in part, as in the case of changes in the tax rates. The blueprint of the budgetary tax proposals can be seen clearly and concretely in the Kelkar Task Force report. The finance minister has also made good use of the fact that for once there was a clear road map laid out — with rates, their expected impact on taxes and their effect on deficits — all painstakingly and scrupulously worked out. In addition to the tax proposals, the proposal of the Planning Commission on using foreign exchange reserves for infrastructure has also been debated in public. This can be said for roughly 18 of the 20 proposals in this Budget. This transparency in the budgetary process is to be commended and taken further in the exercises of the future. The making of road maps for budgetary proposals, as well as revenue and deficit targets, is new and will take budget-making in India to new heights. An important reform in this Budget, then, is the reform of the process itself. Rarely have budget proposals been debated at such lengths any time before. The debate and discussion serve to strengthen the democratic aspect of the exercise and also place more responsibilities on the media, as the primary source of information in the public sphere. The next items on the agenda is more public discussion on subsidies and indirect taxes with a move towards evolving a Goods and Services Tax. The finance minister has already said that in the medium to long term he would like to see a national level Goods and Services Tax. At the end of the day, then, Chidambaram has managed a two-in-one Budget combo: political sense and economic savvy.

01 MAR 2005

# Reform vs CMP: FM to walk tightrope

## Slab changes likely to benefit lower middle class

### Sops likely for tea sector

Arun Kumar  
New Delhi, February 27



THE UNION Budget is expected to provide a ray of hope to the lower-income salaried class. Finance Minister P. Chidambaram is likely to wave his magic wand to increase the slab levels to the benefit of lower-income group. According to sources, the government may increase the tax slab of 20 per cent to incomes up to Rs 2.5 lakh against the current level of Rs 1.5 lakh.

However, it may also remove certain exemptions as suggested by the Vijay Kelkar-led FRBM task force. The sources said all exemptions will be grandfathered for future years, which means that all the exemptions will be clubbed under one heading. Given the government's intention to increase the tax base, it is unlikely to move to a two-rate income tax structure as suggested by Kelkar.

The sources said it may

### Huge outlay seen for job creation

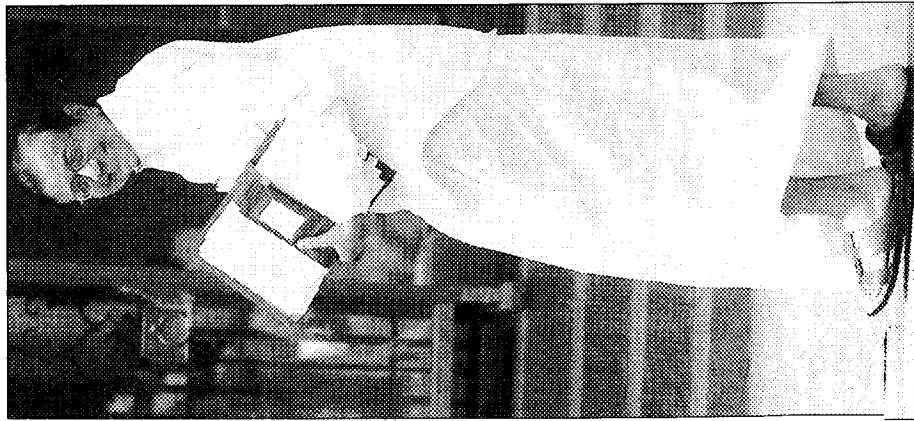
THE FINANCE minister is likely to create a huge corpus to meet the proposed expenditure on account of the Employment Guarantee Fund (EGF).

As per conservative estimates, the government needs to fork out nearly Rs 19,000 crore to guarantee 100 days of employment to every rural household. Rural population below the poverty line is currently around 19 crore. The Planning Commission estimates that there are 1.95 crore unemployed in rural areas. Therefore, to meet its commitment of providing a minimum of 100 days employment, it need to create jobs for 195 crore mandays. And, even if one were to assume the cost per employee per day is Rs 100, it needs a total budget support of Rs 19,500 crore per annum which is around one per cent of the GDP.

HTC

for salaried taxpayers. The Kelkar task force has also suggested for removal of exemptions under Section 10A, 10B, 80IA and 80IB of the Income Tax Act.

It is learnt that the government may withdraw these exemptions and grandfather the same for future years, which means that these would remain applicable for old companies, but would not be available to new units after the cut-off date to be set in the budget.



Sandeep Bamzai & Deepak Joshi  
New Delhi, February 27

A BOOSTER shot is expected for the ailing tea and coffee sectors tomorrow. The budget is most likely to have a comprehensive package for exporters as well with special emphasis on textiles in the post-quota regime. With last year's foreign trade policy looking at reducing transaction costs, the budget will take this forward. The cornerstone being enhancing competitiveness of Indian industry.

With its exports set to ramp up to \$75 billion by the end of this financial year, India is targeting \$150 billion exports by 2009. For this, a conducive and supportive environment has to be created.

Jumpstarting this, the inverted duty structure may be addressed to some extent and substantial relief will be given to the textile sector in this edition of the budget. In the post-quota regime, Indian textiles have to be nurtured so that it takes advantage of the opportunities available.

The crying need for reduction in basic customs duties across-the-board to 10 per cent and ensuring that total customs duty for an item is not above 25 per cent may also be considered. Textiles now account for 4 per cent of India's GDP, total 20 per cent of exports and employs 35 million people directly.

There is every possibility of de-reservation of 26 items under the small scale industries sector, introduction of subsidy and incentive plans, establishment of apparel parks and textile clusters.

Sources have indicated to the *Hindustan Times* that the ailing tea sector will also be given the benefit of reduced import duty of 5 per cent on items of machinery which have been notified by the ministry of finance in the past for other sectors.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2005

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## UPA SCORES OWN GOALS

D.P. 12

IF THE 14TH general election was all about winning through alliances, Assembly elections 2005 tell the same story in reverse. A broken alliance is the shortest and surest route to defeat. Last summer a Congress on the defensive and far from confident about its own vote-pulling capabilities built a winning coalition of national and regional parties. The United Progressive Alliance stood as a testimony to secular unity and surprised the pundits. Nine months on, the UPA has all but snatched defeat from the jaws of victory in two of the three States that went to the polls — and for reasons only too obvious. In both Bihar and Jharkhand, the Congress displayed mindless arrogance in wrecking the alliance that brought it handsome victories in the Lok Sabha election. In Bihar, the party leading the Central Government set out to prove it was a force to reckon with and bit the dust. Its limited alliance with the Lok Jana Shakti Party notwithstanding, it could not even hold the 12 seats it had in the outgoing Assembly. Worse, it inflicted crushing losses on its ally, the Rashtriya Janata Dal. In Jharkhand, the Congress went against alliance dharma and excluded the RJD from its seat-sharing pact with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. In the event, favourites JMM and the Congress finished well behind the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janata Dal(United) combine. When elections were announced to the State Assemblies of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Haryana, the arithmetic was so overwhelmingly in favour of the UPA that it looked set for a 3-0 sweep.

Today the UPA can claim only one unambiguous success — in Haryana. The Congress will no doubt take credit for its landslide victory in this State. Nonetheless, it would do well to temper its euphoria by considering two factors that contributed to this triumph. The mood on the ground was strongly for change. Secondly, the BJP, which fought the last Assembly election with the Indian National Lok Dal, was on its own this time. Haryana is poor consolation for the UPA considering its

losses in Bihar and Jharkhand. In Jharkhand, Chief Minister Arjun Munda of the BJP was hamstrung on many counts — a poor incumbency record, raging inner party dissidence, and incompatibility problems with the JD(U). Yet thanks to the overreaching ambitions of the Congress and the JMM, and the consequent splintering of the UPA's votes, Mr. Munda today looks headed for a return. That the RJD has done rather well for itself in this State is an irony that can only compound the misery of the Congress and the JMM.

The Bihar verdict may have been a blow to the UPA but it hardly redounds to the credit of the BJP-JD(U) alliance, which could not snatch an outright victory in a State thought to have been ruined by "15 years of [RJD] misrule." That Lalu Prasad put up a spirited fight not merely against his acknowledged adversaries but also against his purported allies speaks volumes for the RJD chief's resilience as well as his ability to fight on a number of fronts. Mr. Prasad braved brickbats from all sides, the BJP, the JD(U), the Congress, and the LJP, not to mention an Election Commission that scrutinised every move of the RJD with barely concealed adversariality. Bihar is faced with a hung Assembly that at least for the moment offers no ready solution. The key to the deadlock lies with Ram Vilas Paswan who might think he has been cast in the role of kingmaker. Yet Mr. Paswan is hardly in an enviable position. His bitter campaign against Mr. Prasad renders difficult any immediate patch-up between the two campaign-trail adversaries. On the other hand, Mr. Paswan's long-term ambition to build and nurture a Muslim-Dalit constituency dictates that he stay clear of the BJP-JD(U) combine. It is perhaps owing to this predicament that the LJP leader has suggested a spell of President's Rule for the beleaguered State. Those who favour such a course to clean what they believe to be the present-day equivalent of the Aegean stables clearly do not have much faith in the power of elective democracy.









# হতাশ বন্ধু বামেরাও

প্রথম পাতার পর

এবং বাঁকুড়া-দামোদর নদী রেলপথের গেজ পরিবর্তনের কাজ এই বছরে শেষ হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন লালু। কৃষ্ণনগর বহরমপুর লাইন বৈদ্যুতিকীকরণের কাজ ২০০৫-০৬ সালে শেষ হবে।

নতুন লাইন তৈরির যে কাজ চলছে, তাতে তারকেশ্বর-বিষ্ণুপুরের জন্য বরাদ্দ ১০ কোটি টাকা (বাকি থাকছে ২৪৩ কোটি)। রামপুরহাট মন্দারহিল পেল ১০ কোটি (বাকি থাকছে ৯৪ কোটি)। তবে এ বার ভাল টাকা পেয়েছে সময়সীমা পেরিয়ে যাওয়া বৈদ্যুতিকীকরণের প্রকল্প— রানাঘাট-বনগাঁ (২৪.৭১ কোটি), বারাসত-হাসনাবাদ (৩৩.৩১ কোটি)।

বারাসত-হাসনাবাদের মধ্যে ডবল লাইনের জন্য দেওয়া হয়েছে ৫০ লক্ষ টাকা। বারুইপুর-মগরাহাটে ডবল লাইন প্রকল্পকে জিইয়ে রাখা হয়েছে ১ লক্ষ টাকা বরাদ্দ করে। রেল বাজেটে লোকসভার স্পিকার সোমনাথ চট্টোপাধ্যায়ের নির্বাচনী এলাকা বোলপুর-আহমেদপুরে ডবল লাইন পাতার জন্য ১ কোটি টাকা বরাদ্দ করা হয়েছে।

রাজ্যে ডবল লাইনের ১৭টি প্রকল্প এ বছর শেষ হবে না। নতুন কংক্রিটের স্লিপার তৈরির জন্য ১২টি কারখানার কথা ঘোষণা করেছেন। তার মধ্যে দু'টি বিহারে হলেও পশ্চিমবঙ্গের বিষয়ে কিছু বলা নেই।

যাত্রী পরিষেবাতেও কম টাকা দেওয়া হয়েছে পশ্চিমবঙ্গকে। পূর্ব রেলে যাত্রী পরিষেবার জন্য ২৪ কোটি ২৫ লক্ষ ৪২ হাজার টাকা খরচ করা হবে। অথচ পশ্চিম রেলে ৩০ কোটি ৫৪ লক্ষ এবং পূর্ব-মধ্য রেলে (হাজিপুরে সদর) ৩৪ কোটি ২০ লক্ষ টাকা ঢালা হচ্ছে। উত্তর রেল এই খাতে পাচ্ছে ৩৫ কোটি ৬৭ লক্ষ টাকা।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

## ভাড়া বাড়ল না এ বারও

প্রথম পাতার পর

সামগ্রীর পরিবহন অগ্রাধিকারের ভিত্তিতে বিনা পরসায় করা হবে। এমনকী, যে সব মানুষ প্রাকৃতিক বিপর্যয়ের জন্য আটকে পড়বেন, তাঁদের উদ্ধারের পরে দ্বিতীয় শ্রেণিতে ফেরার টিকিটই লাগবে না। সরকারি হাসপাতালে মৃত্যু হলে মৃতদেহ বাড়ির নিকটবর্তী স্টেশনে নিয়ে যাওয়ার সময় অর্ধেক খরচ লাগবে।

জনমোহিনী বাজেটে কর্মসংস্থানের রাস্তা খোলা রাখতেও কসুর করেননি রেলমন্ত্রী। রেলওয়ে রিক্রুটমেন্ট বোর্ড

নয়, চতুর্থ শ্রেণির কর্মী নিয়োগের বিষয়টি স্থানীয় স্তরেই ঠিক হবে। যেমন হচ্ছে আর পি এফের ক্ষেত্রে।

কিন্তু জনপ্রিয়তার মুগ্ধ যে কম নয় তা অব্যাহত রাখতে স্বীকারও করেছেন লালু। যেমন, ভারতীয় রেলের বছরে প্রায় ১২ লক্ষ অবসরপ্রাপ্ত কর্মীর পেনশনের খাতে খরচ হয় প্রায় সাত হাজার কোটি টাকা। আর বাজেট প্রস্তাবে খরচের যে অঙ্ক সংসদে লালুপ্রসাদ পেশ করলেন তা প্রায় ১৫, ৭৭২ কোটি টাকার। ফলে আর্থিক হাল অনুমেয়।

লালুপ্রসাদ অবশ্য

জানিয়েছেন, পেনশনের ব্যাপারে একটি সামগ্রিক হিসাব নেবে রেলমন্ত্রী। এ ব্যাপারে কোনও পেশাদারি সংস্থাকে কাজে লাগানো হবে। ভারতীয় রেলকে আর্থিকভাবে উন্নীত করতে আধুনিকীকরণের কথাও বলেছেন লালুপ্রসাদ। এ বিষয়ে প্রকল্পের রূপরেখা স্পষ্ট নয় তাঁর বাজেটে। পণ্য পরিবহনের ক্ষেত্রে আর বেড়েছে এই পরিসংখ্যানও লালু তাঁর বাজেটে পেশ করেছেন। এ বার যার পরিমাণ ৪৮৩ কোটি টন। গত বারের তুলনায় প্রায় ৩ কোটি টন বেশি।

27 FEB 2005

27 FEB 2005

# Hidden lash in Laloo largesse

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

## MILKMAN BUDGET: Tapping mammaries of welfare state

New Delhi, Feb. 26: Laloo Prasad Yadav rolled out a second "populist" railway budget in less than a year that came without fare and freight increases and yet managed to promise a surplus of Rs 1,975 crore for 2005-06.

However, just as Laloo Prasad seemed to have lost some of his magic touch in home state Bihar where results of a tense election will be known on Sunday, it appeared that in his eagerness to craft a pro-poor budget he had glossed over certain elements that would be seen as unpopular.

The cornerstone of the budgetary exercise has been a rejig of the commodity classification categories, bringing them down from 27 to 19.

While the recast has lowered transportation costs for a range of goods from petrol and diesel to cars, textiles and tea, it raised the freight costs for rice and wheat (including foodgrain sold through ration shops), pulses, paddy and sugar — all commodities of common consumption.

Most of the foodgrain — especially that meant for ration shops — uses the railways and the re-categorisation means that customers must brace for higher prices. Only if the grain is moved by open wagons will the railways charge the old freight rate.

Laloo Prasad, who was marshalling his cadre to fight what has been widely seen as a tough election in Bihar, might have had little time to go over the fine print of his budget. Result: his so-called populist budget may not be as popular as he might have expected.

One reason for this is that the freight tariff cuts have

- 50% off for milkmen and farmers going for training at national institutes
- Govt rural school students to get 75% concession for annual study tour
- 75% off for girls from rural govt schools taking professional entrance exams
- Free travel extended to unemployed going for state govt job interviews
- 50% concession for carrying bodies of patients who die during treatment at big govt hospitals
- 46 new trains, eight in the east (List on Page 6)

All concessions are for second class fares

### RESERVATION

- Ticket booking from land phones
- Computerised train enquiry across the country. Dial 139
- Ticket booking on Net extended from 4 am to 11.30 pm
- Vacancy position charts on coaches and platforms
- Continuous update of waiting lists

### METRO WATCH

- Trains on New Delhi-Howrah and New Delhi-Chennai routes at 150 kmph
- 2007 deadline for Calcutta's Metro Railway extension to Garia
- World-class stations, starting with New Delhi



Graphic: MANOJ

### TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT

Freight changes may make these goods costlier...

Rice  
Wheat  
Pulses  
Paddy  
Sugar

...and these cheaper\*

Cars  
Tea  
LPG  
Petrol  
Diesel

Detailed list on Page 11

\*Only if companies pass on the benefit

been the sharpest for industries that barely use the railways to move their commodities: the rates for cars and motorbikes have been cut by as much as 61 per cent for distances of 1,500 km.

Most carmakers move a substantial portion of their production by road — and the railways are offering the cuts as an inducement to switch over.

Carmaker Hyundai Motor India president B.V.R. Subbu said: "We only send our products by train to Delhi and this is a region where a drop in freight will be passed on." Rival Maruti Udyog was more circumspect, saying it was assessing the impact.

Although LPG and kerosene freight rates have been lowered by 2.7 and 3.7 per cent, respectively, there is little like-

lihood of a cut in prices as they are already heavily subsidised.

The railways are finally getting ready to stem the loss of earnings in the upper classes with passengers shifting to airlines, taking advantage of cheap Apex fares. Railway Board chairman R.K. Singh said the railways would introduce a frequent traveller scheme sometime in August.

The railway minister seems to have paid no heed to the suggestion of the Planning Commission and the finance ministry to not introduce new trains. He grandly announced 46 new trains.

The truth is that this is a bit of a chimera: the railways are still struggling to fulfil the promises of new trains made by Laloo Prasad's predecessors.

Waitlisted passengers will now get a virtual update on the ticket position and no longer have to wait for the list to be finalised four hours before the departure of trains. The upgrades stop now on the eve of departure.

Laloo Prasad also promised a peace express: a special train daily between Amritsar and border outpost Attari.

■ See Pages 6, 11 and 12

26/2  
G-6  
9-11  
W-11

# Sonia crowds on coalition dharma

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, Feb. 25:** Congress president Sonia Gandhi has asserted that the party, the leading partner in the ruling United Progressive Alliance, has followed coalition dharma to ensure cohesive functioning of the Manmohan Singh government.

"We in the Congress have been very sensitive to the challenges of running a coalition government, accommodating diverse points of view to ensure its cohesive functioning," Sonia said while addressing the Congress parliamentary party here this evening.

The Congress president's assertion came in the wake of railway minister Laloo Prasad Yadav's complaint that the party lacked experience in running a coalition government — a criticism also voiced by CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan.

The coalition has worked well during the past nine months, contrary to the expectations of "our detractors", Sonia said and assured that the party would remain sensitive to accommodating different points of view to ensure that the government runs smoothly.

Sonia said the President's address earlier in the day had laid out the agenda for governance by the Congress-led alliance for the next year and hoped Monday's budget would reflect the commitments of the party's election manifesto.

She said she had detailed discussions with the Prime Minister on giving effect to the party's pledges in areas such as elementary education, employment, health and farmers' welfare.

Sonia drew the attention of ministers to the complaints made against them by party workers. "They are simply unable to get access to our ministers," she said, asking them to be mindful of their responsibilities towards party workers and organisational leaders.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 FEB 2005

## UPA yet to decide on women's quota

9-WPA 9/11/05 11:25  
By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 24.** The Government and the Congress appear to have distanced themselves from the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil's proposal to raise the number of seats in the Lok Sabha for women as a measure to take forward the stalled Women's Reservation Bill, providing one-third reservation in Parliament and Legislatures.

Mr. Patil had in his letter to political parties suggested that the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha could be increased

by one-third by adding 181 seats to the present strength of 545. However, it appears that the proposal does not have any formal sanction within the Government and the party.

The BJP remained lukewarm to the suggestion and said even after adding 181 seats, the total percentage of reservation would remain at 25 per cent.

On his part, The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, told correspondents today that the United Progressive Alliance Government was yet to take a view. He parried

questions whether the suggestion of Mr. Patil was his own view. Mr. Azad said that Mr. Patil had been asked to talk to various political parties and find out their views and asserted that as far as the Congress was concerned, it stood for one-third reservation for women both in Parliament and State Legislatures.

"The Home Minister has initiated a discussion with political parties and the exercise has not yet been completed. Once it is completed, we will see how to go about it," he said.

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2005

# BIG BUCKS FOR BUILDING BOOM

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 24. — Shortly after a breakfast meeting with leading Left party leaders where the finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram, did his best to suggest that he would listen to their demands, the UPA trod on Marxist toes today by allowing 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in the construction and development sector. However, the government barred the sale of undeveloped land by foreign investors to prevent speculation in real estate.

After the UPA and the Left formed a committee for better floor coordination during the Budget session of Parliament, came the FDI decision by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs. Commerce and industries minister Mr Kamal Nath said it would pave the way for entry of foreign investors, spur development and generate employment, particularly in the rural sector. "FDI up to 100 per cent will be allowed under automatic route in townships, housing, built-up infrastructure and construction-development projects," Mr Nath said. Construction-development projects will also include housing, commercial premises, hotels, resorts, hospitals, educational institutions, recreational facilities, and city and regional level infrastructure.

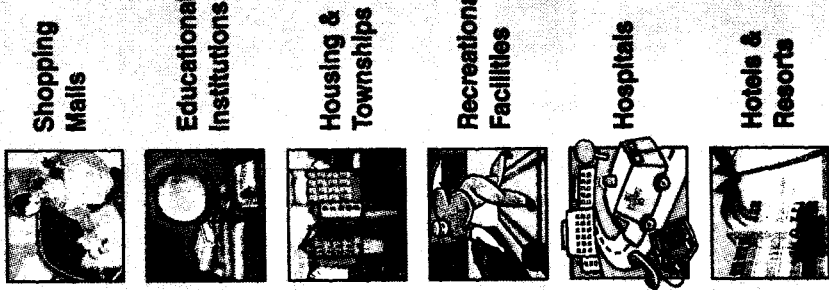
"It is expected that allowing investment on the automatic route in the construction and development sector would have a multiplier effect on the economy by boosting construction activities of all types," the minister said. It would create employment not only for skilled and unskilled labourers, technicians and artisans, but also for engineers, architects and designers, he said.

The move would also lead to spin-off benefits for the manufacturing sector, particularly construction material industries like cement, steel and brick making. Allowing 100 per cent FDI also ensure rapid increase in built-



## 100% FDI IN CONSTRUCTION

- FDI under automatic route
- Minimum area to be developed under each project has been reduced to 25 acres from 100 acres and 2,000 dwelling units for serviced housing plots or a minimum built up area of 50,000 sq m.
- Minimum \$10 million capital for wholly-owned arm
- \$5 million minimum capital for joint ventures
- Original investment cannot be repatriated before three years
- FDI projects would be accorded national treatment at par with local developers
- Sale of undeveloped land barred to prevent speculation in real estate



(LEFT) Mr P Chidambaram and Mr Saram Yechury after Thursday's meeting with the Prime Minister. — AFP

up infrastructure as well as improvement of existing infrastructure.

Left parties were prompt in their reaction. RSP leader Mr Abani Roy said it was a sign that the UPA was either taking the Left for granted or was ignoring it. Mr Deabrata Biswas of Forward Bloc regretted that the UPA was not even bothering to inform the Left about such decisions. CPI leader Mr Gurudas Dasgupta also opposed the move.

During the meeting in the morning, the finance minister tried to explain that the dozen demands of the Left would be looked into seriously. Mrs Sonia Ga-

ndhi, the UPA chairperson, and Dr Manmohan Singh were present. "This was a pre-Budget meeting. We have to see from the Budget what they have actually done," a senior Left leader said. But during the meeting, Left leaders did point out that public sector banks should not be given powers in a haphazard way. There was a need to speak to trade unions and the banking associations for decision-making, they said.

Over breakfast — with the usual menu of dosas, idlis, upma and sandwiches supplemented by chicken cutlets — there were questions regarding

more funds for irrigation. This was after the finance minister spoke about how much agriculture depended on the monsoons. However, Dr Singh intervened to say that efforts would be made in this direction.

Among the Left leaders present were CPI-M general secretary Mr HS Surjeet and CPI chief Mr AB Bardhan. Both left for a visit to Pakistan later today. During the meeting, Left leaders reiterated their proposals regarding the Budget. They had earlier demanded more funds for the Common Minimum Programme which would mean the

implementation of the Employment Guarantee Act, increased deficit spending and cutting down defence expenditure. Strengthening the public sector, mobilising tax revenue, re-introducing the capital gains tax and improving rural credit are some of the suggestions.

At a meeting this afternoon, the Left leaders also opposed the Patents Bill and changes in the banking sector after an increase in the FDI limit. They also called for more commitment towards rural connectivity in the telecom sector.

Another report on page 11

MIXED RESPONSE FROM PARTIES

# Free hand for PSU banks

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SNS & Agencies

NEW DELHI, Feb. 22. — With exactly a week to go before Budget 2005-06 is presented, the government today unveiled its blueprint on banking sector reforms to enable public sector banks to compete with the fast-growing private sector banking.

The PSU banks have been accorded greater autonomy, allowing them to make domestic and overseas acquisitions on their own without seeking any approval from the government. State-run banks could also freely exit non-profitable ventures, start overseas branches or set up subsidiaries, a finance ministry official said.

While the CPI-M is likely to react tomorrow, the smaller Left parties have spoken out strongly against certain parts of the plan including the closure or merger of unviable branches. BJP's economic cell member Mr Jagdish Shettigar said it was a good decision that would help PSU banks compete better with private banks and safeguard the depositor's interests.

The government's blueprint would enable the PSU banks to be equipped with greater operational flexibility, thus providing a level playing field to effectively compete with private sector banks, the official said. The PSU banks can now hire the best talents, while having managerial autonomy to appoint professionals at higher salaries and as many GMs as they wish. The PSU banks will have the freedom to carry out their functions without any impediment, subject to statutory requirements.

The Boards of Directors of the stronger banks will enjoy additional autonomy for framing their own HR policies and procedures for recruitment, for creating additional posts of general managers, for sanctioning differential pay linked to performance with the pay scales decided after negotiations and for deciding the amount of contribution to be made to the staff welfare fund. The government has put four pre-conditions —

■ a track record of three years' consecutive profit, capital adequacy ratio of over nine per cent, non-performing assets of less than nine per cent and minimum owned funds of Rs 300 crore — for banks to get the managerial and functional autonomy. The other areas where banks will be allowed freedom are



- Pursuing new lines of business,
- Making suitable acquisitions of companies or businesses, closure or merger of unviable branches, opening overseas offices, setting up subsidiaries and freedom to exit from a business.
- Deciding staffing pattern, recruitment, placement, transfer, training, promotions and pensions.
- Prescribing standards for categorisation of branches.
- Prescribing essential academic qualifications, minimum qualification standards, and modalities for promotion and recruitment.
- Undertaking visits abroad.
- Laying down policy of accountability and responsibility of bank officials.

The government will continue to exercise certain functions as the owner.

# Govt to invest EPF money in equity, Left livid

Deepak Razdan

New Delhi, February 21

ON A day the Left threatened to "bite very hard" if the UPA government ignored its stand on economic issues, the EPF trustees' board overrode objections from the Left unions and decided to invest in equities, opening the fund to market risk.

Having earlier bowed to Left pressure and raised the EPF interest rate to 9.5 per cent, the board today appointed a private

consultant for advice on investments which can yield the "best returns".

Currently, EPF deposits are invested in government securities in keeping with finance ministry guidelines. The consultant has now been asked to suggest ways for investments in Indian stocks as well as multi-laterally guaranteed international instruments.

The private firm, in consultation with the finance ministry, will draw up a roadmap for the

next 10 to 15 years for investment of social security funds in accordance with the "best national and international practices".

The firm's recommendations, if implemented, will require amendment to the EPF Act.

The report of the consultant, Mercer Human Resource Consulting, Mumbai, will cost Rs 33 lakh. The firm has been asked to evaluate "governance structure"

of the fund, including membership of the fund's key finance and investment committee.

The landmark decision was not a smooth affair. Left-backed unions Citu and Aituc, along with the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and Hind Mazdoor Sabha, opposed the move at the board meeting while the Congress-backed Intuc supported it.

Left unions later criticised the board's "majority decision", taken in violation of the board's past practice of adopting all decisions by consensus.

According to Citu leader W.R. Vardarajan, there was lack of

transparency in the award of the consultancy tender, whose conditions were allegedly relaxed at the last stage. The consultancy exercise could be "fruitful", he said, because EPF investments, in the final analysis, were decided by the finance ministry. "We favour handing over the funds to the RBI, which can work out an inflation-linked formula," he said.

The board could not take up the issue of 9.5 per cent interest payment because of poll-eve

curbs. Labour minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, who presided over the meeting, said there should be no worry on that count, for "the government will pay whatever has been announced".

The payment of 9.5 per cent was announced by the government recently, in spite of the fact that it could result in a deficit of Rs 927 crore.

The board's finance and investment committee will meet on March 3 to take up the interest rate to be paid next year.

27/2

J. WPA Govt



# 'UPA Government's stability depends on its sincerity to CMP'

FD-11  
2/2

By Our Staff Reporter

**MALAPPURAM, FEB. 20.** The stability of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government at the Centre did not depend on the Left parties, but on the sincerity with which the Government implemented the common minimum programme (CMP), said the CPI (M) Polit Bureau member, Sitaram Yechury.

Inaugurating a seminar on the "Left perspective in today's political scenario and future" on the second day of the CPI (M)'s State conference here this evening, Mr. Yechury indirectly warned the Congress-led UPA Government that the Left would not hesitate to withdraw support to it if the Congress did not change its policies.

Mr. Yechury reminded the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, that no Prime Minister who followed the liberalised economic policy after Narasimha Rao had been re-elected. "So your economic measures have to shift for people's welfare, not for capitalist welfare," he said. Mr. Yechury asked the Congress to recognise the content and the message of the people's mandate. The mandate is that there cannot be any Government at the Centre without the support of the 61 Left mem-

bers. The mandate, he said, was that the Government must take on the communalist forces and strive to achieve economic independence and social justice.

Repeatedly warning the Government against violating the CMP, Mr. Yechury said "the moment you deviate from it, the Left will be the first to go to the people to mobilise public opinion against you." He said the Left would strengthen its agitation against the Government if the latter did not include in the forthcoming Budget the demands put forth by the Left.

"The Congress should follow a different set of policies from what it used to follow earlier. The Left will continue to pressurise them," he said. The Left had a major role to play in implementing the people's mandate for a secular democracy. Therefore, it has to strengthen itself. The future of modern India depended on how fast and successful the Left Front would be in the days to come, he said.

Mr. Yechury said the years till 2007 would see a political drought for the BJP, with the elections next year in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Bengal authoring a verdict against communal forces. He called upon the party members in the State to make use of the opportunity.

THE HINDU 21 FEB 2005

# Nath backs 100% FDI in shopping malls, hotels

By Priya Ranjan Dash/TNN

**New Delhi:** The commerce and industry ministry has proposed opening up of the foreign investment policy by allowing 100% FDI in construction of commercial properties such as shopping malls and hotels. The Cabinet is expected to decide soon, on a proposal to this effect by commerce minister Kamal Nath last week.

The note is a follow-up to the feedback Nath received at the recent World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, where he led India's participation. Officials said construction of commercial

properties could attract large amount of FDI.

Also, in a post-Davos report to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Nath has noted the strong investor interest in India and suggested that the government should provide fresh avenues to investors to cash in on the tremendous global interest.

At present, housing and real estate is on the list of seven activities where FDI is prohibited. The commerce and industry ministry, which administers the foreign investment policy, is also looking at partly opening up retail trade, another prohibited activity, for FDI.



Allowing FDI in certain segments of the retail sector, such as in retailing of specific branded products, which would neither affect the domestic trade and shopkeepers nor hit employment,

is being considered.

In the broad sector of real estate, FDI of up to 100% is allowed only in the "development of integrated township". The automatic route is, however, not available to such proposals which require to go through FIPB (Foreign Investment Promotion Board) clearance.

Officials said land, real estate and housing would still remain largely prohibited for FDI. Under the new proposal, however, FDI can go into construction of commercial properties and this could be a precursor for letting in FDI into certain segments of retail trade.

## Govt mulls FDI in construction

**New Delhi:** The government is examining allowing foreign direct investment in construction sector, commerce and industry minister Kamal Nath said.

"We are reviewing FDI provision relating to investment in construction, housing sector... We are examining it with the aim of spurring development and generating employment in rural sector," he said here. Nath said FDI in construction would also stimulate steel and cement industry. He said the aim was to look at FDI in construction and not in real estate as FDI in real estate would only lead to buying and selling of land.

He, however, declined to give a time-frame saying that government was currently holding consultations with the various stakeholders.

Currently, FDI is permitted only in township development, that too with various conditions like \$10 million investment. PTI

# Package for Jharkhand in next session: Manmohan

10-1  
11/12  
By A Correspondent

**RANCHI, FEB. 13.** The policy envisaging a special package for Jharkhand would be unveiled in the next session of Parliament, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, disclosed here today. Dr. Singh was speaking at his first press conference in Jharkhand since becoming Prime Minister.

Asked what the package would be, the Prime Minister said it was in the process of being formulated. To ensure the State's all-round development, the proposed package would include measures to provide large-scale employment, boost industrial growth, increase educational opportunities, and assist improvement in the health sector.

## 'Expectations not met'

He said that Jharkhand was formed with great expectations that were not met.

Criticising the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance Government in the State, he said it had failed on all fronts. There was no law and order, no irrigation, no industrial growth and no educational and no proper health facilities.

Expressing concern over the naxalite problem, Dr. Singh said it was a serious one and the Centre was in favour of resolving it with the cooperation of the affected States.

Pointing out that he was ready to discuss the issue with the Opposition, Dr. Singh rejected the contention that the

scrapping of a tough anti-terror law such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was responsible for the spurt in extremism.

"I don't have any hesitation if the Opposition wants to give any suggestion ... We have to have a comprehensive strategy for the problem."

To a question on the political crisis in Nepal, the Prime Minister said India was concerned and that the Indian Ambassador to that country had already met the King and the Nepal Foreign Minister. "We have already clearly stated that the monarchy and multi-party constitution are the two pillars of the Nepal politics," he said.

He said the Congress was committed to providing a stable Government in Jharkhand by extending all possible support to farmers, the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes and other weaker sections. In

the past four years, the ruling BJP had entirely ignored the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes, he alleged. It had done nothing for the other minorities either, he added. There was rampant corruption in the State, he alleged.

## BJP attacked

Earlier, addressing a public rally in the steel city of Jamshedpur, Dr. Singh charged that the BJP Government was trying to divide the people on communal lines. All sections were unhappy with the Government's performance.

Pointing out that the UPA was committed to improving child education, he promised that in the next three to five years, tremendous improvement would take place in the health and irrigation sectors. Campaigning for the second phase of the Assembly elections in Jharkhand ended today.

# CPI(M) willing to give UPA Government more time

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, FEB. 12. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is still willing, even nine months after the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government assumed power, "to give it [the Centre] some more time" to fulfil the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) aimed at benefiting the working class, the peasantry and the common man.

The CPI (M) would take stock of the "record" of the UPA Government's performance at its party Congress to be held in Delhi in April "and then decide on moves [that might need to be taken] in the future," the Politburo member, Prakash Karat, said at a rally here today, a day after the

conclusion of the three-day 21st State Conference of the party. The Union Budget to be placed at the end of the month would indicate the Government's policy priorities.

The party Congress would also enable the CPI (M) leadership "to find out why we have not been able to extend [our influence] to other parts of the country [beyond West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala]," the Politburo member and former West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, said.

They would also discuss how best to "replicate it [the party's performance in West Bengal] in other States...where the party is not strong enough despite having mass organisations," he said.

Mr. Basu said the present political situation was

"complex." "We have told them [the UPA Government] be there [in power] for five years. But why are you [the Congress] still opposing us in the States?"

"We could never imagine supporting the Congress on the basis of the CMP after having opposed the party over the past 45 years...but the party still opposes us in the States...we need to understand this better."

"We are supporting the UPA Government only on the basis of certain conditions," the West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, said. There could never be total agreement on all issues "and I have told the Prime Minister on occasions to think more seriously before deciding to shut down our factories and

textile mills."

"We cannot support them if they go the same way [as the previous Government]... Where have the promises of improving the lot of people in the rural areas gone? What have they done about them?" he wondered. "We have told Delhi that we are supporting you but don't ignore us," Mr. Bhattacharjee added.

The CPI (M) general secretary, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, underlined the need for regularly assessing political developments.

The State Secretary, Anil Biswas, said that the party organisation should be strengthened for consolidating democratic forces against communal and imperial forces. The Left Front chairman, Biman Bose, presided.

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13 FEB 2005

THE HINDU

## DIFFERENCES WITH LEFT / CONGRESS STARTS FIRE-FIGHTING

# Manmohan calls up Bardhan

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, FEB. 10. Concerned over reports of consistent disagreement by the Left parties, especially on issues concerning economic affairs, with the United Progressive Alliance Government, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and Congress leaders have reached out to the Left in an apparent damage control exercise.

Taking note of the discontent by the Left parties — the Communist Party of India predicting bad days ahead for the United

Progressive Alliance and the All-India Forward Bloc mincing no words — the Congress got into the act, top political sources said.

The Prime Minister made a telephone call to the CPI general secretary, A.B. Bardhan, who was attending a party conference in Andhra Pradesh, and understood to have sought to know the CPI's provocation in making such a statement.

Apparently, the CPI leaders understood that while Dr. Singh and his team heard them in pri-

vate, the policy decisions being announced by his Government on regular basis went contrary to the spirit of discussion.

The Left parties have been expressing dissent over decisions of the Government to raise the limit of the foreign direct investment in telecom and banking sectors despite protest.

### Emissary to AIFB

A senior emissary of the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, got in touch with the AIFB general secretary, Debabrata Biswas. The AIFB, at its last central

committee meeting, concluded that the Congress was pursuing a path of economic reforms not agreeable to the Left. The party has maintained that the Congress was pushing "its agenda" while making it appear that the Left parties were consulted whereas all that the Congress did was to "merely inform" of the decisions arrived at.

Informed sources said that after the Left parties' views came out afresh, the Congress president's political secretary, Ahmed Patel, has begun the fire-fighting exercise.

## UPA is squabbling, says BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 10. The unity displayed by the National Democratic Alliance in its protest against the dismissal of the Parrikar Government in Goa offers a contrast to the "squabbles" visible in the United Progressive Alliance, according to the Bharatiya Janata Party vice-president, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi.

In Maharashtra, he said, the Congress played a tough game of nerves with its alliance part-

ner, the Nationalist Congress Party, and insisted on its own Chief Minister; in Bihar, the UPA had virtually unravelled and no one knew whether the Congress was for or against the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal; in Jammu and Kashmir, the Congress fought the local body elections on its own, not with its partner, the People's Democratic Party; in Karnataka, the relations between the Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular) were not quite right; and in Uttar Pra-

desh, the Congress was supporting the Samajwadi Party Government and the SP said it was supporting the UPA at the Centre, but the two parties were daily engaged in a verbal duel, Mr. Naqvi said today.

On the other hand, the NDA had displayed unity and the ability to rally together "in defence of democracy in Goa."

Commenting on the submission of the Nanavati Commission report to the Union Home Minister, Mr. Naqvi said that if

the Government was doing the proper constitutional thing by not disclosing its contents before it was placed in Parliament, then why did it allow the Banerji committee report to be publicised? The BJP was not convinced that it was the differing status of the two — one was a judicial commission appointed under the Enquiries Act and the other was a committee appointed by the Railways Ministry — that allowed the Government to deal with them differently.

# Cabinet nod for talks on gas pipelines

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 9. The Union Cabinet today authorised the Petroleum Ministry to hold negotiations with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran and Myanmar on the gas pipeline project.

The Petroleum Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar, disclosing this here today, said that the "broad approach" to the talks had been approved.

India is seeking natural gas from Iran, Myanmar and Turkmenistan. The pipelines are envisaged from Iran via Pakistan and from Myanmar via Bangladesh and the proposed supplies from Turkmenistan would come through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Mr. Aiyar said talks have begun with Iran and detailed discussions would begin on Monday when the Iranian delegation arrives. The dates for further talks with the Pakistan Oil Minister are yet to be decided. The techno-commercial group of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh would meet on February 17 and 18.

## ADB report

On the proposal of a pipeline from Turkmenistan, Mr. Aiyar said that no steps had been taken till now. The Government would study the report of the Asian Development Bank on the project.

But the initial estimates suggesting that 60 million standard cubic metres a day gas would be available from Iran may be increased. Pakistan would require 50 million standard cubic metre of gas a day from the Iranian pipeline.

Mr. Aiyar said India would need 400 billion standard cubic metres a day by 2025, of which

half would have to come from international sources. The indigenous availability was only about 100 billion standard cubic metres a day now and it may only double in the next 20 years. Besides, the country's reliance on imported crude oil was increasing with 85 per cent of consumption coming from abroad by 2025. As energy security was a key component of the national common minimum programme, these steps would go a long way in enhancing it, Mr. Aiyar said. The Cabinet also decided to set up a post of Additional Secretary (International Operations) in the Petroleum Ministry. Talmiz Ahmed, an IFS officer, will occupy the post.

## It is good news, says Pakistan

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, FEB. 9. Pakistan has welcomed India's decision to hold talks with Islamabad on the a gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan and said it was ready to address all concerns and apprehensions of New Delhi.

"This is a good news and ... is welcomed. We are ready to remove all concerns and reservations of India," the Pakistan Petroleum Minister Amanullah Khan Jadoon, told a news conference here.

The proposed pipeline has been hanging fire for nearly a decade in view of India's reservations on the safety and security of the pipeline.

The Minister said the project had been "delayed due to India and we will welcome if India joins the project."

THE HINDU

10 FEB 2005

# Left protests against raising FDI in telecom sector

By Our Staff Reporter

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**NEW DELHI, FEB. 7.** A large number of activists from the Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI, Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party today staged a demonstration here to protest against the decision of the United Progressive Alliance Government to increase the foreign direct investment limit to 74 per cent in the telecom sector.

Addressing the gathering, the national CPI secretary, D. Raja, warned the Government of resistance both within and outside Parliament if the decision

was not withdrawn. The Left, he said, would not compromise on steps which affected the national interest.

The decision of the Government would impair national security.

The president of the Delhi Science Forum and expert on the telecom sector, Prabir Purkayastha, pointed out that cellular operators Hutch and Airtel already possessed foreign holding above the stipulated total limit of 49 per cent.

He alleged that the "move by the Government is directed more at legalising the illegality that already prevails and has no

connection with further investments in the telecom sector."

Mr. Purkayastha also accused the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, of unduly favouring the foreign telecom companies and said his actions were suspect since he had legally represented foreign companies in the Supreme Court.

Stating that the telecom industry had become the "most scam-ridden sector of the country," he cited the recent fine imposed on Reliance by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India for violating its licence agreement.

The CPI (M) MP, Dipankar

FEB-11  
8/2

Mukherjee, said the decision was taken by the Cabinet despite the Left parties submitting a detailed note containing their objections to the proposal.

He said the Left parties had raised the issues of security concerns, citing the points mentioned by the Intelligence Bureau, and had also noted that the huge capital resources already available with the existing telecom companies did not make more FDI a necessity.

Further, the Left had called for prioritising rural telephony in the backdrop of the increasing tele-density gap between urban and rural areas.

## Plans protest against FDI

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 3. Left parties today decided to organise an all-India protest on Monday against the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government's decision to hike the foreign direct investment limit in telecom sector to 74 per cent and also seek the intervention of the UPA Chairperson, Sonia Gandhi.

The four Left parties also decided to write a letter to Ms. Gandhi, conveying the stand on telecom and that the announcement came even before consultations were continuing.

After a joint meeting here, these parties said that they have been engaging the Government on various policy matters which the Left considered detrimental to India's economic sovereignty such as amending the Patents Act, allowing foreign banks to purchase shares of private Indian banks and other banking reforms and disinvestment of profit-making public sector undertakings.

"These are matters which, the Left parties strongly feel, need to be thoroughly discussed before any decision is taken with the prime objective of defending India's economic sovereignty," the parties said in a statement. The Monday protest would be observed all over the country specifically opposing the FDI hike in telecom and generally in defence of Indian economic sovereignty" the Left parties leaders said at a press conference. The Left parties said the objections were not limited to security consideration alone but also to tele-density and foreign capital investment among others.

### Electricity Bill

Referring to the new Electricity Bill announced on the basis of the Electricity Act, 2003 which the Common Minimum Programme has promised to review, the Left parties said that till such a review was completed, no new policy measures should be undertaken. It is understood that the Bill does not contain suggestions against privatisation or on continuation of power subsidies.

Today's meeting was attended by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Polit Bureau member, Sitaram Yechury, the CPI general secretary, A.B. Bardhan, the CPI national secretary, D. Raja and Pallab Sengupta, the All India Forward Bloc secretary, G. Deverajan. The Revolutionary Socialist Party could not attend it but had agreed with the decision following consultation over telephone.



## UPA Govt's Zeal For Reforms Upsets Communists

# Left plans to seek Sonia's help to shun Manmohan

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 3 FEBRUARY

**T**HE Left parties on Thursday decided to seek UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi's intervention in the Manmohan Singh government's policy matrix for addressing their reservations against the changes in the FDI rules.

Leaders of the Left parties, who met here on Thursday to discuss the Manmohan Singh government's resolve to carry out the reform promises made in the last budget, was of the view that there was a marked reluctance on the part of the government to leadership to accept the Left's viewpoint. Left leaders said the government leadership was taking the allies for granted and this would have to be addressed by the coalition leadership.

A section of the government is of the view that Ms Gandhi will have to take the role of an arbiter as she alone has the necessary political clout for settling differences. Although the Congress president is part of the consultation process, she has so far not intervened in economic policy decisions of the government.

Meanwhile, refuting the claims of the government that the Left had agreed to the FDI decision, Left party leaders said the announcements were made in



LAUGH LINES: Sitaram Yechuri (right) with A.B. Bardhan

the midst of consultations. "This goes against the spirit of the coalition. The Congress will have to observe the rules of the coalition," Left leaders said after the meeting.

In its letter to the Congress president, the Left is also likely to register its protest against raising FDI in Indian private banks and merger of public sector banks.

The Left dubbed as "thoroughly mischievous" reports that the increase in the EPF interest rate was linked to the decision to raise FDI in telecom. "There has been no such deal," CPM polit bureau member Sitaram Yechuri told reporters. The Left also decided to organise an all-India protest day

on February 7 against the increase in the FDI cap in telecom.

On the new electricity policy, too, the Left has serious reservations. Left leaders said power minister P M Sayeed did not hold consultations with them. The Left parties are opposed privatisation, unbundling of state electricity boards and elimination of cross-subsidies.

"There are matters, which the Left parties strongly feel, need to be thoroughly discussed before any decision is taken with the prime objective of defending India's economic sovereignty," said a statement issued by the Left after the meeting.

# একই দিনে দু'টি সিদ্ধান্তে প্যাঁচে পড়েছেন বামেরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি: টেলিকম ও প্রভিডেন্ট ফাউন্ডার একই দিনে ঘোষণা করে বামপন্থীদের যথেষ্টই অসুবিধা ফেলে দিয়েছেন অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম। পরিণতিতে আজ সরকার সম্পর্কে মনোভাব নিয়ে বাম দলগুলি ও তাদের সহযোগী ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলির মধ্যেই মতভেদ দেখা দিয়েছে।

পরিষ্কৃতি মোকাবিলায় বাম নেতারা সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন, কী ভাবে সরকার ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি লঙ্ঘন করছে ও আলোচনা না-করেই বামীদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা হয়েছে বলে দাবি করছে, তা জানিয়ে জোটের চেয়ারপার্সন সনিয়া গান্ধীকে তাঁরা চিঠি লিখবেন। অন্যদিকে প্রভিডেন্ট ফাউন্ডার বাঙালি সূদের টাকা কে দেবে, তা নিয়ে সরকারের মধ্যে শুরু হয়েছে দ্বন্দ্ব। সরকারি হিসাব অনুযায়ী ৮.৫ থেকে বাড়িয়ে সুদের হার ৯.৫ শতাংশ করার

ফলে অতিরিক্ত খরচ হবে নব্বো কোটি টাকার মতো। কোথা থেকে আসবে সেই টাকা? শ্রমমন্ত্রী চন্দ্রশেখর রাও বলেছেন, “আমরা নিজেদের হিসাব ফের পরীক্ষা করে বোঝার চেষ্টা করব কতটা ফান্ডের থেকেই দেওয়া যায়। তারপর যে টাকা কম পড়বে, তা আমরা অর্থমন্ত্রকের কাছে ভর্তুকি হিসাবে চাইব।” কিন্তু অর্থমন্ত্রকের বায়সচিব ডি স্বরূপ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, তাঁরা ভর্তুকি দিতে পারবেন না।

অর্থমন্ত্রকের বক্তব্য, পি এফের বকেয়া আদায় করে টাকা জোগাড় করুক শ্রমমন্ত্রক। এ সম্পর্কে শ্রমমন্ত্রকের জবাব, তার সুযোগ খুব বেশি নেই, কারণ বকেয়া নিয়ে মামলা-মোকদ্দমার পাহাড় জমে আছে।

টাকা কোথা থেকে আসবে, তা নিয়ে অকশা বামপন্থীরা এই মুহূর্তে মাথা ঘামাতে রাজি নন। তাঁরা বরং অনেক বেশি বাস্তব এখন নিজেদের ভাবমূর্তি

চললে তাঁরা ভবিষ্যতে ভারত বন্ধের ডাকও দিতে পারেন।

আজ চার বাম দলের বৈঠকে অবশ্য দুই বড় দলকে সমস্যায় ফেলে দেন ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের ডি দেবরাজন। তিনি জানতে চান, অর্থমন্ত্রী, বিদ্যুৎমন্ত্রী এবং অন্য কিছু মন্ত্রীও বলছেন, বামীদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করে তাঁরা সিদ্ধান্ত নিচ্ছেন। সেই সব আলোচনা কোথায় হচ্ছে এবং কাদের সঙ্গে হচ্ছে তা তিনি জানতে চান। সি পি আইয়ের পল্লব সেনগুপ্তও প্রশ্ন তোলেন, সরকারের এই ধরনের বক্তব্যের সমালোচনা কেন করা হবে না। এর পরেই বিষয়টি নিয়ে সনিয়ার কাছে চিঠি লেখার সিদ্ধান্ত হয়। এই মুহূর্তে সনিয়ার উপর অনেকটাই নির্ভর করছেন বামেরা। কারণ, বাজেটে যে সব খাতে তাঁরা বরাদ্দ বাড়ানোর দাবি জানিয়েছেন, সনিয়ার জাতীয় উপদেষ্টা পরিষদও ঠিক সেই সব খাতেই বরাদ্দ

এই বৈঠকে সিটু বাম দলগুলির এ তারিখের কর্মসূচিতে ইউনিয়নগুলিকে যোগ দিতে বললেও এইটুকু তাতে রাজি হয়নি। অন্য ভবিষ্যতে দেশজুড়ে ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিতে রাজি হয়নি হিন্দ মজদুর সঙ্ঘ। শেষ পর্যন্ত গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তের মধ্যস্থতায় সমঝোতাসূত্র হিসাবে বলা হয়েছে, ‘শ্রমোজনে’ তাঁরা ধর্মঘটে যেতে বাধ্য হবেন।

ইতিমধ্যে দেশের ‘অর্থনৈতিক স্বাধীনতা’ অক্ষয় রাখার জন্য ও টেলিকম বিদেশি লাগি বাড়ানোর বিরোধিতায় বামেরা দেশজুড়ে বিক্ষোভ দিবসের ডাক দিয়েছেন ৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি। পাশাপাশি বাম ও মধ্যপন্থী ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলি ফেব্রুয়ারির ২৬ তারিখে পোস্টেট অর্ডিন্যান্সের বিরুদ্ধে এবং ৬ থেকে ১২ মার্চ সরকারের অর্থনৈতিক নীতির বিরুদ্ধে বিক্ষোভের ডাক দিয়েছে।

এই বৈঠকে সিটু বাম দলগুলির এ তারিখের কর্মসূচিতে ইউনিয়নগুলিকে যোগ দিতে বললেও এইটুকু তাতে রাজি হয়নি। অন্য ভবিষ্যতে দেশজুড়ে ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিতে রাজি হয়নি হিন্দ মজদুর সঙ্ঘ। শেষ পর্যন্ত গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তের মধ্যস্থতায় সমঝোতাসূত্র হিসাবে বলা হয়েছে, ‘শ্রমোজনে’ তাঁরা ধর্মঘটে যেতে বাধ্য হবেন।

## দেওয়া-নেওয়া

### টেলিকমে বিদেশি লগ্নির সীমা বেড়ে ৭৪ শতাংশ

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২ ফেব্রুয়ারি: অবশেষে টেলিকম ক্ষেত্রে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের সীমা ৪৯ থেকে ৭৪ শতাংশ হল। আজ কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার এই সিদ্ধান্ত অনুমোদনের কথা ঘোষণা করেন অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম।

এই দীর্ঘ টালবাহানা যে বামেদের আপত্তি এবং বিশেষ করে নিরাপত্তাজনিত উদ্বেগের কারণেই ঘটেছে, সে কথা খোলাখুলি জানিয়েছেন অর্থমন্ত্রী। নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা নিশ্চিত করার জন্য তাঁরা বিদেশি বিনিয়োগকারীর উপর সাত দফা শর্তও আরোপ করেছেন।

বামেরা অবশ্যই প্রকাশ্যে এই সিদ্ধান্তের বিরোধিতা করেছেন। সি পি এম পলিটবুরোর সদস্য সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি এবং সি পি আইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক এ বি বর্ধন জানিয়েছেন, তাঁরা নীতিগত ভাবে টেলিকম ক্ষেত্রের দরজা খুলে দেওয়ার বিরোধী। এ দিকে, কলকাতাতেও দলের পলিটবুরোর সদস্য ও পশ্চিমবঙ্গের রাজ্য কমিটির সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাস বলেন, “কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সিদ্ধান্তের আমরা ঘোরতর বিরোধী। একাধিক বার আমরা কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ও অর্থমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে এই ব্যাপারে আলোচনা করেছি। অন্তর্ভুক্তি বাজেট তৈরির সময়ে বামপন্থীরা বিষয়টি নিয়ে লিখিত ভাবে জানিয়েছিলেন, এই ধরনের সিদ্ধান্ত দেশের নিরাপত্তার পক্ষে ক্ষতিকারক হবে। এর আমরা বিরোধিতা করব। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের একতরফা ভাবে এই ধরনের সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ আমরা মেনে নিতে পারিনা।” সংসদের ভিতরে ও বাইরে তাঁরা এই সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদ জানাবেন।

কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভা আজ এক থাকায় টেলিকম ক্ষেত্রের দরজা খোলার পাশাপাশি নতুন বিদ্যুৎ নীতি ঘোষণারও সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে। এই নীতিতে যাতে রাজ্য বিদ্যুৎ পর্যদগুলিকে ভেঙে দেওয়া না-হয় এবং বেসরকারীকরণ বাধ্যতামূলক না-করা হয় তার জন্য বামেরা চাপ দিয়ে চলেছেন। সরকারের ঘোষিত নীতির রূপরেখায় ‘ক্রেতাদের স্বার্থরক্ষা’ এবং ‘বিদ্যুৎ ক্ষেত্রে আর্থিক ও বাণিজ্যিক ভাবে লাভজনক করে তোলার কথা বলা হয়েছে।

টেলিকম ক্ষেত্রে সাধারণ ও সেলুলার-সহ বেশ কিছু পরিষেবায় সরকার ‘সামগ্রিক বিদেশি মালিকানা’ ৭৪ শতাংশ করার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে কেন্দ্র। সরকার আগেই বাম নেতাদের জানিয়েছিলেন, আগের সরকারের নীতি অনুযায়ী বিদেশি সংস্থা সরাসরি ৪৯ শতাংশ মালিকানা নিতে পারলেও ঘুরপথে আরও ১৪ শতাংশ নিতে পারে। কাজেই কার্যক্ষেত্রে তাঁরা যা করছেন তা হল ৬৩ থেকে বিদেশি মালিকানা ৭৪ শতাংশে নিয়ে যাচ্ছেন। এরপরেই বামেরা বিবৃতি দিয়ে নিরাপত্তাজনিত উদ্বেগের কথা জানান। গত বাজেটেই চিদম্বরম টেলিকম, বিমা ও বিমান ক্ষেত্রে বিদেশি লগ্নি বাড়ানোর কথা বলেছিলেন। তারপরে বামেরা বুকিয়ে দিয়েছিলেন, বিমা বিল সংসদে এসে তাঁরা বিরুদ্ধে ভোট দেবেন, কিন্তু বাকি দুটি যেহেতু সংসদে আসবে না, তাই তাঁরা বাইরে প্রতিবাদ-আন্দোলন করবেন।

চিদম্বরম আজ বলেন, “আমরা (টেলিকম নিয়ে) সংশ্লিষ্ট মন্ত্রক ও বাম-সহ সব মিত্রের সঙ্গে একত্রে কাজ করেছি। বামেদের আমরা বলেছিলাম যে, সমস্ত নিরাপত্তাজনিত

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

### প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডে সুদের হার বেড়ে ৯.৫ শতাংশই

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: টেলিযোগাযোগের ক্ষেত্রে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের উর্ধ্বসীমা ৪৯ শতাংশ থেকে বাড়িয়ে ৭৪ শতাংশ করার কমবেশি আট ঘণ্টা পরেই বামপন্থীদের তুষ্টি করতে লোকসান স্বীকার করেই কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম বৃহবার প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুদের হার ৯.৫ শতাংশ রাখার কথা ঘোষণা করলেন।

বামেদের বিরোধিতার মোকাবিলা করতেই এক হাতে পি এফের সুদের হার বাড়িয়ে অন্য হাতে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ বৃদ্ধির দরজাও খুলে দিলেন কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম। অর্থমন্ত্রীর ওই চালের ফলে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ নিয়ে বামেদের বিরোধিতা অনেকটাই খার হারাতে বলে মনে করছেন সংশ্লিষ্ট মহলা। অন্য ভাবে দেখলে, একই দিনে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের সীমা এবং পি এফের সুদের হার বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্ত আসলে বামদের সঙ্গে অর্থমন্ত্রীর এক সমঝোতা সূত্র।

তবে বামদের সঙ্গে ওই সমঝোতার মূল্য অবশ্য মেটাতে হবে পি এফ তহবিলকেই। সুদের হার ৯.৫ শতাংশ করার ফলে পি এফ তহবিলের লোকসানের পরিমাণ ৯২৭ কোটি ছাড়িয়ে যাবে। ওই লোকসান কী ভাবে মেটানো হবে সে ব্যাপারে এখনও কিছু জানানি অর্থমন্ত্রী। এখন এই ‘সমঝোতা সূত্র’ বামপন্থীরা কতটা মেনে চলেন, তা দেখার। লক্ষণীয়, সি পি এম ইতিমধ্যেই টেলিকমে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্তে কড়া প্রতিক্রিয়া জানিয়েছে। আজ, বৃহস্পতিবার চার বামদল দিল্লিতে এ নিয়ে নিজেদের মধ্যে বৈঠকে বসছে।

সিটি এবং এ আই টি ইউ সি-ও আলাদা আলাদা বিবৃতিতে টেলিকম শিল্পে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ বৃদ্ধির সিদ্ধান্তের বিরোধিতা চালিয়ে যাওয়ার কথা বলেছে।

প্রত্যাশিত সুরেই পি এফের সুদের হার বৃদ্ধিকে স্বাগত জানালেও বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ বৃদ্ধির সিদ্ধান্তের বিরোধিতা তাঁরা চালিয়ে যাবেন বলে জানিয়েছেন সিটির সাধারণ সম্পাদক চিত্তরত্ন মজুমদার। তাঁর বক্তব্য, “এন ডি এ সরকারের আর্থিক নীতির সঙ্গে ইউ পি এ সরকারের আর্থিক নীতির কোনও ফারাক নেই।” তবে এই বিষয়টিকে কেন্দ্র করে বড় মাপের কোনও আন্দোলনে যাওয়ার কথা অবশ্য এই দিন তিনি জানাননি।

এ আই টি ইউ সির সাধারণ সম্পাদক গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত এ প্রসঙ্গে শুধু ‘বিদেশি লগ্নির বিরুদ্ধে আমাদের আন্দোলন চলবে’ বলেই ছেড়ে দিয়েছেন। গুরুদাসবাবু এই দিন বলেন, “প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুদের হার বাড়ানোর পাশাপাশি বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের পরিমাণ বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্ত একই সঙ্গে নিয়ে ইউ পি এ সরকার বামপন্থীদের সঙ্গে গাঞ্জর এবং লাঠির নীতি নিয়ে চলছে।”

প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের অর্ধি পরিষদ ২০০৩-০৪ সালের জন্য পি এফের সুদের হার সাড়ে ৯ শতাংশ অনুমোদন করলেও কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থমন্ত্রক এত দিন তা অনুমোদন করছিল না। উল্টে চিদম্বরম জানিয়েছিলেন, সুদের হার ৮ শতাংশের বেশি করা হলেই তহবিলের লোকসান শুরু হবে। সেই মতো তিনি ঘোষণাও করেছিলেন ‘০৩-০৪ সালের জন্য সাড়ে ৮ শতাংশ সুদ দেওয়া হবে। কিন্তু বামদের আপত্তি ও বিরোধিতার জন্যই সেই নির্দেশ বুলিয়ে রাখা হয়। এত দিন দর কষাকষির পরে তা বাড়িয়ে ৯.৫ শতাংশ করা হল।

### টেলিকমে বিদেশি লগ্নি

প্রথম পাতার পর

সংশয় নিরসনের ব্যবস্থা করব। সেই অনুযায়ী আমরা বিভিন্ন শর্ত আরোপ করেছি।” এই শর্তগুলি হল:

এক, সংস্থার পরিচালকদের অধিকাংশ এবং ম্যানেজিং ডিরেক্টর ও চিফ এগজিকিউটিভকে ভারতের আবাসিক নাগরিক হতে হবে।

দুই, একজন আবাসিক ভারতীয়ের হাতে অন্তত দশ শতাংশ মালিকানা থাকবে।

তিন, চিফ টেকনিক্যাল অফিসার ও চিফ ফিন্যান্স অফিসার হবেন আবাসিক ভারতীয়েরা। এ ছাড়াও অন্য যে কোনও গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পদে আবাসিক ভারতীয়কে বসানোর জন্য লাইসেন্সদাতা (অর্থাৎ টেলিকম দফতর) নোটিস জারি করতে পারে।

চার, দেশের কোনও কল ঘুরপথে বিদেশ হয়ে আসবে না (যাতে আড়ি পাতা না-যায়)। পাঁচ, যোগাযোগ সংক্রান্ত কিছু তথ্য (যেমন ‘নেটওয়ার্ক ডায়গ্রাম’) বিদেশে যাবে না। ছয়, সমস্ত গ্রাহক সম্পর্কে স্বচ্ছ তথ্য রাখতে হবে, এবং সাত, মেরামতির জন্য ‘রিমোট অ্যাকসেস ব্যবস্থা’ কোনও বিদেশি সংস্থাকে দেওয়া যাবে না।

এই সাত শর্তের কোনওটি ভাঙা হলে শাস্তিমূলক ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে বলেও অর্থমন্ত্রী জানান।

বামপন্থীরা কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের এই সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে আন্দোলন গড়ে তোলার সিদ্ধান্ত নিলে সেটা তাঁদের পক্ষে বেশ অস্বস্তিকর হবে। ইতিমধ্যে অবশ্য ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলি তাদের সুর চড়া করতে শুরু করেছে এবং ব্যাঙ্ক-কর্মচারীরা আগামী ৩ মার্চ ধর্মঘটের হুমকিও দিয়ে দিয়েছেন। তবে তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি সংস্থাগুলির শীর্ষ সংগঠন ন্যাসকম আজ কেন্দ্রের সিদ্ধান্তকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছে।

# FDI in telecom allowed up to 74 per cent

By Ashok Dasgupta

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 2.** The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the long-deliberated proposal to hike the ceiling of composite foreign direct investment (FDI) in the telecom sector to 74 per cent from the existing 49 per cent. This is subject to certain conditions and clauses inserted by the Home Ministry to safeguard the nation's interest by way of

ensuring the "Indianness" of the operating companies.

Briefing newsmen after the Cabinet meeting, the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, said the increased foreign holding limit at 74 per cent would hold good for services such as fixed line basic services, cellular or mobile services, unified access services, national and international long distance telephony, V-Sat, public mobile radio

trunked services (PMRTS), global mobile personal communication services (GMPCS) along with other value-added services.

With today's decision, the telecom companies which function as service providers and the people at large who are the actual users, have reason to cheer.

For while the telecom companies will have easier access to larger chunks of foreign investment for

capacity expansion and wider network, the consumers can look forward to cheaper call rates.

Explaining the contours of the increased foreign holding limit, Mr. Chidambaram said that the 74 per cent cap would include but will not be limited to investments by foreign institutional investors (FIIs), non-resident Indians (NRIs) or overseas corporate bodies (OCBs), foreign currency convertible bonds

(FCCBs), American depository receipts (ADRs) and global depository receipts (GDRs).

In no case is the ceiling to be exceeded irrespective of whether the foreign investment comes in through the issuance of convertible preference shares or proportionate investment in Indian promoter/investment companies, including their holding companies.

Another report on Page 18

# EPF sop follows FDI uproar

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 2. — The Centre walked a difficult tightrope today, first incensing the Left parties and then trying to throw them a sop. First the FDI rate in the telecom sector was hiked to 74 per cent from 49 per cent and then, the Employees Provident Fund interest rate was restored to 9.5 per cent.

Halfway through the day, things looked gloomy for the government with the CPI-M Politburo strongly opposing the FDI decision and vowing to fight the issue in Parliament. The smaller RSP went even further, speaking about reconsidering support to the UPA government. As a result, the EPF announcement is being seen as a knee-jerk reaction of the govern-

ment after the Red uproar. The Left has appreciated the hike in EPF interest rate — something they said the Prime Minister had promised he would announce at the “right time”. But if it had been classic stick and carrot, the announcements could well have been made at the same time.

The Cabinet cleared the hike in FDI cap in the telecom sector and said all security aspects raised by the Left parties, the defence ministry and other security agencies were addressed. Now, the FDI cap in basic, cellular, unified access services, National Long Distance and International Long Distance, V-Sat, Public Mobile Radio Trunk Services and Global Mobile Personal Communication Services has been increased. The Union finance minis-

ter, Mr P Chidambaram, said the total composite foreign holding should not exceed the 74 per cent cap. The remaining 26 per cent will be owned by resident Indian citizens, or an Indian company, the finance minister said.

Late this evening, the Centre hiked the interest rate on the EPF back to 9.5 per cent from the current 8.5 per cent announced for 2004-05.

“The Prime Minister has decided that the EPF interest rate for 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05 will be 9.5 per cent,” Mr Chidambaram said. “The order to this effect will be issued tomorrow.” The government’s earlier interim order bringing down the interest rate to 8.5 per cent had been opposed by the Left Front and trade unions.

# Tax the rich, Left parties tell FM

**New Delhi:** Left parties on Tuesday asked the government to hike taxes on the rich and phase out exemptions to corporates in the budget for ensuring additional Rs 50,000 crore for employment, agriculture, education and health sectors.

In their pre-budget meeting with finance minister P Chidambaram, Left parties opposed disinvestment of PSUs and wanted more discussion with UPA for finalising the roadmap for banking sector reforms. Asking the finance minister to revamp indirect taxes and raise corporate tax rates to hike the tax:GDP ratio by 1.5 per cent to over 10 per

cent next fiscal from about 9 per cent in 2003-04, the leftist members of UPA plumped for "capping" defence spendings to about Rs 66,000 crore.

"The budget must provide for four key areas— national employment guarantee scheme, investment in agriculture, health and education," CPI leader A B Bardhan said after the meeting.

Prakash Karat of CPM, D Raja of CPI and other leaders reiterated the need to raise government revenue to fund the social sector schemes. "The last budget provided Rs 10,000 crore more for these four areas. Much more is needed in next fiscal." Bardhan said. PTI

# মনমোহনী বাজেট দাবি বামপন্থীদের

আজকালের প্রতিবেদন: দিল্লি, ৩১ জানুয়ারি— কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম আসন্ন বাজেট নিয়ে কাল আলোচনায় বসছেন বাম নেতাদের সঙ্গে। বিকেল তিনটায় নর্থ ব্লকে অর্থমন্ত্রীর দপ্তরে হবে এই বৈঠক। সি পি এম, সি পি আই, আর এস পি এবং ফ ব-র শীর্ষ নেতাদের ডাকা হয়েছিল আলাদা ভাবে। কিন্তু আজ চার বাম দলের বৈঠকে সিদ্ধান্তের পর সি পি এম নেতা প্রকাশ কারাত অর্থমন্ত্রীকে জানিয়ে দেন,

## আজ বৈঠক চিদম্বরমের

তারা চার বাম দল একই সঙ্গে তাঁর সঙ্গে কথা বলবেন। আলাদা আলাদা নয়। আজ সি পি এম সদর দপ্তরে চার বাম দলের নেতারা বৈঠকে বসে তাঁদের সম্মিলিত বক্তব্য চূড়ান্ত করেন। ছিলেন সুরজিৎ, প্রকাশ কারাত, সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি, অবনী রায়, দেবব্রত বিশ্বাস, ডি রাজা এবং এ বি বর্ধন। বাম নেতারা বৈঠকে জানতে পারেন অর্থমন্ত্রী তাঁদের সঙ্গে পৃথকভাবে কথা বলতে চান। এতে চার দলই আপত্তি জানায়। এবং ফোন করে জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়, বৈঠক আলাদা আলাদা ভাবে নয়, একসঙ্গেই হবে। যার ফলে কোনও তরফেই আর কোনও সংশয় সৃষ্টির অবকাশ থাকবে না। উল্লেখ্য, ইউ পি এ-বাম সমন্বয় কমিটির বিগত বৈঠকের সময়ই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নির্দেশে অর্থমন্ত্রী বাজেট নিয়ে বাম দলগুলির সঙ্গে আলোচনার কথা জানান। এর পর জয়রাম রমেশ পৃথকভাবে বৈঠকের সময়সূচি তৈরি করে

জানিয়ে দেন। বৈঠকের পর প্রকাশ কারাত, দেবব্রত বিশ্বাস, অবনী রায় এবং এ বি বর্ধন বলেন, বাম দলগুলির এক্য ও পারস্পরিক সমন্বয় যে কতটা সুদৃঢ়, আজকের ঘটনায় তা আরও একবার প্রমাণিত হল। বাম নেতারা জানান, কাল তাঁরা অর্থমন্ত্রীকে বলবেন শ্রমিক, কৃষক ও সাধারণ মানুষের জন্য উন্নয়ন ও আগাগোড়া কর্মসংস্থানমুখী বাজেট করতে হবে তাঁকে। এজন্য টাকা আসবে

কোথা থেকে তাও তাঁরা বলে দেবেন। বলবেন, অন্তত ৩০ হাজার কোটি টাকার সংস্থান হতে পারে করভিত্তি ঠিক রাখলে। এজন্য কোনও বিপ্লবাত্মক রাস্তায় তাঁকে হাঁটতে হবে না। শুধু ছাড়তে হবে বি জে পি-র পথ। এর আগে কেন্দ্রের শেষ কংগ্রেস সরকার নরসিংহ রাওয়ের প্রধানমন্ত্রিত্বের ও মনমোহন সিংয়ের অর্থমন্ত্রিত্বের সূচনায় যে করভিত্তি বজায় রেখেছিল সেই পথে ফিরে গেলেও চলবে। এতেই ১.৫ শতাংশ রাজস্ব-ঘাটতি পূরণ করা যাবে। সুতরাং, প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংকে তাঁর প্রথম বাজেটের কথা স্মরণ করানোটা, খুব একটা অন্যায প্রস্তাব নয় বলেই মন্তব্য করেন বাম নেতারা। তাঁরা হিসেব কষে অর্থমন্ত্রীকে দেখাবেন এর ফলেই ৩০ হাজার কোটির সাশ্রয় হবে। যে ৩০ হাজার কোটি অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ীর

এরপর ২ পাতায়

## মনমোহনী বাজেট

১ পাতার পর

নেতৃত্বাধীন সরকারের অর্থমন্ত্রীরা ভুল খাতে ব্যয় করেছেন। অবশ্য এন ডি এ সরকারের অবস্থান ও দায়বদ্ধতা ছিল উচ্চবিত্তদের প্রতি। সুতরাং, ওই জমানায় মোবাইল সস্তা আর রুটি দামি হয়েছে। কিন্তু বাম সমর্থনপুষ্ট ইউ পি এ সরকারকে সে-পথে হাঁটলে চলবে না। এই সরকারের দায় শ্রমিক-কৃষক-মধ্যবিত্তকে যতটা সম্ভব সুখ ও স্বস্তিতে রাখা। এজন্যই এই প্রথম এই সরকারের পূর্ণাঙ্গ বাজেটে প্রকৃত পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ হতে হবে অর্থমন্ত্রীকে। কৃষিক্ষেত্রে, কৃষি সংলগ্ন ক্ষেত্রে এবং শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য ও কর্মসংস্থানে বাজেট বরাদ্দের ক্ষেত্রে অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি রূপায়ণ করতে হবে। এবং কোনও অবস্থাতেই বোঝা চাপানো চলবে না সাধারণ মেহনতি মানুষের ওপর। ব্যাঙ্কের অনাদায়ী ঋণ পুরো উসুল করতে হবে। এবং ৯১-এর করভিত্তি অনুযায়ী কর ও শুল্কনীতি রূপায়ণ করতে হবে। এর ফলে জি ডি পি-র ফাঁকও পূর্ণ হবে অনায়াসে।

AAJ'KAL

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