

"Full efforts to resolve problems with Pakistan"

Prime Minister welcomes Musharraf's Kashmir proposal

Kanwar Yogendra and Agencies

SHIMLA: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said here on Sunday that the country would make "full and sincere" efforts to resolve all bilateral problems with Pakistan through talks. Though progress had been made in strengthening the ties with Islamabad, "several complexities" remained, he said.

Dr. Singh welcomed the proposal of Pakistan President General Musharraf to demilitarise a part of Kashmir. On Siachen, he said talks were on. "We will thoroughly analyse the progress. We are not against finding a permanent solution to the Kashmir problem in this situation by way of talks with our neighbour. The atmosphere now is most affable."

Dr. Singh said that with the promotion of people-to-people contacts between the two countries, the frequency of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service would be increased.

The Prime Minister was addressing a press conference. He had visited the tribal district of Kinnaur and dedicating the 1500 MW Nathpa Jhakri Power Project to the nation on Saturday.

Ties with Left

On the United Progressive Alliance's relations with the Left, Dr. Singh said, "we continue to enjoy their progressive support, though sometimes we differ on issues." When asked about the discomfort of the Left on the "non-implementation" of the National Common Minimum Programme in various States

and the absence of coordination committees there, the Prime Minister said, "it is not necessary since we are politically apart." Dr. Singh said that though at the Centre the co-ordination committee had proved its utility, it was not very sure of its extension to the other Congress-ruled States.

On an increase in Employees Provident Fund interest rate, Dr. Singh said it required major reforms and it was for the board and its trustees to decide.

Power sector needs reforms

Speaking at a Power Secretaries conference earlier in the day, Dr. Singh said the State electricity boards (SEBs) which were reeling under a Rs. 21,000-crore loss needed to be unbundled and

the power sector in the country needed urgent reforms.

He said unbundling would ensure a more competitive environment in the sector.

On Saturday, he expressed concern over the electricity shortage in the country and spoke against providing free power as it could be a hindrance to additional power generation.

"While the demand for electricity in the country is increasing, power cuts are assuming alarming proportions," he said.

He expressed dismay at the performance of private investors in the sector. "There is no boon for private investors in the power sector," he said.

The Prime Minister left for Delhi on Sunday after spending a night in the tribal sojourns of Kalpa in Kinnaur district.

30 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Government to divest 10 per cent equity in BHEL

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Contradictory to CMP commitments: Left

Sushma Ramchandran

NEW DELHI: The Government on Thursday launched its disinvestment programme for the current financial year, allowing sale of 10 per cent shareholding in the navaratna public sector company Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), even as the Left parties strongly protested. Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, who briefed newsmen after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs here, claimed that the Left parties had been consulted and the decision was taken in the "spirit" of the national common minimum programme (NCMP).

But the Left parties said the proposal was "directly contradictory" to the commitments made in it.

Both the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India called upon the United Progressive Alliance Government to reconsider the decision keeping in mind the widespread protest it would generate among the people.

In similar statements here, they said the NCMP clearly stated the Government would encourage and strengthen the navaratnas to become global players.

It also categorically stated the Government would not disinvest in or privatise profit-making public sector undertakings.



- **Left consulted: Chidambaram**
- **'In the spirit of common minimum programme'**
- **Government holding will fall to 57.72 p.c.**
- **To make it affordable for small investors**

Mr. Chidambaram said the NCMP mandated that investment avenues be found for retail investors and for reviving PSUs. The latest decision on disinvestment met both requirements.

Funds for health

By selling 10 per cent equity in BHEL, the Government shareholding would fall from 67.72 to 57.72 per cent.

The funds raised from the divestment, estimated to reach Rs. 2,000 crores, would accrue to

the newly set up National Investment Fund. Seventyfive per cent of the fund was meant to finance health and education schemes and the balance to support "revivable" public sector units. The proceeds would not be reflected in the Budget.

The proposed offer would be carried out through the book-building route.

The BHEL stock would be split in consultation with the Heavy Industry and Disinvestment departments to make the issue affordable to small retail investors.

Out of the 10 per cent equity being disinvested, 15 per cent would be reserved for employees. Now BHEL shares were ruling at Rs. 896 each.

Modalities

Asked about the modalities of the issue, Mr. Chidambaram said the details would be decided after a lead manager was appointed.

The process would largely be on the lines of the earlier issue by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC).

The NTPC was the first public sector company the UPA Government disinvested in November last.

It then divested 5.25 per cent of its stake along with the company's initial public offer of the same amount.

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Alliance Brands Manmohan As 'Weak', 'Non-Performing' PM Lacking Command

NDA unveils report card on UPA govt

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 24 MAY

CONTINUING its offence against the UPA government, the NDA on Tuesday termed its first year in office as "a wasted year — a year of non-performance and misgovernance", whose only achievement was the 50-odd committees and commissions that it had set up in the past 12 months and whose aim was to target the Opposition with a vindictive mindset.

Two days after the UPA government released its report-card on its achievements during the first year in power, the NDA brought out its own version. Besides tracking down its failures on various fronts, the BJP and its allies sought to target Manmohan Singh, branding him as "a weak and a non-performing Prime Minister" who was not in command of his own government. The NDA also made a concerted bid to strip "the halo" surrounding Congress president Sonia Gandhi, branding her as "a super Prime Minister" who had no responsibility and accountability.

The UPA government was also ripped apart for inflicting a grievous and greater damage on "the democratic institutions, norms and standards of our polity than any other government in independent India's history, barring the emergency."

The Opposition alliance was particularly critical of Ms Gandhi's efforts to control the levers of power through her position as the NAC chairperson, and demanded the NAC either be disbanded or its head be made accountable to Parliament.

"Additionally, the NAC's work should be made open to scrutiny by parliamentary committees which should have the right to summon the NAC chairperson and members," the NDA chargesheet said. It also expressed serious concern over the continuing efforts to perpetuate a dynasty, and reeled out a partial list of 16 projects named after Rajiv Gandhi, the late Indian Prime Minister. "The government, it

seems, is owned by a family. There were many people who gave up their lives during the freedom struggle, but they find no mention," NDA convenor George Fernandes said on the occasion.

The latest developments in Bihar, the alleged misuse of the office of governors, the Prime Minister's refusal to drop the tainted ministers, including the railway minister, the trashing of the Phukan Commission report and the government's refusal to table the Nanavati Commission report on the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 led the NDA to ramp up its charge of 'misgovernance' against the ruling coalition.

The NDA was severely critical of the role of Bihar governor Buta Singh, labelled as 'Jhoota Singh' by Mr Fernandes. "It is ironical that a man who was charged with indulging in horsetrading during the Narasimha Rao regime is hurling the same allegations," the NDA convenor observed.

Of a greater concern, the NDA claimed, was the uninterrupted flow of infiltrators from Bangladesh. "We wish to draw the people's attention to two ominous developments. One is the Delhi High Court pulling the Centre for not carrying out its promise to deport Bangladeshi's from the national capital. The other is the unprecedented public criticism of the Assam governor's report on the subject by none other than the state's chief minister," the report-card said.

The NDA charged the UPA government with failing miserably on the internal security front, as exemplified by the flip-flop on holding talks with the naxalites, and with failing to carry out its promises in the economy. "The *aam aadmi* (common man) is reeling under unprecedented price rise," it said, taking a dig at the UPA's loud claim of being a champion of the common man's interests.

"The UPA government's promises remain unfulfilled. Its only achievement is that it has survived in office so far," the document surmised.



JUDGMENT DAY: Former PM A.B. Vajpayee & NDA convenor George Fernandes in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Advantage Nitish as poll campaign starts in Bihar

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 24 MAY

THE NDA on Monday formally kicked off the campaign for the coming Bihar election by announcing that the polls will be fought under Nitish Kumar. Mr Kumar is the most credible counterpoint to the RJD goliath Lalu Prasad Yadav.

Mr Kumar's journey from a Kurmi leader in the 1980s to a pan-Bihar leader of significant mettle has been long and ridden with more potholes than the road from Patna to Begusarai. But now it's finally official and his political fraternity stands by him.

Mr Kumar is the man tipped to be Bihar's most modern and forward looking chief minister in the post-Mandal era. Moreover, he does not need to look over his shoulder and watch his back among his own political allies anymore.

Over 10 years after he broke off from the Janata Dal to form the Samata Party and combat the might of the Yadav conglomerate, the engineer from Bakhtiarpur is the most able to be the chief of Bihar.

The BJP-JD(U) combine switched to the poll mode on Monday and threw the gauntlet down before the might of Lalu

Prasad Yadav. But that was only after filling up the space that lay blank all these years in the heavyweight political bout between Nitish and Lalu.

The high-voltage kick-start to the anti-Lalu campaign of the JD(U)-BJP combine came from



state governor Buta Singh in the wee hours of the fated Sunday morning when the UPA government accepted his recommendation to dissolve the Bihar Assembly or the class of 2005.

By a quirk of providence, Buta Singh also handed on a platter the key theme to the combine's poll campaign — how the Constitution was convoluted to keep the proxy Lalu Yadav regime in

the power seat in Patna.

"A dirge for democracy" will be the figurative background music reinforcing the theme in the first of the series of advertisements that will be released in Bihar dailies by Thursday, a good five to six months before elections are to be held in the state. The combine itself expects elections to be held in October but the message is clear. It's Nitish who will get sole, and the top, billing in the campaign.

It's none of the half-hearted, now-you-see-me-now-you-don't, cavilling support that the man who would be chief minister received till now from his own side of the fence. To rub the message in and turn the strobe lights on him and him alone, the engineer from Bakhtiarpur will feature in blow-ups in all the poll posters. Thus, for the first time in the recent past, Lalu Prasad Yadav is himself a subsidiary theme unlike the earlier polls. No one, not even Vajpayee or Advani, will share the honours.

The going for the jugular exercise to clinch that decisive vote for Mr Kumar will hang on an Uncle Sam-like gimmick. "We," the ads will bellow in bold, "want you, the Bihari citizen, to do something decisive to stop your exploitation, your victimisation."



No other option on Bihar: Manmohan

Sunny Sebastian

RANTHAMBHORE: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has defended the Proclamation on dissolution of the Bihar Legislative Assembly, saying there was no option left for the Centre. It had acted on the recommendations of Bihar Governor Buta Singh and also on the basis of its own information, he said.

"It was the Constitutional duty of the Government," Dr. Singh said while interacting with the media at the end of his visit to the National Park here to study the crisis facing the tiger population. "It has been three months already since the elections were held in that State. No Government could be made," he noted.

"An atmosphere of horse-trading of the worst kind prevailed," Dr. Singh said, referring to the Bihar situation. "The Governor had made a recommendation saying that there was no other option than dissolution of the Assembly," he said.

"We had considerable information to substantiate the Governor's recommendations," he added.

Referring to the demands made by Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje, Dr. Singh said he would take them up with the Ministries concerned to render "all possible assistance" to the State.

He, however, made known his concern over the non-implementation of value-added tax (VAT) by Rajasthan as well as the other Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled States. "When Yashwant Sinha and Jaswant Singh were Finance Ministers, the BJP had said that VAT was the right thing for the country and now they have turned against it."

"It is not proper for the States not to introduce VAT, and play politics on the issue. Till the other day, the BJP was promoting the concept of VAT. They did work on it for five years and I appreciate their efforts," he said. Non-adoption of VAT by States such as Rajasthan — which needed to create more jobs in manu-



A DATE WITH THE TIGER: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is a picture of joy as he talks about his first ever sighting of a tiger in Ranthambhore on Tuesday. — PTI

- **Wildlife habitats under pressure**
- **Management of parks must be improved**
- **Need to involve communities in conservation**
- **Forest management, human interface main challenges**

facturing and other sectors — would "considerably hinder" their economic prospects.

Dr. Singh said the Centre would work with the States to make them prosperous and strong. "India can be strong if its States and villages are strong." The States needed to improve their law and order situation and manage their finances more efficiently.

Dr. Singh wound up his two-day visit to the Ranthambhore National Park on Tuesday, with a reassuring message that his Government would stand by the

tigers and all forms of wildlife. Wild habitats, especially sanctuaries sheltering the tigers, were under pressure and there was much to be done to protect the animals.

Dr. Singh had a "fruitful" visit in the morning to the 392-sq-km sanctuary, among the first to be brought under Project Tiger in the 1970s, with his wife, Gursharan Kaur.

As for steps to protect the dwindling population of tigers, he said he would wait for the report of the Task Force, expected in two months. "Give me a chance," he said. "The future is in our hands."

The pressures on the areas surrounding the Parks were increasing and there was need to devise new ways of providing the people with livelihood. "Otherwise, we will be causing irreversible damage to our future," he said.

"I have not come [to Ranthambhore] to find fault with anyone," the Prime Minister said. But "things are not as they should be" in Rajasthan's tiger sanctuaries.

One year of the UPA: areas of darkness

The Manmohan Singh Government's performance in agriculture and employment generation needs to improve.

L.C. Jain

IT WILL be a worthy tribute to the United Progressive Alliance Government to highlight where, in its first year in office, it has failed in relation to the Common Minimum Programme. This is to enable it to prioritise the unfinished tasks. In identifying the areas of failure, there is no need to draw upon the criticisms by either the Left or the Right. UPA sources are themselves sufficient.

The foremost issue to flag from the CMP is growth of employment and reduction in poverty. While UPA Government may be only one year old, most of its senior leaders are experienced hands. They know that growth of employment and reduction in poverty are both "indefinitely linked to growth performance, specially in agriculture," which employs over 60 per cent of our labour force. Understandably, therefore, the cornerstone of their economic strategy was the "reversal of the declining trend in the growth rate of agriculture with the aim of taking it up to 4 per cent."

On April 5, 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh acknowledged at a meeting of the Planning Commission that the actual performance of agriculture "deteriorated even further and will possibly not exceed 1.5 per cent during the first three years of the Plan."

The failure to arrest the declining trend in agriculture perhaps occurred despite the Government's best efforts. But what were the efforts actually made. The only explanation listed by Dr. Singh is that "agriculture is the primary responsibility of the States,"

implying that the Centre is not guilty.

This is not a healthy explanation from the leadership of a party that has had a long innings at the Centre and between 1973 and 1993 has repeatedly sung an ode to agriculture in Parliament. Indira Gandhi had said: "Greater attention to dry farming areas is not merely to avoid inequalities in the rural areas. It is also an essential part of any programme to achieve sustained increases in agricultural production." V.P. Singh had said: "Agriculture is at the centre of our development strategy. The quality of agriculture performance is the single most important factor in reducing the incidence of poverty in rural areas." Rajiv Gandhi had said: "Agriculture is the bedrock of our economy. Growth in this sector is also crucial for the removal of poverty." Manmohan Singh said: "We must ensure that our economic strategy gives full support to agriculture on which the livelihood and well being of the majority of our people depend."

The only Congress leader who comprehended the nature of effort required to raise and sustain agricultural growth was C. Subramaniam, Food and Agriculture Minister in 1966. He pinpointed that "our need is to increase production per acre. Since we have little virgin land each cultivated acre must be made to yield more than what it yields now. This alone will provide an abiding solution to our food and agriculture problem." He spelt out that increasing the per acre yield demands a plan of action involving actual participation by each operating farmer. Unless he is encouraged and helped in the field to step up production there is no hope

of achieving the national targets. Any significant increase in output requires improvement in the agricultural practices followed by the cultivator and an adequate and timely supply of critical inputs such as water, seeds, fertilizers and credit. These have been inducted to some extent. But they are all so compartmentalised that no small farmer and no given acre of land is assured of a composite and timely supply of inputs.

Small holdings

The number of our agricultural holdings is about 115 million, of these over three-fourths are marginal and small. Their average size is a bare 0.40 hectare for marginal and 1.44 hectares for the small farmers. The handicap of size of holdings is compounded by the fact that a vast majority of them, about 86 per cent, are till today condemned to high cost credit from moneylenders; and supply of credit is not accompanied with technical advice. In his convocation address at the Institute of Rural Management Anand in April 2002, President A.P.J. Kalam called for "a systems approach to enhance agricultural productivity including soil analysis, seed choice, cultivation season, fertilizer selection and training to the farmers particularly in the usage of remote sensing data and also of storage, marketing and banking system."

With this yardstick, we can easily assess the gap in the character and content of services presently extended to the marginal and small farms. Our failure should therefore not surprise us. Clearly there are no takers in the system of the wise and practical coun-

sel of C. Subramanian or President Kalam. How then do we expect to achieve sustained agriculture growth in the years ahead?

To say agriculture is a State subject is a flimsy alibi. The States have not turned down any Central initiative in such constructive spheres. Secondly, as Fali Nariman recently pointed out, the Rajya Sabha is the 'Council of States'. Has the Centre ever brought up this subject for discussion in that august House, or sat with State representatives for even two days to adopt a common minimum action plan?

Often the Left parties are accused of holding the UPA Government back. In the case of agriculture there is no evidence whatsoever of the Left parties doing so. In fact, the States governed by Left parties have demonstrated unmatched political will to successfully vest ownership of land in the last cultivator, as that is indisputably the first fundamental requirement for C. Subramanian's design to be made operational.

A related item in the CMP was to endow elected panchayats with autonomy and resources to make them operational and then to liquidate the non-functioning rural administration, which shocked Rajiv Gandhi into bringing the 73rd Constitution Amendment.

All that the UPA can proudly show at the end of one year is induction of a dynamic Panchayatraj Minister in Manishankar Aiyar. No more. In the villages 30 lakh elected representatives wait for the word to speed up agricultural growth and implement employment guarantee. Will someone in the capital make the call?

10.11.2005

বাম স্তম্ভটি করেও সংস্কারে অনড় থাকছেন মনমোহন

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, হৈ প্রধানমন্ত্রী। সব মিলিয়ে আজ মনমোহন চমকপ্রদ চিন্তাভাবনার পক্ষপাতী প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ।

সরকারের ব্যাপারে একেবারেই মনমোহন সিংহ।

বামোদের অনুপস্থিতিতে হলেও সরকারের বরপত্টি উপলক্ষে নিজের বাসভবনে নান্দীর্ষ বক্তৃতায় মনমোহন আজ স্পষ্টই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, সংস্কারের লক্ষ্যে আরও সাহসী হওয়ার কথাই ভারতের ইতিহাসে। এ প্রসঙ্গেই আজ 'আউট অফ দ্য বক্স' নীতির গুরুত্ব বোঝাতে চেয়েছেন মনমোহন। বিশেষত সরকারের ব্যয়সঙ্কোচের ক্ষেত্রে কড়া ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার ইঙ্গিত ছিল আজ মনমোহনের বক্তৃতায়। ভর্তকি কাঠামোতেও বড় ধরনের সংস্কার চান

চালতে গিয়ে সংস্কার ও উন্নয়নের মধ্যে ভারসাম্য রাখা হয়েছে বলে জানিয়েছেন মনমোহন। এক দিকে, সামাজিক বৈষম্য কমিয়ে সাধারণ মানুষের পাশে দাঁড়ানোর চেষ্টা করেছে সরকার। অন্য দিকে, ক্রমাগত আর্জাতিক বাজারে প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতার জন্য দেশকে প্রস্তুত করে তোলার চেষ্টা চালিয়ে গিয়েছে। দু'টি ক্ষেত্রেই সরকারের সাফল্য আর ব্যর্থতার খতিয়ান আজ পেশ করা হয়েছে ৪২ পৃষ্ঠার বরপত্টি রিপোর্টে।

'আ কেয়ারিং গভর্নমেন্ট' নীর্ষক এই রিপোর্টে তিনটি পর্যায়ে কাজের খতিয়ান দিয়েছে সরকার। প্রথম পর্যায়ের 'থিম' হল 'মানুষের জন্য

প্রথম পাতার পর

তার সরকার। কিন্তু সংস্কারের জন্য তাঁর এই ঘোষণায় যাতে বামপন্থীদের সঙ্গে কোনও সমস্যা তৈরি না হয়, সে জন্য বাম স্তম্ভটিও ছিল মনমোহনের বক্তৃতায়। পাঁচ বাম নেতারও (হরকিষণ সিংহ সুরজিৎ, জ্যোতি বসু, বৃন্দেব ভট্টাচার্য, প্রকাশ কাবাট ও সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি) প্রশংসা করেন তিনি। অনুষ্ঠানে অনুপস্থিত বাম নেতাদের উদ্দেশে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেন, "সরকারের এক বছরের সাফল্যে ওঁদের অবদান অনর্কীয়।"

তবে, জোটের মধ্যে মনকষাকষি মেটানোর দায় মনমোহন দিয়েছেন সনিয়ার উপরে। নেত্রীর অকুণ্ঠ প্রশংসা

সরকার। সামাজিক ক্ষমতায়নের প্রসঙ্গে সরকার কী করতে পেরেছে, এবং আরও কী কী করতে চায় তার বিস্তারিত বিবরণ রয়েছে এই অংশে। দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়টি অর্থনৈতিক প্রগতি সংক্রান্ত। এই অংশে, বিদেশি লাগি, বিদ্যুৎ নীতি, শিল্প নীতি-সহ নানা ক্ষেত্রে সংস্কার ও সাফল্যের বর্ণনা করা হয়েছে। আর তৃতীয় ভাগটি জাতীয় সুরক্ষা ও বিদেশনীতি সংক্রান্ত।

জোটের চেয়ারপার্সন সনিয়া গার্লির হাতে এই রিপোর্ট তুলে দিয়ে মনমোহন বলেন, অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কার যে ভাবে করা দরকার, ঠিক সে ভাবেই করবে ইউ পি এ সরকার। বায় সঙ্কোচ ও প্রশাসনিক সংস্কারের কথা বলার

আওয়াজ নয়, তার প্রমাণও মিলেছে এ দিনের অনুষ্ঠানে। সনিয়ার নাম উচ্চারিত হওয়া মাত্রই অনুষ্ঠানে ব্যাপক হাততালি পড়ে। আজকের অনুষ্ঠানে সনিয়াও বুঝিয়ে দিয়েছেন, তাঁর মূল কাজই হল জোটের বন্ধন অটুট রাখা। সরকারের লক্ষ্য ও প্রতিশ্রুতির পুনর্নির্ধারণ, মোটের ওপর দিশা ঠিক করে নেওয়াই এই সালতামামি পর্যালোচনার লক্ষ্য বলে সনিয়া মন্তব্য করেছেন।

তাঁর মতে, নিজস্ব দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি অটুট রেখেও কোনও রাজনৈতিক দল যে বৃহত্তর আঙ্গিকে কাজ করতে পারে, তা প্রমাণ করে দিয়েছে ইউ পি এ।

সংস্কারে অনড় থাকছেন মনমোহন

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কথা যে শুধু ফাঁকা আওয়াজ নয়, তার প্রমাণও মিলেছে এ দিনের অনুষ্ঠানে। সনিয়ার নাম উচ্চারিত হওয়া মাত্রই অনুষ্ঠানে ব্যাপক হাততালি পড়ে। আজকের অনুষ্ঠানে সনিয়াও বুঝিয়ে দিয়েছেন, তাঁর মূল কাজই হল জোটের বন্ধন অটুট রাখা। সরকারের লক্ষ্য ও প্রতিশ্রুতির পুনর্নির্ধারণ, মোটের ওপর দিশা ঠিক করে নেওয়াই এই সালতামামি পর্যালোচনার লক্ষ্য বলে সনিয়া মন্তব্য করেছেন।

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Reform of govt on second-year agenda

PM feet in two boats

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 22: On its first birthday, Manmohan Singh stuck a label to his dispensation — “a caring government”. For the second year, he set among his goals reform of government.

“Our greatest achievement this past year has been to give the people of India an inclusive and humane government, a more representative government and a more caring government... (now) We must move ahead, we must focus on offering a more efficient government,” Singh said.

The Prime Minister’s so-called report card, a 42-page report, listed what his government considered to be its achievements during the year. But, more important, he narrated in his speech to his colleagues in the ministry and leaders of the United Progressive Alliance the challenges for the future.

Singh sought the support of the UPA constituents and the Left to pursue a much wider reform agenda in the coming year.

“The challenge before us is to combine the economics of growth with the economics of equity and social justice. We have no option but to walk on two legs,” he said.

He focused on reforming government, saying the task must get a higher profile in the government’s priorities.

The reform agenda must also include redefining the role of the state. Without talking directly of public sector divestment as he did a few days ago at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, Singh said the role of the government would have to change from being a “provider of goods and services to being a regulator and facilitator ensuring fair play. The government should look more at building physical and human infrastructure”.

He called for bold initiatives in economic

THE PRIORITIES

- Bold economic initiatives, “out-of-the-box” thinking
- New deal for rural India, including Bharat Nirman
- High priority to reform of government
- Redefine government role — from provider of goods and services to regulator and facilitator
- Create jobs and improve investment climate
- Cut wasteful subsidies, review public expenditure and improve ministries’ working
- Expand, modernise physical and social infrastructure
- Make organised sector more competitive, protect interests of unorganised sector workers

policy, which would have to include such measures as reduction of “wasteful subsidies” and restructuring of public finances. These measures would help the government support expansion and modernisation of physical and social infrastructure.

While this is the traditional argument for reforms, and often runs afoul of the Left, Singh also spoke of the “New deal for rural India”, which should please the CPM. He said Bharat Nirman, which he described as a business plan, and several other rural missions announced by the government would transform rural India.

The proposed employment guarantee act would address the problem of lack of jobs in rural areas. Sonia Gandhi, too, harped on this legislation in her speech, clubbing it with the women’s reservation bill as priorities.

The Left is unhappy that the government has not moved either of them.

Singh’s future challenges suggested more of the tightrope walking of the past year between the demands of reforms and the perceived need to be seen to be following policies intended to benefit the poor, an objective that has come to be identified with the Left.

Listing some more instances of this balancing act, Singh said while the goal of creating employment must be kept in sight, the climate for investment must simultaneously be improved.

Without referring to controversial labour law reforms, the Prime Minister said steps should be taken to create a more competitive environment for the organised sector. At the same time, workers’ interests in the unorganised sector must be protected.

If these are the ingredients — often conflicting — that go into creating “a caring government”, Singh could have another careworn year.

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THE TELEGRAPH

Manmohan and Sonia pay tribute to "resilience" of UPA coalition

Government completes one year; Left parties stay away from no-frills function



"A JOURNEY WELL BEGUN": One year on, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance Sonia Gandhi launch a booklet listing the UPA Government's achievements. — PHOTO: AFP

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance Government on Sunday marked the completion of one year in office with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi celebrating

the "resilience" of the ruling coalition, and expressing satisfaction over a journey well begun while acknowledging the challenges ahead.

Addressing a gathering of his Council of Ministers and the UPA at his residence after releasing the report "A Caring Gov-

ernment — One Year of UPA," the Prime Minister said: "The forging of the UPA, its political resilience and the durability of our alliance bears testimony to our determination to offer to the people of our Republic a political platform that captures the true spirit of our Constitution. The

UPA symbolises the values of pluralism and secularism that defined our national movement and are at the core of our national politics."

Stating that she had no hesitation in admitting that the Congress at the Centre had to learn the "ways of participating

and governing in a coalition," Ms. Gandhi said: "One year of the UPA has amply demonstrated that parties can pursue larger national interests without sacrificing their respective political and electoral goals. We have kept our identities, but we have remained true to our responsibilities in government and to the people."

Acknowledging the role of the allies and the four Left supporting parties — who stayed away from the meeting — in ensuring the cohesiveness of the ruling arrangement, Dr. Singh said together, an alternative had been offered to the people; "an alternative to the politics of exclusion and majoritarianism; an alternative to the economics of backwardness and bankruptcy; and an alternative to the sociology of conflict and discrimination."

While Ms. Gandhi complemented the Prime Minister for providing a "dignified and effective leadership" to the Government — instilling "confidence at home" and enhancing "India's prestige abroad" — Dr. Singh returned the complement several times over; recalling her renunciation which "generations to come will marvel" and was "in the great traditions of sages and saints of this ancient land."

On the past year, both leaders

articulated similar formulations with Dr. Singh stating that the mood of the country today was diametrically opposite to what it was last year. "At that time India was shining for a few and the Government could not see what was happening to the many." Asserting that the UPA wanted India to shine for all, he said: "We are committed to building a prosperous, inclusive, equitable, humane, caring and just India."

For her part, Ms. Gandhi said the UPA last year had set out on a "historic endeavour to repair India's secular fabric and restore harmony in our diverse society; to bring the fruits of economic growth directly to our people, especially the weaker sections; and to provide security to the vulnerable." In her opinion, the UPA constituents and supporting parties had come together "not just to form a government but, more importantly, to create a new political alliance with mobilisation and activism as its main thrust."

While Ms. Gandhi spoke in both English and Hindi, the Prime Minister spoke only in English at the no-frills function.

Editorial on Page 10

New UPA formula for Bihar

Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI: The battle for government formation in Bihar moved from Patna to the national capital on Sunday with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) making last-minute efforts to prevent the National Democratic Alliance from winning the numbers game.

Congress leader in-charge of Bihar affairs Harikesh Bahadur met Lok Jan Shakti Party chief and Union Minister Ram Vilas

Paswan to make him relent on the issue of a UPA Government led by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the largest group in the Bihar Assembly.

According to authoritative Congress sources, the formula suggested was that the LJP agree to a Chief Minister from the minority community — as demanded by Mr. Paswan — but from the RJD rather than the Congress. It was also conveyed to Mr. Paswan that the Congress, with just 10 MLAs, was in no position to lead

a government and that it was already committed to supporting an RJD-led dispensation.

It seemed that Mr. Paswan was agreeable to the idea, left as he is with a rump of the 29 MLAs elected on the party ticket.

However, there was no word from the RJD camp on whether its president Lalu Prasad would be agreeable to this.

It would mean that the RJD, which has already elected the former Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, its leader, would have to elect

somebody else. The view was that the ball was now in Mr. Lalu Prasad's court and that he should take a decision soon.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Sitaram Yechury favoured a "secular" government of the UPA.

He said that the "communal forces" represented by the NDA should not be allowed to form a government "through the backdoor." He told *The Hindu* that the mandate for a secular government should be respected.

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MONDAY, MAY 23, 2005

A good year but big promises to keep

A year on, the Manmohan Singh Government looks stronger and more credible than it did when it took office following a general election that upset every electoral calculation and poll prediction. It is worth recalling that nobody expected the Congress, instead of the Bharatiya Janata Party, to emerge as the single largest party in the 14th Lok Sabha; the 14 constituents of the Congress-led alliance to finish ahead of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance; and the Left parties to increase their weight significantly in national politics with a tally of 61 seats. These were the three contingent factors behind the making of the government of the United Progressive Alliance, which to give itself a measure of policy coherence and also satisfy external supporters had adopted a National Common Minimum Programme. But the 14th general election also yielded two vital political lessons. It was a vote against the tension-raising, divisive, communal policies of the BJP-led regime; and, even more clearly, a verdict on mass livelihood issues. The BJP and its key allies, notably the Telugu Desam Party, paid a heavy price for failing, in the popular perception, to generate sufficient employment, for ignoring the deepening agrarian crisis and turning their backs on the rural poor, and for pursuing a completely one-sided policy of economic liberalisation and globalisation that sidelined mass deprivation and led to a sharp rise in inequality in both rural and urban areas.

Generally speaking, the UPA Government has performed commendably on the first set of issues. It has brought about a visible relaxation of the communal situation round the country and put people belonging to all sections, minority as well as majority, at ease. It has got rid of the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act, taken steps to detoxify the field of education, and put in place a Right to Information Act that goes beyond anything India has seen until now. Giving in to political temptation, it deviated from the straight and narrow on federal relations and fair play under the Constitution, notably in the cases of Goa and Jharkhand, but thanks to the Prime Minister's sober intervention adopted early corrective steps to limit the damage. Its work in progress in the foreign policy arena has been impressive. Working on foundations laid by the Vajpayee Government, it has moved progressively to develop détente with Pakistan, with the Prime Minister coming up with a promising 'soft borders' initiative in an attempt to achieve a breakthrough on the Jammu & Kashmir dispute. The Manmohan Singh Government has accelerated the pace of developing friendship and all-round cooperation with China. It came up with a principled and strong response to King Gyanendra's reactionary coup in Nepal; but by inexplicably reversing course and resuming arms supply to the dictatorial King, it has let down the people of Nepal and the cause of democracy. The biggest strength of the UPA Government is a Prime Minister with an enviable reputation for personal integrity, who is nationally and internationally seen as learned, development-minded, reflective, and wholly decent; and his constructive equation with both the leader of the party that heads the coalition government, Sonia Gandhi, and alliance partners.

Rather unexpectedly, the leading Opposition party, the BJP, which in the past has shown formidable adversarial capabilities, has come to the political aid of the UPA experiment. Demoralised and in denial, lacking a plan of action, in organisational disarray, a spectacle of dissonant and squabbling leaders lacking the vision and skills to effect any kind of smooth generational transition, the party of the Hindu Right has grossly misread the national political situation and the popular mood and adopted negativism in place of intelligent opposition on issues that matter. There are enough indications that its prolonged boycott of Parliament and all its standing committees, and its disruptive confrontationism have triggered a popular backlash, reflected in the decision of the TDP to break ranks and attend Parliament in the most recent round. The BJP and its allies must not, of course, be underestimated. They are quite capable of shifting direction and seizing on the UPA's weaknesses to advance their political prospects. But at this juncture, with the BJP in own-goal-scoring form, the Congress-led alliance has little to fear from external enemies.

It is on the second set of vital issues, revolving round mass livelihood, that the improvement achieved on the ground by the UPA dispensation cannot credibly be claimed to be much more than the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee. Socio-economically, the two UPA Budgets have failed to distinguish themselves, in any major way, from preceding NDA Budgets. It has seemed that the focus is all on 'keeping economic reforms on track and accelerating their pace' — not on delivering on the mass livelihood promises. Thus far, the approaches of the Finance Ministry, the Planning Commission, and the Prime Minister himself to socio-economic policy seem out of sync, to put it mildly, with the key promises made in the NCMP. Indeed the economic policy establishment, quite independent of the parties in power, tends to view such promises as an election season affair that becomes an irksome burden and diversion when it comes to implementation. This is reflected in the sneering attitude of establishment ideologues and their media backers to demands made by left-of-centre parties, citizen sector organisations, and some economists for earnest implementation of NCMP promises. In consequence, the Rural Employment Guarantee Bill is a pale shadow of the pledge; the dramatic increases promised in agricultural investment and rural credit are nowhere in sight; and hardly anything worthwhile has been done to revitalise and strengthen the public distribution system, which suffered a near-collapse during NDA rule. The food-for-work programme launched in November 2004 needs careful monitoring to see that the substantial resources and benefits reach those in dire need. While taking heart from the positive popular response to its secular and democratic political policies and its constructive work in neighbourhood and foreign policy, the UPA Government needs to reflect seriously on the disconcerting gap between promise and performance on socio-economic and especially mass livelihood issues — and undertake a first mile course correction. It must take up this challenge as its top priority if it wishes intelligently to anticipate and avert a downslide in its political fortunes.

আবাস যোজনা, পানীয় জল, গ্রামীণ বিদ্যুৎ, সর্বশিক্ষায় জোর

অগ্নি রায় • নয়াদিল্লি

২১ মে: বণিক সমাজের একাংশের অভিযোগ, বাসেদের বাধায় গত এক বছরে তিনি আর্থিক সংস্কার ঠিক যে ভাবে চান, সে ভাবে করতে পারেননি।

বাসেদের অভিযোগ, আর্থিক সংস্কার করতে গিয়ে গত বছরে তিনি সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতার প্রতি যথেষ্ট মনোযোগী হতে পারেননি।

নানা মূর্খির এই নানা মতের মাঝখানে সেই তিনি, প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের বক্তব্য, একেই বলে জোট-রাজনীতির বাধ্যবাধকতা। এরই মধ্যে একমতের ভিত্তিতে যতটা কাজ করা যাবে সেটাকেই বলা হয় 'আর্ট অব পিসিবিলাটি'। সম্ভবত তার নিরিখেই সরকারের মূল্যায়ন করে সততার সঙ্গেই দেশে ছয় দিয়েছিলেন মনমোহন।

বিরোধী ও শরিকদের এই নানা মতের ঘূর্ণির মধ্যেই, কাল সন্ধ্যায়, ইউ পি এ-র চেয়ারপার্সন সনিয়া গান্ধীকে পাশে নিয়ে সরকারের প্রথম বছরের প্রগতি-রিপোর্ট ঘোষণা করতে চলেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। সরকারি সূত্রে জানা

গিয়েছে, এই এক বছরের খতিয়ানে সামাজিক ক্ষমতায়নের দিকটিকেই সবচেয়ে গুরুত্ব দিয়ে তুলে ধরতে চাইছে সরকার। নূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচির প্রতিশ্রুতি মতোই 'জন্মসূচী সংস্কারের' পথে হটতে এই সরকার যে বন্ধপরিকর, তা তুলে ধরাই হবে অনুষ্ঠানের লক্ষ্য।

সন্ধ্যা সাড়ে ছ টায় সাত নম্বর রেসকোর্স রোড থেকে দূরদর্শনে এই অনুষ্ঠানের সরাসরি সম্প্রচার হবে। তবে বাম নেতারা কিন্তু কাল থাকবেন না। যে দিন নূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচি ঘোষণা করে সরকারের পথ চলা শুরু হয়েছিল, সে দিন সে নথিতে স্বাক্ষর না করলেও বাম নেতারা হাজির ছিলেন। হাতে একটি করে পুস্তিকা নিয়ে হাসি মুখে সমবেত ছবি তোলা হয়েছিল। এক বছর পরে প্রগতি-রিপোর্টের দিনে অবশ্য তেমন ছবি পাওয়া যাবে না।

কী থাকছে কালকের এই প্রগতি-রিপোর্টে? কোন বিষয়গুলি সবচেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ? এক বছরের কোন কোন সাফল্যের রাজনৈতিক প্রচার করে ভবিষ্যতের দিকে হাঁটতে চাইছেন সনিয়া-মনমোহন?

সামগ্রিক ভাবে, নূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচি

অনুযায়ী যে যে ক্ষেত্রে 'সংস্কারের জন্মসূচী' রূপকে' বাস্তবায়িত করা গিয়েছে সেগুলিকে সংক্ষিপ্ত আকারে তুলে ধরা হচ্ছে। সরকারের অন্যতম শীর্ষ নেতা প্রধান মুখোপাধ্যায় জানালেন, "আমরা পনোরো-মোলোট বিঘয় বেছে সে সব ক্ষেত্রে সরকারের কাজের খতিয়ান তুলে ধরব। যার মধ্যে রয়েছে সোচ, শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, মহিলাদের হাতে আরও বেশি ক্ষমতা দেওয়া, অভ্যন্তরীণ নিরাপত্তা, প্রতিরক্ষা ও

বর্ষপূর্তি-রিপোর্ট

বিদেশনীতি"। প্রধানবাবু জানিয়েছেন, ভারত নিয়ন্ত্রণকল্প ঘোষিত হওয়ার পরে গ্রামীণ স্বাস্থ্য, শিক্ষা, শক্ত নির্মাণ, গৃহনির্মাণ, পানীয় জলের ব্যবস্থা ইত্যাদি ক্ষেত্রে সরকার কী ভাবে এগোতে চলেছে তারও উল্লেখ থাকবে।

তবে, এক দিকে যেমন বিশেষ ভাবে তুলে ধরা হবে কৃষি, গ্রামোন্নয়ন, সামাজিক ক্ষমতায়নে সরকারের ভূমিকা, তেমনই অন্য দিকে বিদেশনীতি, দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ নিরাপত্তার

উপরেও যথেষ্ট গুরুত্ব আরোপ করা হবে। যেমন, অজস্র বাধা সত্ত্বেও গ্রীনগার-মুক্তফরবাদ বাস চালু করার বিষয়টি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ জায়গা পেতে চলেছে। আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্কের ক্ষেত্রে গুরুত্ব পাচ্ছে আরও কয়েকটি বিষয়।

রিপোর্টের বিষয়গুলি এক নজরে এই রকম— ● ইন্দিরা আবাস যোজনায় ১৫ লক্ষ গ্রামীণ গৃহনির্মাণ। চলতি বছরে এই প্রকল্পের বরাদ্দ ৪০০ কোটি টাকা বাড়িয়ে ২৯০০ কোটি টাকা করা হয়েছে। ভারত নির্মাণ প্রকল্প ঘোষণা হওয়ার পরে এই উদ্যোগ ত্বরান্বিত হয়েছে।

● গত এক বছরে নিরাপদ পানীয় জল মানুষের কাছে। সরকার ঠিক করেছে, সব সরকারি স্কুল ও গ্রামের অঙ্গনওয়াড়িতে পানীয় জল সরবরাহ নিশ্চিত করা হবে। গ্রামে জল সরবরাহের ক্ষেত্রে বাজেট বরাদ্দ ৪৪ শতাংশ বাড়ানো হয়েছে।

● জাতীয় গ্রামীণ বিদ্যুৎ, পরিকাঠামো ও বিদ্যুৎদমন প্রকল্প চালু হবে। উদ্দেশ্য, আগামী পাঁচ বছরে সব গ্রামে সব বাড়িতে বিদ্যুৎ পৌঁছে দেওয়া।

● সর্বশিক্ষা অভিযান চালু করা। প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা কোষ গড়া। জাতীয় মহিলা কমিশন পুনর্গঠন।

● জাতীয় সংখ্যালঘু কমিশনকে সাংবিধানিক সংগঠনের মর্যাদা দিতে বিল আনা। এর পাশাপাশি দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ নিরাপত্তা বিষয়গুলির মধ্যে প্রধান্য পাবে পোন্ডি বিলেপ সন্ত্রাসবাদ বিরোধী লড়াইয়ে ১৯৬৭ সালের বেআইনি কার্যকলাপ (রোধ) আইনের সংশোধন, জন্ম-কার্ডের জঙ্গি অনুপ্রবেশ হ্রাস (৬১ শতাংশ), নকশাল সমস্যা সমাধানে মুখ্যমন্ত্রীদের টাস্কফোর্স গঠন ইত্যাদি। একই ভাবে বৈদেশিক সম্পর্কের মধ্যে পাক প্রেসিডেন্টের ভারত সফর ও দু'দেশের একগুচ্ছ আস্থাবর্ধক ব্যবস্থার উল্লেখ থাকবে রিপোর্টে।

নূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচির বহু প্রতিশ্রুতিই এখনও রূপায়িত হয়নি। তার মধ্যে রয়েছে অসংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রের শ্রমিকদের জন্য জাতীয় কমিশন ও তহবিল তৈরি, মহিলাদের জন্য লোকসভা ও বিধানসভায় আসন সংরক্ষণের প্রতিশ্রুতি। অপরূপ এই প্রকল্পগুলির জন্য রিপোর্টে ফের এক দফা প্রতিশ্রুতিও থাকছে।

বর্ষপূর্তির পরেই সিদ্ধান্ত

এক ধাক্কায় অনেক বাড়ছে তেলের দাম

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

১৯ মে: বর্ষপূর্তি অনুষ্ঠানের পরেই পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম আরও এক প্রস্তুত বাড়ছে কেন্দ্র। কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার কাছে নোট পাঠিয়ে পেট্রোলের দাম লিটারপিছু দু'টাকা ষাট পয়সা, এবং ডিজেলের দাম প্রতি লিটারে তিন টাকা পঁচাত্তর পয়সা বাড়ানোর প্রস্তাব করেছেন পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার। রবিবার ইউপিএ সরকারের বর্ষপূর্তি অনুষ্ঠান। সেই পর্ব চুকলে মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠক ডেকে এ ব্যাপারে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হবে।

পেট্রোলপণ্যের দাম কত বাড়ানো হবে, তা নিয়ে অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরমের সঙ্গে মণিশঙ্করের বিবাদ তুঙ্গে উঠেছে। এর আগে পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম লিটার প্রতি পাঁচ টাকার মতো বাড়ানোর প্রস্তাব দিয়েছিল পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রক। তেল সংস্থাগুলি অবশ্য আরও বেশি মূল্যবৃদ্ধির পক্ষপাতী। কিন্তু মূলত বামদলের চাপেই আগের অবস্থান থেকে সরে এসেছেন মণিশঙ্কর। তাদের দেওয়া বিকল্প প্রস্তাবকে হাতিয়ার করেই অর্থমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে সন্মুখ সমরে নেমেছেন তিনি। তাঁর বক্তব্য, মূল্যবৃদ্ধির সব দায় পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকের ঘাড়ে চাপিয়ে দেওয়া উচিত নয়। অর্থ মন্ত্রকও কিছু দায়ভার বহন করুক। এই বিষয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে মণিশঙ্করের যেমন বৈঠক হয়েছে, তেমনই কথা হয়েছে চিদম্বরমের সঙ্গেও।

সংসদে সিপিআই সদস্য গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তের অর্থমন্ত্রীকে সমালোচনার সময় খোদ সনিয়া গান্ধীর টেবিল চাপড়ানো দেখে উৎসাহিত বামেরা তেলের মূল্যবৃদ্ধি রুখতে ইতিমধ্যেই সুনির্দিষ্ট প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে। সিপিএমের রাজ্যসভার সদস্য দীপঙ্কর মুখোপাধ্যায় দলের তরফে মণিশঙ্করকে যে নোট দিয়েছেন, তাতে বলা হয়েছে, সেস, উৎপাদন শুল্ক ও আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে তেলের দাম বৃদ্ধির কারণে পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম বাড়ানোর দরকার নেই।

কী ভাবে এই মূল্যবৃদ্ধি ঠেকানো সম্ভব তা অনেক দিন আগেই চিদম্বরমের সঙ্গে বৈঠক করে জানিয়ে এসেছিলেন প্রকাশ কারাট, এ বি বর্ধনেরা। কংগ্রেস নেতা জনার্দন রেড্ডির নেতৃত্বে সব দলের সদস্য নিয়ে গড়া সংসদীয় স্থায়ী কমিটিও এ ব্যাপারে যে প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে, তার সঙ্গে বাম প্রস্তাবের বিরোধ নেই। অতীতের বামপন্থী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার বামদলের এই প্রস্তাবগুলিকেই মন্ত্রকের প্রস্তাব হিসাবে মন্ত্রিসভার কাছে পেশ করেছেন। মন্ত্রিসভার আজকের বৈঠকে অবশ্য পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম নিয়ে আলোচনা হয়নি। রবিবার বর্ষপূর্তি উৎসবের আগে এই সিদ্ধান্ত সরকার নিতে চাইছে না।

কী রয়েছে মণিশঙ্কর এবং বাম নেতৃত্বের প্রস্তাবে?

● দেশে উৎপাদিত অপরিিশোধিত তেল থেকে সেস বাবদ প্রতি টনে এক হাজার আটশো টাকা সংগৃহীত হয়। প্রতি বছরে যার মোট পরিমাণ দাঁড়ায় পাঁচ হাজার চারশো কোটি টাকা। এই টাকা মূল্য নিয়ন্ত্রণের কাজে লাগাতে একটা তহবিল গঠন করা হোক।

● আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারের মূল্যবৃদ্ধির সঙ্গে আমাদের স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ বাজারকে বিযুক্ত কর হোক।

চিদম্বরম অবশ্য মণিশঙ্করকে বলেছেন, “সেস বাবদ সংগৃহীত এই অর্থ কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সড়ক তহবিলে যায়। তাকে কী ভাবে আমি মূল্য নিয়ন্ত্রণ তহবিলে পাঠাতে পারি?”

বাম প্রস্তাবে বলা হয়েছে, পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের উপরে লিটার পিছু যে পঞ্চাশ পয়সা সেস বাড়ানো হয়েছে তা অযৌক্তিক। এ ছাড়া পেট্রোলে লিটার পিছু ১ টাকা ৭০ পয়সা ও ডিজলে ১ টাকা ১৫ পয়সা বাড়তি উৎপাদন শুল্ক চাপানো হয়েছে। এ নিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে লেখা চিঠিতে খোদ অর্থমন্ত্রীর বিরুদ্ধে অনুযোগ প্রকাশ করেছেন দীপঙ্করবাবু। তিনি বলেছেন, অর্থমন্ত্রী তাঁর বাজেট বক্তৃতায় বলেছিলেন, শুল্কের হারের পরিবর্তনের ফলে রাজস্বের পরিমাণে কোনও হেরফের হবে না। ফলে, খুচরো বাজারে মূল্যবৃদ্ধির সম্ভাবনা নেই। এখন পেট্রোলপণ্যের মূল্যবৃদ্ধি সংসদে দেওয়া এই আশ্বাসের পরিপন্থী হবে।

বামদলের বক্তব্য, সরকার যে ভাবে আমদানি শুল্ক কমিয়েছে, তাতে বেসরকারি তেল পরিশোধন সংস্থাগুলিই লাভবান হচ্ছে। অন্য দিকে, উৎপাদন শুল্ক বাড়িয়ে তার দায় সাধারণ মানুষের উপরে চাপানোর চেষ্টা চলছে। চলতি পরিস্থিতিতে অর্থমন্ত্রকেরও কিছু দায় বহন করা উচিত বলে মনে করছে সিপিএম।

এই পরিস্থিতিতে চিদম্বরম নিজেই কিছু প্রস্তাব মেনে নিতে আগ্রহী হয়েছেন। নতুন তহবিল গঠনের বিষয়টিও বিবেচনা করা হচ্ছে।

20 MAY 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

বাধ্য ছাত্রের মতো চিদম্বরমদের কথা শুনল বামেরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৮ মে: মধ্যাহ্নভোজের বিরতি পর্যন্ত হল না। পাঁচতারা মৌর্য শেরাটন হোটেল থেকে আনা খাবারের প্যাকেট চলে গেল ৭ রেস কোর্স রোডের সাম্মেলন কক্ষেই। এক টানা আট ঘণ্টা ধরে সহকর্মীদের নিয়ে সরকারের সাফল্য আর ভবিষ্যৎ কর্মপন্থা জেটশরিক-সমর্থকদের বোঝালেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। স্বাধীন ভারতের ইতিহাসে যা কখনও হয়নি।

সরকারের সব বক্তব্য মেনে নিয়েছি।” সরকারের সঙ্গে সচেতন ভাবে দুরত্ব বাড়তে চাওয়া বামেরা যে ইউপিএ-র কাজের মূল্যায়ন সম্পর্কে নিজেদের বক্তব্যে অন্যত, তা বৈঠক শেষের কয়েক ঘণ্টার মধ্যেই স্পষ্ট হয়ে যায়। কংগ্রেসের সাধারণ সম্পাদক অম্বিকা সোনি তাঁদের অনুমোদন করে দেওয়া প্রেস বিবৃতিকে ‘প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইউপিএ’র শরিক ও বামদলগুলির যৌথ বিবৃতি’ বলে দাবি করেছেন জানতে পেরে কারাট ও বর্ধন জালাদা ভাবে জানান, “এটা গুঁদের বিবৃতি। আমাদের কিছু বলার নেই।” যদিও এ নিয়ে বিরোধ বেধেছে বামফ্রন্টেই। ফব নেতা দেবব্রত বিশ্বাস বলেন, আমরা যখন ওই বিবৃতির অন্যতম শরিক তখন একমত কি না, সে প্রশ্ন উঠছে না।

আসলে বামেরা যেমন অবস্থান বদলায়নি, কেন্দ্র ও তার নীতি প্রণয়নে বঙ্গপারিকর। কালই মনমোহন এবং

অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম দ্ব্যর্থহীন ভাষায় জানান, বিদেশি লাগি টানাতে বিধিনিষেধ আরও শিথিল করার পক্ষপাতী তারা। যার মধ্যে শ্রম আইনও থাকছে। এই খোষণা স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই বামেরদের খুশি করেনি। সেই অসন্তোষ চাকতে আজ বৈঠকের শুরুতেই ‘ভারত নির্মাণ’ প্রকল্পের প্রসঙ্গ পাড়েন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। বলেন, পরিবার পিছু অস্তত এক জনের আয়ের সংস্থান করাই সরকারের লক্ষ্য। যে ঘোষণার অন্তরালে একটাই বাতী, সংস্কারমুখী হলেও সামাজিক দায়িত্ব বিস্মৃত হচ্ছে না তাঁর সরকার।

মন্ত্রিসভার সদস্যদের আজ তিন ভাগে ভাগ করেছিলেন মনমোহন। গোড়ায় বলেন নটবর সিংহ, প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়, পি চিদম্বরম, অর্জুন সিংহের মতো প্রবীণ মন্ত্রীরা। বক্তৃতার পরে প্রশ্নোত্তর। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলকে বামেরা চেপে ধরেন গুজরাতে দাঙ্গা নিয়ে। প্রশ্ন ওঠে, সুপ্রিম

প্রসঙ্গ। বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারীকরণ নিয়ে বামেরদের ভোপের মুখে পড়েন এনসিপি-র প্রফুল্ল পটেল। তার সমর্থনে এগিয়ে আসেন মনমোহন। শ্রম আইন সংস্কার নিয়ে প্রশ্ন সামলান চন্দ্রশেখর রাও। শেষ পরে নবীন মন্ত্রীরা।

কৃষি ও গ্রামোন্নয়ন, শিক্ষা-স্বাস্থ্য-পুষ্টি-দুর্ভলতার শ্রেণির ক্ষমতায়ন, অভ্যন্তরীণ নিরাপত্তা, পরিকাঠামো ও অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়ন, প্রতিরক্ষা এবং বিদেশনীতি— এই ছাটি বিষয় নিয়ে আজ আলোচনা হয়। পাসোয়ান বলেন, তিনি ভি পি, দেবগৌড়া, গুজরাল ও বাজপেয়ীর সরকারে থাকলেও এমনটা দেখেননি। সনিয়ার ডাকা নৈশভোজে এসে বাম নেতৃবৃন্দও একই কথা বলেন।

দুপুরের প্যাকেটে ছিল বিয়ানি। সনিয়ার নৈশভোজে গলদা চিংড়ি বামেরা অবশ্য শুধু খাবারই নয়, আজ সরকার নিজেদের যে মোড়কে হাজির করল, তাতে মোড়ের উপরে খুশি।

19 MAY 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

UPA, Left focus on Gujarat affairs

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UPA Govt
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19/5

Resolve to combat communal forces

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) partners and the Left Parties on Wednesday reaffirmed their resolve to confront and combat communal forces and strengthen the secular pillars of the state.

The focus of the meeting, held to review one year of the Government, turned on Gujarat after members sought to know from Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil as to what prevented the Government from ordering a CBI probe in six riot cases being tried outside Gujarat.

The issue was broached by Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Prakash Karat and found support from Ahmed Patel (Congress), Lalu Prasad (RJD) Assaduddin Owaisi (AIMIM) and Debabrata Biswas (AIFB). To Mr. Patil's response, Mr. Biswas said that the members wanted to know the political direction and will of the Government rather than a "bureaucratic" reply, sources privy to the proceedings said.

The Railway Minister, Lalu Yadav, reminded those present of the manner in which he was attacked during his visit to Gujarat. He suggested the setting up of a UPA sub-committee to sort out issues at regular interval.

The Home Minister, who gave a presentation on internal security, one of the themes reviewed at the meeting, mentioned the measures taken by the Government, including the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the initiation of a dialogue with naxalites in Andhra Pradesh. Agriculture, rural development and panchayati raj; education, health and nutrition; empowerment of weaker sections; infrastructure and economic growth; and defence and foreign policy were the other themes taken up

• **Sub-committee needed:**
Lalu Prasad

• **Left concerns raised:**
Prakash Karat

• **Satisfied over coalition:**
Sonia Gandhi

for review. The meeting lasted seven hours with 14 Union Ministers making presentations on the Government's accomplishments.

"Cordial, constructive"

Briefing mediapersons, Congress leader Ambika Soni said the meeting witnessed a structured discussion with leaders making their points on issues. "The meeting was cordial and constructive," she said. A joint statement expressed "overall satisfaction and resolved to move forward even more purposefully to implement their collective, political, social and economic agenda as embodied in the National Common Minimum Programme." Prime Minister Manmohan Singh would present a detailed progress report to the nation on May 22, she said. However, Mr. Karat issued a separate statement saying that the meeting was useful as it gave

an overall view of the UPA Government's performance in the past year and that certain concerns of the Left parties were raised in the course of the meeting. "As far as the assessment of the one year of the UPA Government is concerned, the Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) has already made an assessment in its meeting held on May 14 and 15."

The Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the Bharat Nirman programme would generate employment and bring prosperity to villages. The programme, with an allocation of Rs. 1,70,000 crores over the next four years, would build roads, railways and ports in villages, which would bring about equality and social justice. In her welcome address, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi expressed satisfaction over the coordinated manner in which the coalition had worked throughout the year. Among the Ministers who briefed the meeting were Natwar Singh, Sharad Pawar, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Meira Kumar, Arjun Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, Dayanidhi Maran, K. Chandrasekhara Rao, Ram Vilas Paswan, Shivraj Patil, P.R. Kyndiah, Lalu Prasad, P. Chidambaram and Raghuvansh Prasad Singh. Ms. Gandhi later hosted a dinner for the leaders at her residence.

'Third front will become reality'

Staff Reporter

TIRUMALA: The third front will become a reality in the days to come, the former Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) president, H.D. Deve Gowda, told mediapersons here on Wednesday. Though there was no time frame, it would defi-

nitely take shape.

Regional parties, particularly in the south, which had grown stronger, might play an active role in the formation of the front.

Details on Page 14

19 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

One year on, V-Day mood returns

ARE YOU HAPPY, COMRADE KARAT?

THUS SPAKE

- **P. Chidambaram:** Spiel on liberal FDI policy. Left keeps quiet
- **Natwar Singh:** CPI quizzes foreign minister about Nepal policy
- **Arjun Singh:** Presentation on, what else, but detoxification
- **Shivraj Patil:** Prakash Karat and Laloo Prasad Yadav want more action on Gujarat riots
- **Raghuvansh Prasad Singh:** Left asks rural development minister to take up land reforms
- **K. Chandrasekhar Rao:** Labour minister concedes failure in bringing bills on farm and unorganised workers

OTHER SPEAKERS

- **Pranab Mukherjee,** defence
- **Mani Shanker Aiyer,** petroleum
- **Laloo Prasad Yadav,** railway



Laloo Prasad Yadav and Prakash Karat outside the Prime Minister's residence after the meeting. (PTI)

1915
K. SUBRAHMANYA
AND MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, May 18: Exactly a year after they teamed up, the Congress-led alliance and the Left today presented the picture of a happy family as they went over the performance of the Manmohan Singh government together.

For almost eight hours without a break, Singh and his ministers offered a review of their work against the backdrop of the promises made in the common minimum programme.

The Left leaders patiently heard them out, with no sign of the rancour of the last week when the CPM and the CPI had taken turns to smite the government for not doing enough for the poor.

Neither CPM general secretary Prakash Karat nor his CPI counterpart A.B. Bardhan raised any contentious issues. Karat only suggested that Gujarat riot cases be handed to the CBI and heard outside the state. Bardhan wondered if the government was getting its Nepal policy right.

The Prime Minister, who presented an overview of his government's performance, also avoided any reference to such issues as labour reforms

and divestment, the need for which he had emphasised just two days ago at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee.

"The atmosphere was friendly... there were no confrontational and discordant notes," said Congress leader Ambika Soni, who attended the marathon meeting at the Prime Minister's 7 Race Course Road residence.

The unity befitted the occasion. On this day last year, after getting the better of the NDA in the general elections, the Congress, its poll allies and the Left had resolved to work together to form a secular government and firm up what came to be known a week later as the United Progressive Alliance.

At the end of today's meeting, the UPA partners adopted a statement that "reaffirmed their resolve to confront and combat communal forces and strengthen pillars of the Indian state".

Karat later clarified that "it is not our statement. It is their statement". The meeting was that of the UPA, and the Left parties — they are not members of the alliance — were invited to it. So, technically, the Left could not have been a party to the statement.

UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi hosted a dinner for the

leaders at her 10 Janpath residence, where they had met over dinner on this day last year too.

Sonia opened the review meeting, which centred around a draft status paper on implementation of the common minimum programme that was circulated among the leaders in advance. The draft was finalised for presentation as the government's report card on its completion of one year in office on May 22.

The Prime Minister's overview touched upon almost all subjects. He focused on the Bharat Nirman programme that will address all aspects of the rural economy, including employment generation.

Several ministers then presented their report cards one by one, without a break and over a working lunch. "They ate while they heard out the others," said a leader.

The Prime Minister assured the Left that the government will work out a roadmap keeping its concerns in view.

Although the Left voiced no complaints today, it has stuck to its decision not to attend the anniversary celebrations on Sunday because it wants to maintain a distance from the ruling coalition.

■ **Advani advice to PM,**
Page 6

Left no to UPA joint statement

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 18. — Continuing to puncture every birthday balloon the Congress has tried to float to mark a year of the UPA government, the Left parties today distanced themselves from a joint statement which had expressed "overall satisfaction" over the implementation of the Common Minimum Programme (CMP).

"We are not signatories to the UPA's joint statement," CPI-M general secretary Mr Prakash Karat said after a marathon seven-hour meeting of the UPA Coordination Committee which began at 10 a.m. It was held at the Prime Minister's 7 Race Course residence.

The joint statement said: "Those present at the meeting expressed overall satisfaction and resolved to move forward even more purposefully to implement their collective political, social and economic agenda as embodied in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP)." It went on to state that "the UPA partners and the Left parties reaffirmed their resolve to confront and combat communal forces and strengthen the secular pillars of the Indian state."

The UPA had insisted that the Left too sign the joint statement, subsequently read out by Congress spokesperson Mrs Ambika Soni. They had approached the Left leaders with a draft of the statement bearing their parties' names. "It was simply torn down. We said we did not want to become a party to it though we attended the UPA meeting," a Left Front leader later said.

Mr P Chidambaram did not touch upon any of the Left party's concerns relating to land reforms, the tribal bill, or economic matters. The Left leaders had to virtually sit throughout the session. One of them later said they had "little scope" of speaking out on issues over which they had differences with the government.

"None of our concerns was addressed," said Mr Abani Roy of the RSP. He said all the points discussed at today's meeting by the ministers would be reviewed by the Left parties after the release of the UPA government's report-card of achievements on 22 May.

Mrs Soni said: "The atmosphere was cordial, constructive and upbeat ... there were no discordant note from anywhere, no confrontation."

Agriculture, rural development and panchayati raj; education, health and nutrition; empowerment of weaker sections; internal security; infrastructure and economic growth; defence and foreign policy were taken up for review in the course of the meeting with respective ministers giving a presentation on their track record.

Following Mrs Gandhi's speech indicating a simple affair to mark the first anniversary, Dr Singh gave the leaders an overview of his government's scorecard. He said the government's "biggest project" is going to be the 174,000-crore-Bharat Nirman. Mr Karat pressed for a CBI probe into post-Godhra riots cases.

Miss Mayawati today told a TV news channel that the UPA government had failed to protect the interests of the Dalits.

19 MAY 2005 THE STATESMAN

60% Singh reopens reform chapter

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 16: Manmohan Singh has given himself and his government a score of 6 out of 10.

But far from satisfied, India's most educated Prime Minister has prescribed for the class a regimen that could give sleepless nights to the outside examiner — the Left.

Hours after the CPM came out with a report card replete with perceived shortcomings of the government, Singh brought divestment back on his agenda and underscored

the importance of labour reforms as well as a liberalised investment environment to meet the welfare goals of the coalition.

Addressing the Congress Working Committee that assessed the performance of the government, which completes a year this Sunday, the Prime Minister said a journalist recently asked him to rate himself and his government.

"I said 6/10. For some, this may seem a reasonable mark to get. But I have never been satisfied with a 60 per cent. I do sincerely believe that we can do better. In the coming year,

that will be our endeavour."

In the candid speech before the Congress leadership, Singh stressed that "much, much more" needs to be done. "On the side of governance and policy-making, I do not wish to claim more than what is our due. Let me say, at the very outset, that we could have done more. Much, much more. I am not satisfied with what we have been able to do in terms of implementing new policy initiatives."

The sting for the Left was in the tail but, displaying political acumen, Singh sold the controversial economic pro-

posals as the means to fulfil the targets set by parties like the CPM. The party had found fault with most economic policies of the government in a report card released earlier in the day. (See Page 8)

"We can generate even more employment if we move forward with the agenda of labour reform and the further liberalisation of investment policy. We must do more to protect the interests of workers in the unorganised sector, improve their working conditions and give them social security, even as we create a more competitive environ-

ment for the organised sector," he said.

Singh revived the welfare spin to bring divestment, too, back to the forefront. "We must once again pursue divestment in public enterprises, both to raise resources for development and to make public enterprises more accountable and efficient," he said.

But he added that political consensus is required both within his party and across political parties to take the reforms agenda forward.

The Prime Minister sought to send a message that he was trying to meet the popular

will, saying the people are "impatient" for change, a better quality of life and new opportunities. "We will be failing them if we do not think out of the box and act with courage. Bold initiatives are called for in economic reforms," he added.

Singh's message for his ministerial colleagues was to restructure public expenditure and not treat public enterprises as their "personal fiefs".

He showered praise on Sonia Gandhi who, for the second time in less than a week, hailed him as a "competent and capable Prime Minister".



PM'S PROGRESS REPORT

Marks: 6

Remarks: Not satisfactory, can do better

Things to do: Divestment, labour reforms, investment policy liberalisation

How to do: Think out of the box, act with courage, be bold in economic reforms

১৪ মে ২০০৬

বর্ষপূর্তির অনুষ্ঠান, নৈশভোজ ঘিরে টানা পোড়েন

বামেদের মন পেতে নিজেই উদ্যোগী সনিয়া

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

১৪ মে: বামেদের সঙ্গে তৈরি হওয়া সাম্প্রতিক দূরত্ব ঘোচাতে উঠেপড়ে লেগেছে কংগ্রেসের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব। চলতি মাসের ২২ তারিখ ইউপিএ সরকারের এক বছর পূর্ণ হচ্ছে। তার আগেই যাতে অসুস্ত প্রকাশ্যে সরকারের কড়া সমালোচনার পথ থেকে বাম দলগুলি সরে আসে, সে জন্য সনিয়া গাঁধী স্বয়ং ব্যক্তিগত পর্যায়ে চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছেন। আগামী ১৮ মে ১০ জনপথের বাংলায় যে নৈশভোজের আয়োজন করা হয়েছে, তাতে বাম নেতৃত্বের যোগদান নিশ্চিত করতে কোমর বেঁধে লেগেছেন সনিয়ার রাজনৈতিক সচিব আহমেদ পটেল।

আজ দিল্লির বঙ্গবনে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ও সিপিএম-এর বর্ষীয়ান নেতা জ্যোতি বসুর সঙ্গে দেখা করেছেন পটেল। দস্তুরমতো আমন্ত্রণপত্র দিয়ে ১৮ মে-র নৈশভোজে আসার জন্য বসুকে পীড়াপীড়ি করেছেন সনিয়ার সচিব। সিপিএমের অন্য নেতারাও যাতে উপস্থিত থাকেন, সে জন্য বসুকে বার বার অনুরোধ জানানো পটেল। বসু অবশ্য পটেলকে বলেছেন, তাঁর পক্ষে ওই নৈশভোজে যাওয়া সম্ভব নয়, কারণ ১৮ তারিখ তিনি দিল্লিতে থাকছেন না। তা ছাড়া, শারীরিক কারণেও তাঁর খাওয়া-দাওয়ায় বিভিন্ন বাধা-নিষেধ রয়েছে। তবে অন্য বাম নেতারা যাবেন বলে পটেলকে আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন জ্যোতি বসু।

প্রশ্ন হচ্ছে, কেন সনিয়ার দেওয়া নৈশভোজে বামেদের আসা-না-আসা কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বের কাছে এত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ হয়ে উঠেছে? কেন পটেল আমন্ত্রণপত্র নিয়ে ছুটে গিয়েছেন জ্যোতি বসুর কাছে? এ কি নিছক সৌজন্য, না কি এর মধ্যে রয়েছে জোট রাজনীতির সুস্থ টানা পোড়েন? ২২ মে বর্ষপূর্তির অনুষ্ঠানে ইউপিএ সরকারের এক বছরের কাজকর্ম নিয়ে একটি সার্বিক মূল্যায়ন পত্র প্রকাশ করতে চলেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ ও সনিয়া গাঁধী। সেখানে সরকারের সাফল্যের উপরে স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই জোর দেওয়া হবে। এই পরিস্থিতিতে বামেদের সরকারের কাজকর্মের সমালোচনা সংবাদমাধ্যম বা বিরোধীদের কাছে কোনও রকম ভুল বার্তা পাঠাবে, তা কোনও অবস্থাতেই চাইছেন না কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব।

সেই কারণেই ১৮ তারিখ সকালে সরকারের এক বছরের কাজকর্ম নিয়ে বামেদের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসবেন সনিয়া ও মনমোহন। ইউপিএ সরকারের বর্ষপূর্তি অনুষ্ঠানেও বামেদের উপস্থিত থাকতে কংগ্রেসের তরফে বারবার অনুরোধ জানানো হয়েছে। সেই সঙ্গে সনিয়ার এই নৈশভোজের আমন্ত্রণ থেকে স্পষ্ট বোঝা যাচ্ছে, রাজনৈতিক পর্যায়ে তো বটেই, ব্যক্তিগত পর্যায়েও বামেদের সঙ্গে নৈশভোজ বাড়াতে তৎপর কংগ্রেসের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব।

বামেদের সঙ্গে দূরত্ব ঘোচাতে তৎপর মনমোহনও। তিনি আজ অসুস্থ সিপিএম নেতা হরকিষেন সিংহ সুরজিতকে দেখতে নয়ডার হাসপাতালে গিয়েছিলেন। কিডনির অসুখে অসুস্থ সুরজিতের দ্রুত আরোগ্য কামনা করেছেন মনমোহন। ওয়াকিবহাল মহলের মতে, এটা শুধু মনমোহনের সৌজন্যের পরিচয় নয়, এর মধ্যেও রয়েছে রাজনীতি। কংগ্রেসের ঘনিষ্ঠ আর এক সিপিএম নেতা সীতারাম ইয়েচুরিও এখন ভাইরাস জ্বরে অসুস্থ হয়ে এআইআইএমএসে ভর্তি। এই অবস্থায় এমনিতেই বর্ষপূর্তির অনুষ্ঠান ও নৈশভোজে সিপিএমের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বের একটা বড় অংশের যোগদান অনিশ্চিত হয়ে পড়েছে। জ্যোতি বসু যাবেন না। অসুস্থ সুরজিত, ইয়েচুরি যেতে পারবেন কিনা ঠিক নেই। স্পিকার সোমনাথ এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

দূরত্ব বাড়াতে পাল্টা মূল্যায়ন করবে সিপিএম

দীপ্তেন্দ্র রায়চৌধুরী • নয়াদিল্লি

১৪ মে: কংগ্রেসের কংগ্রেস-নেতৃত্বাধীন জোট সরকারের সঙ্গে এ বার সচেতন ভাবেই কিছুটা দূরত্ব বাড়াতে সিপিএম। এবং কী কারণে কোথায় দূরত্ব কতটা, তা-ও প্রকাশ্যে জানাবে তারা।

২২ তারিখে ইউপিএ সরকারের বর্ষপূর্তিতে তার সাফল্যের খতিয়ান দিয়ে পুস্তিকা প্রকাশ করবেন কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী সনিয়া গাঁধী। একই সঙ্গে কংগ্রেসের কাজের মূল্যায়ন করে নথি প্রকাশ করবে সিপিএমও। বিষয়টি নিয়ে পলিটব্যুরোয় আজ দু'বেলা আলোচনার পরে সরকারের কাজকর্ম সম্পর্কে অখুশির পরিমাণ খুশির চেয়ে বেশি দাঁড়াচ্ছে বলেই পলিটব্যুরো সূত্রের খবর। তবে শেষ পর্যন্ত দু'দিকে পাল্লা সমান রেখেই নথিটি প্রকাশ করা হতে পারে। কারণ, পলিটব্যুরোর এক সদস্যের কথায়, সরকারের কাজে আমাদের সন্তোষের চেয়ে অসন্তোষ বেশি হলে স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই প্রশ্ন উঠতে পারে, বামেরা তা হলে কেন এই সরকারকে সমর্থন করছে।

কিন্তু পাল্টা নথি প্রকাশের উদ্যোগ থেকে এটা পরিষ্কার যে, এখন থেকে খুব সতর্ক ভাবে সরকারের থেকে কিছুটা দূরত্ব বজায় রাখতে চায় সিপিএম। তবে আগামী বছর পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ও কেরলের বিধানসভা ভোটের কথা মাথায় রেখেই এ কাজ করা হচ্ছে, পলিটব্যুরো সূত্রে এমন কথা অস্বীকার করে বলা হয়েছে, ভবিষ্যতের জন্য (অর্থাৎ পরবর্তী লোকসভা নির্বাচন, যা চার বছর পরে হওয়ার কথা) সব বিকল্প খুলে রাখাই তাঁদের উদ্দেশ্য। আপাতত সরকারকে সমর্থন চালিয়ে যাওয়া নিয়ে অবশ্য দলে দ্বিমত নেই। তবে ২২ তারিখ কংগ্রেসের সাফল্যের খতিয়ান প্রকাশ অনুষ্ঠানে হাজির থাকা হবে কি না, সে সম্পর্কে পলিটব্যুরো এখনও সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়নি। দলে এ নিয়ে মতভেদ রয়েছে।

জ্যোতি বসু আজ জানিয়েছেন, পলিটব্যুরোর তিন জন সদস্যের হাতে সরকারের কাজকর্ম 'পর্যালোচনা রিপোর্ট' তৈরির দায়িত্ব দেওয়া হবে। সরকারের কাজ সম্পর্কে তিনি বলেছেন, "কিছু আমরা সমর্থন করি, কিছু করি না।" কিন্তু সরকারের কাজে দল কতটা খুশি, এই প্রশ্নের উত্তরে বৃদ্ধদের ভট্টাচার্য বলেন, "আমরা সেগুলোই আলোচনা করছি। এটা খুব গুরুত্বপূর্ণ প্রশ্ন। এখনই তার উত্তর দেওয়া সম্ভব নয়।" অন্য দিকে, এম কে পান্ডে বিস্তারিত ভাবে জানিয়েছেন নিজেদের অখুশির তালিকা।

পলিটব্যুরো সূত্রের খবর, এম কে পান্ডে এবং চিত্তরত্ন মজুমদারের নেতৃত্বাধীন সিটি লবি অসন্তোষগুলিকেই বড় করে তুলে ধরতে চায়। কিন্তু জ্যোতি বসুর মতো উদারপন্থী নেতারা মনে করেন, কোনও সরকারকে সমর্থন করার সময়ে মানুষকে এটাও বোঝানো দরকার যে, কেন সমর্থন করা হচ্ছে। তার পর বিরোধের ক্ষেত্রগুলি মানুষের সামনে রাখা দরকার, যাতে ভবিষ্যতে ভোট দেওয়ার সময় তাঁরা দু'পক্ষের কথা জেনে নিজেদের অধিকার প্রয়োগ করতে পারেন। অসুস্থতার কারণে উদারপন্থী শিবিরের দুই নেতা হরকিষেন সিংহ সুরজিত ও সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি আজকের বৈঠকে ছিলেন না।

পান্ডে এ দিন প্রকাশ্যেই বিস্তারিত ভাবে জানিয়েছেন, কোন বিষয়গুলি তাঁরা সমর্থন করেন আর কোনগুলি করেন না। তাঁর সমর্থন না-করার তালিকায় রয়েছে, বিমা ক্ষেত্রকে উল্লেখ করার চেষ্টা, টেলিকম ক্ষেত্র-৯৪ শ্রমিকের বিদেশি শ্রমিকের এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

16 MAY 2005

উদ্যোগী সনিয়া

প্রথম পাতার পর
চট্টোপাধ্যায় আবার তখন লন্ডনে থাকবেন। কারাটের মতো কটরপন্থী নেতারা যেতে রাজি হবেন কিনা, তা নিয়ে সংশয় আছে।
বর্ষপূর্তি অনুষ্ঠানে যেতে নারাজ বাম নেতৃত্ব বলছে, আমরা সরকারে নেই, তাই এই অনুষ্ঠানে আমাদের যাওয়ার কোনও দরকারই নেই। তাঁরা আরও জানিয়েছেন, এটা কোনও ঝগড়ার ব্যাপার নয়, নেহাত কৌশলগত দূরত্ব। কিন্তু সনিয়া চান বামেরা আসুন।
এ দিকে, আজ সিপিএম পলিটব্যুরোর বৈঠকে সনিয়ার নৈশভোজে বামেদের যাওয়া-না-যাওয়ার বিষয়টি নিয়েও আলোচনা হয়। এ ব্যাপারে এখনও কোনও পাকা সিদ্ধান্ত হয়নি বলে জানা গিয়েছে। জ্যোতি বসু অবশ্য চাইছেন, বামেরা নৈশভোজে যোগ দিন।

পাল্টা মূল্যায়ন সিপিএমের

প্রথম পাতার পর
অনুমতি, ব্যাঙ্কিং আইন পরিবর্তন করে ধীরে ধীরে ব্যাঙ্ক বেসরকারিকরণের পথে এগোনোর উদ্যোগ, পেনশন বিল এবং ভবিষ্যতে প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের টাকা শেয়ার বাজারে লগ্নির দিকে এগোনো, অসংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রের শ্রমিকদের এবং বনবাসীদের কল্যাণের জন্য বিল না-আনা এবং রাজস্ব: নিচয়তা বিল মাত্র ১৫০টি জেলায় চালাওয়া (ওই সব জেলাতেও অবশ্য কাজ কিছু হচ্ছে না)। রাজনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রে মহিলা বিল না-আনা এবং নেপালে সাজোয়া গাড়ি পাঠানো নিয়েও তাঁদের ক্ষোভের কথা তাঁদের দলিলে লেখা হবে বলে তিনি ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছেন।
তা হলে কোন কাজে তাঁরা সন্তুষ্ট? পান্ডে পাকিস্তান ও চিনের সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক ভাল করা এবং পেটেন্ট আইনের ক্ষেত্রে বাম সংশোধনী মেনে নেওয়ার

মতো দু-চারটি বিষয়ের বেশি কিছু দেখতে পাবেন না।
তবে সি পি এমের দলীয় সূত্রের খবর, সাধারণ সম্পাদক হিসাবে প্রকাশ কারাট বলে দিয়েছেন, রাজনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রে বিজেপিকে প্রতিহত করা ও অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রে একবর্গী দক্ষিণপন্থী ঘোঁক থেকে সরে আসার জন্যই যে তাঁর সরকারকে সমর্থন করছেন, সেই বিশ্বাসটি স্যাথ্যা করে বিরোধের ক্ষেত্রগুলোকে স্পষ্ট ভাবে চিহ্নিত করে দেওয়ার পক্ষে তিনি।
সে ক্ষেত্রে সরকারের সঙ্গে দূরত্ব যেমন বজায় রাখা হবে, তেমনই সমর্থনের ব্যাখ্যাও থাকবে।



Congress president Sonia Gandhi is not too keen on joining the discussion between Haryana transport minister Randeep Singh Surjewala and party leader Janardhan Dwivedi at a Congress rally in Jind, Haryana, on Saturday. PTI

NDA an irresponsible Opposition: Sonia

Jind (Haryana), May 14

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi attacked the NDA on Saturday accusing the alliance of not playing the role of a responsible Opposition.

"The BJP-led Opposition is not playing a constructive role and they are not working sincerely though they talk big things. They boycotted the session (of Parliament) and did not behave like a responsible Opposition," she said. "Despite this, we will not allow any weakness to creep in when it comes to implementing our policies and programmes," she said, addressing a "Dhanyavad Rally" to thank the people of Haryana for returning the Congress to power in the state.

Attacking the BJP, Gandhi said, "Our opponents used to say the Congress could not form a government at the Centre... We not only did that, but showed them we could also run it smoothly."

She said there were "compulsions of a coalition government", but expressed satisfaction at the way the UPA regime had been functioning over the past one year. "The UPA government headed by (Prime Minister) Dr Manmohan Singh has almost completed one year in office and we have implemented several schemes for the welfare of the masses," Gandhi said.

Unemployment was a big challenge facing the country today and the UPA

regime would deal with it firmly, she assured. Now that the Congress had come to power with a two-thirds majority, there were high expectations from it, said Gandhi.

The power situation in Haryana under the previous regime was not good, she said but promised rural electrification under the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyuti Karan Yojna.

The Hooda government's development tasks would not be hampered due to dearth of funds, she further assured.

On the Right to Information Bill, she said, "It was a historic law that will ensure complete transparency in the administration... You will come to know how much money was allocated for a particular scheme, how much spent and whether it was utilised properly."

A separate department had been set up for the welfare of ex-servicemen. "Haryana is also a state of brave soldiers and we are proud of them," she said to a thunderous applause.

The Congress chief also lauded the farming community of the state. "Under (late Prime Minister) Indiraji's leadership the farmers achieved green and white revolutions."

Gandhi, however, expressed concern over the declining sex ratio in Haryana, saying the mindset of the people towards women needed to be changed. "Both men and women are like two wheels of a vehicle," she said.

Agencies

Azad defends stance

TERMINING THE Opposition's three-week boycott of the Budget session of Parliament as "sad and unfortunate", the government on Saturday sought to turn the tables on the NDA on the issue of "tainted" ministers.

Parliamentary affairs minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad said that there was no question of action by the government in the matter, as it was following the precedent of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee who had held that whom to appoint a minister was the prerogative of a Prime Minister.

Besides, the NDA had also argued that no one could be held guilty unless convicted by court, Azad said emphasising that the UPA was now following the footsteps of NDA. He said earlier the Congress used to act swiftly against party ministers after any court stricture was passed against them.

"Nothing has happened from the government's side. They got upset on their own and stayed away," he said.

PTI

Govt turns down Phukan panel report

Says Allegations Of Corruption In Defence Deals Have Not Been Probed

New Delhi: Terming the Phukan Commission report, which probed the Tehelka expose into fictitious defence deals, as "incomplete," the government on Friday rejected the findings as "bereft" of reasons and said the panel had not gone into the allegation of corruption.

Laying the report in the two houses of parliament, the government said it was not bound to table the conclusion as it was "part report" of the commission but it was doing so on the direction of Lok Sabha speaker Somnath Chatterjee. In an "accompanying" note on the report of the commission, which was to investigate 15 major defence deals concluded in '90s, including acquisition of Russian Sukhoi warplanes, T-90s tanks, Israeli 'Barak' missile system and British Advanced Jet Trainer, the government said the panel has "given its report only in two of the terms of reference instead of

report of Justice S N Phukan on the two terms of reference was only on "procedural matters." The cases relating to the expose have been referred by the government to the CBI for a probe, the spokesperson added.

"The terms relating to following of the prescribed procedure in these transactions were inextricably interlinked with other terms, including those relating to corruption charges," the note said. It said even in the matter of procedure the commission found a number of irregularities and made recommendations for further inquiry in 13 out of 15 transactions which it had examined.

"If the commission has accepted that violation of procedure did take place, it was incumbent upon it to complete the investigation as per the term of reference to establish a nexus," it said. ^{PH}

"If the commission has accepted that violation of procedure did take place, it was incumbent upon it to complete the investigation?"

- A Govt statement



S N Phukan: Under fire

four made to it. The report is not complete. Therefore, the government has rejected it," an official spokesperson said.

Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee tabled a copy of the part report of the commission in the Lok Sabha. The spokesperson said even the

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Phukan shot down, fire on Centaur

Fernandes to face CBI

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 13: The Manmohan Singh government today dealt a double blow to its predecessor in power by turning the heat on two former ministers, George Fernandes and Arun Shourie, amid cries of "vindictive" from the BJP.

It tabled the report of the Justice S.N. Phukan commission of inquiry into defence deals during the Vajpayee regime and in the same breath rejected its findings. Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee described the report as incomplete as it did not address allegations of corruption.

The CBI will conduct the probe into the 15 deals struck when Fernandes was defence minister that Phukan was asked to investigate.

On the same day, finance minister P. Chidambaram announced in Parliament that divestment of government holdings from two Centaur hotels would be investigated.

"We are disgusted with the government's obnoxious attitude. It proves its sense of vindictiveness," said Yashwant Sinha, who was finance minister in the NDA government.

As relations between the government and the Opposition, which has been boycotting Parliament, plumbed new depths, there were fears in the BJP camp that similar actions could be initiated

against some of its other leaders and allies.

Justice Phukan's report said: "The commission is of the opinion that his (Fernandes') reputation, as defence minister, in respect of past transactions, was not in any way prejudicially affected and hence no recommendation is called for against him."

Although the report was tabled in Parliament, it was not made available in full to either members of Parliament or to the media till hours after Mukherjee had made it public. But the accompanying note from the defence ministry was widely circulated.

The note said the commission was asked to investigate if "illicit gains have been made by persons in public office, individuals and any other organisation as alleged, and, if so, to what extent".

But the report has not touched upon this aspect, it added. However, the commission found irregularities in procedures and made recommendations for further inquiry in 13 out of 15 cases it had examined.

In the prologue made public, the report said: "During his deposition, Mr Fernandes has said that the entire file was not shown to him and notings in few pages were sent to him for his approval. The commission, therefore... (finds) that no illegality or irregularity has been committed by Mr George Fernandes, as defence minister."

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST



Phukan submits

- Commission probed if illegality was committed by George Fernandes
- Conclusion: Fernandes found clean in all 15 deals
- Question of middlemen's role to be studied in subsequent reports
- Files concerning service headquarters and defence ministry not maintained properly
- Government should take steps to expedite defence purchases cleanly

Govt junks

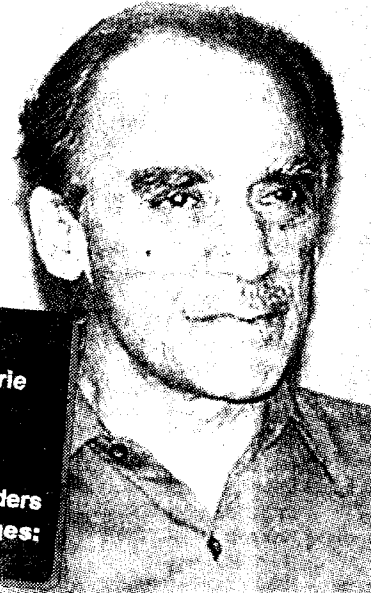
- No mention of who made illicit gains from defence deals and how
- Only looked at procedural issues
- In 13 of 15 cases, procedures flouted but not probed
- Findings can't be accepted without probe into corruption charges
- All 15 transactions to be probed by CBI

Shourie shock

- CAG asks questions about sale of two Centaur hotels
- Chidambaram says both deals will be investigated

Future fears

- Balco and VSNL divestment: Arun Shourie
- UTI crisis over US-64: Yashwant Sinha
- Journalist Shivani Bhatnagar murder: Pramod Mahajan
- Petrol pump allotment: BJP and RSS leaders
- Challenge to dropping of Ayodhya charges: LK Advani



Probe eye on Shourie too

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 13: The Congress-led government today announced an inquiry into the sale of two Centaur hotels in Mumbai during National Democratic Alliance rule.

The nature and scope of the probe will be decided later. The decision follows demands by the Left and other allies as well as the Congress parliamentary party for investigation of the questions raised in a report by the comptroller and auditor general.

Finance minister P. Chidambaram said: "After examining the report of the CAG in respect of sale of two hotels, the government has decided to order an inquiry."

Sources said either the Central Vigilance Commission or the CBI would be asked to perform the task.

A defiant former disinvestment minister Arun Shourie, under whom the sale of the government stake in the hotels was conducted, said he was "willing to face any investigation... there is nothing to hide nor is there any wrongdoing".

The Left was jubilant. Dipankar Mukherjee, a CPM member of Parliament, said: "It is a partial success; we wanted a probe by CBI."

Gurudas Dasgupta of the CPI added: "We want all the divestment transactions to be probed — Balco, Jessop."

Under attack for decisions taken during its rule, the BJP-

led Opposition alliance harbours exactly such a fear. BJP sources said the development was "particularly damaging" because it dented the image of Shourie, the party's Mr Clean.

Sources said a probe was not favoured either by the Prime Minister's Office or the finance ministry, though the CAG report had enough fodder.

The Congress leadership and the Left insisted on an investigation as they felt it would vindicate the stand they had taken on divestment before and during the last election.

The CAG report had examined the sales of Airport Centaur to the Batras, who had links with the RSS, and of Centaur, Juhu, to a company floated by Ajit Kerkar, the former Taj group head who was a director in Air-India, which owned the properties through its hotel subsidiary.

Kerkar's company, Tulip Hospitality Services Ltd, which bought the Juhu hotel for Rs 153 crore despite failing to pay instalments in time, had a paid-up capital of only Rs 2,000. Tulip was the sole bidder.

The CAG report pointed out that in the case of Airport Centaur, too, there was a single bidder in Batra Hospitality which bought the hotel for Rs 83 crore only to resell it for about Rs 30 crore more to Sahara after only a month.

■ See Page 6

সমর্থন তুলে নেওয়ার হুমকি মায়াবতীর

নয়াদিপ্লি, ১২ মে: আয়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গতিহীন সম্পত্তির মামলায় সি বি আই তাঁকে জেরা করায় ক্ষুব্ধ মায়াবতী ইউপিএ সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন তুলে নেওয়ার হুমকি দিলেন। তাঁর বক্তব্য, সি বি আই তাঁকে অযথাই হয়রানি করছে এবং দলিতের এই হয়রানি বন্ধ না-হলে সমর্থন প্রত্যাহারই একমাত্র পথ। লোকসভায় ১৮ জন সাংসদ রয়েছে মায়াবতীর দল বি এস পি-র। তারা কেন্দ্রে সরকারকে বাইরে থেকে সমর্থন দিচ্ছে। বি এস পি সমর্থন তুলে নিলে সরকারের অবশ্য সমস্যা হওয়ার কথা নয়।

উত্তরপ্রদেশ রাজনীতির সমীকরণ অনুযায়ী, দুর্বল মায়াবতীই কংগ্রেসের পক্ষে ভাল। আবার দলিত অবমাননার প্রক্ষে হইচই করলেও মায়াবতী জানেন, কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে ছাড়া তাঁর পক্ষে রাজ্য রাজনীতিতে এঁটে ওঠা মুশকিল।

মায়াবতীকে জেরার প্রসঙ্গ নিয়ে আজ সংসদের দুই কক্ষেই হইচই হয়েছে। রাজ্যসভায় অধিবেশন শুরু হওয়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই প্রসঙ্গটি তোলেন স্বয়ং মায়াবতী। তিনি বলেন, সি বি আই 'দ্বিচারিতা' করছে। আয়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গতিহীন সম্পত্তি রাখার অভিযোগে

তাঁকে জেরা করা হলে সব দলের প্রধানদেরই জেরা করা উচিত। গোটা দেশেই দলিতেরা ক্ষুব্ধ বলে জানিয়ে মায়াবতী বলেন, সি বি আই যদি সরকারের নির্দেশে কাজ করে থাকে, তা হলে সেই সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন তুলে নেওয়া ছাড়া পথ নেই।

বি এস পি-নেত্রী যখন এই মন্তব্য করছেন, সভায় তখন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহও হাজির ছিলেন। কালই সি বি আই-কে 'মনুবাদী' বলেছিলেন মায়াবতী। রাজ্যসভায় কেন্দ্রীয় পার্সোনেল দফতরের প্রতিমন্ত্রী সুরেশ পট্টোরি বলেন, সি বি আই স্বতন্ত্র সংস্থা। আয়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গতিহীন মামলা এবং তাজ করিডর মামলা— দু'টোই শুরু করেছিল এনডিএ সরকার। নেত্রীর হয়রানির প্রতিবাদে লোকসভাতেও বি এস পি সাংসদেরা ওয়েলে দৌড়ে যান। লোকসভা ১০ মিনিটের জন্য মুলতুবি হয়। সভা ফের বসলে প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় বি এস পি সাংসদদের আশ্বাস দেন, "কোনও নেতা বা নেত্রীকে হয়রান করা সরকারের উদ্দেশ্য নয়। আমরাও উদ্দিগ্ন। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী এ ব্যাপারে আলোচনায় রাজি আছেন।" — পি টি আই

কারাটদের সঙ্গে ফের কথা ১৮ই

কাজে অখুশি বামেরা, ব্যর্থতা মানল কেন্দ্রও

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়া দিল্লি, ১২ মে: মনমোহন সিংহ সরকারের এক বছরের কাজ সম্পর্কে আজ নিজেদের অসন্তোষের কথা জানাল বামেরা। সমর্থক দলের এই সমালোচনার মুখে সরকারও কবুল করেছে, মানুষকে দেওয়া সব প্রতিশ্রুতি পূরণ করা যায়নি।

ইউপিএ সরকারের প্রথম বর্ষপূর্তির 'প্রোগ্রেস রিপোর্ট' প্রকাশিত হওয়ার দশ দিন আগে আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে প্রাচর্য বৈঠকে জোটের চেয়ারপার্সন সনিয়া গান্ধীর সামনেই প্রকাশ করাট, এ বি বর্ধনেরা ন্যূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচির বিভিন্ন দিক তুলে ধরে সরকারের কাজকর্মের সমালোচনা করেন। তবে সমালোচনার অর্থ এই নয় যে, সরকার ফেলে দেওয়ার জন্য বামেরা কোমর বেঁধে নামবে। স্থির হয়েছে, ১৮ তারিখ বামেদের সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বসবে ইউপিএ-র সমস্ত শরিক নেতৃবৃন্দ। যা গড়াবে মধ্যাহ্নভোজ পর্যন্ত। সেখানেই তৈরি হবে প্রোগ্রেস রিপোর্টের চূড়ান্ত খসড়াপত্র। সে দিনই রাতে সনিয়া গান্ধী সকলকে ডাকছেন নৈশভোজে। সনিয়া অবশ্য আজ বামেদের জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, যা সমালোচনা-বিতর্ক, তা যেন সে দিনের বৈঠক এবং মধ্যাহ্নভোজনেই শেষ হয়ে যায়। বাম নেতাদের উদ্দেশ্যে তাঁর সহাস্য মন্তব্য, "আমার ওখানে শুধু নৈশভোজই কিন্তু হবে!" আগামী ২২ তারিখ সরকারের প্রথম বর্ষপূর্তি উপলক্ষে জাতির উদ্দেশ্যে বক্তৃতায় কতটা কাজ করতে পারলেন, তার একটা হিসাব দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করবেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ।

কিন্তু ইউপিএ সরকারের কাজকর্মের লক্ষ্যগতি নিয়ে বামদের সমালোচনা যে ভিত্তিহীন নয়, তার স্বীকৃতি আজ সরকারের অন্দরমহল থেকেই এসেছে। ন্যূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচির কতটা বাস্তবায়িত হয়েছে তা খতিয়ে দেখে সরকার যে রিপোর্ট তৈরি করেছে, তাতেও দেখা যাচ্ছে অনেক প্রতিশ্রুতিই এখনও দিনের আলো দেখেনি।

যেমন ২ শতাংশ সেস বসিয়ে পাওয়া অর্থে দেশ জুড়ে প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা বিস্তারের জন্য আলাদা কোষ বা তহবিল তৈরির কথা বলা হলেও আজও কিছুই হয়নি। মহিলাদের জন্য সংসদে আসন সংরক্ষণের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় বিলটির খসড়া তৈরি হয়ে পড়ে আছে। দুর্নীতি রোধে লোকপাল বিলের খসড়াও মুলে রয়েছে। আর বেসরকারি শিক্ষাদ্যোগে চাকরিতে সংরক্ষণের কথা বললেও তা এখনও অগাধ জলে। এ রকম আরও বহু কাজই এখনও অসমাপ্ত রয়ে গিয়েছে। প্রায় প্রতিটি ক্ষেত্রেই হয় তা সংশ্লিষ্ট মন্ত্রক বা কিংবা মন্ত্রিসভার একাধিক সদস্য নিয়ে তৈরি মন্ত্রীগোষ্ঠীর (গ্রুপ অফ মিনিস্টার্স) কাছে পড়ে রয়েছে।

বামেদের সঙ্গে আজকের বৈঠকে সনিয়া বিশেষ মুখ খোলেননি। প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়ই সামলেছেন 'বন্ধু'দের সমালোচনা। বামেদের তরফে উপস্থিত ছিলেন সিপিএমের প্রকাশ কারাট, সিপিআইয়ের এ বি বর্ধন এবং ডি রাজা এবং আরএসপি-র অবনী রায়। অনুপস্থিত

ছিলেন ফরোয়ার্ড ব্লকের প্রতিনিধি। আলোচনায় একশো দিনের কর্মনিশ্চয়তা আইন থেকে শুরু করে মহিলা বিল— সমস্ত বিষয় তুলে বামেরা তাদের হতাশা জানিয়েছেন। উঠে এসেছে নেপালে সামরিক সরঞ্জাম পাঠানোর প্রসঙ্গও। একশো দিনের কর্ম নিশ্চয়তা বিল না আনতে পারার কারণ হিসাবে গ্রামোন্নয়ন বিষয়ক সংসদীয় স্থায়ী কমিটির অসহযোগিতার কথাই জানিয়েছেন মনমোহন। পরে বর্ধন বলেন, "ওই কমিটির চেয়ারম্যান কল্যাণ সিংহ বৈঠক ডেকেও চব্বিশ ঘণ্টার মধ্যেই বাতিল করে দেন। তাঁর যুক্তি, তিনি বৈঠক করতে পারবেন না, কারণ তাঁর দল (বিজেপি) সংসদ বয়কট করেছে।" ফোভ প্রকাশ করে বর্ধন বলেন, এর ফলে ভুগছেন গরিব মানুষেরা।

বামেরা দাবি জানিয়েছেন, সেন্টর হোটেল বিলম্বিতরূপে নিয়ে সিএজি-র রিপোর্টের ভিত্তিতে বিচারবিভাগীয় তদন্ত হোক। প্রধানমন্ত্রী জানিয়েছেন, তিনি মস্কায় থাকাকালীনই এ ব্যাপারে জেনেছিলেন। তখনই বিষয়টি নিয়ে এগিয়ে যাওয়ার নির্দেশ দেন। বাম নেতাদের তিনি অনুরোধ করেন, "আপনারাও অর্থমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গেও বিষয়টি নিয়ে আলোচনা করুন।" বৈঠকের পরে অবনী রায় বলেন, "আমরা প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে জানতে চেয়েছি, কেন মাত্র এক জন ক্রেতাকেই চিহ্নিত করা হল, কেন শ্রমিকেরা চাকরি হারালেন, কী ভাবে পুরো টাকাটা পাওয়া গেল? এই ধরনের অনেক প্রশ্নের উত্তরই আমাদের কাছে স্পষ্ট নয়। প্রধানমন্ত্রী আমাদের অর্থমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বসার পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন।"

বামেদের ধোঁয়াশা রয়েছে আরও অনেক বিষয় নিয়েই। যেমন, ব্যাঙ্ক-সংস্কার। প্রকাশ কারাট মনমোহনকে জানিয়েছেন, ব্যাঙ্ক-সংস্কার নিয়ে চিদম্বরমের ব্যাখ্যায় তাঁরা খুশি নন। বিষয়টি নিয়ে আরও আলোচনা জরুরি। তাঁর বক্তব্য, কেন প্রত্যক্ষ বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ এত জরুরি হয়ে উঠল, তার ব্যাখ্যা চাই।

অর্থনৈতিক সংস্কারের পাশাপাশি বামেরা আজ সরকারের বিদেশনীতিরও সমালোচনা করেছেন। প্রকৃত অর্থে গণতন্ত্র ফিরিয়ে না আনা সত্ত্বেও নেপালকে কেন সামরিক সরঞ্জাম দেওয়া হচ্ছে, এই প্রশ্ন তোলা হয়। উত্তরে প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় জানিয়েছেন, ভারত-নেপাল সীমান্তে কিছু পরিবহণ যান দাঁড়িয়ে রয়েছে। সেগুলি ল্যান্ডমাইন-প্রফ। এগুলিই পাঠিয়ে দেওয়ার কথা ভাবা হয়েছে। কিন্তু অস্ত্র? এই বিষয়ে স্পষ্ট উত্তর দেওয়া হয়নি। সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে বামেদের জানানো হয়েছে, অস্ত্র তো খোলাবাজারেই কিনতে পাওয়া যায়। টাকা থাকলে নেপাল তা এমনিতেই সংগ্রহ করতে পারবে।

বৈঠকের পরে বর্ধন জানিয়েছেন, আদিবাসীদের জমি দেওয়ার অধিকার সংক্রান্ত বিলটি সংসদের আগামী অধিবেশনেই তোলার হবে বলে সরকার আশ্বাস দিয়েছে। এর খসড়া প্রস্তুত করার আগে পরিবেশবিদদের মতামতও নেওয়া হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন মনমোহন।

Left leaders list shortcomings of UPA Government

Government gives status report on implementation of promises in CMP

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Left parties on Thursday told the United Progressive Alliance that during the past one year the coalition Government should have enacted the Employment Guarantee Scheme, the Women's Reservation Bill, the Agricultural Workers' Bill and another one on the rights of tribals.

At a breakfast meeting with the UPA at the residence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Left leaders expressed concern at the resumption of arms supply to Nepal. They sought to know the Government's response on the demand for a probe into the Centaur Hotel's disinvestment.

The leaders said they remained unconvinced by Finance Minister P. Chidambaram's argument on opening up the banking sector for foreign investment and added there was a need for detailed discussion on the subject.

The Left parties had already objected to the move to supply arms to Nepal stating there had not been much change in the situation and that these arms could be used against those agitating for the restoration of democracy. The Government had stated that what was being supplied such as heavy-duty transport vehicles had already been in the pipeline.

- **Bills on jobs guarantee, women's quota, farm workers should have been enacted**

- **Concern over arms supply to Nepal**

- **Opening up of banking sector for FDI opposed**

- **BJP criticised for Parliament boycott, blocking of Standing Committee work**

Regarding employment guarantee, the Government said plans for a legislation in the current session could not materialise since the Bill was pending with the Parliamentary Standing Committee.

The Left leaders were given a status report on the implementation of the promises made in the National Common Minimum Programme with the Minister of State in the PMO, Prithviraj Chavan, briefing the leaders.

The Communist Party of India general secretary, A.B. Bardhan, said later that all the UPA constituents and the four Left parties would meet here on May 18 to finalise the draft of a booklet that would be published by the Government listing the achievements of the coalition

Government.

On the Bill to provide land rights to tribals, Mr. Bardhan said the Government assured the Left delegation that it would be taken up in the next session as the views of environmentalists were also being considered in the drafting of the legislation.

Criticising the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Opposition for not only boycotting Parliament but also "blocking" other parliamentary work, the Left leaders said the Standing Committee on Rural Development was considering the crucial Rural Employment Guarantee Bill to provide 100 days of employment, "but [the] chairman of this Committee [BJP MP] Kalyan Singh, convened a meeting for the purpose but cancelled it within 24 hours saying he could not hold the meeting as his party was boycotting the House," Mr. Bardhan said. He added such an important legislation meant for the vast majority of the poor people had been delayed by this act.

Besides Mr. Bardhan, those who attended were CPI (M) general secretary Prakash Karat, CPI national secretary D. Raja and Revolutionary Socialist Party central committee member Abani Roy. UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, her political secretary, Ahmed Patel and Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee were present on behalf of the UPA.

Left, UPA to meet on arms to Nepal, tribal forest bill

DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 11

TOMORROW's breakfast meeting between the UPA leadership and the Left think tank is going to take up some key differences between the two sides, including arms supplies to Nepal, banking reforms, the Tribal forest rights' bill and the delay in taking up the employment guarantee legislation.

The meeting could have been quite acrimonious, with the Left wanting to have its way in each of these crucial sectors, but what might temper deliberations is the agreed premise of confronting the boycotting NDA in a much more united way. There is a feeling in both Congress and Left circles that the NDA tactic of "stalling and diluting" legislative business will have to be exposed.

In fact, apart from these key economic issues and Nepal, the Laloo factor may also come up for discussion.

True, both the Left and the Congress do not agree with Laloo on the issue of L.V. Saptarishi's allegations against the Election Commission. But the fact that the NDA is targeting Laloo specifically to weaken the UPA coalition may be discussed tomorrow in the presence of both UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

There may also be some sort of camaraderie between the two sides tomorrow, because after a year in office, the coalition wants to show that not everything about the alliance is messy. The UPA may want to present a progress card at the completion of a year in office on May 22 and it wants the



CPI sees Nepal as a growing area of difference between UPA and Left

Left to be a part of it. And the Left, despite being critical of the Congress on economic issues, may agree to be part of the process.

The CPI(M) sees Nepal as a growing area of difference between the UPA establishment and the Left. After all, the party points out, leaders of political parties are still being picked up or being kept in house detention. There is "hardly any move towards democracy", according to the party.

The party's Rajya Sabha leader, Nilotpal Basu, today said that his party is opposed tooth and nail to the idea of the Nepalese regime being provided arms to fight the Maoist rebels at this stage.

The Tribal forest rights' bill,

which environmentalists have spoken out against, is also an important issue. Even CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat has stressed that this bill is of crucial significance. The CPI(M) believes it would allow deprived tribals living on the edges of the forest access to resources to which they have a natural right.

With senior Politburo member Sitaram Yechury ill, it is possible that Karat, the new general secretary, will participate in tomorrow's meeting on behalf of the CPI(M). Karat had not really wanted the coordination mechanism to undergo any change, but may have to take part in the meeting, with Yechury indisposed and undergoing treatment at All Indian Institute of Medical Sciences, in the Capital.

12 MAY 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

Sonia gives full marks to Singh

First annual progress report on May 22

Year of blows for BJP

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 11: The Manmohan Singh government's progress report will be known only on May 22, the day it completes a year in office, but the Prime Minister himself received a glowing certificate from party leader Sonia Gandhi today.

"Let us congratulate the Prime Minister for his leadership, his dignified and effective leadership," she said at the Congress Parliamentary Party meeting with Singh sitting next to her on the dais.

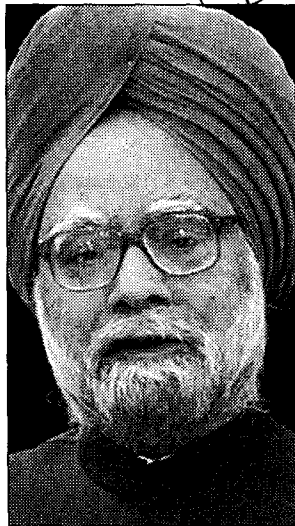
The Congress president also heads the United Progressive Alliance as chairperson.

Her ringing endorsement of the Prime Minister's performance came amid sharp attacks over the past few weeks from the BJP on Singh, who is frequently described by the Opposition as a "weak leader".

Sonia spiced up her support for Singh with a stinging attack on the BJP, describing its "self-imposed boycott" of Parliament as a tactic to shift attention from "its internal dissension and its total disarray to issues that have no consistent or substantive content".

Otherwise, she asked, why should it not accept the Prime Minister's offer to discuss any of the issues that agitated them?

Addressing the CPP's end-session meeting attended by all senior ministers and party leaders, she revealed that the



Singh: Welcome support

government would present the progress report on May 22.

The Congress Working Committee will meet on May 16 to decide the agenda and the UPA co-ordination committee will gather two days later to finalise the performance record.

She confirmed that the party's chief ministers were under scrutiny, too. A review of their performance will be made at a chief ministers' meeting.

Sonia said: "Not even our most bitter critic can accuse our Prime Minister of being arrogant, subjective or inconsiderate."

Still, the National Democratic Alliance ignored Singh's repeated pleas to end their boycott. "Worse, they tried to

justify their actions by spreading canards against the Prime Minister himself, and that too in an extremely crude and offensive language," Sonia said.

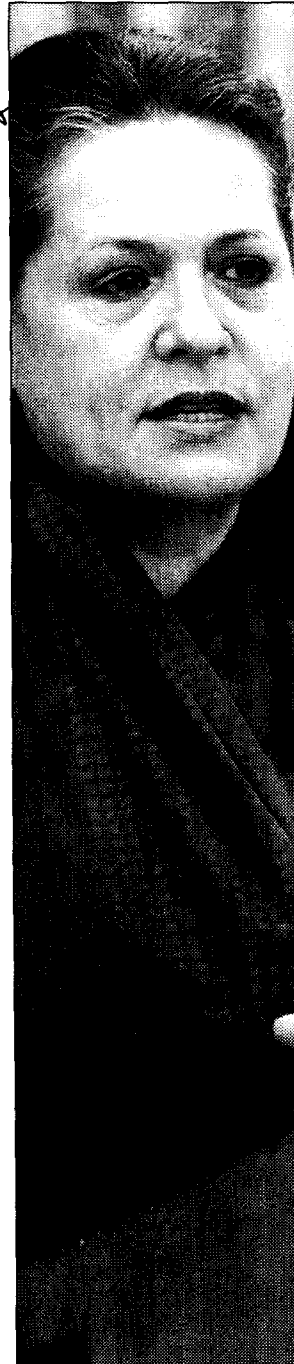
She was alluding to the NDA's recent memorandum to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in which Singh was accused of trying to stall Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's meeting with former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee.

Continuing with her attack on the NDA, Sonia said each of the charges the Congress had made while in the Opposition against the Vajpayee government was now being vindicated.

The latest report of the comptroller and auditor general (CAG) showed that the divestment of the government holding from two hotels in Mumbai was carried out in a "most non-transparent manner which caused substantial losses to the national exchequer". She expressed confidence that the UPA government would take appropriate action.

She also referred to the CAG censure of the money spent by the previous government on the "India Shining" campaign before the 2004 Lok Sabha polls without parliamentary approval of the expenditure.

Sonia cited as vindication of "our position" the confirmation that the defence ministry under George Fernandes had provided hospitality to Justice S.N. Phukan who was probing charges against him.



Sonia: Gunning for BJP

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, May 11: BJP leaders are getting ready to draw up a "chargesheet" citing the UPA government's "failures" to coincide with its first anniversary on May 22. But they privately admit there is "as much, if not greater need" to look at their own record in Opposition since May 2004.

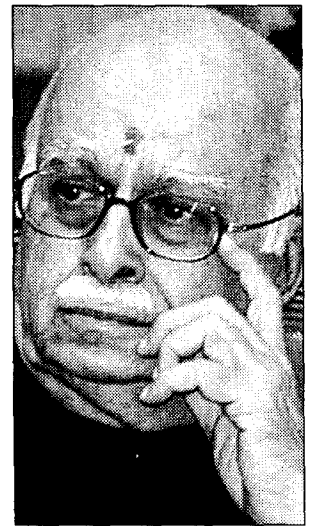
One of the problems worrying BJP leaders is the failure to clinch the leadership question.

The anointment of L.K. Advani as party president after the loss of Maharashtra was meant to rein in the "ambitions" of second-rung leaders and raise party morale. But from day one, he has been under siege.

Uma Bharti challenged his authority in full public view and the VHP declared he was not up to the mark. Advani's attempts to appoint party chiefs in two crucial states, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, were resisted by Narendra Modi and Uma loyalists.

Then came the stunning blow: RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan's advice that Advani and A.B. Vajpayee should step back from "active" politics. Advani fought back by according bigger roles in party affairs to Sangh bete noires Venkaiah Naidu and Pramod Mahajan.

But the leadership controversy was revived by party vice-president M.A. Naqvi's surprise statement that the BJP would be led by younger



Advani: Time to introspect

leaders in the next election. Naqvi kept his job by apologising to Advani.

A second worry has been the signs of fracture in the NDA. The Telugu Desam Party, though an "outside" supporter, was an important ally. Now it seems to be wooing the Left.

The NDA's failure to make an impact as an Opposition, too, is bothering BJP leaders. The boycott of Parliament, they feel, has not worked.

The perception is that the boycott was called to "protect" one individual, George Fernandes, because of fears that a discussion on his defence deals may raise questions also on the roles of some BJP leaders and their associates.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Left slams UPA on job Bill

New Delhi, May 11

ACCUSING THE UPA government of "diluting" the Employment Guarantee Bill, which they said was "languishing in the standing committee of Parliament", key allies CPI(M) and CPI on Wednesday lent support to a countrywide campaign for a full-fledged, universal and irreversible legislation in this regard.

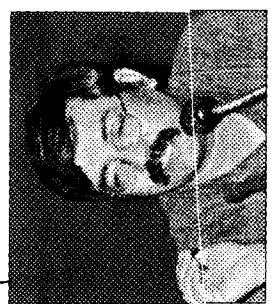
"The Bill has limitations, which we hoped would get rectified in the parliamentary committee. But the parliamentary process itself is being manipulated so that the passage of the Bill cannot be guaranteed in the Budget Session", CPI(M) leader in the Rajya Sabha Nilotpal Basu told a press conference. Basu also unveiled the Left's tool to put pressure on the government

and ensure the passage of the Bill — a nationwide campaign called rozgar adhikar yatra, which will be launched from the capital on May 13.

Basu complained that the committee was not meeting as often as it should to fine-tune the Bill. The left parties' representatives in the committee recently wrote to the chairman, asking for a meeting to be held. "Only after that did the committee meet on a couple of occasions", he said.

Basu added, "There are forces in the government which are opposed to the idea of such an Act. They feel that clubbing two existing employment schemes through this Act is sheer wastage of time. We have to fight such forces".

CPI national secretary D Raja agreed with Basu.



Nilotpal Basu: On the offensive

"One year has passed since the government committed itself to bringing this Act into force. But still, the Bill remains at the stage of a Bill", he said. Noting that the Bill had some inadequacies, Raja said the right to work should be universal and not limited to just the poor households as there would be different interpretations of the word 'poor'. "It should cover the entire country and not be limited

to 150 districts", he added.

The press conference was also addressed by former Prime Minister V.P. Singh, who said the right to work was one of the two issues he was personally involved with and commended the Centre for making a firm commitment in the common minimum programme (CMP) on the issue. He made a special mention of UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi for her "particular interest" in the matter.

He, however, regretted that much of what was advised by the National Advisory Council (NAC) had not found place in the Bill. Calling for a "social audit" of the employment guarantee schemes, Singh said, "Local bodies such as panchayats should be given the responsibility of keeping a watch on the implementation of

the schemes".

The briefing was also addressed by NAC members Medha Patkar and Jean Dreze, who complained that the draft Bill given by the council had been diluted and had a number of flaws in its present form.

"The rozgar adhikar yatra will go through 10 states before returning to Delhi at the end of June", informed Annie Raja of the People's Action for Employment Guarantee, a conglomerate of around 100 organisations which is organising the campaign.

The yatra will demand immediate adoption of a full-fledged Employment Guarantee Act, which is universal and irreversible, and extends to the whole of India, ensuring equal wages and equal participation of women.

Agencies

লালু, কমিশনকে সতর্ক করে রাশ টানার চেষ্টিয় মনমোহন

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১০ মে: সাংবাদিকদের প্রশ্ন শেষ হওয়ার সময়টুকুও দিলেন না। তার আগেই পকেট থেকে কাগজ বার করে বিবৃতি পড়তে শুরু করে দিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। রেলমন্ত্রী আর নির্বাচন কমিশন— দু'পক্ষকেই তাঁদের সাংবিধানিক দায়িত্ব সম্পর্কে সচেতন করে, সংঘাত আচরণের পরামর্শ দিয়ে চলতি বিতর্কে কার্যত জলা ঢালতে চাইলেন তিনি।

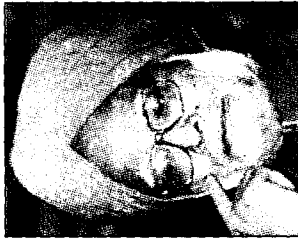
গত লোকসভা ভোটে ছাপরায় পুনর্নির্বাচন করানো নিয়ে লালু-কমিশন বাগযুদ্ধে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বিরক্ত। লোকসভার অধিবেশন যখন চলছে, তখন নির্বাচন কমিশনের মতো সাংবিধানিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের সঙ্গে তাঁর এক মন্ত্রীর প্রকাশ্য সঙ্ঘাত বিরূপ প্রতিক্রিয়ার জন্ম দিতে পারে ভেবেও উদ্বিগ্ন তিনি। তাই মনমোহন এক দিকে সাংবিধানিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের বিরুদ্ধে মুখ খোলা নিয়ে রেলমন্ত্রীকে সতর্ক করেছেন, অন্য দিকে নিরপেক্ষ ভাবে দায়িত্ব পালনের কথা মনে করিয়েছেন কমিশনকে।

মস্কো থেকে নয়াদিল্লি ফেরার পথে বিমানে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বললেন, “বিহারের লোকসভা ভোটের সময় নির্বাচন কমিশনারদের আচরণ সম্পর্কে লেখা একটি চিঠি নিয়ে বিতর্ক সৃষ্টি হয়েছে। আইনমন্ত্রী হংসরাজ ভরদ্বাজ এই চিঠি প্রাপ্তির কথা অস্বীকার করেছেন।” প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এই বিবৃতি লালুকে হুঁতু খুঁশি করবে না। যদিও মনমোহন বলেছেন, দায়িত্ব দু'পক্ষেরই। যারা সাংবিধানিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের তিরের আছেন তাঁদেরও যেমন দায়িত্ব আছে, যারা বাইরে আছেন তাঁদের দায়িত্বও কিছু কম নয়। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় সূত্রে বলা হচ্ছে, কমিশন

এবং লালু দু'পক্ষকেই সংঘত হওয়ার নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন মনমোহন। বিবৃতির মাধ্যমে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বোঝাতে চেয়েছেন, তিনি সাংবিধানিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের মর্যাদা লুপ্ত করার পক্ষে নন। বিরোধীরা সংসদ বয়কট করলেও এই গোলাযোগ্যকে যাতে প্রচারের হাতিয়ার করতে না পারে সে ব্যাপারেও তিনি সতর্ক।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেন, ভারতীয় গণতন্ত্রে সাংবিধানিক প্রতিষ্ঠান হিসাবে নির্বাচন কমিশনের ভূমিকা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। স্বাধীনতার পর থেকে এ দেশে সৃষ্ট ভাবে নির্বাচন করানোর ব্যাপারে কমিশনের ঐতিহ্যের ভূমিকা প্রশংসা করেন তিনি। ভারত গোটা বিশ্বের সামনে প্রগতিশীল, মজবুত ও দ্রুত বিকাশশীল অর্থনীতি হিসাবে নিজেকে প্রতিষ্ঠিত করেছে। নানা সংস্কৃতি নানা জাতি, নানা ভাষা ও ধর্ম নিয়েও ভারত গণতান্ত্রিক কাঠামোকে বজায় রাখতে পেরেছে। পৃথিবীর কাছে এটা একটা দৃষ্টান্ত।

২২ মে এক বছর পূর্ণ হচ্ছে ইউপিএ সরকারের। এই এক বছরে লালু-শিবু সোরেনের মতো শরিক ও সমর্থক বাম্পদের নিয়ে দফায় দফায় বিপাকে পড়েছেন মনমোহন। শরিক সমর্থকদের মন রাখতে অনেক সময়েই পিছু হটতে হয়েছে তাঁকে। জোট রাজনীতির এই



সাংবিধানিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের স্বায়ত্তশাসনের পাশাপাশি গণতান্ত্রিক কাঠামোয় এই ধরনের প্রতিষ্ঠানের দায়িত্বপালনের বিষয়টিও তুলে ধরেছেন। এতে সুকৌশলে রেলমন্ত্রীর ক্ষোভকেও নিরসন করা যাবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। তিনি বলেন, “মর্যাদা এবং স্বায়ত্তশাসন রক্ষা করে এই ধরনের প্রতিষ্ঠান যাতে আমাদের গণতান্ত্রিক জীবনে তার নিজস্ব অবদান রাখতে পারে সেটাই দেখা প্রয়োজন।”

দু'পক্ষকে সংঘত হওয়ার পরামর্শ দিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বিতর্কে জল ঢালার চেষ্টিয় মনমোহন আজ যার চিঠি নিয়ে যাকতীয় বিতর্ক, সেই আমলা এল তি সপ্তর্ষিরে কারণ দর্শানোর নোটস দিয়েছে পোর্সোলেল মস্কক। তিনি কেনে দু'জন নির্বাচন কমিশনারকে আক্রমণ করেছেন তার

জবাবদিহি চাওয়া হয়েছে। দিল্লিতে লালুর ঘনিষ্ঠ কেন্দ্রীয় গ্রামোন্নয়ন মন্ত্রী রঘুবংশ প্রসাদ যাদব জানিয়েছেন, “এক জন সরকারি কর্মী মস্কককে না-জানিয়ে নির্বাচন কমিশন সংক্রান্ত তথ্য প্রচারমাধ্যমের সামনে নিয়ে এলেন, কেন তা খতিয়ে দেখছে পোর্সোলেল মস্কক। প্রধানমন্ত্রী মস্ককোতে আন্তর্জাতিক রাজনীতির ব্যস্ততার মধ্যেও এই বিষয়টি নিষ্পত্তির জন্য সপ্তর্ষির বিরুদ্ধে আনা অভিযোগও খতিয়ে দেখাতে বলেছেন।”

শো-কজ নোটস হাতে পাওয়ার পরেই লালু ও রঘুবংশের সঙ্গে দেখা করেছেন সপ্তর্ষি। নোটসের জবাব দিতে তিনি আইনজীবীদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করবেন বলে খবর। যদিও সংবাদমাধ্যমের সামনে তিনি আজও মুখ খোলেননি। তবে মনমোহনের বিবৃতি সশ্বেও মুখে কুলুপ আঁটেতে নারাজ লালু বলেছেন, তিনি নির্বাচন কমিশনের বিরুদ্ধে কোনও অভিযোগ করেননি। সপ্তর্ষির অভিযোগকে সমর্থন করেছেন মাত্র।

ইতিমধ্যে আজ বিজেপি নেতা অরুণ জেটলির কড়া সমালোচনা করেছেন রঘুবংশপ্রসাদ। জেটলি অভিযোগ করেছিলেন, কাপার্ট সংস্থার ডি জি সপ্তর্ষির চাকরির মেয়াদ বাড়ানোর আশ্বাসের বিনিময়ে তাঁকে দিয়ে তথ্য বিকৃত করিয়েছিলেন রঘুবংশ। রঘুবংশের বক্তব্য, জানুয়ারি মাসেই সংস্থার কার্যনির্বাহী কমিটির বৈঠকে স্থির হয়েছিল, ডি জি পদে তিন বছরের মেয়াদ বাধ্যতামূলক করা হবে। তার সঙ্গে সপ্তর্ষির চাকরির মেয়াদ বৃদ্ধির কোনও সম্পর্ক নেই। বিষয়টি নিয়ে আজ দিল্লিতে সরব হয়েছে সিপিআই সাংসদ গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত। তিনি বলেন, কোনও অবস্থাতেই নির্বাচন কমিশনের বিশ্বাসযোগ্যতাকে খাটো করা উচিত নয়।

Govt disowns Laloo attack on poll panel

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, May 9: Laloo Prasad Yadav kept up his attack on the election commissioners but the government today officially distanced itself from his demand for their resignation, speaking up for upholding the dignity of constitutional authorities.

Law minister H.R. Bhardwaj disapproved of the action of senior IAS officer L.V. Saptharishi in hurling charges of bias against election commissioners B.B. Tandon and N. Gopalaswamy.

"As far as the controversy (triggered by Saptharishi) is concerned, I am not in favour of challenging the integrity of such long-serving election officers... (and) it is not proper for civil servants to criticise constitutional authorities. They come under a certain discipline and they should adhere to that discipline," he said.

But new fronts in the battle opened today with Laloo Prasad meeting United Progressive Alliance head Sonia Gandhi and the three election com-

HOW TO BLOW THE WHISTLE

There is no directive on complaints by government officials against members of another department or a constitutional body. But Saptharishi had some options

•When he was under EC

Saptharishi could have written to the chief election commissioner before the Lok Sabha poll process in Bihar concluded last year. For that duration, he was under the poll panel's administrative jurisdiction

•Why did he choose the law ministry?

It is the administrative ministry for the Election Commission

•Did he make any mistake?

He should have avoided making a public statement against the election commissioners. Service rules bar such outbursts

•What could he have done?

Make a representation to the cabinet secretary and hope that the government will pursue the complaint

missioners led by outgoing chief T.S. Krishnamurthy trooping to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Election Commission sources said a report containing the response to Saptharishi's allegation was handed to the President. Saptharishi has said he has written a letter to the law ministry, charging Tandon and Gopalaswamy with acting at the behest of the BJP and countermanding election at Chhapra, where Laloo Prasad was contesting, last year.

"I am still demanding and

suggesting to Tandon and Gopalaswamy, you please resign, please leave your posts. But I am not going to approach the law minister or the Prime Minister," Laloo Prasad said.

Bhardwaj denied having received any letter from Saptharishi and said even if there was one, it was an improper act on the part of the civil servant.

Saptharishi was an observer at the May 10, 2004, Chhapra election, but has made the charges now in a letter he purportedly wrote last week, all-

eging caste bias among election commissioners, when Tandon is days away from taking over from Krishnamurthy, who steps down on May 16.

"I have no such letter. I cannot tell you if there is any other minister under whom he is working and he has that letter. He (that minister) can certainly call for his (Saptharishi's) explanation."

Approaching retirement, Saptharishi is director-general of the Council for People's Advancement and Rural Technology under the rural development ministry headed by Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, who belongs to Laloo Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Even Singh said he had not received any letter from Saptharishi but had come to know of it from media reports.

BJP spokesperson Arun Jaitley accused Singh of striking a deal with Saptharishi that if he levelled such an allegation, he would get an extension. Singh denied the charge, saying there was no move to give Saptharishi an extension after July.

■ See Page 6

10 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

মনমোহনের

প্রথম পাতার পর

চালু করার ব্যাপারে তাঁর 'অয়েল ডিপ্লোম্যান্সি' যথেষ্ট সফল হয়েছে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। বাণিজ্যমন্ত্রী কমল নাথের কাজেও খুশি মনমোহন। ডব্লিউটিও-তে ভাল কাজ দেখিয়ে সুনাম কুড়িয়েছেন কমল নাথ।

মানবসম্পদ উন্নয়নমন্ত্রী অর্জুন সিংহকে নিয়ে মনমোহন ও সনিয়া দু'জনেই বেশ অখুশি। বর্ষীয়ান এই নেতা সম্প্রতি যে ভাবে ধুমধাম করে নিজের ৭৫ বছরের জন্মদিন পালন করেছেন, তাতে অনেকেরই জ্ব কঁচকঁচে। নগরোন্নয়ন ও সংসদবিষয়ক মন্ত্রী গুলাম নবি আজাদও তাঁর দায়িত্ব ঠিক ভাবে পালন করতে পারেননি বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। আজাদকে শুধুই নগরোন্নয়নের দায়িত্বে রেখে প্রিয়রঞ্জন দাশমুসিকে সংসদবিষয়ক মন্ত্রকের ভার দেওয়ার কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে বলে খবর। বিদ্যুৎমন্ত্রী পি এম সঙ্গদের কাজেও সন্তুষ্ট নন মনমোহন। তথ্য ও সম্প্রচার মন্ত্রী জয়পাল রেড্ডির কাজেও তিনি হতাশ। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়ের মতে, যতটা ভাবা হয়েছিল ততটা ভাল কাজ করতে পারেননি জয়পাল।

প্রশ্ন উঠেছে অর্থমন্ত্রী চিদম্বরমের কাজ নিয়েও। কংগ্রেস-সহ ইউপিএ জোটের বিভিন্ন দল, বিশেষত বামেরা, সংসদে চিদম্বরমের নীতির বিরুদ্ধে অসন্তোষ দেখিয়েছেন। রাজ্যসভায় জয়রাম রমেশের মতো কংগ্রেস সদস্য প্রকাশ্যে চিদম্বরমের সমালোচনা করেছেন। চিদম্বরমের কাজে সনিয়াও খুশি নন বলে অনেকেই মনে করছেন। সম্প্রতি লোকসভায় সিপিআই নেতা গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত চিদম্বরমের সমালোচনা করার সময় সনিয়া টেবিল চাপড়ে তাঁকে উৎসাহ দিয়েছিলেন। অবশ্য কারও কারও মতে, বামেদের খুশি করার জন্যই সনিয়া প্রকাশ্যে চিদম্বরমের সমালোচনা করার এই কৌশল নিয়েছেন।

কাল তিন দিনের সফরে মস্কো যাচ্ছেন মনমোহন। তিনি দেশে ফিরে মন্ত্রীদের মূল্যায়ন নিয়ে সনিয়ার সঙ্গে কথা বলবেন। ১৩ই মে সংসদের চলতি অধিবেশন শেষ হচ্ছে। তার পরে মন্ত্রিসভায় বড় ধরনের রদবদলের যথেষ্ট সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে বলে ওয়াকিবহাল মহলের ধারণা।

মন্ত্রিসভায় বদলের ইঙ্গিত

নটবর, শিবরাজ,

অর্জুনের কাজে

অখুশি মনমোহন

১-১১-০৫ জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

৭ মে: এ যেন বার্ষিক পরীক্ষার ফল বেরোবার আগে দুরদুর বৃকে অপেক্ষা। কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রীদের অবস্থা এখন অনেকটা সেই রকমই। কারণ, খোদ প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ চিঠি পাঠিয়ে জানতে চেয়েছেন, গত এক বছরে নিজেদের কাজের মূল্যায়ন তাঁরা কী ভাবে করছেন। অর্থাৎ, এক ধরনের 'সেক্স অ্যাসেসমেন্ট'। চলতি মাসের ২২ তারিখ এক বছর পূর্ণ হচ্ছে ইউপিএ সরকারের। তারই প্রেক্ষিতে মূলত সনিয়া গাধীর পরামর্শে মনমোহন এই কাজ করেছেন বলে জানা গিয়েছে।

শুধু নিজস্ব মূল্যায়ন নয়, মন্ত্রীদের এই এক বছরের কাজকর্মের একটি সার্বিক রিপোর্ট তৈরি করছেন মনমোহন নিজে এবং তাঁর সচিবালয়। এই মূল্যায়নের ভিত্তিতে মন্ত্রিসভায় বেশ কিছু রদবদলের সম্ভাবনা খতিয়ে দেখছেন তিনি। রাজনৈতিক মহল সনিয়ার 'পরামর্শের' কথা বললেও কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রীর রাজনৈতিক সচিব আহমেদ পটেল অবশ্য এ ব্যাপারে মুখ খুলতে নারাজ। প্রসঙ্গ এড়াতে তিনি বলছেন, বিষয়টি একান্ত ভাবেই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এজিয়ারের মধ্যে পড়ে।

তবে রাজনৈতিক কারণেই মন্ত্রিসভায় কিছু রদবদল প্রয়োজন হয়ে পড়েছে। শিবু সোরেন ইন্তুফা দেওয়ার পরে কয়লা মন্ত্রকের দায়িত্ব এখনও কাউকে দেওয়া হয়নি। শিবু নিজে ওই মন্ত্রক ফিরে পেতে আগ্রহী হলেও মনমোহন তাঁকে ফের মন্ত্রিসভায় ঠাই দিতে চান না। 'দাগি' মন্ত্রী প্রসঙ্গে রেলমন্ত্রী লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবকে নিয়ে এমনিতেই যথেষ্ট বিব্রত ইউপিএ সরকার। বিরোধীদের হাতে আরও একটা হাতিয়ার তুলে দিতে মনমোহন রাজি নন।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অপছন্দের তালিকায় রয়েছে ১০ নম্বর জনপথের ঘনিষ্ঠ বলে পরিচিত সতীশ শর্মার নামও। সনিয়া চাইলেও নরসিংহ রাও সরকারের আমলে পেট্রো-কেলেস্কারিতে জড়িয়ে পড়া সতীশকে পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রক দেননি মনমোহন। এখন সতীশকে অব্যাহত পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকে আনতে চাইছেন সনিয়া-রাহুল-প্রিয়ঙ্কা। কিন্তু মনমোহন নারাজ।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়ের তৈরি প্রাথমিক রিপোর্টে স্বরাষ্ট্র ও বিদেশমন্ত্রকের মতো কয়েকটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ মন্ত্রকের সমালোচনা করা হয়েছে।

রিপোর্টে বলা হয়েছে, স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল বেশ কয়েকটি বড় সমস্যা অনেক দিন ধরে বুলিয়ে রেখেছেন। এর মধ্যে রয়েছে এনএসসিএন (আইজাক-মুইভা), ছরিয়ত, আলফা, বড়ো বা এলটিটিই-র সঙ্গে শান্তি আলোচনার মতো গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিষয়গুলি। ভারত-পাক বাসযাত্রা শুরু হওয়ার আগের দিন যখন শ্রীনগরে ভয়ঙ্কর বিস্ফোরণ ঘটে, শিবরাজ তখন আশ্রয়ানে সুনামি-পরবর্তী পুনর্বাসনের কাজ পরিদর্শনে গিয়েছিলেন। স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই প্রশ্ন উঠেছে, কোনটা বেশি জরুরি ছিল?

প্রশ্ন উঠেছে বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহের কাজকর্ম নিয়েও। চীন ও পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে সম্পর্কের উন্নতি ঘটলেও নেপাল ও বাংলাদেশের প্রতি ভারতের নীতি সামঞ্জস্যহীন বলে অনেকেই অভিযোগ তুলেছেন। এই মুহূর্তে সংঘাত, তো পর ক্ষণেই আপসের যে নীতি এই দুই প্রতিবেশী দেশের প্রতি নেওয়া হচ্ছে, তাতে অখুশি বিভিন্ন মহল। একই অভিমত প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়েরও।

অন্য দিকে, পেট্রোলিয়াম ও পঞ্চায়েত মন্ত্রকের ভারপ্রাপ্ত মন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ারের কাজের প্রশংসা করা হয়েছে এই রিপোর্টে। এক দিকে ম্যানমোহন বাংলাদেশ-ভারত, অন্য দিকে ইরান-পাকিস্তান-ভারত, দু-দুটো গ্যাস পাইপলাইন

এর পর চকিদের পাতায়

06 MAR 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Govt raps Oppn for double talk

Centre Never Tried To Scuttle Musharraf-Atal Meeting: PM

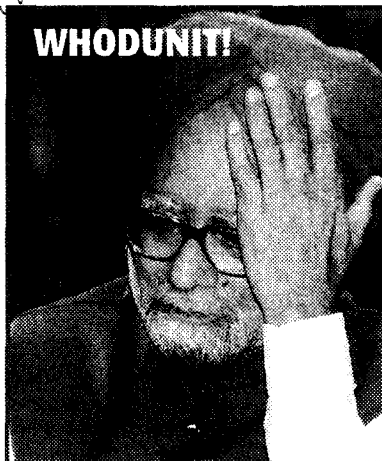
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 5 MAY

MINUTES after the NDA's Parliament boycott strategy suffered a setback with its fellow traveller TDP breaking ranks to return to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, a combative Prime Minister said the country should know that there was a "world of difference" between what the leaders of the BJP-led NDA say and what they do.

He said the NDA effort to blame him and his government for the disruption of the Parliament as well the BJP charge that his government had tried to prevent the Pakistan President from calling on A.B. Vajpayee are "absolutely false".

Mr Manmohan Singh, while renewing his appeal to the Opposition to attend the budget session, rejected the NDA charge that he and his government was not making enough efforts to break the deadlock.

Speaking in the Rajya Sabha, Mr Singh said: "It is not for want of trying on the part of the government or myself... As soon as the NDA announced its decision to boycott



the session, I had called up the leader of Opposition L.K. Advani, NDA chairman Atal Bihari Vajpayee and leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Jaswant Singh. I requested them to let us end this chapter; and all issues can be discussed on the floor of the House." He added: "I was promised by one of these three that on Monday,

they could come for (discussing) the Finance Bill and thereafter they will decide what they will do. Therefore, the allegations that the House is not able to function because of something that the government has done, is, in my humble submission, not borne by facts".

The Prime Minister dubbed the accusation that his government had attempted to prevail upon Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf during his recent visit here not to see the NDA chairperson Atal Bihari Vajpayee as "totally false".

"This is totally false. Now, this is the length to which the Opposition goes. I think the country should know that between the two — what they say and what they do — there is a world of a difference". He also took serious note of the "type of language" that the NDA had used against him in the memorandum they submitted to President APJ Abdul Kalam.

The Prime Minister was responding to observations made by TDP leader R. Chandra Sekhar Reddy that neither the Prime Minister nor the government tried to resolve the issue.

Cabinet clears 11 Bills

Statesman News Service

Green light for SEZ

NEW DELHI, May 4. — The Cabinet today cleared as many as 11 Bills for introduction in the current session of Parliament, including legislation on Right to Information Act, 2004. Some of these will be sought to be passed in the current session while others will be referred to Standing Committees of Parliament, I&B minister Mr Jaipal Reddy said at the end of a Cabinet meeting chaired by the Prime Minister.

The Bills cleared for introduction in Parliament are for enactment of small and medium enterprises development Bill 2005 and introduction of VAT for Bihar, Mr Reddy said.

The Cabinet approved the repealing of the existing Freedom of Information Act, 2002, and enacting a new legislation, Right to Information Act, 2004. The new legislation was introduced in 2004 and later referred to a Standing Committee which then reported back to the House. The Bill of 2004 and the report of the Standing Committee were referred to a GoM which has since submitted its

NEW DELHI, May 4. — The Centre today cleared the Special Economic Zone legislation providing a fiscal package, including 15-year income-tax holiday, to give a push to exports, FDI and job creation. The legislation provides single-window mechanism for SEZs. — SNS

report with recommendations. The Bill has now been cleared, Mr Reddy said. The new legislation will seek to repeal the Freedom of Information Act, 2002, and will seek to confer statutory rights upon citizens seeking the right to information.

The VAT Bill for Bihar is being introduced since the state is under President's rule. The legislation needs to be cleared by Parliament to implement the decision of the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers to introduce VAT with effect from 1 April.

The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, will also be amended. Also approved was Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Bill, 2005, and Taxation Law Amendment Bill, 2005.

05 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Manmohan sets up trade, economic relations committee

To act as 'think tank' for economic aspects of foreign policy

Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has set up a "trade and economic relations committee", comprising senior Ministers and officials, to take quick decisions on economic aspects of the country's foreign policy.

The Prime Minister's Media Advisor Sanjaya Baru told presspersons on Monday that the committee would be chaired by Dr. Singh and would have the Finance, External Affairs and Commerce Ministers — P. Chidambaram, Natwar Singh and Kamal Nath — as members.

Conceived of as a "think-tank" and "implementation mechanism", it also has Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission M.S. Ahluwalia, chief of the Economic Advisory

Council to the Prime Minister C. Rangarajan, head of the National Manufacturing and Competitiveness Council V. Krishnamurthy, and National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan as members. Its convenor will be Dr. Singh's Principal Secretary, T.K.A. Nair.

Mr. Baru stressed that if required, other Ministers could be invited to attend the committee's meetings.

For instance, if the Prime Minister were to discuss the issue of a high-speed rail corridor with Japan, Railway Minister Lalu Prasad would be involved.

Mr. Baru said the focus areas of this committee, for instance, would be the forthcoming visits of Dr. Singh to the U.K. in July for the G8 summit and to the

U.S. This was not another Cabinet committee, he said.

Mr. Baru said that Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong, who met Dr. Singh in Indonesia, would come to India in the next couple of months to sign the Indo-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement.

Over the last few months there had been several inter-Ministerial meetings before the Prime Minister was to travel abroad or before a foreign leader's visit to India, but the idea was to give formal shape to these consultations in the form of this committee, Mr. Baru said.

'Professional inputs'

"It is not about theorising, it is about doing," Mr. Baru he

said, adding that the constitution of the committee meant that "professional inputs" would be brought into the process of decision-making.

This panel would study free trade agreements and comprehensive economic cooperation agreements between India and other countries. Issues like the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline could also be brought before the committee.

More generally, the body would advise the Prime Minister on steps that could be taken to promote India's economic engagement with foreign countries, the rest of the world.

Since the panel would work under the direct charge of the Prime Minister, this was expected to speed up the process of decision-making.

7/2/04
11/1/04
2/1/05

0 1 4 2 2

Little has changed since UPA took over: Karat

"Two bourgeois combinations monopolise the political space"

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: As the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance Government prepares to celebrate one year of its completion in office, the supporting Communist Party of India (Marxist) is of the view that on the ground, people have yet to experience change.

"The class character of the Congress and the performance of the UPA Government which pursues policies of liberalisation are bound to impact the livelihood and living conditions of the people. On the ground, people cannot experience any change – the agrarian distress continues, the crisis of small and traditional industries is getting worse, the repeated increases in prices of petroleum products is heaping additional burden on the people. All this is bound to generate discontent in the

coming days," the CPI(M) general secretary, Prakash Karat, said in his article in the latest edition of the party organ, *People's Democracy*.

Major features

Recounting the national political-tactical line determined by its recent party congress, he said, the following were other major features of the current situation. Though the Bhartiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has been defeated, its strength should not be underestimated as it would try to regroup; Congress cannot be relied upon to carry out a consistent struggle against communal and divisive forces; changing stances of regional parties; growth of caste politics; growing American influence in economic, political and foreign policies; and the major role being played by the Left.

Mr. Karat also outlined the tasks before the party – campaign against communal forces; fight for people's interest and expansion of party's influence through movements on local, social and economic issues.

He said that the party while working towards strengthening the organisation would also work to build a third alternative. "It is not in the interests of the Left and democratic forces, that two bourgeois combinations, one headed by the BJP and the other by the Congress, monopolise the political space. There is a need for a third alternative".

Need for unity

Building such an alternative would require the coming together of the Left and other democratic and secular parties through joint movements and campaigns.

01 MAY 2005

Govt okays 9.5% PF for 2002-'04

Left Welcomes Amount, PM Awaits Recommendation For 2004-'05

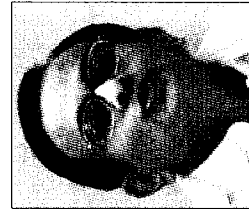
New Delhi/Kolkata: The Union finance ministry on Friday fulfilled the long-pending demand of the labour ministry by ratifying a 9.5% interest rate for 2002 to 2004 for about four crore subscribers of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF). The finance ministry is still awaiting a recommendation from the EPF board for the 2004-'05 rate.

Finance minister P Chidambaram made the announcement to reporters about the decision that may involve a net outgo of about Rs 66 crore. While the fund earned a surplus of Rs 204.92 crore during 2002-'03, there was a shortfall of Rs 271 crore in the following fiscal.

For 2002-'03, the EPF board de-

clared a 9.5% interest while for 2003-'04 it was 9% along with a 0.5% bonus for the year since it was a golden jubilee year. The representatives of central trade unions, which are one of the legs of the tripartite Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the EPFO, had been attacking the finance and labour ministries on the delay in ratifying the interest for the last three years.

Though the rate for 2002-'03 and 2003-'04 was ratified, Chidambaram said the ministry is awaiting a recommendation from



P Chidambaram

the delay in the issue, Chidambaram had announced a 1% hike in the EPF rate to 9.5%, leaving the CBT to find ways to cover up the estimated Rs 927 crore shortfall.

The EPF trustees are likely to meet in May to formulate ways to

the CBT for the interest rate to be ratified for 2004-'05.

The EPF trustees had earlier decided an "interim" 8.5% for 2004-'05, a move that was opposed by trade unions, mainly belonging to Left parties.

After hectic parleys with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the issue, Chidambaram had announced a 1% hike in the EPF rate to 9.5%, leaving the CBT to find ways to cover up the estimated Rs 927 crore shortfall.

The EPF trustees are likely to meet in May to formulate ways to

bridge the shortfall as also to decide on the rate for 2005-'06.

In Kolkata, welcoming the finance ministry's ratification of the 9.5% interest rate on EPF for 2002-'03 and 2003-'04, CPI leader Gurudas Dasgupta on Friday said that a similar interest rate should be fixed for the 2004-'05.

"We want 9.5% EPF rate for all time to come. There should be no piecemeal decision. The government will have to do it. There is no option," said Dasgupta, who is the general secretary of the CPI's labour arm, the All India Trade Union Congress. "We welcome the belated decision of the finance ministry to ratify the 9.5% interest rate for 2002-'03 and 2003-'04." PTI

30 APR 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

CHARGES FRAMED IN FODDER CASE

Lalu sparks govt crisis

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/ RANCHI, April 25. — The UPA government today plunged into its first major crisis with the CBI framing charges against Mr Lalu Prasad in the multi-crore 1996 fodder scam case and the Opposition seizing the opportunity to call for his immediate sacking. The government, however, said "nothing doing" to the resignation demand.

The NDA beefed up its offensive in both Houses of Parliament where the proceedings remained paralysed with the Rajya Sabha adjourning for the day two hours ahead of schedule, having done little business.

The CBI in Ranchi framed charges against Mr Prasad, Dr Jagannath Mishra and 68 others. All the accused appeared before designated CBI judge Mr Uma Shankar Prasad Sinha. They have been charged in a case of a fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 37 crore from the Chaibasa treasury in 1996, when Mr Prasad was the chief minister. He is an accused in six of the 39 fodder scam cases which are being currently heard in Jharkhand.

Charges have been framed under Sections 120(B) (Punishment of criminal conspiracy), 420 (Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), 467 (Forgery of valuable security, Will, etc), 468 (Forgery for purpose of cheating), 471 (Using as genuine a forged docu-

Charges have been framed under Sections 120(B) (Punishment of criminal conspiracy), 420 (Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), 467 (Forgery of valuable security, Will, etc), 468 (Forgery for purpose of cheating), 471 (Using as genuine a forged document), 477(A) (Falsification of accounts) read with Sections 13(2) and 13(1)(D) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988



ment, 477(A) (Falsification of accounts) read with Sections 13(2) and 13(1)(D) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

While Mr Prasad kept silent, his lawyer Mr Chittaranjan Sinha charged the CBI with implicating his client without any concrete evidence.

In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker adjourned the House a couple of times to buy a temporary peace. When Mr Prasad came at 4 p.m. to make a statement, he was greeted with protests. "Now it's for him to prove his innocence," Mr SK Modi (BJP) said. Mr HR Bhardwaj said Mr Prasad couldn't be removed till he was convicted. The Congress accused the BJP of "hypocrisy". Mr Prasad ridiculed BJP's demand for his ouster.

Nepal arms on hold after Left volley

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, April 25: After giving a clear indication about resuming arms supplies to Nepal, the Manmohan Singh government today took a step back after some strong condemnation from its key ally, the CPM.

It said arms supply would not be revived unless King Gyanendra took serious steps to restore democracy. Supplies were cut off after the king declared emergency, assuming charge himself.

The hint that resumption was on the cards came in Jakarta after a meeting between Singh and the king.

Yesterday, the CPM was the first to oppose the move. "There should be no question of resuming arms supplies to a despotic king who suppresses the elementary democratic rights of the people. The UPA must realise the appreciation and goodwill it earned with its firm stand in defence of democracy and popular government in Nepal will disappear," the politburo had said.

The statement was Prakash Karat's first strike on



ALLY'S VOICE: Singh and Karat

behalf of the CPM against the government since taking over as general secretary.

Today's linking of arms supply revival to restoration of democracy is the result of the realisation that more forces could join the Left and turn the move into a major controversy, souring the success of talks with China and Pakistan.

After his meeting with Singh on the sidelines of the Asian African Conference in Jakarta on Saturday, the king had claimed that India had given a commitment to resume arms supply. The Prime Minister had left the issue open when later he said India would look

at Nepal's request for arms "in the proper perspective".

This was interpreted in most quarters as an attempt to resume supply. Till last evening, government sources had given clear indication that a consignment of ammunition that was in the pipeline would be supplied soon.

The Indian leadership has said that during the talks, the king had unveiled a roadmap for restoring democracy. Although details of what the monarch said were not shared, it was suggested that Gyanendra would take urgent steps to restore the situation that prevailed before Febru-

ary 1 when he clamped emergency.

On April 30, the ordinance the king issued to impose emergency expires. Opinion in Delhi as well as Kathmandu suggests he might not extend the ordinance. Though it is not clear if such a step would mean the king's willingness to shed powers, it would certainly be a step towards restoration of democracy.

Earlier, Indian officials had been suggesting that despite differences with the king, the threat posed by the Maoists in Nepal was a much more serious concern for Delhi. Plans to resume arms supplies flow from this assessment.

The king had told Indian leaders he would like to hold municipal polls in areas where the Maoists were not strong and gradually complete the process in the entire country.

Notwithstanding the assurance given by the king, considering resumption of supply was an admission by India that its policy of boycotting the king had not worked.

It may now have to go back to the drawing board again.

■ See Page 8

26 APR 2005

THE TELEGRAM

Karat not keen to change set-up at UPA-Left meet

DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

CPI(M)'s new general secretary Prakash Karat is not too keen to replace his predecessor, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, and attend the UPA-Left coordination committee meetings in the company of the other Politburo member, Sitaram Yechury.

Surjeet and Yechury have been attending these meetings on behalf of the CPI(M) since the coordination committee was set up in July last year.

Though the Politburo will take a final decision in this respect, Karat, who has returned to his low-profile workstation in his own small room on the second floor of A K Gopalan Bhavan, has taken every pain to carry on with the old tradition of collective leadership.

He sits opposite the room occupied by Yechury as before, and as was evident during the Left's late night unscheduled meeting with Railway Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav on Thursday, the party hierarchy or its working style has not changed at all despite Karat's elevation. Yechury remains the party's public face and ambassador. It was Yechury, who went along with CPI's D Raja, to meet Yadav.



There is some eagerness in Congress circles if the UPA-Left coordination meetings would now see a replacement of Surjeet by Karat. As it is there is mixed opinion about Karat. Some would view him as a hardliner. A few, on the

other hand, have said that Karat is easier to do business with because he pledges only that which he can deliver.

But Karat, according to CPI(M) sources, feels comfortable with the present set-up. He would not like to upset it. As a result, in all likelihood — unless the politburo in its next meeting on May 14-15 wants a change — the 11-member UPA-Left coordination committee will be the same as before. Besides, Surjeet himself says he is going to remain as active as possible. He has said in the latest *People's Democracy* article that he was not taking any "sanyas".

Gujarat sends report on Lalu attack

'Administration provided enough security'

24/4 J WAA 907 MD-1

Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI: The Union Home Ministry on Saturday received a report from the Gujarat Government on the incident in Vadodara involving the Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad.

He had gone there on Thursday to visit the site of the Sabarmati Express accident at Samalaya in which 17 persons lost their lives and over a hundred were injured.

Authoritative Ministry sources told *The Hindu* that the State Government's report, containing its version and sequence of events on the day when Mr. Lalu Prasad was visiting the hos-

pital where the injured were admitted and the site of the crash, would be examined.

Asked if the Home Ministry would be inclined to send a Central team on a fact-finding mission to Vadodara, the sources said that there was no such move at present but a decision would be taken after examining the State Government report.

It is said that the Gujarat report had pointed out that despite lack of advance intimation about Mr. Prasad's programme, the district administration provided adequate security to him at short-notice.

The Air Traffic Control, Vadodara, had given information

on Mr. Prasad's visit and arrangements had been made by the local administration.

At the hospital where Mr. Prasad was reportedly attacked, the report said, people of all political affiliations as well as relatives of the victims of the train tragedy had gathered and, as emotions ran high, some of them pelted the Minister with water pouches and ice cubes.

However, it was not clear who damaged Mr. Prasad's car.

The report stated that many Gujarat Ministers had reached the site and rescue and relief operations had begun by 4 a.m., 45 minutes after the Sabarmati Express had rammed a goods train

and several of its bogies had capsized.

The Governor, Nawal Kishore Sharma, had also sought detailed information from the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and the Governor might also send in his independent assessment of the handling of the Railway Minister's visit by the State Government.

Sources drew a parallel with the situation when during the NDA regime, the Home Ministry had invoked Article 256 while dealing with reports of violence and disturbances during the 2001 Assembly elections in West Bengal during the Chief Ministership of Jyoti Basu.

24 APR 2008

THE HINDU

Centre pledges to table Phukan report

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 20

THE GOVERNMENT assured Parliament on Wednesday that it would table the Phukan Commission report on the Tehelka expose along with the Action Taken Report (ATR) before the close of the current session.

Following a statement to this effect in the Rajya Sabha, law minister H.R. Bhardwaj told Hindustan Times that while the Phukan Commission report would be tabled in the first week of May, the government did not intend to table the Central Vigilance Commission report. He said while in power, the NDA itself had refused to give it to the Public Accounts Committee, which was seized of the CAG report on various arms deals.

As for the ATR, certain cases, which found mention in the Phukan report on Tehelka's sting operation called West-End, have already been forwarded to the CBI. The government is awaiting the agency's investigation report and this is

likely to be stated in the ATR.

The Phukan Commission report was submitted to the government in February 2004. Bhardwaj's assurance to the Rajya Sabha came after an observation by chairman Bhairon Singh Shekhawat that rules required the report of any inquiry commission to be tabled within six months of submission.

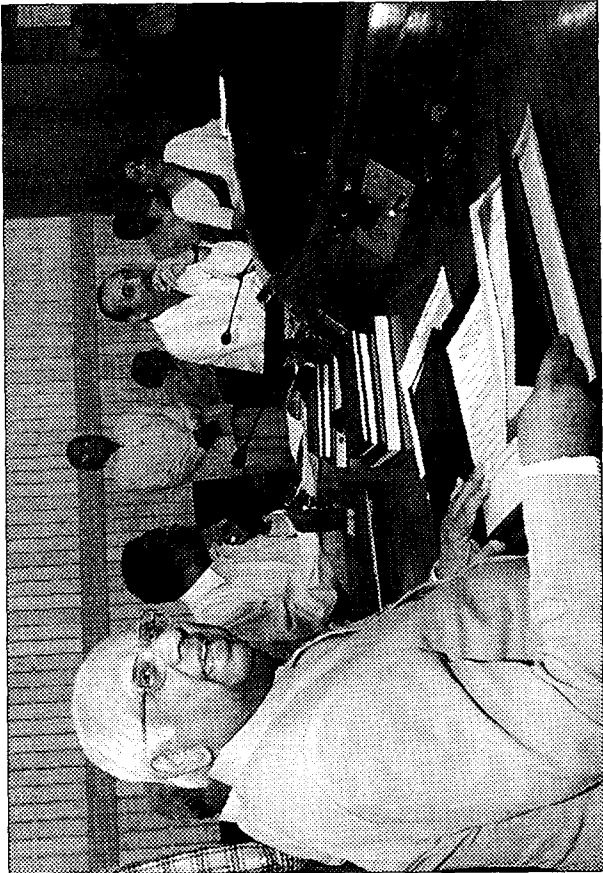
Later Lok Sabha Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee told reporters that he too has asked the government to table the interim report and the ATR on the Phukan Panel's findings on the Kargil arms purchase latest by the end of the current session. In the Upper House, initially the treasury benches took the position that the government had sought an opinion from the law ministry on whether the report in its present form could be tabled and was waiting for that opinion. Minister of state for parliamentary affairs Suresh Pachauri said "the terms of reference of the Phukan Commission were determined during the NDA's tenure. Part I of the report has been submitted to us and we have

forwarded it to the CBI. Since parts II and III are awaited, I cannot comment on the possible contents. We have no objections to tabling the report once we get the Law Ministry's clearance.

"The government is also ready for a discussion or debate on the matter once the report is tabled" he added. Thereafter, the Chairman said as per rules, it was important that the government tabled the report.

Leader of the Opposition in the Upper House, Jaswant Singh said that he himself as Defence Minister had not recommended tabling the CVC's report on grounds that it would amount to setting a precedent. But in the same breath, he came up with a seemingly partisan argument that "if it (not tabling the report) is an issue, let it be tabled".

Thereafter, the Law Minister said that the government was agreeable to a debate "since it is a matter of public interest." But the report needed to be studied if the government were to be expected to enter into a debate on it.



Speaker Somnath Chatterjee presides over the Zero Hour meeting on Wednesday. PTI

21 APR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Kargil uproar shuts down Parliament

NDA Wants Withdrawal Of Fresh Govt Affidavit On Defence Purchases

New Delhi: The budget session of Parliament resumed on a tumultuous note as the opposition forced adjournment of both Houses accusing defence minister Pranab Mukherjee of "political vendetta" against his predecessor George Fernandes and demanding his resignation.

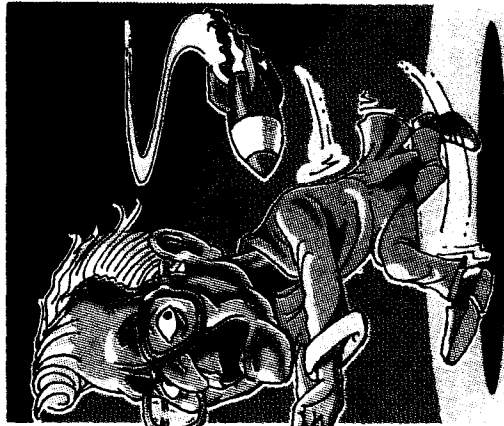
The BJP-led NDA sought immediate withdrawal of the fresh government affidavit on Kargil defence purchases, claiming that by submitting "contradictory" affidavits in the supreme court, the government has made a "mockery" of the judicial system. The UPA government has filed a fresh affidavit, asking the CBI to probe 23 new charges against Fernandes. The first affidavit said no procedure or law was violated in the purchases.

As Fernandes sat quietly on the front row, his colleagues trooped to the well of the Lok Sabha, shouting slogans like "defence minister resign forthwith", "we want justice" and "withdraw the false affidavit".

Repeated pleas by speaker Somnath Chatterjee to restore order fell on deaf ears, forcing him to adjourn the House for the day. Similar uproarious scenes were witnessed in the Rajya Sabha. As they pleas went unheeded, the presiding officers—Chatterjee in the Lok Sabha and deputy chairperson K. Rehman Khan in the Rajya Sabha—called it a day soon after both the Houses reassembled after the first adjournment.

The NDA was unrelenting in its demand for resignation of the defence minister and withdrawal of the fresh affidavit de-

Ram



spite the government agreeing in both Houses for a full-fledged discussion.

After obituary references to Po-pe John Paul II and four former members in the Lok Sabha, Chatterjee allowed BJP leader V K Malhotra to raise the issue. Malhotra alleged that the second affidavit was "contradictory" to the first one and the move was "immoral, illegal and unconstitutional".

He said the Congress and its president Sonia Gandhi had been levelling false charges against Fernandes as they were in the opposition. This drew loud protests from the treasury benches.

Mukherjee, who is leader of the Lok Sabha, asserted there was "nothing contradictory" in the two affidavits and everything was done according to the law of the land. The government was ready for a full-fledged discussion "even today under whatever form or whatever manner the opposition wanted", he added.

Questioning whether Mukherjee was taken into confidence before the affidavits were filed, Prabhunath Singh of the Janata Dal (United) asked him to resign as he has attempted to "tarnish" the image of Fernandes "under pressure". Mohammad Salim, of the CPM, countered that the government should weed out officials trying to "shield" NDA leaders charged with corruption. PTI

UPA committed to reversing neglect of agriculture sector: Manmohan

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, APRIL 9. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today said that the agriculture sector had been neglected in the past decade. "While the Tenth Plan assumed that agriculture production would grow at the rate of four per cent, the reality is that in the first three years of the Plan, we have not been able to ensure even 1.5 per cent rate of growth," he said.

Inaugurating the Agriculture Summit-2005 here today, organised by the Agriculture Ministry and the Federation of Indian Chambers and Commerce Industry, Dr. Singh said that the United Progressive Alliance Government was committed to reversing the deceleration in the farm sector in the past decade. To achieve a seven to eight per cent growth rate of the economy, the rate of growth in the agriculture sector would have to

be accelerated.

Among the audience were industry leaders, diplomats, senior bureaucrats and a sprinkling of "progressive farmers" mostly from Congress district committees. Some farmers from Jind, Haryana, said they could not understand the proceedings conducted in English.

Commenting that the reality of a "globalised, industrialised" India was as true as the reality of "the bullock-cart and the illiterate farmer," Dr. Singh said the UPA's "new deal" for rural India would bridge the gap of "advanced forms of agriculture and industry" and "other forms from a bygone era."

For this a Second Green Revolution based on the application of new technologies and modern business practices were required. "New technologies will enable farmers to make informed choices and undertake product planning in a demand-

driven rather than supply-driven mode. An awareness of the niche markets and export opportunities suited to the new international trade regime opening up through the World Trade Organisation is also necessary," he said.

The Prime Minister's remarks come close on the heels of one of its alliance partners, the CPI (M), and societal groups seeking an Alternative Agriculture Policy suited to Indian conditions and renegotiation of the Agreement under the WTO for it to be "fair and just" to a developing country like India.

'New deal'

Dr. Singh said the "new deal" required reversing the declining trend in investment in agriculture, stepping up credit flow to farmers, increasing public investment in irrigation and wasteland development, increasing funds for research and

development and extension, creating a common single market in the country, investing in rural healthcare, education, electrification, rural roads, futures markets, insurance against risk in farming and forging public-private partnerships. He sought suggestions from the summit on how a financial window could be created for long-term capital flows into agriculture.

Dr. Singh had a special word of praise for the Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, whose appointment as Agriculture Minister, he said, was another index of the importance he attached to the sector.

Earlier, Mr. Pawar said 16 States had agreed to amend the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Act to facilitate the setting up of direct, private markets. An Integrated Food Bill and the Seed Bill were on the anvil.

See also Page 8

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THE HINDU

One year of the UPA government

Continuity and change

COMMENTARY

S.L. RAO

The United Progressive Alliance government started with two major disadvantages. It was a ramshackle coalition with constituents who had nothing in common (despite a post-election common minimum programme). Their desire was to be in government and to keep the Bharatiya Janata Party or the National Democratic Alliance out on "secular" considerations. Some of them had been in the NDA before and no doubt some will join it again.

The party that perhaps truly believed in secularism was the Communist Party of India (Marxist), given its record in protecting illegal Bangladeshi immigrants for bolstering the communist vote bank. It gave up claims to seats in government and to other loaves and fishes of power. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was there because it had earlier been abandoned by the NDA. The Rashtriya Janata Dal saw an opportunity to protect its Bihar turf and save its leadership from criminal prosecutions.

The Congress leadership grabbed almost all the perquisites of power. Despite having only 145 members of parliament, it went about cleaning up the government of "saffron" influences, sacking existing governors and appointing its faithful followers, giving others high level positions at the ministerial level as commission chairmen, advisors and the like. It behaved as if it was in power by itself as it had been for over thirty years.

But the Congress in the UPA is at the mercy of the communists, the DMK and the RJD. Ideologically, the Congress is as distant as can be from the communists. It is closer to the NDA on economic, foreign and security policies. This can be seen from the absence of major changes in policies after the UPA government came to power.

The communists have been against most of the economic reforms that the prime minister and his finance minister know are required. Virulently anti-United States of America, anti-Israel and pro-Arab, the communist veneration of China and Russia continues. They have different reactions from the Congress (which is like the NDA on these matters) to Pakistani duplicity, Jammu and Kashmir as part of India and to the Maoist insurrection that is coalescing from Nepal to Andhra Pradesh.

The separation of the prime ministership from the leadership of the party, with many worshipful acolytes of the "sacrificing" Sonia Gandhi in the cabinet, must make

The author is former director-general, National Council for Applied Economic Research

governance difficult. The two positions have rarely been separate anywhere. When they were so in the Congress, they ended up in serious conflict with each other when the party chief was independently powerful (for example, Purshottamdas Tandon and Jawaharlal Nehru).

It worked when the prime minister was *numero uno*. The prime minister as political nonentity works when the president is not merely a symbol as in Pakistan or even France. A prime minister needs strong political antennae with intelligence agencies and party informers since politics affects gover-

ministers in sensitive ministries like home create further problems for government. Some ministers take direction from the party, not the prime minister and the cabinet. The loss of trust in the Congress on account of political decisions on Bihar and Jharkhand, where partner parties were let down, has led to a sharpening of the discord in the coalition. This creates more difficulties for government. Politics has been badly managed. The prime minister has a government to run but with very little political support from his partymen or others in the coalition.



nance. These seem today to be with the Congress party chief.

Political decisions that make an impact on the government are taken without adequate government inputs and sometimes without information to the government. Cabinet ministers do their own thing so long as they have the ear of the party chief. This was an arrangement fraught with pitfalls, as is evident in Jharkhand and Goa among many others. Ministers close to the party chief appear to believe that their ministries are independent of the rest of the government. The changing colours from saffron to red in the human resource ministry presages much more vicious politicking in the future and as the UPA gives way to the NDA or a third front.

The political miscalculation that led to the Congress boycott of George Fernandes in the last parliament paralysed the current one. Ministers publicly appear to contradict the prime minister, something they will never do with the party leader. Inept but well-connected

“ The separation of the prime ministership from the Congress leadership must make governance difficult ”

From P.V. Narasimha Rao down, there has been broad continuity in policies with each successor government. The NDA continued the Congress economic reforms but innovated further in foreign and security policies. But the UPA has toed the NDA line with no innovations except in energy.

The minister of external affairs innovates by wanting radical change in negotiations with Pakistan. The MEA is said to have tried to downplay the prime minister's visit to Mauritius. It tried to prevent the Musharraf visit for the Delhi one-day cricket. The MEA tries to revive the anti-Americanism en-

demic to India during the Cold War. But so far the UPA has continued policies to get closer to east Asia and China.

On defence and security, the initiatives of the NDA to negotiate substantial new weapons purchases continue. India is preparing for the role the BJP envisaged for it, to be a military poser from here to the Straits of Hormuz and towards the Malacca Straits and as a counterweight to China. The nuclear bomb is as important to India's security strategy today as it was with the NDA.

On economic policies, the prime minister and the finance minister, charter members of the reforms club, are constrained by their partners. Some examples are disinvestment and privatization, subsidy cuts on domestic gas, kerosene, and so on, reforming the public distribution system to move from physically handling grains, foreign investment in telecommunications, airports, banks and so on, labour law reform, and bringing provident fund interest rates down to match the lower interest rate regime. The emphasis on the social sector and agriculture ("reforms with a human face") is a continuation of the NDA rhetoric, though with a little more money. The tax rate changes, new taxes and tax reforms use reports submitted to the previous government. The BJP has politicized the implementation of VAT after enabling its acceptance by states. It will rue its turnaround when it gets back to power.

The UPA has made significant changes in energy policies. Oil and gas policies are now integrated with foreign policy, military postures, free trade areas and so on. It has broadened oil and gas supply sources, aggressively gone after buying oil and gas fields overseas and is embarking on restructuring the Indian oil companies to improve their bargaining and competitive powers. It has been more vigorous than the NDA in pursuing the NDA's power policies.

But the UPA has been as ham-handed in handling domestic challenges as the NDA. From Manipur to Goa and Kashmir to Andhra, it has stumbled in handling delicate domestic security issues. No prime minister can survive for long if his ministers do not follow agreed policies. Fortunately, the home minister seems now to have been sidelined in his own ministry.

The prime minister's major contribution is administrative reform. Reverting to the central role for the Planning Commission, and reforms in administrative appointments, procedures and practices, will be a lasting contribution. However, poor Congress political management might kill this coalition before their implementation.

UPA Government can last only if it sticks to CMP: Basu

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 9. The veteran Marxist leader, Jyoti Basu, today re-asserted that the Left parties want the United Progressive Alliance Government to complete its term but that would depend on implementation of the agreed Common Minimum Programme.

"We want it (UPA) to last for five years but that can happen only if they implement the Common Minimum Programme. We told them (Congress) [so] on the first day," Mr. Basu told correspondents at a book release function, on the sidelines of the 18th congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Commenting on the contradictions between the Congress and the CPI (M), he said, both parties had differences and opposed each other for the past five decades. "The Congress has a programme, the Left has its programme but now we (both) depend on the Common Minimum Programme. It is not our full programme..." he said.

The CPI (M), he said, had never hidden the fact that there were differences with the Congress but considering the

changed political situation in which the Bharatiya Janata Party and the "fascist" Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were carrying out their agendas, the Left provided outside support to the Congress-led formation.

Inter-dependent

"We are dependent on the Congress-led Government and the Congress is also dependent on the Left. We hope there is patience and both sides discuss with each other," he said, adding that the Left parties would not desist from raising issues in Parliament and agitating outside if in their opinion the Congress-led Government took "anti-people, anti-CMP" steps.

Earlier, Mr. Basu released the book "MEMOIRS-25 Communist Freedom Fighters" and presented the first copy to the CPI (M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, and Capt. Lakshmi Sehgal.

Mr. Basu said he was happy and proud to release the book on the Communists' association with the freedom struggle which "unfortunately has been ignored or absolutely minimised."

The book, he hoped, would be of use to partymen and the

people.

The party said the significance of the book was two-fold. First, recognising that official interpretations of the history of India's freedom struggle often ignored many of the ideological streams that came together in that mighty movement, it puts the record straight, by detailing some of the Communists' powerful contributions to the epic struggle. Second, it acts as a counter to the vilification of the role of the Communists in the freedom struggle from quarters such as the RSS, whose own contribution to the freedom movement had been either negligible or counterproductive.

The memoirs include those of Muzaffar Ahmad, Ganesh Ghosh, Hemanta Ghoshal, A.K. Gopalan, Qazi Nazrul Islam, K.P. Janakiammal, Kishori Lal, Kake Mithalal, Amalendu Mukherjee, Bankik Mukherjee, Sammar Mukherjee, Satish Pakvashi, Bhagbati Panigrahi, Shamrao and Godavari Parulekar, P. Krishna Pillai, P. Ramamurthy, Vimal Ranadive, Ahilya Rangnekar, Lakshmi Sehgal, Rahul Sankrityayana, Niranjana Sengupta, Durgadas Sikdar, Major Jaipal Singh, Harkishan Singh Surjeet and Shiv Verma.

10 APR 2005

THE HINDU THE HINDU

Left parties seek clarification on "clean chit" to Fernandes

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 8. Leaders of the Left parties today sought a clarification on reports that the Centre had given a "clean chit" to the former Defence Minister, George Fernandes, for arms procurement during the Kargil war.

The Congress, meanwhile, maintained that there was no question of giving Mr. Fernandes a "clean chit," and that the last word was yet to be said on the issue.

During their breakfast meeting at the residence of the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the Left leaders sought to know the details in the presence of the United Progressive Alliance chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee and the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh.

The Left leaders, including the Communist Party of India

(Marxist) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet; its Polit Bureau member, Sitaram Yechury; the CPI general secretary, A.B. Bardhan; its national secretary, D. Raja; the All-India Forward Bloc general secretary, Debabrata Biswas; and the Revolutionary Socialist Party Central Committee member, Abani Roy, were invited by the Prime Minister to brief them on the upcoming visits of the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, and the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf.

Sources in the Left parties said the leaders broached the issue in the context of the recent U.S. proposal to supply F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan and related developments. "What about the George issue," they asked.

The Left leaders were concerned as these parties were in the forefront of boycotting Mr. Fernandes in Parliament and

pilloried him over the "coffin scam." Mr. Mukherjee denied that his predecessor was given any "clean chit" and said an additional affidavit was being filed in the Supreme Court.

Dignitaries' visit

On the visits of the two dignitaries, Mr. Natwar Singh briefed the Left leaders. Later, Mr. Yechury told correspondents that the Left parties were happy with the Government's foreign policy direction. "On foreign policy, the Government is going according to our understanding in the Common Minimum Programme." He said the border dispute with China could be solved only through talks and hoped that understanding between India and China would improve after the visit.

Mr. Raja said the Left parties congratulated the Government for the successful flagging-off of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus.

09 APR 2005

THE HINDU

PM intervenes in trade row

Advisory council told to look into key issues

K.A.Badarinath
New Delhi, April 8

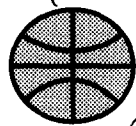
WITH THE finance and commerce ministries haggling over trade issues, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has intervened to bring about a truce. Singh has ordered his economic advisory council led by former RBI governor C. Rangarajan to look into four crucial issues.

In the meantime, the prime minister has directed the revenue department to put in abeyance income tax proceedings against 30,000 exporters to recover the benefits availed by them on sale of DEPB credit under 80 HHC of the Income Tax Act.

Commerce & Industry Minister Kamal Nath said: "The prime minister is seized of the matter. He has directed that proceedings and tax assessment drive must be kept in abeyance".

The prime minister's advisory council has been asked to submit its report on the crucial issue of exporters availing 80HHC benefits on transfer or sale of DEPB credit at a premium which is legally permissible.

While Finance Minister P. Chidambaram and Nath differed on this issue, the prime minister intervened to end the tussle. Sources said the PM's advisory council would also consider the option of amending the Income



FOREIGN
TRADE
POLICY

Tax Act with retrospective effect to provide tax exemption to on exporters earnings on DEPB credit sale. In case the Rangarajan panel things that "tax assessment and recovery is found unavoidable", the commerce ministry has recommended that penalty and interest could be waived on the tax demand raised by the finance ministry.

Meanwhile, the commerce ministry and the directorate general of foreign trade will seek a legal opinion on the vexed taxation issue bogging the exporters who have been asked to cough up the benefits availed under 80 HHC of the Income Tax Act between 1997-2002.

Owing to serious differences between the finance and commerce ministries, another issue that has been referred by PM to his advisory council is the proposal to exempt 100 per cent export oriented units from levy of service tax.

While the finance ministry is not willing to forego the revenue following exemption of EOUs from service tax, the commerce ministry has argued that the facility would be available to

special economic zone (SEZ) units. "We cannot subsidise our exports, but let us at least not tax them" is the stand taken by Nath.

The tax benefits vis-à-vis DEPB credit sale availed by exporters is about Rs 13,000 crore. This is against Rs 360,000 crore exports (\$ 80 billion) done by the exporters, the commerce ministry pointed out.

The tussle between the finance and commerce ministries does not end on these two issues. While the latter demanded scrapping the sunset clause of Income Tax Act for EOUs, the finance ministry has apparently taken the view that as decided earlier, the clause should go by 2009.

Without setting the cut off year, the EOUs must be allowed to avail the ten year tax holiday irrespective of when they commence their export operations.

Even on this issue, the PMO has taken the initiative and referred the proposal to Rangarajan panel.

Another major proposal that has been referred to Rangarajan committee is to provide deemed export benefits to DTA units for supply against "Served from India scheme certificate" for service providers. While the finance ministry was not willing to extend the scope and coverage of deemed export schemes, the issue has been referred to Rangarajan panel.

09 APR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

TARGET BUS

Soldiers shepherds for nightmare ride

Army in one of riskiest peace time missions

SUJAN DUTTA

New Delhi, April 6: The Indian Army will tomorrow shepherd a busload of civilians through hostile territory in one of the riskiest peace time military operations in recent history.

The road to Muzaffarabad and an elusive peace in Kashmir is a nightmarish scenario for any army, mined as it is with the threat from militants who are not backed by any state.

This afternoon's attack on and the burning of the Tourist



A woman jumps out of a window of the reception centre in Srinagar. (Reuters)

Reception Centre in Srinagar has only underscored the threat. Every country, including the US, is fearful of militants who are non-state actors.

In Kashmir, the Indian government has so far said the militants are backed by Pakistan. But the bus service is the consequence of an agreement between New Delhi and Islamabad. Prima facie, Pakistan does not support the militants.

In the wake of the fidayeen attack today, army headquarters was asked for an update on the security situation. The

re was even pressure from the political leadership on the army for a "security guarantee". The army top brass is understood to have said that such a guarantee is unrealistic.

The bus will be driven through terrain that can be deceptive. A small improvised explosive device with a timer can prove to be deadly as can a sniper on a hill top.

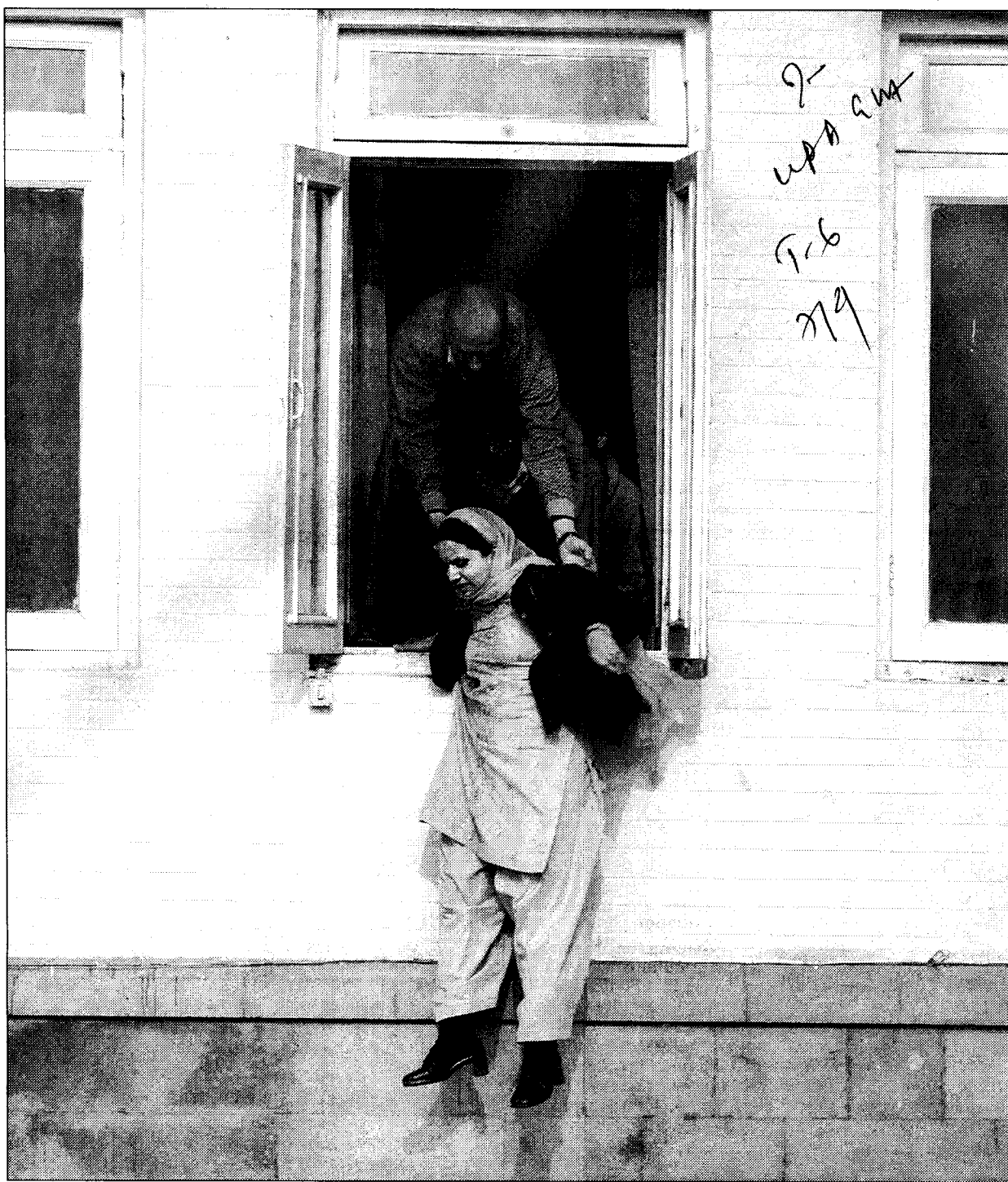
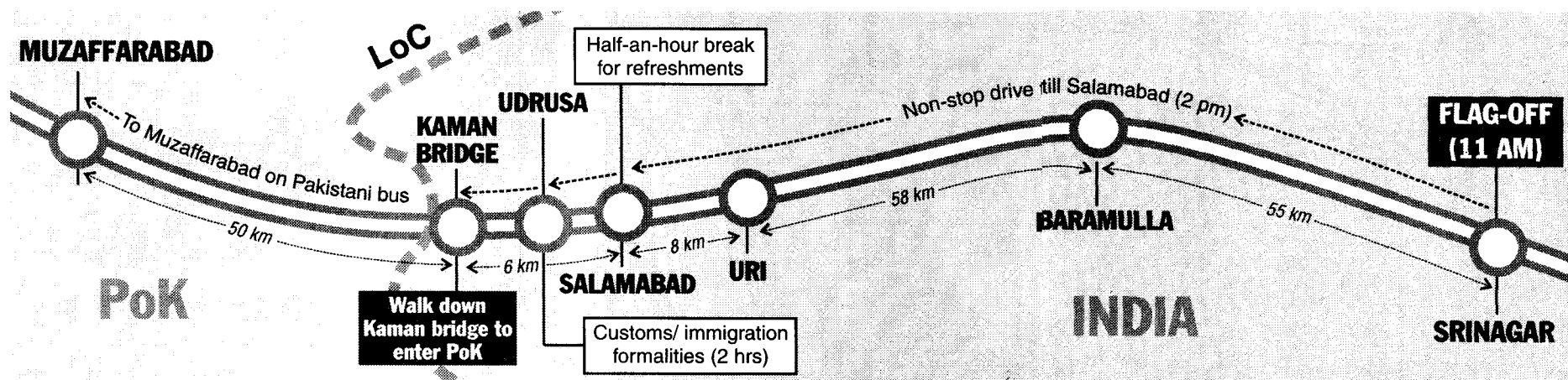
The army's task is to "sanitise" the Jhelum Valley Road — the road from Srinagar to the Kaman Bridge on the LoC. Commanders with decades of experience in counter-insurgency operations and with knowledge of the terrain are hesitant to use the term "sanitise". But they have told the political leadership the army will do "everything possible".

The reason the army is hesitant to use the word "sanitise" is military. Given the political environment and topography through which the road runs, a 100 per cent security guarantee is impossible.

The army told the government that it was occupying vantage positions in the hills through which the road cuts, sending road opening patrols (ROPs) to check for mines and improvised explosive devices and patrols through spots in the hills that give a vantage view of the road. It was also conducting helicopter sorties.

Despite the risk, army headquarters is in favour of the bus running as scheduled. It feels an attack on the bus will alienate the militants from the people. Plus, the bus service is practically, apart from the LoC ceasefire, a Kashmir-specific confidence-building measure with Pakistan that can stabilise the security situation in the long term.

Without a shade of doubt, the attack is an embarrassment for the security establishment. Also, it has struck fear in the hearts of the passengers. There was no way of knowing what the passengers who have got entry permits and have booked tickets are saying. They are in "the safe custody" of security forces, chiefly the CRPF.



A woman being helped out of the burning Tourist Reception Centre in Srinagar on Wednesday. (Reuters)

Singh, Sonia steam ahead

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, April 6: India and Pakistan today affirmed that the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and Muzaffarabad-Srinagar buses will ply tomorrow despite the militant attack in the Kashmir capital this afternoon but top leaders here were holding a series of meetings till late in the evening on the security situation.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi will go to Srinagar tomorrow, official sources said, for the inaugural of the bus service despite the threat from militants.

The Centre has not blamed any particular group or power for masterminding today's attack.

"These (attacks by militants) are desperate acts of desperate people. There is no change with regard to the flagging off of the bus service. The peace process and the journey of peace will go on," spokesperson for the Prime Minister's Office, Sanjaya Baru, said.

But shortly afterwards, the Prime Minister summoned another meeting that was being attended by the foreign, defence and home ministers.

Foreign minister K. Natwar Singh and home minister Shivraj Patil are likely to accompany the Prime Minister to

Srinagar tomorrow.

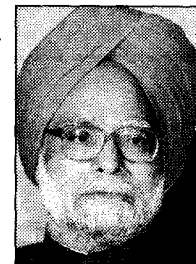
Congress spokesperson Ambika Soni said Sonia will also be at the inaugural of the bus service. "Nobody is going to be cowed down by these acts of terror. Congress chief Sonia Gandhi herself has informed me on arrival from Dandi that she would definitely be going to the Valley tomorrow for the flagging off of the bus."

Former defence minister and NDA convener George Fernandes said the government has to take the call on the bus service. After meeting the home minister, Fernandes said he would not proffer any advice.

Patil described the morale of the passengers of the inaugural bus as "high". He said all passengers who were to take the bus to Muzaffarabad were safe. "In all, 24 passengers were to go and all 24 are absolutely safe."

He presided over a meeting attended by, among others, home secretary V.K. Duggal, IB director E.S.L. Narasimhan and special secretary (internal security), Anil Chowdhury.

South Block sources said hardliners in Pakistan and the militant outfits, which were feeling increasingly sidelined, have tried to do something dramatic to send out a clear signal about their presence.



Singh, Sonia



PoK high, Pak cautious

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Islamabad, April 6: The militant strike in Srinagar caused ripples in Pakistan today but the establishment as well as prospective passengers said they would not be cowed down by such "dastardly acts".

"The attack on innocent Kashmiris is, in fact, a heinous assault on humanity," foreign ministry spokesperson Jalil Abbas Jilani told reporters in Islamabad in a quick reaction condemning the attack.

Jilani was initially reluctant to confirm whether the bus service would take off from Muzaffarabad as scheduled. "Pakistani and Indian officials are in touch with each other, reviewing the latest situation and the security arrangements for the service," he said.

Jilani later said the bus service would go ahead as scheduled.

However, even before the formal announcement was made in Islamabad, the Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (referred to as Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in India), Sardar Sikandar Hayat, said he would see off passengers at the inaugural tomorrow. "I am fully sure that the bus will run from our side," he told a private television channel. "Let's see what is acceptable to Allah."

"We express grave sorrow at this very unfortunate incident," foreign minister Khurshed Mehmood Kasuri told reporters. "We condemn this incident."

He added: "No religion allows violence. This particular thing is really unbelievable because they (the passengers)

have committed no crime. All they wanted to do is to meet their loved ones from whom they have been separated."

Farooq Haider, a senior official in PoK, also said the bus will run according to schedule. "Violence will not delay the bus service."

Passengers who were to take the service from Muzaffarabad, the capital of PoK, said they were determined to make the journey to Srinagar. "I am not scared. I will definitely go if the bus goes," said Nisar Ahmed Zakir. "In warlike situations, such incidents happen. But I will go."

Officials said tickets for 27 of the 30 seats on the bus from Muzaffarabad had been collected and the three remaining passengers were expected to pick up theirs when they arrived from outlying areas.

MUKHTAR AHMAD

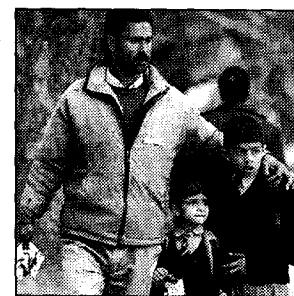
Srinagar, April 6: Farhat Ara, 50, was visiting her husband at the Tourist Reception Centre when militants attacked the building hiding passengers who will take the bus to Muzaffarabad tomorrow.

"It was touch and go. The fire seemed to be approaching us fast when security-men came and asked us to leave the building immediately through the rear exit. It is a miracle my husband and I are alive," she said.

Farhat's husband, 60-year-old retired school headmaster Syed Zain-ul-Abidin Shah, is one of the passengers on the inaugural bus that has been threatened by militants.

When police knocked on the doors of their Jehangir Chowk residence last Sunday, saying they had come to escort her husband to a secure location, Farhat was gripped by fear for his safety

'Travel is not worth the risk'



An injured man takes two boys to safety in Srinagar. (Reuters)

"I told the police party that perhaps the travel was not worth the risk my husband would be taking if he had to remain in a safehouse as if he were some politician or VIP. I was not allowed to

meet my husband after he was escorted out of the house till today," she said.

Fearing militant attacks, the passengers had all been moved to the reception centre where they have been living in virtual quarantine.

Farhat's fear heightened after today's attack, to which she was an unwilling witness. "What use is seeing your relatives if your family on this side of the line is going to face danger?" she asked.

"The point of bus is that families across the Line of Control are to be united and for that they are to be separated from their relatives on this side and kept at an undisclosed place days before travel. It is a logic I fail to grasp."

Voicing the fear of a backlash after the bus returns and the hype subsides, Farhat said: "We have to be on edge even after the safe return of my husband from Muzaffarabad. It is a hanging sword, God knows for how long."

No foul play in Kargil buys, UPA tells apex court

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 5 APRIL

IN a development that has kicked the bottom of the Congress' campaign against George Fernandes, the Manmohan Singh government told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that Kargil purchases were clean. In an affidavit filed before the Supreme Court, the government has said there was no violation of any financial rules of the government or the Defence Procurement Procedures, 1992.

The Centre said the modified procedures issued on June 21, 1999 were not to substitute or supersede the prescribed procedures for normal procurement action. The modified procedures were meant only to "telescope"

the time frame, particularly for imports, that has become critical keeping in view the intensity of "Operation Vijay" and unpredictability of the situation on the period for which the operation would last, it said.

The government said the measures taken to abridge the time frame were related to simplification of the terms of contract and simplification of procedure. In the simplification procedure, provisions were made to make the price negotiation committee (PNC) reports more comprehensive, obtain approval for the release of foreign exchange together with expenditure, clearance and a closer monitoring of contracts signed, the Centre said.

"These in no way violated any of the financial rules of the govern-



ment or the Defence Procurement Procedures, 1992," the government maintained.

In the last elections, the Congress had targeted former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on this issue. The public accounts committee (PAC) headed by

The Supreme Court had issued notice to the Centre to explain what steps it had taken after the report of the comptroller and auditor general (CAG) referred to irregularities in the purchase of arms and ammunition and other materials during and after the Kargil war in July 1999. The apex court had issued notice only to the Centre even though the PIL had made former defence minister George Fernandes a party while alleging that the irregularities in the Kargil scam caused a loss of Rs 2,175 crore to the national exchequer.

The Bench had earlier referred the PIL filed by K.G. Dhananjay Chauthan to attorney general Milton Banerjee and who had told the court that the relevant papers have been scrutinised by

his junior and nothing substantial has been found. But the apex court asked the attorney general to file an additional affidavit. He said it appeared from the CAG report that almost double the amount of the price of the ammunition was paid and wanted to know as to why the government did not let the PAC to go through the "secret" report of Central Vigilance Commission on this issue.

In the affidavit, the Centre had said the PNC report on review of procurement for Operation Vijay (army) was presented to the Parliament on August 6, 2003. The committee had then expressed their inability to give the findings from the CAG report on the ground that the ministry was not supplied the CVC report.

PM for political consensus on power

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, April 4. — Asking political parties to shun differences over user charges for electricity, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today said there should be a "broad consensus" on energy policy to attract new investment for sustaining over seven per cent economic growth.

"The challenge of rational pricing and distribution of electricity has to be addressed in a non-partisan manner. We need to work towards more rational pricing policies to ensure new investments," he said launching the Rajiv Gandhi Gramteen Vidyutikaran Yojna. The new scheme, aimed at providing electricity in all the remaining 74,000 villages in a time-bound manner by 2009, was launched in the presence of National Advisory Council chairperson

Mrs Sonia Gandhi. Expressing concern over poor delivery system, Mrs Gandhi underlined the government's commitment to ensure proper monitoring and involving panchayats for proper implementation and achievement of physical targets.

Electricity should be valued and used judiciously, the Prime Minister said adding, "even when governments offer subsidy to certain categories of users, they must understand the relevance of this subsidy and have respect for the asset being provided to them. "I, therefore, urge our political leadership to take a more long-term and national perspective in pursuing energy policy," he added.

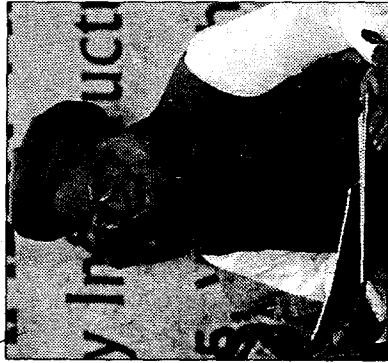
Giving details of the scheme, Union power minister Mr PM Sayeed said the government has allocated Rs 5,000 crore for providing subsidy under the scheme. In a country of over one billion

people and a dynamic economy growing at over 7 per cent, "we are going to consume more energy and we will have to generate this energy," Dr Singh said.

"The challenge of economic generation, distribution and pricing of electricity has to be addressed in a non-partisan manner so that we can, in fact, ensure rapid spread of electrification across the country and can attract new investments in this vital sector," he added.

Stressing that rural electrification is a key foundation stone in the modernisation of agriculture, Dr Singh said, "we can not delay the implementation of this basic commitment any longer and this Yojna is an important first big step."

The scheme was launched across the country through a video conference in which 12 chief ministers and Bihar Governor Mr Buta Singh partic-



Dr Manmohan Singh inaugurating the Rajiv Gandhi Yojna in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Dandi show

NEW DELHI, April 4. — The Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi and the Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh will participate in the "biggest ever party rally in Gujarat" at Dandi on 6 April on the occasion of the culmination of the party's re-enactment of Mahatma Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha, which the AICC says, will "herald a change in the disturbed state politics". The rally is set to throw down the gauntlet at the Narendra Modi government for the future battle between the Congress and the BJP. — SNS

ipated. The scheme is aimed at providing electricity to the remaining 56 per cent rural households by 2009.

Voicing concern over the quality of delivery systems, Mrs Gandhi said, "I believe we will

have taken a giant step forward in ensuring proper implementation of rural development plans." Very soon, Parliament will make National Rural Employment Guarantee Act a reality, she said.

UPA leaders consider US aircraft offer

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 3 APRIL

THE UPA leadership has begun looking at the US offer to supply 126 multi-role combat aircraft to India. The political leadership, which is of the view that ally Left's ideological reservations and armed forces' technical considerations should not be allowed to come in the way of discussing the offer with the US, is on the job with defence minister Pranab Mukherjee holding first round of talks with American ambassador David Mulford.

Both sides have not revealed the contents of the talks that took place last week but defence ministry sources said the ambassador made a "substantive offer". The defence minister is expected to share the details of the discussion with the Prime Minister and his colleagues in the Cabinet committee on security. Besides helping the country buy a major weapons platform from the US, the offer will help New Delhi get more attractive terms from the Russian and French competitors of Lockheed Martin and Boeing.

The armed forces have been taking a conservative view with its leadership preferring French Mirages and Russian Sukhois.

According to them, the machines are not just user-friendly for Indian pilots, the two countries have also been dependable allies of New Delhi. The political leadership, however, is citing the recent diversification in sourcing defence equipment — for instance, Phalcons from Israel — to reject the armed forces' argument. Besides, the offer of coproduction will ensure reliable supply of spares.

The US offer is appealing for the political leadership as it could make India a production hub for the latest war machines. As the offer involves development of the latest variant of F-16s in India — as was done for Saudi Arabia — India could become a major player in the defence market.

It is also enticing that the US has hinted such cooperation could go beyond F-16s and F18s in areas such as command and control of nuclear weapons, early warning and missile defence systems.

The political leadership is also assessing the American offer in the context of a broader relationship with the US, which has signalled that it is willing to work together in the area of nuclear energy.

Both sides are, at present, looking to chalk out a roadmap in nuclear energy cooperation and a beginning is expected to be made very shortly.