Iran clears air on gas pipeline

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 28: Iran is disappointed with the Indian vote in Vienna, but not enough to shelve the gas pipeline deal. This was the message from

Tehran today after India sided with the US at Friday's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) meeting on the Iranian nuclear controversy Ali Larijani, Supreme National Security Council secretary and Iran's chief negotiator on the nuclear dispute, suggested that though Tehran is

disappointed with Delhi's vote, it will not judge "an old friend" by a single incident.
The managing director of Iran's state-owned National Petrochemical Company, Reza Nematzadeh, was more busi-

"We have not had any problem with any country regarding our deals on petrochemicals, and the same applies to India," he said. "Our petrochemical agreements with India will definitely be imple-

mented in due time."
Delhi's decision to vote for the US-ipitiated western coun-

and stop it from reaching the

tries' resolution, which spoke of referring Iran's ruclear issue to the UN Security Council, marks a major forei; an policy shift. Delhi, howe ver, is harping on the fact that the resolution doesn't set a specific timetable.

This, it argues, allows more scope for negot iations and offers the chance of a settlement at the IAEA itself. Delhi has even claime at the decision was taken to safe guard Iran's "legitimate" interests.

Neither Iran nor Iridia in general bought the argument. Smarting under the blow. Tehran had announced it would review its deals with all the countries that had voted against it in Vienna.

against it in vietina.

The hint was clear: Iran would put on hold its recent deal with India on supply of liquefied natural gas though a

pipeline.
Today, India's ambassador
to Iran met senior officials in
the Iranian foreign ministry.
K.C. Singh made it clear that
India values its ties with Iran
and supported the resolution
only to avoid a confrontation

oke Security Council.

The focus is now shifting towards the next IAEA meeting in November, when the agency's board of governors—of which India is a member—meet in Vienna to assess whether Iran has complied with the recommendations. If the opinion goes against Tehran, the matter may be referred to the Security Council within a snerific timeframe

within a specific timeframe.
The key question is: will India again vote with the West or will it do a course correction and maintain its neutrality by abstaining?

ty by abstanting:
Many reasons are being attributed to the Indian policy shift. Sources said that till foreign minister Natwar Singh's visit to Iran early this month, Delhi was confident it would be able to de-link the nuclear deal signed with the US from Indo-Iranian relations.

indo-tranian relations.

But the foreign minister's visit brought the focus back on the ties and led the US and the European countries to insist that India take an unambiguous stand on Iran.

ous stand on tran. A cornered Delhi negotiated and watered the resolution down before voting for it.

BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS

We are not convinced by the explanation given by the government Sitaram Yechury

CPM leader



Our petrochemical agreements with India will definitely be implemented Reza Nematzadeh

MD, National Petrochemical Company, Iran

> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on Wednesday. (PII)

THE TELEGRAPH

India's vote on IAEA step surprises Iran

Dubai: Voicing surprise over India's support to an IAEA resolution on its controversial nuclear programme, Iran on Tuesday threatened to review its economic and trade ties with all those countries which voted against Teheran.

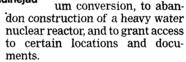
It also threatened to resume uranium enrichment and block UN inspections of its nuclear facilities unless the United Nations' nuclear agency IAEA retracted its resolution that put the country on the verge of referral to the Security Council for possible sanctions. "We were very surprised by India," Iranian

foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters in Teheran, adding "We will send a letter of objection to the countries that voted for the resolution."

Warning the 22 countries, which voted for the resolution on Saturday, of economic consequences, he said "Iran will revise these (economic and trade) relations and these countries will suffer. Our economic and political relations are coordinated with each other."

Defending its decision to support the resolution, India on Monday hoped that it would not affect bilateral energy cooperation and that it would go ahead with the 7.4-billion dollar trilateral gas pipeline project through Pakistan if found eco-

nomically viable. Foreign secretary Shyam Saran said in New Delhi that India supported the IAEA resolution to avert "a major confrontation" between Iran and the international community. The IAEA resolution told Iran to suspend all uranium enrichment activities, including urani-



Asefi said his country "has taken the most steps to strengthen the IAEA but the agency's members themselves move to weaken it. We believe the agency's power should be strengthened. We act within the frameworks of the NPT and its additional protocol as well as the nuclear safeguard. Agencies



Iranian President M Ahmadinejad

THE WILLS OF INDIA

CPM asks govt to shift focus to reforms of

NEW DELHI 15 SEPTEMBER,

THE CPM has asked the Manmohan Singh government to reorient the focus of economic re-forms. The Marxist party found a new weapon in the latest Human Development Report to hit out at economic policies saying the government was solely preoccupied with corporate profits.

Seeking increased investment in social infrastructure, the CPM has said that the Left parties will mount pressure on the govern-ment to keep CMP promises re-garding "massive increase" in investments in agriculture, health and education. The party said reversing the India's decline into deeper poverty and insecurity required a shift in focus of economic reforms from corporate profit

to people's welfare.

The CPM claimed that it had an alibi in the Human Development Report (HDR), which while ranking India at the 127th position out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index and 58th out of 103 developing countries on the Human Poverty Index, said that translating economic success into human development advances will require public policies aimed at broadening the distribution of benefits from growth and global integration, increased public invest-ment in rural areas and services and political leadership to end

and pointcal leadership to end poor governance and address gender inequality.

The party, in an editorial in the forthcoming issue of the party organ People's Democracy, quoted from the report: "overcoming the legacy of decades of under-investment in developunder-investment in develop-ment and deep-rooted gender inequalities posed immense challenges. Political leadership of a high order will be needed to address these challenges."

The Economic Times 16 75 5 1905

Gas pipeline plan on despite UN ban threat

Reuters

Islamabad, September 8

PAKISTAN AND India said on Thursday they were pressing ahead with a \$7-billion project to pipe Iranian gas to South Asia, despite a looming threat of UN sanctions against Tehran.

Officials from both the countries discussed legal, financial, technical and commercial aspects of the project at a meeting in Islamabad.

Doubts have been cast over the pipeline after Washington expressed concern about the project because of its opposition to Iran's nuclear programme.

The International Atomic Energy Agency last week said questions remained about Tehran's atomic activities and confirmed

Iran had resumed its uranium processing work, setting the scene for a possible referral to the UN Security Council. "As far as we're concerned, we are going ahead", petroleum secretary S.C. Tripathy said.

IRAN GAS

■ Both India and Pakistan said they will go ahead with the pipeline project ■ The countries asserted their stand in the face of possible UN sanctions against Iran

pathy said.

The two countries are likely to issue a joint statement on Friday outlining their progress in the latest talks. The proposal to build the pipeline has been discussed for years but uneasy relations between nuclear rivals Pakistan and India has prevented progress.

But the plan gained momentum after a peace process between the two countries began early last year. Pakistan earlier said it wanted the project to be completed by 2010, after which the country would be facing an acute gas shortage.

India has suggested the pipeline should initially bring 60 million cubic metres of gas a day in the first year, which should be upgraded to 90 million cubic metres in the second and 120 million in the third.

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Where the outcome is important

he attempt at preparing an outcome budget to monitor public expenditure is by itself laudable even though the first ever attempt might have fallen short of expectations. India joins a list of select countries, which have institutionalised a mechanism to measure the development outcomes of all government programmes. When properly structured, the outcome budget can become an important tool in the management of public finance, ensuring cost effectiveness of outlays while simultaneously ensuring that the money spent is accounted for. As it would indicate expenditure incurred on specific projects along with the physical progress achieved during the year, the document will serve as a reference point for the next year's budget. A pre-requisite to the exercise is transparency in government finances. Earlier this year, the Government decided to place in the public domain relevant information on spending by the Central Ministries so that those who have a stake as well as public-spirited citizens can scrutinise how the money is spent. The outcome budget takes the process further: in what is termed as a pre-expenditure process, it will set targets to be achieved along with timetables for each project or programme. That way financial outlays are expressed in terms of physical targets that can be more meaningfully monitored.

Inevitably the first attempt, even by the Government's admission, has not yielded "a perfect document." The Government needs to build the requisite skills, knowledge, and attitude to draw proper lessons from the exercise that calls for much more than juxtaposing sanctioned expenditure with the physical progress achieved. The expectation is that there will be an increased awareness among government servants of the need to concentrate on outcomes rather than on the outlays. Although as many as 44 ministries and 61 departments have participated this year it is only plan expenditure that is being monitored for now. The bigger challenge, as always, is to check non-plan expenditure. There have been certain practical difficulties such as in benchmarking the standards and quality of outcomes in certain areas such as infrastructure where the outlays are huge. Besides, it is not easy to evaluate, in one financial year, the effectiveness of programmes or projects that typically take many years to fructify. Programmes with a high social content need to be measured against specially developed benchmarks. The Government has promised to set up a special mechanism to monitor flagship programmes such as the Bharat Nirman and the new national rural employment guarantee scheme. The outcome budget is a welcome step in the direction of greater fiscal discipline. Obviously it needs to be further refined and enlarged if the results envisaged are to be achieved.

CIISCX I

Rise From 7000 To 8000 in Just 55 Days, FM Says No Cause For Concern

Mumbai/New Delhi: India's key share market index on Thursday rose to a dizzy high, scaling the 8,000 mark, on the back of brisk buying by foreign and domestic funds and easing global oil prices, but the government said there was nothing to worry.

The stock market barometer, the benchmark 30-share Sensitive Index (sensex), opened strong at 7,957.35 against Tuesday's close of 7,946.78 and later rallied past the 8,000 level to a high of 8043.7, up by 96.92 points.

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"The sensex rise is not a cause for worry or concern. Stock market movement is orderly", finance minister P Chidambaram said, but asked investors to make informed

He asserted that the government and market regulator SEBI were carefully looking at price to earnings (P/E) ratio of Nifty and sensex. The P/E ratio is presently between 14.5 and 15.5. "At this level, they look comfortable," Chidambaram said, adding that the index crossing 8,000 mark also showed business confidence was "very high," "We are still in comfort Zone," he

The sensex took just 55 days to race from 7,000 to the 8,000 mark, representing the second fastest 1,000 points rise ever. Earlier, the market had travelled from 5,000 to 6,000 in just 48 days, according to data available with the BSE.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs), which have pumped in about Rs 1,186 crore during last week, reported net investments of Rs 247.90 crore on Monday FIIs were believed to be creating long positions in the

Days Of Thunder

Investors seemed to be making purchases in response to easing oil prices, which fell below 65 US dollar a barrel level in Asian trade. Rising crude price had forced the government to hike fuel prices on Tuesday, and prices of Missians of the prices of th

7,000 20 June '05

The Finance Minister said he expected second quarter results of business houses and banks to be as good as the first quarter. The sensex, supported by blue chips like Infosys, Reliance Endustries, Satyam Computers, Reliance Energy and Tata Motors, quoted at 8008.51, gaining 61.73 in the first 30 minutes of trading.

5,000 30 Dec '99 Market watchers attribute the robust climb in the sensex to aggressive buying by FIIs and domestic mutual funds, though public activity remained negligible during the period. "There has been a lot of buying regularly from FIIs and domestic MFs," said Tarun Bansal of Aquatoris Shares Pvt Ltd, a leading stock broker in the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE).

3,000 2 March '92 Earlier, the market had travelled from 5,000 to 6,000 in just 48 days, according to data available with the BSE. But it slogged for over 170 days to reach the 7,000 mark on June 20, 2005.

Indian mutual funds were active sellers when the market hovered between 6,700-7,000, but turned very aggressive buyers once it passed the 7,000 mark, said Manoj Choraria of United Share Brokers.

The FIIs and MFs' interest was triggered on hopes of robust corporate earnings. Marketmen said the bourses were robust and hoped that the byllish sentiment would continue for songetime. Agences

Can I buy now, or is it too late?

By Abir Pal/TN

Mumbai: It's a question that invariably por up every time the sensex scales a new high. was there on investors lips, when Dals Street's barometer topped 5,000, its doing th rounds today when it topped 8,000 and bound to be asked, if and when, the sense touches 9,000: Is it still a good time to buy Unfortunately, while the query may be a conmon one, the answer is far more complex an

For a start, it depends on who you speak the Says Narayan S A, MD of one of the country largest brokerage houses Kotak Securitic "Well, it would be completely unrealistic finanyone to enter the market now and expect be rewarded with the same fantastic return early investors have been reaping." "The ke words now are clearly caution and care. Sna investors, typically feel left-out in the latte stages of a bull run and there is a tendency tiget it at any cost. This can be very dange ous," says Jigar Shah, Director, K R Chokse Shares and Securities.

Shares and Securities.
Shah says stock markets are definitely over enthusiastic, and swept up in this euphoriare failing to factor in critical issues like the rise in oil prices and the adverse impact this is sure to have on India Incs profitability.

PRICE OF AUTO FUEL GOES UP FROM TODAY

LPG spared, petrol snared

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 6. — The government today increased the price of petrol by Rs 3 and diesel by Rs 2 a litre, but spared kerosene and domestic

spared kerosene and domestic LPG. The Union Cabinet also decided against a cut in excise duties on petrol and diesel.

"The hike will be effective from midnight tonight," petroleum minister Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar told reporters after a meeting of the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. This is the second time this year that the price of fuel

has been hiked to bring it at par with galloping global oil tariffs. The prices were last raised in June but since then, international crude prices have crossed \$70 a barrel.

Mr Aiyar said the government had decided to issue bonds to oil companies to make up for the loss on account of selling petroleum products below cost. Public sector oil firms — IOC, BPCL, HPCL and IBP — lost Rs 14,500 crore this fiscal on selling fuel below the cost. "The value of bonds, the structure and duration (tenure) will be decided by the finance ministry in consultation with the petroleum ministry," Mr Aiyar said.

finance ministry in consultation with the petroleum ministry," Mr Aiyar said.

Later, briefing reporters, the petroleum secretary, Mr SC Tripathi, said petrol was under-priced by Rs 7.45 a litre to the cost and diesel by Rs 5.15 a litre. LPG was being sold at a loss of Rs 96 per cylinder and kerosene price was discounted by Rs 12.85 a litre.

Despite the Cabinet decision to allow oil marketing companies (OMCs) to hike the retail prices of petrol and diesel, at least two public sector companies, including the IBP, are expected to incur

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rol		Previous	Present	
but	Kolkata	43.77	46.77	
	Delhi	40.49	43.49	
and the London	Mumbai	45.91	48.91	
	Chennai	44.24	47.24	
1 1		Previous	Present	
	Kolkata	30.79	32.79	
	Delhi	28.45	30.45	
	Mumbai 💮	35.19	37.19	
	Chennai Chennai	31.50	33.50	
	MR:			

* Rupees per litr

major losses during the current fiscal owing to surging international crude prices, Mr Tripathi said. The IBP would have been declared a sick company in two months had the prices not been raised, he added. While the maximum burden would be shouldered by the petroleum industry, absorbing around 51 per cent of the deficit, the government would bear 36 per cent and the consumer 13 per cent by way of a price hike.

The oil bonds would be issued by the end of this week to mop up at least Rs. 10,000 crore. He said the current increase will net about Rs 5,000 crore while the refineries would give a market discount to the tune of Rs 14,000 crore to the OMCs.

Mr Tripathi expected the current global price spiral to stabilise as a rise in summer months was unprecedented. In such a scenario, the domestic retail prices would also not have to be changed during the current fiscal, he predicted.

More reports on pages 4, 9 Bus fares may go up: Kolkata Plus I

প্রতিবাদে পথে নামছে বাম-বিজেপি তেল সংস্থা বাঁচাতেই

দামবৃদ্ধि, यूक्ति का<u>क्स</u>

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৬ সেপ্টেম্বর: রান্নার গ্যাস ও কেরোসিন ছাড় পেলা। কিন্তু পেট্রোলের দাম লিটার-পিছু তিন টাকা আর ডিজেলের দাম লিটার-পিছু দু টাকা বাড়িয়ে দিল ইউপিএ সরকার।

সমর্থক বামেদের সব রকম আপত্তি অগ্রাহ্য করেই বাড়ানো হল পেট্রোপণাের দাম। রান্নার গ্যাস আর কেরাসিনে যে হাত পড়ল না, তার কারণ বিহারের ভাট। এই মূল্যবৃদ্ধির কড়া সমালােচনা করেছে বাম ও বিজেপি। দুই পক্ষই রাস্তায় নেমে আন্দােলনের হমকি দিয়েছে। পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের মূল্যবৃদ্ধির প্রতিবাদে পশ্চিমবন্দের সর্বত্ত মিছিল করা হবে বলে কলকাতার জানান সিপিএমের রাজ্য সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাস। তাঁর মতে, মূল্যবৃদ্ধির ফলে পরিবহণ খরচ বাড়বে। কৃষকেরাও ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হবেন।

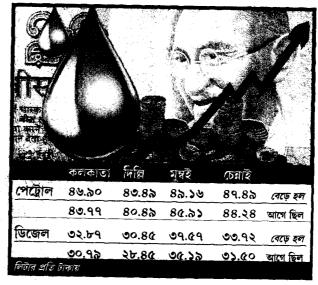
এই মূল্যবৃদ্ধি সাধারণ মানুষের পক্ষে কষ্টকর হবে, তা স্থীকার করে নিয়েও কংগ্রেস জানিয়েছে, এ ছাড়া আর উপায় ছিল না। বিশ্ব বাজারে চড়া দামের জন্মই সরকার এই অপ্রিয় সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে বাধ্য হয়েছে বলে যুক্তি দিয়েছে তারা। দাম না-বাড়ালে রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত তেল সংস্থাপ্তলি লাটে উঠত বলে আশক্ষা কংগ্রেস নেতাদের।

একই যুক্তি দিয়েছেন পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকের সচিব এস সি ত্রিপাঠী। তাঁর কথায়, "পরিস্থিতি কতটা সঙ্গীন, তার উদাহরণ হিসাবে বলছি, আইবিপি দু'মাসের মধ্যে চিরতরে রুগ্ণ হয়ে পড়তে পারে। চলতি পরিস্থিতিতে আইওসি, এইচপিসি এবং বিপিসি'রও এই হাল হবে এক দুই বছরের মধ্যে। আর্থিক হাল এতই খারাপ যে, আইওসি বাদে অন্য তিনটি সংস্থা ডিভিডেন্ড দিতে পারবে না। আইওসি-ও গত বছরের চেয়ে কম ডিভিডেন্ড দেবে।" পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ারও জানিয়েছেন, তেল সংস্থাগুলিকে বাঁচাতে সরকার দাম ৰাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে। এই সংস্থাগুলির আর্থিক ক্ষতি চলতি বছরে ইতিমধ্যেই প্রায় ১৫

হাজার কোটি টাকায় পৌঁছেছে বলে পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকের দাবি।

অন্য দিকে, তেল কোম্পানিগুলির আর্থিক সুরক্ষায় ১৯৯৭ সালের আদলে অয়েল বন্ড বাজারে ছাড়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে সরকার। পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকের কর্তাদের বক্তব্য, দাম বাড়িয়েও আর্থিক ক্ষতি পুরোপুরি রোধ করা সম্ভব নয়। কেরোসিনে প্রতি লিটারে ১ টাকা ও রান্নার গ্যাসে প্রতি সিলিন্ডারে ২০ টাকা দাম বাড়ানোর

হাজার কোটি টাকার বোঝা চাপত না।
বৃন্দা মূল্যবৃদ্ধির দায় চাপিয়েছেন
অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরমের উপরে। তাঁর
প্রশ্ন, "শুল্কের হার কমানো যাবে না
কেন? বাজেটের সময় অপরিশোধিত
তেলের দাম ছিল ব্যারেল প্রতি প্রায়
৪০ ডলার। হালে তেলের দাম ব্যারেল
প্রতি ৬০ ডলারের বেশি। তা হলে
টাকার অল্কে শুল্ক খাতে আয় তো
বেড়েছে। সেই আয়ের টাকাটা কী
হক্ছে? আর, সব মিলিয়ে এই ক'দিনে



সিদ্ধান্ত কার্যকর না-হওয়ায় তেল কোম্পানিগুলির আয় বাড়ার সন্তাবনা আরও সঙ্কুচিত হয়েছে। এই অবস্থায় সরকারি গ্যারাটি প্রদত্ত বন্ড ভাঙিয়ে টাকা তুলতে পারবে সংস্থাগুলি।

তবে সরকারের যুক্তি মানতে বামেরা নারাজ। সিপিএম পলিটব্যুরোর সদস্য বৃন্দা কারাট বলেন, "আমরা যে বিকল্প প্রস্তাব দিয়েছিলাম, তাতে সরকার কান দিল কই?" একই কথা বলেছেন অনিল বিশ্বাস। তাঁর মতে, বর্ধিত শুক্ক প্রত্যাহার, রিলায়েন্সের বকেয়া সাড়ে দশ হাজার কোটি টাকা শুক্ক আদায় ইত্যাদি ব্যবস্থা সরকার নিলে সাধারণ মানুষের ঘাড়ে ২১

প্রায় ৪০ হাজার কোটির ক্ষতি হয়েছে বলে সরকারের যে দাবি, তা ঠিক নয় বলেই আমাদের ধারণা।" কিন্তু পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকের অফিসারেরা বলছেন, বাজেটে পেট্রোলিয়াম ক্ষেত্র থেকে আয়ের যে হিসাব কষা হয়েছিল, সেই লক্ষ্যমাত্রায় পৌঁছনোর সম্ভাবনা দূরঅন্ত্। তাই শুল্ক কমানোর প্রস্তাব নিয়ে আলোচনা হলেও তা করা হয়নি।

আর ত্রিপাঠী বলছেন, সব কিছু করেও পাঁচ হাজার কোটি টাকা ক্ষতি মেটানো যাচ্ছিল না। তা হলে কি ফের তেলের দাম বাড়বে? আমলার আশ্বাস, "দাম চড়া হারেই বেড়েছে। সুতরাং কয়েক মাস নিশ্চিম্ভ থাকতে পারেন।

Your fuel bill will go up from tomorrow HT Correspondent The Cabinet will take a decise

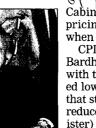
HT Correspondent New Delhi, September 5

THE STAGE is set for another round of hikes in prices of petro-leum products. The Cabinet meets on Tuesday to decide on the quantum of increase even as Left par-ties made a last-ditch effort to come up with a formula to offset the huge losses oil companies were making ever since global crude prices hit the roof.

Knowing that the issue could spark off another battle with the Left, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh spent the better part of Monday trying to build a consensus. Singh met Left leaders and argued that there a price hike was now inevitable.

minister Petroleum Mani Shankar Aiyar, whose absence from the last Cabinet meeting had resulted in the decision being put off, is expected to arrive from Dhaka early on Tuesday. Sources said the petroleum ministry had proposed raising petrol and diesel prices by Rs 3 per litre each and LPG price by Rs 20 per cylinder, besides suggesting a cut in levies on petrol and diesel by Re 1 per litre.

Finance minister P. Chidambaram said the



WHAT AIYAR WANTS

- Hike of Rs 3/It of petrol and diesel
- Rs 20 more for LPG cylinders

Cabinet will take a decision on potroleum products pricing petroleum products when it meets on Tuesday.

CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan said after the meeting with the PM that he had suggested lowering of excise duties and that states too should be asked to reduce taxes. "But he (Prime Minister) had a counter-argument that while it was true excise earnings were going up, dividends of oil PSUs had gone down to almost zero level," Bardhan said. He also quoted Singh as saying that the revenue budget of the states was in a very bad shape.

In its memorandum to the PM, the CPI(M) asked the government to do away with the levy of road cess on petrol and diesel and forego increased customs and excise duties, which will all

make available Rs 5,800 crore to the government. It also suggested other measures like making additional crude cess available for stabilisation fund, suspension of duty-free benefit for exports, withdrawal of sales tax concessions to private refineries which will yield another Rs 5,000 crore. Also the reported non-payment of additional excise duty of Rs 10,500 crore by RIL should be recovered.

India, Iran ignore US on pipeline

Teheran, Islamabad and Delhi May Ink Deal in Dec

Teheran: Ignoring pressure from the US to scuttle it, India and Iran on Saturday decided to go ahead with the proposed \$7.4 billion gas pipeline project to supply muchneeded natural gas through Pakistan and sign a framework agreement by December this year for

"If all goes well there can be a tripartite meeting of the concerned ministers of (India, Iran and Pakistan) to finalise a framework agreement by December 31," external affairs minister K Natwar Singh said, after holding wide-ranging talks with his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mot-

taki here.

In another major deal, Singh said Teheran has agreed to supply five million metric tonnes of liquid natural gas to India annually. India had asked for 7.5 million

India had asked for 7.5 million tonnes of natural gas supply. Singh, who is here on a three-day visit, said a preliminary framework accord for the pipeline to supply natural gas to India could be made ready by November

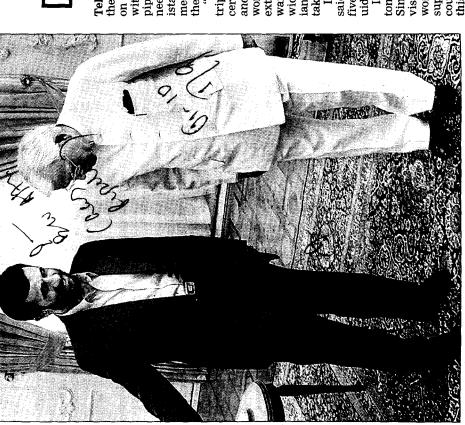
this year. This is being considered here as a key step to make the project

Iunctional.

On the US opposition to the pipeline project, which was mooted during the visit of then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Iran in April 2000, India bad made it clear that it was a purely bilateral one based on commercial considerations and it would not bow to any international pressure.

Washington, which is opposing the sale of oil by Iran, has said that the money coming from sale of gas to India could be used for other purposes by Teheran, including on its nuclear programme. Keen to carry forward the ambitious project, petroleum minister Mani Aiyar had visited Tehran in June this year during which the two sides decided to set up a joint working group to study all aspects of the project.

After detailed discussions on a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues for over an hour with the teo sides, Singh said the two sides decided to hold a meeting of their joint commission, headed by the foreign ministers, in Teheran in March to review the entire gamut of their relationship. The Agencies



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad welcomes external affairs minister K Natwar Singh in Teheran on Saturday

India-Iran pipeline project on track

PRESS Trust of India

Tehran, September 3

IGNORING PRESSURE from the US, India and Iran on Saturday decided to go ahead with the proposed 7.4 billion dollar gas pipeline project to supply muchneeded natural gas through Pakistan and sign a framework agreement by December this year.

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US SNURRED

GO AHEAD

Despite pressure from America, India and Iran have cleared the 7.4 billion dollar gas pipeline via Pakistan

ROADMAP

If all goes well, there will be a meeting of foreign ministers of India, Pakistan and Iran in December

had made it clear that the project was a purely bilateral one based on commercial considerations and it would not bow to any international pressure.

Washington, which is opposing the sale of oil by Iran, has said that the money coming from sale of gas to India could be used for other purposes by Tehran, including funding its nuclear programme.

Keen to carry forward the ambitious project, petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar had visited Tehran in June this year.

India also raised with Iran the issue relating to renewal of stay permit and ownership of property rights for Indians living here as Natwar Singh held talks with Mottaki. Mottaki assured natwar that he would look into the issue, Singh said after the hour-long meeting.

Natwar charms Tehran dailies

Tehran, September 3

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS minister K. Natwar's visit has created a media splash in Iran with leading dailies front-paging pictures of the smiling dignitary being received by his counterpart Manuchehr Mottaki.

Tehran Times, Iran's leading English daily, waxed lyrical about the growing relationship between the two countries.

The daily quoted Mottaki as describing India-Iran relations as "old, friendly and expanding".

It stressed the "deepening and expansion of bilateral negotiations" in energy, culture and trade. *Iran News*, another influential paper, sounded equally upbeat about relations and the outcome of discussions between Natwar Singh and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mottaki.

IANS

O A MARINES

Govt to sell 78% stake in Maruti

Disinvestment Expected To Fetch Rs 1000 Crore

New Delhi: Aiming to raise Rs 900-1,000 crore, the government on Friday decided to offload 8 per cent of its equity in Maruti Udyog Ltd in favour of public sector financial institutions.

The government holding would reduce to 10.28 per

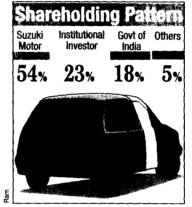
cent after the disinvestment in favour of the psu financial institutions, including public sector banks, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee told reporters after a meeting of the cabinet committee on economic affairs, which gave its nod to the proposal. The disinvestment would be done through competitive bidding with the market price as the benchmark, he said.

With the current market price of over Rs 513, the 8 per cent disinvestment would fetch around Rs 1,092.69 crore. Maruti share prices appreciated by over Rs 28 on the BSE.

To a question, Mukherjee did not give any timeframe for disinvestment, saying such a move does not have any specific time as the shares would be sold when the market is bullish.

When asked whether all allies of the UPA government, including the Left, supported the government move, he said: "Today's Maruti is different from earlier times. What is left (of the govt equity) in Maruti?" The government would appoint advisors to advise and assist it in the sale transactions, the defence minister said. He said the amount realised from the "non-strateinvestment would be utilised by the government in sectors that require attention on priority. The government had earlier held 45.8 per cent of stake in MUL, comprising 13.23 crore shares of Rs 5 each.

In June 2003, the government sold 7.94 crore shares, constituting 27.5 per cent of equity shares, through an



initial public offering.

The government mopped up Rs 993 crore from the IPO by selling shares at Rs 125 per share of face value of Rs-5. It now holds residual shares of 18.28 per cent, comprising around 5.28 crore of shares, of the total equity of MUL.

Earlier, heavy industry officials had said the ministry would support the proposal to offload 8 per cent government equity in MUL if the sales proceeds are used for social sector projects.

Ministry officials said if the funds were parked in the national investment fund (NIF), it would justify the disinvestment. Recently, the department of disinvestment had formulated a note tooperationalise the NIF. The MUL disinvestment is expected to operationalise the fund, created for assisting the social sector and restructuring of public sector units. TNN & Agencies

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Mega outsourcing contract for Indian infotech firms

HT Corporate Bureau New Delhi, September 1 W.

ABN AMRO has signed a multi-million dollar deal with Indian IT bell-wethers Infosys Technologies, TCS and Patni Computers for application support and development, giving a major boost to India's global delivery model.

The Infosys deal amounts to \$140 million while TCS's landmark engagement is expected to generate revenues over 200 million euros.

The five-year global deal is part of ABN Amro's \$2.2 billion global contract for outsourcing its IT infrastructure, application support and enhancement and application development. The offshore component of the deal, which is the single largest multi-year European contract, is estimated at \$500 million

timated at \$500 million.
Infosys Technologies chief Nandan M. Nilekani said: "We have a committed business of \$140 million with the potential of going up to \$250 million in the coming years. It includes committed volumes in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific

and the right to bid as a top five service provider for application development projects with the bank."

Following a competitive tender, ABN Amro has reached an agreement with five vendors including TCS, Patni, Accenture, and IBM in addition to Infosys to improve the performance of its IT services and realise efficiencies.

IBM has bagged the infrastructure management part of the deal. It involves the basic network, servers and other hardware within the company.

S. Ramadorai, MD and CEO of TCS, said: "The milestone engagement with ABN Amro is a validation of our global delivery strategy."

Narendra Patni, CEO of Patni, said, "Over the years, Patni has helped companies transform business operations by using global delivery as a strategic weapon." Infosys said it had been using the

Infosys said it had been using the modular sourcing model for a long time. "We have always believed that the corporate world is moving towards this model, where the best of the breed in each space bags a part of a larger contract," said Nilekani.



NEW VISTAS

- IT infrastructure contract awarded to IBM
- Application support and enhancement to TCS and Infosys
- Application development to Accenture, IBM, Infy, TCS and Patni

TRIMMING DOWN

- ABN Amro trimms its IT workforce to around 3,500 personnel
- After layoffs, some 1,500 jobs have been slashed
- Idea was to save \$1 billion annually

as a company

THE HIDUST MY MES

Govt to retain 51% share in PSU banks

Press Trust of India

MUMBAI, Aug. 27. — The government today said it would retain 51 per cent equity stake in public sector banks and banks which have reached the limit of 51 per cent will have to identify new forms of capital to strengthen the capital base. "The policy of the UPA government is to retain these banks as public sector banks. We have rejected the earlier formulation, which was rather bizarre, that government, stake will be reduced to 33 per cent without affecting the public sector character of the banks," Union finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram said here today.

Speaking at the annual general meeting of Indian Banks' Association (IBA), he said the government's policy is to ensure its equity does not, as a result of public issues by banks, go below 51 per cent.

However, some new forms of capital would have to be identified in order to strengthen the capital base of these banks which have reached the limit of 51 per cent, he said. "For private banks, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has declared a roadmap for reforms in their ownership. This has opened up possibilities of organic as well as inorganic growth of foreign banks operating in India," Mr Chidamharam said

He said the banking sector may witness a net depletion of 200 basis points in capital adequacy after the adoption of Basel II norms. This would entail raising of fresh capital as well as optimal use of existing capital, he added.

Mr Chidambaram said the initiatives of some public sector banks for raising further capital would be constrained

Banks to rework business plans

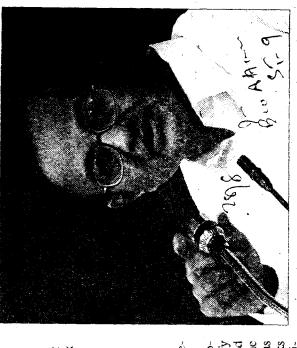
MUMBAI, Aug. 27. — After receiving flak from the Centre for projecting that business would be stagnant in 2005-06, the public sector banks (PSBs) will rework targets for deposit mobilisation, advances and profitability. Indian Banks Association members, including State Bank of India, would review the targets, IBA chairman and SBI chief, Mr AK Purwar told reporters here today. He, however, did not elaborate as to how the process would shape up. **PTI**

by the policy requirement to keep the government's share holding at 51 per cent or more.

"It is imperative that banks in the country study the proposed New Basel Capital Adequacy framework, identify their transition path and initiate steps to be fully prepared for adoption of the new standards when introduced," he said. Referring to consolidation, he said the government has decided that the move for it has to originate from the banks themselves "driven by the boards and supported by the officers and employees and based upon operational synergy and strategic coherence".

The finance minister said consolidation becomes a must for development and strengthening of competition in the wake of predominance of public sector banks.

"Without consolidation, the public sector banks are indistinguishable from one another and alike in all respects except the name in the masthead. We have still to see any major activity on this front," he said,



Mr P Chidambaram

Meanwhile, the government has consciously limited its role as an owner to four areas including appointment of chairmen and managing directors and executive directors, declaring and communicating national policies, setting in place the standards of corporate governance, and monitoring the performance of the banks through the instrument of State of Intent, he said.

2 PM TAILSMAN

Govt presents first outcome budget

today presented its first outcome budget, a mechanism to measure the development outpage document in Parliament, terming it as a NEW DELHI, Aug. 25. — The government first step to move towards an outcome-oriencomes of all major programmes. The finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram, tabled the 723-

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to ministry and programme to programme. "I hope this will become an annual feature," he Describing the exercise as "historic", Mr Chidambaram said it was a complex and arduous process, which differed from ministry

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financial utilisation to ensuring intended out-

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ted Budget and to shift the focus from mere

expenditure scrutiny. "Ministries and departments will now begin to look at expenditure The outcome budget, he told reporters later, was a pre-expenditure instrument to help realise the ministries' vision through clearly ment to the current system built around postdefined outputs and outcomes as a supplethrough the prism of outcomes," he said.

Statesman News Service

The current practice, he elaborated, was Outcomes to be specifically defined in that after the Budget, each ministry presents measurable and 'monitorable' terms' interstanding commission of Parliament. "These are ministerial documents for the year gone by. But the outcome budget is about performance in the year to come." There will thus be outcome budget in May and performance three documents — Budget on 28 February, budget next April.

may "not be perfect". "But it will improve as we go along, as we hone and refine it further. To begin with, it is an important step in gov-The voluminous document, he pointed out, ernanče."

Plan expenditure. From the next year, an outcome budget would be prepared for Non-The exercise this time was taken up only for Plan expenditure as well. Nine ministries have not been covered in this exercise, including atomic energy, defence, external affairs and parliamentary affairs. Asked whether they would be next year, Mr Chidambaram said, "Let us put on our thinking caps.

Elaborating on the process adopted for the outlay budget, the minister outlined the

 Benchmarking the standards/ quality of ■ Standardising unit cost of delivery; ever required;

 Capacity building for requisite efficiency at all levels, in terms of equipment, technolooutcomes and services

gy, knowledge and skills;

Ensuring flow of right amount of money at the right time to the right level, with neither delay nor "parking" of funds;

■ Involvement of the community/ target groups/ recipients of the service, with easy ac-

■ Effective monitoring and evaluation sys-

delivery systems effective with appropriate comes would, therefore, require making the nancial management systems, increasing structures and processes, strengthening fiuse of information technology and meaningful involvement of all concerned in criti-cal decision making and implementation Efficient conversions of outlays into out cess and feedback systems.

26 A" ? ? ? ? .

দায়বদ্ধুতা মাপতেই আউটকাম

স্টাফ বিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৫

নগস্ট: আর্শ্বিক শৃদ্ধলার পথে আরও

নক পা এগোলো কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার।

হস্পতিবার প্রথম 'আউটকাম বাজেট'

না বায়ের খতিয়ান পেশ করে অর্থমন্ত্রী

পি চিদম্বরম জানালেন বরাদ্দ নয়, বায়

কেমন ভাবে হচ্ছে সেই নতুন নিরিখে

মাগামী দিনে মাপা হবে সরকারের

নায়বদ্ধতা। গত বছরই যা বলেছিলেন

প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ।

'আউটকাম বাজেট' তৈরি করার মূল ভাবনা হল, করদাতার অর্থ অপচয় না-হয়ে যাতে সতিটে তা উয়য়নের কজে লাগে, তা নিশ্চিত করা। এ দিন আউটকাম বাজেটে অর্থমন্ত্রী বিশদে পেশ করলেন চলতি বছরে ৪৪টি মন্ত্রক ও ৬১টি দফতরের নানা ক্ষেত্রে বরাদ্দ করা অর্থ যে-ভাবে বয়য় করা হবে, তার বিবরণ। ৭২৫ পাতার এই রিপোর্টের প্রধান উদ্দেশ্য বরাদ্দ করা অর্থরে তারয়র নির্দিষ্ট ক্ষেত্রগুলি চিহ্নিত করা।

এই বায়ের খতিয়ান পেশ করে অর্থমন্ত্রী বলেন, "২৮ ফেব্রুয়ারি বাজেট বক্তৃতায় আমি যা বলেছিলাম, তারই পুনরাবৃত্তি করছি। আমি সে সময়ে বলেছিলাম, "একটি বিষয়ে সতর্ক করছি যে, বরাদ্দ বেঁধে দেওয়া কিন্তু ফলাফলের নিশ্চয়তা নির্ধারণ কুৰে না। দেশের মানুষ চান, তার সদ্মবহার কতটা কী হল, তার হিসাব নিতে। তার জেরে আমি যোজনা পর্যদের সঙ্গে একযোগে এমন একটি পদ্ধতি ঠিক করতে চেয়েছি, যাতে কাজকর্ম আদতে কতটা কী এগোলো, তা ঠিক করা যায়। তার জেরেই প্রধানমন্ত্রী ১৭ মার্চ বিভিন্ন কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রীকে চিঠি দিয়ে জানতে চেয়েছিলেন, আর্থিব ব্যয়বরাদের অনুপাতে কতটা কাড সম্পন্ন হল, তার হিসাব পেশ করতে।

বস্তুত, প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিং সরকার গঠনের পর থেকেই সতই করেছিলেন যে, ব্যয় বরান্দের কতট অংশ কাজে লাগল, তা নিয়ে যথেই সচেতন থাকতে হবে। কারণ, সরকারি বিভিন্ন খাতে খরচ যতটা হয়, কাজ ততটা এগোয় না বলেই আশ্লম প্রকাশ করেছিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। তার জেরেই যে এই রিপোর্ট, তা জানিয়েছেন চিদম্বরম।

সর্বশিক্ষা অভিযান, জাতীয় গ্রামীণ কর্মসংস্থান গ্যারান্টি প্রকল্প, মিড-ডে মিল, সুসংহত শিশু বিকাশ কর্মসৃচি, সড়ক প্রকল্প ও ভারত নির্মাণের মতো কিছু প্রকল্পে অর্থ মন্ত্রক ও যোজনা কমিশনের বিশেষ নজরদারি থাকবে।

তবে ব্যয়ের এই খতিয়ান যে
চূড়ান্ত নয়, চিদম্বরম তাঁর রিপোর্টে তা
স্পষ্ট করেছেন। তাতে বলা হয়েছে,
"পরিকল্পনা বহির্ভূত খাতে কত খরচ
হল, তা পরবর্তী রিপোর্টে শুধু পেশ
করা হরেছে পরিকল্পনা খাতে খরচের
হিসাব।" অর্থাৎ, কর্মচারীদের বেতনসহ অন্যান্য খাতে কত খরচ হল, সেই
হিসাবে অবশ্য এখনও ধোঁয়াশা রয়ে
গিয়েছে। আগামী বছর থেকে
পরিকলপনা বহির্ভূত খাতে ব্যয়ও এই
খতিয়ানের মধ্যে আনা হবে।

সব মিলিয়ে, রিপোর্টটি যে একশো শতাংশ নিখুত নয়, তা স্বীকার এর পর সাতের পাতায়

দায়বদ্ধতা মাপতেই বাজেট

প্রথম পাতার পর

করেছেন অর্থমন্ত্রী। তাঁর মতে, "এটা একটা শুরু। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর নির্দেশে এটা আমরা করছি। ফলাফলের ব্যাপারে ইউ পি এ সরকার যে রীতিমতো সচেতন, তা অস্তত এই রিপোর্টে প্রতিফলিত হয়েছে।"

তবে চিদম্বরম রিপোর্ট পেশ করে একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কথা মনে করিয়ে দিয়েছেন। তা হল, এ বার রাজ্যগুলিকে দায়বদ্ধতা বাড়ানোর এই পথে হাঁটতে হবে। তাঁর আশা, অন্তত কয়েকটি রাজ্য এই উদাহরণ অনুসরণ করে রাজ্য গুরে এই কাজ শুরু করেব।কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থমন্ত্রী মনে করিয়ে দিয়েছেন, আরও একটি বাজেট প্রকাশ এখনও বাকি। এই তৃতীয় বাজেটটি হবে 'পারফরম্যাশ বাজেট' বা ফলাফল বাজেট। প্রত্যেক বছর বাজেটে বরাদ্দ অর্থ কেমন ভাবে ব্যয় হল, ও তার ফলে উন্নয়ন কতটা হল, তারই চূড়ান্ত ফল প্রকাশিত হবে পারফরম্যাশ বাজেটে। ফলে ২০০৫-'০৬ সালের পারফরম্যাশ বাজেট প্রকাশিত হবে ২০০৬ সালের এপ্রিল-মে মাসে। এই প্রকাশনাত্রয়ীর (সাধারণ বাজেট, আউটকাম বাজেট ও পারফরম্যাশ বাজেট) সাহাব্যে দেশের মানুষ বুঝতে পারবেন, করদাতার অর্থ কেমন ভাবে ব্যয় হঙ্কে ও তাতে উন্নয়নের কাজই বা কতটা এগোছেছ।

Se Dille sour

ANADARAZAE MATRIKA

Singh tackles Left on economic policy

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Aug. 25: The Prime Minister's Left allies were left with red faces for the second day today as Manmohan Singh dropped all pretence of trying to hide differences over economic policy.

He went ahead and announced his reform agenda, such as relaxing labour Jaws and allowing foreign investment in retail.

For the second day, he caused embarrassment to CPM leaders in Delhi by praising Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government in Bengal and stressing how there were differe nces between the communists

in Calcutta and in the capital. CPM politburo member Sitaram Yechury bristled. "The Prime Minister has been very appreciative of our chief minister. We are telling him 'please emulate him'."

After saying yesterday Bhattacharjee is a role model for other chief ministers. Singh commented in an interview to a consultancy firm's publication that Bengal re-



On public sector

Shares of profitable companies, other than navratnas, to be sold in the market

On labour laws

Not hire and fire, but more flexible framework, particularly in public sector

On foreign investment Think big, with the ambition to be in the same league as the Chinese

On retail trade

Foreign investment can be allowed after protecting small shopkeepers

What is good for Bengal is also good for country

alised the need for labour market flexibility.

"It is my task to carry conviction to our Left colleagues in Delhi. I haven't given up." the McKinsey Quarterly Journal

In a change from his charistic non-controversial the Prime Minister aped determined to address ult issues like labour arket reform public sector divestment and foreign investment in retail trade.

All three are anathema to the Left. Yechury evaded comment on labour reform, but said caustically: "Have land reforms. Empower the landless peasantry. That is what Bengal has done."

Singh made a strong argument for labour reform, but added: "We don't have the broad-based consensus in our coalition for me to assert that I can move forward in a big way.

Gurudas Dasgupta, an MP belonging to the CPI, said: "We are alarmed at the Prime Minister's statement.

Singh also expressed hope that he would be able to get round the Left's objection to foreign investment in retail

"I am convinced that we can work out a package that is fair... that will not hurt our small shopkeepers but will create a lot more employment.

The Prime Minister hoped that he would be able to persuade his "patriotic" Left col-

Addressing Singh's hint of differences in the CPM — between Bengal and Delhi -Yechury said Bhattacharjee had not deviated from the party's principles.

The three yardsticks are that foreign investment is welcome if it increases productivity, creates jobs and upgrades technology.

"We want the (central) government to apply these same conditions," Yechury said.

ICRIER Favours 49% Foreign Stake, But Gradually

Congress MPs join voice in anti-retail FDI chorus

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 24 AUGUST

HE Opposition as well as the Left's efforts to stall FDI in the retail sector, got support from an unexpected quarter — Congress members in the Rajya Sabha, on Wednesday. Congress' PJ Kurien said, the Centre's move was against the interest of the domestic retail sector. He also asked the government not to proceed with its plan.

The development, which has brought to public glare lack of support for the Centre's new policy initiative within the Congress, may sap the government's enthusiasm over proposed changes in the retail policy.

The BJP benches sought assurance from commerce minister Kamal Nath that his department will not make any forward movement in the direction of opening up the sector. The Left pointed to the Congress' own reservations towards demand shelving of the new policy plan. Mr Nath, however, refused to give any assurance to the House.

The development cannot but be distressing for the government as the department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP) is in the process of preparing a Cabinet note for allowing foreign investments in retail trading ventures.

A report by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) had made a strong case for opening up the sector to foreign investors. The report was commissioned by the consumer affairs department. The ICRIER had recommended that at least 49% FDI be allowed in the retail industry initially. However, since domestic retailers are still in the process of consolidating their position, the opening up should be



a gradual process

The ICRIER study seems to be of the view that organised retailing has significant backward linkages through setting up of supply chains, investment in food processing industry and manufacturing units, increased productivity of agriculture, growth of interlinked sectors such as tourism and IT.

Mr Nath on Wednesday said, according to his ministry's assessment, consumers would gain from organised retailing, since it leads to lowering of prices and brings improvement in the quality of products. There have been reports that retail majors like Carrefour, Wal-Mart, 7-Eleven and Auchan are keen to enter the Indian retail business. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has ranked India among the six most attractive destinations for investment in retailing alongside countries like China, Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia and Hungary

Left wants change in reforms course

> New Delhi 24 AUGUST

THE Left parties on Wednesday called for a "course correction" in economic reforms so that the benefits could filter down to the masses. The Left warned that inequitable growth could lead to social unrest. "There's a need to review reforms or else it could lead to social strife," said D Raja, CPI national secretary. Mr Raja was addressing a seminar on Poverty Alleviation and Economic Reforms, organised by Assocham.

"It's not that the Left does not want creation of wealth, but we have to see how its equitable distribution is taken care of. Economic development will have to take place along with social justice," Mr Raja added.

Addressing industry captains, CPI(M) politburo member Sitaram Yechury said poverty eradication was economically beneficial as it would expand the market. Mr Yechury added that production and consumption level of foodgrain had fallen since economic reforms began in the 1990s and now it stood where it was during WW II. "Reforms have widened inequity, but it cannot be done away with. However, a measure of regulation must be introduced," he said. Mr Raja said problems had arisen as the process had been taken up because of a "crisis and according to the diktats of some other countries."

Alle The Economic Times

asses rural job Bill after two-day debate 18 / V C 3/4

The gove card RURAL POOR M

LA MIL TOO

HILLIAN TARTAR



At least one crore rural workers may opt for the scheme once mplemented in two months

The guarantee $100\,\mathrm{davs}$

every year at a minimum wage to at least one tobe-bodied person in each rural household employment on asset-creating programmes

Pivotal role

Panchayats to finalise and approve projects and also monitor them

SOO districts to be identified as most backward

First step



sites. In case of more than five cent participation at the worklooking after children (below women workers, facility for

Rs Cocap



tee for at least 100 days of employment on asset-creating public works programmes every sections of the House during year at a minimum wage to at least one able bodied person in every rural household received unprecedented support from all around 13 hours of debate.

> THE NATIONAL Rural Emplo yment Guarantee Bill was una nimously approved by the Lok Sabha on Tuesday after a mara nued till midnight on Monday night. A slew of amendments, including a last-minute change

New Delhi, August 23

How much is minimum

thon two-day debate that conti

Significantly, bowing to pressure from the Left parties, the moved a last-minute amend-ment providing for a minimum wage as applicable in various rural development minister eral other changes that had earunder the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, apart from sevier been okayed by the Union Cabinet. Later, speaking to HT, Raghuvansh Prasad explained states

> Opposition-sponsored amendments, especially those withdrawn or rejected by the

moved by the BJP, were either

that provides for legal guaran

House by a voice vote. The Bill

minister Raghuvansh Frasad

Singh were also okayed.

moved by rural development

on minimum wage provision

ject, the Centre did not intend to mum wage amendment provision. He said since statutory intrude into their powers. The states were free to provide the importance of the mini minimum wage was a state sub wages as per their laws even as the Centre could intervene th rough an enabling clause of the Bill to raise its level, if need be.

200 districts in the country. "We

have enough money (around Rs 10,000 crore) to imp lement the scheme in the last year," he added while asserting tation in the first phase across few months of the current fisca cal would be fine-tuned going by that the scheme for the next fis the experience of its implemen

What is an Outcome Budget? N Outcome Budget? N Outcome Budget? N Outcome Budget? N ining Commission. The latter is

N Outcome Budget measures the development outcome of all government programmes. For instance, it will tell a citizen if money has been allocated for building a primary health centre and whether the centre has indeed come up. In other words, it is a means to develop a linkage between the money spent by a government and the results which follow. The concept has developed in many democracies to make budgets more cost effective.

According to experts it signals the emergence of an important tool for effective government management and accountability. Earlier too, there have been efforts to bind government expenditure to results, like zero based budgeting. But experts acknowledge that an outcome orientation is a better means to achieve the same objective.

In India, the central government has decided that with effect from this fiscal year, it will put up in the public domain, information about spending by ministries, so that all stake holders, including the people's representatives, civil society and the intended beneficiaries of the schemes and projects can scrutinise how well a project has been implemented. This will ensure value for money for government expenditure.

How will it change the way the government works?

It is expected to change the mindsets of government officials to become more result oriented, instead of outlay centric. Currently, most departments measure the extent of their work in

terms of their budget instead of penditure Finance Committee for

terms of their budget, instead of the benefits that the citizens derive from them work.

Since most ministries and departments have developed citizen's charters, it should, therefore, be possible to achieve the deliverables mentioned in the charters through the Outcome Budget exercise.

What is the schedule for the exercise?

The Outcome Budget would be applied on plan schemes in this year, as it is easier to link expenditure with results for such investment programmes.

Finance minister P Chidambaram has said from next year, the expected outcomes for non-plan expenditure would be similarly compiled. Non plan expenditure includes salary and pension for government employees, defence expenditure, interest payments on government debt and subsidies.

Very soon, the outcome budget could become a part of the regular budgetary process and could be finalised within three months of the presentation of the annual Union Budget. This would mean, every ministry would have to present its preliminary

Outcome Budgets while proposing its demand for grants to the ministry of finance. It is a sort of examination of expenditure before they are made, instead of a post expenditure scrutiny. The Ex-

penditure Finance Committee for instance, which sanctions government plans of upto Rs 100 crore, has recently modified its rules and decided to ask for clear definition of outcomes at the stage of planning a programme.

At the end of the year, we should ask not how much has been spent, but what has been achieved, the finance minister said, explaining the rationale for the exercise. Admitting that converting outlays into outcomes is a complex process, which may differ from ministry to ministry and programme to programme, Mr Chidambaram said, administrative ministries have to develop a commitment to make the exercise successful.

In addition, converting outlays into outcomes will require ensuring the flow of right amount of money at the right time to the right level, with neither delays nor parking of funds, effective monitoring and evaluation systems, which indicate the areas requiring further calibration and honing, of processes to deliver the intended outcomes, and the involvement of the community or target groups for whom the schemes are meant.

Which agencies will monitor whether the results are being achieved?

The exercise is a joint effort of the finance ministry and the Plan-

ning Commission. The latter is giving final shape to the consolidated Outcome Budget of the administrative ministries, after detailed discussions with them. The document will also be put up on the web for the people to give their comments.

A new division called the Programme Outcome and Response Monitoring Division has been created within the Planning Commission to coordinate the initiative. The Division will try to bring a fair degree of uniformity of approach across the ministries, but with due regard to the special nature of their collective responsibilities, programmes and projects.

This means, that while it is relatively easy to find out if the defence ministry has spent its Budget to buy a new weapons system, it is far more difficult to establish if the Rs 100 crore spent on a block has helped families to move above the poverty line. So the yardsticks have to take into account such differences.

What will be the yardsticks to measure outcome?

Some of the common yardsticks to be employed include standardising the unit cost of delivery, benchmarking the standards and quality of outcomes and capacity building for requisite efficiency at all levels, in terms of equipment, technology, knowledge and skills.

edge and skills.

Thus, implementing agencies will have a clearer idea of what is expected of them, and can be gauged against agreed performance indicators, having greater flexibility on the use of money to achieve given outcomes.

The Economic Sines

Employment Bill tabled in House

Jobs not a dole, but right of rural masses

SAROJ Nagi New Delhi, August 18

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi put her and her party's stamp on the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREG) Bill which promises to socially, economically and politically transform the face of rural India by guaranteeing 100 days of employment to job seekers

with a minimum wage of Rs 60.

In her first speech since the Congressled UPA government came to power, Sonia unfolded the vision behind the UPA
government's "landmark" legislation,
taken up in the Lok Sabha on Thursday.
The Bill would address two key issues unemployment and lack of rural infrastructure — by offering employment not as a "populist measure" or a
"dole" but as a "right" of rural masses.
The legislation and its amendments

The legislation and its amendments were piloted by Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh whose vigorous espousal set the tone of the debate. Kalyan Singh (BJP), who initiated the debate, Nitish Kumar (JD-U), D P Yadav (RJD) and Hannan Mollah (CPM) and youngsters like Jyotiraditya Scindia (Congress) were among those who spoke on Thursday. The speeches reflected a broad consensus on the Bill.

Even as Sonia commended Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's support to the Bill, her party is expected to use it to give a fillip to the slogan of "Congress ka haath, garib ke saath", give economic reforms a human face and jostle with the Left for the "pro-poor" constituency that once belonged to the Congress and Indiaga Gandhi

The PM is likely to intervene in the debate on Monday. The new law would be backed by legal and enforceable guarantee. Sonia said.

She addressed the concerns of sceptics about financing the scheme. "An economy that is growing at 7% per year can and should find tahe resources for such a crucial intervention."

The real challenge was to make the legislation work so that it impacts the lives of the rural masses. "We need to rid ourselves of the *sab chalta hai* attitude," she said. Kalyan Singh demanded extending the Bill to include the urban



Sonia Gandhi: True to her word

poor. Nitish Kumar said 100 days employment was insufficient. He demanded removal of the provision of filling up application forms as it threatened to create middlemen.

Scindia quoted Aristotle to underline the importance of the Bill brought by Sonia, the PM and the Congress to transform rural India. "It shows there is no difference in our niti and niyat, our katni and karni," he said, taking a swipe at the BJP which promised one crore jobs annually but fostered a 0.075 % negative employment growth rate and added 3 million to the category of educated unemployed.

By combining economic growth with generation of employment opportunities, the UPA will, through the NREG Bill, help bridge the gap between political and economic equality, bring the poor into the centre of the reforms agenda and take power to the grassroot level, Scindia said. The programme "will be self-targeting, self-liquidating and self-adjusting", he said, with India Awakening and not (NDA's) India Shining as its theme song.

He struck an emotional chord by recalling his father Madhavrao Scinda's words: "The country must be told that there's a plan of action and that there is light at the end of the tunnel... The weaker sections and the BPL must never be lost sight of."

গ্নকরণ গুরুত্ব হারায়

স্টাফ রিপের্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৭ অগস্ট: অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম আজ আরও এক ধাপ এগিয়ে জানিয়েছেন, সরকারের কর্মসূচি থেকে 'বিলগ্নিকরণ' আদৌ গুরুত্ব হারায়নি। লাভজনক সংস্থাগুলির শেয়ারের মালিকানা অন্য সংস্থার হাতে না-দেওয়া বা বেসরকারিকরণের ব্যাপারে সরকারের ,সিদ্ধাস্তটিও নতুন কিছু নয়। গত বছর ক্ষমতায় আসার পরে ইউ পি এ সরকার ঘোষণা করেছিল, ন্যুনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচি অনুযায়ী রাষ্ট্রীয়ত্ত সংস্থার শেয়ারের মালিকানা অন্য সংস্থার হাতে দেওয়া হবে না, যেটা করছিল এন ডি এ সরকার। এই ব্যাপারে প্রাক্তন অর্থমন্ত্রী যশোবস্ত সিংহের সঙ্গে তর্কযুদ্ধে অবতীর্ণ হতেও আপত্তি নেই চিদম্বরমের।

এমনকী. ভেলের ১০ শতাংশ শেয়ার বেচার সিদ্ধান্তটিও যে আপাতত ঝুলিয়ে রাখা হয়েছে, সেই ইঙ্গিতও তিনি দিয়েছেন। যে-বামদলগুলির আপত্তিতে ভেল নিয়ে এগোতে পারছে না সরকার, সেই বামেদের সঙ্গে এখনও সরকারের আলাপ আলোচনাও যে চলছে, তা জানিয়েছেন কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থমন্ত্রী। তাঁর কথায়, ''আমরা বিলগ্নিকরণ স্থগিত রাখছি বা নস্যাৎ করে দিচ্ছি মনে করলে ভুল হবে।"

অন্য দিকে, বণিকসভা অ্যাসোচ্যাম

১০% করে শেয়ার বেচলে কত মিলবে

(চলতি বাজার দরে)

১) ও এন জি সি	> 0,0৮8
২) এন টি পি সি	৭, ১৬১
৩) আই ও সি	8,0७২
8) সেল	২,২৮৯
৫) ভেল	১,৭৭৬
৬) গেইল	১১৩৭
৭) ন্যালকো	৯২৭
৮) পি এন বি	৭৭৩
৯) বি পি সি এল	920
১০) এইচ পি সি এল	৫২৩
১১) এম টি এন এল	869
১২) কর্পোরেশন ব্যাঙ্ক	৪৩৮
১৩) শিপিং কর্পোরেশন	৩৩৯
১৪) ই আই এল	२ऽ४
সূত্র: অ্যামোচ্যাম ইকো পালস সমীক্ষা	*কোটি টাকার

ভেল, ইঞ্জিনিয়ার্স ইন্ডিয়া, ন্যাশনাল লপ্তে সরকারের ঘরে আসবে প্রায় ৩১ অ্যালুমিনিয়াম কোম্পানি, হিন্দুস্তান হাজার কোটি টাকা। পেট্রোলিয়ামের মতো ভারত চলতি বাজার দর অনুযায়ী মাথাপিছু সম্প্রতি একটি সমীক্ষা চালিয়ে দেখেছে ১০ শতাংশ করে শেয়ার বেচলেই এক পেতেই পারে লাভজনক রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত

অ্যাসোচ্যামের সমীক্ষা অনুযায়ী, সরকারের প্রথম ১৪টি সংস্থার ক্ষেত্রে সরকার শিক্ষা-স্বাস্থ্য-পরিবার কল্যাণ খাতে ভাল মতো বরাদ্দের সুযোগ সংস্থাগুলির মাত্র ১০ শতাংশ করে শেয়ার বিলগ্নিকরণের মাধ্যমে।

যেমন, ও এন জি সি-র ১০ শতাংশ শেয়ার বেচলে সরকারের হাতে আসবে ১০, ০৮৪ কোটি টাকা। <mark>তারপরও</mark> সরকারের হাতে ওই সং**স্থার প্রায়** ৬৪ শতাংশ শেয়ারের মা**লিকানা থাকবে**। এন টি পি সি-র ক্ষেত্রে সরকারের মালিকানা রয়েছে ৮৯.৫ শতাংশ। তার ১০ শতাংশ বেচলে মিলবে ৭ হাজার ১৬১ কোটি টাকা। আই ও সি∹র ক্ষেত্রে সরকারের হাতে রয়েছে ৮২ শতাংশ শেয়ার, ১০ শতাংশ বেচলে আসবে ৪ হাজার ৬২ কোটি টাকা।

অ্যাসোচ্যামের বক্তব্য, চলতি বাজেটে শিক্ষা-স্বাস্থ্য-পরিবার কল্যাণ খাতে বরাদ্দ করেছে ১০ হাজার ২৮০ কোটি টাকা। ফলে, এক লপ্তে ৩১ হাজার কোটি টাকা আয়ের সুযোগ সরকার কাজে লাগাবে কি না, তা ভেবে দেখুন চিদম্বরম!

বা**জেটের খতিয়ান। পিটিআই**য়ের খবর: বাজেটের হিসাব-নিকাশ করতে আগামী সপ্তাহেই সংসদে 'খরচের খতিয়ান' পেশ করবেন বলে ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছেন চিদম্বরম। বিভিন্ন মন্ত্রকের পক্ষ থেকে যোজনা কমিশনের কাছে প্রকল্পগুলিতে খরচের রিপোর্ট ইতিমধ্যেই পাঠানো হয়ে গিয়েছে। ওই সমস্ত ব্যয় কতটা যুক্তিসঙ্গত হয়েছে, তারই খতিয়ান নেওয়া হবে।

There has been no proper debate in India on the welfare state

Economists don't argue

n astonishing amount has been written about the proposed employment guarantee act. But the debate over this act was often more like ships passing each other in the night than an actual debate. The Right - in the economic sense of the term - has been sceptical that the EGA might be administratively untenable, fiscally imprudent and unsustainable. The Left, for its part, has been correct in thinking that we will have to think more creatively about social guarantees to a large number of citizens for whom the undoubted benefits of wealth creation are still a distant gleam. On the other hand, the Left does not quite own up to the onerous responsibility of macro-economic prudence. So the debate is stuck between unthinking idealism and

intemperate cynicism. The debate on the EGA often has the character of a non-debate, because the issues are never joined. The Left thinks that throwing state money with good intentions is the solution to most problems. The Right on the other hand, seems to move from the plausible assumption that throwing money is not always a solution to the more dubious proposition that it is not a necessary part of a solution. The Left is enamoured of a certain kind of idealized statism, the Right of a knee-jerk cynical anti-statism. The Left argues that more spending on welfare is necessary, the Right cautions that almost all of it will go waste. The Right speaks of regulatory reform, freeing up the markets, protecting property rights, privatizing, removing labour market rigidities, balancing the budget as crucial ingredients of sound economic policy. The Left gives all of these things short shrift and argues instead for greater spending on social security, employment guarantees, welfare schemes, job security and so forth. The Right wants to remove the barriers that bind those who want to create wealth. The Left is interested in the fate of those who might not be able to. The Right wants reform of the state first; the left does not want the cause of justice to wait till the state

f course, these contrasts are stylized. In principle, few economists of the Right will deny that they are for more social welfare. They just disagree about the means and strategies that will make welfare programmes efficient and sustainable. It is often patently disingenuous of the Left to accuse

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PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

those championing the cause of trade and privatization to be antipoor. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As Burke said, those who yelp loudest on behalf of the poor do not always do the most to help them. But it has to be acknowledged that sometimes excessive attention to a particular class of issues relating to efficient markets can render some important welfare challenges invisible. It is more likely that economists on the Left will oppose some of the market discipline and regulatory sanity of their colleagues on the Right. But they have something of a point in bringing to attention the fact that India will, down the line, need not just pro-market reform but something like a genuine welfare state as well.

But an investment in technology and authentic databases would also help considerably. It is absolutely astonishing that one of the IT powerhouses of the world will not use IT to improve the quality of government service delivery. The point is that the debate can now move to constructively designing new delivery systems. But instead it has been caught in the quagmire, where half of our economists are still thinking in very traditional terms when it comes to service delivery, and the other half quite content to reiterate their critique.

Second, Left and Right have acquired material and intellectual vested interests. This allows each side to accuse the other of hypocrisy and thus ignore their argu-

Third, there is also a curious kind of self-selection in terms of intellectual interests of economists of the Left and the Right. There are very few from the Left who take things like public finance and regulation seriously as intellectual pursuits, and very few from the Right who bring their analytical talents to bear upon designing welfare systems. They can thus easily remain immune to each other's concerns. And finally, the public debate, at least, is dominated by implausible extremes. On the one hand, you have claims like those made by Surjit Bhalla, that there is very little agrarian unemployment, and on the other hand, those made by Utsa

hypocrisies.

or what it is worth, we are living in a fool's paradise if we think that we do not need a serious welfare state. A properly run EGA could be one element in the construction of such a state. I happen to think that the scheme is not a bad idea with two caveats. First, we should invest in capacity-building for monitoring; and second, I am not entirely convinced that we should set the wages at minimum wage for such a scheme. But there can be a proper debate about designing the

Patnaik that there is very little

poverty reduction. In the public de-

bate, such polemical positions sim-

ply crowd out the space for cons-

tructive engagement.

'are content to expose each other's

details of the scheme. But the larger point is that I am not convinced why the Left and the Right have to always talk past each other. Why cannot we have disinvestment and increased social spending? Why can't we have greater labour-market flexibility and more social protection for labour? Does macro-economic prudence necessarily require giving up welfare ambitions? Can tough thinking on incentives and governance be reconciled with a more robust sense of justice? Can there not be a grand social contract where we free up every obstacle to the creation of wealth, but with mechanisms in place to better the condition of the least well-off substantially? Why can't the Left give up on untenable subsidies and the Right its implacable hostility to a measure of welfare?

The Left often speaks a language of idealism without responsibility, the Right invokes the discipline of responsibility without due consideration to justice. If they took each other's concerns seriously, we could have a genuine argument. Otherwise much of what passes as debate is theoretical posturing, an elaboration of self-confirming assumptions that do little to address concrete problems.

MOW YOUR MISSION

also revealed much about the economics profession in India. For one thing, there are very few economists who seem to be willing to dirty their hands with what one might call mid-range design of social service delivery systems. We all agree that the state is a corrupt and leaky bucket. But what is astonishing is how little effort goes in to designing better monitoring and invstems for state r mes. Admittedly, a very complex cluster of vested interests stands in the way of a real reform of the state.

This problem could be addressed in substantial measure if we had better monitoring systems. The right to information is one component of such a monitoring system.

But we are using these vested inter-

ests as too much of an alibi to even

try. Take, for example, the one

thorny issue in the implementation

of EGA, the problem of fake muster

The debate over the EGA has

Does macroeconomic prudence necessarily require giving up welfare ambitions?

ment. Organized labour is part of s political constituency. It therefore sacrifices future job creation by excessively protecting the present incumbents of the organized sector. The Right, on the other hand, is so focussed on its target audience, capitalists, that it feels the existential burdens of many in the rest of society far less. Even if one were an ardent supporter of promarket reform, it would be foolish to shut one's eyes to the enormous social challenges occasioned by our economic success that will require state intervention. But both sides

E finds 'defects' in sale of PSUs

NDA's claim on strategic sale of Yashwant Sinha, finance minister Mr P Chidambaram today disputed NEW DELHI, Aug. 17. — Cross-PSUs, saying it can never be a preing swords with his predecessor Mr ferred route for disinvestment.

TS;

77

icy, as strategic sale raises more ess, reserve price and post closure "UPA has rejected this NDA polquestions than it answers," he said, pointing to a number of defects in valuation of assets, bidding procadjustment claims.

whether disinvestment was done He countered the claims of Mr Sinha that strategic sale of PSUs ensured a higher Price-Earning Ratio (P/E) of their shares, saying there was no difference in the ratio through book-build public offers or the previous practice of strategic

Mr Chidambaram also took cudgels against Mr Sinha for accus-

ing UPA of derailing reforms, and growth and all economic fundasaid they are meant to accelerate mentals indicate that the Manmohan Singh government had precisely achieved it.

with regard to abandoning strategic sale or retaining at least 51 per cent government stake in PSU banks, as He also said the government had these objectives have been clearly laid down in the National Common not made any new announcement Minimum Programme.

Elaborating on the defects of the by taking into account only the productive assets and excluded unprostrategic sale route, he cited Balco privatisation and said it had raised questions on the valuation of assets ductive assets.

155 crore.

Criticising the media for "waking up all of a sudden" on the decision PSU banks, he said: "We had given up strategic sale as early as February" reflecting the NCMP manto abandon strategic sale as well as retaining government control in

He also pointed to loopholes in the NDA policy of going through strategic sale even when there was truly transparent and open, as it There were number of instances phates disinvestment, he said the single bidding and said it was not was the case in the sale of two howhen banks have been "arm twisted" to fund the bidders of PSUs, he of India, the government will have post closure adjustment claims Referring to a Supreme Court In the case of Paradip Phoswere more than the bid price of Rs if the money (to set up a PSU) had come from the Consolidated Fund to retain 51 per cent stake in the judgement, Mr Chidambaram said

means government holding will not In case of banks, he said "PSU banks will remain PSU and it go below 51 per cent."



13 PSUs OFF DIVESTMENT LIST

Stake sale shelved

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 16. — Against the backdrop of a raging controversy over the decision to disinvest 10 per cent stake in Bhel, the government today called off strategic sale of stakes in 13 other profit-making PSUs, such as HPCL, Nalco, Shipping Corporation and National Fertilisers.

"In keeping with the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) guidelines, it has been decided to call off the process of disinvestment through strategic sale of 13 profit-making PSUs," the Union minister of state for finance, Mr SS Palanimanickam, said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha.

The move overturns the NDA government's decision to put up 18 PSUs for strategic sale.

Later, finance minister Mr P Chidambaram said strategic sale of stakes in PSUs wasn't the "right option". "We don't think that strategic sale is a transparent method... I believe that strategic sale is no longer the proper approach to adopt. It raises more questions and is not the preferred route," he said dismissing a suggestion that the decision was taken under pressure from the Left.

Mr Chidambaram said

Unions rap PM

KOLKATA, Aug. 16. — The major Left trade unions today denounced as "one-sided" the Prime Minister's statement that workers had a responsibility to cooperate with the management to ensure profitability and said his speech made no mention of retrenchments and other antilabour policies. — SNS

that rather than strategic sale, the government was considering the public offer route to sell minority stakes in PSUs. "This is what is being discussed," he said, adding the government would also consider residual stake sale on a case-to-case basis.

The companies that have been taken off the divestment list include National Aluminum Company Ltd, Shipping Corporation of India, National Fertilizers Ltd, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd and Engineers India Ltd. Balmer Lawrie, Hindustan Paper Corporation, State Trading Corporation, National Building Construction Corporation, Engineering Projects India Ltd, Sponge Iron India Ltd, Manganese Ore India Ltd and Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers are the others which won't be privatised.

The Centre's decision has, predictably, enthused the Left parties.

তেলের দাম বাড়ছেই, মন্ত্রীর যুক্তি মানতে নারাজ বামেরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১১ অগস্ট: পেটোল-ডিজেলের দার বাড়ছেই। আজ সংসদে মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ারের বক্তব্যে এই ইঙ্গিত স্পষ্ট। তবে পেটোলিয়াম মন্ত্রী আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন যে, দাম বাড়ালেও শরিকসমর্থকদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করেই সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে সরকার। বামেরা অবশ্য মনে করছে, বরং করের বোঝা কমিয়ে গ্রাহকের উপর চাপ কমাক সরকার।

আজ সংসদে আইয়ার পরিষ্কার জানিয়েছেন যে পরিস্থিতি যা দাঁড়িয়েছে, তাতে আই ও সি. এইচ পি সি এল বা বি পি সি এলের মতো তেল বিপণন সংস্থাগুলি 'রুগ্ণ' হয়ে পড়তে পারে। তিনি বলেন, "সরকারের আয় প্রায় চার হাজার কোটি টাকা ধাকা খেয়েছে। বিশ্ব বাজারে তেলের দামের অনুপাতে আমাদের তেল বিপণন সংস্থাগুলির ঘাটতি গত বছর ছিল ২০ হাজার ২০ কোটি টাকা। সেটা এ বছর বেড়ে দাঁড়াবে ৪০ হাজার কোটি টাকা। এ বার গ্রাহকদের কিছুটা দায় করতেই হবে। না হলে (তল সংস্থাগুলিই রুগণ হয়ে পড়বে।"

এ দিকে, পশ্চিম এশিয়ায় জঙ্গি হানার আশন্ধা এবং মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র ও ইরানের মধ্যে সম্পর্কের অবনতির জেরে পেট্রোপণ্যের আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে অনিশ্চয়তা দেখা দিয়েছে। সৌদি আরবে জঙ্গি হানার আশক্ষায় সে দেশে দৃতাবাসগুলি সাময়িক ভাবে বন্ধ রেখেছে মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র। এই সব কিছুর ধাক্কায় আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে তেলের দাম বেড়ে ব্যারেল প্রতি ৬৫ ডলারে দাঁডিয়েছে।

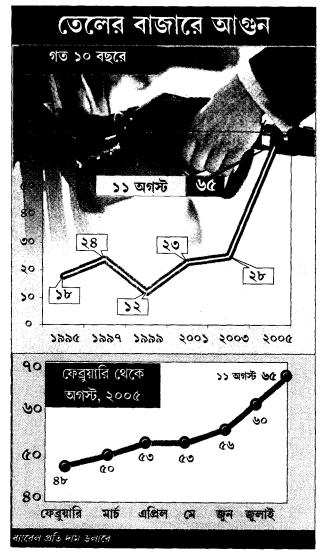
সি পি এম সাংসদ তথা পেউলিয়ম বিষয়ক সংসদীয় স্থায়ী কমিটির সদস্য দীপঙ্কর মুখোপাধ্যায়ের মতে, আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে তেলের দাম বাড়ার বিষয়টি অগ্রাহ্য করে যায় না। আবার, তা সত্ত্বেও গ্রাহকদের উপর দায় চাপানোর 'যুক্তি' তিনি মানেন না। বরং, সরকার চাইলেই চলতি পরিস্থিতেও গ্রাহকদের কিছুটা স্বস্তি মিলতেই পারে, এমন কথা মনে করেন দীপঙ্করবারু। কারণ, দেশের বাজারে উৎপাদন শুল্কের হার কমিয়েই দাম কম রাখা সম্ভব বলে মনে করছেন সি পি এম সাংসদ।

তিনি বলেন, "পেটলের খুচরো মূল্যের ক্ষেত্রে করের হার প্রায় ৫৭ শতাংশ, ডিজেলে ৩৫ শতাংশ। আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে যাই দাম হোক না কেন, ধরলাম দাম বাড়ল, করের অঙ্কটা অন্তত যা আছে, তাই থাকুক। তা যেন আর না বাড়ে। দ্বিতীয়ত, তেল শিল্পের উন্নয়নে সংগৃহীত সেস বাবদ প্রায় ৫৪০০ কোটি টাকা সরকারের হাতে ি । রয়েছে, যেটা তেলশিল্পের উন্নয়ন বাদে অন্য খাতেই ব্যয় হয়।"

অন্য দিকে সরকারের যুক্তি,
আন্তর্জাতিক ক্ষেত্রে নানা রাজনৈতিক
টানাপোড়েনও তেলের বাজারে আগুনে
ঘি ঢেলেছে। যেমন, ওপেকের দিতীয়
বৃহত্তম উৎপাদক সদস্য ইরানের সঙ্গে
মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সম্পর্কের 'অবনতি'
আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে পরিস্থিতি
ঘোরালো করে তুলেছে। ইরান তার

পরিবর্তন দরকীর, কারণ এক বছরের উপর এই হারে পরিবর্তন হয়নি।

লভন থেকে এ এফ পি-র খবর।
বিশ্ব বাজারে অশোধিত তেল সরবরাহে
অনিশ্চয়তার জেরে ব্যারেল প্রতি দর
আজ লেনদেন শুরু হওয়ার পরে
ব্যারেলে ৬৫ ডলার ছাড়িয়ে যায়। তবে
দিনের শেষে তা কিছুটা কমে যায় বলে
বাজারের সূত্র থেকে জানা গিয়েছে। এই
দিন নিউ ইয়র্কের বাজারে লাইট স্যুইট



পারমাণবিক কর্মসূচি এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার ব্যাপারে 'জেদ' ধরায় সঙ্কট দেখা দিয়েছে।

মণিশঙ্কর মনে করেন, অভ্যন্তরীণ বাজারে দামের উপর রাশ টেনে ধরার জন্য রাজ্যগুলির তরফে সহায়তা দরকার। তাঁর মতে, বিক্রয়করের হারে ভারসাম্য আনা দরকার। এটি অবশ্য রাজ্য তালিকাভূক্ত। বিক্রয়করের হারে

কুডের দাম সর্বোচ্চ ৬৫.৩০ ডলারে পৌছে যায়। ১৯৮৩ সালে প্রথম লেনদেন শুরু হওয়ার পর থেকে এটাই লাইট সাুইট কুডের সর্বোচ্চ দর। পরে তা কমে হয় ৬৪.৯০ ডলার। লন্ডনে ব্রেন্টের দাম পৌছে যায় ব্যারেলে ৬৫.৬৬ ডলারে। ১৯৮৮ সালে বিক্রির সূচনা হওয়ার পর এই প্রথম ব্রেন্টও ৬৫ ডলার ছাড়াল।

BHEL divestment on hold

HT Corporate Bureau New Delhi, August 5

THE GOVERNMENT has put the disinvestment of BHEL and residual shareholding of Maruti Udyog on hold as some of the UPA constituents have raised objections to it. The disinvestment of navratna PSUs will be taken up only after arriving at a consensus on the issue.

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"The disinvestment of BHEL has been put on hold. I cannot tell you the time-frame for the issue to be resolved. The reason is that some parties have objected to the sale of government's stake in the company. We will look into all the objections to the sale. We do not want to steamroll our way," said Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Minister Santosh Mohan Dev.

On the issue of disinvestment of navratna PSUs, he said that it was under discussion, and meetings would be held with the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and Sonia Gandhi on the issue.

The government holds 67.72 per cent stake in BHEL. A Cabinet decision was taken earlier to offload 10 per cent through

Reliance offers discounts

RELIANCE INDUSTRIES has offered trade discounts to all refining and marketing companies. "Reliance has offered trade discounts. We expect Rs. 1,500 crore discount from all standalone companies," said Indian Oil Corporation chairman Sarthak Behuria on the sidelines of a directors' certification programme on corporate governance organised by Standing Conference on Public Enterprises. Of the total Rs 1,500 crore discount, IOC is likely to get Rs 700 to Rs 800 crore, he said. IOC is also negotiating discounts on LPG and kerosene it buys from Reliance to minimise losses due to price freeze. IOC's borrowings are also likely to increase from Rs. 19,000 crore due to the cash losses.

an initial public offer. The government's stake in Maruti is a tad over 18 per cent. The minister said that this issue was not in his pocket.

The proposal of Heavy Industries Min-

istry to sell its stake in Tide Water Oil will be put before the Board for Reconstruction of Public Sector Enterprises (BRPSE) when the case for revival for the holding company Andrew Yule is taken up. Earlier, the government had indicated that it wanted to sell the entire 27 per cent stake in Tide Water Oil.

The Finance Ministry has agreed to look into the demands of the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises for more funds to revive the sick PSUs whose cases have been recommended by the BRPSE.

"Yesterday, I had discussions with Finance Minister P. Chidambaram and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia. They have assured to look into the demand," said Mohan Dev.

So far, the government had written off large sums of money of PSUs which the BRPSE had recommended for revival, he added

In many cases (of revival), the Finance Ministry has recommended that the funds needed for the purpose be raised from the sale of assets of companies themselves.

O 6 AUG SOME THE HIDUSTAN TIME

No decision on BHEL sale: Chidambaram

"Monetising shares at appropriate time and price is good economics".

Special Correspondent (10) mum Programme, Finance ed on domestic stock exchanges The Government decided that Lillings.

Special Correspondent

NEW DELNI: The Centre told the Lok Sabha on Tuesday that it was considering the objections from workers and others to the proposed disinvestment in Bhaand emphasised that "no further decision has been taken in the rat Heavy Electricals Limited

disagreed with suggestions that which would gain by getting listprofitable and unlisted CPSEs, Access to capital ernment's shareholding in profit-making Central Public Sector taining majority ownership control is within the guidelines "The minority sale of the gov-Enterprises (CPSE) while realong with full management of the National Common Mini-

There were a number of large,

ed on domestic stock exchanges through an initial public offer of a small proportion of the government's shareholding. Listing on the exchanges would enable the CPSEs to access the capital markets for their capital investment requirements. in response to a calling attention Party of India leaders Gurudas Minister P. Chidambaram said motion tabled by Communist Dasgupta and P. Sudhakar Red-Mr. Chidambaram empha-

There were also a number of listed, profitable CPSEs in which the public shareholding was very limited. Enlarging it provided an also provided greater liquidity for trading in the shares. Emty for investment through reservation of part of the offered opportunity to investors. This ployees would get an opportunisised that monetising part of the government holding at an appropriate time and appropriate

price was good economics. He

the move was "bad economics."

vestment Fund, which would the disinvestment proceeds be have a permanent corpus. It proposed that the Fund be profesfecting the corpus. The income channelled into the National Inwould be used to finance select social sector schemes and meet sionally managed to provide sustainable returns without afthe capital investment requireble CPSEs, Mr. Chidambaram ments of profitable and reviva-

Dividend payout

asked why the Government was Referring to BHEL, Mr. Reddy

shares for subscription by them.

en eggs. The proceeds from disinvestment of 10 per cent shares 2,000 crores while the company The Government decided that killing a goose that laid the goldwere expected to be around Rs. was giving dividends worth Rs.

the dividend was a return at par Mr. Chidambaram said while value of the shares, the mone-tising value would be several times higher, and both the Government and the people could 500 crores a year. benefit from it.

rears than in the previous years. creased the tax-GDP ratio in the

Gurgaon incident will not impact FDI inflows: MNC survey 40 1

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: An overwhelming 80 per cent of the CEOs of the multinational companies, polled by the ASSOCHAM Business Barometer (ABB), say that the Gurgaon incident involving labour clashes at the Honda facility will not have any impact on the confidence of foreign investors in India.

Most of them including a vast majority from the Japanese firms based in India responded to the ABB poll saying that Gurgaon-like incidents are not peculiar to India and such skirmishes can happen anywhere in the world including the most advanced industrial economies and that they do happen.

As many as 73 per cent of the 150 CEOs said the incident was blown out of proportion and was given extra mileage.

The overexposure to the scuffle between the police and the labour in the Delhi suburb could have damaged the country's image as an investment destination mechanism in place, as demonbut for the Government's intervention at the highest level, they said. "The unfortunate Gurgaon incident was an isolated case and cannot be seen as a pattern as is clear from the informed perception of the MNCs including those from Japan, some of whom have been operating in India for the past 50 years," said ASSOCHAM president Mahendra K. Sanghi.

Although over 50 per cent of the corporate heads believed that India has its institutional strated in the past six decades, at times events overtake the system. They underlined the need for strengthening the mechanism at the operational level.

"The institutional mechanism to tackle Gurgaon-like situations has been more on paper than showing the real impact at the operational level." This was the common refrain in the nationwide ABB poll that was conducted three days after the unpleasant incident.

Centre & CPM go slow on Bhe

CORRESPONDENT

re today told Parliament it hasn't taken any decision on divestment in Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (Bhel), opposed was virtually bailed out by the New Delhi, July 29: The Cen-CPM from embarrassment on by the Left and trade unions. Hours later, the government

calling attention motion.

the issue at the hands of the CPI.
"Letters have been reand others opposing divestment in Bhel," finance minisceived from workers' unions ter P. Chidambaram had told in the morning

The BJP joined in the din The Centre had in May by demanding that "tainted decided to sell 10 per cent of ministers", including RJD its equity holding of 67.72 clief Laloo Prasad Yaday, quit per cent in the state-run enginter would not be advisable. demolition case. sion has been taken in the Later, a CPM move helped defeat CPI member Gurudas sideration. No further deci-

do not want a discussion on the sale, sniffing a conspiracy and following Chidam- to ultimately sell off the Left sources said the CPM bram's statement. tleir posts. Centre on the issue during a Dasgupta's plan to corner the

navratna.

The CPM feels that both Eime Minister Manmohan Sngh and Sonia Gandhi approiate the Left's problems Ath the divestment move, and tat the Centre is trying to find way out of the standoff. Dasgupta never got a chance to speak as the House was adjourned three times with the CPM joining hands with the Rashtriya Janata Dal The two parties were demanding the resignation of leader of the Opposition L.K.

(RJD) to create bedlam.

te issue now and forcing sme reaction from the minis-The party felt discussing

Advani, who has been charge-sheeted in the Babri Masjid

government has decided "to list currently unlisted, profitable PSUs, each with a net worth of more than Rs 200 crore, and sell minority shareholding of the government in listed profitable PSUs". eering giant through an open offer. The Left opposed

The Telegraph had reported that the Centre has circulated a note that of some 100 profitable PSUs, "only 28 are currently listed. It is ... in the public interest if all large profitable PSUs are listed, at least The government had reserved about 1.5 per cent — or 15 per cent of the offer — for Bhel employees, hoping this the unions. But they joined the would be an attractive sop for

did not specifically say the plan will cover navratnas, he did not say it will not. on the domestic stock ex-Though Palanimanickam changes."

junior

minister, S.S. Palanimanickam, told Parliament that the

Left in opposing the sale. Chidambaram's

THE TLLEGRAPH 2905

CPI(M) seeks CBI probe into Centaur hotel sale to the anjoy Guha who Mr. dd this, they asked, adding that Batra and the HCI. Is it true that

"Undeniable links" between Ranjan Bhattacharya and A.L. Batra

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party why there were lapses in the sale of Mumbai's Hotel Airport Centaur and Hotel Juhu, who were day wanted the CBI to find out of India (Marxist) on Wednesthe people behind it and who the Ranjan Bhattacharya, a close relbeneficiaries were and whether ative of the former Prime Minis-

ter, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had vestment Minister, Arun Shoulinks with A.L. Batra, who rie's role "was that of the role insofar as diverting all ataries of the sale and resale of this hotel. Our attempt is to rie's role "was that of the mythical Shikhandi of the Mabring into the public domain the real culprits." habharata. He still retains this tention from the real beneficibought and then re-sold Airport The CPI(M)'s Deputy Leader in the Rajya Sabha, Dipankar resale of Airport Centaur. They Mukherjee, said at a press conference here that they had questions pertaining to the sale and

Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan and journalist Par-

alleged that their enquiries showed that the former Disin-

of India (HCI) and Mr. Batra that did not bar the re-sale or have a lock-in period.
"We want the CBI and the Mukherjee said were part of an this could be done because there between the Hotel Corporation was a loophole in sale agreement independent, three-member panel that went into the case also addressed the press conference. CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat, who was also

independent,

Bhattacharya, whether he made Ranjan a call to a senior HCI official on April 18, 2002 to seek details of Government to ask Mr. Vajthe sale agreement between Mr. payee's son-in-law, Mr. Mukherjee said that Mr. Batra bought Airport Centaur Rs. 115 crores within four months. "How could Mr. Batra present, said he was only a "facil-itator." for Rs. 83 crores and resold it for

the phone over to him," they asked. They alleged that there were "undeniable links" between Mr. Bhattacharya and one Sanjiv Tyagi, a business associate of Mr. Bhattacharya made the call and then handed

No, says Bhattacharya

Mr. Bhattacharya refuted the

has his facts wrong. I do have a relation with Carlson Hotels of the U.S. I am in a joint venture He said that "Prakash Karat Suites, which is different from which is the Country Inns and chain. My venture has nothing to do with Radisson. charges made against him, say-

ing Mr. Karat had his facts "wrong."

"I have nothing to do with the disinvestments in Centaur hotel," he told PTI.

ইরান পাইপলাইনে আমেরিকার আপত্তি নেই, দাবি আইয়ারের,

নয়াদিল্লি ওয়াশিংটন, ২৬ জুলাই: পাকিস্তান হয়ে ইরান-ভারত গ্যাস পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পে আমেরিকা নয়াদিল্লির কাছে কোনও আপত্তি জানায়নি বলে সাফ জানিয়ে দিল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। আজ পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার লোকসভায় এক লিখিত জবাবে বলেন, "মার্কিন কর্তৃপক্ষ পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পের প্রসঙ্গ আদৌ সরকারি ভাবে তোলেননি।" অন্য দিকে, মার্কিন বিদেশ দফতরের এক অফিসার আজ ভারতের পাইপলাইন প্রকল্প নিয়ে নতুন করে আশঙ্কা জানিয়েছেন। বিদেশ দফতরের আভার সেক্রেটারি আন্টেনি ওয়েন বলেন, "ভারত ইরানের মতো একটি দেশ থেকে জ্বালানি নিতে আগ্রহী। এই দেশের নীতি বিশ্বের স্থিতিশীলতার পক্ষে ক্ষতিকারক।" সুদান থেকে জ্বালানি কিনতে চিনের প্রস্তাবিত প্রকল্পকেও তিনি একই কারণে সমালোচনা করেন।

আইয়ার অবশ্য বলেন, মার্কিন বিদেশ সচিব কন্ডোলিজা রাইস এর আগে জানিয়েছিলেন প্রস্তাবিত ওই পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পে ইরান ও ভারতের মধ্যে সহযোগিতার বিষয়টিকে কেন্দ্র করে তাঁরা উদ্বিগ্ন। কিন্তু পরে মার্কিন অফিসারেরা প্রকাশ্যেই জানান, ভারতে জ্বালানির প্রয়োজনীয়তার বিষয়টি তাঁরা উপলব্ধি করতে পারছেন। এ ব্যাপারে তাঁরা 'গঠনমূলক' দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিই নিতে চেয়েছেন।

পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পে আপত্তির প্রসঙ্গটি ওঠে মূলত ইরানের পরমাণু কর্মসূচি নিয়ে তার বিরুদ্ধে ১৯৯৬ সালে জারি করা আমেরিকার আর্থিক নিষেধাজ্ঞাকে কেন্দ্র করে। আইন অনুসারে, যে-রাষ্ট্র ইরানের তেল ক্ষেত্রে ৪ কোটি ডলারের বেশি লগ্নি করবে, তাদের বিরুদ্ধেও নিষেধাজ্ঞা জারি করবে আমেরিকা।

এ দিকে, ইরান-পাকিস্তান-ভারত গ্যাস পাইপলাইন নিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের মধ্যে কোনও মতবিরোধ নেই বলেও জানিয়েছেন আইয়ার। ওয়াশিংটনে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেছিলেন, পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পে ঝুঁকি আছে। এ ক্ষেত্রে মনমোহন এবং আইয়ারের মনোভাবে যথেষ্ট ফারাক বলেই সংশ্লিষ্ট মহলের অনুমান ছিল। -পিটিআই, এ পি

Left mum on Bhel in House

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 25: The Left may have cried hoarse against Bhel disinvestment, but in Parliament it will not raise a murmur of protest.

The Left leaders, who are opposed to the government's decision to divest 10 per cent of Bhel shares, are in a bind—the conflict has lingered but carrying it to Parliament would give the BJP leverage.

The monsoon session of Parliament began on a note of camaraderie with Congress ministers Pranab Mukherjee and Ghulam Nabi Azad working out a floor strategy with senior Left MPs to keep the BJP at bay.

"The Left will oppose us aggressively but will also support us to the hilt," said Union parliamentary affairs minister Ghulam Nabi Azad.

On Bhel, the CPM's Rajya Sabha leader Nilotpal Basu said: "We have articulated our concern on the issue to the highest leadership of the UPA. We expect an amicable settlement."

The BJP's strategy to mount an offensive on the UPA government has restrained the Left. The main Opposition party has tabled an adjournment motion for a discussion on the government's failure to check infiltration from Bangladesh. It also plans to bring an adjournment motion against Prime Minister Man-

mohan Singh for "praising" British colonial rule in his speech at Oxford University.

Basu said the Left parties would support the government on the floor of the House and there was no question of their siding with the Opposition party to corner either the government or the Prime minister.

Bhel, however, seems to have put the Left on the backfoot. The CPM did not expect the row to spill over to the monsoon session and had hoped the government would backtrack on the divestment before that. But the UPA stuck to its stand and so did the Left. Several meetings between the Prime Minister, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Left

leaders took place, but none yielded results.

Basu could not say how long it would take to resolve the crisis but indicated that it might be a long haul. "We do not believe in deadlines," the MP said.

Senior Congress ministers said the Left parties are with the government and there is no threat as long as they stick to their political line to keep the UPA government in office so that the BJP does not gain ground.

For the Left, therefore, there will be two strategies when it comes to the UPA. Outside Parliament, it will make its opinions known loud and clear, but once inside, the differences will dissipate.

স্বশাসিত 'নবরত্ন' নিজেদের ভবিষ্যৎ সম্পর্কে সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে

– বাদল অধিবেশনে বাম-ঝড় রুখতে ২৫ জুলাই– প্রথমদিনই লাভজনক রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত সরকার সংস্থাগুলিকে কাজের স্বাধীনতা দিল। পরিচালনা, বিনিয়োগ ও বিভিন্ন বিদেশি কোম্পানির সঙ্গে যৌথ উদ্যোগ বা য়ে কোনও সম্পর্ক স্থাপনের ক্ষেত্রে স্বাধীম সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে পারবে 'নবরত্ব' ও 'মিনিরত্ন' নামে চিহ্নিত রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত শিল্প প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলি। আজ কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভা ছাড়পত্র দেওয়ার পর ভারী শিল্পমন্ত্রী সম্ভোষমোহন দেব এ কথা জানান। এর পাশাপাশি তথ্য সম্প্রচারমন্ত্রী জয়পাল রেডিড ঘোষণা করেন মন্ত্রিসভার সিদ্ধান্ত। সম্ভোষমোহন উদ্যোগভবনে তাঁর মন্ত্রকে বসে বলেন, সরকার জাতীয় ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি অনুযায়ী কাজ করছে। এ কথা আমাদের অভিন্ন কর্মসূচিতেই ছিল। বামপদ্বীরা স্বাভাবিকভাবেই এই কর্মসূচির

দেবারুণ রায়, অর্পিতা চৌধুরি ● দিল্লি

সঙ্গে একমত। অভিন্ন কর্মসূচির আরও ব্যাপক রূপায়ণের পথে রাষ্ট্রায়ন্ত শিল্পের মধ্যে লাভজনক প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলিকে আরও বেশি স্বশাসন দেওয়া হবে অর্জুন সেনগুপ্ত কমিটির রিপোর্ট কার্যকর হলে। এ কথা জানিয়ে সম্ভোষমোহন বলেন, সেনগুপ্ত

ভেল'-বিতর্ক এড়াল কেন্দ্র

কমিটির রিপোর্ট নিয়ে এখন সমস্ত মন্ত্রকের মতামত চাওয়া হয়েছে। এ ছাড়া আজ মন্ত্রিসভা কর্মসংস্থান ভিত্তিক দুটি বড় প্রকল্প মঞ্জুর করেছে। যাতে লাখো কর্মসংস্থান সৃষ্টি হবে সারা দেশে। বিশ্বমানের অটোমোটিভ টেস্টিং কেন্দ্র গড়ে তোলা হচ্ছে দেশের

বিভিন্ন প্রান্তে। প্রথম পর্যায়ে তিনটি 'অটোমোটিভ হাবস' দিয়ে শুরু হবে। এর জন্য মোট ১৭১৮ কোটি টাকা বরাদ্দ। কেন্দ্রগুলি গড়ে উঠবে ৬টি জায়গায়। শিলচরের ঢোলছড়ায়, রায়বেরিলি, পুনে, আহমেদনগর, চেনাই ও হরিয়ানার মানেসরে। যানবাছনের ওপর বেস প্লেক্কে ডোলা ৫১০ কোটি টাকা থেকে আসবে প্রথম পর্যায়ের টাকা। এই টেস্টিং কেন্দ্রগুলি গড়ে উঠলে দেশে

প্রাস্ফং কেন্দ্রন্তাল গড়ে ভারতা দেশে

পথাদুর্ঘটনা অনেক কমবে বলে সরকারের
আশা। এ ছাড়া সারা দেশে 'টেক্সটাইল পার্ক'
বা বস্ত্রশিল্প উদ্যান গড়ে তোলা হবে ২৫টি। প্রত্যেক
পার্কে ৫০টি করে বস্ত্রশিল্প ইউনিট থাকবে। ফলে
মোট ১২৫০টি অত্যাধুনিক বস্ত্রশিল্প কারখানা গড়ে
উঠবে। এতে নতুন কর্মসংস্থান হবে অস্তত ৫ লাখ

এবপর ৬ পাতায়

🎺 নবরত্ন' সিদ্ধান্ত নের্বে

১ পাতার পর OCE স্থাতার পর লাকের। আজ কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার অর্থনীতি বিষয়ক কমিটিতে এই প্রকল্পটি গৃহীত হওয়ার পর প্রাথমিক ঘোষণা করেন অর্থমন্ত্রী চিদম্বরম। পরিকাঠামো ক্ষেত্রে অন্যদিকে সরকারকে বেসরকারি ক্ষেত্রের সঙ্গে এক ধরনের যৌথ উদ্যোগের যাওয়ার ছাডপত্র দিয়েছে সি সি ই এ। এই প্রকল্পটি পরিচালনা করবে অর্থমন্ত্রক। এজন্যও বার্ষিক যোজনায় বছর বছর ধার্য হবে বাজেট বরাদ্দ। অভিন কর্মসচিতে পরিকাঠামোয় জোর দেওয়ার ফল বলা হয়েছিল। সেই অনুযায়ীই সরকারের এই সিদ্ধাস্ত। বলা হয়েছে সড়ক, জাতীয় সড়ক, वन्मत, विमृा९, दिल, जल সরবরাহ, প্রয়ঃ প্রণালীর দৃষণ প্রতিরোধ ব্যবস্থা এবং শৌচাগার ইত্যাদিতে প্রয়োজনে বেসরকারি সাহায্যও নেওয়া যাবে। এ বিষয়ে ভর্তুকি যা কিছু দেওয়ার তা দেওয়া হবে বাজেটেরই মাধ্যমে। তবে সরকার এ ব্যাপারে যথেষ্ট সতর্ক থাকবে। রাকেশ মোহন কমিটি পরিকাঠামোখাতে ৭৫০০ বিলিয়ন টাকার বিনিয়োগ দরকার বলে রিপোর্ট দেয়। এই বিপুল বিনিয়োগের অঙ্ক দেখেই বেসরকারি পুঁজিকে সরকার কাজে লাগাতে চায়। উল্লেখ্য, ক্ষেত্র বিশেষে এ নিয়েও বামপদ্বীদের সঙ্গে বিরোধ বাধার সম্ভাবনা। ভারী শিল্প দপ্তরের মন্ত্রী সম্বোষমোহন দেব এদিন বলেন, রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত শিল্প বাঁচিয়ে রাখা আর তার শ্রীবৃদ্ধি করাই আমার মন্ত্রকের কাজ। শেয়ার বিক্রি আমাদের দায়িত্বের মধ্যেই নেই। বিক্রির কাজ চিদম্বরমের। 'ভেল'-এর ক্ষেত্রেও তাই। কী হবে তা উনিই জানেন।

এদিকে 'ভেল' বিলগ্নীকরণের ইস্যুতে কট্রর মনোভাব দেখালেও সংসদের ভেতরে এ নিয়ে আলাদা করে কোনও প্রস্তাব আনতে চান না বাম সাংসদরা। বাদল অধিবেশনের প্রথম দিনেই এ বিষয়ে নিজেদের অবস্থান স্পষ্ট করে দিয়ে বাম দলগুলি বুঝিয়েছে, ইউ পি এ সরকারের সিদ্ধান্তের বিরোধিতা করতে গিয়ে পরোক্ষে এন ডি এ-কে সবিধে করে দিতে রাজি নয় তারা। উল্লেখ্য, 'ভেল' বিলগ্নির বিরুদ্ধে সরব হওয়ার সিদ্ধান্তের কথা ইতিমধ্যেই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন এন ডি এ আহায়ক জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজ। এই পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে বিষয়টি নিয়ে সংসদের ভেতর বামেরা যদি কোনও প্রস্তাব নেয়, তা হলে অন্তত ভেল ইস্যতে কেন্দ্রের বিরুদ্ধে বাম-বি জে পি-কে

वुक्रमूदत कथा विलद्धि रहा। वरे অম্বস্তিকর পরিস্থিতি এড়াতে বামেরা চায় সরকারের সঙ্গে বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ আলোচনার মাধ্যমে সমস্যার সমাধান করতে। সি পি এমের সংসদীয় দলের নেতা বাসুদেব আচারিয়া ও নীলোৎপল বসু যুক্তি দেখিয়েছেন, ভেলের শেয়ার বিক্রির সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে বামেদের বক্তব্য ইতিমধ্যেই জানানো হয়েছে ইউ পি এ-র সর্বোচ্চ নেতৃত্বকে। আমাদের আশা, বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ মীমাংসা হবে বিষয়টির— বলেছেন দই সাংসদ। এবং এক্ষেত্রে কোনও চূড়ান্ত সময়সীমা আরোপ করা হচ্ছে না বলেও জানিয়েছেন তাঁরা। সি পি এমের বক্তব্য : বিলগ্নি নিয়ে বিরোধিতা সত্ত্বেও সরকার যদি পুরনো অবস্থানই বহাল রাখে, তখন প্রতিক্রিয়া জানানো হবে। তার আগে নয়। আর অভিন্ন ন্যুনতম কর্মসূচি মানা হলে তো কোনও সমস্যাই থাকবে না। বাম সূত্রের খবর, বিলগ্নি-বিতর্ক মেটাতে ইউ পি এ চেয়ারপার্সন সোনিয়া গান্ধী নিজেই হস্তক্ষেপ করবেন। সেক্ষেত্রে, ভেল-এ বিলগ্নির সিদ্ধান্তটি নিয়ে হয় আর কোনও উচ্চবাচ্যই করা হবে না, অথবা আগের সিদ্ধাস্ত বাতিল করে নতন প্রস্তাব ক্যাবিনেট বৈঠকে অনুমোদিত হবে। পাশাপাশি এই ইস্যুতে এন ডি এ-র ভূমিকা নিয়ে বাম নেতাদের কটাক্ষ : যারা একসময় রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত সংস্থা বিক্রির বিলগ্নীকরণ মন্ত্রক তৈরি করেছিল, তাদের মুখে এই বিরোধিতা মানায় না।

জওহর ভবন: মৌলানা আজাদ রোড ও জনপথের মোড়ে জওহর ভবন নামে বিদেশমন্ত্রকের সদর দপ্তর গড়ে তোলা হচ্ছে। মন্ত্রিসভার সিদ্ধান্ত। এতে ১৭২ কোটি ৭৫ লক্ষ টাকা খরচ ধার্য হয়েছে। বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের সমস্ত বিভাগ উঠে আসবে এই বাডিতে।

LOOK AAJKAL

Left criticises Posco deal

Orissa Government decision to allow export of iron ore opposed

Special Correspondent Correspondent

BHUBANESWAR: The movement against the proposed steel plant of the Korean steel major, Pohang Steel Company (Posco) at Paradip gathered momentum on Sunday with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India opposing the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the company and Orissa Govern-

Addressing a convention on 'Our Mineral Resources and Posco Deal' here, CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat and the CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan criticised the deal in which the Orissa Government promised a series of concessions to the Korean company. Opposing the State Government's decision to allow the company to export iron ore, they called for a nationwide campaign against the venture.

"Review mineral policy"

Mr. Karat said the controversy surrounding the Posco deal was not an issue concerning Orissa alone. "The issue should be discussed with a national perspective as it relates to the excampaign against venture

Country's mineral policy is faulty as it allows loot of our mineral wealth:

ploitation of our exhaustible mineral resources," he said.

Stating that his party was against 100 per cent foreign direct investment in exploration and exploitation of various minerals, including iron ore, and 74 per cent FDI in exploration of precious stones, Mr. Karat said there should be enough checks and balances to protect the interests of the country and those who would be displaced by mining and industrialisation. We are not against FDI in the mining sector. But the country's mineral policy is faulty as it allows loot of our mineral wealth by foreign companies. Unless we challenge the country's mineral policy, we cannot fight the Posco deal," Mr. Karat said.

Blaming the United Progressive Alliance Government and Planning Commission for pushing the Posco project through,

ernments at the Centre had tried to minimise the role of the States with regard to exploitation of mineral resources.

He criticised the Orissa Government for going ahead with industrialisation without having in place a mining policy or a policy for rehabilitation and resettlement. Observing that the tribal people were paying the price for industrialisation, Mr. Karat said no project should be allowed to come up before the completion of the rehabilitation and resettlement of the affected

'MoU faulty

Similar views were expressed by Mr. Bardhan who termed the Posco MoU "faulty." "The project should be opposed both in the mining area as well as at Paradip where thousands of people will be displaced and their livelihood would be affected," he said. The MoU was silent on the issue of rehabilitation and resettlement, he said.

Criticising the State Government for promising all help to Posco, Mr. Bardhan said that Posco should not be given mining lease where it will take away iron ore by just paying rovaltv.

Discussion needed

Eminent economist Prabhat Patnaik said deals such as the one signed with Posco should be converted into agreements only after they were passed by the legislatures of different State Governments. "We cannot allow a handful of bureaucrats to take decisions on matters relating to utilisation of mineral resources. We must guard against plundering of the mineral wealth and ensure proper utilisation of the same," he said.

Prof. Patnaik stressed the need for detailed discussion on the timeframe within which the mineral resources of a particular State should be exploited. "Orissa has to decide whether to exhaust the mineral resources within 25 years, 30 years or 50 years," he said. He said the present form of industrialisation would "leave Orissa a pauperised State." "A small bunch of people in the cities benefit from such industrialisation," he said while stressing the need for protection of the interests of the tribal and marginalised people who would be affected.

ONGC signs MoUs with Mittal to acquire global oil giants

PRESS Trust of India New Delhi, July 23 Mr "

OIL & Natural Gas Corporation and steel tycoon L.N. Mittal on Saturday joined hands for acquisition of oil and gas companies abroad, with Canadabased PetroKazakhstan their first target.

Two joint venture companies floated on Saturday by ONGC and Mittal Group will target oil and gas opportunities in Central Asian countries and Africa, with the state-owned firm aiming to capitalise on the steel giant's 'goodwill' in countries like Kazakhstan to bag mega deals like PetroKazakhstan

The joining of the two titans is a preparation for Indian bids for global oil giants like Unocal, petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar said at the ceremony to sign two memoranda of understanding (MoUs).

ONGC, India's largest oil producer, will hold a 49.98 per cent stake in both the joint venture companies while Mittal, who till now was focused only on the global steel business, will have 48.02 per cent equity. The remaining two per cent will be with ICICI.

ONGC Mittal Energy Ltd, a joint venture between ONGC Videsh Ltd - the overseas arm of ONGC - and Mittal Investments SARL, would focus on acquisition of oil and gas firms and exploration business.

The other company, ONGC Mittal Energy Services Ltd, will look at related businesses like refining, petrochemicals, pipelines, LNG, shipping and energy trading.

and energy trading.
"Our business is in oil-dominating countries and governments there have



Minister for petroleum and natural gas Mani Shankar Aiyar (standing left) looks on as ONGC chairman and managing director Subir Raha (seated left) and Mittal Group chairman and chief executive officer Lakshmi N. Mittal sign two memoranda of understanding.

been telling us to get into oil business," said L.N. Mittal, chairman and CEO of Mittal Group, which has a presence in 14 countries worldwide. The deal capitalises on ONGC's domain knowledge in oil and gas and Mittal Group's expertise in global business.

Mittal said out of the 14 countries where his group has business interests, six or seven have oil and gas opportunities. "We are basically focusing on Central Asia and Africa," he added.

The target countries include Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Angola, Trinidad and Tobago and Malaysia.

ONGC chairman and managing director Subir Raha said the joint ventures are for "securing energy security of India through global resources."

Aiyar complimented Mittal's global strides and said he has found an able match in "visionary" Raha who "thinks out of the box and who is willing to reach for the stars."

"This is a partnership of strong and confident (companies) to increase their strength exponentially," he said.



Iran-India pipeline project not to be abandoned: Aiyar ()

India's enormous energy requirement cannot be met without Iran gas

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Close on the heels of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh voicing concern over the security risks involved in the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, Minister for Petroleum Mani Shankar Aiyar said on Saturday that the country's deal with the U.S. on nuclear energy was not a "quid pro quo" for abandoning the \$ 7.4-billion pipeline project.

New Delhi will continue negotiations with Islamabad and Teheran on the gas pipeline to achieve a project structure, Mr. Aiyar announced while speaking during the signing ceremony of the MoUs (memoranda of understanding) between the stateowned oil major, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and the L.N. Mittal Group, the world's largest steel producer, to set up two joint venture (JV) companies in a unique public-private partnership.

Asked if India had agreed to ground the pipeline project for import of Iranian natural gas so as to obtain nuclear fuel and technology from the U.S. for power generation, Mr. Aiyar quipped: "I don't think there is any connection between the two."

The Prime Minister, during his U.S. visit earlier this week, had stated in Washington that the pipeline project was "fraught with risks" and expressed doubts as to whether any international bankers' consortium would be ready to underwrite the project.

Mr. Aiyar said:

"The Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project is fraught with terrible risks. In my view, it is going to be extremely difficult to put together a financial consortium to finance the project and run [it] as a world-class project.



STEELY RESOLVE: Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Mani Shankar Aiyar welcoming Chairman and CEO of Mittal Group L. N. Mittal at his office in New Delhi on Saturday. - PHOTO: KAMAL NARANG

But (India's) enormous energy requirement cannot be met without accessing gas in Iran." Earlier, ONGC's overseas arm, ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), inked an MoU with Luxembourg-based Mittal Investment SARL for setting up a JV called ONGC-Mittal Energy Ltd. The JV, in

which the two partners are to share 98 per cent equity in the proportion of 51:49 with the balance two per cent stake going to financial institutions, is to be engaged in the exploration of oil and gas as well as acquisition of hydrocarbon assets and companies abroad

Under another MoU between ONGC and Mittal Investment under the same shareholding pattern, a second JV called ONGC-Mittal Energy Services Ltd. is to be involved in trading and shipping of oil and gas, including LNG, sourced from the other JV company.

Left ire against hunder PM in the pipeline

DEEPAK Razdan

New Delhi, July 22

AFTER DISAPPROVING the Indo-US pacts signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's trip to Washington, the Left parties on Friday felt that the country's commitment to the gas pipeline project with Pakistan and Iran was somewhat "diluted".

Meeting two days before Parliament's monsoon session begins, the Left has expressed concern over the Prime Minister's statement to an American newspaper on the pipeline project. Its leaders, who met under the chairmanship of the CPI(M)'s Harkishen Singh Surject, took exception to Manmohan Singh's comment that the project was "fraught with difficulties" and that no international consortium was ready to underwrite the project. This statement was "unfortunate", the Left parties said, when it was known the US was opposed to the project and was threatening Pakistan with sanctions if it dared to go ahead.

The Left parties considered the

project "an acid test" of the UPA government's commitment to an independent policy serving national interests. Left leaders demanded that the PM should clarifications of the control of the c fy his stand on the matter.

L? F THE MOUSTANTING

A farewell to the gas pipeline? A farewell to the 21st century. It would be folly to

give up the energy bird in hand for two in the Bush

Siddharth Varadarajan

USINESSMEN AND economists projects do not usually advertise that fact when they are in the market for a loan. Which is why it was surprising to see Prime Minister Manmohan Singh being so candid in an interview to the Washington Post on Wednesday on the bankability of the who have misgivings about the creditworthiness of one of their proposed gas pipeline from Iran.

gy. He then added: "But I am realistic the situation there in Iran, I don't know if any international consortium of bankers enough to realise that there are many risks, because considering all the uncertainties of Asked about India's discussions with Iran on the pipeline, the Prime Minister said India desperately needed new sources of enerwould probably underwrite this."

not, Dr. Singh's last sentence is likely to knock the stuffing out of the ambitious project's financial prospects. What the Prime a good reason not to touch the project, which is vital to India's energy security in Whether he deliberately meant to do so or bankers - who were not exactly queuing up anyway because of the fear of U.S. sanctions Minister has done is to give international

tion of Mohammed Ahmadinejad as Presihas linked the riskiness of the project to "the This is, presumably, a reference to the elec-In what is another first in the Indian discourse on the pipeline, the Prime Minister

dent of Iran earlier this month. Or, more precisely, to the negative reaction in Washington to the Iranian electorate's choice of a man the U.S. says is a "hardliner."

Shift in India's stand?

that the Bush administration is extracting a Post certainly suggest a major shift in the ington on Thursday that a decision on the role to play, his remarks to the Washington Taken together with Monday's deal on nuclear energy with the United States, the Prime Minister's new-found scepticism on the Iran pipeline will heighten the suspicion very heavy price from India in exchange for recognising it as a state with "advanced nuclear technology." Though Dr. Singh told reporters prior to his departure from Washpipeline belonged to India, Iran and Pakistan alone and that "outside parties" had no indian position is already under way.

sit rights, safety and security — will be recycled in order to justify walking away from a pendent on Pakistan, paying transit fees to the Musharraf regime, wanting reverse tran-Now that the grand energy 'bargain' has been struck in Washington, one can safely predict that the tone and tenor of discussions about the pipeline within the "strategic community" in India will shift from qualified support to outright hostility. All the old arguments — about becoming de-

In proposing an "energy dialogue" with India when she was in New Delhi in March,

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was project drew a spirited public rebuttal from work for Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's call for the U.S. to declare with America's strategic agenda in Asia. On ise of an agreement on the nuclear front. If the new U.S.-India defence framework took New Delhi up to the door, the key to its unlocking lay in the safeguards and test ban concessions India made. What is left now is the implementation. And India has been told in no uncertain terms that if Congress is to legislate the changes President Bush has the first to explicitly link U.S. flexibility on Her advice that India abandon the Iranian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh but a lot has changed since then. For one, the unexpected election of Mr. Ahmadinejad work its sums, as have the recent attempts the nuclear question to the Iran pipeline. has forced the Bush administration to reby China to speak of a new security framewhen its troops will leave Central Asia. For another, the Manmohan Singh government itself showed a new willingness to engage Monday, Washington delivered on its promdential waiver but chose not to - the pipeline deal with Iran must not go through

ular natural gas - will have to play as a Those who argue that this condition is an acceptable price to pay do not realise the crucial role hydrocarbons — and in particNuclear energy today provides barely four per cent of India's energy needs. If the Bush

entists in the Department of Atomic Energy mises the Indian side will have to make. nuclear power will generate, at best, some 20 per cent of our energy needs by 2030. Where is the remaining 80 per cent going to come could potentially get a boost in the shortmitments, the Indian nuclear energy sector term, though many former and serving scihave grave reservations about the compro-Even with the most optimistic predictions

Piped gas from Iran is a low-cost source ed by gas imports from Myanmar, Qatar, and Central Asia. Importing gas in liquefied form there are a number of financial and political solutions available, including the involvement of China as the end-point of the Security of transit through Pakistan but but even this would need to be supplementis an option but the costs are much higher

India's medium-term energy security, it is also the key which will help us unlock the potential of a pan-Asian energy grid involvposition to the pipeline is not just because of its antipathy to the Islamic regime that is in knows the involvement of Iran in this kind of these years to dominate the transit routes of - or discouraging potential investors from The Iranian project is not only vital for ing Central Asia and China as well. U.S. oppower there. It is because Washington project will undo the efforts it has made all Asian energy. Losing interest in the project getting involved - is the last thing India should be doing.

আধুনিকীকরণে র্রাজি

বস্ত্র মন্ত্রকের নীতি নস্যাৎ করে দিয়ে চটকল-মালিকেরা দ্ব্যর্থহীন ভাবে জানিয়ে দিলেন, চটকল আধুনিকীরণের পথে তাঁরা যাবেন না। চটকল-মালিকদের বক্তব্য, বর্তমানে দেশের ৭৩টি চটকলে প্রায় সাড়ে তিন লক্ষ শ্রমিকের আনুমানিক ৫৫০ কোটি টাকা বকেয়া রয়েছে। সেই বকেয়া মেটাতে গেলে আধুনিকীকরণ সম্ভব নয়। অর্থাৎ চটকল-মালিকেরা নিজেদের তহবিল টাকা থেকে খরচ করে আধুনিকীকরণের পথে যাবেন না। তাঁরা পরোক্ষে বলতে চান, এই কাজে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারকেই টাকা দিতে হবে।

সরকারি পরিসংখ্যান বলছে, আধুনিকীকরণের নামে গত ১০ বছরে আনুমানিক ৩৫০ কোটি টাকা খরচ হয়ে গিয়েছে। অথচ কোনও চটকলেই

আধুনিকীকরণ হয়নি।

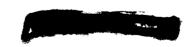
একটি অর্থ লগ্নিকারী সংস্থার মাধামে ওই টাকা চটকলগুলির মধ্যে ভাগ করে দেওয়া হয়। এখন আবার আধুনিকীকরণের ধুয়ো তুলে চটকল-মালিকেরা কেন্দ্রের উপর নতুন ভাবে চাপ সৃষ্টি করতে চাইছেন। বর্তমানে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের ৫৯টি চটকলের মধ্যে ৩৯টিই রুগ্ণ। ১০টি বরাবরের জন্য বন্ধ হয়ে গিয়েছে।

আধুনিকীকরণের জন্য কিছু দিন থেকেই চটকল-মালিকদের উপরে চাপ সৃষ্টি করছিল কেন্দ্রীয় বস্তু মন্ত্রক। মন্ত্রকের পক্ষ থেকে জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়, যে-সব চটকল আধুনিকীকরণের পথে যাবে না, তাদের কেন্দ্রীয় বরাত দেওয়া বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হবে। প্রয়োজন হলে কেন্দ্র অভিযুক্ত চটকলের একটি কালো তালিকাও তৈরি করবে। সেই তালিকার ভিত্তিতেই চটকলগুলিকে কেন্দ্রীয় বরাত বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হবে। প্রতি বছর খরিফ ও রবি মরসুমে ভারতের বিভিন্ন সমবায় সংস্থা কেন্দ্রীয় বন্ধ এবং কৃষি মন্ত্রকের মাধ্যমে পশ্চিমবঞ্চের

নির্মাল্য মুখোপাধ্যায় তাকিব গুলিকে প্রায় পাঁচ হাজার কোটি
টাকার বস্তা সকলনকে ক্রি টাকার বস্তা সরবরাহের বরাত দেয়। বৰ্তমান নীতিতে যে-সব চটকল আধুনিকীকরণের পথে যাবে না, তাদের সেই বরাত দেওয়া হবে না।

চটকল-মালিকদের শীর্ষ সংগঠন ইন্ডিয়ান জুট মিলস অ্যাসোসিয়েশন (ইজমা)-এর পক্ষ থেকে বিশ দফা যুক্তি তুলে ধরে আধুনিকীকরণের কেন্দ্রীয় প্রচেষ্টার সরাসরি বিরোধিতা করা হয়েছে। বলা হয়েছে, চটকলে উদ্বত্ত শ্রমিক কমিয়ে আনার সুযোগ বা কর্মী ছাঁটাইয়ের অধিকার না-দিলে আধনিকীকরণের কাজ করা যাবে না। ইজমা-র বক্তব্য: বর্তমানে চটকলের শ্রমিক-সংখ্যার ৪০-৪৫ শতাংশই উদ্বত্ত। যেখানে বাংলাদেশ, পাকিস্তান এবং চিনের চটকলে এক টন পাটজাত দ্রব্য উৎপাদন করতে ২৫ জন শ্রমিক লাগে। সেখানে ভারতের যে-কোনও চটকলে লাগে প্রায় ৫৫ থেকে ৬৫ জন। সরকারি চটকলে শ্রমিকের ওই হার ৮৫। দেড়শো-দু'শো বছরের পরনো যন্ত্রে এখনও কাজ হচ্ছে বলেই উৎপাদনের হার এত কম বলে সমীক্ষায় জেনেছে বস্ত্র মন্ত্রক।

আধুনিকীকরণের শ্রমিকদের বকেয়া মিটিয়ে দেওয়ার জন্যও চটকল-মালিকদের উপরে চাপ তৈরি করেছে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। বলা হয়েছে, যে-সব মালিক শ্রমিকদের বিধিবদ্ধ বকেয়া ১০ লক্ষ টাকার উপরে বাকি রেখেছেন, তাঁরা কেন্দ্রীয় সাহায্য পাবেন না। পশ্চিমবঙ্গের ৫৯টি চটকলে শ্রমিকদের বিধিবদ্ধ বকেয়া আনুমানিক ৫৫০ কোটি টাকা। তার মধ্যে কেবল প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডেই বকেয়া প্রায় ২৫০ কোটি টাকা। শ্রমিকদের এই ন্যায্য পাওনা মিটিয়ে দেওয়ার জন্য কেন্দ্র ও রাজ্য সরকার উভয়েই চেষ্টা চালিয়েছে। কিন্তু এখনও তাতে ফল হয়নি। সম্প্রতি কয়েকটি চটকল শ্রমিকদের বর্তমান প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড জমা দিতে শুরু করেছে। তবে বকেয়া রয়েছে আগের মতোই।



Gas pipeline project: India and Pakistan move ahead

To appoint financial consultants so as to enter into a framework agreement by Dec.

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: India and Pakistan have moved a step towards making the long-awaited Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project a reality. The two countries decided to appoint financial consultants with the aim of entering into a bilateral framework agreement by December this year.

A two-day meeting of a joint working group concluded on Wednesday with both sides looking forward to starting work on the project in 2006, with the gas supplies expected to begin from 2010.

According to Pakistan's Petroleum Secretary Ahmad Waqar, India has also agreed to participate in other transnational gas pipeline projects in the region such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) and Gulf-South Asia projects. India has been invited to attend the next meeting of TAP's steering committee.

Releasing the joint statement after the talks, he said the project was essential for "sustain-

able and affordable energy" to meet the needs of the two countries' high economic growth rates. While it was considered too early for discussions on the price of gas, the two sides agreed on the crucial importance of appointing financial advisory consortia to advise on project structure and related technical, financial, commercial and legal matters.

Framework agreement

It was also agreed that once basic issues pertaining to the project had been satisfactorily resolved between the three countries concerned — Iran, Pakistan and India — they would enter into a "Framework Agreement." In this regard, it was agreed that the Indian side would submit a draft text to the Pakistan side before the next meeting of the JWG, scheduled for August in Islamabad.

Both countries agreed there were common interests in regard to technical aspects such as size and specifications of the pipeline, quality of gas, quantum of gas required by both

India agrees to participate in other transnational gas pipeline projects

sides and the build period. The joint statement also said that technical experts of both countries would meet soon to harmonise the position to achieve a project of international standards.

The consultants, who are expected to be appointed by mid-September, will submit their reports by November-end. The bilateral talks on these issues are expected to pave the way for a trilateral agreement involving Iran as well, according to Petroleum Secretary S.C. Tripathi, who led the Indian delegation at the JWG.

Safety standards

Mr. Waqar said the aim was to complete the project by 2010 as Pakistan was projected to become a gas deficit country by then. Pakistan would initially be importing 10 million standard cubic meters per day raising it to 60 mmscmd over the next five years. India was considering importing 60 mmscmd initially and increasing the quantity to 90 mmscmd over a three-year span. However, the framework agreement would address all concerns of safety of pipeline and safe delivery of gas.

The joint statement said the two sides would initiate the process of joining the Energy Charter, initially with observer status. In the various inter-governmental agreements entered into by them, the provisions of the charter, which governs operations of such pipelines globally, would be referred to.

On the price of gas, Mr. Waqar said it would depend on the well-head cost of the gas, transportation cost and the transit fee, which would be based on international standards. He stressed that the project was in the interest of the "progress and prosperity of our people." The project was feasible even without India joining it, though the economics would improve with the larger country joining it.

15 JUL 2004

IRAN PIPELINE Affordability of gas is the main concern, to appoint financial consultants

Pakistan,

India play pipeline tune

ENŠECONOMIC BUREAU NEW DELHI, JULY 13

AKISTAN sent out a strong signal that it is keen to ensure that the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project does not remain a pipedream.

After the two-day meeting of the Joint Working Group, India and Pakstan agreed that 'affordability would be their key concern' while discussing gas price with Tehran. The two were unanimous on security and safety of the pipeline but left its aspect and the route for their next meeting in the last week of August.

Pakistan Oil Secretary Ahmed Waqar said as Pak-

istan will start experiencing strortage of gas by 2010, it wants to ensure that 'proposed' pipeline takes off much be fore that. 'ADB has stated that an Iran-Pakistan pipeline is feasible, but the economics improve if India joins," he added,

As a major step towards fructifying the \$4.16 billion pitzeline project, both countries have decided to appoint financial consultants by September 15.

Iran and Pakistan with India suggesting that the pipeline pass through thickly populated areas to avoid sabotage. ENS

Indian petroleum secretary S.C. Tripathi said the two sides hardbroad agreement on composition of gas, technical standards and techno-economic considerations that will make the project cost-effective for

VEW DELHI: Higher steel prices may push up the cost of the Iran-Paking prooff much istan-India pipeline to more than \$7 billion, about 75 per cent more than the previous estimate of \$4.16 billion. According to the latest estimate presented to the Indo-Pak joint working group, the cost of laying 2100-km of pipeline from Assaluyah Port in Iran to the Indian border (Barmer district in Rajasthan), may be \$7.42 billion to be spent over the construction period of five years. The cost has gone up on account of higher cost of acquisition of land for laying the pipeline in

both the countries.

While India expects its demand to be 50 million standard cubic metres per day (MSCMD) crossing to 90 MSCMD three years later, Pakistan put its initial requirement in 2010 at 10 MSCMD, touching 60 MSCMD five years thereafter.

Asked about US reservaMations on the project Waqar trav
said, "Our President and agre
Prime Minister have stated on two
number of occasions that we to g
would take a decision on what
2000
our public interest would de-

The two sides will appoint separate consultants who be-

sides suggesting the project sumer price structure would also do a prefeasibility study of the 2,600 Both want kilometre long pipeline project to be built by 2009-10, transportation sources said. India is expected national leve to play a major role in drafting able' rate of the tripartite agreement when Iran has both et comes in to play.

The consultants will submit their report by November end when Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyer will travel to Pakistan for inking an agreement on the project. The two countries want the project to get off the ground by early 2006.

Pakistan termed its affordability as \$3.50 per MBtu for power and 50 cents per MBtu for fertiliser. India said its con-

sumer price for both sectors was a uniform \$2 per MBtu. Both want the price to be at wellhead price with pipeline transportation charge at international level with a 'reasonable' rate of return.

able rate of return.

Iran has been talking of gas
price being closer to LNG
prices which are in the range
of \$3.5-\$4.0 per MBtu.

On transit fees, which India will have to pay Pakistan for use of its territory, the indications were that it would be between 10-20 cents per MBtu, translating to about \$150 mil-

lion per annum.

The proposed pipeline, which has been hanging fire for over a decade now, appears to be moving forward.

dia, Pakistan get pipeline consultant

HT Corporate Bureau New Delhi, July 13 IN A major breakthrough towards fructifying \$ 4.16 billion Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, both India and Pakistan on Wednesday decided to appoint that they want the project to get off the Both sides have categorically said financial consultants by September 15.

ground by early 2006. And this is despite opposition by the US administration to The long awaited project has seen many twists and turns, but with both India and Pakistan realising the ecoto expedite the process. Pakistan in India dealing with Iran on this subject. nomic spin-offs, they have come togeth-

province of Baluchistan. At the end of the two-day meeting of able and affordable energy for both the ment of high economic growth rate". He said the JWG has laid down a framework for further negotiations on the istan oil secretary Ahmed Waqar said, "This project is essential for sustaincountries and for meeting the requirethe joint working group (JWG), Pak

■ Iran, Pakistan, India will enter into a 'framework agreement'

■ Next step: Appointment of respective financial advisory con-

sortiums

■ JWG discussed proposed pipeline

The progress

routes and delivery point

Indian petroleum secretary S.C. Tripathi said the two sides had a broad nical standards and techno-economic agreement on composition of gas, tech-

project cost-effective for both the countries. Ahmed Wagar said Pakistan was looking at importing 10 million stanconsiderations that would make the

day over the next five years. India on the other hand, will begin with 60 MMS CMD of gas and increase imports to 90 MMS CMD in three years time. to 60 million standard cubic metre per

Asked about US reservations on the project, Waqar said, "Our President and Prime Minister have stated on a number of occasions that we would take a decision on what our public interest would demand

The two sides will appoint separate consultants who besides suggesting the feasibility study of the 2,600 km long pipeline project to be built by 2009-10, project structure would also do a pre-

vember end when petroleum minister istan for inking an agreement on the ants will submit their report by No-Mani Shankar Aiyer will travel to Pakgovernment sources said. The consult

project, said sources.
The consultants would also suggest commercial, legal, contractual modalidecided at the two-day joint working group meeting, which ended on ties and the way the project should be financed, sources said adding this was Wednesday

The JWG would meet again in August to thrash out issues of safety and security of the pipeline before the summit between Aiyar and his counter part in Pakistar

THE HIDUSTAN TIMES

ৰ্জাতীয় স্বার্থে প্রকল্প এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাবে পাকিস্তান

্রিগ্যাস পাইপলাইনে রাজি ঐ করাতে ঢাকা যাচ্ছেন আইয়ার

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্ল, ১২ জুলাই: গ্যাস পাইপলাইন নিয়ে ঢাকাকে রাজি করানোর 'শেষ চেষ্টা' করতে চলতি মাসেই সে দেশে যাচ্ছেন পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার। এ নিয়ে দীর্ঘ টালবাহানার পরে নয়াদিল্লি মনস্থির করেছে, এর পরেও ঢাকা উৎসাহ না দেখালে তাদের বাদ দিয়ে সরাসরি মায়ানমার থেকেই গ্যাস আনা হবে। তবে সরাসরি গ্যাস আনা খরচসাপেক্ষ হওয়ায় ঢাকাকে রাজি করানোর আপ্রাণ চেষ্টা করবেন মণিশঙ্কর। পাশাপাশি, ইরানভারত গ্যাস পাইপলাইন নির্মাণের সময়সীমা স্থির করতে আজ বৈঠকে বসেছিল দু'দেশের যৌথ কর্মী গোষ্ঠী। পাকিস্তান বৈঠকে জানিয়ে দিয়েছে, তাদের জাতীয় স্বার্থের দিকে তাকিয়েই প্রকল্পটি রূপায়ণের ব্যাপারে তারা এগিয়ে যাবে। তবে আমেরিকা এই প্রকল্প থেকে সরে আসার জন্য পাকিস্তানের উপর কতটা চাপ দিছে, সে প্রসঙ্গ অবশ্য এই দিন এডিয়ে যান পাকিস্তানের প্রতিনিধিরা।

সম্প্রতি মায়ানমারের পেট্রোলিয়াম ও বিদ্যুৎমন্ত্রী ব্রিগেডিয়ার জেনারেল লুন থি-র সঙ্গে মণিশঙ্করের সবিস্তার আলোচনা হয়েছে। মায়ানমারের মন্ত্রীকে জানানো হয়, গ্যাস

পাইপলাইন নিয়ে ঢাকার সঙ্গে শীঘ্রই কথা বলা হবে। মাসের শেষে মণিশঙ্কর বিষয়টির চূড়ান্ত রূপ দিতে ইয়াঙ্গন যাবেন।

পাকিস্তান জাতীয় স্বার্থে প্রকল্প রূপায়ণ করতে চাইলেও অপর পাইপলাইন প্রকল্প নিয়ে ঢাকার টালবাহানায় দিল্লি ক্ষুব্র। কেন্দ্রের অভিযোগ, পূর্বশর্ত এনে বিষয়টিকে বিশ বাঁও জলে ঠেলে দিচ্ছে ঢাকা। ভারত জানিয়েছে, উৎসাহ না-দেখালে ঢাকাকে বাদ দিয়ে মায়ানমার থেকে গ্যাস তরল করে (এলএনজি) জাহাজে আনা হবে। তবে তা ব্যয়বহুল।

ঢাকা জানিয়েছে, পাইপলাইন আনার বিনিময়ে তাদের জন্য নেপাল-ভূটান-ব্রিপুরা দিয়ে 'পাওয়ার ট্রানজিট করিডর' করে দিতে হবে। অর্থাৎ, নেপাল ও ভূটানের জলবিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্র থেকে এত দিন দিল্লি যে সস্তায় বিদ্যুৎ কিনে এসেছে, এ বার তার ভাগ দিতে হবে ঢাকাকে। ঢাকার দ্বিতীয় দাবি, এই রুটেই তাদের জন্য বাণিজ্য-করিডর করা হোক। কিন্তু শর্তসাপেক্ষে গ্যাস আনতে ঘোরতর আপত্তি দিল্লির। কূটনৈতিক কারণে বাংলাদেশকে ওই সুবিধা দিতে চায় না দিল্লি। তাই আর্থিক সুবিধার কথা বলে, শর্ত ছাড়াই ঢাকাকে রাজি করাতে আপ্রাণ চেষ্টা করবেন মণিশঙ্কর। Statesman News of With the union petroleum tary, Mr SB Tripathi, had categorica minister, Mr Mani Shankar made a detailed presentation of cour

Mr Waqar said a range of and candid manner," he told reporters, adding that they had reached some issues was discussed, including technical, comlegal. "All sets of issues were discussed in an open the issues. "Principles have been laid down," he said. and understanding on most of financial mercial,

dollar pipeline project.
"Progress has been made and a way ahead is being detailed," he said. tion on the multi-billion

Mr Aiyar had met his Pakistani counterpart, Mr Amanullah Khan Jadoon, in Islamabad last month and the Iranian minister, Mr Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, where they agreed to take forward the pipeline project, in the face of American protests. The Prime Minister, Dr

Manmohan Singh, had categorically said no outside country beyond the three nations involved in the project had any influ-

ence over the project.

The visiting senior
Pakistani official also said that they would proceed with the project, "as it is in our national interest".

The discussions were held to fix a framework for supply of Iranian gas to Pakistan and India by 2009-10. include timelines and milestones to ensure the the project, which will

Aiyar before going into talks of the Indo-Pak Joint Working Group.
At the end of the day, India and Pakistan today began their two-day talks

gas pipeline.
The Pakistani petroleum n secretary, Mr Ahmed l Waqar, said "good progress" had been made on the first day of talks. A oint statement will be released tomorrow at the seven-member end of discussions.

on finalising a timetable for constructing the trilateral Iran-Pakistan-India

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ভেল নিয়ে বাম-সনিয়া বৈঠক শেষ 'সৌহার্দ্যপূর্ণ' সমাধানের কথা

জুলাই: ভেল-এর বিলগ্নিকরণ নিয়ে হবে' এই একটি বিষয়েই আজ সনিষা গাঁধীর সঙ্গে বামপন্থীদের ঐকমত্য হল। কিন্তু দু'পক্ষেরই মর্যাদা রক্ষার মতো সৌহার্দ্যের সূত্রটি স্পষ্ট হল না।

আজ পর্যন্ত যা পরিস্থিতি, তাতে এই ঐকমত্য রক্ষা করতে হলে কিন্তু সরকারকে ভেল-এর বিলগ্নিকরণ থেকে পিছিয়ে যেতে হবে। কারণ নবরত্ব সংস্থা সম্পর্কে ন্যুনতম কর্মসূচি সরকারকে মেনে চলতে হবে, এটাই হচ্ছে বামেদের একমাত্র বক্তব্য। এর অর্থ, সরকারকে প্রকাশ্যে জানাতে হবে যে, তারা ভেল-এর দশ শতাংশ শেয়ার বিলগ্নিকরণের সিদ্ধান্ত থেকে সরে এল। আজকের বৈঠকে কিন্তু ইউ পি এ-র চেয়ারপার্সন সনিয়া নিজে এ বিষয়ে কোনও স্পষ্ট প্রতিশ্রুতি দেননি। কারণ কংগ্রেস সত্র অনুযায়ী, সরকারের মর্যাদা রক্ষিত না-হলে তা 'সৌহার্দ্যপূর্ণ' সমাধান হতে পারে না।

তা হলে কি প্রকাশ্যে কিছু না-বলে ভেল-এর বিলগ্নিকরণ স্থগিত রাখা

প্রকাশ কারাটের ঘনিষ্ঠদের বক্তব্য, বিতর্ক 'সৌহার্দ্যপূর্ণ ভাবে মেটানো সরকার প্রকাশ্যে না-জানালে তাঁদের সমন্বয় কমিটিতে ফিরে যাওয়ার প্রশ্নই উঠবে না। সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে এর আগে দু'টি প্রস্তাব বামেদের দেওয়া হয়েছিল। এক, দশের পরিবর্তে ভেল-এর পাঁচ শতাংশ বিলগ্নিকরণ করা যেতে পারে এবং দুই, এর পরে আর কোনও নবরত্বের বিলগ্নিকরণ হবে না বলে প্রতিশ্রুতি দেওয়া যেতে পারে। দ্বিতীয় প্রস্তাবে কাজ হবে না বঝে আজ সনিয়ার রাজনৈতিক সচিব আহমেদ পটেল শেষ পর্যন্ত পাঁচ শতাংশের প্রস্তাবটিই বামেদের সামনে রাখেন। প্রকাশ কারাট এবং এ বি বর্ধন সঙ্গে সঙ্গে তা খারিজ করে দেন।

এর পরে সনিয়াকে বাম নেতারা জানান, বিলগ্নিকরণ চলবে না— এটাই তাঁদের একমাত্র বক্তব্য। সনিয়া তখন বলেন, তিনি প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে কথা বলে সমস্যা সমাধানের চেষ্টা করবেন।

কিন্তু তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ ঘটনাটা ঘটে তার পরে। বাইরে বেরিয়ে তাঁরা কী বলবেন, বামেরা তার খসড়া সনিয়াকে জানিয়ে

দেন। তাতে বলা বাক্যে লেখা হবে যে, বিষয়টির সমাধান হয়ে যাবে বলে বাম নেতারা আশাবাদী। কিন্তু আহমেদ পটেল তার সঙ্গে সৌহার্দ্যপূর্ণ শব্দটি যোগ করতে অনুরোধ করেন। এ থেকেই বাম নেতাদের একাংশ এই সিদ্ধান্তে পৌঁছেছেন যে, ভেল-এর বিলগ্নিকরণ বন্ধ হয়ে যাচ্ছে। অন্য দিকে কংগ্ৰেস সূত্রের বক্তব্য, সরকারের মান-মর্যাদা রক্ষা হবে না, এমন কোনও সমাধান কিন্তু 'সৌহার্দ্যপূর্ণ' হতে পারে না।

পটেল বলেন, "বিষয়টির দ্রুত সৌহার্দ্যপূর্ণ সমাধান হবে বলে আশা করছি।" আর সদর দফতরে ফিরে কারাট বলেন, "নবরত্ন সংস্থা সম্পর্কে ন্যুনতম কর্মসূচিতে যা লেখা আছে, তা সরকার যাতে মেনে চলে, তার জন্য আমরা সনিয়া গাঁধীকে হস্তক্ষেপ করতে অনুরোধ করেছি। সমাধান হবে বলে আমরা আশাবাদী।"

কারাট আজ রাতে চিন যাচ্ছেন। তিনি ফেরার আগেই প্রধানমন্ত্রী মার্কিন সফরে যাবেন। ফলে, সমাধান কবে হবে, সেটা আন্দাজ করা যাচ্ছে না।

Left sticks to its stand on Bhel divestment

Our Political Bureau VV

N what holds ominous portends for the Manmohan Singh government's disinvestment plans, the Left on Saturday decided to stick to their "no-divestment-of-navaratnashares" stand. A day before their meeting with UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, the Left Parties reiterated that the divestment of 10% Bhel shares was a violation of the Common Minimum Programme, and that there could be no compromise on the issue.

The Left, which sees Bhel disinvestment proposal as a question of "policy and principle", is not prepared for any dilution in its stand against divesting shares of navratna companies. At a meeting to discuss the issue, top Left leaders decided to adhere to the position taken in their recent letter to Ms Gandhi in which it said that it was not for the government to sell shares of the navratna companies and appropriate those proceeds.

With the Left-affiliated trade unions taking a strong stand against the Bhel issue, the Left



Parties may find it even more difficult to renege from their stand. In what is seen as a hardening of position, the central and state trade unions, in fact, on Saturday announced the decision to hold a country-wide strike on September 29, while formulating a 16-point demand in a resolution which also sought an end to the disinvestment of profit-making PSUs. The Left leaders took note of this at the meeting.

In a bid to step up pressure against the divesting navratna shares, the Left Parties are also likely to remind the government of reservations expressed within the government from senior ministers like Mani Shankar Aiy-

er and Ram Vilas Paswan. As of now the Left has thrown the ball in the government's court with no formal proposal being placed yet before it to end the stand-off. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was keen that the deadlock should end before he left for the US next week.

"Our stand is well known. Tomorrow we will meet the UPA chairperson and hear from her what she has to say. We will then decide," CPI general secretary AB Bardhan told reporters after a 45minute meeting, RSP leader Abani Roy said "it is a matter of principle for us. We have all decided to stick to our stand on this issue. We will take a view when the government comes up with a proposal. So far it has not." The meeting was also attended by CPM leaders Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Prakash Karat, Sitaram Yechuri, S Ramachandran Pillai, D Raja of CPI and Manoj Bhattacharya of RSP.

To questions whether the Left would agree to divesting 5% shares of Bhel, Bardhan said "We are not bargaining. The ball is in their court. It is for them to say."

The Economic Times

ভেল বেসরকারীকরণ হচ্ছে না, দাবি কেন্দ্রের

मीरश्चन ताग्र**र**होश्ती ● नग्नामिल्लि

8 জুলাই: ভেল নিয়ে সরকার-বাম স্নায়ুযুদ্ধ থামার আশু লক্ষণ নেই।

বামেদের একাংশ কিছুটা নরম মনোভাব নিতে চাইলেও সিপিএমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাটের ধনুকভাঙা পণ, সরকারকে স্বীকার করতে হবে যে, ভেলের দশ শতাংশ বিলগ্রিকরণের সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়ে তারা অভিন্ন ন্যুনতম কর্মসূচি লগ্র্ঘন করেছে। তা হলে তাঁরা সমন্বয় কমিটিতে ফিরলেও ফিরতে পারেন।

অন্য দিকে, অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম
স্পষ্ট জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, সরকারি
অংশীদারিত্ব ৬৭ শতাংশ থেকে ৫৭-এ
নামানোর অর্থ 'বেসরকারীকরণ' নয়।
প্রধানমন্ত্রীও এই মতেরই সমর্থক। ফলে
কোনও রফাসূত্র মিলছে না।

এই অবস্থায় কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী সম্পর্কে বামেদের এত দিনের নরম সনিয়া গাঁধী সিপিএমের প্রবীণ মনোভাবও ক্রমশ পাল্টাচ্ছে। কারাট নেতাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করছেন এবং সিপিআইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক বলে থবর। তবে জ্যোতি বসু বা এ বি বর্ধন দু'জনেই জানিয়েছেন, এই

হরকিষেধ সিংহ সুরজিতের মতো নেতাদের সঙ্গে তিনি নিজে কথা বলছেন কি না, তা স্পষ্ট নয়। দলের মুখপাত্র আনন্দ শর্মা আজ বলেন, "কংশ্রেসের দুটি লক্ষ্য। ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি মেনে চলা এবং নবরত্ন সংস্থাগুলির রাষ্ট্রীয়ত্ত চরিত্র বজায় রাখা।" তাঁর কথা থেকেই স্পষ্ট যে, সরকার ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি লঙ্খন করেছে বলে কংগ্রেস নেতারা মনে করছেন না।

এই মনোভাবের আন্দাজ পেয়েই বামেরা এখন ভারত-মার্কিন প্রতিরক্ষাচুক্তি নিয়েও সরব হতে শুরু করেছেন। সিপিআই নেতা ডি রাজা আজ বলেন, "প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় যদি এই সব চুক্তি করেন এবং চুক্তিপত্রে রাজনৈতিক কথাবার্তাও যুক্ত করা হয়, তা হলে বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহের জন্য কী কাজ অবশিষ্ট থাকে?" প্রণব সম্পর্কে বামেদের এত দিনের নরম মনোভাবও ক্রমশ পাল্টাক্ষে। কারাট এবং সিপিআইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক

চুক্তিও ন্যুনতম কর্মসূচির লগুঘন। ক্ষেপণাস্ত্র প্রতিরক্ষা নিয়ে কিছু মার্কিন বিজ্ঞানীর অভিমতও প্রণবের কাছে পাঠানোর কথা ভাবছেন বামেরা।

এই অবস্থায় ৮ তারিখে প্রতিরক্ষা চুক্তির বিরুদ্ধে জমায়েত এবং ৯ তারিখ শ্রমিক সংগঠনগুলির বৈঠক থেকে ভারত বন্ধের ডাক দেওয়ার দিকে এগোক্ছেন বামেরা। বাম সূত্রের খবর, সরকার নমনীয়তা না-দেখালে তাঁরা ক্রমশ বিষয়-ভিত্তিক সমর্থনের রাস্তায় সরে থাবেন। কাল বিষয়টি নিয়ে কারাট ও বর্ধনের আলোচনা হয়েছে। বর্ধন আজ বলেন, "আমরা এখন বিষয়ভিত্তিক বিরোধিতা শুরু করেছি।"

সিপিএমের একাংশ অবশ্য এখনও
আশাবাদী যে সরকার নতিস্বীকার
করবে। কলকাতায় আজ সীতারাম
ইয়েচুরি বলেছেন, "ভেলের বিষয়ে
দেখা যাচ্ছে সরকার অভিন্ন কর্মসূচি
মানছে না। এ বিষয়ে সরকার আমাদের
জবাব দেবে বলেছে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী ৬
জুলাই স্কটল্যান্ড যাচ্ছেন। তিনি ৯

্রিপেশ্রুন ঠ তারিখ দেশে ফিরবেন। তার পরেই ভেল নিয়ে তাঁর সঙ্গে কথা হবে।"

ইয়েচুরির দাবি, নাুনতম কর্মসূচিতে বলা আছে নবরত্ব সংস্থার বিলগ্নিকরণ করা হবে না। কিন্তু ঘটনা হল, কর্মসূচিতে লেখা আছে লাভজনক সংস্থার বেসরকারীকরণ হবে না। বিলগ্নিকরণ ও বেসরকারীকরণকে সমার্থক ধরে নিয়ে বামেরা সরকারকে চাপ দিচ্ছেন। কারণ, তাঁরা মনে করছেন নইলে ভবিষ্যতে আরও অনেক সংস্থার বিলগ্নিকরণ ঠেকানো যাবে না।

কিন্তু বামেদের বক্তব্য সরকার মেনে নেবে এমন সম্ভাবনা কম। কংগ্রেস সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, বামেরা যে সমর্থন বজায় রাখবেন, সে ব্যাপারে কোনও সংশয় নেই। কাজেই তাঁরা বামেদের মনোভাব নিয়ে খুব বেশি উদ্বিগ্ন নন। অন্য দিকে, কারাট-বর্ধনেরাও সমন্বয় কমিটিতে ফিরে যেতে খুব একটা আগ্রহী নন।

সব মিলিয়ে স্নায়্যুদ্ধ দীর্ঘায়িত হওয়ার সম্ভাবনাই বেশি।

0 5 JUL 2005 ANADABAZAR PATRICE

"Negotiations on with Left over BHEL"

Problems over disinvestment will be sorted out soon, says Ahmad Patel

Special Correspondent

AHMEDABAD: Congress president Sonia Gandhi's political adviser Ahmed Patel is confident that the problem between the Left parties and the UPA Government over disinvestment in the Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited will be "sorted out soon."

Talking to mediapersons on Saturday after filing his nomination in Gandhinagar as the only Congress candidate from Gujarat for the Rajya Sabha elections, Mr. Patel said negotiations were on with the Left parties. "We will find out a solution soon," he said.

He said he was confident that Left parties would not withdraw their support to the UPA Government on this issue. He said the Left parties supporting the Government had every right to voice their opinion on important issues concerning the people and the Government would try to accommodate their views as far as possible. "There are no differences between the Left parties and the Congress-led UPA Government," Mr. Patel said.

Flood situation

About the BJP Government's handling of the current flood situation in Gujarat, Mr. Patel said it was "too early" to decide

Patel criticised the Gujarat Government for not keeping the main Opposition party informed about the flood situation

about its efficiency. He said he would neither appreciate nor be critical about its handling of the situation. He, however, criticised the Government for not keeping the main Opposition party informed about the situation.

He said by now the Government should have convened an all-party meeting to maintain a proper coordination between the administration and other political parties involved in the rescue and relief operations. He said the Congress Rahat Samiti carried relief work on its own without any coordination with the State Government.

Relief measures

Mr. Patel said he hoped unlike the relief measures after the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, the BJP Government would this time "talk less and work more." But "I will not say the Government is doing nothing," he said.

0 3

WIT HINDS

Sonia, Left leaders discuss BHEL BONANT AT divestment issue

Seeks ideas to raise resources for social sector

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: United Progressive Alliance Chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Friday had a meeting with Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Prakash Karat and CPI national secretary D. Raja in an attempt to resolve the stand-off over disinvestment in Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL).

There is nothing to report by way of a final decision. We are confident of a proper constructive solution in the near future," Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said.

First meeting after boycott

This was the first formal interaction between the leaders after the Left parties wrote to Ms. Gandhi on Sunday conveying their decision to suspend participation in the UPA-Left coordination committee meetings protesting against "serious violation of the Common Minimum Programme." Ms. Gandhi

extended an invitation to them self-reliance, besides providing on Thursday to discuss the issue after returning from Himachal Pradesh. Ahmed Patel, political secretary to the Congress president, was also present at the meeting.

Mr. Karat and Mr. Raja explained their stand on violation of a specific provision in the CMP on "navaratna" companies.

'Early solution"

"Ms. Gandhi said a way should be found for early settlement of the matter. We also hoped that discussions will help resolve the issue," Mr. Karat and Mr. Raja said at a press briefing.

Ms. Gandhi hoped that a solution could be found before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh left for the G-8 meeting in Scotland next week.

The Left leaders said there was no ambiguity in the CMP on the "navaratna" companies. Mr. Raja emphasised at the meeting that the public sector undertakings were the strength of ecodevelopment

employment to Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Ms. Gandhi sought to know how the Government could raise resources to fund social sector commitments as promised.

The Left leaders said that they had submitted a note to the Finance Minister before the last Budget and that this was a separate issue. Mr. Raja said the huge reserves of the PSUs could be put to use. The Government could also think of innovative

All-India Forward Block general secretary Debabrata Biswas told The Hindu over telephone that there was no scope for the Left parties compromising on their stand on the BHEL issue. He was in contact with Mr. Karat. The AIFB would discuss the developments at its central committee meeting in Kolkata between July 8 and 10. "It is a policy issue based on the commitment in the CMP and there could be no dilution," he added.

রফা খুঁজুতে ভেল-সিদ্ধান্ত ্রি^মর্কুলিয়ে, শু রাখার প্রস্তাব

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৯ জুন: ভেলের শেয়ার বিক্রির পরিয়াণ কমানোর সমাধানসূত্র পেশ করেও বামেদের মনোভাব বদলাতে পারল না ইউপিএ সরকার।

ভেলের মতো লাভজনক সংস্থার
একটি শেয়ারও বিক্রি করা চলবে না,
এই বক্তব্য থেকে সরতে নারাজ
বামেরা। সাধারণ ভাবে রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত
সংস্থাগুলির চরিত্র বদলানো হবে না,
কংগ্রেসের তরফে বারবার এই আশ্বাস
দেওয়া হলেও বামেরা অনড়।
সিপিএমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ
কারাট সাফ জানিয়ে দেন, ভেলের
ক্ষেত্রে কোনও 'দেওয়া-নেওয়া'র তত্ত্বে
তাঁরা বিশ্বাস করেন না।

শেষ পর্যন্ত পরিস্থিতি সামাল দিতে অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরমের সূত্র— ভেল নিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভায় গৃহীত সিদ্ধান্ত আপাতত 'ঝুলিয়ে' রাখা হোক। এই ব্যাপারে বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করে কাজ নেই। পরিস্থিতি কিছুটা ঠান্ডা হলে সময়-সুযোগ বুঝে বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করা যাবে।

তবে ভেল-বিতর্ক এমন কিছু প্রশ্নও
সামনে এনেছে, যা বামেদের পক্ষে
অস্বপ্তিকর। বামেদের 'ছিচারিতা'র
কথা বলে প্রশ্ন তোলা হচ্ছে, হলদিয়া পেট্রোকেমে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকারের
অংশও তো বিক্রি করে দিতে চায়
বামফ্রন্ট। হলদিয়া পেট্রোকেম তো
লাভজনক সংস্থা। এই প্রসঙ্গে রাজ্যের
শিল্পমন্ত্রী নিরুপম সেনের সওয়াল:
"পেট্রোকেমে আমাদের যে অংশটুক্
রয়েছে, সেটা খুব বেশি নয়। তা ছাড়া,
হলদিয়া পেট্রোকেম তো আর রাষ্ট্রায়ত
সংস্থা নয়। তাই ভেল ও পেট্রোকেমের
মধ্যে তুলনা করাটা বিভ্রান্তিমূলক।"

আজ অবশ্য লখনউয়ে কারাট রীতিমতো কড়া সুরেই জানিয়েছেন যে, ভেলের ১০ শতাংশ শেয়ার বিক্রির প্রস্তাব ইউপিএ সরকারের তরফে ন্যূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচি থেকে প্রথম গুরুতর বিচ্যুতি। তাঁর কথায়, "এই ক্ষেত্রে দেওয়া-নেওয়ার কোনও প্রশ্ন নেই। অভিন্ন কর্মসূচি যাতে মেনে চলা হয়, বাম দলগুলি তার উপরেই জোর দিচ্ছে।" তবে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ এবং ইউপিএ চেয়ারপার্সন সনিয়া গাঁধীর অনুরোধও যে তাঁরা একেবারে ফেলছেন না, তা-ও জানিয়েছেন কারাট। তিনি বলেন, "নবরত্বের বিলগ্নিকরণ নিয়ে কংগ্রেসের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বের আলাপ-আলোচনা সম্পূর্ণ না-হওয়া পর্যন্ত ইউপিএ-র প্রধানমন্ত্রী এবং চেয়ারপার্সন, দু'জনেই আমাদের অপেক্ষা করতে বলেছেন। আমরা অবশ্যই সেটা করব।"

এই প্রসঙ্গে নিরুপম সেনের বক্তব্য, "নীতিগত ভাবে আমরা মনে করি না, ১০ শতাংশের জায়গায় ৫ শতাংশ শেয়ার বিক্রি করলে বিষয়টি বদলে যাবে। আমরা যে বার্তটা মানুষের কাছে পৌঁছে দিতে চাইছি, সেটা হল আমরা লাভজনক রাষ্ট্রায়ভ সংস্থা বিক্রির বিপক্ষে। আশা করা যায়, সরকার এই সিদ্ধান্তটি বিবেচনা করবে।" আজ অবশ্য দিল্লিতে ভেলের কর্মী সংগঠনের একটি প্রতিনিধিদল ভারী শিল্পমন্ত্রী সম্ভোষমোহন দেবের সঙ্গে দেখা করে আর্জি জানিয়েছে

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

3 n JUN 2005

ANADARAZAD PATRIKA

Navaratnas, Left and disinvestment (As a card-carrying Congressman, I feel the UPA should not only join the Communists

against the disinvestment of navaratnas or profit-making PSUs, but also beat them at their own game."

'Americai' V. Narayanan

THE COORDINATION committee of the United Progressive Alliance and Left was started with the main intention of getting the Left inside the policy-making apparatus of the Government, which depends on them for the outside support. Lately, the Communists have been making a lot of noise on petrol and diesel prices, among other things; these noises are focussed more on votes than on sound economic principles that will assist the country. The spat between the Left and the UPA in general and the Congress in particular has come to the fore, with the Communists announcing that they were not going to attend the UPA coordination committee meeting over the disinvestments of navaratnas.

Leaving aside the Left and Right leanings of the UPA and politics out of it, I as an American-trained senior finance executive see the logic in the Left's argument. Unfortunately within the Congress we do not have a formal forum that is active, to air our views on the formation of economic policies. I do not always agree with the Left. Several times they will oppose the Congress and others when they propose or do exactly what their own Government in West Bengal or other places has done. Sometimes Indian Communists in opposition are more "loyal to the king" than the birthplace of Communism or Communist-ruled countries like

Leaving this aside, I applaud the recently elected Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Prakash Karat's principled stand opposing privatisation of profit-making public enterprises. There are a lot of leeches in the public sector that are draining taxpayers. These should be the target of disinvestment or liquidation by the exchequer. However, the smart and well-meaning Finance Minister P. Chidambaram's insistence on disinvestment of the profit-making public sector defies logic. The contention that after disinvesting, the money will be used for social security programmes or other investments needed for PSUs is more of rhetoric. This does not augur well for the well-managed PSUs and above all for navaratnas

We all know that he who pays the piper

will call the tune. The time will not be far away when a repetition of the demand made by Suzuki on Maruti Udyog will be made on navaratnas. The current well-intentioned UPA Government is buckling under, and planning to disinvest in the profit-making navaratnas. It may not be far-fetched for the private investors who have their foot in, thanks to the UPA Government, to break the door open easily in the future, when someone not so people-friendly and socially oriented as the Congress is in the Government.

'Create level-playing field'

In addition, it is better for the economy to create a level playing field where the private sector can compete with the navaratnas. This will make the navaratnas more efficient and effective. We already have a good case history of similar nature in India. Look at what is happening to BSNL. Imagine even partly privatising BSNL. I wonder if the mass of consumers in India will have had the benefits they are enjoying today. I have no doubt that most BSNL subscribers today feel that they are getting the best service they ever had with the public sector after the

advent of private mobile and landline operators.

This has helped not only the consumers, but also the economy by creating more direct and indirect jobs and deeper penetration of telephones than what would have happened had we privatised the BSNL. The competition introduced among airlines is another recent experience from which lessons can be learnt.

I feel the major reason for the Left opposing this move is to take care of their per-ceived vote bank, public sector employees. As a card-carrying Congressman, I feel the UPA should not only join the Communists against the disinvestment of navaratnas or profit-making PSUs, but also beat them at their own game. The Congress and the UPA should encourage the private sector, which will create new jobs for us and create competition for the navratnas. This will also make the navratnas more efficient and customer friendly.

(The writer is a chartered and management accountant and a management specialist trained in the U.S. He is a member of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.)

Africa must form cartels

African countries must band together and set up cartels that lay aside money to acquire the means of adding value to their raw materials before export.

Cameron Duodu

THE WEST is not, out of altruism, going L to reverse the system of trade that impoverishes Africa. It is Africa that must fight politically to force the change. Why has it not been done before now? The answer is that African Governments have, in the past, been short-sighted and self-centred to a degree that borders on stupidity.

Our governments may speak to the West in polite, diplomatic terms. But Africans who know the true causes of their continent's poverty consider the West to be part of the problem. They are not interested in palliatives such as aid, and the humiliation of becoming "highly indebted poor countries" reliant on charity; they demand eco-

African countries must band together and

form cartels that lay aside money to acquire the means of adding value to their raw materials before export. Goods that are processed can better be held back from sale when prices are low. OPEC (and before OPEC, the giant oil companies) has proved that economic power comes through cartels. But you cannot form viable cartels using raw cocoa, coffee beans or tea leaves. Unlike oil, which can stay unspoilt underground, food commodities are perishable.

However, coffee is the second most important commodity traded in the world yielding first place only to oil. So if Africa could bite significantly into that market, it could earn enormous sums. Even if Africa could only influence rather than control the prices of its exports, it would not need anyone's assistance to end its poverty. But at present Africa is a "price taker," and the value of its exports is determined not by their final price in western sales outlets, but by the initial price offered at the farm gate. Before OPEC flexed its muscles in the 1970s,

petroleum was selling for under \$3 a barrel. Today, it is selling for \$58. African governments must take a leaf out of the OPEC book. They have already produced an economic programme called the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development. But Nepad relies heavily on expected inflows of foreign investment, whereas foreign entrepreneurs cannot, by definition, be interested in what Africa really needs — namely, to vertically integrate the industries.

If Africa is able to accumulate enough capital to change its inherited production patterns and earn more from its products. these products will still be faced with punitive tariffs. But the climate of opinion in the West is shifting against such practices, and African governments must enlist the support of the peoples in the West to force their governments to dismantle such tariffs. Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

(Cameron Duodo is a Ghanaian novelist and journalist.)

THE MINDU J## 2805

FM asks states to mobilise resources

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 28. — The finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram, today called upon the states to take steps for resource mobilisation while expressing concern at the functioning of rural cooperative banks as well as high non-performing assets (NPA).

assets (NPA).

Briefing reporters after his presentation to the National Development Council (NDC), Mr Chidambaram also announced that the government will for the first time present an "outcome budget" to gauge the effectiveness of the money spent on various heads under different ministries.

"In the first week of July, we will come out with an outcome budget," he said adding that this would help allocate resources based on progress in delivery. The exercise would make departments and ministries more accountable, he added.

Mr Chidambaram also asked the states to carry out similar exercises for better tracking of expenditure. "I urge upon the states to prepare similar outcome budgets," he said.

Under the present system of

budgets, ne said.
Under the present system of allocation of funds under the budget (whether in Centre or states), there was no method to monitor the outcome of resources that had been allocated to various sectors in different ministries.

"Higher outlays are necessary, but not sufficient to realise the desired objective," he said in his presentation, adding that the attempt in the budget would be to specify the desired outcomes in quantitative terms with a time-frame. The key to achieving outcomes, he said, was to ensure efficient service delivery, transparency and accountability.

cy and accountability.

Asserting that the economy was in a "resilient" mode, Mr Chidambaram told the NDC meeting that inflation was under control, but the challenge was to mobilise resources to rev up



Mr P Chidambaram

investments. He admitted that the country was short as far as planned investments were concerned, citing that only 50 per cent of the MTA targets could be achieved in the first three years.

achieved in the first three years.
"We have to make up the balance 50 per cent in the remaining

two years, that is 2005-06 and 2006-07, which is a tall order," Mr chidambaram said in his presen-

Meanwhile, he asked the chief ministers to carry forward pension reform as the liabilities of both the Centre and states was expected to cross a staggering Rs 100,000 crore by 2009-10.

The PFRDA (the Pension Fund Regulatory) and Development Authority) Bill has already been referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee and nine states, apart from the Centre, have implemented the new defined contribution pension scheme," he told

reporters.

In his presentation, Mr Chidambaram said the existing pension system had limited coverage of only 12 per cent of the labour force, while a large section (88 per cent) remained uncovered due to lack of individual choice, portability and multiple pension fund managers and coy-

2 9 JUN 2005

THE STATES " " "

PM scales down growth rate to 7-8%

Sagging Farm Sector Not Taking Benefits Of Growth To Rural Poor

per cent and fearing rural poor were not getting benefits due to al Development Council meeting began on Monday to approve the ing down the growth rate to 7-8 New Delhi: The crucial Nation mid-term appraisal of 10th plan with PM Manmohan Singh scal the sagging farm sector.

in an apparent reference to the averaging 6.5 per cent in the past three years," Singh told the NDC "We cannot achieve the original tenth plan target of 8 per praisal shows that performance growth.....Mid-term ap thus far is well below this target performance of NDA.

to have deteriorated and possibly formance of agriculture appears "unfortunately the perwould not exceed 1.5 per cent "The UPA government has set maining two years of the 10th plan (2005-07)," Singh said, a target of 7-8 per cent in the regrowth during 10th plan. adding,

lic-private partnership to boost nancial constraints. Because of the disturbing performance of tion has grown that the benefits Singh said the cornerstone of 10th plan strategy was a reversal declining trend to achieve 4% farm growth. He stressed on pubinfrastructure and removing fihardly surprising that a percep growth have bypassed a sub our people, agriculture, Singh said "It stantial section of ij



MULAYAM BRINGS GOWDA TO NDC: Uttar Pradesh CM steals forty winks during the NDC meeting in New Delhi on Monday

The PM wanted chief ministers to explore the possibility of doubling farm output in 10 years for The two-day NDC meeting has been convened to approve the which he suggested an NDC subcommittee for a concrete action mid-term appraisal.

public and private investment in ment, the PM referred to two specific areas...overcoming power shortage that is plaguing practically all states and creation of environment for attracting both On infrastructure the sector

For this, he said, "We should restore the health of electricity agencies in states by reducing average transmission and commerlosses by 10 percentage points in the next two years and focussing on providing quality power at appropriate prices." cial

were given minimum security of tenure as changes without notice ity of district administration for development of rural areas, it was necessary that civil servants and short tenures do not produce Singh said to improve the qual accountable results.

Outlining the positive aspects of the economy emerging from the mid-term appraisal, deputy chairman of Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, said inflation which was a concontrol, industrial growth had growth, savings rate was high cern in mid-2004 was now under picked up recording 8.1 per cent and fiscal deficit under check.

The mid-term appraisal has also underlined some important ral and urban, regional imbal-ances, growing unemployment, lagging behind in targets in soweaknesses in the economy which required urgent correceration in agriculture, infracial sector like health and educa tive action. They included decel structure inadequacies both ru tion and gender inequality.

and come out with proper mix of borrowing programmes. Observdevolution, states on Monday asked the Centre to not discrimiin the existing pattern of fund nate against performing states mission has already extended certain select states which have not done well, Tamil Nadu CM JJayalalithaa said that the same exercise was again being undertaken under different heads by Pointing out at the anomalies substantial amounts as grants to the Planning Commission and ing that the 12th Finance Com the Centre. PTI

eft bares teeth on Bhel

OUR SPECIAL (\(\)\(\)

New Delhi, June 26: The Manmohan Singh government received its first big jolt today with its Left ally deciding to stay away from the committee formed with leaders of the two sides in protest against the divestment of state-owned Bhel.

In a letter to Sonia Gandhi, the panel's chairperson, Left leaders said: "In the light of this (divestment), we find no useful purpose will be served by attending the coordination committee meetings. We have, therefore, regretfully decided to suspend our participation in the committee.

The word used is "suspend" and not "quit", which means the Left is leaving the way open for a return, though the decision to not attend meetings itself is enough of a blow to the government.

"We never said that it is non-negotiable," said CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan at

eral secretary A.B. Bardhan at a joint news conference

The Congress was hoping "Nothing is beyond resolution. It can be resolved and it will be resolved," said spokesperson Ambika Soni.

Still, the fact is that the Prime Minister, who was sent a copy of the letter, has failed to convince the Left over several sessions — he met former CPM general secretary H.S. Surject last night and spoke to his successor Prakash Karat today - of the Centre's reasons for selling 10 per cent of its equity in Bhel in the market. Karat said: "This is the

first serious violation of the common minimum programme (CMP, the cornerstone of the alliance).

They did not explain why it's a violation of the CMP, which commits the government to not privatising the socalled public sector navratnas, of which Bhel is one, but does not bar divestment.

The Prime Minister had earlier met Left leaders to explain that the government did not intend to privatise but only divest a part of its Bhel shares.

Even after a 10 per cent divestment, the government would hold 57 per cent of Bhel, giving it majority control.

But the Left believes that the government is resorting to creeping divestment and privatisation" by selling off as-sets of profit-making public sector units.

The letter sent after a meeting of Left leaders said: "Our experience has been that the government has gone ahead with many decisions despite our disagreement.'

One such was the decision to raise petrol and diesel prices.

"What has perturbed us most is the manner in which the government has gone ahead with the Bhel divestment which is to be followed by other navratnas and PSUs, the Left said.

'Iran-India pipeline a mistake' Rademaker says US believes Iran will Tehran urges Delhi to move ahead,

■ Rademaker says US believes Iran will use the revenue to manufacture WMDs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, JUNE 17

A TOP US State Department official has said that the US considered the proposed Iran-India gas pipeline "a mistake because it provides revenue to the Iranian regime, which we believe will use the manufacture to weapons of mass destruction."

But Stephen G. Rademaker, Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, said the US did not yet have a formal position on the pipeline, as it was still a "proposal the table." In New Delhi

for talks on arms control, Rademaker, who held a series of meetings with senior officials, including Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, told them the US felt that India was ready to take responsibilities under the Proliferation Security Initiative.

Visiting India for the third time since he took over in 2002, Rademaker proposed India's participation beyond the PSI core group, though India has insisted that any possibility of joining the PSI would need India to be part of the central body that decided the policy structure. Rademaker said, "Today, there is little need for a core group. It hasn't met for over a year.'

Rademaker said the 'US wanted to see India's framework legislation on export controls implemented at the earliest. "This is an important step. The end-game is implementation. It is critically important for

> India to have in place controls on the export of sensitive materials," he said.

> Dismissing any possibility of India and US heading towards any agreement on non-proliferation, maker said, "We

are actually hoping to move ahead so that non-proliferation becomes a less important bilateral issue, since we recognise India as mature," adding, "Our discussions set the stage for a successful visit of your PM on July 18 to Washington."

Rademaker also made a presentation on missile defence but all he said was that both sides exchanged views on missile defence technology. "In future, an acquisition may happen, and we have said we are prepared to discuss this.'

points to presence of multinationals

SHISHIR GUPTA

NEW DELHI, JUNE 17

WITH Washington signalling its concern over the Iran-India pipeline, Tehran has told Delhi that eight multinationals from China, Japan, Australia and the EU are involved in developing the petroleum sector in Iran,

At a meeting with an Iranian delegation last month, the impact of US' Iran and Libva Sanctions Act was discussed in detail. Officials from Tehran urged Delhi to go ahead with the project since other western companies were operating in Iran without fear of sanctions.

The roadmap for the project was also charted out.

R Javadi, managing director of National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC), told Petroleum Ministry officials that total international investment in Iran was \$6.8 billion and total lending \$9.4 billion. This includes sectors such as petroleum, petrochemicals, mining and power.

Javadi said under the Sanctions Act, even US companies were permitted to take sub-contracts. He said the Dubai subsidiary of US major Halliburton was currently executing a sub-contract worth \$100 million while Bechtel was in talks with Tehran over participation in an LNG contract.

The NIGEC managing director said France's TOTAL, Italy's ENI and AGIP, Stat Oil of Norway, China's CNPC, Australia's BHP, JGC of Japan and Germany's Linde were the multinationals involved in the petroleum sector.

The third India-Iran joint working group, which met from June 11-13, focused on "term sheets (scope of the agreement)" for the pipeline. Despite US concerns, both sides have prepared a roadmap for the project. The following key steps were outlined:

- India and Pakistan will have to spell out if they wish to limit their participation to importing gas or if they want to get involved as promoters instead.
- Pakistan will have to state how much gas it wants, where it will be tapped, the extent of its investment and the security measures it will take to transport the gas till the Indian border.

Once this is done, officials from the three countries will sit together and flesh out other details, including the price of gas, the volume to be imported, the transit fee, the endconsumer profile, transaction structure, the route of the pipeline and the timeframe for completion of the project.

Chidambaram for effective regulation of foreign funds "NGOs should guard against diversion or misutilisation" Special Correspondent nomic implications. "Accounting of such flow of funds revamp the FCRA. The existing legislation failed to check overseas funding of

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Saturday called for "effective regulation" of foreign funds in view of serious security and economic risks, and exhorted non-governmental organisations to ensure that such inflows were not diverted or misutilised.

While there were 30,000 organisations registered under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, only 16,000 duly reported the flow of funds amounting to Rs. 5,000 crores annually. "If 16,000 organisations accounted for Rs. 5,000 crores, an equal amount must be going unreport-This had serious security and eco-

"Accounting of such flow of funds should not be construed as intrusive or invasive." This became necessary, as 50 per cent of the NGOs did not report the funds received from abroad.

Mr. Chidambaram was delivering the valedictory address at the two-day seminar the FCRA here.

Conceding that some of the NGOs were doing yeoman service, he maintained that accounting and reporting of funds received was important, particularly in this era of globalisation.

The seminar was organised within a few days of the Government deciding to set up a Group of Ministers (GoM) to tion failed to check overseas funding of anti-national organisations.

Mr. Chidambaram said the flow of funds two decades ago was usually in public accounts as it was from one government to another. Now, much of the funds came by way of private capital flows. Hence the need for careful regu-

Any strategy to counter anti-national activities such as terrorism would have to break the foreign funding chain, he said. The FCRA was one such law, which protected the interests of the country by preventing the misuse of foreign funds,

Post-Singapore, trade deals on fast trad

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Having sealed



the Manmo-han Singh got down to deal government expanding through a series of free regional trade agreements India's eco nomic and gagement with the world (RTAs) and bilateral comtrade agreements (FTAs) prehensive economic coop.

on the current status agreements mal Nath made a presenta-Commerce minister Kaeration (CECA)

ered and a roadmap pre-pared to study the future FTAs, RTAs and CECA.

He said studies would be conducted for further nego-

future roadmap for a

tiations of FTAs and RTAs 7 and to assess its impact on industries. These studies would be a prelude to "our future investments". (TERC), headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The committee decided to host of possible FTAs and RTAs to the trade and economic relations committee set guidelines for future

nomic affairs secretary Rakesh Mohan and com-merce secretary S N Menon among others. External affairs minister This was the second meeting of TERC and was attended by finance minister ing competitive commission V Krishnamurthy, eco-P Chidambaram, chairman of the national manufacturtrade and economic cooperation negotiations. "The PM has reviewed various trade agreements, which are profuture trade agreements," posed and are under discussion and set guidelines for Nath said after a two-hour

ducted through RTAs and FTAs, which would be the

Natwar Singh, deputy chairman of Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia and chairman of the PM's economic advisory council C Rangarajan are also members of TERC. Natwar

The commerce ministry

 \mathcal{L} \mathcal{L} \mathcal{L} \mathcal{L} the possibility of a CECA could be explored.

rea and in case it materialises, it could be India's first FTA with an advanced There is also a proposal for an FTA with South Koindustrialised

day cleared the CECA with mally signed on June 29 by the Prime Ministers of the The cabinet had on Mon-Singapore which will be for two countries. The CECA with Singapore seeks to integrate India's financial sector with that of Singapore in a bid to attract large-scale FDI and FII investment. country.

promises to give a boost to Indian services exports, es-pecially of professional The arrangement also

future, regardless of the progress in the multilateral trade opening up being sought to be achieved under WTO. As much as 60% of world trade could be conpresentation said that RTAs and FTAs would increasingly govern world trade in the

block, Mercosur and with two FTAs with Sri Lanka trade India at present has just and Thailand but is negotiating FTAs with Asean the American building blocks.

Nath said reports of ex-

trade

perts on various

agreements and investment proposals would be consid-

A joint study group headed by Rakesh Mohan on the an FTA with China, India's Indian side has not favoured third largest export market, but has recommended that South Africa and Brazil.

Middle class owns 60% of cars, ACs

By Sujata Dutta Sachdeva Times News Network

New Delhi: The Indian middle class is not just growing at a rapid pace, it has also become the segment driving consumption of 'luxury' goods like cars and air-conditioners, according to a survey by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

While the middle class, which the survey defines as households with annual incomes between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 10 lakh at 2001-02 prices, accounted for barely 5.7% of all Indian households in 2001-02, it already owned 60% of all the cars and ACs in the country and 25% of all TVs, fridges and

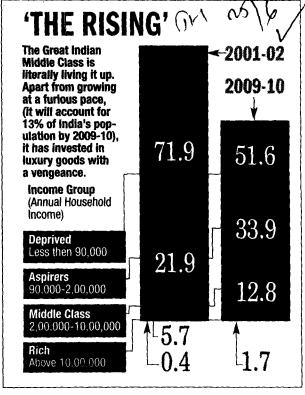
motorcycles.

Read that with the projection that the middle class will account for 13% of India's population by 2009-10 and you can see why the NCAER sees huge growth potential in the market for cars and mobikes. The study predicts that the market for cars will grow at 20% a year, while bikes will clock growth of 16% per an-

num till 2009-10.
Fridges and colour TV makers can hope to cash in on the boom too, with projected growth rates in the range of 10% to 11%. The market for radios, electric irons, bicycles and wrist watches too will grow, though by a more modest 7-

9% a year.
On the flip side, black & white TVs, scooters and mopeds may be hit with the report suggesting that demand for these goods will actually decline.

The projected consumption boom isn't just restricted to urban India. On the contrary, the survey suggests that the urban market for some relatively low-end products will be saturated by the end of the decade, while rural demand picks up. As a result, 80% of radios, 65% of colour TVs, 48% of mobikes, 40% of scooters and 33% of fridges will be owned by the rural



populace by 2009-10. Indeed, the projection is that with rural incomes rising, even the demand for cars will grow in the villages to the point where the country-side will account for 11% of all cars by the end of the decade.

The survey— The Great Indian Middle Class—categorises the population into four income groups. The "deprived" are those with household incomes below Rs 90,000 a year and they constituted just under 72% of all households in 2001-02. By 2009-10, that share will be down to 51.6%, says the survey.

The next step on the income ladder consists of the "aspirers"— those with annual household incomes between Rs 90,000 and Rs 2 lakh.

This category constituted a little under 22% of all households in 2001-02, but is likely to rise to 34% by the end of the decade.

end of the decade.

The "middle class" households numbered 10.7 million in 2001-02; by 2009-10, they're expected to rise to 28.4 million. "The rich

too are growing in numbers," points out Rakesh Shukla, senior fellow and head of the survey team, NCAER. From 0.8 million in 2001-02, they're expected to grow to 3.8 million by the end of the decade.

end of the decade.

"While the number of crorepatis families was 5,000 in 1995-96, they increased to 20,000 in 2001-02. By the end of the decade, there'll be 1.4 lakh such households," says Shukla. Also, most of the deprived (85%) and the aspirers (60%) will be concentrated in rural areas by the end of the decade, while three-fourths of the rich and two-thirds of the middle class will be found in cities.

The report is based on extensive surveys covering three lakh households across 858 villages and 660 towns and cities all over India. It covered a list of 20 durables, 7 consumables and a host of services, including mediclaim, life insurance and credit cards. It projects an overall increase of 9% per annum in the market for the durables covered.

Mega deal for steel plant signed property and plant signed property and property an

South Korean major Posco's MoU with Orissa Government

Prafulla Das

BHUBANESWAR: The Orissa Government and the Korean steel major Pohang Steel Company (Posco) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Wednesday to set up a 12-million tonne steel plant at the port town of Paradip in Orissa.

The MoU was signed by the Executive Vice-President of Posco, Soung-Sik Cho, and the Orissa Government's Steel and Mines Secretary, Bhaskar Chatterjee. Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Posco, Ku-Taek Lee, and Korean Ambassador to India Jung Il Choi were present at the signing ceremony.

Billed as the largest ever single foreign direct investment in the country, the Posco project has created controversy with several Opposition parties protesting against the company's proposal for permission to export high-alumina content iron ore from the State.

The proposed mega steel plant will come up at Paradip at a cost of Rs. 51,000 crores and will

- Project to be completed in two phases
- Plant to reach full capacity by 2016
- Orissa to provide 600 million tonnes of iron ore to Posco
- Centre to earn Rs. 89,000 crores over 30 years

be completed in two phases, each phase consisting of two modules of three million tonnes a year

The first module is likely to be completed by June 2010. After that, three million tonnes of capacity will be added every two years and the plant will reach its full capacity by 2016.

According to the MoU, Posco has promised to register a company in India in August this year and sign a final Memorandum of Agreement by the year-end after conducting a detailed investigation on the economic feasibility, land purchase and the rehabilitation and resettlement programme.

Employment generation

Orissa will provide 600 million tonnes of iron ore to Posco for captive use over a period of 30 years.

The entire project, including mining, steel plant and a captive port with a big berth for cape size vessels at the plant site, is likely to generate direct employment for 13,000 people and indirect employment for 35,000 people. With the commissioning of the mega plant, the Centre will earn Rs. 89,000 crores over 30 years by way of excise and customs duties, service taxes and corporate income tax.

The Orissa Government will benefit to the tune of Rs. 22,500 crores during the same period. The MoU with Posco is the 37th to be signed by the Patnaik Government for setting up steel. plants in different parts of the State.

Another report on Page 12

BJP protests against hike in fuel prices

"It would make life difficult for the common man; cost of essential items will go up"

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of activists of the Delhi Pradesh Yuva Morcha of the Bharatiya Janata Party were detained while they were protesting against the steep hike in fuel prices at Jantar Mantar here on Tuesday.

According to police, around 600 protesters were detained after they tried to break through the barricades on Parliament Street. Water cannons were used to bring the crowd under control. Earlier, addressing the gathering, BJP national general secretary Arun Jaitley said that the hike in petrol and diesel prices would make life more difficult for the common man. The people were recling under the burden of taxes imposed by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government and with the hike in fuel prices, the cost of essential items would go up.

Left parties criticised

Mr. Jaitley alleged that the Left parties were hand in glove with the Congress; the hike had been announced only after the Kolkata municipal elections.

Delhi BJP president Harsh Vardhan said the UPA Government had increased the fuel prices for the fourth time in a

While there had been a 33 per cent increase in the price of diesel, that of petrol had gone up by 25 per cent.

Dr. Vardhan charged the Left parties with adopting double standards. "If the parties had sympathy for the common man, then they should have withdrawn support to the Government."

They said a nationwide agitation would be launched to force the Government to withdraw the price hike.



FACING THE BARRAGE: Police use water cannon against Bharatiya Janata Party members protesting against the hike in petroleum prices, in New Delhi on Tuesday. - PHOTO: AP

Centre will amend Act to sell-off PSUs

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, June 21. — The government has decided to amend the Act under which it had acquired two sick companies to create the Tyre Corporation of India Ltd, before going ahead with its disinvestment.

The Board for Reconstruction of Public Sector Enterprises (BRPSE) had recommended disinvestment of Tyre Corporation. The department of heavy industry, under which the company functions, referred it to the department of disinvestment.

The department of disinvestment had returned the case with the advice of seeking the opinion of the Attorney General on the question whether the public sector companies created through an Act of Parliament can be disinvested without going back to Parliament.

After receiving the opinion of the Attorney General the department of heavy industry has decided to approach the Parliament to get its nod for disinvestment of Tyre Corporation of India.

Apart from Tyre Corporation, the department of heavy industry has decided to seek amendments in the Acts through which it acquired Andrew Yule, Bharat Wagon, Burn Standard and Company, Praga Tools and Richardson and Cruddas.

It has already approached law ministry in this regard. The approval of changes in the Act governing these companies would ensure that the government is not caught on the wrong foot if an objection is raised on the means to revive these companies.

The previous government had to shelve the plan to sell Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), which were acquired through Acts of Parliament, when the judiciary said that Parliamentary nod was essential if the government wanted to change their basic character.

Earlier too the government had planned to disinvest Tyre Corporation of India but as there was just one bidder the plan was shelved. Of the three units of the company, which is sick, only two are working.

It is producing tyres for some private players and its

turnover during 2004-05 was Rs 101.71 crore.

The main reasons for decline in profitability of the company was higher interest burden due to provision of penal interest, non-availability of working capital and general condition.

Before disinvestment of the company the government would also have to clean up its balance sheet to a certain extent.

Oil pooling A

Price hikes in petrol and diesel have forged a brand new and very unlikely political alliance

new and absurd alliance. Sworn enemies, they suddenly find themselves on the same side of the fence in their opposition to the oil price hike. With world oil prices touching \$59 per barrel, most people would agree that oil prices must rise in India. After all the country is not — as far as we know located on a different planet. Besides, if the Left and the BJP were themselves in power at the Centre, it is unlikely that they would have had any choice but to hike oil prices. So what is all this posturing about? Perhaps acting with irresponsibility is one of the delights of being in the Opposition or in supporting the government from the outside. You then have the luxury of traipsing around the country and decrying price hikes as governmental folly.

There is another delicious irony that seems to have escaped these two political entities. The CPI was part of the I.K. Gujral government when it took the decision to dismantle the administered price mechanism (APM). Two CPI ministers, Indrajit Gupta and Chaturanan Mishra, were part of that Cabinet decision to do so. And that government, let us not forget, was being supported by the CPM from the outside. Coming to the BJP, was it not the NDA government that had decided to revise petrol prices every fortnight, in keeping with its

THE BJP and the Left need our special congratulations for their new and absurd alliance. Sworn enemies, they suddenly find themselves on the same side of the fence in their opposition to the oil price hike. With world oil prices touching \$59 per barrel, most people would agree that oil prices must rise in India. After all the country is not — as far as we know—located on a different planet. Besides,

Of course, if the UPA government had done the right thing by petroleuvn products, it would not have had to face this treatment. Even though the APM was officially dismantled in April 2002, subsequent petroleum ministers have not given up their power over oil PSUs and allowed them to determine prices for themselves. Oil prices should, rightly, have been market determined by now. There was a time when the prices of sugar and cemeint were fixed by the government. This had made them highly politicised, too. Not any more — for the simple reason that the government has kept itself out. But this has not happened in the case of petroleum products. The NDA government did nothing to reduce its petroleum minister's control over oil prices. The government changed, but the price of petrol still gets discussed at Cabinet meetings. So when its Left allies scream into its ear: when the BJP goes into overdrive on the issue, the UPA government only has itself to blame.

বাম চাপ উড়িয়ে বাড়ল পেটোল-ডিজেলেব দাম

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২০ জুন: বামেদের দেওয়া বিকল্প প্রস্তাব খারিজ করে দিয়ে পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম বাড়াল কেন্দ্র। এবং অনেকটাই। আজ মাঝ রাত থেকে পেট্রোলের দাম বাড়ছে লিটার পিছু আড়াই টাকা, ডিজেলের দু টাকা। সাম্প্রতিক কালের মধ্যে ডিজেলের দাম এক ধাক্কায় এতটা বাড়েনি।

পেট্রোপণ্যের মূল্যবৃদ্ধি নিয়ে সহযোগী বামেদের সঙ্গে ইউপিএ সরকারের টানাপোড়েন চলছিল দীর্ঘদিন ধরেই। পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকের বক্তব্য ছিল, আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে অপরিশোধিত তেলের দাম যে হারে বেড়েছে, তাতে দেশে

পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম না বাড়িয়ে উপায় নেই। দীর্ঘ সাত মাস দাম না বাড়ানোয় তেল কোম্পানিগুলিকে এখন দৈনিক প্রায় ৭০ কোটি গুনাগার দিতে হচ্ছে। প্রাথমিক ভাবে পেট্রোল ও ডিজেলের দাম লিটার পিছু গড়ে পাঁচ টাকা বাড়ানোর প্রস্তাব করেছিল তারা।

অন্য দিকে বামেদের দাবি ছিল, বর্ধিত মূল্যের দায় বহন করুক অর্থ মন্ত্রক। কমানো হোক শুল্কের পরিমাণও। কিন্তু তাতে কর্ণপাত করেনি মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার। ক্ষুব্ধ বামেরা জানিয়ে দিয়েছে, ২৮ জুন দেশ জুড়ে প্রতিবাদ দিবস পালন করবে তারা। আন্দোলনে নামার কথা ঘোষণা করেছে বিজেপিও।

সরকারের বক্তব্য, বাড়তি দামের বোঝা সবাই মিলে ভাগ করে নেওয়ার পুরনো নীতিই অনুসরণ করা হয়েছে। কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার অর্থবিষয়ক কমিটির বৈঠকের পরে পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার বলেন, "সরকার, তেল সংস্থা এবং সাধারণ মানুষের মধ্যে বর্ধিত দাম ভাগাভাগি করে দেওয়া হয়েছে।" তাঁর বক্তব্য, আন্তর্জাতিক বাজার দর অনুযায়ী পেট্রোলের দাম লিটারপিছু ৪ টাকা ৬৮ পয়সা ও ডিজেলের দাম ৫ টাকা ১৩ পয়সা বাড়ানো দরকার ছিল। তা করা হয়নি। বাড়ান হল না কেরোসিন ও রায়ার গ্যাসের দামও।

কিন্তু দাম যা বাড়ল তাতেও যথেষ্ট বিপাকে পড়বেন সাধারণ মানুষ। এখনই ভাড়াবৃদ্ধির দাবিতে সরব পরিবহণ শিল্পের মালিক সংগঠনগুলি। পশ্চিমবঙ্গও তার ব্যতিক্রম নয়। ফলে অদূর ভবিষ্যতে বাস-অটো-ট্যাক্সির ভাড়া আরও এক দফা বৃদ্ধির সম্ভাবনা যথেষ্ট। যদিও এ ব্যাপারে আজ স্পষ্ট করে কিছু বলেননি রাজ্যের পরিবহণমন্ত্রী সুভাষ চক্রবর্তী। পেটোপণ্যের এ বারের মূল্যবৃদ্ধিকে বামেদের ব্যর্থতা হিসাবেই দেখছে রাজনৈতিক মহল। কাল রাতে ভেলের বিলগ্লিকরণ নিয়ে ইউপিএ-বাম সমন্বয় কমিটির বৈঠকে অসম্ভোষ জানান বাম নেতারা। আর তার কয়েক ঘণ্টার মধ্যেই তেলের দাম বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্তে তাঁরা দৃশ্যতই হতাশ। চার বাম দল আজ এক বিবৃতিতে বলেছে, "মূল্যবৃদ্ধির সিদ্ধান্ত ফিরিয়ে নিতে সরকারকে বাম দলগুলি অনুরোধ জানাছে। সরকার এমন ব্যবস্থা নিক যাতে আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে তেলের মূল্যবৃদ্ধি সামাল দেওয়া যায়।"

কী ভাবে তেলের মূল্যবৃদ্ধি ঠেকানো সম্ভব তা নিয়ে

দাম কোথায় কত			
	যা ছিল	যা হরে	বেড়েছে
পেট্রোল			
কলকাতা	৪০.৮৯	89.63	২.৬২
मि क्कि	৩৭.৯৯	৪০.৪৯	2.00
মুম্বই	৪৩.২৩	১৫.১ ৫	२. ९३
চেন্নাই	83.২৫	8 ৩ .৯৭	૨. ૧૨
ডিজেল			
কলকাতা	২৮.৭২	७०.৮०	२.०४
मि ल्लि	২৬.৪৫	২৮.৪৫	2,00
মুম্বই	৩২.৮৩	૭ ૯.২২	২.৩৯
চেন্নাই	২৯.৩০	৩১.৫২	২.২২
		(मिछै।	রপ্রতি, টাকায়)

তাঁদের মতামত আগেই অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরমকে জানিয়েছিলেন প্রকাশ কারাট, এ বি বর্ধনেরা। কংগ্রেস নেতা জনার্দন রেড্ডির নেতৃত্বে সব দলের সদস্য নিয়ে গড়া সংসদীয় স্থায়ী কমিটিও এ ব্যাপারে যে প্রস্তাব দিয়েছিল, তার এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

দাম বাড়ল

প্রথম পাতার পর সঙ্গে বামেদের বিরোধ ছিল না। এই প্রস্তাব অনুযায়ী:

- দেশে উৎপাদিত অপ্রিশোধিত তেল থেকে সেস বাবদ প্রতি টনে এক হাজার আটশো টাকা সংগৃহীত হয়। প্রতি বছরে যার মোট পরিমাণ দাঁড়ায় পাঁচ হাজার চারশো কোটি টাকা। মূল্য নিয়ন্ত্রণের কাজে লাগাতে এই টাকা দিয়ে একটা তহবিল গঠন করা হোক।
- আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারের মূল্যবৃদ্ধির প্রভাব থেকে দেশের ভিতর জ্বালানির দামকে আড়াল করা হোক।

তাদের পুরোদস্তর উপেক্ষা করে সরকার একতরফা ভাবে দাম বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা করায়ও বামেরা অসন্তঃ। কলকাতায় জ্যোতি বসু বলেন, "আমরা ইউপিএ সমন্বয় কমিটির বৈঠকে এবং সংসদে বিষয়টি তুলব।" সিপিআই সাংসদ গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত জানিয়েছেন, এই সিদ্ধান্তের প্রতিবাদে তাঁরা দেশ জুড়ে সাধারণ ধর্মঘট ডাকার কথা ভাবছেন। ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের দেবব্রত বিশ্বাস বলেছেন, আন্দোলনের কর্মসৃচি নিয়ে তাঁরা শীঘ্রই আলোচনায় বসকেন।

2 JUN 2005

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Left plans protest on June 28

- "Justification for oil price increase misplaced; Act on alternative proposals"

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Left parties on Monday strongly opposed the oil price hike and decided to organise a protest demonstration on June 28. The parties called upon the Government to reverse the decision and take measures that can absorb the burden of the increased international oil prices.

"This price hike comes in the wake of three price hikes in petroleum products in the past one year. This has imposed an added burden on the people. It will affect the farmers and increase the

cost of living for those who rely on transportation for pursuing their daily work and activities.

Cascading effect

The price increase in diesel in particular will be inflationary and have a cascading effect on prices of all commodities," a joint statement by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the CPI, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the All-India Forward Bloc said.

The Government's justification for the price increase was misplaced, the statement said. While it is true that international oil prices have been rising, the Government changed excise duties in the budget itself which led to an added burden of Rs. 1.70 a litre for petrol and Rs.1.15 a litre for diesel.

The Left parties urged the Government to act on alternative proposals given by them to avert price hike.

These included cancelling additional cess of 50 paise a litre for highways; change in excise duty so that it does not lead to retail price hike; doing away with import parity in product

price; setting up a price stabilisation fund to meet the fluctuation of global crude price; and review of duty draw back payment to exporters of petroleum products by private refineries.

"It is unfortunate that the government has not taken up these proposals to avert the price hike."

Firmly opposing the increase, the parties decided to mobilise the people and launch a vigorous protest all over the country. They also called upon the people to join together and register their protest.

Oil prices raised 40-1 Petrol costlier by Rs. 2.50, diesel by Rs. 2;

kerosene, cooking gas spared g- gw off and

Ashok Dasgupta

NEW DELHI: After dilly-dallying for months owing to pressure from the Left parties and other coalition partners, the UPA Government on Monday effected a larger-than-expected hike in the prices of petrol and diesel while sparing the cooking fuels, LPG and kerosene, vet again.

Instead of the anticipated increase of about Re. 1-1.50 a litre, the Cabinet approved an increase of Rs 2.50 a litre in the price of petrol and Rs. 2 a litre in the price of diesel. The revised prices are to come into effect from midnight on Monday.

The protests by the Opposition parties apart, the Left allies have called for a nationwide agitation on June 28 against the price rise as the Government has ignored their suggestions.

Briefing newspersons the Cabinet meeting, the Information and Broadcasting Minister, S. Jaipal Reddy, however, said that the decision to raise the petrol and diesel prices by this margin was taken after consulta-tions with "everyone." It was effected to only "partly offset" the hike in global oil prices and in-crease in duties. The Left parnevertheless,

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\gg	و الرح	in Dalbar liter
		in Rs per litre DIESEL
	7 4 75 6	Old New
Delhi	1 THE R. P. LEWIS CO., LANSING, MICH. 49 11 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12	26.45 28.45
7	Daniel March	43.7
Kolkata	40.89 43.79	28.72 39.80
Mumbai	43.23 45.93	32.83 35.20
Chennai	A1 25 AA 26	29.30 31.51
Source:	•••	
Source: I	UL .	KBK

announced protests against the

CPI leader D. Raja noted that the hike would have a "cascading effect on general prices," affect ing the common man and the nation's economy.

Even as the increase in global oil prices and hike in duties warranted a hike of Rs. 4.68 a litre in petrol, the Government settled for an increase of Rs. 2.50 a litre. Similarly, the diesel price hike, announced after an hour-long debate in the Cabinet, was only Rs. 2 a litre despite the need to raise it by Rs. 5.13 a litre.

We have basically gone back to the principle of equitable burden sharing between the Government, the consumers and the

oil companies," the Petroleum Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar, told newspersons after the Cabinet meeting.
While the Government took a

substantial hit on its revenue when it lowered duties on LPG and kerosene in the budget, the marketing companies would have to bear the uncovered part on petrol and diesel and absorb a loss of over Rs. 11 a litre on kerosene and Rs. 130 a cylinder on

Revenue loss for firms

Mr. Aivar said the upstream firms, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, GAIL (India) Ltd. and Oil India Ltd., will continue to share the revenue loss of oil marketing firms on LPG and kerosene this fiscal.

The Minister said the objective behind the price increase was that "our oil sector companies should not suffer cash loss. Their profits must be such as to service their equity obligations and profits must be adequate to meet the investment requirements of future. "This is a onetime hike and we may consider reverting to the mechanism of fixing prices every fortnight only after international oil prices stabilise.

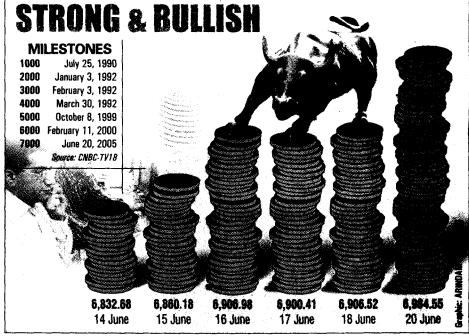
Sensex climbs anew peak

Statesman News Service

MUMBAI, June 20. Events over the last weekend proved quite dramatic for the capital market. Few were in the know that the eight-month-old squabble between the Ámbani brothers would end in such an anti-climax. The amicable settlement had its instant impact on the capital market as the benchmark Sensitive Index of the Stock Exchange, Mumbai, closed at the highest 6984.55 points today but not before flirting thrice with the 7000-point mark.

The Reliance settlement and Mr Anil Ambani's series of announcements vesterday led to an euphoric trading session at the Dalal Street today and history was created as the benchmark 30-scrip Sensitive Index of the Stock Exchange, Mumbai - after nearing the 7,000-mark thrice during the day closed at the highest-ever level of 6984.55 points or 1.13 per cent up with a 78.03 point-gain.

The Sensex touched 7000.27, 7000.85 and 7001.55 as brisk trading was reported during mid and final sessions of the day. The rally was clearly a drive by the Reliance and Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Enterrpises groups with the latter's shares showing an unprecedented increase in



their values. This was so because the ADA Enterprises announced preferential share issues of Rs 1720 crore for Reliance Energy and Rs 3000 crore for Reliance Capital.

Reliance's contribution to the surge in Sensex was 38.52 per cent. But the biggest gainer was Reliance Energy. REL closed Rs 658.25 or Rs 67 up with a gain of 11.33 per cent. The day's high was Rs 705.90. Reliance Industries ended the day at Rs 630.40, Rs 29.55 up or gain 4.92 per cent. Reliance Capital (anon Sensex stock) increased 24.79 per cent to close Rs 58.45 up at Rs 294.20, the highest for the

day was Rs 308. The IPCL stock too increased 3.94 per cent to end Rs 167.60.

Among the 30 stocks comprising Sensex, the other main gainers who pushed the benchmark Index were Infosys Technologies Rs 2,375.50 (Rs 86.70) or 3.79 percent, Satyam Rs 503.50 (Rs 17) or 3.49 per cent. Total shares traded in Sensex were worth 2.44 crore and the turnover was Rs 1425.54 crore.

Analysts say the focus seems to have shifted from midcap stocks to frontline shares over the past three sessions as the Midcar Index has been undergoing correction. However, they claim this does not mean

that the madcap bubble has burst. They remain as sturdy and financially strong as before. The rally, however, is to be ascribed to Reliance and ADAE. The market said the brothers had separated without much bitterness and with apparent satisfaction as seen in yesterday's press conference and today's e-mail by Mr Mukesh Ambani to Reliance Infocomm employees. Mr Anil Ambani's commitment to invest Rs 1,000 crore @ Rs 573 for each share personally in REL will fetch him an additional 8.60 per cent of the

Mukesh bids farewell to Infocomm: page 9

Reliance announces family settlement

Ambanis' mother outlines broad framework

Oommen A. Ninan

MUMBAI: The long and bitter battle for control of the largest private corporate empire in the country, the Reliance Group, ended on Saturday with the Ambani brothers — Mukesh and Anil — agreeing to split the conglomerate.

The broad framework of the settlement was contained in a statement signed by Mrs. Kokilaben Ambani, the widow of the founder of the Reliance Group Dhirubhai Ambani and mother of Mukesh and Anil.

Mrs. Ambani said:

"With the blessings of Srinathji, I have today amicably resolved the issues between my sons, Mukesh and Anil, keeping in mind the proud legacy of my husband Dhirubhai Ambani. I am confident that both Mukesh and Anil will resolutely uphold the values of their father and work towards protecting and enhancing value for over 3 million shareholders of the Reliance Group, which has been the foundational principle on which my husband built India's largest private sector enterprise.

"Mukesh will have responsibility for Reliance Industries and IPCL while Anil will have responsibility for Reliance Informm, Reliance Energy and Reliance Capital. My husband's foresight and vision and the values he stood for combined with my blessings will guide them to scale new heights," she said.

The statement came on the heels of the RIL's board meeting at which Mr. Anil Ambani's resignation from the position of Vice Chairman and managing Director of RIL was accepted.

The board decided to consider

Who will control what







Anil Ambani

Kokilaben D. Ambani

Mukesh Ambani

Reliance Energy (Rs. 4,593 cr.)

- **■** Power generation
- **■** Power distribution

Reliance Infocomm (Rs. 5,387 cr.)

- **■** Mobile services
- **■** Basic telephony

Reliance Capital (Rs. 296 cr.)

■ Non-banking finance company

Reliance Industries (Bs. 73.164 cr.)

- Oil refining
- **■** Petrochemicals
- Oil retailing
- Oil exploration

IPCL (Rs. 9,386 cr.)

■ Petrochemicals

Figures in brackets are turnover for the year 2004-05

Graphic by Varghese Kallada

a proposal to reorganise the businesses as per "Kokila D Ambani's principle of ensuring the highest shareholders value." To do this, it decided to authorise the Corporate Governance and Stakeholders' Interface Committee to "examine in depth all the relevant issues including statutory and legal requirements and suggest a suitable scheme of reorganisation." It empowered the Committee to seek professional and legal expertise to prepare a scheme for reorganisation.

The board expressed its gratitude to Mrs. Ambani "for finding an amicable resolution in the overall interests of the company and its shareholders which will pave the way for preserving and taking forward the historic legacy of Dhirubhai Ambani, foun-

der Chairman of the Company."

Market observers suggest that it will still take a few weeks before the details of the exact nature of the reorganisation are available. Mrs. Ambani's statement uses the phrase "will have responsibility for" while referring to the division of the companies. This, they point out, does not clarify the ownership structure within the group and between the two brothers.

'A new dawn'

PTI reports:

Terming the settlement as the "dawn of my new life", Mr. Anil Ambani wished his elder brother Mr. Mukesh Ambani "the very best in future."

More reports on Page 13

19



2 NEW HOLDING FIRMS AS PRELUDE TO AMBANI DEAL

Brothers to buy each other out

Statesman News Service

MUMBAI, June 17. — The final 60 minutes of trading at the bourses today were dominated by the Reliance Industries Limited stock which surged to a 52-week high at both the SE in Mumbai and NSE amidst positive signals that the Ambani brothers were working on the final draft of their agreement with the help of aides and an amicable resolution of their claims on family assets would be achieved by June-end and might not be delayed till 7 July, the death anniversary of their father, Dhirubhai Ambani.

Insiders suggest that the final settlement will see Mr Mukesh Ambani and Mr Anil Ambani buying out each other's stake in the two holding companies that will come into existence as a prelude to the actual division. As a part of the process, the proposal being worked out will see the creation of a holding company that will own the controlling shares of Reliance Energy, Reliance Infocomm and Reliance Capital which are the businesses that are going Mr Anil Ambani's way in the split. This holding company will have the same pattern of share-holding as in Reliance Industries Limited so that no minority shareholder loses out in the proposed division of the entire group.

Market sources claim the two separate entities are expected to have a combined value of Rs 700 to Rs 740 for each share. Mr Anil Ambani's statement after the eventful board meeting recently that the company is undervalued now seems valid as market analysts say the company share has been underperforming by 13 per cent.

The split of Reliance's core business and investment will unlock value. A statement to this effect was also made by the younger brother as vice-chairman and managing director of the company.

The split draft being worked out serves two objectives: First, there is no tax implication and secondly, an automatic listing on the



exchanges under the SEBI norm as the new holding company will have the same share-holding pattern as the already-listed RIL. The new holding company for RIL, which will be retained by the chairman and MD, Mr Mukesh Ambani, will be valued higher than the new holding company for the businesses going to his younger brother and this will necessitate him paying cash to Mr Anil Ambani as a part of the mutual transaction.

Stock exchanges and shareholders — in that order — will have to be informed of the formula, thus being drafted for the brothers' final signatures. The respective boards will then consider it and finally the matter will be placed before Bombay High Court for approval. This means that even if the two brothers sign the settlement in the next few days, the entire process of the split and the emergence of new and re-fashioned entities will take a minimum of six months.

The market, however, showed its approval as the RIL stock closed at the SE, Mumbai, at Rs 600.85 up Rs 10.05 or 1.69 per cent. The rate at the NSE was Rs 603.85 or Rs 13 up, indicative of a 2.20 per cent increase. A block deal of 1.09 lakh RIL stocks @ Rs 599.55 was reported at the NSE.

The surge in the Reliance group stocks led to Sensex recovery which ended for the week above the 6,900-mark at 6,906.52 points. The volume in Reliance shares at SE, Mumbai, was 35,97,912 shares.

lisco, Sail to merge & Among to merge

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 16. — The Cabinet today cleared a proposal for merger of public sector Indian Iron and Steel Company and Steel Authority of India following an approval of the Board of Industrial and Financial Reconstruction.

"Iisco is a holding company but the decision was taken for complete merger with Sail, for a larger perspective," the information and broadcasting minister, Mr Jaipal Reddy, said after a Cabinet meeting here, chaired by the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh. "Both have their strengths and the Cabinet felt their merger would be for the better."

The merger would ensure availability of high quality iron ore to Sail's steel plants, an official note said. With Sail's financial and managerial capabilities and availability of potential with Iisco mines, collieries, large infrastructural facilities and good work culture, there would be greater synergy for capacity expansion and technological upgradation of the plant, Mr Reddy elaborated.

Welcoming the move, Sail chairman Mr VS Jain said they would follow up the matter. The Board of Directors of both Sail and Iisco have already given in-principle approval to the merger. lisco, one of the oldest steel-making plants, was a private sector unit till 1972, when the Centre took over the management of the company. Over the years, Iisco's performance has been unsatisfactory mainly due to old plant and machinery, obsolete technology and lack of necessary capital inputs. The BIFR declared lisco "sick" and put it under its purview since June 1994. Subsequently, it appointed the IDBI as an operating agency to examine the viability of the company and to formulate a rehabilitation scheme for lisco.

On 15 February, 2000, the Cabinet approved a financial and business restructuring package for Sail, envisaging waiver of loans advanced to Sail from the

Block grants scheme for IITs, IIMs

NEW DELHI, June 16. - Undoing an NDA decision, the UPA government today decided to restore a measure of functional and financial autonomy to prestigious institutions of higher learning such as IITs and IIMs with the Union Cabinet approving a modified block grant scheme for funding these institutions. The information and broadcasting minister, Mr S Jaipal Reddy, who briefed the media on the Cabinet decision, alleged that the autonomy of these institutions was adversely affected during the NDA rule. "We are seeking to augment the financial and functional autonomy of these prestigious institutions". The continuance of the block grant scheme of funding, with some modifications, was approved on the basis of the experience of its implementation in IITs, IIMs and the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. — SNS

Details on page 4

Steel Development Fund (worth Rs 5,073 crore) and Rs 381 crore (from the government). The waiver enabled writing down of Sail's assets to the extent of Rs 3,001 crore and Rs 1,566 crore worth of loans advanced to Iisco from Sail and Rs 381 crore from the government. Further, an amount of Rs 506 crore, comprising interest, written off in the past on loans to Iisco from Sail funds, was written back in Sail's books. This resulted in no dues from Sail to lisco. The Centre approved a proposal for revival of lisco in June 2002. Based on this, Iisco and Sail prepared a rehabilitation package, which was approved by the BIFR.

Left welcomes merger

The CPI-M today termed the merger decision as a "historic event", saying that it would give IISCO a fresh lease of life. Chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and CPI-M state secretary Mr Anil Biswas welcomed the merger move.

অবশেষে মানল কেন্দ্র

সেল-এ মিশে গিয়ে ইস্কোর ইচ্ছাপূর্ণ

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৬ জুন: অবশেষে সেল-এর সঙ্গে মিশে যাছে ইস্নো। বিলগ্নিকরণের জমানায় প্রায় উল্টো স্রোতে গিয়ে দেশের প্রথম ইম্পাত সংস্থাটিকে পুনরুজ্জীবনের জন্য সেলের সঙ্গে মিশিয়ে দেওয়ার প্রস্তাবটিতে আজ অনুমোদনের সিলমোহর লাগিয়ে দিল কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার অর্থনৈতিক বিষয়ক কমিটি। বার্নপুরে ইস্কোর ভবিষ্যৎ নিয়ে দীর্ঘ দিন দোলাচলের শিকার হাজার হাজার কর্মী অবশ্য তাঁদের এই ইচ্ছাপ্রণের সংবাদ এখনও পুরোপুরি বিশ্বাস করে উঠতে পারছেন না।

তবে এত দিন যাঁরা টেলিকম, বিমা, বিমান পরিবহণ বা সংবাদপত্রে বিদেশি মালিকানার প্রশ্নে নিজেদের উপেক্ষিত বলে মনে করছিলেন, সেই বামপন্থী নেতারা এ দিন সমস্বরে ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন নেতাদের সঙ্গে গলা মিলিয়ে মন্ত্রিসভার সিদ্ধান্তের সমর্থন করেছেন। দিল্লিতে মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠকের অব্যবহিত পরেই মহাকরণে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বৃদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য বলেন, "কেন্দ্রের এই সিদ্ধান্ত স্বাগত। আমরা দীর্ঘ দিন এই প্রস্তাব নিয়ে কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করেছি। এর ফলে ইন্ধোর বছ শ্রমিক ও সংস্থার অনুসারী শিল্প উপকৃত হবে।" সি পি এমের রাজ্য সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাসের মন্তব্য, "বামপন্থী আন্দোলনের জয়। আমরা কেন্দ্রকে যে সমর্থন করিছি দাবি আদায়ের জন্য, এর থেকেই তা প্রমাণিত।" রাজ্যের শিল্পমন্ত্রী নিরুপম সেনের আশা, ইন্ধো আধুনিকীকরণের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় সব কিছু এ বার করবে সেল। বন্ধ কুলটি কারাখানাও সেল আধুনিকীকরণ করবে, এমন আশাও প্রকাশ করেন তিনি।

এই সুরই ধ্বনিত হয়েছে ভান, বাম সমস্ত ইউনিয়নের কথায়। সিটুর সাধারণ সম্পাদক চিত্তরত মজুমদার বলেন, "এটা অনেক দিন ধরেই আমরা দাবি করছিলাম। বিলগ্নিকরণের জমানায় এটা একটা ভাল উদ্যোগ। আমরা একে স্বাগত জানাছি।" এই সংযুক্তিকরণ পশ্চিমবঙ্গের শিল্প ক্ষেত্রে সুসংবাদ বলে মন্তব্য করেন আইটাকের সাধারণ সম্পাদক গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত। ইনটাকের রাজ্য সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রমথেশ সেন ও ভারতীয় মজদুর সঙ্গের সাধারণ সম্পাদক বৈজনাথ রায়ও মন্ত্রিসভার এই সিদ্ধান্তকে পুরোপুরি সমর্থন করে বলেছেন, এর ফলে সংস্থার পাশাপাশি উপকৃত হবেন ইস্কোর ১৬,২১৮ কর্মী।

তবে এই সিদ্ধান্ত যে নিয়ন্ত্রিত অর্থনীতির জমানার অবিমৃশ্যকারী সরকারি হকুমের মতো নয়, সেল কর্তাদের কথাতেই তা পরিষ্কার। নব্বইয়ের দশকের শেষ থেকে কয়েক বছর ধরে ইস্কো পুনরুজ্জীবনে দেশি-বিদেশি যে সব সংস্থা আগ্রহ দেখিয়েছিল, তাদের সবচেয়ে বড় আকর্ষণ ছিল ইস্কোর হাতে যে-খনি আছে, তার লৌহ আকরিক। সেলের তরফ থেকে বরাবরই বলা হত যে চিরিয়া, মান্ধারপুর ও গুয়া, এই তিন জায়গায় ইস্কোর খনিতে যে লৌহ আকরিক আছে, তার মান দেশের মধ্যে শ্রেষ্ঠ। পরিমাণ এশিয়ায় বৃহত্তম। মোট আকরিকের ভাণ্ডার ২০০ কোটি টন। বিপুল পরিমাণ এই আকরিক ভাণ্ডার যে কোনও সংস্থার কাছেই বড় সম্পদ। পাশাপাশি চাসনালা, জিৎপর ও রামনগরে আছে তিনটি কয়লাখনি।

এর সঙ্গে যুক্ত হয়েছে বিশ্ব বাজারে ইম্পাতের মূল্যবৃদ্ধির আশির্বাদ। ইম্পাতের দাম যে-ভাবে বেড়েছে গত দু'বছরে, তার উপরে ভর করেই দীর্ঘ লোকসানের পর ২০০৩-'০৪ সালেই লাভের পথে ফেরে ইস্কো। ওই বছর ১,০৫১ কোটি টাকার মোট ব্যবসা করে ২৭ কোটি টাকা নিট মূনাফা করেছে ইস্কো। ২০০৪-'০৫ সালে মোট ব্যবসার পরিমাণ দাঁড়ায় ১,৪৮৭ কোটি টাকা। নিট মূনাফার অঙ্ক ৪৬ কোটি ৬০ লক্ষ টাকা। অথচ ২০০২-'০৩ সালে ইস্কো ১৮২ কোটি টাকা লোকসান করেছিল। প্রায় দশ মাস আগে কলকাতা সফরে এসে কেন্দ্রীয় ইম্পাতমন্ত্রী রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান ইস্কো-সেইল সংযুক্তির ঘোষণা করেছিলেন। বলেছিলেন, ইস্কোর পুনরুজ্জীবনে অর্থের অভাব হবে না।

ইস্কোর জন্য কেন্দ্র অবশ্য গত কয়েক বছর ধরেই যথেষ্ট্র দরাজ। নয়ের দশকে সেল ইস্কোকে যে ১,৯৪৭ কোটি টাকা ঋণ দিয়েছিল, ১৯৯৯ সালে তা মকুব করে কেন্দ্র। ২০০২ সালে এন ডি এ সরকার ইস্কো পুনরুজ্জীবনের জন্য সেলের একটি প্রকল্প অনুমোদন করে। তার আওতায় কর্মীদের একাংশকে স্বেচ্ছাবসর দিতে ৫৪০ কোটি টাকা বরাদ্দ করা হয়। ইস্কো আধুনিকীকরণের জন্য সেলকে বাজার থেকে ৩৪১ কোটি টাকা ঋণ সংগ্রহ করতে গ্যারান্টি দিতেও রাজি ছিল সরকার। পুনরুজ্জীবনের অঙ্গ হিসাবে ১৩১ বছর আগে গড়ে ওঠা কুলটির কারখানাটি বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়। '০৩ সালের গোড়ায় ওই কারখানার কর্মীরা স্বেচ্ছাবসর পান।

ইস্কোর পুনরুজ্জীবন ও আধুনিকীকরণ নিয়ে দীর্ঘ দিন নানা মহলে আলাপ আলোচনা চললেও, সেলের পক্ষে এ বার তা যে বিশেষ সমস্যার হবে না, বিভিন্ন মহলে সেটাই ধারণা। তার একটা কারণ যদি হয় সেলের পরিচালন দক্ষতা ও প্রযুক্তি ভাণ্ডার, অন্য কারণ অবশাই ওই সংস্থার বর্তমান আর্থিক স্বাস্থ্য। ইম্পাতের মূল্যবৃদ্ধির আর্শীবাদে সেল ২০০৪-'০৫ সালে নজিরবিহীন আর্থিক ফল করেছে। ৩১,৮০০ কোটি টাকার মোট আয় ও ৬,৮১৭ কোটি টাকার নিট মুনাফা দুটোই রেকর্জ। সেলের খাতাও এখন প্রায় ঋণশূন্য।

ফলে দায়িত্ব নিতে সেলের কাঁধুও এখন যথেষ্ট চওড়া।

● বিশ্বাসই হচ্ছিল না বার্নপুর শিল্পাঞ্চলের..... পৃঃ ৬

1 7 JUN 2005

Government again defers decision on fuel price hike

No conclusion due to absence of Ministers, says Chidambaram

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The United Progressive Alliance Government on Thursday failed yet again to a take a decision on the Petroleum Ministry's proposal to hike petrol and diesel prices, ostensibly in the wake of opposition from allies.

However, briefing newspersons after the Cabinet and Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) meetings here, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said, "The Cabinet deferred a decision in view of the absence of some Ministers." He did not divulge the names of the Ministers who were absent.

The decision to defer the hike in fuel prices, according to informed sources, was taken at the CCEA meeting.

Another meeting is to be convened in the next few days to discuss the petroleum prices issue again, the sources said.

Following the interaction with the Left parties and other partners in the UPA coalition, the Petroleum Ministry, as per its proposal, had sought a price hike of about Rs. 1.50 a litre for both petrol and diesel.

The state-owned oil companies, however, have been demanding a steeper increase of Rs. 4 a litre for petrol and Rs 5 a litre for diesel in keeping with the spiralling international oil prices, coupled with the hike in duties announced in the budget for the current fiscal.

This apart, the public sector unit oil companies want an increase in LPG and kerosene prices as they were losing heavily on both the cooking fuels on account of the prevailing subsidies



TO MAKE A PRESENTATION: Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar arrives at the Prime Minister's Office for a Cabinet meeting in New Delhi on Thursday.

- PHOTO: V. SUDERSHAN

Ambanis set a date for settlement

ARUN Kumar & Agencies New Delhi, June 15 16/6

CORPORATE INDIA'S biggest family soap may be nearing a happy ending — or at least an ending of some sort—almost seven months after the famous television byte in which Mukesh Ambani spoke of differences over ownership issues.

The peace plan between Mukesh and Anil Ambani is likely to be unveiled on July 6, Reliance group founder chairman Dhirubhai Ambani's death anniversary, "or any day before it in July", a source said.

The brothers met last week as part of efforts to hammer out a settlement, under which Reliance Industries might be split. Mukesh is likely to retain IPCL while Anil will get other segments of the Reliance empire. Kokilaben Ambani is meeting her sons separately almost every day.

Day-to-day talks are being held between the two sides to work out details, based on which a formal announcement could be made on July 6 to end the fiercest battle in India's corporate history.

The settlement is based on a formula suggested by ICICI chairman and family friend K.V. Kamath. Kamath had broken his silence a few days ago saying that the brothers were mature and intelligent and would find a way out.

The first sign of a settlement happening came earlier this month at the Reliance Energy AGM. In his capacity as chairman and managing director, Anil not only made several expansion-related announcements but also contended that Reliance Industries would supply gas from KG basin to the 3,700 MW Dadri project.

Second, there is a change of guard at Reliance Infocomm. While there is no announcement, sources said Anil's core team had



WHO GETS WHAT

- MUKES# Likely to retain Reliance Industries & IPCL
- ANIL Should get Reliance Energy Ltd, Reliance Capital and Reliance Infocomm

already taken over the controls.

A new company might be formed after splitting RIL. The sources also hinted at a merger between Reliance Industries Ltd and IPCL in future.

The equity holding of Anilheld companies — Reliance Capital, Reliance Energy, Reliance Infocomm and Reliance Telecom — and other companies like insurance will be parked in the new company, which will have Anil as chairman and managing director. All RIL shareholders will get a proportionate holding in the new company.

Keenly watching the proceedings, finance minister P. Chidambaram said last month that the brothers were moving towards a settlement and there was no need for any government intervention in the family dispute. "Both Mukesh and Anil talk to me from time to time and I advise both to settle their dispute quickly... Looks like they will reach a settlement," Chidambaram said.

The ministry of company affairs, too, has been keeping a close watch on the developments.

18 JUN 2005 THE HID THES

ইরান গ্যাস লাইন নিয়ে

কিনতে ভারত চুক্তি সই করার পরের স্কড়ানো হবে না। তার পর ইরানে গিয়ে দিনই ইরান-পাকিস্তান-ভারত গ্যাস পাইপলাইন নিয়ে আবার হুমকি দিল আমেরিকা। ওয়াশিংটন ইসলামাবাদকে বলেছে, এই প্রকল্পে সায় দিলে তাদের উপরে নিষেধাজ্ঞা আরোপ করা হবে। আমেরিকার এই হুমকির ফলে গ্যাস পাইপলাইন প্রকল্প ফের অনিশ্চিত হয়ে পড়ল বলেই বিশেষজ্ঞদের মত। সি পি এম অবশ্য আজ বলেছে, মার্কিন বাধা উপেক্ষা করে ভারত ও পাকিস্তানের এই প্রকল্প রূপায়ণ করা উচিত।

গোপন পরমাণু কর্মসৃচির কারণে তাদের কালো তালিকায় থাকা ইরান থেকে ভারতে গ্যাস আমদানির সিদ্ধান্তে ঘোর আপত্তি বুশ প্রশাসনের। মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব কন্ডোলিজা রাইস ভারত সফরের সময় স্পষ্ট ভাষায় নিজেদের আপত্তির কথা জানিয়েছিলেন। মার্কিন মনোভাবের আন্দাজ পেয়ে প্রায় ২৬০০ কিলোমিটার দীর্ঘ এই পাইপলাইন প্রকল্প থেকে খানিকটা হাত গুটিয়ে নেয় পাকিস্তানও। কিন্তু পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ারের সাম্প্রতিক পাক সফরে অনেকটাই বরফ গলে। প্রকল্প নিয়ে এগোতে রাজি হয় ইসলামাবাদ। দু দৈশের যৌথ বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়, এই

নয়াদিল্লি, ১৪ জুন: ইরানের গ্যাস প্রকর্মের সঙ্গে অন্য কোনও বিষয়কে গ্যাস আমদানির চুক্তি সেরে ফেলেন মণিশঙ্কর। পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পের বিভিন্ন দিক খতিয়ে দেখতে যৌথ কৰ্মসমিতি গড়ার ব্যাপারে সহমত হয়েছে দু'দেশ।

> আমেরিকার এ ভূমিকার তীব্র নিন্দা করেছে সিপিএম। দলের পলিটব্যুরোর এক বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়, মার্কিন চাপের মুখে নতিস্বীকার করে এই প্রকল্প থেকে পিছিয়ে আসা উচিত হবে না ভারত ও পাকিস্তানের। মনমোহন সিংহ যখন আমেরিকা যাবেন, তখন এই কথা স্পষ্ট ভাষায় বুশ প্রশাসনকে বলা উচিত বলে মন্তব্য পলিটব্যুরোর। — পি টি আই

> ইয়াসিন মালিকের দাবি। পাক তথ্যমন্ত্রী শেখ রশিদ আহমেদ আশির দশকের শেষে নিজের বাড়িতে জঙ্গি শিবির চালাতেন বলে জেকেএলএফ প্রধান ইয়াসিন মালিকের মন্তব্য, উড়িয়ে দিয়েছেন রশিদ। রশিদের বক্তব্য, "তিনি কোন শেখের কথা বলছেন জানি না। রাওয়ালপিভিতে অনেক শেখ আছেন।" মালিকের কথার প্রতিক্রিয়ায় ভারতের বিদেশমন্ত্রক বলেছে, এই মন্তব্য চোখে আঙুল দিয়ে দেখিয়ে দিয়েছে, পাক নেতৃত্ব মুখে শান্তির কথা বললেও সর্ষের মধ্যেই ভূত রয়েছে।

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Deal may result in curbs on Indian cos

By Indrani Bagchi/TNN

New Delhi: With the US once again making its opposition to the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline clear, India finds itself facing potential embarrassment, especially as petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar is busy travelling between Iran and Pakistan trying to tie up the deal. The pact, if it goes through, may attract US sanctions for Indian companies engaged in the project.

According to reports, Washington's concern was emphasised by US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice during her last week's visit to Pakistan. She apparently indicated that the project could attract provisions of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, but more important, the bad blood it would create in Washington would seriously impact US-Pak relations. It could also result in curbs, she is believed to have warned Islamabad.

With India and the US working

With India and the US working overtime on an energy dialogue that is intended to increase US presence in the Indian energy sector, this project may have a deleterious effect on India's energy security efforts. It will also make it difficult for Indian companies like ONGC or GAIL to operate overseas with US sanctions on them.

On Monday, a state department spokesperson said, "The US is prepared to work with both countries on the broader question of their energy

Mani In A Mess



needs and ensure their prosperity."
Until last year, it was India which

Until last year, it was India which had held up talks on the pipeline, citing serious security concerns. Security experts say the concerns remain, especially with the Balochistan Insurgency gathering steam in Pakistan. The pipeline is supposed to traverse the Baloch territory.

the Baloch territory.

Many experts had said the UPA government's de-linking of the pipeline project from other considerations was seen as capitulating to Pakistan's demands. Initially, the government had given the go-ahead for the project as a bilateral project, making it Iran's re-

sponsibility to deliver the gas at India's doorstep.

By involving Pakistan in a joint working group, Aiyar has made it a trilateral affair. Islamabad has even asked for an extra \$100 million to pay for security of the pipeline. This, despite guarantees that Islamabad is supposed to be giving.

Earlier, India had linked the pipeline to transit rights to Afghanistan, but it was abandoned. So what's India thinking of? Government sources say where Pakistan is headed is clear. Islamabad, they say, may use the pipeline to wangle a better energy deal from the US in return. There is also a Unocal pipeline that is being talked about from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan, to Pakistan's new port, Gwadar. Unocal may be an American company, but whether the US will give its nod to a project which may end up being a viable energy source for China is another matter altogether. However, currently, the project has US blessings, as does another proposal to bring gas from Qatar to Pakistan. For India, the problem is much more complex.

India may be the flavour of the season for the US, but it is equally true that it does not enjoy the kind of blanket leverage with Washington that Pakistan does. To get the US to work on India's energy needs, India will have to learn to reciprocate. The other problem is the cost of the fuel.

"Vast potential for more trade with U.S."

Economic issues key to international relations, says Manmohan

Special Correspondent

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NEW DELHI: Noting that economic issues were the key to international relations, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, on Monday said there was a need for greater coordination in the Government to deal with the outside world.

For this, he said, the Government must devise a medium-tolong term strategy for the country's economic interaction with the world, with special focus on relations with its neighbours and major economic partners.

Chairing the first meeting of the Trade and Economic Relations Committee (TERC), Dr. Singh said: "Economic relations have come to increasingly influence strategic engagement. In-

the world is still relatively limited and this must increase."

Amplifying the point further during the meeting which discussed issues pertaining to India-U.S. economic relations ahead of his visit to the U.S. in July this year, Dr. Singh said: "China's economic engagement with the U.S. is ten times that of India. There is vast potential for increased trade and investment relations with the U.S. We must consider how we can realise this potential."

Briefing newspersons here after the two-hour meeting, the Prime Minister's media advisor, Sanjaya Baru, quoted Dr. Singh as saying that economic issues had become the key to international relations and there was a dia's economic interaction with need for a holistic view on this.

Gas pipeline could be wo extended to China

Atul Aneja Co Co Co A Prile

MANAMA: India and Iran have discussed the extension of the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline to China to anchor a trans-Asia en-

ergy tie-up.

"Iran has given the green signal on our embarking on a serious dialogue with the Chinese authorities on whether this pipeline could be extended to China," Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, who is in Iran on a three-day visit, said on Sunday. Iranian officials also spoke about the possibility of involving China in the project. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh told Petroenergy Information Network that the subject had been discussed with Mr. Aiyar, and Iran was "willing to extend the pipeline up to China."

China, India and Iran have already decided to develop Iran's giant Yadavaran oil field as part of their growing cooperation in

the energy sector.

Iranian English daily *Tehran Times* reported that Mr. Zanganeh would be in Pakistan "in a few days" for discussions on the 2,600-km pipeline project.

Meanwhile, India and Iran are all set to sign a multi-billion dollar agreement on the annual sale of five million tonnes of gas to India for 25 years. Supplies are likely to begin towards the second half of 2009. Under the agreement, the Gas Authority of India Limited would market 40 per cent of the liquefied natural Gas, Indian Oil Corporation 35 per cent and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited the rest.

India, Iran to sign \$25-b deal today

talks with Iranian oil quantities can be raised to 7.5 million LNG quantity be A GSPA for at least five million tons raised to 7.5 million per annum of LNG would be signed tones. We have to wait Zanganeh," petroleum non continue for additional supplies, Mr for the outcome of my on 13 June and if Iran agrees the tons or else discussions would Mani Snakar Aiyar said minister Mr Bijan Shankar Aiyar said. The Gas Sales and Purchase Agreement (GSPA) for at least five TEHRAN (Iran), June 12. — India is likely to sign a \$25 billion deal with Iran for import of liquefied natural gas (LNG) tomorrow, for meeting its growing energy requirements. The said deal will be opera-

price for an additional 2.5 million tional supplies. tones of LNG New Delhi wants to agreed five million tones per annum of LNG. On the contrary, Iranian buy over and above the already side has proposed a hike in price. fran has refused to concession on million tones per annum of LNG beginning second half of 2009-10 will be signed by a consortium of Indian firms and National Iranian

Gas Export Company (NIGEC),

officials said.

tional from 2009-10.

Of the five million tonnes per annum LNG to be imported from Iran, the state-run gas utility Gail (India) Ltd will be responsible for

of each consignment plus a fixed price of 1.2 dollars per million British thermal unit (mBtu).

Price, according to this formula, would be capped at 3.10 dollars per

mBtu at 31 dollars a barrel Brent

price, officials said.

crude oil price at the time of loading

As per the agreed pricing formula, India will pay Iran 0.065 of Brent

However, Iran has agreed to maintain C2 (ethane) component in five million tones per annum of LNG would be signed on 13 June and if Iran agrees the quantities can Mr Aivar said, a GSPA for at least the LNG at five per cent.

be raised to 7.5 million tones or else discussions would continue for addi-

marketing 40 per cent, Indian Oil Corp (IOC) 35 per cent and Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) the

"We have been insisting on the

emaining 25 per cent.

Phase 12 of the gigantic South Pars gas field. The fixed price component (1.2 dollars per mBtu) would have year after the second year of the an escalation of two per cent per

be costlier than the LNG that India Oatar LNG has been priced in a band of \$16 to \$24 a barrel of for the first five years, at a fixed price of \$2.53 per mBtu, \$20 a barrel contract delivery.

Officials said, Iranian gas would has been importing from Qatar. Japanese crude cocktail (JCC). As per agreement Qatar is selling LNG, oil price.

Since the current fixed pribe period ends in 2009, Oatar LNG price will rise by 52 cents to \$3.05 per mBtu at the ceiling of the price band. Added to these prices is \$0.26 per mBtu shipping cost, making the current delivered price of \$2.79 per mBtu, \$3.29 per mBtu after 2009.

Indian companies will also have a right to take stake in the plant that To this 0.30 dollars per mBtu would be added \$3.40 per mBtu for ransporting the gas in its liquefied form in specialized tankers from

natural gas produced from Phase-12 will be set up in Iran to liquefy the of South Pars gas field.

Indian firms can take up to four per cent stake for every one million

Mr Aiyar said, India had linked purchase of LNG from Iran to Oil (ONGC) Videsh Ltd, the overseas field, Yadavaran and 100 per cent in arm of the state-owned ONGC, getting a 20 per cent share in the development of Iran's biggest onshore oi 30,000 barrels per day Jufeyr field. Gas one of LNG they buy. Natural and

would translate into 60,000 barrels The 20 per cent in Yadavaran per day of crude oil for India, he

have progressed well, the deal for equity in oil fields has not moved. I day ministerial level discussion (with "While talks on LNG purchase hope at the conclusion of the three fran) something concrete emerges, he said

JUN 2005

THE STATESMAN

Press Trust of India

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8, 2005

The energy route

he establishment of a joint working group on ener-

gy cooperation marks a new high in the development of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. Having wisely set aside its political objections to the pipeline, India needs to sort out a whole raft of economic and financial issues with both Pakistan and Iran. The cost of gas at the well-head is a major issue for New Delhi and Islamabad, and one which the two countries will jointly have to tackle for maximising their individual gains. Transit fees are another issue that will require careful negotiation. Eventually, trilateral discussions involving Iran will be needed to settle questions of security, insurance and infrastructure finance. An obvious factor to be taken into account is the United States' publicly expressed opposition to the project. However, despite the existence of domestic laws such as the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, Washington will not find it easy to sabotage the proposed pipeline or block international sources of funding. Japan, for example, has successfully resisted the Bush administration's pressure to walk away from the Azadegan oilfield project. As long as India and Pakistan remain firm on their right to conduct business with Iran, the U.S. will have to back off.

The Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline is, of course, only one of a number of projects that New Delhi needs to push ahead with in order to tackle the growing mismatch between domestic energy production and consumption. By 2025, India's gas deficit is likely to be more than 200 million metric standard cubic metres a day (mmscmd). Imports from Iran via Pakistan will help narrow the gap but the country will also have to tap additional sources as diverse as Myanmar, Oatar, Turkmenistan and the wider Caspian basin, During his talks with his Pakistani counterpart, Oil and Natural Gas Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar has suggested making India the final destination for the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) pipeline. The Turkmen idea was first floated during the Taliban's rule by an international energy consortium led by U.S. firm Unocal but could not find traction for obvious reasons. Today, however, the scenario is quite different. If New Delhi were to join TAP, it would give India and Pakistan an incentive to work together for bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan rather than working at cross-purposes there as they have done in the past. Notwithstanding Pakistan's insistence that the "stand-alone" Iran pipeline project will not be the harbinger of a broader set of economic linkages, the size of the venture is bound to generate positive externalities in every sphere. Creating mutual dependencies is the surest way of ensuring that India and Pakistan start living like normal neighbours. In the energy sector itself. India has asked Pakistan to remove diesel from its negative import list so that surplus diesel from north Indian refineries such as Panipat can be sold across the border. Given the absence of its own refineries in West Punjab, Pakistan would be foolish to demur.

Pak clears India-Iran pipeline %

K.A. Badarinath
Islamabad, June 7

PAKISTAN PRESIDENT Pervez

Musharraf on Tuesday closed the

PAKISTAN PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf on Tuesday cleared the \$4.2 billion gas pipeline project from Iran to India via Pakistan. After an hour-long meeting with visiting petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, Musharraf also approved the setting up of a joint working group to implement the project

Later, briefing newsmen, Aiyar said "President Musharraf gave his blessings to conclude all the preliminary work on the project before the end of this year".

The Pak President has also okayed India's proposal to participate in the Gulf South Asia pipeline project that envisages bringing piped LNG from Qatar to Pakistan. Since Islamabad has no objection to India participating in this multi-billion LNG project, New Delhi will now take up the issue with Doha. India proposes to seek Qatar's approval to lay a branched pipeline from mid-way to meet LNG demand in the southern states.

in the southern states.

On Tuesday, India and Pakistan released a joint communiqué at the conclusion of Aiyar's three-day tour of Pakistan. The statement reflects the commitment to jointly develop transnational pipelines to meet the rising energy demands on both sides. The energy requirement by both countries has been pegged at 500 million cubic metres per day by 2025. Of this, 300 million cubic metres would be the shortage faced by Pakistan while India would need to plug a 200 million cubic metres shortfall. The communiqué outlined cooperation between both countries in all the three transnational pipelines — with Iran, Turkmenistan and Qatar.

বাইরের বিষয়্পুকুল্প রূপায়ণে বাধা নয়, জানালেন আজিজ

পাইপলাইনের সূচনা আগামী বছরেই

ইসলামাবাদ, ৬ জুন: ইরান-ভারত পাইপলাইন প্রকল্প ২০০৬ সালের মধ্যেই শুরু করে দিতে কৃতসংকল্প নয়াদিল্লি এবং ইসলামাবাদ। এই লক্ষ্যেই দু'টি দেশ আজ একটি যৌথ কমিটি গড়ার সিদ্ধান্ত দিয়েছে। অন্য দিকে পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী সওকত আজিজ স্পষ্ট ভাষায় জানিয়েছেন, ইরান-ভারত পাইপলাইন সম্পূর্ণ 'আলাদা' একটি প্রকল্প, যার সঙ্গে অন্য কোনও বিষয়কে যুক্ত করা যায় না। আজিজ আজ এ কথা জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন ভারতের পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ারকে। তুর্কমেনিস্তান-আফগানিস্তান পাইপলাইনটিও ভাপতে আনা হবে বলে আইয়ারকে কথা দিয়েছে পাকিস্তান।

ফলে ইরান থেকে গ্যাস আনার এই ৪০০ কোটি ডলারের প্রকল্প ঘিরে আমেরিকা আপত্তিকে পাকিস্তান যে আমল দিতে চাইছে না, আজিজের এই বক্তব্য থেকে সেই ইঙ্গিত অত্যন্ত স্পষ্ট হয়ে উঠেছে বলে কূটনীতিকরা জানান। তিনি বলেছেন, তাঁর ইচ্ছা ভারত ও পাকিস্তান দুটি রাষ্ট্রই প্রকল্প যত দ্রুত সম্ভব শেষ করার উপর সর্বাধিক গুরুত্ব দিক। পাশাপাশি এই পাইপলাইন সংযোগই দুটি দেশের মধ্যে পারস্পরিক নির্ভরতা তৈরি করে স্থায়ী সুসম্পর্করে পথ তৈরি করে দেবে বলে আশা প্রকাশ করেছেন আজিজ। আইয়ারের কথায়, "এখন মনে হচ্ছে প্রকল্পের উপর থেকে অনিশ্চয়তার মেঘ কেটে গিয়েছে।"

দু'টি দেশের শক্তির চাহিদা মেটাতে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ

এই প্রকল্প রূপায়ণ নিয়ে সব বাধা কাটাতে সাহায্য করবে ওই যৌথ কমিটি। এই 'জয়েন্ট ওয়ার্কিং গ্রুপ'এর নেতৃত্বে থাকবেন ভারত ও পাকিস্তানের পেট্রোলিয়াম সচিবেরা। প্রকল্পের কারিগরি দিক, অর্থের সংস্থান, বাণিজ্যিক বিষয় ইত্যাদি নিয়ে যৌথ আলোচনার মাধ্যমে ঐকমত্যে পক্ষছতে সাহায্য করবে এই কমিটি। যদি প্রকল্পের সব শর্ড দু'টি দেশের কাছে গ্রহণযোগ্য হয়, তা হলে ২০১০ সালের মধ্যেই পাইপলাইন দিয়ে গ্যাস পরিবহণ শুরু হয়ে যাবে বলে সরকারি সৃত্রে ইঙ্গিত মিলেছে। ইরান এই মুহুর্তে কমিটিতে যোগ না দিলেও পরে তারাও সামিল হলে প্রকল্প সংক্রান্ত ব্রিপাক্ষিক চুক্তি সই হবে।

আজিজ বলেন, "বাইরের কোনও বিষয়ের সঙ্গে এই প্রকল্পের ভাগ্যকে যুক্ত করা উচিত নয়। একমাত্র তা হলেই ভারত ও পাকিস্তান উভয় দেশই প্রকল্পরপায়ণের প্রতি মন দিতে পারবে। অন্যান্য বিষয়, যেমন পাইপলাইন নির্মাণ, প্রকল্পের খরচের সংস্থান, গ্যাসের দাম ইত্যাদি নিয়ে সিদ্ধান্তে আসাও অনেক সহজ হবে।" ইরান-ভারত এবং তুর্কমেনিস্তান-আফগানিস্তান, দু'টি পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পেই পাকিস্তান অগ্রাধিকার দিছে বলে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন পাক প্রধানমন্ত্রী। পাকিস্তান হয়ে ওই গ্যাস ভারতে সরবরাহ হলে দু'দেশের জ্বালানির চাহিদা সংক্রান্ত সমস্যার সুরাহা হবে বলে মন্তব্য করেন আজিজ।

পাকিস্তানের পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী আমানুল্লা খান

জাদুর উপস্থিতিতে আইয়ারের সঙ্গে আজিজের এই বৈঠক অনুষ্ঠিত হয়। ভারতীয় হাই কমিশনার শিব শঙ্কর মেননও হাজির ছিলেন। আইয়ার এই বৈঠককে অত্যপ্ত উৎসাহজনক এবং সফল বলে মন্তব। করেছেন। আজিজকে তাঁর গঠনমূলক সুপারিশের জন্য ধন্যবাদ জানান আইয়ার। আজিজের সঙ্গে বৈঠক গ্যাস পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পকে অনেক দূর এগিয়ে নিয়ে গেল বলে মনে করছেন তিনি। উল্লেখ্য, ইরানের পরমাণু কর্মসূচি নিয়ে আপত্তি তুলে প্রকল্প রূপায়ণে বাদ সাধতে চেয়েছিল আমেরিকা।

নিরাপত্তা যথেষ্ট। প্রস্তাবিত ইরান-ভারত গ্যাস পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পে নিরাপত্তা সুনিশ্চিত করতে যথেষ্ট ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হচ্ছে। প্রকল্পটির সম্ভাব্যতা নিয়ে সমীক্ষা রিপোর্টে এ কথা জানিয়েছে আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থা বি এইচ পি বিলিটন। এই রিপোর্টের উপর ভিত্তি করেই প্রকল্প নিয়ে পাকিস্তানের পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী আমানুল্লা খান জাদুর সঙ্গে আলোচনা করেছেন মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার। রিপোর্টে বলা হয়েছে, ০.৯ থেকে ১.৫ মিটার গভীরে বসানো হবে ওই পাইপলাইন। প্রতি ১৫০ কিলোমিটার অন্তর থাকবে রক্ষণাবেক্ষণের আলাদা ইউনিট। ২৬০০ কিলোমিটার পাইপলাইনের ৭৬০ কিলোমিটার যাবে পাকিস্তানের মধ্যে দিয়ে। পাইপলাইনে সরবরাহ ব্যাহত হলে ওই সমস্ত ইউনিট তা দুই থেকে তিন দিনে মেরামত করতে পারবে। — পি টি আই

India keen to join TAP gas project Interests of India, Pakistan lie in accessing low-cost energy: Mani Shankar Aiyar

ISLAMABAD: India expressed interest injoining the Asian Develties to give a concrete shape to the \$4.16 billion Iran-India gas kistan (TAP) gas pipeline even as it held talks with Pakistan on Bank-sponsored Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pa-Sunday on exploring possibili-

THE KINDO

Petroleum Minister Mani lah Khan Jadoon, towards form-Shankar Aiyar led the Ministerial-level discussions with his Pakistani counterpart, Amanulcheaper gas from Iran and Turkpipeline project.

reporters here.

derstood that the common troubled state of Afghanistan, was exploring options on iminterest of India and Pakistan expressed willingness to get on porting gas from Iran, Turkmen expressed willingness to get on board the discussions to be held lies in accessing low cost energy, affordable fuel from our extend-

ed neighbourhood, which "India is not at the moment stretches from countries bor- party to TAP. But Jadoon has mal invitation for me to join the accepted to arrange for the for-Ministerial-level discussions at the next joint committee meeting scheduled to be held in July," tries bordering the Arabian Sea," dering the Caspian Sea to couneral in Karachi in the 1970s, told Mr. Aiyar, who was Consul-Gen-

Ministerial-level talks on Tues-A joint statement will be issued at the end of three-day New Delhi, which till now was of the TAP pipeline to India due to doubts over gas reserves in Furkmenistan and difficulties in non-committal on the extension

Pakistan's Petroleum Secretatransmitting the gas through a Pakistan's Petroleum Secreta-pipeline passing through the ry Ahmad Waqar said Islamabad

2,600-km pipeline, 760 km of which is to pass through Pakiswith Islamabad on transit issues. This had led Iran quoting a price its calculations of the delivered tan. It had left it to Iran to deal at least 40 per cent costlier than

in talks between Iran and Pakistan for the past four-five months. New Delhi hopes to gressed rapidly, there was a lull achieve a breakthrough in getative to the producer and affordable to consumer." - PTI by India from Iran had proting a price which "is remuner-

price of gas through a pipeline. While talks on purchase of gas India's participation in the projects. "We need gas anyway. We are considering three projects.... India will be welcome to join," he said. "Having shared interests terest in India becoming party to has signalled its willingness to as buyers of gas we must build on porting gas from Iran, Turkmenistan and Qatar and welcomed this," Mr. Aiyar said, adding that Pakistan "has reconfirmed its inthe discussions on TAP. India

New Delhi had till now only been talking to Teheran for import of natural gas through the consider the matter further."

গ্যাস পাওয়ার ব্যাপারে এ বার যাতে ভারত ও পাকিস্তান দু'টি দেশ ইরান আগেই জানিয়েছে গ্যাস করতে পারে, তার জন্য ইসলামাবাদকে লাহোর থেকে এখানে এসে পৌছেছেন রেখেছিল ভারত। তারই জেরে ইরান ভারতের পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী। তিনি পাক দর বাড়াচ্ছে বলে অভিযোগ। পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী আমানুল্লা খান জাদুকে এই বিষয়ে অবহিত করবেন বলে তাঁর সফরসঙ্গী অফিসারদের সূত্র নিয়ে আসা যায় কি না, সে ব্যাপারেও থেকে জানা গিয়েছে।

উল্লেখ্য, ইরান প্রস্তাবিত পাইপলাইন মারফত প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাস দরে পাকিস্তানকে গ্যাস দেওয়ার কথা। পাঠানোর জন্য যথেষ্ট চড়া দর পাকিস্তানকে ডিজেন দিতে। হেঁকেছে। ভারত ও পাকিস্তান পাকিস্তানকে ওয়াগা সীমান্ত দিয়ে কম রাজি ভারত। এ ব্যাপারেই ইরানের জানাবেন আইয়ার।

ইসলামাবাদ, ৫ জুন: ন্যায্যমূল্যে উপর চাপ দিতে আমানুক্লা খানকে রাজি করাতে চান আইয়ার। অন্য দিকে একসঙ্গে ইরানের সঙ্গে দর ক্যাক্ষি সরবরাহের দাম পড়বে ৪ ডলার। পরিবহণের খরচ ইত্যাদি সিদ্ধান্ত আর্জি জানাবেন মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার। নেওয়ার দায়িত্ব ইরানের হাতেই দিয়ে

> ুর্কমেনিস্তান-আফগানিস্তান-পাকিস্তান গ্যাস পাইপলাইনটি ভারতে আইয়ার কথা বলবেন। উল্লেখ্য, এশীয় উন্নয়ন ব্যাক্ষের ওই প্রকল্পে ২ ডলার

একজোট হলে দাম কিছুটা কমতে দামে জুলাই থেকে শুক্র করে ছুমাসে পারে বলে সরকারি মহলের ধারণা। ৩ লক্ষ ২০ হাজার টন ডিজেল বিক্রির দৈনিক ৯ কোটি ঘন মিটার গ্যাস প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে ইভিয়ান অয়েল। সেই পাইপলাইন মারফত আমদানি করতে কারণে ভারত থেকে আমদানির ক্ষেত্রে হলে প্রতি দশ লক্ষ ব্রিটিশ থার্মাল নিষিদ্ধ পণ্যতালিকা থেকে ডিজেলকে ইউনিটের জন্য ২.২৫ ডলার দাম দিতে বাদ দিতে পাকিস্তানকে আর্জি --- পি টি আই

DE JUN 2005

ANADARAZAR DATRIKA

PM stresses reforms in finance sector

Proposes consolidation of banks

Mumbai, June 4

IN A bid to achieve eight per cent economic growth, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday stressed on pushing financial sector reforms including consolidation of banks and setting up of active debt market.

"We can't achieve sustainable growth without a strong, stable and efficient banking sector.

While there is no single model for consolidation,

the system must consolidate itself," he said inaugurating the bi-centennial celebrations of the State Bank of India.

Singh said two important

changes were required—to develop an active debt market and banks should expand their credit portfolio to meet the capital re-

quirements of Industry, agriculture and small and medium enterprises.

Union finance minister P. Chidambaram, who also participated in the celebrations, said the Government wants the economy to grow at eight percent for which banking reforms are essential to meet credit requirements of trade, industry and the farm sector.

"India's exports and imports are likely to touch 200 billion dollars soon, he said adding trade will grow at such a "galloping pace" that lenders will have to expand capital to meet demand.

Emphasising on the need to step up agriculture credit, Singh said special attention was required to cater to small and marginal farmers. "There is a need to restructure rural branches of commercial banks to increase credit." The Prime Minister's assertion on restructuring of rural banks came a day after finance minister Chidambaram announced that Regional Rural Banks would be merged by August end.

Observing that first phase of banking reforms is coming to a close, Singh said Indian financial system would grow in size and complexity. Banks need to fo-

cus on organisational effectiveness, he said advocating greater autonomy to banks.

Singh also stressed enhancing credit to small and medium units. "With gradual disappearance of development banks in the original form, a gap in credit availability is emerging.

Banks should bridge this gap

through adequate long-term financing," he said.

Referring to bank finance for farm sector, he said while banks have achieved higher growth in providing credit to agriculture and allied activities last year, the momentum must be carried further. "Credit for agriculture and allied activities is not a single market. Provision of credit for hi-tech agriculture is no different from credit to industry," Singh said.

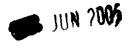
Asserting that one of the most

Asserting that one of the most successful components of the economic reforms was in banking, he said India was ahead of China in robustness and soundness of banking system.

Singh also asked SBI to show the way forward to all banks in widening and deepening the market for rural credit and financing infrastructure development.

Agencies





বাম সুরে ন্যালকোর বিলগ্নিকরণ নিয়ে অপিতি তুললৈন খনিমন্ত্রী

मीरश्रक्त तायरंगिथूती ● नयामिल्लि

৩ জুন: অর্থনৈতিক সিদ্ধান্তের প্রতি পদে বিরোধিতার মুখে পড়ে কালই মনমোহন সিংহ বাম নেতাদের কাছে উত্থার সঙ্গে প্রশ্ন তুলেছিলেন, তা হলে কাদের প্রতিনিধি হিসাবে তিনি প্রধানমন্ত্রী হয়েছেন। প্রশ্নটা নিয়ে যে তাঁকে আরও গভীরভাবে ভাবতে হবে, তাতে সংশয় নেই। কারণ, তাঁর অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরমের প্রস্তাব প্রকাশ্যে বাতিল করে দিয়ে আজ তাঁরই সরকারের খনিমন্ত্রী সিসরাম ওলা জানিয়ে দিলেন, তিনি ন্যালকোর মতোঁ লাভজনক সংস্থার শেষার বিলগ্নি করে সংস্থাকে দুর্বল করার বিরুদ্ধে।

এতদিন এই ধরনের বিভিন্ন বিষয়
নিয়ে মন্ত্রিসভার মধ্যে বিবাদ হয়েছে।
সেটা প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পক্ষে অস্বস্তির কারণ
হলেও অবাঞ্ছিত ঘটনা নয়। কিন্তু
পরীণ নেতা হয়েও ওলা যে ভাবে
প্রকাশ্যেই মুখ খুললেন, তার থেকে
একটা বিষয় স্পষ্ট হচ্ছে। যতই
বামেদের চাপের, কথা বেশি করে
প্রচারিত হচ্ছে, ততই মন্ত্রিসভার বিভিন্ন
সদস্য আকস্মিক ভাবে বাম-খেঁষা
মনোভাব দেখাতে শুক্ত করছেন।

সাম্প্রতিক কালে এমন ঘটনা আরও ঘটেছে। তবে অন্যদের নিজস্ব যুক্তিও ছিল। রেলমন্ত্রী লালুপ্রসাদ বামেদের মতোই ডিজেলের দাম বৃদ্ধির বিরোধিতা করেছেন; কিন্তু তাঁর সামনে রয়েছে বিহারের নির্বাচনের দায়। পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ারও নিজের মন্ত্রকের ঘাড়ে সব দায় রাখতে

চান না বলে পেট্রোপণ্য নিয়ে বামেদের দাবির আংশিক প্রতিধ্বনি করেছিলেন। এমন কী উপজাতি উন্নয়ন মন্ত্রী পি আর কিভিয়াও বামেদের পছন্দসই 'অরণ্যের অধিকার' সংক্রান্ত বিল নিয়ে এগিয়ে এসেছিলেন সরকারের নৃদত্ম কর্মসূচিতে তা আছে বলেই (যদিও পরিবেশবিদদের বাধায় তা এখন শিকেয় উঠেছে)।

কিন্তু ওলা যা করলেন, তা নেহাতই বামেদের প্রতিধ্বনি।

অর্থমন্ত্রক গত মাসে ন্যালকো-র ২০ শতাংশ শেয়ার বিলগ্নিকরণের কথা ভেবে দেখতে খনি মন্ত্রককে অনুরোধ করেছিল। ন্যালকোয় সরকারের শেয়ার ৮৭ শতাংশ। বামপন্থীরা লাভজনক সংস্থার এই ধরনের বিলগ্নিকরণের বিরোধিতা করে চলেছেন। দু দিন আগে বাম দলগুলির সংযুক্ত সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে সিপিআই সাধারণ সম্পাদক এ বি বর্ধন ভেল-এর বিলগ্নিকরণের প্রসঙ্গে করেছিলেন, "আমরা সরকারকে হুঁশিয়ার করে দিছি যেন ভবিষ্যতে এই ধরনের বিলগ্নিকরণ না-করা হয়।"

আর দু'দিন পরেই আজ সিসরাম বললেন, "আমরা বিলগ্নিকরণের বিরুদ্ধে। এখনও আমরা অর্থমন্ত্রকের চিঠির জবাব দিইনি। যখন দেব তখন বিরোধিতার কথা জানিয়ে দেব।" কেন এই বিরোধিতা? ওলার কথায়, "আমরা আমাদের সংস্থার শক্তি কমাতে চাই না। ন্যালকো ভাল কাজ করছে ও গত আর্থিক বছরে সর্বাধিক (১২২২ কোটি ৪৩ লক্ষ) টাকা লাভ করেছে। কাজেই বিলগ্নিকরণের কোনও প্রয়োজন নেই।" সংস্থার সম্প্রসারণের জন্য তাঁদের বাজার থেকে টাকা তোলার দরকার নেই বলেও মন্ত্রক জানিয়ে দিয়েছে।

সবটাই কিন্তু বামেদের হাতে অন্ত্র তুলে দেওয়া। কারণ, সি পি এমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাটের বক্তব্যই হল: "কোনও লাভজনক সংস্থা নিজের প্রয়োজনে শেয়ার বেচতে চাইলে ভিন্ন কথা। কিন্তু সরকারের প্রয়োজনে বিলগ্লিকরণ চলবে না।"

এই ভাবে বামেদের সুরে সুর মিলিয়ে চলার প্রবণতা বাডতে থাকলে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের পক্ষে সেটা একটা সমস্যার কথা বটেই। সেই সমস্যায় যে তাঁকে পড়তে হচ্ছে সে কথা গত দু'দিনে পরোক্ষে বাম নেতাদের বুঝিয়ে দিয়ে তাঁদের আরও সদর্থক মনোভাব দেখাতে অনুরোধ করেছেন তিনি। এমনকী পেট্রোপণ্যের দাম নির্ধারণের ক্ষেত্রে বামেরা যে সব যুক্তি দিচ্ছেন, তা যে বাস্তবসম্মত নয় (রফতানির ক্ষেত্রে শুক্ষছাড় বাদে) তাও তিনি বাম নেতাদের জানিয়েছেন। কিন্ত তা সত্তেও দাম সংক্রান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে প্রতিটি শরিককে এই বিষয়টি ব্যাখ্যা করে বলা হচ্ছে বলে সরকারি সূত্রের খবর। কারণ, প্রধানমন্ত্রী চান না, কোনও শরিকদল প্রকাশ্যে বামেদের সঙ্গে সুর মেলান।

ঘটনা হল, প্রধানমন্ত্রী যা-ই মনে করুন না কেন, সিসরাম ওলার মতো ব্যক্তি তাঁদের মনোভাবের প্রতিধ্বনি করবেন, বামেরা ততই উল্লসিত হবেন। এবং সরকারের উপর তাঁরা ততই চাপ বেশি করে বাড়িয়ে চলবেন।

ON JUN JO E

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Fuel prices set to rise, Left plans Bw Afrom

HT Correspondent New Delhi, June 1

AFTER CONSULTING all stakeholders, the Centre is planning a moderate hike of Rs 2 per litre of petrol and diesel prices under a new scheme in which ONGC will be asked to bear part of the burden arising from an increase in duties and global oil prices. The subsidy-sharing scheme and the price hike is likely to be cleared when finance minister P. Chidambaram and petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyar meet the Prime Minister on Thursday.

Reliable sources say that Manmohan Singh has already sounded out the Left parties on the issue, terming the impending rise in petroleum prices

On its part, the Left has decided to take the matter to the streets in protest and plans are already on to organise mass agita-

The Left parties have argued that there were alternatives which could have bailed the government out. Instead, it has decided to take the "extreme step", putting the common man in more trouble.

Manmohan Singh is believed to have person-ally briefed CPI (M) general secretary Prakash Karat and politburo member Sitaram Yechury and told them that the oil companies were incurring huge losses because of the rising prices of crude in the international market.

The government's point of view was dis-



Fare deal

It's good news for those who love to fly. They could soon expect a reduction in air fares with the recent announcement by the petroleum ministry reducing the aviation turbine fuel prices by 08 per cent (\$53 reduction per barrel). The fuel component in the air fare works out to about 25-30 per cent. The one to take the lead was Bangalore-based Air Deccan.
The airline said it was looking at a 2-3 per cent reduction in its fares from the current levels

cussed threadbare at a meeting attended by leaders of the CPI (M), the CPI and the Forward Bloc. Yechury set the tone by opposing the price hike—he said the Centre had ignored the alternatives sug-

gested by the Left parties.

CPI leader AB Bardhan and the Forward Bloc's Debabrata Biswas told reporters after the meeting that the CPI (M) had conveyed the Left's point of

view to the PM.

The BHEL of the street of the

The UPA Government has gone back on its promises in disinvesting equity in BHEL.

Jayati Ghosh

HE DECISION of the United Progressive Alliance Government to sell off 10 per cent of public holding of equity in Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) is in direct contravention of its own promises. The National Common Minimum Programme made it clear that profitable public sector enterprises would not be privatised. In the case of "navratna" PSEs such as BHEL, it had further explicitly promised that while they would be allowed to raise resources from the capital market, the Government would devolve full managerial and commercial autonomy to such enterprises — to strengthen them and enable them to become globally competitive players.

The decision to divest shares in BHEL—just like the earlier sale by the UPA Government of some equity in NTPC—completely disregards both of these important promises. This particular act of divestment would take place without the agreement of the parties providing outside support to the UPA, and indeed by overriding the decision-making power of the Board of BHEL, which has clearly not been consulted either. Further, the expected proceeds from the sale of this equity—around Rs.2000 crore—is to go

into the Government's coffers, to the newly created National Investment Fund. This is supposed to finance health and education schemes and also provide some funds for the revival of public sector units. In other words, this money is to go towards spending by the Government, in a move that is both unnecessary and fiscally irresponsible.

Unnecessary, because this amount of public resources can easily be found if the Government really intends to. After all, more than Rs.30,000 crore was found as additional defence expenditure. And irresponsible because the sale of equity from a profitable enterprise necessarily involves the loss of tuture revenue because of foregone profits. The sale of any asset implies a capital loss which properly should only be balanced through some other change in assets or lia bilities, such as through retiring debt. Using such money as a form of current revenue which is in effect what is being done here, is completely illegitimate.

In the case of BHEL, the amount of foregone profits is not small at all, since last year alone, the total operating profits of the company (before depreciation interest and taxes) amounted to more than Rs.19,000 crore and even post-tax profits were more than Rs.10,000 crore. Indeed, BHEL, like several other "navratnas" has been showing profits

Interest rate retained at 9.5 per cent

Please-all PF raids reserves

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, May 28: The good news first: employees' provident fund subscribers will get interest at 9.5 per cent for 2004-05.

The bad news now: the fund's custodian will have to dip into — and devour a large portion of — its reserves to please the Left and spare the finance ministry.

The central board of provident fund trustees today decided to honour the Prime Minister's commitment to increase the interest rate from the declared — but unimplemented — 8.5 per cent to 9.5 per cent.

cent.
"The provident fund interest rate for 2004-05 has been recommended at 9.5 per cent," labour minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao said after a five-hour meeting of the board of trustees here.

The Prime Minister had assured the Left leaders sometime ago that the interest rate would be increased to 9.5 per cent as they had demanded.

That assurance was seen as a quid pro quo because it was made public a few hours after the government decided to increase the foreign direct investment cap in telecom, which the Left had been opposing.

The erstwhile BJP-led

government had cut the provident fund interest rate to 9 per cent but threw in a bonus later, making the effective rate 9.5 per cent.

The fund had announced an interim rate of 8.5 per cent for 2004-05 but it was not notified. The cloud of uncertainty has been removed by today's announcement that the rate would stay at 9.5 per cent.

The decision will leave the provident fund with a cumulative deficit of Rs 716 crore. The shortfall will be plugged by squeezing money out of a special reserve fund which now

THE HOLE

- ●2004-05 interest: 9.5%
- •Shortfall: Rs 716 cr •Fallback: Rs 950-cr reserve fund

WHAT NEXT?

Current year's rate yet to be decided. Stock market investment is an option but unions are opposed to it. Ball now in consultant's court

has around Rs 950 crore. This reserve has been created out of the unclaimed deposits of provident fund holders.

Many of them belong to companies that have long gone into liquidation; others are those who do not want to take the trouble of collecting their dues or are not aware how to do so. The unclaimed deposits have earned interest of over Rs 600 crore.

The reserve fund is not meant for meeting shortfalls—it can at best be a stopgap arrangement. The rate for the current year (2005-06) has yet to be decided and the reserves will be insufficient to meet the

shortfall year after year.

Hard-nosed economics should have pulled the interest rate down to 8 per cent — that is what the provident fund earns by parking most of its cash in a government deposit scheme.

With the finance ministry refusing to raise that rate and the Left insisting that the subscribers should not be touched — the original demand was 12 per cent — the fund had little option but to tap its own reserves.

Trade union leaders said they were "unhappy" with the move to dip into reserves. They said the trustees would request the Prime Minister and the finance minister to increase the interest the government pays the fund.

In January, the government had given provident funds the freedom to invest up to 5 per cent of their corpus in the equity market and another 10 per cent in corporate debt.

But the fund has not yet done so, primarily because of opposition from trade unions and its conservative instincts. Barring aberrations, stock markets have outperformed other regular avenues of investments but an element of risk is always at play.

The fund has appointed a multinational consultancy, Mercer, to suggest ways to maximise returns. It remains to be seen whether the fund will explore the new avenue if the consultant recommends such a course of action.

LEFT SLAMS MOVE - SHARE TOUCHES 52-WEEK HIGH

Centre to divest 0% BHEL equit

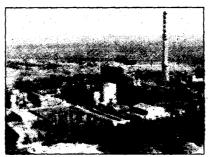
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 26. - Brushing aside opposition from the Left parties, the government today announced a 10 per cent disinvestment in the Navratna public sector unit, BHEL, to mop up around Rs 2,000 crore. The decision sent the company's share to a 52-week high of Rs 918.

The sale of government shares will be done through the book-building route and the stock will be split to ensure a wide retail participation, finance minister Mr P Chidambaram said after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister. The stocks would be split in consultation with the departments of heavy industries and disinvestment.

Out of the stake sale, 15 per cent will be reserved for BHEL employees. This, the minister said, was an opportunity for small investors to acquire blue-chip shares. The government's equity in BHEL will come down from 67.72 per cent to 57.72 per cent, he said. The balance, at present, is held by the public and financial institutions.

After reaching a 52-week high of Re



918, the BHEL share today closed at Rs 909.85 on the BSE, up 4.56 per cent against yesterday's close of Rs 870.15. The day's development pushed up the market cap of BHEL by over Rs 1,000 crore to Rs 22,269.49 crore against Rs 21,258.63 crore yesterday. Ten per cent of BHEL's equity amounts to around 2.4 crore shares. At the current market price of Rs 909.85, it would enable the government to raise around Rs 2,183.64 crore. However, the exact ratio of the split and the pricing of the issue will be decided after a lead manager to the offer is appointed. The money raised from the sale of the stakes would deposited in the National Investment Fund. The income generated from this fund would be partly used to resuscitate the "revivable PSUs". Asked about a possible adverse

PC thanks 'alert' Left

NEW DELHI, May 26. - Dismissing the NDA's claim that the UPA and its Left es were at "loggerheads" on economic policies, Mr P Chidambaram today said at a press meet here that the Left's "alertness" had helped the Centre "in formula-ting the right mix of policies". "As far as economic policies are concerned, the Left has been helpful and alert," he added. To a question if he would accept the offer of cooperation from the BJP in the face of the Left's reservations on certain economic policies, he said: "The Opposition must extend cooperation and must support the pieces of legislation which are in the national interest. I will accept cooperation from every quarter." --- PTI

reaction by the Left, the minister said they had been consulted before the decision was taken. But the CPI-M said in a statement that the Cabinet decision was "directly contradictory" to the commitments made in the Common Minimum Programme and called for its reconsideration. Citu leader Mr Chittabrata Majumdar urged the government to refrain from "such a retrograde exercise". The move was "a betrayal" and deserves "condemnation," he said.

27 MAY 2005



Delhi to ink gas deal with Dhaka, Yangon

Dhaka, May 24

INDIA, MYANMAR and Bangladesh are expected to sign an MoU to build a consortium company for construction of a tri-nation gas pipeline, Bangladeshi proponents on the project said. "It is expected that the

"It is expected that the three nations will very soon sign an MoU for an international consortium company which will build, own and operate the pipeline," KB. Ahmed, MD of Mohona Holding Ltd, which formulated the concept, said. "It would not only benefit the country but also usher in new areas of regional cooperation," he said.

"Myanmar has sent us letters agreeing to sell gas and Ingia has agreed to huy."

"Myanmar has sent us letters agreeing to sell gas and Inoia has agreed to buy it, with Bangladesh to decide on giving 'right of way' through its soil," Ahmed said. Dhaka has decided to explore this plan within its framework of "greater energy and other regional cooperation," Ahmed said.

Explaining details of the project, he said there wore

Explaining details of the project, he said there were two options for the pipeline, which would go through Bangladesh. The pipeline could go through Paltwa and Aizawl in Mizoram, through Tripura and after crossing into Bangladesh through Brahmanbaria and Jessore districts before entering West Bengal. The other envisaged a route through Bangladesh from Myanmar through Teknaf district along the coast, entering Bangaon while the other routes remained same.

The project would bring in upto \$600 million in investment to Bangladesh, besides possible "wheeling charges" of \$100 million annually, cost of land and a subsidiary of state-run PetroBangla another 24 million dollar annually for its services, he said.

PT

Centre steps into Reliance affairs, some to give a notice to Reliance within a week, Ms nance and the absence of ance company affairs see

NEW DELHI, May 19. -The government today directly intervened in the Reliance group's affairs for the first time by asking the Registrar of Companies to issue a notice to the conglomerate on the basis of complaints filed by Mr Anil Ambani, who has locked horns with his elder brother, Mr Mukesh Ambani, over ownership issues.

"We have asked the RoC

to give a notice to Reliance," company affairs secretary Ms Komal Anand told reporters when asked about action being taken by the ministry on the complaints filed by Mr Anil Ambani. She, however, did not elaborate on the details in the notice to be served by the RoC, which is under the administrative control of the ministry, and the nature of the complaints made by Mr Anil Ambani.

The report on the issue was expected to be comAnand said on the sidelines of a seminar organised by the Competition Commission of India. The company affairs minister, Mr Prem Chand Gupta, said on Monday that the government would take appropriate action soon on Mr Anil Ambani's complaints. "Government has to do its job. We know what we have to do," Mr Gupta said.

The junior Ambani has been publicly raising the issue of corporate gover-

financial information and disclosures in the group. Last month, he declined to sign the financial accounts of the group's flagship company RIL, headed by Mr Mukesh Ambani, and made public his dissent at the company's board meeting on 27 April.

Securities and Exchange Board of India chairman Mr M Damodaran acknowledged receiving let-ters from Mr Anil Ambani vesterday.

THE STATESMAN 20 MEY 2005

Open economy to continue: PM

Press Trust of India

WASHINGTON, May 19. — Asserting that India was committed to remain an open economy, the Prime Minister has said there was a greater willingness internationally now to work with the country and build relationships of mutual benefits.

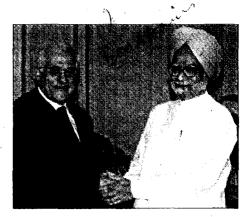
It is now a new India committed to remain an open society and open economy where ideas of "brain drain" have been replaced by "brain gain", Dr Manmohan Singh said in an op-ed article in The Wall Street Journal published today.

If a commitment to remain an open society is one of the pillars of India's nationhood, the other is it's commitment to remain an open economy — one that guarantees freedom of enterprise, respects individual creativity, and mobilises public investment for social infrastructure.

Just as developed industrial economies enabled "economies in transition" to graduate into open economies, said Dr Singh, "I believe India's policies toward the world have been shaped by this commitment, and we should be proud to identify with those who defend the values of liberal democracy and secularism across the world.

Today, the Prime Minister noted, there is a greater willingness internationally to work with India and to build relationships of mutual benefit.

Indian industry and Indian professionals, he pointed out, have demonstrated their ability to step out with confidence



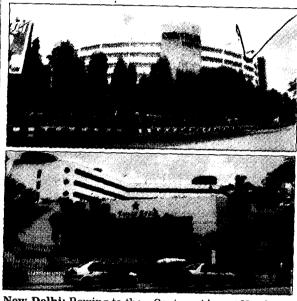
Dr Manmohan Singh greets Palestinian leader Mr Mahmud Abbas in New Delhi on Thursday. Mr Abbas arrived in India on a two-day tour during which New Delhi was expected to renew its support for the Palestinian cause. - AFP

from a highly protected environment into

a mercilessly competitive one.
"We do have a vast unfinished agenda of social and economic development, and my government's priority will be to implement this," said Dr Singh. "Doing so will further enable us to deal with the challenges of globalisation. The global environment has never been more conducive to India's economic development than it is today. "The world wants India to do well. However, we recognise that our real challenges are at home. It is for this reason that we place such great emphasis on increasing investment in infrastructure, agriculture, health and education, urban renewal and the knowledge economy."

Centaur hotel Sale: Govt Corders probe Bows To Pressure From

Left Parties



New Delhi: Bowing to the demand of Left parties, finance minister P Chidambaram on Friday announced an inquiry into the sell-off of Centaur Hotels in Mumbai after the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) passed strictures on the then NDA government over the controversial sale. "After examining the report of the (CAG) in respect of sale of two hotels, the government has decided to order an inquiry," he said amid thumping of desks in both houses of Parliament.

"The nature and scope is under consideration and will be announced in due course," he said in a brief statement. The opposition NDA was not present as it was boycotting both the houses since April-end. Chidambaram's suo motu statement came days after Left parties had given an ultimatam to the Government that it should institute a CBI inquiry into the sale of Centaur Juhu and

Centaur Airport Hotels.

Soon after the CAG report was tabled in parliament on May six, the Left party members were up in arms in both houses wanting to know what action was being taken on the CAG findings. Chidambaram had promised in August last year that he would initiate action only after getting the report.

The CAG report found "inconsistencies" in procedure and "relaxations and deviations" offered to the sole bidder that lowered the value of the property. The disinvestment minister in the NDA government, Arun Shourie, had said he was prepared to face any inquiry and denied any wrongdoings. In a severe criticism of the procedure and valuation process, the CAG report said "sale transactions of the two hotels, Juhu Centaur and Airport Centaur, were finalised on the basis of single bids without the benefit of competition." PII

CAG report slams Centaur hotels deal

Statesman News Service 9 6 W ANY

Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) today criticised the controversial sale of the two Centaur hotels in Mumbai, saying there were inconsistencies in assumptions made for their NEW DELHI, May 6. valuation.

Parliament today said. "Assumptions. Sale transactions of the two hotels Juhu Centaur and Airport Centaur
 were finalised on the basis of single tion, the CAG report tabled in erties and the fixation of the reserve price of the Airport Centaur were not made during a valuation of the propconsistent with the practice followed relaxations were allowed to the bidder bids without the benefit of competiby the ministry in other cases," the report said. "Repeated extensions and of Juhu Centaur to facilitate the sale.



Juhu Centaur Hotel

Details on page

The disinvestment of the two Centaur hotels during the NDA regime, with Mr Arun Shourie as the departmental minister, had come under severe criticism from the Left, who alleged irregularities in the deal. Soon after the report was tabled today,

Juhu Centaur to Mr Ajit Kerkar of Tulip for Rs 153 crore. In retaliation, ment to conduct an open probe into Lok Sabha alluded to Mr Shourie's "active interest" in the divestment of On Wednesday, the finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram, had in the Mr Shourie had dared the governthe sale of the two hotels.

inquiry," he said. "The CAG report is During the BJP briefing today, Mr Jaswant Singh called for an open inquiry into what the CAG had said. "Mr Shourie is ready to face an open only an audit account and can't judge

The CAG report noted "efforts made to balance the need and urgency evident". It criticised the procedure and the valuation process used in the to sell the hotels and to obtain the best possible price from the sale were not the system. Left leaders sought to raise the issue in Parliament. In the Rajya Sabha, CPI-M leaders Mr Dipankar Mukherjee and Mr Nilotpal Basu intervened dur-However, the deputy chairman, Dr A Rehman Khan, disallowed it. ing a debate and wanted a discussion.

Another report on page 5

THE STATESMAN

বাম চাপে মত বদল প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সেল-ইস্কো মিলতে পারে পুজার আগেই

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৩ মে: বামেদের চাপ ও ইম্পাত মন্ত্রকের আগ্রহ—এই দু'রের কথা মাথায় রেখে শেষমেশ সেল-ইস্কো সংযুক্তিকরণে মত দিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। সম্প্রতি পরিকাঠামো উন্নয়ন নিয়ে সংশ্লিষ্ট সব মন্তর্কের সঙ্গে কথা বলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। ইম্পাত মন্ত্রক সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, তার পরেই প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইম্পাতের জোগান বাড়াতে মন্ত্রককে সেল-ইস্কো সংযুক্তির কাজ ক্রত সেরে ফেলার নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন।

বাজেট অধিবেশনের প্রথম পর্বেই লোকসভায় সেল-ইস্কো সংযুক্তির কথা ঘোষণা করে দেন ইস্পাতমন্ত্রী রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান। তার পরেই এই বিষয়ে সব নথিপত্র যোজনা কমিশনের কাছে পাঠানো হয়। কিন্তু কমিশন এই সূপারিশ থারিজ করে দিয়ে বিষয়টি নিয়ে প্রকাশ্যে দরপত্র ডাকার পরামর্শ দেয়। বাম সাংসদেরা অবশ্য হাল ছাড়েননি। একাধিকবার প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে তাঁরা ক্রত সেল-ইস্কো সংযুক্তির জন্য মনমোহনের উপরে চাপ দিতে থাকেন।

প্রথমে প্রধানমন্ত্রী নিজেও এই সংযুক্তির ব্যাপারে খুব একটা সম্ভষ্ট ছিলেন না। তাঁর বক্তব্য ছিল, সেল এখন লাভ করছে বলেই তার ইস্কো অধিগ্রহণের ক্ষমতা হয়েছে, এই ধারণা ঠিক নয়। চিন এখন প্রচুর ইস্পাত কিনছে বলেই আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে ইস্পাতের দাম বেড়ে গিয়েছে বলে বাম সাংসদদের জানিয়েছিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। তা ছাড়া, যে সরকারের আমলে ইস্কো বিক্রির চিন্তাভাবনা শুরু হয়েছিল, ঘটনাচক্রে, সেই নরসিংহ রাও সরকারে অর্থমন্ত্রী ছিলেন খোদ মনমোহন সিংহই। তখনও তাঁর মত ছিল ইস্কোকে সরকারি ক্ষেত্রে রেখে পুনক্জজীবন সম্ভব নয়।

কিন্তু এখন রাজনৈতিক বাস্তবতা অন্য রকম। এবং সেই বাস্তবের মাটিতে পা রেখেই তাঁর সিদ্ধান্ত বদল করেছেন মনমোহন সিংহ। সরকারের প্রধান সমর্থক বামেদের উপেক্ষা করা যে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পক্ষে সম্ভব হবে না, সেই ইঙ্গিত এ বারে
প্রথম থেকেই ছিল। বামেদের চাপ ও ইস্পাত মন্ত্রকের আগ্রহ
দেখে শেষমেশ সেই পথেই হটিলেন মনমোহন। কয়লা ও
ইস্পাত সংক্রান্ত সংসদীয় স্থায়ী কমিটিও এই সংযুক্তির পক্ষে
জোরালো ভাবে মত দিয়ে সম্প্রতি বলেছে, এই কাজটি
আরও আগেই সেরে ফেলা উচিত ছিল।

যোজনা কমিশনের মত জানার পর ইম্পাত মন্ত্রকও প্রথমে একটু থমকে গিয়েছিল। কিন্তু মনমোহনের নির্দেশ পেয়ে মন্ত্রক ঠিক করেছে, দ্রুত কাজ শেষ করে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার অনুমোদনের জন্য খসড়া প্রস্তাব পাঠিয়ে দেওয়া হবে। আজ এইটাক নেতা গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত ইম্পাতমন্ত্রীর দক্ষে দেখা করলে মন্ত্রী তাঁকেও জানিয়েছেন, খুব দ্রুত এই সংযুক্তির কাজ শেষ করে ফেলা হবে। সি পি এম সংসদীয় দলের নতা বাসুদেব আচারিয়া ও রাজ্যসভার সদস্য দীপঙ্কর মুখোপাধ্যানও এই বিষয়ে কড়া নজর রাখছেন।

ইস্পাত মন্ত্রক সূত্রে এখন বলা হচ্ছে, মে-জুনের মধ্যে মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠকে বিষয়টি অনুমোদিত হয়ে গেলে তার তিন মাসের মধ্যে সংযুক্তির প্রক্রিয়া শেষ করে ফেলার চেষ্টা হবে। সব কিছু এই সূচি অনুযায়ী এগোলে কিন্তু পুজোর মধ্যেই সেলের সঙ্গে ইস্কোর সংযুক্তির কাজ শেষ হয়ে যেতে পারে।

যোজনা কমিশন জানিয়েছিল, যে ভাবে সেল ৪৬৯ কোটি টাকা দিয়ে ইস্কো কিনে নিতে চলেছে তা মুক্ত কর্থনীতির রীতিনীতির সঙ্গে সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ নয়। এ ক্ষেত্রে প্রতিধ্বন্দিতার ভিত্তিতে যারা সর্বেচ্চ দাম দিতে চাইবে, তাদের হাতেই সংস্থাটি যাওয়া উচিত বলে জানিয়েছিল কমিশন। প্রকাশ্যে নিলাম না-করে সংযুক্তির পথে হাঁটায় কমিশন মন্তব্য করেছিল, 'আরও স্বচ্ছ এবং কষ্টসাধ্য পথই নেওয়া উচিত'। কিন্তু রাজনৈতিক চাপের মুখে তাঁদের মতামত এখন গুরুত্বীন হয়ে গিয়েছে।

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২ মে: পেট্রোপণ্যের দাম বড় মাত্রায় বাড়ানোর প্রভাব দিয়েছে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। সেই নিয়েই বাম দলগুলির সঙ্গে তাদের টানাপোড়েন অব্যাহত। এর আগে দু 'ফগায় সিপিএমের সঙ্গে বৈঠকের পরে আজ পেট্রোলিয়ামমন্ত্রী মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার বসলেন সিপিআই নেতাদের সঙ্গে। কিন্তু দীর্ঘ আলোচনাতেও জট খোলেনি। কারণ, পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম এক ধাক্কায় এ বার অনেকটাই বাড়াতে চায় সরকার। রান্নার গ্যাসের দামও বাড়াতে চায়, যদিও তালিকা থেকে আপাতত বাদ রাখা হয়েছে কেরোসিনকে। এটা কোনও ভাবেই চান না বামেরা।

আইয়ারের প্রস্তাব, পেট্রোলের দাম লিটার প্রতি সাড়ে চার টাকা ও ডিজেলের দাম চার টাকা নব্দই পয়সা বাড়ুক। এ ছাড়া রোড সেসের পরিমাণও লিটারে পঞ্চাশ পয়সা বাড়ানোর প্রস্তাব রয়েছে। মূল্যবৃদ্ধি নিয়ে পেট্রোলিয়ম মন্ত্রকের এই প্রস্তাবে সরকারের সায় আছে। কিন্তু এই ব্যাপারে সরকার বামেদের সম্মতিও নিতে চায়। ইতিমধ্যে সিপিএমের সঙ্গে দু'দফা কথা হয়েছে। আজ সিপিআই-এর সঙ্গেও কথা হয়। কিন্তু কোনও বাম দলই এই প্রস্তাবে রাজি হয়ন। তাঁরা চান, শুল্ক কমিয়ে সরকার পরিস্থিতি সামাল দিক। অর্থ মন্তর্ক শুল্ক হারে বিশেষ রদবদলে রাজি হক্ষে না।

মণিশঙ্কর আজ সিপিআই নেতাদের বোঝান, দাম না-বাড়ালে ৩৭ হাজার কোটি টাকার বোঝা চাপবে সরকারের ঘাড়ে। কারণ, আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে তেলের দাম পঞ্চাশ

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২ মে: পেট্রোপণ্যের দাম ভলারের নীচে নেমেছে ঠিকই, কিন্তু উনপঞ্চাশ ভলারেই তা মাত্রায় বাড়ানোর প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। সেই আটকে গিয়েছে। কাজেই সরকারের পক্ষে পেট্রোপণ্যের য়ই বাম দলগুলির সঙ্গে তাদের টানাপোড়েন অব্যাহত। দাম এক ধান্ধায় বেশ খানিকটা না-বাড়িয়ে উপায় নেই।

পেট্রোপণ্যের মৃল্যবৃদ্ধি নিয়ে ইউপিএ-র সঙ্গে বামেদের বিরোধ চলছেই। এখন আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারদরে ওঠানামা অনুযায়ী দামের অল্প রদবদলের ক্ষমতা তেল সংস্থাগুলিকেও দেওয়া হয়েছে। কিন্তু দাম এক ধাকায় অনেকটা না-বাড়ালে অবস্থার মোকাবিলা করা মন্ত্রকের পক্ষে অসম্ভব। তাই সরকারের ভিতরে আলোচনার পরে বামেদের সঙ্গে কথা শুরু করেছেন আইয়ার। তিনি নিজেই আজ বৈঠকের আগে বলেন, "আজ সিপিআইয়ের এ বি বর্ধন এবং ডি রাজার সঙ্গে কথা বলছি। সিপিএমের সীতারাম ইয়েচুরির শরীর ভাল নেই বলে উনি আজ আসতে পারছেন না। পরে আবার কথা বলব।"

এ দিনের আলোচনার পরেও যে জট খোলেনি, প্রমাণ বর্ধনের বক্তব্য থেকেই। তিনি স্পষ্ট জানান, দু'পক্ষই তাদের অবস্থানে অনড়। বর্ধন আরও জানান, তাঁরা চান শুক্ষহারে পরিবর্তন ও শোধনাগারের খরচ কমানো হোক। অন্য দিকে, সিপিএমের সাংসদ নীলোৎপল বসুও আজ দাবি করেছেন, শুক্ষের হারে পরিবর্তন সহ যে সব সুপারিশ তাঁরা আগেই করেছেন, তার প্রেক্ষিতে দাম বাড়ানোর প্রয়োজনই নেই। ডিজেলের দাম বাড়ালে সব পণ্যই আরও দামি হবে, বামেরা এই কথা বললে আইয়ার বলেন, আধা শতাংশ মুল্যবৃদ্ধি হতে পারে। তবে বামেরা এই হিসাব মানতে রাজি নন।

O 3 MAY 2005

ANADABAZIE PATILIKA

Sops for women & senior citizens

No tax on withdrawals

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 2. — The finance minister today did away with the 0.1 per cent Banking Cash Transaction Tax on savings and raised the income-tax exemption limit for women and senior citizens above 65 years.

In his February Budget speech, Mr P Chidambaram had proposed a 0.1 per cent banking cash transaction tax on all withdrawals beyond Rs 10,000 in an attempt to unearth black money. The proposal backfired as it was opposed by the entire middle class and salaried sections. Acknowledging that women and senior citizens formed a major constituency of the UPA coalition, he raised the income-tax exemption limit for women to Rs 1,35,000 from his Budget proposal of Rs 1,25,000 and for senior citizens from Rs 1,50,000 to Rs 1,85,000 pulling most of them out of the tax net.

Women earning between Rs 1,35,000 and Rs 1,50,000 will attract a 10 per cent tax and those making between Rs 1,50,000 and Rs 2, 50,000 will pay a 20 per cent tax. Beyond Rs 2, 50,000, it would be 30 per cent. For senior citizens, income between Rs 1, 85,000 and Rs 2, 50,000 will be taxable by 20 per cent and beyond Rs 2, 50,000, by 30 per cent.

Mr Chidambaram raised the limit of cash withdrawals by individuals and companies to Rs 25,000 and Rs 1,00,000 respectively in current and other accounts. Withdrawals from savings bank accounts will be totally exempted. However, withdrawals beyond Rs 25,000

IFs & BUCKS

- E Tax exemption for withdrawal if below Rs 25.000
- m 0.1 per cent tax if the withdrawal is above Rs 25,000 by individuals and Rs 1 lakh by companies
- Fringe Benefit Tax to be relaxed
- ★ I-T exemption limit for women raised to Rs 1,35,000 and for senior citizens to Rs 1,85,000

by individuals and Rs 1 lakh by companies and others will attract the 0.1 per cent tax. Withdrawal from term deposits will also be subjected to this tax.

FRINGE BENEFIT TAX

The minister exempted advertising expenditure from the purview of the Fringe Benefit Tax and reduced the base value on all expenditure, barring four, from 50 to 20 per cent. Retaining the overall rate of FBT at 30 per cent, he diluted some key provisions. Any privilege, service or amenity provided directly or indirectly by an employer by way of reimbursement or otherwise to staff will attract the FBT, which is to be paid by employers. The employers' contribution to the pension fund will be taxed under FBT. This was something industry wanted to be scrapped. Any free or concessional ticket provided by the employer for private journeys of employees or their families will come under the purview of FBT.

India Inc welcomes changes, page 11

PW to set up committee for boosting trade Cour Political Bureau Out Political Bureau

my are increasingly shaping foreign policy, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has set up a high-level committee, key ministries involved in the exercise of ECOGNISING that trade and econotant visits lined up for the Prime Minister in the coming months, the decision is expected to further facilitate cohesiveness amongst drawing the framework for economic which he will chair, to coordinate and promote India's economic engagements with other countries. With a number of impor-

A PMO official on Monday said the would give an impetus to trade agree-ments in bilateral as well as multi-lateral "The committee will study aspects trade and economic relations committee (TERC) would try and flag initiatives that agreements with other countries.

agreements on economic front had to be tent during recent visits of Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, when a number of kept pending.

committee to be formally approved on Sunday, was not only a think tank, but an ting up an extraordinarily large number of committees, though, has caught attention in some quarters. A recent report had said Mr Singh had averaged one committee a week since he became Prime Minister last May. A PMO aide was quick to refute it reasoning that they were work-oriented committees where decisions were taken and not necessarily engaged in academic pursuits. He argued that TERC, the latest The Prime Minister's penchant for setimplementation panel as well

with Singapore. Prime Minister Singh is Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visits New Delhi at the end of the month. Officials said Mr Singh had discussed the issue with Mr Loong at the keen that the CECA be readied before the be a comprehensive economic agreement Asian-African meet in Jakarka.

and chairman of the national manufacturing competitiveness council (NMCC), V. Krishnamurthy. Narayanan and principal secretary to affairs and commerce and industry, the economic advisory council, C. Rangarajan Besides ministers of finance, external panel would include the deputy chairman of planning commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia, national security advisor M.K Prime Minister T.K.A. Nair. Two other prominent names are the chairman of the

comprehensive economic coordination agreements (CECAs) and attempt to come out with steps that will promote economlike the free trade agreements (FTAs) and

The need for having a wholesome apic engagement," said the official.

TIMP 03 MAY 2005 The Economic

Stamp on PF rate

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 29: The government today said it will pay an interest of 9.5 per cent to some four crore subscribers to the state-run employees provident fund for the financial years 2002-03 and 2003-04.

Although the EPF board had earlier announced this rate, it could not credit the higher interest in subscribers' accounts, except of those who were exiting from the fund on retirement, as the finance ministry had not ratified it.

Today's announcement is likely to involve a net outgo of about Rs 66 crore.

Finance minister P. Chidambaram, who announced the ratification today, said his ministry was awaiting the recommendation of the board on how it plans to pay 9.5 per cent for 2004-05. "We want 9.5 per cent for

"We want 9.5 per cent for all time to come. There should be no piecemeal decision. The government will have to do it. There is no option," said Gurudas Dasgupta, the CPI leader who has been spearheading the Left effort to keep the EPF rate at 9.5 per cent.

Under Left pressure, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh promised continuation of the rate, despite advice to the contrary from the finance ministry. It is not clear how this money will be paid.

About 80 per cent of the EPF corpus is invested in a government special deposit scheme. The interest paid on this scheme was cut last year to 8 per cent, which means the EPF board has to find the money to bridge the 1.5 per

cent gap. In cash terms, the gap between what the board earns and what it has to pay for 2004-05 is Rs 927 crore.

The board has rejected the option of investing 5 per cent of its corpus in stocks and another 5 to 10 per cent in high interest bearing private bonds.

The current average yield from EPF investments is estimated at 9.1 per cent, with public sector securities yielding the highest return. But these securities are also trying to cut interest rates.

Earlier, the minister said the Centre was unlikely to allow re-investment of interest incomes from EPF funds parked in the special deposit scheme. Implicit in this message is the suggestion that EPF funds should be invested in either stocks or high-yield bonds.

30 APR 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Improvident Fund

The decision to offer a high EPF rate only means it's time to reinvent the Fund

THE Manmohan Singh government, presumably under pressure from the Left parties, has announced an Employees Provident Fund (EPF) rate higher than what the EPF earned in 2004-05. Under the EPF scheme Para 60(4), the interest liability of EPF cannot exceed the income earned by the EPF from its investments during that year. To give a rate higher than what was earned is the path to another US-64 type situation. Ŷet, the government has declared an interest rate of 9.5 per cent which will create a deficit of Rs 927 crore. Who will pay for the deficit, and indeed how will it be paid? When the EPF statues do not permit a clear subsidy to be paid, how will the EPF get higher returns when the interest rate on SDS, in which 80 per cent of EPF funds are parked, has not been changed.

At the root of the problem lies the way the interest rate on the EPF is determined. The Central Board of Trustees of the Employees Provident Fund Organisation, which has trade unions as members, in discussions with the government, decides the interest rate and the finance ministry ratifies it. Instead, the scheme should operate on the proper accounting principals on which fund managers and mutual

funds operate. To use incoming contributions to pay high interest rates which are not sustainable can lead to bigger and bigger holes. Rates should not be "declared" before the beginning of a year. Whatever is earned should be paid out as interest.

As this newspaper has pointed out in the past, the bulk of the interest subsidy goes to the top 15 per cent of the members, who in no way qualify for such a subsidy. It is ironic that the trade unions put pressure to give them more money. There is a need to limit the membership of the EPFO to mandatory members, who earn below Rs 6,500 a month so that even if the government chooses to give a subsidy, only they are the beneficiaries. Recently, the scheme to computerise the EPFO was abandoned. It is time for the organisation to be recreated along modern accounting and functioning principles. The high level of defaults, the poor service, the lack of proper tracking of the individual accounts of the estimated four crore members and the political interference, which will inevitably make the scheme unsustainable, will put the old age security of its members at peril. It is time for the complete reinvention of the EPFO.

Finance Ministry ratifies 9.5 p.c. EPF rate for 2002-03 and '03-04

Decision benefits 40 million Provident Fund subscribers

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: For the 40-million subscribers of the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) all over the country, here's something to cheer about. Fulfilling a longpending demand of the Union Ministry for Labour and the Left parties, the Union Finance Ministry on Friday ratified the 9.5 per cent rate of interest for the fiscal years 2002-03 and 2003-

Announcing the ratification at an informal briefing here, the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, told newspersons that the total extra outgo on account of the EPF rate for the two years might be about Rs 66 crores.

Fund Organisation (EPFO) earned a surplus of Rs 204.92 crores during 2002-03, it was faced with a shortfall of Rs 271 crores the following year.

For 2002-03, the EPF Board had declared an interest rate of 9.5 per cent on Provident Fund deposits. For the next fiscal, the rate worked out to 9.5 per cent, as apart from the 9 per cent interest, it included a 0.5 per cent bonus because 2003-04 was its "golden jubilee" year.

As for the last fiscal (2004-05), although the Centre has declared the rate of interest at 9.5 per cent, the matter hangs in limbo as the EPFO does not have the necessary funds to service

While the Employees' Provident the depositors. When queried on this, Mr. Chidambaram said that the rate has not been ratified for the year. "The recommendation of the CBT (Central Board of Trustees of the EPFO) is awaited," he said.

For 2004-05, the CBT had earlier decided on an "interim" rate of 8.5 per cent. This, however, was opposed by the trade unions as being too little. Following "internal parleys" among the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, and the Finance Minister, Chidambaram had announced a one- per cent hike in the EPF rate to 9.5 per cent. However,

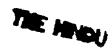
the Finance Ministry made it clear that it was for the EPFO to find ways and means to cover the shortfall estimated at about Rs 927 crores.

7-Bio Alforma

Interestingly, the announcement by Mr. Chidambaram came on the same day that the Government approved of foreign direct investment (FDI) to the extent of 74 per cent in the telecom sector.

Having already had a number of meetings to find a way out of the imbroglio, the CBT is now likely to meet again in May to devise ways of bridging the shortfall anticipated on account of the pay-off for 2004-05 as also to decide on the interest rate for the current fiscal.

30 AFR 7000



Petroleum Ministry seeks hike in petrol, diesel prices

Finance Ministry not for duty cuts

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: With the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, maintaining a firm "no" to scaling down the duties on petroleum products, the Petroleum Ministry is seeking an increase of Rs. 2.50 a litre in the price of petrol and Rs. 1.30 a litre on diesel price.

Following North Block's rejection of the duty cut proposal put forward by the Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Mani Shanker Aiyar, the Ministry is now of the view that the increase of Rs. 2.20 a litre in petrol price and Rs. 1.06 a litre on that of diesel owing to the hike in duties, coupled with the additional cost of producing cleaner fuel -Rs. 0.30 a litre on petrol and Rs. 0.24 a litre on diesel — should be passed on to the consumers.

Ministry officials note that Mr. Chidambaram, at a meeting here on Monday, rejected the Petroleum Minister's proposal

- . Move follows Finance Ministry's rejection
- Budget proposals revenue-neutral: Aivar
- Left leaders, allies to be consulted
- Consensus to be placed before Cabinet

of parting with the additional revenues to be garnered from the hike in excise duty on petrol and diesel.

On the contrary, the Finance Ministry maintained that it would lose Rs. 5,460 crores on reduction in customs duty on crude oil, along with another Rs. 390 crores on the reduction in import duty on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and kerosene, apart from yet another Rs. 2,140 crores on slashing of the excise duty on the two cooking fuels.

Besides, it stood to lose Rs. 1,100 14,000 crores in the full year of crores on CVD/AV (assessable

Against this, it would gain just Rs. 8,961 crores from the increase in excise duty on petrol and diesel, thereby rendering entire exercise revenue-neutral.

"The Finance Ministry assumptions of revenues are at a crude price of \$38 a barrel while the April average has been \$49.27 a barrel. They will gain more than they will lose," an official said. This apart, the increase in road cess would fetch another tidy sum of Rs. 3,116 crores in 2005-06.

The increased duties and spiralling crude prices actually warrant a Rs. 5.26 a litre increase in price of diesel and Rs. 5.77 a litre hike in the price of petrol.

In their absence, the oil PSUs stand to lose about Rs. 2,400 crores a month.

Coupled with this, the oil companies also stand to lose Rs. 2005-06 on sale of LPG and kerosene as the present prices are nowhere near the costs.

"I am more than convinced that the Budget proposals are indeed revenue-neutral," Mr. Aivar told newspersons after his meeting with the Finance Minister. He said it has to be examined if the increased cess is to be passed on to customers, as it will accrue only when it is collected.

"I will meet Left party leaders and other allies on the issue,' Mr. Aiyar said. The consensus of the discussions would be placed before the Cabinet for approval.

Officials said the increased duties on petrol and diesel were balanced by lowering of rates on domestic cooking gas (LPG) by Rs. 17.75 a cylinder and on PDS kerosene by Rs. 0.88 a litre.

Despite this, the oil firms were selling kerosene at Rs. 10.30 a litre discount to cost and domestic LPG was under-priced by Rs. 82 a cylinder.

Violence over WAT

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 23. — Trouble erupted at Metiabruz today just after a meeting had been held to protest against VAT.

A row broke out between two groups of tailors and traders from the VIP Market on Akra Road over the imposition of VAT. Soon, the fracas assumed political overtones with CPI-M and Congress leaders trading charges. Around 10 a.m., the association of the tailors and garment-traders of the market was holding a meeting in protest against VAT. They had called a 24-hour bandh at the market today. "While the meeting was on, a group of men, associated with the Citu-affiliated West Bengal Tailors' Union told some of the traders to open their shops," a trader said.

When they did not relent, an altercation broke out. "The pro-VAT group forced the traders to open the shops. They damaged shops, hurled stones, smashed glass panes and set on fire three motorcycles parked outside the market," a tailor said. Soon, the situation worsened as both sides clashed. As it was the weekly market day today, the area was crowded.

As the trouble escalated, a large police force arrived. Police resorted to a lathicharge but to no avail. To disperse the mob, police fired two rounds in the air.

DIG (Presidency range) Mr Hermanpreet Singh said: "Twenty persons were arrested in this connection."

According to local councillor Mr Sailen Dasgupta: "The traders were holding a peaceful meeting when CPI-M goons ransacked the shops." CPI-M leader Mr Dilip Sen, on the con-

TRADERS' STRIKE

KOLKATA, April 23.-The Confederation of West Bengal Trade Associations have decided to go on strike from 25 April to 29 April in support of the on-going trade strike by wholesellers in the state. Earlier, the CWBTA, had announced that they would join the trade strike only on 29 April. Another trade organisation, Federation of West Bengal Traders Association, which, too, had earlier announced that it would join the strike on 29 is contemplating doing the same. — SNS

trary, blamed the Congress-Trinamul combine for the trouble.

"We had asked the traders to withdraw the bandh. We told them that the administration and police will ensure that there is no trouble," Mr Sen said.

Maheshtala MLA Mr Mursalin Mollah said that the touts of businessmen from Burrabazar opposing VAT were responsible for today's violence. However, the garment-traders remained divided over VAT. A member of the market association said: "Earlier, when we met finance minister Mr Asim Dasgupta he had assured us that small-time traders like us would not have to pay VAT. But, on 1 April we, too, were dragged into the VAT net."

Speaking at the Writers' Buildings, the state finance minister said: "If traders who wish to do business are obstructed, then the Kolkata Police and the district police have been told to take action."

He also added that there was no news of rise in prices.

मीरश्रेक तायरहोधुती ● नयामिल्लि

২২ এপ্রিল: গত বছর বামেদের চাপের সামনে নতিস্বীকার করেছিলেন: কিন্তু এ বছর অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরম আর মাথা ঝোঁকাবেন না।

শ্রমমন্ত্রককে কার্যত চরমপত্র দিয়ে অর্থমন্ত্রক জানিয়েছে, নিজেদের টাকা কোথায় কী ভাবে খাটিয়ে কত সুদ দেবে তা প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের অছি পরিষদই ঠিক করুক। অর্থাৎ গত বছর ফান্ডের আয় মোটের উপর ৮ শতাংশ হওয়া সত্ত্বেও যে ভাবে সাড়ে ৯ শতাংশ সুদ ঘোষণা করা হয়েছিল, চলতি বছরে তা হবে না। শুধু তা-ই নয়, শ্রমমন্ত্রকের একাংশের ধারণা, স্পেশাল ডিপজিটরি স্কিমে (এস ডি এস) টাকা রাখা বা তা থেকে ৮ শতাংশ সদ দেওয়ার বিষয়েও ভবিষ্যতে আরও কড়া মনোভাব নিতে পারে অর্থমন্ত্রক। ফান্ডের ৭৫ শতাংশ টাকা এই সরকারি প্রকল্পে খাটে।

এই ঘটনাক্রমের অর্থ হল, প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুদের হার চলতি বছর থেকে নানতম সাডে ৮ শতাংশে নামা কাৰ্যত অনিবাৰ্য হয়ে দাঁড়াচ্ছে। শ্রমমন্ত্রকের একাংশের বক্তব্য, সাড়ে ৮-ও নয়, ৮ শতাংশের বেশি দেওয়াই সমস্যা হয়ে যাবে। আর পরবর্তী বছরগুলিতে যদি অর্থমন্ত্রক এস ডি এস নিয়ে কড়াকড়ি করতে থাকে, তা হলে সুদ আরও কমতে পারে।

সুদের হার এ ভাবে কমতে থাকলে মধ্যবিত্ত চাকুরিজীবী মানুষের উন্ধা ফান্ডের সুদ দেওয়া উচিত। বাড়বে। তার দায় কে নেবে? গত বছর বামপন্থীরা চেষ্টা অর্থমন্ত্রীকে 'ভিলেন' প্রতিপন্ন করতে। সোজা দাওয়াই হল, শেয়ার বাজারে টাকা খাটাও এবং বেশি আয় করে বেশি সূদ দাও'। এই পথে চললে ১০ শতাংশ পর্যন্তও সুদ দেওয়ার রাস্তা খুঁজে পেতে পারেন প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড কর্তৃপক্ষ।

ঘটনা হল, এই মনোভাব নিয়ে শ্রমমন্ত্রকের যতটা না সমস্যা, তার থেকে অনেক বেশি সমস্যা হল

বামেদের। তাঁরাই চাপ দিয়ে গত বছর ৮-এর জায়গায় সাড়ে ৯ শতাংশ সুদ দেওয়ানোর ব্যবস্থা করেছিলেন (যদিও তার জনা এখনও অর্থমন্ত্রক বাড়তি টাকা দিতে রাজি হয়নি এবং সরকারি বিজ্ঞপ্তিও জারি হয়নি)। কিন্তু শেয়ার বাজার বামেদের কাছে খুবই খারাপ জায়গা। ফলে সেখানে টাকা খাটানোর প্রশ্নে তাঁদের মনোভাব, 'নৈব নৈব চ'।

শেষ পর্যন্ত যদি তাঁরা শেযাব বাজারে সম্মতি না-দেন, তা হলে সুদ কমবেই। আর তখন চিদম্বরমের জবাব হবে, 'দায় তো বামেদের'। এই অবস্থায় বামপন্থীরা খানিকটা হকচকিয়েছেন। স্দের হার নিয়ে এ বছর তাঁরা কী করবেন, সেই প্রশ্নের জবাব বাম নেতারা দিতে পারছেন না। বরং এক শীর্ষ নেতার বক্তব্য, এ বছর তাঁরা বেশি হইচইয়ের ঝুঁকি নেবেন না। শেয়ার বাজারে টাকা খাটানোর প্রশ্নেও বামেদের একাংশ এখন দ্বিধাগ্রস্ত।

এই অংশের মনোভাব অবশ্য বাম ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলির মধ্যে প্রতিফলিত হচ্ছে না। গতকাল শেযাব বাজাবে টাকা খাটানোর বিষয়টি নিয়ে শ্রমমন্ত্রক ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন নেতাদের সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বসে। সেখানে বাম ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলি ঘোরতর বিরোধিতা অন্যদিকে কংগ্রেসের শ্রমিক সংগঠন ইনটাকের কিন্তু সাফ কথা, নিজেরা টাকা খাটিয়ে তার থেকে যা আয় পাওয়া যাবে তার ভিত্তিতেই প্রভিডেন্ট

বস্তুত প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড করেছিলেন সরকারের এই চাপের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতেই কাল চার বাম দল পেনশন বিলের এ বার কিন্তু চিদম্বরম তৈরি। তাঁর বিরোধিতা করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়। তাঁরা সরকারকে বোঝাতে চান, এই ধরণের 'মৌলিক প্রশ্নে' তাঁরা নতিস্বীকার করতে রাজি নন। কিন্তু **প**রিস্থিতি যা দাঁড়িয়েছে, তাতে স্পষ্ট যে অর্থমন্ত্রকও নতিস্বীকার করতে রাজি নয়।

> ফলে প্ৰভিডেন্ট ফান্ড নিয়ে বাম-চিদস্বরম লড়াইটা এখন বেশ চিত্তাকর্ষক হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে।

ভ্যাট' নিয়ে শোরগোল/২ ব্যবসায়ীদের রাগ কেন

অভিরূপ সরকার

বসায়ীদের ভ্যাট নিয়ে একাধিক অসন্তোষের কথা শোনা যাচ্ছে। প্রথমত, কিছু ব্যবসায়ী বলছেন, ভ্যাট জিনিসটা ঠিক কী তাঁরা জানেন না, সরকার একটা অজানা জিনিস তাঁদের ঘাড়ে চাপিয়ে দিচ্ছেন বলে তাঁরা বিরোধিতা করছেন। দ্বিতীয়ত, কিছু ছোট ব্যবসায়ী বলছেন, ভ্যাট চালু হলে তাঁদের অনেক খুঁটিনাটি হিসেব ও প্রতিটি লেনদেনের কাগজপত্র সযত্নে রেখে দিতে হবে. নইলে করছাড় মিলবে না। অত খুঁটিনাটি হিসেব রাখার জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় লোকবল ও অর্থবল তাঁদের নেই। তাঁদের মতে ভ্যাট ছোট ব্যবসায়ীদের স্বার্থবিরোধী। তৃতীয়ত, যখনই কর ছাড় পাবার প্রশ্ন উঠবে, তখনই একজন ব্যবসায়ী করছাড় পাবেন কি পাবেন না বা পেলেও কী ধরনের নথিপত্র জমা দিলে পাবেন ইত্যাদি বিচার করবার অধিকার ট্যাক্স অফিসারের হাতে চলে আসবে। অফিসার অসাধু হলে এই অধিকারের অপব্যবহার করে ও করদাতাদের অপদস্থ করার ভয় দেখিয়ে ঘুষ আদায় করে নেবেন।

তলিয়ে দেখলে বোঝা যাবে, আপত্তিগুলি ধোপে টেকে না। ভাটি সম্বন্ধে সাধারণ করদাতাদের ওয়াকিবহাল করার দায়িত্ব অবশ্যই সরকারের, সরকার সে দায়িত্ব পালন না করলে তাকে সমালোচনার অধিকার অবশ্যই করদাতাদের আছে। কিন্তু তাই বলে ভাল-মন্দ জানবার আগেই শুধুমাত্র অজ্ঞানা বলে একে বর্জন করতে হবে, এ কেমন যুক্তি? দ্বিতীয়ত, ছোট ব্যবসায়ীদের খাতাপত্র রাখার অসুবিধের কথা ভেবে একটি বিকল্প ব্যবস্থা রাখা হয়েছে, তাঁরা কর-ছাড়ের ঝামেলায় না গিয়ে মোট লেনদেনের উপর একটা বাঁধা হারে কর দিয়ে দায়মুক্ত হতে পারেন। এই বিকল্প বেছে নিলে খুঁটিনাটি হিসেব রাখতে বা প্রতিটি লেনদেনের কাগজপত্র

জমাতে হবে না। তৃতীয়ত, যদি তর্কের খাতিরে ধরেও নিই যে, ভ্যাট চালু হলে অসাধু অফিসারদের দৌরাত্ম্য বাড়বে, তাদের বশে রাখার জন্য ব্যবসায়ীকে আরও বেশি অর্থ ব্যয় করতে হবে, তা হলেও সেই বাড়তি ব্যয়ের পরিমাণ মোট কর-ছাড়ের থেকে বেশি হতে পারে না। হলে, ব্যবসায়ী কর ছাড় পাবার চেষ্টাই করতেন না আর তার ফলে অসাধু অফিসারের পকেটেও কিছু আসত না। কিন্তু করছাড় না চাইলে ব্যবসায়ী আগের অবস্থায় অর্থাৎ বিক্রয় কর ব্যবস্থায় যেখানে ছিলেন সেখানেই থেকে যাচ্ছেন, আর কিছু কর ছাড় পেলে তার একাংশ অসাধু অফিসারকে দিয়েও তাঁর লাভ হচ্ছে। কোনও ক্ষেত্রেই বিক্রয় করের তুলনায় খারাপ

অবস্থা ব্যবসায়ীর হচ্ছে না। তা হলে তাঁরা ভ্যাটের বিরোধিতা করছেন কেন?

সংশয় হয়, আসলে যে কারণে ব্যবসায়ীরা ভ্যাটের বিরোধিতা করছেন, সে কারণটা চেঁচিয়ে বলার মতো নয়। ভ্যাট বিরোধিতার প্রকৃত কারণ বোধহয় এই যে, ব্যবসায়ীরা ভয় পাচ্ছেন ভাটে চাল হলে কর ব্যবস্থায় স্বচ্ছতা আসবে, লেনদেনের খুঁটিনাটি সরকার জানতে পারবে। ফলে এখন যে-সব ব্যবসায়ী ঠিকমত বিক্রয়কর দিচ্ছেন না তাঁদের অনেককেই করের আওতায় আনা সম্ভব হবে। কর ব্যবস্থায় স্বচ্ছতা আসার মূল কারণ: ভ্যাট-এর ক্ষেত্রে কর-ছাড়ের সুযোগ কাজে লাগাতে গেলে করদাতাকে প্রমাণ দিতে হবে যে সে উৎপাদনের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় জিনিস কিনেছে ও তার উপর কর দিয়েছে। তাই কর-ছাড়ের সম্ভাবনা থাকলে ক্রেতা অন্তর্বতী লেনদেনের প্রতিটি পর্যায়ে বিক্রেতার কাছ থেকে ক্যাশমেমো বা রশিদ দাবি করবেন, সেই নথি সরকারের কাছে জমা দিয়ে কর ফেরত চাইবেন। এর ফলে সরকারের চোখ এড়ি<mark>য়ে আর্থিক লেনদেনের ঘট</mark>না কমবে, কর ব্যবস্থার *লেখক ইন্ডিয়ান স্ট্যাটিস্টিকাল ইনস্টিটিউটে (কলকাতা)* জাল আরও বিস্তৃত হবে, সরকারের রাজস্ব আদায় বাড়বে।

ভাট ষ্ঠাল হলে রাজস্ব আদায় বাড়বে— এই দাবি প্রসঙ্গে ফিরে আসি। ভ্যাট চালু হলে রাজস্ব আদায়ের উপর দু'টি পরস্পরবিরোধী শক্তি কাজ করবে। এক দিকে দ্বৈত করের অবসান ঘটছে বলে কর আদায় কমে ধাবার একটা প্রবণতা দেখা দেবে, অন্য দিকে কর ব্যবস্থার জাল বিস্তৃত হচ্ছে বলে আরও বেশি কর আদায় হবার সম্ভাবনা। এই দুই মিলিয়ে নেট ফল কী দাঁড়াবে সেটা জোর দিয়ে বলা শক্ত। কিছুদিনের জন্য কর আদায় কমে যাওয়া আদৌ অসম্ভব নয়, যে কারণে কেন্দ্র রাজ্যগুলিকে স্বল্পমেয়াদি কর আদায়ের ঘাটতি মিটিয়ে দেবার প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছে। কিন্তু আশা করা হচ্ছে, দীর্ঘমেয়াদি বিচারে করজাল বিস্তৃতির প্রবণতা দৈত কর বিলোপের প্রবণতাকে ছাপিয়ে গিয়ে মোট কর আদায় বাড়িয়ে দেবে।

ব্যবসায়ীরাও ঠিক এ রকম একটা কিছু আশক্ষা করছেন। তাঁদের আশঙ্কা, ভ্যাট চালু হলে শেষ পর্যন্ত তাঁদের আরও বেশি পরিমাণে কর দিতে হবে। এই কারণেই তাঁরা ভ্যাটের বিরোধী। সরকার ও ব্যবসায়ী দু'পক্ষই যখন মনে করছেন. ভাাটের ফলে শেষ পর্যন্ত কর আদায় বাড়বে, তখন কর আদায় বাড়বার একটা সম্ভাবনা নিশ্চয় আছে।

ভ্যাটের অন্য একটি দিক নিয়েও রীতিমত বিতর্ক চলছে। রাজস্ব আদায় বাড়ানোর চেষ্টা ছাড়াও ভ্যাট বিভিন্ন রাজ্যের পরোক্ষ কর ব্যবস্থার মধ্যে একটা সমন্বয় আনার চেষ্টা করছে। বলা হচ্ছে, এই সমন্বয় দুটো কারণে দরকারি। প্রথমত, সমন্বয় না ঘটলে (বিভিন্ন রাজ্য একই হারে পরোক্ষ কর না বসালে) ভ্যাট ব্যবস্থা চালানো কঠিন হয়ে দাঁড়াবে। ধরা যাক পশ্চিমবঙ্গের এক উৎপাদনকারী কাঁচামাল কিনল মহারাষ্ট্র থেকে। ভ্যাট যে ভাবে চালু হয়েছে, তাতে ভিন্রাজ্য থেকে কাঁচামাল কিনলে এখনও কর ছাড় পাওয়া যাচ্ছে না। কিন্তু ভবিষ্যতে আন্তঃরাজ্য লেনদেন বাড়াতে হলে ভিন্রাজ্য থেকে কেনা কাঁচামালের উপরও কর ছাড় দিতে হবে। একটা সম্ভাবনা হল, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার এ রাজ্যের অন্তিম

উৎপাদনকারীকে কর ছাড় দিল এই শর্তে যে, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ থেকে কাঁচামাল কিনে যিনি মহারাষ্ট্রে অন্তিম উৎপাদন করছেন, তাঁকে মহারাষ্ট্র সরকার কর-ছাড় দেবেন। এই সমন্বয় সম্ভব হবে যদি দু'টি রাজ্যে পরোক্ষ করের হার এক থাকে। সমন্বয়ের দ্বিতীয় যুক্তি হিসেবে বলা হচ্ছে, অতীতে বিনিয়োগ বা ব্যবসাবাণিজ্য আকর্ষণের তাগিদে রাজ্যগুলি অনর্থক কর হ্রাসের প্রতিযোগিতায় জড়িয়ে পড়েছে। ফলে রাজাগুলিতে কর আদায় কমছে। এই অস্বাস্থ্যকর প্রতিযোগিতা এড়ানোর একমাত্র উপায়: রাজ্যগুলির মধ্যে করের হারে সমতা আনা। ভ্যাট প্রবক্তারা তাই সব রাজ্যে সমহারে কর বসানোর ব্যবস্থা করেছেন। এই হার ঠিক

করছে রাজ্য সরকারের প্রতিনিধিদের নিয়ে তৈরি করা এক কমিটি, যাতে কেন্দ্রীয় প্রতিনিধিরাও থাকছেন। লক্ষণীয়, এই ব্যবস্থার মধ্যে কোনও কোনও অর্থনীতিবিদ রাজ্যের ক্ষমতা হ্রাস পাওয়ার অশনি সংকেত দেখতে পাচ্ছেন। তাঁরা বলছেন, রাজ্যের আয়ের প্রধান উৎস পরোক্ষ কর। এই করের হার কোনও কেন্দ্রীয় কমিটি ঠিক করে দিলে রাজ্যের আর্থিক স্বাধীনতা বলতে প্রায় কিছুই থাকবে না।

সন্দেহ নেই, রাজাগুলির আর্থিক অবস্থা খুবই খারাপ, তাদের আরও বেশি রাজস্ব আদায় করা দরকার। কিন্তু রাজ্য একতরফা করের হার বাড়িয়ে গেলেই যে রাজস্ব বাড়বে এমন তো নয়। রাজ্যে একতরফা করের হার বাড়ানো হলে ব্যবসাবাণিজা রাজা ছেডে পালিয়ে যাবে, তার ফলে মোট রাজস্ব আদায় কমেও যেতে পারে। এই অবস্থায় রাজ্যগুলির মধ্যে করের হারে সমতা আনার প্রস্তাব একেবারে ফেলে দেবার নয়।

অর্থনীতির শিক্ষক

সংশয় হয়, যে কারণে ব্যবসায়ীরা ভ্যাটের বিরোধিতা করছেন, সেটা চেঁচিয়ে বলার মতো নয়। বোধহয় ব্যবসায়ীরা ভয় পাচ্ছেন ভ্যাট চালু হলে কর ব্যবস্থায় স্বচ্ছতা আসবে, লেনদেনের খুঁটিনাটি সরকার জানতে পারবে।

'ভ্যাট' নিয়ে শোরগোল/১

নতুন ব্যবস্থার যুক্তি আছে

অভিরূপ সরকার

পু আ তোল অর্থশ কলেও

'লু অ্যাডেড ট্যাক্স বা ভ্যাট নিয়ে সারা দেশে তোলপাড় চলছে। এই ভ্যাট কিন্তু অর্থশাস্ত্রের কোনও প্রচলিত ধারণা নয়। কলেজ-বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের চলতি পাঠ্যপুস্তকে

খুঁজে পাওয়া যাবে না এর অস্তিত্ব। এই বিষয়ের অন্যতম প্রামাণ্য রেফারেন্স বই 'হ্যান্ডবুক অব পাবলিক ইকনমিক্স' তার চারটি খণ্ডের হাজার তিনেক পাতার মধ্যে ভ্যাট শব্দটির উল্লেখ করেছে একবার। কিন্তু তাত্ত্বিক সমর্থন থাকুক না থাকুক, অস্বীকার করবার উপায় নেই যে রাজিল, চিন এবং ইউরোপিয়ান ইউনিয়নের দেশগুলি সহ এই মুহূর্তে একশো তিরিশটি দেশে ভ্যাট চালু আছে। পয়লা এপ্রিল থেকে আমাদের দেশের বেশ কয়েকটি রাজ্যেও চালু হয়েছে ভ্যাট, যদিও এর সূচনা হরিয়ানায় পুরোপুরি ও মধ্যপ্রদেশে আংশিক ভাবে আগেই ঘটেছিল। ভ্যাট যখন আমাদের ঘাড়ে এসেই পড়ল তখন এর ভাল-মন্দ নিয়ে ভেবে দেখাটা জরুরি হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে, বিশেষ করে এই কারণে যে কেউ কেউ আশক্ষা করছেন এর ভালর থেকে মন্দের দিকটাই বেশি।

গত জানুয়ারি মাসে ভ্যাট নিয়ে একটি সরকারি শ্বেতপত্র প্রকাশিত হয়েছিল। শ্বেতপত্রটি সুলিখিত। এতে ভ্যাট ব্যবস্থা চালু করবার উদ্দেশ্য ও তার মূল সুবিষেগুলির কথা পরিষ্কার ভাষায় লেখা আছে। শ্বেতপত্রটি আমাদের জানাচ্ছে, ভ্যাট চালু করবার সুবিধে মূলত তিনটি। প্রথমত, এতদিনকার বিক্রয়কর ব্যবস্থায় করদাতাদের অনেক সময় একই জিনিসের

উপর একাধিক বার কর দিতে হত।
ভ্যাট চালু হলে সেটা থাকবে না।
দ্বিতীয়ত, জিনিসপত্রের দাম ভ্যাটের
ফলে খানিকটা কমে যাবে। তৃতীয়ত,
ভাাটের ফলে সরকারের রাজস্থ
আদায়ও রীতিমত বৃদ্ধি পাবে। এই
দাবিগুলির যথার্থতা খতিয়ে দেখার
আগে বোঝা দরকার ভ্যাট ঠিক কী
জাতীয় করব্যবস্থা, বিক্রয়কর ব্যবস্থার
সঙ্গে এর তফাত ঠিক কোথায়।

্ বিক্রমকর এবং ভ্যাটের মধ্যে তথাতিওলি বোঝবার শ্রেষ্ঠ উপায় একটি সহজ উদাহরণের শরণাপন্ন হওয়া। ধরা যাক দেশে দশ শতাংশ হারে বিক্রমকর চালু আছে। এই অবস্থায় ধরা যাক, একটি সংস্থা অপর একটি সংস্থার কাছ থেকে দশ টাকা মূল্যের কাঁচামাল কিনল। এই দশ

টাকার উপর কর বসল আরও এক টাকা, ফলে কর সমেত কাঁচামাল কিনতে ক্রেতার মোট খরচ পড়ল এগারো টাকা। কাঁচামাল কিনে তাতে ন টাকার মূল্য সংযোজন ('ভ্যালু আ্যাড') করল ক্রেতা। অর্থাৎ কাঁচামাল, কাঁচামালের উপর কর, তার নিজস্ব মূল্য সংযোজন (যার মধ্যে মূনাফা ও মজুরি দুই-ই রয়েছে), সব মিলিয়ে তার উৎপাদিত জিনিসের দাম দাঁড়াল কুড়ি টাকা। ভোক্তার কাছে বিক্রি করার সময় আবার তার উপর আরও দশ শতাংশ কর চাপল, জিনিসটার জন্য ভোক্তা খরচ করল বাইশ টাকা। ফলে সরকারের ঘলে কর বাবদ আরও দু টাকা জমা পড়ল। অর্থাৎ উৎপাদন ও ৩. াবিক্রয়ের শেষে কাঁচামাল বিক্রেতা পেল তার সংযোজিতমূল্য ন টাকা, অন্তিম উৎপাদক পেল তার সংযোজিতমূল্য ন টাকা এবং কর বাবদ সরকার পেলেন তিন টাকা।

এই উদাহরণে দু'টি ব্যাপার লক্ষণীয়। এক, সরকার দশ শতাংশ হারে বিক্রয়কর ধার্য করলেও, উনিশ টাকা মূল্যের জিনিসের বিক্রি বাবদ সরকারের ঘরে তিন টাকা কর জমা পড়ছে অর্থাৎ প্রকৃত করের হার গিয়ে দাঁড়াক্ষে পনেরো শতাংশেরও বেশি। এর কারণ, সরকার কাঁচামালের উপর দু'বার কর পাচ্ছে, একবার সরাসরি, আর একবার পরোক্ষ ভাবে, অন্তিম উৎপাদনের উপর করের অংশ হিসেবে—যেহেতু অন্তিম দ্রব্যের দামের ভিতর কাঁচামালের দামও ধরা আছে। করের হার আরও বেড়ে যাক্ষে কারণ কাঁচামালের উপর যে এক টাকা কর দেওয়া হল, চূড়ান্ত পর্যায়ে গিয়ে আবার তার উপর দশ শতাংশ কর বসছে, অর্থাৎ সরকার একবার দেওয়া করের উপর আবার কর পাচ্ছে।

দ্বিতীয়ত, বিক্রয়কর ব্যবস্থায় কর বসছে বাজারের লেনদেনের উপর, মূল্য সংযোজনের উপর নয়। উপরের উদাহরণে যদি একই লোক কাঁচামাল তৈরি এবং অস্তিম উৎপাদন সম্পন্ন করত তা হলে সরকারের ঘরে একবারই দশ
শতাংশ হারে এক টাকা নব্বই পয়সা কর জমা পড়ত।
পক্ষান্তরে, উৎপাদন প্রক্রিয়াটি যত অসংযুক্ত হচ্ছে, অর্থাৎ
যত বেশি করে উৎপাদনের বিভিন্ন অন্তর্বতী অংশ এক একটি
সংস্থায় তৈরি হয়ে বাজারের মাধ্যমে অন্তিম উৎপাদকের
হাতে পৌছছে, সরকারের ঘরে তত বেশি কর জমা হছে।
ফলে, বিক্রয়কর ব্যবস্থা প্রকারান্তরে উৎসাহ দিছে সেই রকম
একটা উৎপাদন প্রক্রিয়াকে, যেখানে একটাই দৈত্যাকৃতি
সংস্থা প্রথম থেকে শেষ অবধি উৎপাদনের প্রতিটি পর্যায়ে
দায়িত্ব নেবে। এই উৎসাহদান অর্থনৈতিক দক্ষতা বাড়াবে না
কর্মাবে, সে প্রসঙ্গে আমরা যাব না।

ভ্যাটের ক্ষেত্রে কর বসছে শুধুমাত্র মূল্য সংযোজনের উপর। উৎপাদনের বিভিন্ন মধ্যবর্তী পর্যায়ে যা যা কর কোষাগারে জমা পড়ছে, সরকার তা প্রত্যেকটি পর্যায়ের অন্তিম উৎপাদনকারীদের ফিরিয়ে দিছে। ভ্যাট ব্যবস্থায় আমাদের উদাহরণের অন্তিম বিক্রেতা, যে তার কাঁচামাল কেনার উপর এক টাকা কর দিল এবং ভোক্তাকে জিনিস বিক্রিব সময় তার কাছ থেকে দু টাকা কর সংগ্রহ করল, সে সরকারের ঘরে দু টাকা জমা না দিয়ে এক টাকা জমা দিছে। যেহেতু সে কাঁচামালের উপর আগেই এক টাকা কর দিয়েছিল, সেই এক টাকা সে সরকারের কাছে করছাড় হিসেবে দাবি করে ফেরত পেয়ে যাছে। ফলে সরকারের ঘরে মোট কর জমা পড়ছে তিন টাকার বদলে দু টাকা।

এ বার দেখা যাক ভ্যাটের প্রবক্তারা এই নতুন ব্যবস্থার সপক্ষে যে দাবিগুলি করছেন সেগুলি কতটা ঠিক। প্রথম দাবি, এই নতুন ব্যবস্থা দ্বৈত করের অবসান ঘটিয়ে করদাতার

করের বোঝা লাঘব করবে। উদাহরণ থেকে স্পষ্ট যে, দাবিটি অসঙ্গত নয়। তবে একটু খতিয়ে দেখলে বোঝা যাবে নতুন ব্যবস্থাতেও এক জিনিসের উপর দু'বার কর দেবার ব্যাপারটা পুরোপুরি চলে যাচ্ছে না। আমাদের উদাহরণ অনুযায়ী, শুধু সংযোজিত মূল্যের উপর দশ শতাংশ কর চাপানো হলে উনিশ টাকা মূল্যের জিনিসটির উপর কর হওয়া উচিত ছিল এক টাকা নব্বই পয়সা। নতুন ব্যবস্থায় কিন্তু সরকারের ঘরে দু'টাকা কর জমা পড়ছে। সরকার দশ পয়সা বেশি পাচ্ছে তার কারণ কাঁচামালের উপর যে এক টাকার কর দেওয়া হয়েছিল সেটি অন্তিম দ্রব্যের দামের সঙ্গে যোগ হয়ে তার মূল্য বাড়িয়ে দিচ্ছে, ভোক্তাকে বর্ধিত মূল্যের উপর কর দিতে হচ্ছে। অর্থাৎ করের উপর কর জারির সমস্যাটা থেকে যাচ্ছে।

আমাদের উদাহরণে দশ পয়সা হলেও বাস্তবে এর পরিমাণ খুব সামান্য হবে না। তবে নতুন ব্যবস্থায় করদাতাদের করের বোঝা যে খানিকটা লাঘ্ব হচ্ছে তাতে সন্দেহ নেই।

ভ্যাট প্রবক্তাদের দ্বিতীয় দাবি, জিনিসপত্রের দাম নতুন ব্যবস্থায় কমবে। আমাদের উদাহরণ থেকে এটা পরিষ্কার যে কর ছাড় পেলে উৎপাদনকারীর লাভ হবে। কিন্তু করের বোঝা কমলেই যে সে জিনিসপত্রের দাম কমিয়ে দেবে তার হিরতা কোথায়? এমন হতেই পারে কাঁচামালের উপর নতুন কর-ছাড়টা বাড়তি মুনাফা হিসেবে সে নিজেই হজম করে ফেলল। তবে বাজারে প্রতিযোগিতা থাকলে কর-ছাড়ের ফলে জিনিসপত্রের দাম খানিকটা কমতেও পারে। কর-ছাড়ের সুযোগ নিয়ে এক বিক্রেতা বাড়তি খন্দের ধরতে তার পণ্যের দাম কমালে অন্য প্রতিযোগীরাও প্রতিযোগিতায় টিকে থাকার জন্য দাম কমাতে বাধ্য হবে। কিন্তু এটা সম্ভাবনা মাত্র, এ রকমটা যে ঘটবেই তা হলফ করে বলা যায় না। আর, জিনিসের দাম যত কমবে, যদি তা আদৌ কমে, ততই করের উপর কর ধার্য হবার সমস্যাটা কম হবে।

ভ্যাট প্রবক্তাদের তৃতীয় দাবি, ভ্যাট চালু হলে সরকারের রাজস্ব আদায় বাড়বে। এই দাবি কতটা যথার্থ তা খতিয়ে দেখার আগে একটা ছোট্ট ধাঁধার উত্তর মেলা দরকার। ভ্যাট চালু হলে যেহেতু ব্যবসায়ীদের একই জিনিসের উপর দু'বার কর দিতে হচ্ছে না, ফলে তাঁদের তো খুশি হওয়ার কথা। তা হলে কেন ব্যবসায়ীরা সারা দেশ জুড়ে ভ্যাটের বিরুদ্ধে টানা তিন দিন বন্ধ পালন করলেন? করের বোঝা কমে যাওয়া সম্বেও কী নিয়ে তাঁদের অসন্তোষ?

লেখক ইন্ডিয়ান স্ট্যাটিস্টিকাল ইনস্টিটিউটে (কল্**কাতা**) অর্থনীতির শিক্ষক

ভ্যাট চালু হলে যেহেতু ব্যবসায়ীদের একই জিনিসের উপর দু'বার কর দিতে হচ্ছে না, ফলে তাঁদের তো খুশি হওয়ার কথা। তা হলে কেন ব্যবসায়ীরা সারা দেশ জুড়ে ভ্যাটের বিরুদ্ধে টানা তিন দিন বন্ধ পালন করলেন ?

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

VAT with some 'flexibility'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA WHAT A STATE OF THE ASSET OF THE

NEW DELHI, April 16. — States will be given flexibility to levy different VAT rates on some items but there will be uniformity in tax rates of most items, Empowered Committee chairman Dasgupta said today. Asim

The VAT panel will again meet on 25-26 April to resolve amicably the problems faced by states, including the variations in VAT rates and unjustified rise in prices of some items, he told reporters after four-hour long meeting of state finance ministers here.

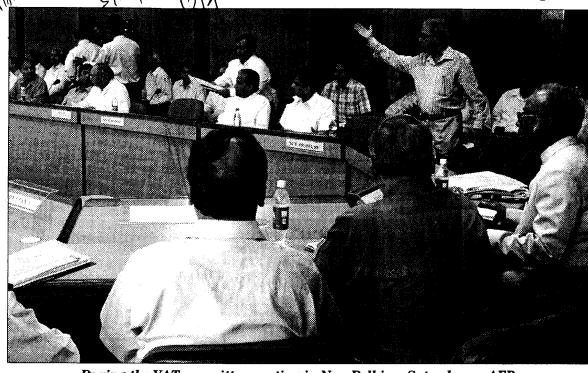
Mr Dasgupta will also visit the eight states — UP, Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh — for persuading them to join the VAT regime. "Twenty-one states introduced VAT and they remain firm in the implementation process. There are about eight states, which have not switched to VAT but may be in the

final stages.
"We will visit all these states and request them to join us," Mr Dasgupta said, adding all the states were together when VAT panel was formed to introduce the

tax reform.

Admitting that there was initial hiccups, he said, "Nearly 130 countries have introduced VAT and the initial teething problems was much more intense there... We are confident in resolving the issue in the interest of the consumers". Problems pertaining to variations in VAT rates and rise in prices of some items is expected be resolved by this month. "We have received complaints of variations in VAT rates across states... We want to come to a convergence among ourselves. When a new tax system is introduced, there is bound to be variations. But it can be settled, he said, adding "we will strike a balance between uniformity and flexibility in VAT rates'

Mr Dasgupta said there was



During the VAT committee meeting in New Delhi on Saturday. - AFP

total consensus" among states on the VAT rates but wherever there is variations, it would be sorted out by this month-end.

"In our federal structure, the basic feature of VAT is common. But there will be some reasonable federal flexibility. We will strike a balance. It's not an easy job. But we will do it," he said. Apart from VAT rates, the panel will also look into reasons for price rise in certain items and complaints against companies flouting VAT rules, he said. "In certain commodities, there has been price rise which was not justified under regime. Complaints against large manufacturers, who have not passed on the VAT benefits, have also been received," Mr Dasgupta said. State government will again explain the VAT rates to traders and manufacturers so as to ensure that prices come down to the level possible, he said.

The Empowered Committee in

its next meeting will also resolve the differences between states on the issue of minimum floor tax rate on diesel and other petroleum products. Some states have imposed tax rate on diesel at lower rate instead of the floor rate of 20 per cent envisaged by Empowered Committee earlier.

However, Mr Dasgupta said that petroleum products will be out of VAT since their prices are not totally market determined. Petroleum products are still out of VAT. There will be no deviation. The reason why petroleum products have been kept out of VAT is that they are not marketable com-

modity and falls under adminis-tered price mechanism," he said. Mr Dasgupta said the list of items under VAT will not be extended but there could categorisation of different items under one head.

While VAT panel will again visit the eight reluctant states to persuade them to join the VAT league, Uttar Pradesh representative and agriculture minister Ashok Bajpai emphatically asserted that the state is not going to switch over to the new regime immediately. "Unless the traders

in the state agrees, we will not switch to VAT," he said.

The state government officials are talking to traders' bodies and it may take Uttar Pradesh some time to switch over to VAT, added. Some states like Uttar Pradesh and Delhi also raised the issue of introducing another slab of eight percent VAT. However, Mr Dasgupta said the discussion on slab rates will be held at an "appropriate" time. While he emphasised that variation in VAT rates among states are not significant, the Confederation of All India Traders said the variation is in over 500 items including essential items like tea, floor, maida and other foodgrain.

17 APR 2805

THE STATESMAN

Left helps pass Patents Bill Statesman News Service 9- 200 mile in prices of essential drugs, giving multina-

NEW DELHI, March 22. — With the Left parties supporting the UPA government as expected, the Patents Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha today. And the price for the support, which was agreed upon after final discussions yesterday evening, was the amendments that the Left demanded and the gov-

ernment introduced as their own changes.

With the NDA walking out in protest, the Bill was passed by voice vote. The NDA wainted a consensus and would have preferred further discussions on the subject in the parliamentary standing committee. But the government felt there was little room for that as the there is little time left to meet the WTO deadline. The Bill would have been cleared yesterday but for a few last-minute hitches. Some amendments demanded by the Left were not placed by the government. Besides the Left, support also came from Samajwadi Party, making the Bill's passage a formality.

During the debate, commerce minister Mr Kamal Nath said the NDA had originally moved the Bill and was going back on its word simply because it was now in the Opposition. He denied that it would mean a rise tional pharmaceutical giants an advantage.

That the Left would support the Bill was clear when Mr Suresh Kurup of the CPI-M announced that he would support the Bill. Earlier, the government had accepted 10 of the 12 amendments suggested by the Left. Mr Rupchand Pal of the CPI-M, who was involved in the negotiations, supported the Bill and criticised the BJP. Even parties like the RJD, not entirely happy with the Congress, supported the Bill.

Opposing the Patents (Amendment) Bill in its present form, NDA convener and former defence minister Mr George Fernandes agreed that this piece of legislation was framed by the NDA government. But he reiterated his party's demand that the Bill be sent to the parliamentary standing committee to seek the opinion of a cross-section of people and organisations. He referred to the concerns raised by the WHO over generic drugs, particularly in the fight against diseases like AIDS. "No matter what the TRIPS say, where health is concerned we should not play with it," he said. Among others, Ms Maneka Gandhi said she feared a hike in drug prices soon.

THE STATESMAN 17 APR 2005

Rural incomes rise faster than urban ones

be the bound hat alme ast Enough in the second that the second se

By Shivani Singh/TNN

says the National Council of Applied Economic Research New Delhi: For those who feared Incomes in rural India are growing faster than in urban areas, that the gusting winds of economic growth would go past rural India, here's a sunny statistic.

While urban incomes are growing at 3.2% per annum, rural incomes are rising by 4.5% a year. In 1994-95, three years after forms, the average rural income the country started economic rewas 55-58% of the average urban income. By 2001-02, it was up to 63-64% and in 2004-05 estimates are that the figure would touch 66%, or roughly two-thirds of ur-(NCAER).

IS Of Sulf distri With pockets getting heavier, the middle class in villages is exareas it is increasing at 13%," says R K Shukla, principal statisclass, he means a household earning between Rs 2 to Rs 10 panding. "The rural middle class is growing at 12%, while in urban tician at NCAER. By middle

Rural middle class growing at 12%, in urban areas it is increasing at 13% 2001-02: 35% of India's 60 million million middle class lived in the In 2001-02, 35% of India's 60villages. By 2009-10, India is like-

lakh per annum.

The numbers of those with a household income of over Rs 10 ly to have a middle class popula-tion of 154 million, one-third of And villages will have their fair share of the creamy layer too, NCAER estimates suggest. which will be from villages.

lakh per annum are projected to increase from 4 million in 2001-02

decade, with rural India accounting for 22-23% of this population.
On the flip side, the ranks of the "deprived" are not coming to 21 million by the end of this

and that trend is not expected to down fast enough in rural areas change in a hurry.

"Even as the number of de-prived persons (with an annual family income of less than Rs 90,000) is declining, it is not as fast or in the same ratio as in urban areas," says Shukla.

The decline in the number of "deprived" persons is 1.7% per 2009-10, there will be 600 million "deprived" persons. In 2001-02, there were 730 million. In this, annum in rural areas as compared to 4% per year in urban areas. NCAER has projected that in

prived" will actually go up from 82% in 2001-02 to 84% in 2009-10. the percentage of rural "de

This large chunk of village population that still lacks purchasing power could be acting per capita disposable income is as a roadblock in the much-expected rural market boom. "The still low as a large number of ers. Poor roads, power problems even those who can afford rural folks are daily wage earn make white goods and consumer durable inaccessible them," says Shukla.

shampoo and detergent sachets a variation of green are evidence that the rural market is yet to A chhota fizz drink, small and the good old red soap now in

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2005 APR

Crucial VAT panel meeting today

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, April 15. The Empowered Committee of finance ministers on VAT will take a decision tomorrow on removing variations in tax rates.

The Committee will also discuss in detail the issue of price rise due to implementation of VAT by states from this month, its chairman Mr Asim Dasgupta said today.

As a preparation for the meeting, the Committee collected data on variation in VAT rates and other implementation issues from officials of the 21 states that have switched over to the new tax system.

"Any decision on that (variations in VAT rates) will be announced tomor row," Mr Dasgupta told reporters after emerging from a 4-hour long meeting with state sales tax commissioners and other officials.

State finance ministers. including of those states that have not switched over to the new tax system, attend the Empowered Committee's meeting tomorrow. The including rice, floor, suji, data revealed that only a few states have resorted to variations in tax rates.

"If we take 21 states that implemented VAT collectively, there have not been significant variations (in VAT rates) from their committed stance. In a few states, we have noted deviations," Mr Dagupta said.

Sources said variations in VAT rates have been found in a couple of states, including Delhi.

Delhi, in fact, altered the VAT rates of some items and put around 14 categories of items under the exempted list on Wednesday. Émpowered committee secretary Ramesh Chandra had earlier this week admitted that variations in VAT rates among states was a serious issue.

Today's meeting, attended by Parthasarthy Shome, advisor to finance minister Chidambaram, and other officials of the ministry, also discussed the issue of price rise due to VAT. "We will discuss it in detail tomorrow," Mr Dasgupta said.

Earlier this month, Mr Dasgupta had said prices of essential commodities,

maida and medicines, have fallen due to VAT.

Sources said data presented in the meeting today also revealed prices in "many" states have fall-en after implementation of VAT.

Mr Chandra said the issue of uniform sales tax on diesel at 20 per cent was also taken up in today's meeting. While Delhi had increased VAT on diesel to 20 per cent, Haryana has a lower tax rate. Delhi was insisting that other states also increase the tax on diesel to 20 per cent, as decided by the Empowered Committee. "We presented our stand on the issue to the committee," Delhi Sales Tax Commissioner Mr RK Verma said.

Various implementation issues like anomalies in VAT rates, issuance of 21point convergence list and diversion of trade to non-VAT states have cropped up after implementation of the new tax system.

Five BJP-ruled states, besides Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttaranchal have implemented VAT.

ইস্কো-সেলু, সংযুক্তিতে আপত্তি মুন্টেকের

मीरश्चक ताग्रटॉॅंश्ती **●** नग्नामिक्किं

১৫ এপ্রিল: ইস্কো নিয়ে ফের অনিশ্চয়তা। এই বছরের মধ্যেই সেলের সঙ্গে ইস্কোর সংযুক্তির প্রস্তাব প্রত্যাশার যে আবহ তৈরি করেছিল, তাতে আপাতত জল ঢেলে দিয়েছেন মন্টেক সিংহ অহলুওয়ালিয়া।

যোজনা কমিশন মনে করে, যে ভাবে সেল ৪৬৯ কোটি টাকা দিয়ে ইস্কো কিনে নিতে চলেছে, তা মুক্ত অর্থনীতির সঙ্গে সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ নয়। সেই কারণেই প্রতিদ্বন্দিতার ভিত্তিতে যারা সর্বোচ্চ দাম দিতে প্রস্তুত, তাদের হাতেই সংস্থাটি যাওয়া উচিত। প্রকাশ্যে নিলাম না-করে যে ভাবে এই সংযুক্তির বিষয়টি ভাবা হয়েছে তা 'সমর্থনযোগ্য নয়' বলে জানিয়ে যোজনা কমিশন বলেছে, 'আরও স্বচ্ছ ও কষ্টসাধ্য পথই নেওয়া উচিত'।

অর্থাৎ, সেল নিয়ে নতুন করে মতামত আবশ্যক বলেই ইস্পাত মন্ত্রক

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আবার 'অর্থনীতির' সঙ্গে 'রাজনীতির' দ্বশ্ব শুরু হল।

কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভা যথন ইম্পাত
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সমর্থনে যাবতীয় কাগজপত্র পেশ
করবেন। তার পর সিদ্ধান্ত অনেকটাই
নির্ভর করবে রাজনৈতিক চাপের
পরিপ্রেক্ষিতের উপর।

কেন্দ্রীয় ইম্পাতমন্ত্রী রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান সম্প্রতি লোকসভায় বলেছিলেন, এই বছরের মধ্যেই এই সংযুক্তি ঘটে যাবে। সেই অনুযায়ী মন্ত্রক মন্ত্রিসভায় পেশ করার জন্য সংযুক্তির খসড়া পরিকল্পনা তৈরি করেছে। তবে এই জাতীয় বিধয়ে যোজনা কমিশনের

তা কমিশনের কাছে পাঠায়।

আগামী দিনে পাসোয়ান যে তাঁর সিদ্ধান্তের পক্ষে লড়বেন তাতে সংশয় নেই। তা ছাড়া যুক্ত হবে বামপন্থীদের চাপ। এই টানাপোড়েনের মধ্যে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ তাঁর বিশ্বস্ত সহযোগী মন্টেকের মত উড়িয়ে দেবেন কি না, তার উত্তর কারও জানা নেই।

যোজনা কমিশন কিছু তাঁদের মতামত দিয়েছেন অত্যন্ত দৃঢ়ভাবে।
১১ এপ্রিল তারিখে তৈরি তাঁদের নোটে বলা হয়েছে সংযুক্তি সংক্রান্ত থক্ষ নোট (ইম্পাতমন্ত্রক ও এম নং ১(১৭)/২০০৩-সেল আর এস তারিখ ১৮ মার্চ,২০০৫) তাঁরা পরীক্ষা করেছেন। তাঁদের বক্তব্য: "এই প্রশ্ন ওঠা স্বাভাবিক যে কেন স্বচ্ছ পদ্ধতিতে অন্যান্য পক্ষের কাছেও ইস্কো কেনার জন্য আহ্বান জানানো হবে না।" ইস্কোকে বাঁচিয়ে তোলার ক্ষমতা যাদের আছে, তাদের মধ্যে যারা সবচেয়ে

বৈশি দাম দেবে, তাদের কাছেই ইস্কো বেচে দেওয়া উচিত বলে মন্তব্য করে ওই নোটে বলা হয়েছে, "এর পরেও সেলই ইস্কো নিতে পারে, যদি তাদের দরই বেশি হয়।"

কমিশন এ কথাও বলেছে, ইস্কোর পুনরুজ্জীবনই যদি লক্ষ্য হয় তা হলে আর্থিক ও ব্যবসাগত পুনর্গঠন (বি আর পি এস ই) সংক্রান্ত সরকারি পদ্ধতির মধ্যে দিয়েই তা হওয়া উচিত। এরপর কমিশন বলেছে, "এক কথায়, (মন্ত্রকের) প্রস্তাবের মধ্যে ইস্কোর পুনরুজ্জীবনের লক্ষ্যে অন্যান্য, ও আরও ভাল সম্ভাবনা শেষ করে দেওয়া হচ্ছে, এবং সেই কারণেই বর্তমান আকারে প্রস্তাবিটি সমর্থনযোগ্য নয়।"

ইস্কো সম্পর্কে কমিশনের এই
মতামত কেন্দ্র অবশ্য শেষ পর্যন্ত
অগ্রাহ্য করতে পারে একটি যুক্তিতে।
কারণ, গত এক দশক ধরে সেলের
এর পর সাতের পাতায়

ইস্কো-সেল

প্রথম পাতার পর আধুনিকীকরণ বা পুনরুজ্জীবনের জন বিভিন্ন পথে চেষ্টা করা হয়েছে। বেসরকারি হাতে ইস্কো বেচে দেওয়ার চেষ্টাও হয়েছে। কাজেই আবার সেই চেষ্টা করে লাভ কী, সেই প্রশ্নও প্রাসঙ্গিক। কিন্তু এটাও ঘটনা যে পাসোয়ান সেলের সঙ্গে ইস্কোর সংযক্তির প্রস্তাব নিয়ে আসার আগেই পশ্চিমবঙ্গের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য জিন্দাল গোষ্ঠীকে ইস্কো কিনে নেওয়ার জন্য আহ্বান জানিয়েছিলেন। কাজেই জিন্দাল বা দেশি-বিদেশি অন্য কোনও সংস্থা সেলের থেকে বেশি দামে ইস্কো কিনতে আগ্রহী কি না তা খতিয়ে দেখা উচিত, কমিশনের এই বক্তব্যও সহজে উড়িয়ে দিতে পারবে না কেন্দ্ৰ।

16 APP 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

MISSING, A HOLISTIC VIEW OF TRADE

NO MAJOR CHANGES were expected from the annual supplement to the foreign trade policy that was unveiled by Commerce Minister Kamal Nath on Friday. The five-year Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) presented on August 31, 2004 was the United Progressive Alliance's first policy statement in the area and was meant to replace the earlier Export-Import policies. However, despite being projected as a departure from EXIM policies, the FTP hardly contained any path-breaking announcements. Given the diminishing role of the Government in exports and imports, it is perhaps not realistic to expect significant announcements and concessions from trade policy statements. The first annual supplement to the FTP sticks to the pattern already established; it is mainly an exercise in fine-tuning procedures.

There is another reason why trade policy announcements do not appear all that significant. Foreign trade, except in a narrow procedural sense, cuts across the domains of several Ministries. The well-known constraints to exports — high transaction costs, 'export' of domestic levies, and above all infrastructure inadequacies — cannot be addressed by the Commerce Ministry alone. Nor is the ballooning petroleum import bill, estimated at \$29 billion out of a total import bill of \$105 billion last year, the sole concern of any one Ministry. Most likely, it is

the absence of a timely and co-ordinated action plan by several arms of the government that explains the Commerce Minister's inability to effect changes such as replacing the duty entitlement passbook scheme. The scheme, a major export incentive, seeks to neutralise the incidence of domestic levies on exports. Trade policy should take a holistic view and deal with the whole range of policy measures in fields such as transportation, logistics, and banking.

Exports, which have been growing at a brisk pace in recent years, touched \$80 billion last year. The share of India's exports in global trade is still minuscule, less than the share of many small countries. There is a need to broadbase the composition of exports and look beyond the top six destinations — the United States, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, China, and Japan. Not to be forgotten, the stickiness in oil imports and the high global petroleum prices all but rule out the possibility of the trade deficit narrowing in the near future. Last year, merchandise imports exceeded exports by \$25 billion. The deficit was met entirely by services, essentially software exports estimated at \$30 billion. It is time the overall policy framework transcended the confines of merchandise trade and tapped the full potential of these two sources in boosting the balance of payments.

New Foreign Trade Policy Unveiled

2005-06 EXPORT TARGET ■ \$92 BILLION IS THE

Statesman News Service

government today unveiled the new Foreign Frade Policy, projecting a touching \$ 92 million in higher growth trajectory to the FTP announced by sectors including agriculfor the country's exports, the current fiscal. Among a slew of measures in the Commerce and Industry ture, marine products, export oriented units and Annual Supplement 2005 were packages in several Minister, Mr Kamal Nath NEW DELHI, April 8. service sectors

target of 24 per cent, Mr Nath said. "The growth rate achieved in 2004-05 has been unprecedented A special package for tion at major ports and a reduced obligation under the Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme are year touched a record high of \$ FTP. India's exports in the the sector, initiatives in infra-80 billion, showing the highest ever export growth the tsunami-hit marine structure to ease congesthe other highlights of the jo announced last Comprehensive year first

Boost to marine exports Package for EOU sector for units debonding

manufacturing sector

competitiveness of

Measures to enhance

commodities

congestion at major ports

acilitate trade

Facility to reduce

ALL SMILES: Mr Kamal Nath releases the Foreign Trade Policy at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

of world merchandise trade earlier than the tar-Formulation of Inter-State ■ Removal of export cess all agricultural, plantation

Highlights

get date of 2009," the min-He also announced the setting up of an Inter-State Trade Council to engage the state governments in providing an ister said.

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Sounci

duty benefits under the EPCG Scheme would be extended for import of capital goods required by covered shopping area of enabling environment for boosting international trade. To facilitate modernisation of the retail sector in India, concessional retailers with a minimum international Procedural simplification to maintained, India will and if this momentum

To address the problem of port congestion that hampered 1000 square metres. frequently cross the milestone of \$ 150 billion of merchandise exports substantially and thereby, double her share

tive. Under a special package for Export Oriented Units (EOUs), a simpliput in place for units Passbook (DEPB) Scheme will continue till a new policy is in place some exports, Mr Kamal Nath announced a new initiafied procedure has been debonding from EOUs. The Duty Entitlement time in September.

ciency of the export sector. The ICC president, Mr Umang Kanoria also Meanwhile, Mr PR Agarwala, senior vice presi-Chamber of Commerce in dent at the Bhara Kolkata, in his reaction designed to enhance effi said the measures are well welcomed the Policy.

2005 APR

THE STATESMAN

Cess on farm exports

40 9/1 to go 20 AVN

By Sushina Ramchandran

NEW DELHI, APRIL 8. The Government today announced the setting up of an Inter-State Trade Council as part of measures to boost exports, especially in the key areas of agro-products, marine products, and handlooms. In a supplement to the five-year foreign trade policy (2004-9), numerous steps to cut red-tapism have been unveiled, especially in the export promotion capital goods (EPCG) and advance licensing schemes. These are expected to benefit the small-scale units and the retail sector while reducing the congestion in ports.

The Commerce Minister, Ka-

nal Nath, outlining the new policy initiatives at a press meet, said an unprecedented 24 per cent export growth rate in 2004-2005 forced him to revise the target for the current year from \$88 billion to \$92 billion. Quick estimates for 2004-2005 showed that total exports reached \$80 billion, against the target of \$74 billion. With even higher imports, the trade deficit had reached \$25 billion. He felt this was largely due to the high cost of oil imports.

"Avoid taxing exports"

The Minister, stressing the need to avoid taxing exports, said the cess on export of all agricultural and plantation commodities, under the various Commodity Board Acts, were proposed to be abolished. Consultations would be held with other Ministries which might be levying cess on exports, with a view to eliminating them. "We cannot subsidise our exports but let us at least not tax them."

Launching a special package for the marine products sector, he said this was meant to help the fishermen affected by tsunami. It includes allowing import of mono-filament long line system for tuna fishing at a concessional duty of five per cent and allowing duty-free import of special flavours and ingredients for seafood processing up to one per cent of the value of exports. The system of waste disposal of seafood only after Customs

inspection is being replaced by a self-removal procedure for waste clearance.

The Minister said the "Vishesh Krishi Upaj Yojana" would be extended to poultry and dairy products, apart from flowers, fruits, vegetables and minor forest produce. The Shellac export promotion council had also been made the nodal agencyl for minor forest produce while a special handloom trademark would be developed on the lines of Woolmark and Silkmark.

New scheme

As for the duty entitlemen pass-book (DEPB) scheme, he said a scheme to replace it had been finalised and it would it place within six months. The Minister conceded the exporters' demand for a transitional period to shift to the new scheme.

Under the "EPCG package, fast track companies fulfilling 75 per cent of their export obligation in half the time, would be freed from the balance obligation. This is expected to ben efit the pharmaceutical secto significantly. Concessional durbenefits have also been given to the retail sector as well as fo capacity expansion and quality the EPCG scheme had been extended to minor ports, inland container depots and the container freight stations in orde to augment port facilities.

to augment port facilities.

Mr. Kamal Nath was confident that the proposed Inter-State Trade Council would improve the coordination between the States and the Centre with regard to trade. Some States had formulated export policies but a great deal was needed to coordinate these efforts.

The advance licensing scheme had also been rationalised with three different categories being merged. The scope has been extended to all previous exporters. Besides, as a major initiative towards cutting transaction costs, he said, a single common application form "Ayaat-Niryat" of 50 pages would replace the present 120 page set.

Govt buys time on oil

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 8: The government seems to be buying time on the controversial issue of raising petrol and diesel prices in the wake of skyrocketing international crude rates.

The government is clearly worried over the adverse political fallout of such a move, which, in recent months, has pushed its economic imperatives to the backburner.

Left leaders met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today but skirted around the prickly economic issues. The CPM later ratcheted up pressure on the government by demanding the withdrawal of the excise duty hike on petrol and diesel in the recent budget. This, they argued, will obviate the need to raise pump prices.

Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee said the issue of increasing the prices of the two auto fuels was not discussed at the cabinet meeting today.

Public sector oil companies have been seeking a Rs 4.50-per-litre hike in petrol and Rs 5 per litre increase in diesel rates due to hardening of crude prices, increase in excise duty, levy of additional road cess and extra cost in-

curred in supplying ultra-low sulphur fuel from April 1. "The petroleum ministry

"The petroleum ministry had proposed that 60 per cent of the hike sought by state-run companies be allowed now and the remaining be spread over a period. But the issue did not come up for discussion today," a senior official said.

The ministry is reported to have circulated a cabinet note, pointing out that public sector firms were losing Rs 1,250 crore a month in revenues due to the freeze in petrol and diesel prices since November 2004.

Meanwhile, the government has allowed Indian Oil to directly charter ships for crude imports instead of going through Transchart, the chartering wing of the shipping ministry. The shipping ministry had been opposed to the move on the ground that it would hit Indian shipping firms, including SCI, which is given preference under Transchart.

Information and broadcasting minister Jaipal Reddy said "the cabinet gave its approval for allowing IOC to charter ships for oil imports directly."

According to the shipping policy, import of government-owned cargoes should be done only on free-on-board basis through Transchart.

CMP drives Kamal Nath's trade policy

FOREIGN TRADE POLICY The Prime Minister's

Exports touch \$80 billion, imports \$105 billion in 2004-05

Economic Council will

Prime Minister.

Export target for 2005-06 is \$92 billion **HE HIGHLIGHTS**

Key theme is employment generation, sops for agri-export

ne, dairy, retail, auto component sectors

Pass Book scheme) sales

DEPB (Duty Entitlement

involving Rs 13,000 crore

export earnings, exemption of service tax to Ex-

ing to taxes on profits from

now examine issues relat-

Duty Entitlement Passbook Scheme rates issue, and tax no-Inter-State Trade Council set up to boost exports ices under Section 80 HHC to be taken up by PMO

Export cess on agri and plantation sectors to be removed. Export obligation reduced in agri, manufacturing and SSI EPCG benefit operationalised for retail sector

extending

(EOUs),

Oriented

deemed export benefit to

DTA units for supply against 'served from India scheme certificate' for ser-

Less paperwork for exporters To cut transcation costs, Nath outlined some regle application form)—
"Aayat-Niryat"—which has forms measures like a sin-

> Council has been given 30 days to submit its report.

providers.

been prescribed for exporters reducing 60 per cent paperwork. Exporters filling 102-page forms so

far will now have a 50-page

ial imported under licence from one unit of a firm to larisation and permitting transfer of duty free materof licences for export regu-

steps to streamline proce-

agricultural, dairy under the Advance Licensnies, firms fulfilling 75 per cent or more of their export obligation in half the nalised, allowing clubbing ing Scheme and to incentivise fast-track compa-The ALS has been ratiooriginal obligation period shall be freed from the balance export obligation.

would be developed mark ines of silk

agri exports, including removal of export cess on modities. Translating the rade Policy for the counvenefits under "Vishesh oultry products including bles allowing exporters to farm and plantation comryside, Nath announced Krishi Upaj Yojana" for lowers, fruits and vegetaget duty credits against ex-

nandloom sector on the Promoting Brand India, Nath said a trade mark

> **Kamal Nath lets the CMP** ower foreign trade policy

Sops for employment, agri & plantation exports 98-1 NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

IT may have been an 'annual supplement' to last year's Foreign Trade Policy, but that didn't stop Commerce Minister Kamal Nath from pushing the populist Common Minimum Programme (CMP) goal of creating employment through exports.

So there were sops galore for employment-generating sectors like agri exports, marine, dairy, poultry, retail stores and automotive components, among others.

Apart from tinkering with incentives for specific sectors, Nath's bigpicture announcement is the setting up of an Inter State Trade Council, a platform to create competition among states to adopt economic policies like tax framework and labour laws to compete for investments in export-oriented companies.



Sets up inter State Trade Council

In terms of numbers, India's exports posted a healthy 24 per cent growth, touching \$80 billion, surpassing the target of \$68 billion. The target for next year is \$92 billion. There is a \$25-billion trade deficit as imports were \$105 billion.

In a major relief to exporters, Nath said that all income tax notices to exporters under Section 80 HHC for 2001-02 onwards would now be held in abeyance, thanks to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

09 APR 2005

CPM warns govt on discredited' economic policies

New Delhi: Reflecting their differences



with the government they support from outside, the Left parties on Wednesday cautioned the UPA

H S Surjeet

coalition at the Centre against following "old discredited" economic policies, making it clear that they would not give up on their 'basic agenda'

As the CPM congress began its six-day deliberations, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, in probably his last address as general secretary to the party's highest-policy making body, said that while the Left supported the UPA government "to meet the exigencies of the current situation, let me make it clear that there will be no giving up

on our basic agenda".
"We shall act as sentinels of the people. We shall make independent assessments and decide our course of action," he told over 800 delegates from various parts of the country during his inaugural address and in a veiled warning to the Congress-led government.

Observing that differences in ideology and "class character" of the Congress and the CPM were "well known," Surjeet said the struggle between the approaches of the two par-

ties would continue.
Voicing the Left's concerns over the reforms policies pursued by the Central govern-ment, over which differences have been aired by them in the open, CPI general secretary A B Bardhan asked the government not to pursue the "same

old discredited" policies but to adhere to the common minimum programme to carry out economic reforms with a human face. The congress, held every three years, is meeting in the backdrop of offers by Surject to step down as general secretary. There are indications that the mantle would go to a younger Prakash Karat. The other nonagenarian leader Jyoti Basu has also offered to quit. PTI

ভ্যাটের প্রতিবাদে দ্বিতীয় দিনেও দেশ জুড়ে দোকান-বাজার বন্ধ

এই কর ব্যবস্থায় ত্রুটি আছে, বললেন মন্টেক

'গুরুতর ক্রটি' আছে, জেশজুড়ে নতুন কর ব্যবস্থা চালু হওয়ার কয়েক ঘন্টা আগে এই কথা বললেন যোজনা কমিশনের ডেপুটি চেয়ারম্যান ও কেন্দ্রের সংস্কারমনস্কতার অন্যতম প্রতীক মন্টেক সিংহ অহলুওয়ালিয়া। প্রবেশ কর, অকট্রয়ের মতো নানা কর জিইয়ে রেখেই ভ্যাট যে-ভাবে চালু করা হচ্ছে, তাতে গোটা কর-কাঠামোয় গুরুতর খামতি থাকবে বলে মন্তব্য করেছেন মন্টেক। সামগ্রিক ভাবে ভ্যাট অনেক যৌক্তিক বলে মেনে নিলেও দেশ জুড়ে ব্যবসা ধর্মঘটের দ্বিতীয় দিনে মন্টেকের এই মন্তব্য নিঃসন্দেহে নতুন কর নিয়ে বিতর্ক আরও বাড়িয়ে দেবে।

দশম যোজনার অন্তবর্তী মূলায়নে বলা হয়েছে, "ভ্যাটের জন্য যে কর বিন্যাস প্রস্তাব করা হয়েছে, তাতে গুরুতর ব্রুটি থাকছে। পণ্যের উপরে যে সব পরোক্ষ কর আছে তাতে এর কোনও প্রভাব নেই। অকট্রয় ও প্রবেশ-করের মতো করগুলি চালু থাকছে।" ওই নথিতে আরও লেখা হয়েছে, "সব মিলিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় ও রাজ্যের কর ও ভ্যাটের ফলে করের হার দাঁড়াবে ৩০ শতাংশের কাছাকাছি। ভ্যাট চালু হওয়ার পরে যে করগুলি চালু থাকবে, তার সম্মিলিত প্রভাব হবে এর চেয়েও বেশি।"

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পাশাপাশি, কেন্দ্রীয় বিক্রয়কর কী ভাবে বিলোপ করা হবে ও এক রাজ্য থেকে অন্য রাজ্যে পণ্য চলাচলের ক্ষেত্রে কী ভাবে লেনদেন হবে, তা নিয়ে কোনও পরিকল্পনা করা হয়নি বলে কেন্দ্র ও রাজ্যগুলি সমালোচনা করেছে কমিশন। কমিশন বলেছেন, "পণ্য ও পরিবেবা মিলিয়ে একক কর

নয়াদিল্লি, ৩১ মার্চ: ভ্যাট ব্যবস্থায় ব্যবস্থার জন্য কোনও প্রস্তুতি নেওয়া চতর ব্রুটি' আছে, জেশজুড়ে নতুন হচ্ছে না। এই কর ব্যবস্থাই সবচেয়ে ব্যবস্থা চালু হওয়ার কয়েক ঘন্টা যুক্তিযুক্ত এবং অর্থনীতির জন্যও এটি গে এই কথা বললেন যোজনা সবচেয়ে উপযুক্ত।"

ভ্যাট ব্যবস্থায় লেনদেনের প্রত্যেক স্থার মে মূল্য যুক্ত হয় তার উপরে কর ধার্য করা হয়। কমিশনের বক্তব্য, ভ্যাটের এই প্রাথমিক ভিত্তিটি যথেষ্ট দুর্বল করে দেওয়া হয়েছে বিভিন্ন পণ্যকে 'ইনপুট' বা কাঁচামাল ও ফাইনাল প্রভান্ত' বা চূড়ান্ত পণ্য বলে চিহ্নিত করে। কমিশনের যুক্তি, উৎপাদন থেকে উপভোক্তার হাতে পৌছনোর শৃঙ্খলে যে-কোনও পণ্যই কাঁচামাল বা চূড়ান্ত পণ্য হিসাবে পরিগণিত হতে পারে।

তবে এত সমালোচনা সত্ত্বেও
ভ্যাটকে বেশি যুক্তিযুক্তি বলে বর্ণনা
করে মন্টেক বলেন, "যে সব সরকার
এই কর কার্যকর করছে না, তারা
সংশ্লিষ্ট রাজ্যের উৎপাদকদের উপর
বাড়তি ব্যয়ের বোঝা চাপিয়ে দিছে।"
এই কর ব্যবস্থা কী ভাবে নতুন
বিনিয়োগের সিদ্ধান্ত প্রভাবিত করতে
পারে, তা ব্যাখ্যা করে তিনি বলেন,
"বিদেশি ও দেশি, সব শ্রেণির
বিনিয়োগকারীই লগ্গি করার সময় যে
সব রাজা ভ্যাট চালু করছে, সেগুলিকে
ভ্যাধিকার দেবেন।"

দেশে ম্যানুফ্যাকচারিং বা উৎপাদনমুখী শিল্পের বৃদ্ধির জন্য যোজনা কমিশনের সদস্যোরা সুপারিশ করেছেন, কেন্দ্র ও রাজ্যগুলির করের হার আশিয়ান দেশগুলির মাত্রায় (অর্থাৎ ১০-১২ শতাংশ) নামিয়ে আনা উচিত। এর কারণ ব্যাখ্যা করে তাঁরা বলেন, করের চড়া হার পণ্যের মূল্য বৃদ্ধি ঘটায়। আর মূল্য বৃদ্ধি ঘটলে চাহিদা কমতে বাধ্য। বিশেষ করে

আর্থিক ভাবে অপেক্ষাকৃত দুর্বল শ্রেণির মানুষের কাছে।" এ খবর সংবাদ সংস্থা পি টি আইয়ের।

দিল্লি থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানাচ্ছেন, রাজ্যের মধ্যে উৎপাদিত পণ্যের ক্ষেত্রে ভ্যাট ব্যবস্থা নিয়ে কোনও সমস্যা নেই বলে জানিয়েছেন যোজনা কমিশনের সদস্য অভিজিৎ সেন। কিন্তু যে সব পণ্যের ক্ষেত্রে অন্য রাজ্য থেকে কাঁচামাল আসে, সেখানে বর্তমান কর বিন্যাস নিয়ে কিছু প্রশ্ন থেকেই গিয়েছে। তিনি বলেন, এ ক্ষেত্রে কেলকর কমিটির সুপারিশে এ ক্ষেত্রে কেন্দ্রের ভূমিকা ঠিক কী হবে, তা স্পষ্ট করে বলা হয়েছে। কমিশনের ধারণা, রাজাভেদে কর বাবস্থায় যে সামঞ্জস্যের সমস্যা রয়েছে, তার সমাধানে কেন্দ্রের ভূমিকা থাকছে। অভিজিতবাবু বলেন, ''কেলকারের রিপোর্টের প্রেক্ষিতেই আমরা আমাদের মনোভাব জানিয়েছি মাত্র।"

সংবাদ সংস্থার খবর, তবে যোজনা কমিশনের চোখে ভ্যাট ব্যবস্থার যে ক্রটি বিচ্যুতি ধরা পভুক না কেন, দেশের কর ইতিহাসের এই মাহেন্দ্রুক্তণে বিশ্বব্যান্ধ ও আন্তর্জাতিক অর্থ ভাণ্ডার (আই এম এফ) নতুন করের ভূয়সী প্রশংসা করেছে।

এই দুই প্রতিষ্ঠানের কর্তাদের মতে ভ্যাট যেমন একাধারে কর ফাঁকির প্রবণতা কমাবে, অন্য দিকে তেমনই সরকারের রাজস্ব আয় বাড়াবে। এই ব্যবস্থা সরকারকে ঋণের ফাঁদ থেকে বেরিয়ে আসতে সাহায্য করতে পারে।

আর্দ্তজাতিক অর্থ ভাণ্ডারের প্রতিনিধিরা বলেন, এই কর সংস্কার বাঞ্ছনীয়, কিন্তু রাজ্য সরকারগুলিকে আর্থিক শৃঙ্খলাপরায়ণ করে তোলার জন্য আরও বেশি প্রয়াসের প্রয়োজন।

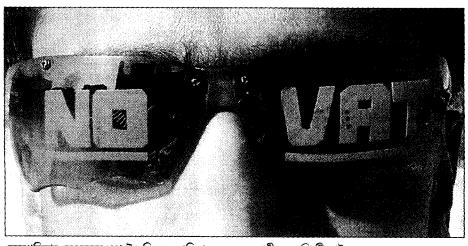
আন্দোলনে অটল রাজ্যের ব্যবসায়ীরা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: ভ্যাট বা যুক্তমূল্য প্রতিবাদে ব্যবসায়ী করের সংগঠনগুলির ডাকা ৭২ ঘণ্টা বন্ধের দ্বিতীয় দিনে, বৃহস্পতিবারও কলকাতা-সহ গোটা রাজ্যেই দোকান-বাজার ছিল বন্ধ। কলকাতার ফুটপাথের ব্যবসাতেও এ দিন চোখে পড়ার মতো ভাটা পড়েছে। ব্যবসা বন্ধের কারণে এ দিনও শহরের রাস্তায় যানবাহন চলেছে উল্লেখযোগ্য রকমের কম। রাজা সরকার যেমন আজ. শুক্রবার পয়লা এপ্রিল থেকে ভ্যাট চালু করতে বদ্ধপরিকর, ব্যবসায়ী সংগঠনগুলিও তেমনই ভ্যাটের বিরুদ্ধে তৃতীয় দিনের বন্ধ বহাল রাখার কথা জানিয়েছে।

বনধের অন্যতম উদ্যোক্তা ফেডারেশন অব ট্রেডার্স অ্যাসোসিয়েশন (এফ টি এ)-র সাধারণ সম্পাদক মহেশ সিংহানিয়া এ দিন জানিয়েছেন, শুক্রবার থেকে রাজ্য সরকার ভ্যাট চালু করুক বা না করুক, ব্যবসা বন্ধ তৃতীয় দিনেও বহাল থাকবে। তিনি বলেন, ''এর পরে আমাদের আন্দোলনের গতি প্রকৃতি কী হবে, তা ঠিক করতে আগামী সপ্তাহের গোড়ায় আমরা বৈঠকে বসব।" ব্যবসায়ী সংগঠনের ওই নেতার অভিযোগ, ''আমাদের অর্থমন্ত্রী কথার খেলাপ করছেন। ভ্যাট নিয়ে একই সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন রকম কথা বলছেন।" ফেডারেশন অব ট্রেডার্স অর্গানাইজেশনের নেতা রবীন্দ্রনাথ কোলেও এ দিন বলেন, "ভ্যাটের বিরোধিতায় আমরা অটল আছি।" ব্যবসা বন্ধ সর্বাত্মক হয়েছে এবং শুক্রবারও একই চিত্র থাকবে বলে তিনি দাবি করেন।

এ দিকে, অর্থমন্ত্রী অসীম দাশগুপু
বুধবারের মতো এ দিনও ব্যবসায়ীদের
ধর্মঘট প্রত্যাহার করে রাজ্য সরকারের
সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসার ডাক দেন।
অসীমবাবু এ দিন রাজ্য বিধানসভায়
বলেন, "আলোচনার দরজা খোলা
রয়েছে। তবে পরিবেশটা উন্নত নাহলে কোনও আলোচনাই ফলপ্রসু হয়
না।" তিনি বুধবার জানিয়েছিলেন,
বনধ প্রত্যাহার না-করলে আলোচনার
পরিবেশ তৈরি হবে না।

বুধবারের মতো এ দিনও গোটা কলকাতার সমস্ত রাস্তার দু'পাশের দোকানগুলি ছিল বন্ধ। সদাব্যস্ত পোস্তাও রয়েছে স্তব্ধ হয়ে। ছোট বড় মিলিয়ে পোস্তায় প্রতিদিন কম করে তিন থেকে চার হাজার ট্রাকে মাল ওঠানো এবং নামানো হয়। দু'দিন ধরে পোস্তার সে কর্মব্যস্ততা নেই। পোস্তার মোড়ে কয়েকজন ট্রাফিক পূলিশ ছাড়া আরও কারও দেখা মেলিন্দি



বৃহস্পতিবার অমৃতসরে ভ্যাটের বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদে এক ব্যবসায়ী। — পি টি আই