

কংগ্রেসি চাপেও তেলের নয়াদামে অনড় প্রধানমন্ত্রী

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ৭ জুন: সিজের দল এবং সরকারের সমর্থক বামেদের হাজার চাপের মুখেও প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিং পেট্রোপণ্যের বর্ধিত মূল্য প্রত্যাহার করতে রাজি নন। নিজের এই মনোভাব তিনি তেলমন্ত্রী মুরলী দেওরাকে বুঝিয়েও দিয়েছেন।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী নিজে অবশ্য এ নিয়ে আজ কোনও মন্তব্য করেননি। তাঁর মিডিয়া উপদেষ্টা সঞ্জয় বাবুও এ নিয়ে সরাসরি কোনও উত্তর দেননি। বাবু বলেন, সংশ্লিষ্ট মন্ত্রী মুরলী দেওরাই যখন এ নিয়ে কথা বলেছেন, তখন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতরের কিছু বলার থাকতে পারে না।

পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম নিয়ে সরকার এবং কংগ্রেসের টানা পোড়েন এখনও অব্যাহত। দাম কমানোর জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রীর উপরে কংগ্রেস চাপ রেখে চলেছে। চাপ আছে বামেদেরও। কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বের বক্তব্য, সরকার দাম কমালে ভাল। না হলে দল এ ব্যাপারে নিজেদের বক্তব্য সাধারণ মানুষকে জানাবে। উদ্দেশ্য একটাই, ভোটব্যাঙ্কের রাজনীতিকে অটুট রাখা।

কিন্তু গোটা ঘটনায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী মোটেই খুশি নন। তাঁর সচিবালয়ের মতে, অর্থনীতির উন্নয়নের জন্যই প্রধানমন্ত্রী সংস্কার চালিয়ে যেতে চান। তা ছাড়া, তেলের দাম বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্ত কারও একার নয়। মন্ত্রিসভায় সর্বসম্মত ভাবে এই সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে। এ নিয়ে কংগ্রেসের বিরোধিতাকে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়ের অনেকেই খুব ভাল ভাবে নেননি। তাঁদের মতে, আরজেডি-ডিএমকে-র মতো দল যখন বিরোধিতা করছে না, তখন কংগ্রেসের উচিত, দামবৃদ্ধির কারণ সাধারণ মানুষকে বোঝানো।

বিভিন্ন মহলকে বোঝানোর এই দায়িত্ব প্রধানমন্ত্রী আজ তুলে দিয়েছেন তেলমন্ত্রীরই কাছে। পশ্চিমবঙ্গের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্যের সঙ্গেও কথা বলার পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন তিনি। ইতিমধ্যেই তেল প্রস্তুতকারক সংস্থাগুলির সঙ্গে দেওরার বৈঠক হয়েছে। সেখানেও প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বার্তা জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন তিনি। পাশাপাশি, সংবাদমাধ্যমে বিজ্ঞাপন দিয়ে দাম বাড়ানোর কারণ ব্যাখ্যা করার সিদ্ধান্তও নেওয়া হয়েছে।

পেট্রোপণ্যের উপরে রাজ্যের করের পরিমাণ কমানোর জন্যও দেওরা আজ আবেদন জানান। এ প্রসঙ্গে, বিশেষ করে মহারাষ্ট্র ও পশ্চিমবঙ্গের কথা উল্লেখ করেন তিনি। তাঁর মতে, রাজ্য যে হারে কর নেয়, তেলের দাম বাড়লে সেই হারে তার রাজস্বও বাড়ে। দাম বাড়ার আগে রাজ্য যে রাজস্ব সংগ্রহ করত, সেই পরিমাণ অব্যাহত রাখলে, বর্ধিত দাম থেকে অনেকটাই সুরাহা পাবেন সাধারণ মানুষ। মহারাষ্ট্রের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে ইতিমধ্যেই এ নিয়ে কথা বলেছেন দেওরা। এ বার বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্যের সঙ্গেও কথা বলবেন দেওরা।

পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রকের বক্তব্য, সাধারণ মানুষের কথা ভেবেই কেরোসিন-রাবার গ্যাসের দাম বাড়ানো হয়নি। কিন্তু কিছু ক্ষেত্রে বাধ্য হয়েই দাম বাড়তে হয়েছে। আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে তেলের দাম যে ভাবে বেড়েছে, তাতে নবরত্ন সংস্থাস্থলিকে বাঁচাতে এ ছাড়া আর কোনও উপায় ছিল না।

কংগ্রেস অবশ্য এখনও হাল ছাড়েনি। দলের মুখপাত্র রাজীব গুন্ডের মতে, বাস্তব পরিস্থিতি মানলে এই মুহুর্তে দাম বাড়ানো ছাড়া কোনও উপায় নেই। আমরাও মূল্যবৃদ্ধি প্রত্যাহার করতে বলছি না। কিন্তু সব দিক খতিয়ে দেখে বর্ধিত মূল্য কিছু পরিমাণ কমানো যেতেই পারে। সরকারের এই বিষয়টি বিবেচনা করা উচিত।

পশ্চিমবঙ্গ বাদ, অন্যত্র ধর্মঘটে সায় সিপিএমের

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা: শাসক সি পি এমের সঙ্গে বিরোধী সি পি এমের ফারাক ক্রমশ স্পষ্ট হচ্ছে। বনধ-রাজনীতি নিয়ে শাসক সি পি এম এখন অনেক সতর্ক। তাই পেট্রোপণ্যের মূল্যবৃদ্ধির বিরুদ্ধে অন্যান্য রাজ্যে বিরোধীদের ডাকা বনধ-ধর্মঘটের মতো কর্মসূচিতে সি পি এম সামিল হলেও এই রাজ্যে ক্ষমতাসীন সি পি এম আপাতত সেই পথে যাচ্ছে না। বুধবার বামফ্রন্টের বৈঠকের পরে ফ্রন্টের চেয়ারম্যান এবং সি পি এমের রাজ্য সম্পাদক বিমান বসু বলেন, “ধর্মঘট নিয়ে আমাদের কোনও আলোচনা হয়নি। আলোচনা যখন হয়নি, তখন এই রাজ্যে ধর্মঘট হবে না।”

রাজ্যের উন্নয়নমুখী কর্মকাণ্ডে বনধ, ধর্মঘট যে সামগ্রিক ভাবে বিরূপ প্রতিক্রিয়ার সৃষ্টি করে এবং দেশি-বিদেশি বিনিয়োগকারীদের কাছে অবাস্তবিক সঙ্কেত পাঠায়, মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য, শিল্পমন্ত্রী নিরুপম সেনের মতো শীর্ষ নেতারা দলের ভিতরে-বাইরে বারবার তা বলেছেন। কিছু দিন আগে কলকাতার রাজপথে জোর করে বনধ করানোর বিরুদ্ধে সরব হয়েছিলেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী স্বয়ং। তথ্যপ্রযুক্তিকে বনধের আওতার বাইরে রাখার জন্যও তিনি লড়াই করেছেন নিজের দলের অন্তরে। এখন জ্বালানির মূল্যবৃদ্ধির বিরুদ্ধে শাসক সি পি এমের বনধ না-করার সিদ্ধান্ত বুঝিয়ে দেয়, সপ্তম বামফ্রন্ট সরকারের বুদ্ধবাবুরা এ ব্যাপারে গোড়া থেকেই রাশ টেনে ধরার পক্ষপাতী।

পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের মূল্যবৃদ্ধির প্রতিবাদে ১৩ জুন দেশ জুড়ে প্রতিবাদ দিবস পালনের ডাক দেওয়া হয়েছে। ওই দিন উত্তরপ্রদেশে সাধারণ ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিয়েছে সমাজবাদী পার্টি। ওই দলের সাধারণ সম্পাদক অমর সিংহ জানান, সি পি এমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাটের সঙ্গে আলোচনার ভিত্তিতেই তাঁদের দল উত্তরপ্রদেশে সাধারণ ধর্মঘট ডেকেছে। সি পি এম-ও সেই ধর্মঘটে সামিল হবে। এখানে কিন্তু বিমানবাবুরা সাধারণ ধর্মঘট করবেন না। কেন করবেন না? এই প্রশ্নের সরাসরি কোনও উত্তর দেননি বিমানবাবু।

এ দিন কারাটের বিবৃতির ব্যাখ্যা দিয়ে বিমানবাবু জানান, অবস্থান-বিক্ষোভ, ধর্না, আইন-অমান্য কর্মসূচির মধ্য দিয়ে বিভিন্ন রাজ্যে প্রতিবাদ জানানো হবে। সাধারণ ধর্মঘটের মধ্য দিয়ে প্রতিবাদ জানানো হবে অনেক রাজ্যেই। প্রতিবাদ আন্দোলন কেমন হবে, সংশ্লিষ্ট রাজ্যের রাজনৈতিক দলগুলিই সেই ব্যাপারে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে। তবে পশ্চিমবঙ্গে শুধু প্রতিবাদ আন্দোলনই হবে। তাঁদের প্রতিবাদ আন্দোলন কেমন হবে, তা ঠিক করতে ফ্রন্টের নেতারা এ দিন বৈঠক করেন। বৈঠকের পরে বিমানবাবু জানিয়ে দেন, এই রাজ্যে আন্দোলন সীমাবদ্ধ থাকবে মিছিল-বিক্ষোভের মধ্যেই।

বিমানবাবু বলেন, “মঙ্গলবারেই আমাদের রাজ্যে প্রতিবাদ আন্দোলন শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। চলবে ১৩ জুন পর্যন্ত। ওই দিন বিভিন্ন তেল কোম্পানির আঞ্চলিক দফতরের সামনে বেলা ২টা থেকে বিকেল ৫টা পর্যন্ত অবস্থান-বিক্ষোভ হবে।” তার পরেও কেন্দ্র যদি পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম না-কমায়, তা হলে পরবর্তী কর্মসূচি স্থির করতে তাঁরা বৈঠকে বসবেন বলে জানিয়েছেন বিমানবাবু।

এ দিন ফ্রন্টের কলকাতা জেলা কমিটির ডাকে রানি রাসমণি রোড থেকে কলেজ স্কোয়ার পর্যন্ত প্রতিবাদ মিছিল বেরোয়। বিমানবাবু জানান, রবিবার রাজ্যের সব বাজার-হাটে এবং সোমবার বিভিন্ন কলকারখানার গেটে বিক্ষোভের কর্মসূচি নেওয়া হয়েছে।

KUDOS & BRICKBATS FOR GOVT

Left's mix bag for Centre

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Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, June 15: The Left parties today came out with a mixed report card on the two-year performance of the UPA government giving kudos for its initiatives like OBC quota in educational institutions and rural employment guarantee Act but brickbats for its policies and actions not in keeping with the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP).

The Left parties also demanded a halt to the government's move to bring FDI in the retail sector, reorient the focus of foreign policy and take prompt steps to bring Bills for Women's Reservation in legislatures and forest land rights of agricultural labourers.

"The UPA government has taken steps in order to fulfil some of the commitments made in the NCMP by scrapping POTA and adopting Right to

Fuel hike issue

NEW DELHI, June 15: Quibbling between the Centre and the states on who should provide more relief to consumers on fuel prices intensified with the latter asking the Union Government to give an account of accruals to it from the latest hike in prices. The Empowered Committee of state finance ministers on VAT today took a "unanimous" decision to ask the Union Finance Ministry whether it is planning any excise cut on petrol and diesel. ■ PTI

Information Act and National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme", said a nine-page note of the Left parties. There are instances where the government has moved in the right direction but half heartedly and has therefore fallen short of fulfilling the commitments made in the NCMP", the note said.

Doc set to give Rs 1,300-cr pep pill to Vidarbha

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**GOVERNMENT IDENTIFIES 31 DISTRICTS, RELIEF
TO INCLUDE A WAIVER OF OVER RS 1K-CR DEBT**



Our Bureau
NEW DELHI

BIG loan waivers are back. The Prime Minister is set to announce the first instalment of Rs 1,300-crore debt relief for distressed farmers of the six most backward districts of Vidarbha on Friday. The relief will include a waiver of over Rs 1,000-crore debt, apart from debt rescheduling.

The government has identified 31 districts, where farmer suicides were reported, for distress relief. These are spread over Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Since it's not feasible to restrict debt waiver to farmers of only one state, the relief package is likely to balloon into a tidy sum. This will strain bank balance sheets or the exchequer or both.

The cut-off date for debt relief to farmers is June 30, 2006. Sources said financing for the loan waiver would come directly from the Centre through budgetary support and would not burden cooperative credit institutions.

Cooperatives have been asking for a support of close to Rs 22,000 crore and have been unable to give loans to farmers at an interest rate of 7% for loans of Rs 3 lakh upper limit — as announced in Budget 2006-07. The government has said it would make Rs 2,500 crore available to banks as farm interest rate subsidy, but has not yet disbursed any funds.

The farm relief package as a whole is likely to be spread over three years, beginning this fiscal. The Maharashtra loan waiver is part of a total package of Rs 4,313

crore for irrigation, extension services and the like.

Three options have been proposed for the larger package to be put in place later. "The decision will be taken depending on the sort of financial burden the government is capable of absorbing," official sources said. They added: "Any subsidy for the waiver will have to be first factored into the budget and then the modalities will have to be worked out."

Public sector banks have not yet been apprised of their commitments towards the loan waiver package. A senior government official said the banks cannot afford to write off loans of such magnitude without budgetary support.

While the interest component of the loans may be waived off, it will be difficult for the banks to write off the principal amount. Any proposal to waive off total outstanding loans worth Rs 24,000 crore in the 31 districts may spell disaster for public sector banks. Banks are already witnessing a pressure on their profitability due to narrowing net interest margins (NIMs).

The districts for which the distress relief package will be announced on Friday could include Wardha, Akola, Yavatmal, Amravati, Chandrapur, Bhadara and parts of Nagpur for the time being.

These are districts which registered high suicide rates over the last two years among cotton farmers and where each farming family has an average loan burden of at least Rs 50,000.

► Yield, price shocks: P 16

Govt okays import of wheat, sugar

Cabinet Meeting On Rise In Prices Allows Private Players To Augment Flour Mill Requirements

New Delhi: Concerned over the surging prices of essential commodities, the government on Thursday banned export of pulses, allowed private players to import wheat and limited import of sugar.

State governments are also urged to take adequate steps against hoarding if at all.

"Wheat, pulses and sugar are driving prices up, therefore, the decision has been taken to augment the supply side. We are confident, that with these decisions, inflationary expectations will be dampened," finance minister P Chidambaram said after nearly 90-minute cabinet committee meeting on pricing.

Codex norms would be adhered to while importing wheat, as they are internationally accepted and "there is no dilution in it", he added. Global bids have been received for additional wheat import

lating to the recent fuel price hike are well known.

The cabinet held detailed discussion with the agriculture and other related ministries about the prevailing situation. "Decision has been taken to import adequate quantity of wheat and some qualities have already been contracted," Chidambaram said, adding that the government has not committed on quarantine norms.

Chidambaram said besides the designated canalising agency for wheat import, the government has also decided to allow private sector to import wheat. "This is to provide for the flour mills requirements," he said, adding that details, including the level of duties, would be announced shortly.

As far as pulses is concerned, he said the government has decided to hold up any further exports from the country "with immediate effect."

Chidambaram said the cabinet

15-point agenda for minorities

The Union cabinet on Thursday okayed a new 15-point programme to prevent and control communal incidents and take care of minorities welfare and decided to earmark 15% of funds in various schemes and programmes for nationally declared minorities. The cabinet decided that 15 per cent of the funds may be earmarked wherever possible in relevant schemes and programmes for the nationally declared minorities, finance minister P Chidambaram said.

This would be under tariff rate quota principle (TRQ), he said adding the tariff rate and quantity will be decided later and announced shortly.

Chidambaram said the inflation rate on the manufactured articles of three primary articles—wheat, pulses and sugar—was low, though fuel sector had shown an increase due to rise in fuel prices. "It was to address this inflationary trend, that the cabinet decided to take steps to augment supply to dampen prices," he said.

In reply to a query on spiralling prices of tomatoes he quipped, "I wish we can import tomatoes too." However, the current high prices of tomatoes were restricted to Delhi and they would adjust according to the season, he added.

Meanwhile, he said, the government has directed the cabinet secretary to look into the regulation of the commodity market with assistance from experts.

has also given its nod for the import of sugar before September 30, which is the end of current season and before the start of next crushing season.

Govt to re-present profit Bill

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, May 31: Grappling with the problem arising out of refusal of assent to the Bill, the Prime Minister today met the President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, amid assertion that the government will re-present the legislation that seeks to exempt 56 posts from being considered offices of profit "either in the present form or amended".

The Union Cabinet is meeting on Friday in which the Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Amendment Bill, passed by the two Houses earlier this month, will be taken up for being re-presented in the monsoon session.

The President's decision to refer the Bill back to Parliament gave the Opposition an opportunity to target the government



The Prime Minister with the President. A file photograph

and Mrs Sonia Gandhi. The BJP-led NDA approached the Election Commission asking it to act on disqualification petitions against several MPs, including Mrs Gandhi.

Law minister Mr HR Bhardwaj, who had piloted the bill in Parliament, told reporters that there was "no lacunae" in the legislation but "we would

respectfully reconsider it" since the President has returned it.

Dismissing suggestions that the action of the President was a "setback" to the government, he said this was part of the democratic process, which has various checks and balances.

When reporters questioned him on the points

raised by Parliament on retrospective effect and a uniform law for the entire country, the minister said: "It (retrospective effect) is very much valid. There can be no two views on this. Every now and then we revalidate the law. It is a valid concept in law." He said it was not possible to have a uniform law on the subject as state legislatures had different laws on the matter and had their own prerogative to declare any office as office of profit or exempt any one from the list.

Under the Constitution, the President has powers to refer a Bill back to Parliament for reconsideration. But once the two Houses reconsider the Bill and pass it afresh without or without amendments, the President is duty-bound to give assent to it.

0 1 JUN 2006

THE STATESMAN

ON HIS AGENDA ■ Disinvestment proposals and pension revamp back on radar; his hope: section in Left has been practical PM not to give in to Left threats, pushing key reforms

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 5

WITH Assembly elections over, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has given a clear signal to the Left by going ahead with the fuel price hike that he is not going to delay crucial and tough economic decisions. Next on the agenda is pending disinvestment proposals.

It's learnt that over the past couple of weeks when the PM was recovering from a wrist surgery, he found time to reflect on issues that had been put on hold largely due to the

Assembly elections. In keeping with the demands of the coalition, the Government did not want the relationship with the Left take an ugly turn. Now that the Left has made its political gains by winning Kerala and West Bengal, the sense is that the PM wants to get back to business regardless of the Left's threat of a nationwide strike.

Taking a tough posture towards the Left, the PM is also keen to move soon on the 5-10 per cent disinvestment proposal for the Neyveli Lignite Corporation. This was listed in the last Cabinet meeting

but was postponed and is likely to make it to the agenda later this week.

The Left has been opposed to this move as the corporation also has expansion plans in Kerala. In principle, the Left has not favoured disinvestment but the Government is now unlikely to soft pedal the issue any longer.

Also on the Government's agenda is to act soon on the PFRDA (Pension Fund Regulatory Development Authority) Bill that seeks to revamp the manner in which pensions are handled. This will involve contributions from employees into

a fund that can be invested in the stock market, removing the burden from the Government.

Here again, the Government has encountered Left opposition. But the feeling now is to not get bogged by these pressures which are only delaying important reform initiatives and giving rise to a negative sentiment.

According to reliable sources, the PM feels that Left governments in West Bengal and Kerala too will need to wrestle with such issues of economic and fiscal reforms. Given that a section of the Left has been more practical in its eco-

nomic approach, the hope in the PMO is that better reasoning shall prevail in due course.

Regardless of the outcome, sources said, PM has made up his mind not to endlessly postpone critical decisions of government. At the same time, Singh is expected to calibrate his approach and not escalate this to a political stand-off. A lot will depend on the extent the Left carries ahead its protest over the fuel price hike.

Meanwhile, there is a question mark on whether the PM will stop in Kolkata during his visit to Arunachal Pradesh next week.



PM feels Left govts in Bengal, Kerala too stand to gain

বাম আপত্তি উড়িয়েই বাড়ল পেট্রো-মূল্য

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ৫ জুন: বামদেদের হুমকি পুরোপুরি উপেক্ষা করে পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের দাম বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্ত নিল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। পেট্রোলের দাম বাড়ল লিটার-প্রতি ৪ টাকা আর ডিজেলের ২ টাকা। গরিব ও মধ্যবিত্ত মানুষকে রেহাই দিতে রান্নার গ্যাস ও কেরোসিনের দাম বাড়ানো হয়নি বলে সরকার জানিয়েছে। আর বামেরা জানিয়ে দিয়েছে, তেলের দাম বাড়ার প্রতিবাদে আন্দোলনে নামবে তারা।

এক পয়সাও দাম না-বাড়ালে বছরের শেষে তেল সংস্থাগুলির আয় কমে যেত ৭৩,৫০০ কোটি টাকা। বামদেদের দাবি অগ্রাহ্য করে সরকার উৎপাদন শুল্ক কমায়নি (তবে আমদানি শুল্ক ছাড় দেওয়া হয়েছে)। আজকের সিদ্ধান্ত অনুযায়ী, তেল বিক্রয় সংস্থাগুলি মোট ৯ হাজার কোটি টাকার দায় বহন করবে। এ ছাড়া, সরকার বস্ত্র বাজারে ছেড়ে ২৮,৩০০ কোটি টাকা জোগাড় করবে। তেল শোধনকারী সংস্থাগুলি ২৪ হাজার কোটি টাকার দায় বহন করবে। এই ভাবে দাম বাড়ার হার কমিয়ে ক্রেতাদের কাছ থেকে সংগ্রহ করা হবে ৯,২০০ কোটি টাকা। বাকি ঘাটতি মেটানোর জন্য আরও কিছু ছোটখাটো ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে।

তেলমন্ত্রী মুরলী দেওরা আজ জানান, রপ্তারাজন কমিটির সুপারিশ অনুযায়ী এখন থেকে সরকার 'ইমপোর্ট প্যারিটি' থেকে 'ট্রেড প্যারিটি' (অর্থাৎ শুধু আমদানি করা অশোধিত তেলের দামের ভিত্তিতে হিসাব না-করে ৮০ শতাংশ

আমদানি ও ২০ শতাংশ দেশজ উৎপাদনের সামগ্রিক ভিত্তিতে হিসাব করা)-তে সরে এল। এই নতুন হারে হিসাবের ফলে ২২০০ কোটি টাকার বোঝা কমে যাবে। তা ছাড়া, পেট্রোল-ডিজলে আমদানি শুল্ক ১০ থেকে ৭.৫ শতাংশে নামানোর ফলে ৪১০০ কোটি টাকার বোঝা সরে যাবে। এই দুই কারণে তেল বিক্রয় সংস্থাগুলির পক্ষে বাড়তি দায় বহন করা সহজ হবে। দেওরার বক্তব্য, "আমরা ন্যূনতম দাম বাড়িয়েছি। কৃষক ও গ্রামীণ মানুষের কথা মাথায় রেখে ডিজেলের দাম খুবই কম বাড়ানো হয়েছে।"

দাম বাড়ানো কতটা জরুরি, তা বোঝানোর জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ চেয়েছিলেন দাম বাড়ানোর অব্যবহিত আগে দুই বাম দলের নেতাদের সঙ্গে কথা বলতে। কিন্তু প্রকাশ কারাট বা এ বি বর্ধন তাতে কোনও আগ্রহ দেখাননি। আজ সন্ধ্যার কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠকের আগে সি পি এম দফতর থেকে একটি চিঠি পাঠিয়ে বামদেদের বক্তব্য আরও এক বার জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। দাম বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্তের পরেই কারাট বলেন, "আমরা এই মূল্যবৃদ্ধির সম্পূর্ণ বিরোধী। অবিলম্বে এই সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে বিক্ষোভের আয়োজন করব। তার

পরে অন্য দলগুলির সঙ্গে কথা বলে দেশব্যাপী প্রতিবাদের স্বপ্ন করা হবে।" **এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়**

তেলের নয়া দাম		
পেট্রোল লিটার প্রতি ৪ টাকা,		
ডিজেল লিটার প্রতি ২ টাকা বাড়ল		
	পেট্রোল	ডিজেল
কলকাতা	৫১.০৭	৩৪.৯৬
দিল্লি	৪৭.৫১	৩২.৪৭
মুম্বই	৫৩.৫০	৩৯.৯৬
চেন্নাই	৫১.৮৩	৩৫.৯৫

● রাজ্যে এখনই পরিবহণের ভাড়া বৃদ্ধি নয়... পৃঃ ৫

পেট্রো-মূল্য

প্রথম পাতার পর

কারাট-বর্ধনের আগেই জানিয়েছিলেন, প্রতিবাদ হিসাবে দেশব্যাপী বা কোনও কোনও রাজ্যে ধর্মঘটও হতে পারে। ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলিও সেপ্টেম্বরে ধর্মঘট ডাকার সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে চলেছে। তার আগে তেলের দামবৃদ্ধির বিরুদ্ধে ১৩ তারিখ প্রতিবাদ দিবস পালনের সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন চিত্তব্রত মজুমদার-গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তেরা। বুধবার দেশজোড়া বিক্ষোভের ডাক দিয়েছে বিজেপি-ও। সরকার রান্নার গ্যাস ও কেরোসিনের দাম না-বাড়ালেও বামপন্থীরা তাতে নরম হচ্ছেন না। তাঁদের বক্তব্য, এমনিতেই এখন জিনিসপত্রের দাম বাড়ছে। ডিজেলের দাম বাড়লে জিনিসপত্রের দাম আরও বাড়বে। এমনিতেই সরকারের 'মার্কিনঘেঁষা বিদেশনীতি' সম্পর্কে বামেরা ক্ষুব্ধ।

তার পরে তেলের দাম এবং বিলম্বীকরণ সংক্রান্ত বিভিন্ন প্রস্তাব ঘিরে এখন বাম-সরকার সংঘাতের নতুন পর্যায় শুরু হতে চলেছে। তেলমন্ত্রী দেওরা আজ বলেন, তাঁরা বামদেদের অসন্তুষ্ট হওয়ার মতো কিছু করেননি। বামদেদের বোঝাবেন বলে জানিয়েও তিনি বলেন, "ওঁরা রাস্তায় নামলে ফুলমালা পরিয়ে দেব।" তাঁর বক্তব্য, সরকারকে নবরত্ন সংস্থাগুলির স্বাস্থ্যের কথাও ভাবতে হবে।

কেন্দ্র আগেই বলেছিল, দাম অপরিবর্তিত থাকলে রান্নার গ্যাসের দরুন তেল সংস্থাগুলির ২৭,১৮২ কোটি টাকা এবং পেট্রোল-ডিজেলের জন্য ৪৬,৩৩০ টাকা কম আদায় হবে। বামদেদের বক্তব্য, এখন পেট্রোলের উপরে ৫৭ এবং ডিজলে ৩৬ শতাংশ শুল্ক রয়েছে। আন্তর্জাতিক বাজারে দাম বাড়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে সরকারের রাজস্ব ৯৬ হাজার কোটি টাকা থেকে বেড়ে ১ লক্ষ ২৬ হাজার কোটি হয়ে গিয়েছে। কাজেই শুল্কের হার এবং কর ছাড়ের ব্যবস্থা বদলে, তেল সংস্থাগুলির উপরে কিছুটা ভার বহনের দায়িত্ব দিয়ে বাড়তি বোঝা সামালানোর প্রস্তাব দিয়েছিলেন তাঁরা।

ANADABAZAR PATRICK

Congress asking States ruled by it to reduce tax on oil diversionary: Karat

UPA Government should restructure the tax and duty pattern; We demand total rollback

Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD: The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has said the Congress leadership's move to ask the States ruled by it to reduce sales tax on petrol and diesel as "diversionary" and called it "pure tokenism."

The party reiterated that the UPA Government should take a lead in forgoing the additional revenue it is generating in the form of customs and excise duties to cushion the impact of price hike instead of asking the States to effect cuts in their sales tax.

"The UPA Government should restructure the tax and duty pattern on petrol and diesel in line with the recommendation made by the Parliamentary Standing Committee," the CPI (M) general secretary, Prakash Karat, has said.

Speaking to reporters after the conclusion of the party's three-day central committee meeting here on Saturday, he said while the Congress was seeking modification to the latest petrol price hike, the CPI (M) was demanding a total rollback.

He alleged that the Government was trying to pass the buck to the State Governments.

The Government, in the last three years, had earned additional revenue to the tune of Rs. 20,000 crores through customs and excise duties.

On the resolutions passed by the central committee, he said the Left parties would submit a note to the Manmohan Singh Government on its views on the performance of the Government and what needed to be done to improve it.

The note would contain the areas of concern and areas where they differed with the UPA and "how we expect the Government to go."

The note would be prepared in a few days and submitted to the UPA Government that would be given sufficient time to respond before deciding on the next step.

The party was not sure when the next meeting of the UPA-Left coordination committee meeting would be held.

The CPI (M) took a serious view of the Government's moves to increase the prices of rice and wheat in the public distribution system that would be accompanied by the reduction in the quantum of supply and cuts for BPL and APL cardholders.



Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Prakash Karat (left), along with West Bengal State Committee secretary Biman Bose and Polit Bureau member Sitaram Yechury after the Polit Bureau meeting in Hyderabad on Saturday. — PHOTO: MOHAMMED YOUSUF

NOTE TO PM ON CMP BREACH

Left fires salvo at Centre

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 14: Left parties have told the government that it was eroding the basis of their support by making deviations from the national Common Minimum Programme (CMP).

On the eve of a UPA-Left Coordination Committee meeting, the Left parties submitted a detailed note to the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, listing the deviations. The CMP was the basis of their support to the government, they said.

The Left parties are ready to wait for the government's reply and can agree to another Coordination Committee meeting later, but the reply must be specific. They have drawn the UPA leaders' attention to the fact that the government cannot ignore the CMP in drawing up its policies.

The Coordination Committee meeting, taking place at the Prime Minister's residence tomorrow, would mainly discuss the govern-

ment's initiatives in Jammu and Kashmir and clarify the position on talks with the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulf).

A senior Left leader said they wanted to be briefed on the government's dialogue with leaders of various parties in Kashmir. The Coordination Committee could take up the issue of petroleum price hike.

Referring to the CMP deviations, a Left leader said there was a commitment that the government would protect the public sector. After BHEL disinvestment was given up under Left pressure, the Centre promised to consult it before announcing any decision. In spite of that, disinvestment in NALCO and Neyveli were sought to be rushed through. In the same manner, the government was trying to modernise Kolkata and Chennai airports through privatisation.

The Left also criticised the Centre's foreign policy for its open tilt towards the USA.

THE STATESMAN

বাম জঙ্গিপনায় ক্ষুব্ধ প্রধানমন্ত্রী কারাট-পাক্ষেদের লাগাম দিন বুদ্ধ, চান মনমোহন

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

৭ জুন: মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্যের সংস্কারমুখী ভূমিকায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ খুশি। কিন্তু প্রকাশ কারাট বাহিনীর নেতৃত্বে কেন্দ্রে সি পি এম যে ভাবে সরকার-বিরোধী আন্দোলন চালাচ্ছে, তাতে তিনি যারপরনাই ক্ষুব্ধ। আর মনমোহন চাইছেন, দলকে বুঝিয়ে এই 'যুদ্ধং দেহি' মনোভাব থেকে বার করে আনার দায়িত্বটা নিন বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্যই।

সি পি এমের বাড়াবাড়িতে প্রধানমন্ত্রী এতটাই ক্ষুব্ধ যে, গত কাল তেলের মূল্যবৃদ্ধি নিয়ে অফিসারদের এক বৈঠকে মন্তব্য করে বলেন, 'বামেরা সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন তুলে নিতে চাইলে তুলে নিক। কিন্তু আমি আর এ ভাবে সরকার চালাতে চাই না।' সি পি এমের আচরণে ক্ষুব্ধ হলেও প্রধানমন্ত্রী বিশ্বাস করেন, রাজ্য চালানোর অভিজ্ঞতা থেকে বুদ্ধবাবু জানেন, প্রশাসনিক বাধ্যবাধকতা কাকে বলে। তাই দলের কটরপন্থীদের বোঝানোর দায়িত্বটা বুদ্ধবাবুকেই অর্পণ করতে চান তিনি।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় সূত্রের খবর, আজ ঘনিষ্ঠ মহলে তিনি বলেছেন, "আমি মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে কথা বলব। ওঁর উচিত দলকে বোঝানো।" এখানেই শেষ নয়, প্রধানমন্ত্রী কেন্দ্রীয় পেট্রোলিয়াম মন্ত্রী মুরলী দেওয়ারাকেও বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্যের সঙ্গে কথা বলার নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন।

আবার দলের ক্রমাগত এ হেন 'জঙ্গি' আচরণ বুদ্ধবাবুর কাছেও অস্বস্তির কারণ। তাই তিনিও এখন চাইছেন, এই ব্যাপারে একটা মীমাংসায় পৌঁছতে। হায়দরাবাদে আগামী কাল থেকে শুরু হতে চলা সি পি এম কেন্দ্রীয় কমিটির বৈঠকে তিনি এই প্রসঙ্গ উত্থাপন করবেন বলে দলীয় সূত্রের খবর।

প্রকাশ কারাটদের ভূমিকায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ক্ষোভ তৈরি হয়েছে বলে তাঁর কলকাতা সফর বাতিল হওয়া ঘিরেও জল্পনা তৈরি হয়েছে। কলকাতা হয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ইটানগরে যাওয়ার কথা ছিল ১২ তারিখ। কিন্তু ওখানে প্রবল বর্ষণ চলছে। তাই সেই সফর বাতিল হয়ে যায়। প্রথমে ঠিক ছিল, কলকাতা হয়ে যাওয়ার পথে রাজভবনে মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বৈঠক করবেন। কলকাতায় ইন্ডিয়ান ইনস্টিটিউট অফ সায়েন্সেস-এর শিলান্যাস করারও কথা ছিল। অরুণাচল বাতিল হওয়ায় কলকাতা সফরও একই সঙ্গে বাতিল করে দেওয়া হয়েছে। কিন্তু সেই কারণের কথা বললেও রাজনৈতিক জল্পনা তৈরি হয় যে, বাম-বিরোধিতায় বিরক্ত প্রধানমন্ত্রী সচেতন ভাবেই মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বৈঠক বাতিল করলেন।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় সূত্রে অবশ্য আজ প্রাথমিক ভাবে বলা হয়েছে, বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য বা পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সম্পর্কে কোনও বিরূপ মনোভাবের জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী তাঁর কলকাতা

সফর বাতিল করেননি। একই সঙ্গে অরুণাচল ও পশ্চিমবঙ্গে যেতে চান বলেই এ বারের যাত্রা পিছিয়ে দিয়ে নতুন করে এই দুই রাজ্যের সফরসূচি তৈরি হবে। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়ের যুগ্ম সচিব সঞ্জয় মিত্র ইতিমধ্যেই এ ব্যাপারে কাজকর্ম শুরু করে দিয়েছেন। তবে একই সঙ্গে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর মুখপাত্র জানিয়েছেন, ১২ জুন কলকাতা যাওয়া প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পক্ষে রাজনৈতিক ভাবেও সমীচীন হত না। কারণ, ১৩ তারিখ তেলের দাম বাড়ার প্রতিবাদে দেশ জুড়ে বিক্ষোভ কর্মসূচি বামেদের। তার এক দিন আগে কলকাতায় গেলে এমন ব্যাঘাত হত যে, তিনি বামেদের তুষ্ট করতে গিয়েছেন।

বুদ্ধবাবুর সঙ্গে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর একটা ঘনিষ্ঠ ব্যক্তিগত সম্পর্ক গড়ে উঠেছে। ট্রেনের ধাক্কায় হাতের মৃত্যুর ঘটনায় বিচলিত মুখ্যমন্ত্রী চিঠি দিয়েছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে। সঙ্গে সঙ্গে মনমোহন অফিসারদের ডেকে ব্যবস্থা নিয়েছেন। কিন্তু দিল্লিতে কারাট-পাক্ষেদের কথায় কথায় বিদ্রোহ দেখে বিরক্ত প্রধানমন্ত্রী। আর তাই দেখে আমলা মহলে আশঙ্কা, এই পরিস্থিতি রাজ্যের উন্নয়নের প্রক্রিয়ায় কোনও বাদ না

সাধে। যেমন, ভট্টানের টালা জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্প থেকে এক হাজার মেগাওয়াট বিদ্যুৎ উৎপাদন হলে তার বড় অংশ পশ্চিমবঙ্গের পাওয়ার কথা। সমপরিমাণ তাপবিদ্যুৎ দেওয়ার কথা পশ্চিমবঙ্গের। পাঁচ বছর আগে এই চুক্তি হয়েছে। কেন্দ্রীয় বিদ্যুৎ মন্ত্রকের লাল ফিতের বাঁধনে এই প্রকল্প এখন আটকে। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে চিঠি দিয়ে জানিয়েছেন, রাজ্যে জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রয়োজন। অবিলম্বে তা দেওয়া হোক। প্রধানমন্ত্রী নিজে উৎসাহিত হয়ে এ ব্যাপারে বুদ্ধদেববাবুকে সব রকম সাহায্যের আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন।

এ ছাড়া, বিশেষ অর্থনৈতিক অঞ্চল থেকে শুরু করে বিদেশি প্রত্যক্ষ



বিনিয়োগ পর্যন্ত সব ব্যাপারে রাজ্যকে কেন্দ্রের উপরে নির্ভর করতে হয়। তাই মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নিজেও অহেতুক রাজনৈতিক সংঘাতে যাওয়ার পক্ষে নন। তিনি এ বার ভোট জিতেই বলেছিলেন, কেন্দ্রের সঙ্গে সংঘাত বাড়ানো তাঁর অগ্রাধিকার নয়। রাজ্যের উন্নয়নের স্বার্থে প্রতি মুহূর্তে তাঁকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও অন্যান্য মন্ত্রীদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ রাখতে হয়। তাই তিনি সংঘাত চান না।

আর এই কারণে এ বার প্রধানমন্ত্রী এ ব্যাপারে বুদ্ধদেববাবুরই সাহায্যপ্রার্থী। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় সূত্রে আজ বলা হয়েছে, উপজাতি সংরক্ষিত বনাঞ্চল বিল প্রসঙ্গে সরকারের সঙ্গে সি পি এমের প্রবল সংঘাত সৃষ্টি হয়েছে। বৃন্দা কারাট এই বিলের বিরোধিতায় সরব। এই ঘটনায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয় বিরক্ত। দৈনন্দিন খুঁটিনাটি নিয়ে সংঘাত থেকে বিরত থাকার জন্য বারবার অনুরোধ করছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। এ বার তিনি চাইছেন, বুদ্ধবাবু তাঁর হয়ে দলে সক্রিয় ভূমিকা নিন। আর বুদ্ধবাবুও একটা মীমাংসায় পৌঁছতে চাইছেন।

Manmohan backs Deora on fuel hike

Rules out rollback despite protests spilling onto roads

PRESS Trust of India
New Delhi, June 7

ENDING SPECULATION of a partial rollback in fuel prices under pressure from political parties, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is believed to have held firm on the government's decision to hike petrol price by Rs 4 a litre and of diesel by Rs 2.

"There will be no roll-back. We will face it," Singh told petroleum minister Murlu Deora on Wednesday, sources in the ministry said.

Deora is understood to have apprised the PM about the developments related to the fuel price hike, including the feedback he got from the political arena.

Sources said the PM approved the petroleum ministry's publicity and advertisement campaign on the circumstances that necessitated the fuel price hike, in tandem with other steps including duty cut and issuance of oil bonds, to save national oil companies from bankruptcy.

The PM is also understood to have directed Deora to explain the circumstances to leaders of the Left parties, who have announced their decision to start an agitation against the Cabinet decision of Monday. In particular, Deora will talk to West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee in this connection.

Explaining the government's stand to the Left will not be an easy task. The Left parties and the Opposition parties, particularly the BJP, are in no mood to listen.



A BJP protest in Chandigarh.

PROTEST MAP

DELHI BJP activists hit the road. Party president Rajnath Singh warned of a greater stir

GUJARAT, UP BJP workers squatted on railway tracks disrupting train services

ORISSA BJP workers blocked roads. CPI cadres formed a human chain in Bhubaneswar

KOLKATA BJP workers burnt Chidambaram's effigy. CPI(M) decided against going for strikes. It will only organise demonstrations, "to create awareness about the Centre's anti-people policies"

Fuel price hike: Left hits streets

Warns Centre Against Taking It For Granted, Demands Rollback Of Increase

New Delhi: Senior Left party leaders took to the streets on Tuesday and courted arrest demanding a complete rollback of the hike in fuel prices and warning the UPA government that it could not take Left support for granted.

Launching a nationwide agitation against the hike, CPM leaders Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury, CPI's A B Bardhan, RSP secretary Abani Roy, Forward Bloc leaders Debabrata Biswas and G Devarajan courted arrest at the Parliament Street police station here on Tuesday along with a large number of Left activists. Leaders from the SP, RLD and JD (S) were also present.

Left leaders said the demonstration was meant to mount pressure on the government to reverse its "anti-people" decision and made it clear that the issue would be raised in the UPA-Left coordination committee

meeting slated for Wednesday. They, however, said the stir was not a threat to the stability of the two-year-old government which was established to keep "communal forces" at bay.

Addressing the gathering, Karat ridiculed the move by Congress-led state governments to reduce state-level taxes on petrol and diesel as "foolishness" and said the Centre should first reduce taxes to make fuel cheaper instead of passing the entire burden to the states. He said the hike in fuel prices could have been avoided had the government implemented the alternatives suggested by the Left parties, including slashing customs and excise duties on crude imports. "We have also suggested that the oil cess fund, amounting to a whopping Rs 1,25,000 crore, could be converted into a price stabilisation fund so that entire burden of

global crude price hike is not passed onto consumers," Karat said, adding that if the Centre reduced the taxes, Left-ruled states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura might think of following suit.

Criticising the government for not considering the proposal to cut the incentives being given to private oil companies and re-

fineries, he said, "Common people of the country are suffering the burden of such incentives."

Ridiculing the Centre's claims on inflation and price indices, CPI leader A B Bardhan said, "The prices of all essential commodities are increasing. Still the government says inflation and prices of essential commodities are un-



FUELLING AN AGITATION: Leaders of Left parties A B Bardhan (from left), Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury at a rally in Delhi on Tuesday

der control." He also warned the UPA about a Nepal-like uprising against it if the government went ahead with its anti-people policies. Taking potshots on the NDA's demand for a change in the tax structure on fuels, Bardhan said, "We had asked the same thing when the NDA was in power. But they never listened to it while hiking fuel prices."

Forward Bloc leader Debabrata Biswas accused the Centre of having no commitment to the people. "The government will be in danger unless it reverses its decision of fuel price hike," he said. Criticising the Centre for exerting pressure on states to reduce taxes, RSP's Abani Roy said, "It seems the government is not concerned about the burden of the people. Instead, it government is passing on the responsibility to the state govern-

AGENCIES

We can work it out, says UPA

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI

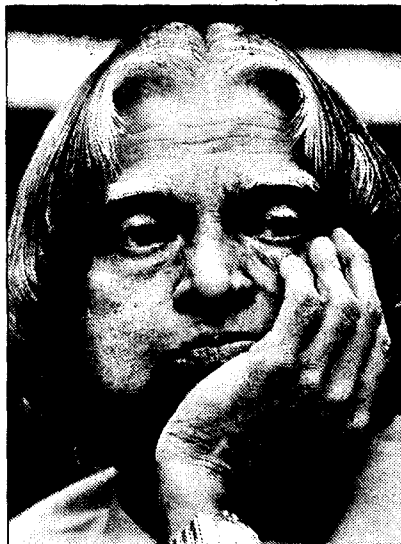
A DAY after President APJ Abdul Kalam served a notice on the ruling regime that he should not be taken for granted by sending back the office of profit Bill, the "we-should-fight-it-out" section has gained the upper hand in the UPA.

The Left leaders, who invoked majority support for the Bill, came to their backing when they asked the government leadership to get Parliament send back the Bill "as it is." Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday met the President to explain the circumstances that led to Parliament passing the legislation. The government issued a brief statement on the 30-minute meeting between the Prime Minister and the President saying they "discussed current issues of national importance."

After the meeting, there were indications that the government may go in for some more political and legal consultations on the issues raised by the President. A final decision on the Bill will be taken by the Cabinet.

Although the Cabinet is scheduled to meet on Friday, it may not take a final decision on the issue as some senior political managers of the ruling establishment are out of the Capital.

Law minister HR Bhardwaj, who drafted



President APJ Abdul Kalam

the inelegant legislation, and his colleagues in the Congress appear to be of the view that the government need not pull its punches as it has the backing of a majority of Parliament.

"I do not see any deficiency. We do not frame wrong legislation," the minister told re-

porters. But a small section in the government was of the view that no impression of a President-government confrontation should be created.

On his part, the law minister insisted that President's suggestion for a uniform law for the entire country was untenable. "It's not possible as state legislatures had different laws on the matter and had their own prerogative to declare any office as office of profit or exempt anyone from the list."

While returning the Bill, President Kalam asked Parliament to look into the legal propriety of the legislation's applicability with retrospective effect.

He said the Bill's focus should be on evolving a comprehensive criterion, which would be fair and reasonable and applied across all states and Union Territories in a clear and transparent manner. Under the Constitution, the government has to bring the Bill afresh in Parliament for reconsideration.

The entire episode has raised serious questions about the quality of decision-making by the Manmohan Singh government. The Opposition on Wednesday used the President's pointed query to assert that Rashtrapati Bhawan's observations vindicated its stand that the Bill was passed only to help Sonia Gandhi and the government's friends in the Left.

01 JUN 2006

The Economic Times

Free trade pact not to hurt farmers

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 8: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has assured Congress president Sonia Gandhi that the proposed Indo-Asean free trade agreement (FTA) would not affect Indian farmers.

The Prime Minister has, in a letter dated April 20, allayed the fears of the Congress president over any negative fallout of the proposed free trade agreement on the farm sector.

Earlier, through a letter to Singh, dated April 12, Sonia had advised the government to "very carefully scrutinise" the FTA to protect farmers.

Referring to Sonia's letter,

a section of the media had tried to create an impression of a rift on the issue between the Prime Minister and the Congress president.

PMO and commerce ministry officials clarified that the letter had been written earlier and the Prime Minister had already replied to it.

In the reply the Prime Minister said the government enters into bilateral and regional economic negotiations only after a thorough study of the issues concerned to safeguard the livelihood of farmers.

Singh also said the government was very cautious while negotiating market access in agriculture, often imposing quantitative restrictions after



Singh & Sonia: No need to worry

consultations with the farm lobby.

PMO sources said after the letter to Sonia, the Prime Minister's Trade and Economic Relations Committee (Terc) on

May 3 reviewed the ongoing negotiations relating to the FTA with Asean.

The discussions were still on and no final decision has been taken on these issues, the

sources said.

In the meantime, the commerce ministry has sent to the Terc its recommendations on the FTA. The recommendations relate to tariff on various products and the sensitive negative lists.

In his letter to Sonia, Singh said he is one with the Congress president on the impact the FTAs will have on the economy. He said the negotiations were done with utmost care, keeping in mind the interests of those who might be adversely affected in the short run.

Singh said he agrees with Sonia on the need to protect and strengthen the agricultural sector.

The letter said the government has accepted the Swaminathan committee's report and would implement the recommendations within a specific time.

The government's approach to regional trading agreements and FTAs has evolved after a careful consideration of India's geo-political and economic interests, the letter said.

The Prime Minister said though India has a large domestic market, its experience with insular policies — before economic reforms were introduced in 1991 — as also the global experiences bring out the potential of trade and economic cooperation.

09 MAY 2006

Left opposes oil price hike

Deora to meet Chidambaram

Sushma Ramchandran

NEW DELHI: The Left parties have strongly opposed a hike in the prices of petroleum products while urging the Government to cut Central and State taxes to spare the common man.

Speaking after a Petroleum Ministry presentation on the impact of surging global oil prices on domestic oil companies, they warned that they would not allow yet another price hike by the UPA Government.

Petroleum Minister Murli Deora, who invited the Left leaders for consultations on the oil price hike issue, said talks would begin with the Finance Ministry on Thursday. In the presentation, it was stated that the total under-recoveries by domestic oil companies would reach Rs. 73,500 crore in the current fiscal unless prices were raised or upstream companies made a larger contribution. The extent of price hike needed to completely wipe out the under-recoveries was given as Rs. 114.45 per cylinder in the case of cooking gas, Rs. 9.33 per litre for petrol and Rs. 10.43 per litre for diesel. The price of kerosene would have to be raised by Rs. 17.16 per litre.

Official sources, however,

stressed that this was only a factual presentation and did not represent the extent of price hike being sought by the Ministry.

The Left leaders, including Sitaram Yechury of the CPI(M) and Gurudas Das Gupta of the CPI said other steps could be taken instead of a price hike to resolve the oil crisis. They suggested that the Finance Minister part with the oil cess estimated at Rs. 60,000 crore along with cutting both customs and excise as well as State Government levies which would also achieve the objective of reducing the losses suffered by the oil companies. It was noted that the total Central and State levies on the oil sector fetched as much as Rs. 1.26 lakh crore of revenue.

Mr. Yechury said it was necessary to carry out tax rationalisation rather than impose such a heavy burden of taxes on just one sector of the economy.

Mr. Das Gupta said the Left had earlier submitted a memorandum on the issue and highlighted the need to shift taxes from oil products to other areas.

Photograph on Page 12

11 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

Pvt docs join strike, Arjun ready for talks

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An effigy of Arjun Singh was burnt by medical students opposite Kersar Sal Medical collage near Science City, SG Road, Ahmedabad on Monday

New Delhi: The anti-reservation agitation by medical students spread to different parts of the country on Monday with private doctors also joining the IMA-called nationwide strike, crippling basic health services for the second straight day.

As the agitation gathered steam, human resource development minister Arjun Singh said he was ready to hold discussions on the issue with the striking students if they come forward for talks.

Thousands of medical students boycotted classes while government and private doctors struck work in hospitals in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bangalore and New Delhi, where a mass indefinite hunger strike by students of five premier medical colleges continued.

Normal and emergency service-

es were affected in several hospitals in the national capital due to the strike with private hospitals also announcing closure of OPD services in support of the strike.

The striking resident doctors said they were running parallel OPDs in hospitals to "ensure that patients are not deprived of basic facilities and to minimise problems caused by the one-day strike."

Hundreds of patients and their relatives were seen looking for help in various hospitals across the capital. However, authorities claimed they have initiated steps to ensure that essential services were maintained. At least 150 students of five medical colleges of Delhi and some adjoining colleges, under the 'Youth For Equality' banner, continued their indefinite hunger strike at the premier healthcare

institute AIIMS demanding immediate rollback of the controversial proposals.

With the strike spreading fast, the Centre on Monday held an emergency meeting of home and health ministry officials and representatives of Delhi government and police on the issue.

A woman medical student from Lady Hardinge Medical College, who was on hunger strike at AIIMS, was admitted to hospital emergency ward after she collapsed apparently because of dehydration. Her identity was not immediately disclosed. Doctors from across the capital also held a demonstration at Rajghat demanding withdrawal of the proposals and action against police who had baton-charged striking students in Mumbai on Saturday. AGENCIES

Govt looks for quota compromise

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, May 15: The government today trod cautiously in the face of swelling protests by doctors, proposing an "incremental" increase in education quotas instead of a one-time jump.

Sources in the human resource development ministry said the idea was to phase in the hike in quotas for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) over a number of years to make them acceptable.

Ministry officials, however, refused to put a figure on the final quota target. They said a staggered increase — 5 per cent one year, 10 per cent the next and so on — was what they had in mind from the beginning.

According to indications, the Centre is moving towards a 27 per cent quota for OBCs in higher education institutions, including IITs and IIMs. At present, there is a 15 per cent quota for Scheduled Castes and 7.5 per cent for Scheduled Tribes but none for OBCs.

As striking medical students refused to pipe down, the government stepped in this evening, announcing it would come up with a compromise solution.

"We will ensure a mechanism in which the interests of all sections of society are taken care of. Details are being worked out and they will be announced shortly," Pranab Mukherjee said after a meeting chaired by the Prime Minister.

The meeting of the cabinet committee on political affairs

came a day after HRD minister Arjun Singh ruled out any rollback in his quota proposal and left the decision to the cabinet.

Singh was present at the meeting. There is apprehension in the political leadership about his likely response to a question on the issue that is listed in Parliament tomorrow. He has embarrassed the government in the past and could do so again.

The 93rd constitution amendment bill, which proposes education quotas for OBCs,

would also look at increasing the number of seats in technical institutions as well as medical colleges.

The nifty-gritty of the bill that would give effect to the constitutional amendment will be finalised after the cabinet approves a note circulated by the human resource development ministry. The note will have to be approved by the agriculture and health ministries also.

HRD ministry sources said the reason medical — and not engineering/management

students — were out on the streets was that the number of seats in medical colleges had remained the same for decades.

But IITs have been systematically increasing seats. IIMs too have been doing so after the HRD ministry turned up the heat.

The sources said the ministry was aware the number of seats could not be increased overnight as there would have to be a corresponding expansion in infrastructure like hostels and academic facilities.

The one thing the ministry was clear about was that the 93rd constitution amendment was here to stay. The Centre and states would have to make enabling provisions to give effect to it.

A ministry note says: "The delay in bringing the enabling legislation for ensuring the above reservations (for SCs/STs and OBCs) means that all private institutions become free from any responsibility of reservation or regulation of fees."

■ See Page 8 and Metro

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Bill passed, NAC chief on exempted list

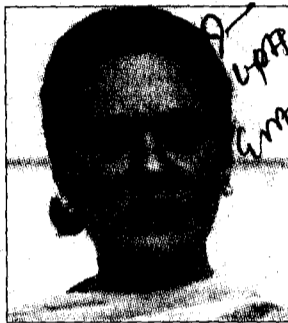
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 16: The Lok Sabha today passed a controversial legislation to clear the air on the messy issue of office of profit after a stormy introduction and heated debate. Passed by voice vote, the measure seeks to exempt 46 posts, including the National Advisory Council chairmanship, from the purview of the office of profit.

Both the introduction and the passage of the Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Amendment Bill, 2006 bringing changes in the 1959 Act were turbulent and saw walkout by angry BJP and other NDA Opposition members.

Replying to the debate, law minister Mr HR Bhardwaj argued that the legislation would clear the air on the definition of office of profit.

Claiming that all suggestions have been accommodated, he slammed the BJP for attacking Mrs Sonia Gandhi. "We have respect for everyone, every political leader. But still our leader is



attacked," the minister said. Cheered by the UPA members, Mr Bhardwaj said Mrs Gandhi had upheld ethical and moral values and principles which were lacking in others.

The introduction of the Bill was preceded by a protest walkout by the BJP-led NDA opposition. The leader of the Opposition, Mr LK Advani, argued that the post of the chairperson of the National Advisory Council (NAC) cannot be exempted by a simple legislation and could be done only through a Constitutional amendment. He accused the government of "bulldozing" the measure.

Objecting to the inclusion of the NAC post in the exemption list, Mr Advani said Mrs Gandhi as NAC

chief had become a "super Prime Minister". He said "everyone agreed that the office of the Prime Minister has been devalued and diminished".

Contesting this, Mr Bhardwaj said NAC chairmanship was not a Constitutional office. "It is not even a statutory office," he said adding Mr Advani had "lack of knowledge of parliamentary law". The Leader of the House and defence minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, refuted Mr Advani's charge that he was not consulted on the measure. Mrs Gandhi was not present in the House when the Opposition raised procedural issues. Speaker Mr Somnath Chatterjee, who has been charged with holding an office of profit, did not preside over the proceedings when the issue was taken up on grounds of propriety.

Mrs Maneka Gandhi, BJP, described the legislation as "sinister" and was intended at saving the chairperson of NAC. She did not mention the name of Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

■ See also page 5

17 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

ARJUN TREADS 'MIDDLE PATH' ON QUOTA

Centre keeps options open

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 16: Amidst spiralling anti-reservation protests across the country, the Union HRD minister, Mr Arjun Singh, today echoed the Centre's "middle-path line" - formulated during last night's Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) meeting - holding that the government is committed to providing quota for OBCs in educational institutions but will also keep the interests of non-reserved category students in mind while taking a final decision on the matter.

Evidently, the Manmohan Singh government is now treading extremely cautiously on this complex and sensitive issue that is fast threatening to assume an explosive dimension. The government is yet to announce its "mechanism" to defuse the confrontation and resolve the matter, but there are clear signs that the government might eventually increase the number of seats for general category students in Central institutions, particularly in elite ones like IIMs, IITs, AIIMS,

and might even lower to some extent the 27 % proposed quota for OBCs as part of its "balancing act".

The PM is likely to start consultations with political parties from tomorrow on the issue as part of the government's crisis-management to evolve a political consensus to tackle the growing confrontation in society. To reconcile social equity with merit, the government might also opt for phased implementation of a balanced proposal, including an increase in number of seats, in order to cushion its fall-out.

The defence minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee's appeal to the agitating students and medicos after the PM-headed CCPA meeting last night did not appear to have cut much ice with them so far.

During Question Hour in the Lok Sabha today, Mr Arjun Singh said the government has an "open mind" on the issue and been considering various options to balance the interests of all sections of students, even as the Speaker Mr Somnath Chatterjee issued an appeal to the protesting

students to end their stir.

There were also reports from a few places of pro-quota students and people hitting the streets to press for Mr Singh's original proposal for providing 27 % reservation for OBCs in Central institutions of higher learning.

The NHRC today called for reports from police even as it appealed to striking medicos to resume their duties.

Mr Arjun Singh said the government is "not unmindful" of concerns expressed by agitating students and that it is seriously considering all options that will also satisfy them. He, however, also made it clear that the government is committed to implementing the proposal on reservations.

Mr Singh promised to get back to the House with a "comprehensive roadmap." Resident doctors in the Capital's hospitals continued their indefinite strike for the fourth day today, disrupting health services. With another 100 joining today, a total of 200 medical students are now on hunger-strike at AIIMS.

17 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

Centre considering all options on quota

Arjun Singh reiterates Government's commitment

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Government stood committed to implementing the constitutional amendment providing reservation for the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in private and unaided educational institutions, Union Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh said on Tuesday. However, several suggestions such as increasing the number of seats and including economically backward sections were under consideration, he added.

The issue rocked the Rajya Sabha during zero hour with some members of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and Congress shouting down Bharatiya Janata Party leader Kalraj Mishra when he attempted to raise the issue of lathi-charge on students.

'Canard'

Mr. Singh told the Lok Sabha during question hour that a "canard" was being spread by certain sections that the objective of the Government and commitment of the House had been "hijacked by me personally as my own agenda."

The United Progressive Alliance Government, he said, would ensure that the 93rd Amendment, which enables the State to make bylaw, provisions for the advancement of the weaker sections in matters of admission to all educational institutions except minority educational institutions, was implemented.

Appealing to people to think with a cool mind and not to get provoked or agitated, the Minister said he did not support the police action.

Everybody had the right to



- Increasing seats and including economically backward sections under consideration
- Arjun Singh assures comprehensive roadmap
- Somnath asks students to withdraw protest and wait for decision

present their view in a peaceful manner. The Government was not unmindful of the fact that a section of the people and students felt that something was being taken away from them. "I would like to dispel that impression. We are very seriously considering all the options that could help these sections of the people of the communities who have, at the moment, acquired a certain stake in the entire thing."

However, there could be no other view in providing reservation except on how to implement it. There should be no doubts on it and there could be no justification of getting the Amendment cleared by Parliament if the decision was not to be implemented. The Government was considering several suggestions it received, including providing reservation for ec-

onomically backward classes, and after completion of consultations, it would come out with a comprehensive roadmap on the issue.

The issue was not to take forward and backward any particular section of society but to bring about a balance in all sections. Mr. Singh refused to set a timeframe in which the Government would do so.

Speaker Somnath Chatterjee appealed to the students to withdraw their protest saying that the agitation would neither help them nor the country. The Government had not yet taken any decision on the issue, he said and suggested that everybody wait for it. He asked members to keep in mind the sensitivity of the issue and not complicate it while raising questions.

In the Rajya Sabha, even as Mr. Mishra began by saying that the "brutal" lathi-charge on peacefully protesting medical students was uncalled for, RJD members Ramdeo Bhandary and Manganil Mandal shouted him down. Even after Chairman Bhairon Singh Shekhawat said he had allowed Mr. Mishra to raise the matter relating to "police brutality" and not the reservation issue, the RJD members were not pacified. This brought several BJP members on their feet in protest.

Mr. Mishra charged the treasury benches with wanting to divide the country. "The police brutality and lathi-charge has triggered a spate of protests by students. If not controlled in time this fire will rage through the country and go out of hand," he said.

See also Page 13

Govt digs in its heels on quota

But Arjun Promises To Take Everyone Along

New Delhi: Seeking to assuage agitating medics, government on Wednesday said in the Lok Sabha that it will take "everyone along" and "protect" their interests but ruled out any dilution of its commitment on OBC quota in higher educational institutions.

"Government will have a collective view taking into consideration all aspects....No one will have any objection, if efforts are made to address the causes of tension. That alone will be the wise thing," HRD minister Arjun Singh said replying to a calling-attention motion on the issue.

He brushed aside reports that government was speaking in different voices on reservation to OBCs in IIMs, IITs and other educational institutions. "This is false," he said. The Minister said the main reason for the "delay" in implementing the constitutional amendment providing OBC quota was due to assembly elections in five states which had brought the model code of conduct into force.

Singh said there have been suggestions for increasing the number of seats in the general category as also establishing more such institutions "but one cannot take a decision within 24 hours".

Earlier, making a statement, he said "The Central Government is



Policemen hold back a gathering of pro-reservation activists as they try to enter the compound where medical students are on a strike at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi on Wednesday

aware of all views expressed in this regard and shall take an appropriate decision on this issue without in anyway diluting the commitment arising out of the constitutional amendment in Article 15(5)."

Singh said the issue of a Central legislation to give effect to provision of Article 15(5) covering Central institutions was under government's consideration. He said a decision would be taken in the "interests of society as a whole and in the interest of all". "We have given a commitment to the nation...the constitutional amendment has been passed by Parliament... there is no

question of going back on it," he said. Singh said if some tensions were simmering in society on this issue "We will sort it out".

Meanwhile, confusion prevailed on Wednesday over the resumption of duty by resident doctors of the five top medical institutions of the national capital in the wake of the ongoing protests by medical students against the proposed quota-hike for OBCs at seats of higher learning.

While an official of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences said some of the striking resident doctors have resumed services, Dr Subrato Mandal from the Resident Doct-

ors Association of AIIMS maintained that not a single resident in the five hospitals have gone back to duty.

Health services in all government hospitals suffered even though emergency and in-house patients were being attended to by specialists. With majority of residents off work, routine procedures took a backseat and only urgent medical attention were being given priority. "OPDs are running in the hospital but routine procedures are not being carried out. There are no routine admissions and surgeries are not being carried out in emergency," a senior doctor

in LNJP said. AGENCIES

PM, Arjun hold hands on quota

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 20: Before the Congress Working Committee met today, the Prime Minister and Arjun Singh tried hard to spare themselves, the party and the government a big embarrassment on the reservation issue by kissing and making up.

Manmohan Singh finally made public his views on the Other Backward Classes quota, saying his government was committed to improving their social and educational status as well as that of the minorities.

The Prime Minister also appealed to the striking medicos to call off their agita-

tion, assuring them of an amicable settlement taking into account the interests of all sections of students.

Arjun, on his part, denied he had raised the quota issue to create problems for the Prime Minister.

But at the three-hour CWC meeting, chaired by Sonia Gandhi and attended by Manmohan, Arjun, Pranab Mukherjee, Shivraj Patil, Ambika Soni, Ahmed Patel and other senior leaders and functionaries, the mood was not "entirely pro-quota or pro-Arjun", sources said.

The human resource development minister sounded "defensive" as he explained that the constitutional amendment law had been passed in a "spir-

it of consensus".

Some "tough" questions, insinuating that a policy matter had been allowed to become a "personal agenda", were tossed at the minister.

There was a suggestion that the quota bill should be given a thorough legal scrutiny so that the government and the party didn't lose face if it was legally challenged. One member asked Sonia to sound out the CWC members individually.

Most of the committee's 30 members are from the upper castes and the few backward caste representatives - such as Ashok Gehlot, B.K. Hariprasad and V. Narayanswamy - are either inarticulate, "overawed" in the pres-

ence of the heavyweights or unable to put up a cogent defence of reservation.

Manmohan, under pressure from senior Congress leaders to articulate the government's pro-reservation position, had said on a visit to Visakhapatnam earlier in the day: "Our government has given all our minorities a new sense of confidence. We will ensure rapid improvement in the social and educational status of the backward classes and minorities."

The party wanted to stem a perception that the Prime Minister was "pandering" to the anti-quota lobby - backed by some corporate honchos, "intellectuals" and academics - to try and retain the "goodwi-

ll" he had earned among the upper and middle classes.

Asked about a possible personal agenda, Arjun told a TV channel: "This is a canard which is below contempt. Only that person who does not know what kind of respect and regard I hold for Sonia Gandhi could say (this). She is the leader and whatever she decides is acceptable to me."

Sources said that the Congress's OBC MPs were "fully" with Arjun and the non-OBCs too backed him out of "political expediency". But there was a sense of disquiet, too.

"Arjun's motives were always unclear," said a leader from Madhya Pradesh, who had worked closely with Arjun once.

Rival rallies, for & against

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 20: As medical students from as far as Mangalore joined a huge anti-reservation rally in Delhi and the hunger strike entered its seventh day, pro-quota doctors held their own demonstration at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

"Down with upper caste chauvinism," chanted the protesters gathered under the banner of Medicos' Forum for Equality.

The police kept the two opposed groups away from each other, barring the pro-reservation demonstrators from the AIIMS central lawns, the base of the anti-quota protesters.

"Everyone else can just walk in," a pro-quota doctor complained. "In spite of being a resident in this hospital, I can't."

One outsider who had walked in triggered a brief commotion by stripping himself and beginning to play his guitar near those on hunger strike. The lyrics spewed abuse at the media and said the students' struggle was right but not their method. He was led away.

Pro-quota doctors alleged a colleague was beaten up at AIIMS by the rival group and that the police and hospital administration had failed to act on his complaint.

At Jantar Mantar, students from some 15 medical and engineering colleges from Mangalore, Vadodra, Patiala and Bikaner joined the Youth for Equality's anti-reservation rally. Ex-cricketer and MP Navjot Singh Sidhu led the protesters to Jantar Mantar.

The IT hub of Bangalore witnessed two huge rallies, one in support of quotas and one against. The pro-reservation camp burnt the effigy of Infosys chief mentor N.R. Narayana Murthy for his anti-quota views.

IIM Calcutta seats

Before the quota row broke out, IIM Calcutta had already decided to increase the seats for its postgraduate programme from 265 to 335 for 2006-07.

CARROT AND STICK TO REIN IN PROTESTERS

Seat hike solution on Singh table

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 20: The Group of Ministers set up to deal with the reservation row today suggested what the government had hinted at yesterday: introduction of the Other Backward Classes quota with a seats increase.

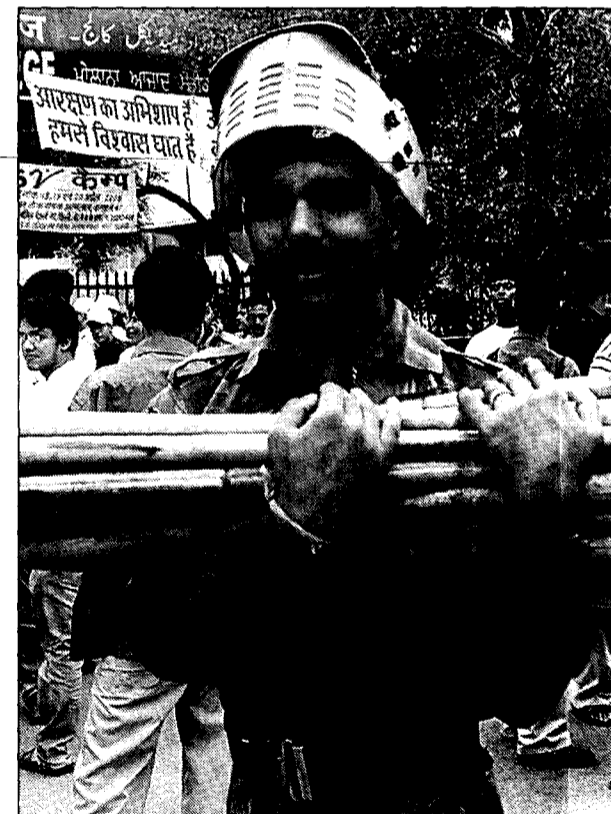
Briefing the CWC on the recommendations, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee hoped for a possible breakthrough by Monday even as the government hardened its stand against the agitating medicos.

"The Group of Ministers has worked out a formula to increase the number of seats as well as institutions to ensure that the seats available to general category students aren't reduced," a source said. The GoM, which submitted the recommendations to the Prime Minister, also suggested that new institutions on the lines of the AIIMS be set up across the country.

The government earlier threatened strict action



(Left) A policeman embraces a medical student at an anti-quota rally in New Delhi on Saturday and (right) a RAF personnel keeps back sticks (used during lathi-charge) in a van after the rally passed off peacefully. (PTI)



against the striking doctors. In a warning signal, it put out newspaper advertisements for recruitment of doctors at its hospitals. Health ministry officials said walk-in interviews would begin on Monday.

But to try and resolve the standoff through a dialogue, Mukherjee and finance minister P. Chidambaram met representatives of the agitating

doctors. Mukherjee later said he had requested the doctors to call off their agitation and they had said they would get back to him tomorrow. "I hope it will be resolved by Monday," Mukherjee said.

The medicos, too, appeared to soften their stand after the meeting. Dr Nethan, speaking on behalf of the agitators, said the proposals to protect the

number of seats in the general category and introduce the new quota in a phased manner were a positive step. Yesterday, the doctors had been doubtful about a seats increase, arguing this would need upgraded infrastructure and more teachers and hospitals.

Late tonight, however, the medicos decided to continue the strike over the Centre's re-

jection of their demand for a committee of experts to review the reservation policy.

"We have decided to continue with the strike. But we are ready to negotiate," a representative of the agitators said. He added they weren't aware of the Prime Minister's appeal to them to call off the agitation, and so had not considered it yet.

2815
928

Two years, too lost

The UPA needs to reverse its instinctive lurch towards old-style socialism

THIS week the UPA government completes two years in office. So, where are the festivities? By all indicators, the air in New Delhi should be purposefully celebratory. The recent mini-general election in the form of four key state assembly polls split the spoils neatly among the UPA's constituents and its allies. The coalition government led by Dr Manmohan Singh is suffused with prognoses of robust longevity. And yet, a gathering disarray is tangible within this governmental stability. It would be facile to read it in the stockmarket crash of Monday. It would be gaining only a part profile to see it in the sustained street protests for and against Mandal II. The larger picture is found in a dilemma. As antidote to the sudden onset of visible disarray, the prime minister and the Congress party, which leads the UPA alliance, need to address a question: is the alliance militating against itself in a blind search for a centre of gravity?

Anniversaries are apt moments to take a long political view, and it gives that question a worrisome edge: is the Congress opting out of a strenuous interrogation of its present agenda and lurching for the old comforts of its seventies socialism? Far too much of the party's leadership is weighing in on the side of re-installation of statist pa-

ternalism. The issue of reservations — in higher education and in private sector jobs — is illustrative. What is being recommended to augment and strengthen social infrastructure is an old quick-fix: slice the existing pie and commandeer private decision-making in a symbolic jab at equity. It is reminiscent of those absurd ceilings on the productivity of manufacturing units. The reforms, initiated after Indira Gandhi's return to power in 1980 and consolidated in the 1990s, showed the huge returns to be got by enabling overall growth. It is strange then that the Congress's instinct now appears to be to deliver its promised new social contract by similar regulation — instead of enabling social inclusiveness through focussed investment in education and incentivising private-public partnership.

At two years, a government typically heads into the mid-term stretch, its eye on the platform it must construct for re-election in three years' time. The prime minister has repeatedly said the right things about meaningful equity through reform. Now is the time to act upon them. Because, as V.P. Singh found out earlier, there is no gratitude to be had from the electorate by recourse to reservation as an easy substitute for enlightened targeting.

23 MAY 2006



FAROOQ JAVED/HT

Manmohan Singh, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Shivraj Patil at the round table meet in Srinagar on Wednesday.

PoK rebels can return

JAY Raina and ARUN Joshi
Srinagar, May 24

GHOST TOWN Srinagar shut down in protest, terror attacks continued, the big players kept away. But Prime Minister Manmohan Singh saved day one of the Second Round Table conference, walking the peace talk alone and holding out hope for a generation of Kashmiris that had turned it back on India to take up arms.

Singh announced a review of cases of all detainees, "including those (who) crossed over (to PoK) after violating our laws and who are now anxious to come home".

Over 3,000 Kashmiris crossed over to Pakistan and were trained in militant camps in the first flush of the separatist movement. With the dream of freedom soured, many are eager now to return. A safe passage and amnesty for former militants has been a long-standing demand of several Kashmiri leaders from the Hurriyat and the PDP.

In his opening remarks, Singh expressed no acrimony against the moderate Hurriyat conference that boycotted the conclave — a move which, many argue, has made the meet a non-starter. (The BJP's state unit and the Ladakh Buddhist Asso-

ciation also stayed away.)

"To resolve all political issues, all forms of dialogue should continue. In this connection, the dialogue with the Hurriyat was positive," he remarked, while expressing hope that the separatists will join such conferences at an appropriate time.

The Prime Minister also asked the leaders representing different shades of opinion to focus on five areas: security of the people, human rights and good governance, the bringing together of different regions of the state, working on the economic future of the state and arrangements to bring people from both sides of the LoC closer.

24 MAY 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MORE SEATS FOR GENERAL CATEGORY

Govt cracks quota whip

Deepak Razdan

NEW DELHI, May 23: Amidst the raging country-wide reservation row, the ruling Congress-led UPA amalgam decided to go ahead with extending the 27 per cent quota for OBCs in Central universities and institutions, proposing to implement it through legislation to be brought in for passage during the monsoon session of Parliament. The OBC students will get the benefits of this proposal only from June 2007, the next academic session.

However, as part of its "balancing, middle-path formula", the UPA government also decided to simultaneously increase the number of seats in Central educational institutions "keeping in view the interests of all sections of the student community and to meet their aspirations for opportunities for higher education." This was meant to cushion the non-reserved category students from the impact of implementation of the OBC quota proposal.

The decision came in the

IMA splits

NEW DELHI, May 23: Cracks appeared in the Indian Medical Association, which has been supporting the quota protesters, with doctors belonging to the backward classes setting up a new body - Indian National Medical Association - to back the government's reservation proposal. ■ SNS

wake of a marathon, two-session meeting of the UPA-Left Coordination Committee at the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's residence tonight.

Agitating doctors said: "The government has backstabbed us". They resolved to continue their strike. Termination notices were today issued to strikers in Delhi hospitals.

In the face of continuing anti-quota protests, the government, backed by Left parties, resolved that the 93rd amendment to the Constitution paving the way for OBCs quota in educational institutions would be implemented in "letter and spirit."

An oversight committee would be constituted to draw up a time-bound roadmap for implementing these decisions. Smaller groups consisting of deans, directors and vice-chancellors of the institutions concerned would be set up to work out the details of the institutions, and the oversight committee would put together the recommendations of these groups and submit a comprehensive report by 31 August, 2006.

The government's decision was announced by defence minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee. The morning session of the UPA-Left panel meeting witnessed PMK leaders expressing severe resentment over the government's proposal to increase the number of seats, which they maintained, would "dilute" the provision contained in the constitutional amendment.

The PMK leaders told the meeting that they would not accept suggestions which "diluted" the Constitutional

■ Turn to page 4

24 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

PM ANNOUNCES 5 J&K WORKING GROUPS

Panel to look into self-rule

Kavita Suri

SRINAGAR, May 25: The Prime Minister today announced setting up of five working groups "to look more closely at the broad issues and problems in Jammu and Kashmir" with one group dealing with Centre-state relations, including the question of autonomy and self-rule.

The five working groups would work towards confidence-building measures across segments of society in the state, strengthening relations across the line of control, economic development, ensuring good governance and strengthening relations between the Centre and the state.

All the groups are official committees with the approval of the Government of India, Dr Manmohan Singh said while addressing a Press conference at the SKICC auditorium on the conclusion of the round-table talks here this evening. He hoped that these groups would work towards finding common ground and forging a consensus on specific issues through a time-bound result-oriented approach.



The body of a tourist lies in the main hospital in Srinagar. ■ AFP (Another photograph on page 5)

One of the groups, Dr Singh said, would discuss measures for those who wanted to return to their homes from PoK. But he added that it was a matter for security agencies.

Minutes after the Prime Minister left for New Delhi following the round-table conference, three tourists were killed and five others injured when militants lobbed a grenade at a tourist bus at Zakoora, on the out-

skirts of Srinagar. The injured were taken to hospital.

To a question on the demand for self-rule that came up for discussions during the two-day conference, the Prime Minister said the group dealing with Centre-state relations would take up the issue and report back to the next round table as soon as it finished its work. On the Hurriyat boycott, Dr Singh said he was hopeful those who stayed away would participate in the future.

He said that the scope of homecoming of those youth who had crossed the LoC and wanted to return could be discussed at an appropriate forum, keeping in view security aspects.

The Prime Minister said he had not received any proposal from President Pervez Musharraf to visit Jammu and Kashmir to participate in a round-table conference.

The service rifle of a CRPF jawan Navjeet Singh went off accidentally, injuring him at the indoor stadium here today when he was alighting from a vehicle around 1.15 p.m. sources said. The gunshot sparked panic.

26 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

Centre orders increase in medical seats

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**Students seek written assurance on intake,
decide to continue strike**

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry has asked Central Government-run medical institutions to increase the number of seats, even as medical students and junior doctors on Saturday decided to continue with their fortnight-old strike against the Centre's decision to reserve 27 per cent seats for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in higher education.

The Ministry on Saturday sent out letters to nine Centrally-run medical institutions spelling out the methods for increasing the seats in Post-Graduate courses to ensure that general category seats were not affected by the 27 per cent reservation, and also provide the Ministry with the details of the existing infrastructure and their requirement, monetary and otherwise, to enhance the seats.

This decision was taken after the Union Health and Family Welfare Secretary P.K. Hota and Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) P. Venugopal met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday morning.

The AIIMS has reportedly agreed to increase the number of seats from 50 to 90. The other institutes that have been asked to enhance the intake are Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, Safdarjung Hospital, Lady Hardinge Medical College (Delhi), Jawaharlal Institute of Post Graduate Medical Education and Research (Pondicherry), Central Institute of Psychiatry (Ranchi), National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sci-

• Letters sent to nine Centrally-run medical institutions

• AIIMS agrees to increase the number of seats from 50 to 90

• No need to worry about shrinking 'opportunities': Manmohan

ences (Bangalore), Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (Chandigarh) and North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (Shillong).

The striking students had on Friday met Dr. Singh who had assured them that there would be a huge growth in educational opportunities in the coming years and the students need not worry about shrinking "opportunities."

However, the medicos wanted a written assurance from the Prime Minister on the increase of seats in the medical institutions, constitution of a non-political commission to review the existing reservation policy, exclusion of OBC creamy layer and no action against those who participated in the strike.

Meeting with Oscar Fernandes

The students also met Union Minister Oscar Fernandes on Saturday morning to express their dissatisfaction with their Friday meeting with Mr. Hota and said that instead of the written assurance, the Health Secretary had handed them the statement issued to the media.

28 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

Govt sets up 13-member oversight committee

New Delhi: Moving quickly to bring an end to the quota imbroglio, government on Monday announced a 13-member committee headed by senior Congress MP Veerappa Moily to look into the issue of implementation of 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in higher education institutions and requirements for increasing seats without reducing the number in general category.



Veerappa Moily

Approved by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the oversight committee with secretaries from the ministries of HRD, health and family welfare, agriculture and finance, has been asked to submit its report by August 31, this year.

The committee includes B Mungekar, member, Planning Commission, R Mashelkar, direc-

tor-general, CSIR, S K Thorat, UGC chairman, R A Yadav, vice chairman, AICTE, N K Ganguly, director-general, ICMR, G Mohan Gopal, former VC, National Law School and R V Vaidyanatha Ayyar, former secretary.

Simultaneously, the government also appointed three groups to go into specific details about universities and institutes regarding the course of action for giving effect to OBC quota in a time-bound manner.

Under the terms of reference, the groups will identify the courses at undergraduate and post-graduate level in each of the institutions and universities and student intake for academic session 2007-08. The groups have also been asked to identify the total number of OBCs and consequently to other categories in each course.

The groups would identify for each course the increase in the total number of seats so as to maintain the total availability of seats in the unreserved category and deter-

mine the requirement of faculty and other infrastructure for the enhanced intake and to determine the additional requirement of recurring and non-recurring expenditure.

Among other things, the groups will suggest measures, in short term, to be taken by each institute for the enhanced intake from the academic session 2007-08 and any other preparatory or consequential steps required to be taken in order to implement the policy of reservations. The groups would submit their recommendations by July 31.

The group for technological/engineering institutions would be headed by M Anandakrishnan, former vice chancellor of Anna University. It would have Sanjay Dhande, director, IIT, Kanpur, S K Dube, director, IIT, Kharagpur, Sanjeev Bhargava, director, IIT, Jabalpur, R P Dahiya, director, NIT, Jaipur, N Balakrishnan, IISc, Y V Rao, director, NIT, Warangal, I M Mishra, IIT, Roorkee and Indira Rajaraman, NIPFP as its members. AGENCIES

30 MAY 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

HRD ministry cautious about quota reply to EC

Statesman News Service

George alleges irregularities

NEW DELHI, April 13 : After the Election Commission's move yesterday to seek further clarifications from the Union HRD minister Mr Arjun Singh over his reply to the EC's notice on OBC reservation issue, the HRD ministry seems to be treading cautiously.

Mr Singh, who has sparked off a major controversy by proposing 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in Central educational institutions, including universities, IIMs and IITs, had sent a tough, unapologetic reply to the EC's notice to him a few days ago.

The EC had taken cognizance of his proposal as a "prima facie" case of its model code of conduct, given that elections are on in five states. Denying the charges, the HRD minister, had questioned the EC's judgment on the issue.

Mr Singh's reply did not go down well with the EC, sources said. Unsatisfied with the HRD minister's reply, the EC shot off another letter to the Cabinet sec-

PATNA, April 13: Mr George Fernandes today approached the Election Commission alleging serious irregularities in the presidential election of the JD-U. The new party president Mr Sharad Yadav, who defeated him in the poll, was quick to respond and asserted there was no threat of a split in the party. "There is absolutely no threat of a split in the JD-U. The delegates, MPs and MLAs from Bihar and elsewhere overwhelmingly voted in my favour. ■ PTI

retary yesterday asking him for Mr Arjun Singh's clarifications on several points. EC sources said the tone and tenor of Mr Singh's letter were "objectionable". Mr Singh's bid to make his reply public a day before it was to be sent to the EC was said to have been taken into account.

EC officials have said that they would expect decorum and propriety from a senior Cabinet minister like Mr Singh and not things unbecoming of his position. As the controversy has snowballed, the HRD ministry as well as the PMO have maintained silence in the matter.

The HRD ministry today consulted the law ministry to prepare Mr Singh's second reply to be sent by 18

April.

At the centre of the OBC quota storm, Mr Arjun Singh has been entangled in a string of controversies earlier - ranging from his detoxification drive to cleanse the history textbooks from saffron elements to his stand in favour of the Aligarh Muslim University's minority status. Private schools went to court against his ministry's decision to offer free education to girl child.

He played a key role in passing the constitutional amendment Bill about reservation for weaker sections in educational institutions, State-aided or private that overturned the Supreme Court's verdict scrapping reservation in private colleges.

14 APR 2006

THE STATESMAN

Protesters use technology to organise

Anti-quota pitch on Net, phone

Arjun says he did not violate poll code

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

OUR BUREAU

April 9: If word of mouth brought some of the country's young out on the streets after the Mandal Commission recommendations for job quotas, this time the Internet and the mobile phone are being used to organise against expanding reservation in educational institutions.

As some 3 lakh aspirants to the IITs wrote their joint entrance examination papers today, the World Wide Web was aflame with campaigns against reservation for other backward classes (OBCs).

Petitions are being made on the Net to the President, Prime Minister and at times to entities like the "Next Generation", in the manner of *Rang de Basanti*, the movie.

Support for the quota could not be found.

"This (quota) is more of a political move to gain something in the short term.... If (planners) wished to eliminate backwardness, they could start from grassroots," writes Sarsij Nayanam, who has petitioned the President, on the site *PetitionOnline.com*.

The site hosts online campaigns from all over the world to promote "participatory democracy". The top three petitions, signed by many current and former students of institutions like IITs and IIMs, are protests against the quota.

The highest circulated one, started by Nayanam on April 7, is close to the 10,000-signature mark.

Nayanam, who studied at the Birla Institute of Technology, Ranchi, said in an email: "If such a thing ever gets implemented, then just think of the rift that will be created between the two classes."

He says most of the people

who have signed are "studying in the institutes" and "there is a large section which has just passed.... And, as expected, IITians, present and former, have participated in (sic) a large scale."

Mobile phone messages are flying around to organise protests. One said: "IF u r giving yr class 12 exams or trying fr a masters, 50% of all seats are now reservd. Lets start a campaign against this insanity. Pass this on to everyone."

Another (in picture) gave

Join the peaceful protest against arjun singh's 50% reservation tuesday 11th april, 5pm at jawaharlal nehru stadium, ndtv and sahara have promised their

a call to join a protest in Delhi. It said two TV channels "have promised their support", adding the third element of communication technology to the campaign.

Blogs, personal diaries on the Net, are speaking out, too. Vivek K writes with a touch of irony: "Create high facility community school where only weaker community people are taken without any test."

One campaign ends on a patriotic note, taking its queue from *Rang de Basanti*: "All we need is a 'Generation Awakening'.... And if you disagree with me then be ready to face a 'not so good' India."

If quota supporters are organising, there's at least no sign of it in the new-generation media. One SMS began to circulate tonight, but that too as a response.

"U mite be against reservation bt dnt forget we do live in a highly unequal society," it said.

New Delhi, April 9: Arjun Singh today formally informed the Election Commission he had not made any announcement on a 27 per cent education quota for other backward classes.

A day after being warned he could be pulled up for violating the model code of conduct in five election-bound states, Singh said the Centre has yet to take a decision on the percentage of reservation.

"There was no announcement of any concession, much less any other breach of the model code of conduct, as mentioned in your letter. There is no basis even for a prima facie view to that effect," Singh said in his reply.

Yesterday, the Centre had been forced to issue a clarification after the poll panel stepped into the row over raising the quota percentage to 49.5 in educational institutions, including IITs and IIMs.

The minister said it was unfortunate the panel had concluded "the alleged announcement amounts to new concession to sections of the electorate in the five states".

Such a conclusion had been reached only on the basis of media reports, he said.

"What is more, it has also been concluded that it prima facie violates the model code of conduct without mentioning which provision of the model code of conduct the commission had in view."

Singh said he was at a loss why the row had snowballed as he had made it clear a "decision would be taken and announced only after elections".

Besides, Article 15(5) enhancing the reservation had come into force on January 20 after the 104th amendment.

"Thus, advancement of... (OBCs) in matters of admission... is an existing constitutional scheme and by no stretch of imagination is a new announcement."

ORISSA | Rajnath slams 'appeasement', soft-handling of terror

Blasting UPA, yatra rolls out

ENS & PTI

BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 6

BJP president Rajnath Singh today began his five-week Bharat Suraksha Yatra with a pledge to foil the Muslim "appeasement" of the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre.

"Only for getting their votes, the Congress-led UPA government is offering the Muslims new reservations in jobs and education. We will not allow their politics of appeasement to succeed," he said.

Singh, who had offered obeisance last night, again prayed at the Jagannath temple this morning, before embarking on the 35-day 5,500-km journey criss-crossing several states.

Addressing a rally, he said the purpose of the yatra was to create awareness in the minds of the people about the "designs" of the Congress and to warn the UPA that if it did not mend its



BJP president Rajnath Singh (Centre) with BJP leaders ahead of the Bharat Suraksha Yatra in Bhubaneswar on Thursday. PTI

ways, it should be ready to face the consequences in the next elections. Charging the UPA government with being soft towards terrorists, Singh said: "Is this not for the sake of votebank politics? What is it for?"

Referring to the arrest of six HuJI militants with links to Bangladesh in connection with the Varanasi bomb blasts yesterday, he said Bangladeshi infiltration in Assam was a matter of serious concern.

The Supreme Court, he added, had observed that the state was facing external aggression and internal disturbance on account of largescale illegal migration from that country, a clear and total vindication of BJP's demand for repeal of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act.

Lashing out at the UPA government for its failure to curb rise in prices of essential commodities, he said whenever Congress came to

power at the Centre the prices have shot up.

Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, his counterparts in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand Raman Singh and Arjun Munda and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi also addressed the gathering. They expressed concern over the rise in incidents of terrorism and extremist violence in different parts of the country.

Senior BJP leader and former party president Venkaiah Naidu said the UPA government was like a vehicle being driven by Manmohan Singh, while its steering was with Sonia Gandhi, brakes with CPI(M) and power brake with Lalu Prasad Yadav, who he termed as the "ultra PM".

Sonia's resignation, he said, was just a "drama" because she knew that her Lok Sabha membership had to go.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Within PM's panel, protest over IIM, IIT quotas

promoting excellence and autonomy."

Second, he wrote, "while we recognize the access to education should be distributed widely across social groups, we feel 49 pc reserved seats is a step in wrong direction. At the moment, measures are in place for SCs/STs and these should not be supplemented by reservation for OBCs".

And third, "till such time as we evolve a new consensus on more imaginative access policies, let the status quo continue. This is an opportunity to think afresh on this issue and not rush into introducing measures that we know are irreversible".

He concluded by saying, "Some of our colleagues disagree with these propositions, we can record their dissent in the letter. There is no point having an NKC, if we don't take a stand on this issue".

Jayati Ghosh wrote back: "As you know, I disagree on this matter. If such a letter is indeed sent, I would like to insist that my dissent

be explicitly recorded in the letter, in an easily visible manner. I would also like to see the letter before it is finally sent".

The Knowledge Commission, formed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, has Sam Pitroda as chairperson and Dr P M Bhargava as vice-chairperson. Its other members are Infosys CEO Nandan Nilekani, Delhi University Vice-Chancellor Deepak Nayyar, Ashok Gan-guly, Andre Beteille, Ghosh and Mehta.

Set up in June 2005, the commission advises the PM on matters relating to institutions of knowledge production, knowledge use and knowledge dissemination. It is helped by the Planning Commission and has a National Steering Group to assist it, which is chaired by the PM and includes HRD Minister Arjun Singh, along with Ministers of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry, Communication and Information Technology, Science and Technology and Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission.

Within PM's panel, protest over Arjun Singh's OBC order

■ No basis for OBC quotas, no point to Knowledge Commission if we can't take stand: convenor Mehta

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

THE first voice of protest against Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh's decision to impose 49.5 per cent quota in IITs, IIMs and Central universities has come from the high-profile National Knowledge Commission (NKC), which reports directly to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and whose mandate is to sharpen the country's "knowledge edge".

In a strong e-mail to all commission members yesterday, NKC's member-convenor Pratap Bhanu Mehta has asked the commission to intervene and write to the PM against the quota regime.

Terming this as a "very distressing development", Mehta, who heads the Centre for Policy Research, wrote: "There is no point having NKC, if we don't take a stand on this issue".

Mehta's views on the issue, however, were not liked by another commission member Jayati Ghosh, an economics

professor at JNU. She promptly wrote back to the members to record her "dissent" on this issue.

Mehta, in his e-mail, argued his case against the quota: "IITs are already facing severe faculty shortages, and to simply increase the number of seats will have serious adverse consequences. It shows the extent to which these institutions are being subjected to the ministry's own political and intellectual predilections".

"I know we have divergent views on reservation. I think there is probably more a consensus on SC/ST reservation, but reservations for OBCs have very little justification: indeed it is in some ways hurting the cause of SC/STs. But the idea that 49 pc of seats must come under reserved categories is surely alarming."

Mehta, a former professor at Harvard University, wrote: "Can we perhaps send a short letter to PM registering our protest and it will have three points. First, the new proposals are incompatible with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



PM Centre investing Rs 1,80,000 crore on the road network, besides providing funds to states to improve highways

'World-class infrastructure to push growth'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PANIPAT, APRIL 5

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh today said his government was investing Rs 1,80,000 crore for building highways and road network as part of efforts to develop world-class infrastructure.

Laying the foundation stone of the Rs 325-crore elevated highway project here, he said under the ambitious Rs 1,74,000-crore Bharat Nirman Programme, the UPA government aims to provide every village with well laid roads, telephone, electricity and drinking water by 2009.

"I have repeatedly said our country needs world-class infrastructure. We have set for ourselves a growth target of 8 to 10 per cent over the coming years," he said. Manmohan said to achieve this growth rate, the country would need massive investments in basic infrastructure such as roads, ports, telecom, electricity and airports.

Among the various initiatives to provide international standard infrastructural facilities in the country, the Prime Minister said the Centre was investing Rs 1,80,000 crore on the road network, besides providing funds to state governments to improve state highways and other roads.

He said in the last one year, the government had awarded contracts for four-laning of nearly 5,500 km of national highways,



PM Manmohan Singh with Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda at Panipat on Wednesday. P77

which was the highest ever since the start of the National Highways Development Programme. The PM said the UPA government was giving the highest priority to roads, schools and hospitals to provide basic facilities in rural areas.

"Road connects villages to towns and towns to big cities and brings jobs closer to our homes," Manmohan said, adding high quality roads also encourage setting up of new industries and creating new income opportunities.

"Our government has given highest priority for development of national highways and rural roads," he said.

Lauding Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda for initiating the elevated highway project at Panipat, he said it would lead to overall development of the city and its adjoining areas and would boost the economy of the region.

The Prime Minister said the government has already begun preparatory work for the Delhi-Hissar portion of NH-10 going via Rohtak and would be awarding contract by the year-end. In about three years, people from Hissar and Rohtak will be able to travel comfortably on a world-class road to Delhi.

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6/21
In Haryana, it's a story of red tape running over roads

KANDULA SUBRAMANIAM

NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

EVEN as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh spoke of giving infrastructure projects a push, a scrutiny of the tall claims made by the Haryana government shows that more than just a push will be needed.

Given its geographical position, the state has much to offer by way of providing connectivity to other states. However, apart from the NCR region, infrastructure development, especially in the transport sector, has not touched other parts of the state.

Take, for instance, the claim that the four-laning of the Zirakpur-Parwanoo portion of National Highway 22, including the bypass for Pinjore, Kalka and Parwanoo, has been "approved". The factual position is that the detailed reports and feasibility studies are yet to be completed for a project conceived as far back as 2000. With the project ultimately having proved unviable, it is learnt that while the objective is to have four lanes, some stretches could be just two-laned. As a major portion of this highway will pass through mountain terrain, the execution time for the project could take over 25 to 30 months.

Take another NH-22 stretch, the Ambala-Zirakpur, where work for four-laning has been allotted and is likely to start soon. The contract for these works was awarded to the GMR group in November last year but the project company is yet to submit its financial closure. While the company paid the National Highway Authority of India around Rs 105 crore to undertake work on

this high-density stretch, the land acquisition process is still underway. Notification for the same was tabled in Parliament in March this year. Most of the land needs to be acquired in Punjab as only 5 km (out of 40 km) falls within Haryana.

Then there's the claim that work will start soon on the electrification of the Delhi-Rohtak rail track, which the state claims is approved. The project has, in fact, only been "identified" and awaits approval from the Planning Commission. Another rail project, connecting Rohtak-Jhajjar-Rewari, was part of the Rail Budget announcements this year. The ministry is still in the process of finalising the blueprint for this Rs 189 crore project where the state government is to share 50 per cent of the costs.

Coming back to highway projects, the state claims the process of four-laning the NH 10 on the high-density Delhi-Rohtak stretch has started. Works for this project are yet to be awarded, a procedure likely to be completed by June or July this year.

For the 270 km Kundli-Palwal Expressway connecting NH 1, 2, 8, 10 and 71B—conceived more than three years ago—Rs 1,400 crore are required for land acquisition alone, while the total project cost is estimated to be over Rs 4,000 crore. Land acquisition has already created problems for the project as this highway requires some of the most expensive real estate to be had in the entire region.

The much talked-of 6/8 laning of the Delhi-Gurgaon highway, where construction is in progress, the completion date has been pushed back by more than a year.

Govt neglecting CMP, says Bardhan

Guwahati News Service

GUWAHATI, April 4. — Veteran CPI leader Mr AB Bardhan rued today that the Congress that is heading the UPA government at the Centre, was no longer talking about the common minimum programme (CMP) of the coalition. "The Left is going to mount pressure and raise issues to make the Congress stick to the CMP. The Left is willing to join even non-UPA parties barring the BJP to mobilise people against the Congress' policies outside the CMP," Mr Bardhan said. He, however, said at this moment no one was talking about disrupting the UPA government at the Centre as "who will replace it is also a big question".

The Left, which has been critical of the Indo-US nuclear deal and UPA government's "America-centric" policies, is happy over improved relation with neighbours and looking positively towards implementation of the employment guarantee programme of the government. The CPI leader said that the "office of profit" issue had received too much hype and it was not justified to try and show Mrs Sonia Gandhi as the conspirator behind all these.

He, however, observed that an ordinance over the issue was uncalled for and that the Parliament should have been allowed to con-

tinue.

Mr Bardhan said that the ruling Left Front will fight the forthcoming Assembly election in West Bengal on the main plank of 'industrial development'.

He exuded confidence that the Left Front would romp home for the seventh term in West Bengal. "This time the focus will be on industrial development in Bengal which was once second to only Maharashtra in respect of industrial development," he said. He said that the agricultural reforms ushered in by the Left Front government resulted in agricultural surplus in West Bengal besides increasing the purchasing power of the peasantry. "The ground is now set for industrialisation," he said.

About measures taken by the Election Commission for holding Assembly election in West Bengal, Mr Bardhan said: "What they are aiming at is not very clear to us. The Left has been ruling on its strength and it is well known to all." "There is confusion about posting outside security force personnel who don't know the local language, in polling stations. It shows lack of confidence in state police. It is not going to augur well for a constitutional body like the Election Commission," the CPI leader said informing that all four partners in the Left Front had lodged a complaint with the Election Commission yesterday against such a move.

05 APR 2006

THE STATESMAN

UPA will finish its term: PM

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, April 1. — Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today ruled out any possibility of a mid-term election and expressed confidence that the UPA government would complete its full term in office.

"During its past two years of incumbency, the UPA government outlined its plans to give a new thrust to development and it is very much on course to complete its mission," Dr Singh told reporters at the airport here on his arrival for two-day electioneering in Assam.

Regarding election commissioner Mr Navin Chawla, the Prime Minister said: "We received the President's letter forwarding the complaint against Mr Chawla yesterday. I will take a decision after completing my tour of Assam." Just before he hit the campaign trail, Dr Singh appealed to the people of Assam to "vote for the Congress for peace, security, development and modernisation. Vote us into power for the next five years".

"Congress governments at the Centre and in the state offer the best possible combination of governance that can bring in peace and rapid development to Assam," said Dr Singh who is a Rajya Sabha member from Assam.

On the prolonged insurgency, he said: "The misguided youths of Assam have a Prime Minister from the state in New Delhi. There is no problem that can't be solved

through negotiation. We want peace to prevail in Assam in the interests of development and prosperity of its people." On the current, albeit nascent, dialogue with the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), Dr Singh ruled out the possibility of entertaining any discussion on the "sovereignty of Assam". He said all rural infrastructure development projects and employment generation programmes initiated by the UPA government had been undertaken keeping in mind Assam's best interests. "The Congress government at the Centre is committed to help people of Assam live a life of dignity and with self respect," Dr Singh said.

Referring to the problem of illegal migration from Bangladesh, he said: "We are firmly against any kind of infiltration and have taken appropriate steps to prevent it. The work erecting fences along the Indo-Bangla border is progressing at a good speed and the national register of citizens (NRC) of 1951 is being updated for detection of illegal migrants in Assam. Having said that, Dr Singh pointed out: "At the same time, we want to genuine Indian citizens living in Assam are not harassed in any way during the detection and subsequent deportation of illegal migrants. The Foreigners (Tribunals for Assam) Order, 2006 was formulated for that purpose following the Supreme Court's order to to repeal the IMDT Act, 1983."

THE STATESMAN

03 APR 2006

THE STATESMAN

PARLIAMENT SESSION FROM 10 TO 23 MAY

Chastened Centre calls House meet

38/17 55-1 2-WPA GMA
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 30. — Barely a week after it botched up plans to bring in an ordinance over the "office-of-profit" issue, criticised by the Opposition as a move to "bail out" Mrs Sonia Gandhi, the government today called a Parliament session from 10 to 23 May.

Disclosing the decision, earlier taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA), the I&B and parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, was at pains to explain that "it is a regular session" in a bid to imply that it had nothing to do with the replacement of the previously planned ordinance by an amendment of the existing law defining the "office of profit."

While the Opposition said the adjournment of both Houses on 22 March was clearly intended to bring in the ordinance, Mr Das Munshi had then denied the charge and said it was because Parliament had transacted all the key financial business and hence there was no need for another session in May. Originally, Parliament was scheduled to adjourn for a recess to meet again on 10 May.

"The cat is out of the bag," was how the BJP described the decision. "If both the Houses are being convened from 10 May to consider the balance agenda, why were they adjourned sine die instead of adjourning it till 10 May as was planned earlier," asked party general secretary Mr Arun Jaitely.

In an interesting volte-face, Mr Das Munshi said at today's briefing that the government had some legislative business

to transact and indicated it would also consider amendment of the existing law or a fresh legislation on the "office-of-profit" issue.

He said the CCPA's decision was in line with the commitment the government made to the Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha chairman while recommending sine die adjournment of the Houses on 22 March.

Answering a specific question, he said the Speaker was competent to convene the session as Parliament was not prorogued, a development that would have necessitated convening of a fresh session by the President. He said the leader of the Lok Sabha, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, would write to all political parties, seeking their views on the 'office-of-profit' issue. He explained that "their inputs" would be used in framing a new law.

Meanwhile, informed sources do not rule out the possibility of scrapping the existing law "lock, stock and barrel" and bringing in a fresh legislation to clear "all grey areas" over the definition of "office of profit". The sources point out that even the Prime Minister had indicated such a possibility yesterday, saying the government would consider all issues including "doing away" with the "office-of-profit" clause.

Earlier this week, Mr Das Munshi held talks with the BJP, Left and other smaller parties on the "office-of-profit" issue and submitted his report to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. "Most political parties suggested that there can be a comprehensive law with a new legislation or by amendment or clarification within the existing act," Mr Das Munshi had said.

THE STATESMAN

'LAW FAVOURED ACROSS THE BOARD'

All-party talks on 30 March

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 27. — After the mess it created over the "office of profit" issue, the government today began operation clean-up and as a first step decided to discuss an appropriate strategy with major political parties on 30 March. Party leaders, by and large, favour legislation to resolve the issue once and for all.

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) is expected to discuss the issue the same day after the customary Cabinet meeting. The parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, who had held talks with the BJP, Left and other smaller parties, later submitted his report to the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh. "Most political parties suggested that there can be a comprehensive law with a new legislation or by amendment or clarification within the existing act," Mr Das Munshi said at the Prime Minister's residence after submitting the report.

All parties barring the AIADMK and Shiromani Akali Dal have conveyed their views, he said, adding that they are expected to do so later. Mr Das Munshi met the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Mr LK Advani and Rajya Sabha Opposition leader Mr Jaswant Singh, who reportedly favoured a law to plug loopholes in the existing rules. The BJP as well as the Samajwadi Party reportedly disfavoured any all-party meeting to discuss the issue.

The BJP was not willing to disclose what transpired between

party leaders and Mr Das Munshi at their meeting. "We have given our view point," BJP spokesman Mr Prakash Javadekar said. He said the government should first declare the date for reconvening the Parliament session. He was non-committal on whether the Jharkhand formula was acceptable to the party at the Centre as well.

On the issue of Mr VK Malhotra facing a similar disqualification, Mr Javadekar said rules should apply to all. He said if a complaint was lodged against someone then let the Election Commission decide on it. "We will not run away like Mrs Sonia Gandhi (from facing the law)," he said.

BJP leader Mr Vijay Goel called for a nationwide debate on whether resigning from the Lok Sabha did not tantamount to violation of rules by way of denying Parliament a chance to take action against the member for holding an office of profit.

The messy row erupted with the disqualification of Samajwadi Party leader Ms Jaya Bachchan from her Rajya Sabha membership for being the head of the Uttar Pradesh Film Development Corporation. Sensing a similar fate for the Congress president, Ms Sonia Gandhi, the brain-trust in the government hit upon the idea of an Ordinance to bail her out, but it was scuppered by an angry Opposition after a newspaper scoop on the government plan.

The government brain-trust has since come in for muted criticism from Congress leaders, including Dr Karan Singh, who resigned his Rajya Sabha membership on the dual office issue.

Another report on page 4

THE STATESMAN

GOVT, OPP DISCUSS OFFICE OF PROFIT

Consensus on new law

SNS and Agencies

NEW DELHI, March 25. ~ The government and the Opposition tonight appeared to be coming round to the view that comprehensive legislation on the controversial office-of-profit issue needs to be brought soon. A Parliament session is likely to be convened after the Assembly elections in five states ends on 10 May. The BJP said it was willing to consider a Bill but would not express its views on the proposed legislation until it saw its contents.

With Prime Minister Manmohan Singh taking an active role, parliamentary affairs minister Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi started trying to evolve a consensus.

He first met leaders of the Left allies and several small parties and then held discussions with the leader of the Opposition Mr LK Advani and senior BJP leader Mr Jaswant Singh.

They said they were in favour of a law to plug loopholes in the rule governing office of profit. The Left leaders, too, were in favour of a legislative consensus. On the timing of the Parliament ses-

More pleas to EC

NEW DELHI, March 25. ~ The Election Commission received more petitions for disqualification of an MP and nine MLAs from Jharkhand today, even as there were indications that it would not decide on such issues as whether the National Advisory Council is an office of profit. **SNS**

sion, Mr Advani said it was for the government to decide and, adding that the party was against the ordinance route. The BJP chief, Mr Rajnath Singh, wanted an immediate House session.

Mr Das Munshi said while recommending adjournment of the Budget session sine die, the government had assured the presiding officers that it would strive to re-convene the session on 10 May after the Assembly elections. Mr Das Munshi said the consultations are expected to end tomorrow. "We will consult the Shiv Sena, BJD, JD-S and the MDMK," he said.

The Left parties told the government that there was need for a comprehensive amendment of the law.

26 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

POSITIVE SENTIMENTS, SAYS PAKISTAN

PM offers peace treaty

5/1
25/3

UP AG/VA

Statesman News Service

AMRITSAR/NEW DELHI, March 24. — Dr Manmohan Singh today made an offer to culminate the present peace process with Pakistan in a "Treaty of Peace, Security and Friendship" and commended President Pervez Musharraf for taking "bold steps". The Pakistan foreign office responded by noting that the Prime Minister's remarks have "positive sentiments".

This "new" initiative was made by the PM at the inaugural ceremony of the Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service in the city of the Golden Temple.

"I have a vision that the peace-making process must ultimately culminate in our two countries entering into a Treaty of Peace, Security and Friendship to give meaning and substance to our quest for shared goals," said Dr Singh, adding, "I make this offer to the people of Pakistan on this historic occasion. I am sure the leadership of Pakistan will reciprocate".

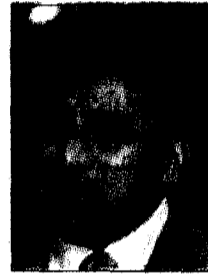
He also noted that there could be "meaningful agreements" on Siachen, Sir Creek and Baglihar if "all concerned are willing to accept the ground realities."

The PM said that "the time has come to leave behind the animosities and misgivings of the past and to think the unthinkable."

Complimenting General Pervez Musharraf for taking "bold steps" to curb extremism, Dr Singh said, "more needs to be done in the interest of both India and Pakistan".

He also said that it was a "mistake to link normalisation of other relations with finding a solution to Jammu and Kashmir".

Interestingly, Dr Singh suggested that both sides should begin a dialogue with the people in their areas of control to improve the quality of governance. It is an obvious reference to the Northern Areas of Gilgit and Baltistan in PoK, which have no democratic institutions relative to the Indian side of Kashmir. Dr Singh seems to be stating that instead of



Dr Manmohan Singh Gen Pervez Musharraf

'I make this offer to the people of Pakistan on this historic occasion. I am sure the leadership of Pakistan will reciprocate'.
~ Dr Manmohan Singh

Pakistan's favourite 'solution' of self-governance for Kashmir, internal consultations would be a better way.

Dr Singh said he envisaged a situation where the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir could with the active encouragement of Indian and Pakistani governments work out cooperative, consultative mechanisms so as to maximise gains of cooperation in solving problems of social and economic development of the region.

Following the speech, the Pakistan foreign office spokesperson, Ms Tasnim Aslam said, "We have seen some reports about the Prime Minister's remarks.... It reflects some positive sentiments". She added, "He has also acknowledged the need to move forward on the resolution of Kashmir and other issues between the two countries".

However, Pakistan rejected the application of "ground realities" as urged by Dr Singh to reach solutions. The Pak FO spokesperson said the ground reality is that accepting the LoC as a solution to the Kashmir issue was not acceptable to either Pakistan or the Kashmiris. So, a viable solution has to be found acceptable to all parties, she added.

Sonia in 'sacrifice' re-run

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 23. — Capping a day of dramatic developments, Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi, cornered by an Opposition clamouring for her disqualification on the "office of profit" issue, today resigned from the Lok Sabha and as chairperson of the National Advisory Council, a move that stunned the nation and caught her detractors unawares.

Mrs Gandhi made it clear that she would contest again from Rae Bareilly, the constituency that sent her to Parliament. She drove to the Speaker, Mr Somnath Chatterjee's residence and handed over her resignation that was accepted by him with immediate effect.

Her dramatic move, hailed by her supporters as "a great act of sacrifice", came nearly two years after she turned down the post of the Prime Minister. Reading out a prepared statement in Hindi at her 10 Janpath residence, Mrs Gandhi said she was resigning both as MP and chairperson of the NAC, a post that was at the centre of the current controversy.

"I have full faith that my brothers and sisters in Rae Bareilly (constituency in Uttar Pradesh) and the whole nation will understand my sentiments," she said in a somewhat cracking voice. "I have done this because I think it is the right thing to do," she said in English in response to a query.

"For the last two days, some people have been trying to create an atmosphere as if the government and Parliament are being used to favour me. This has hurt me very much. I have stated it earlier also that I am in politics and public life not for my selfish ends. I have taken a pledge to serve the people of the country and to protect the secular ideals. So, in keeping with my public life and political principles and

All options open on ordinance: PM

NEW DELHI, March 23. — A day after Parliament was adjourned sine die, there is no clarity on whether the government is bringing an ordinance to redefine office of profit or a Bill in the normal course when Parliament meets next.

All that Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said was that the government had not considered the ordinance and that "all options are open". There were enough indications from overnight developments that an ordinance was to be considered today at the Cabinet meeting but there was a sudden turn of events with Mrs Sonia Gandhi expressing herself against any measure to "protect" her by exempting the chairpersonship of the National Advisory Council from office of profit. Added to that was opposition from Left parties to any move to bring an ordinance to amend the law that lists offices of profit that will not attract disqualification on incumbent MPs.

When asked whether promulgation was still an option, the Prime Minister said "there is no explicit decision as of now. We have not considered the ordinance. All options are open. We will discuss with other political parties and strive to have the widest possible consensus". At a post-Cabinet briefing, parliamentary affairs minister Mr PR Das Munshi maintained that the ordinance was not discussed at the Cabinet meeting. But he parried all questions on whether the government was still considering the ordinance route. — SNS

according to my own belief, I should take a hint from her resignation, the Prime Minister said. "I don't know". He gave a similar response when asked about Lok Sabha Speaker Mr Somnath Chatterjee.

Asked why Parliament was adjourned abruptly, the Prime Minister said all political parties wanted to go and campaign for the elections. "This decision was not made yesterday. This decision was made with the consent of all political parties many, many days ago that the House will reconvene after the elections on 10 May," he said.

The science and technology minister, Mr Kapil Sibal, who reportedly advised Mrs Gandhi to resign, described her decision as "a very wise move, a very bold move". "She has exposed the venomous nature of the Opposition which has targeted her right from day one," he said. In a related development, the Prime Minister met President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam this evening and apprised him of the developments.

■ **'Cinderella' of Orbananno' does it again, page 5**
 ■ **Editorial, Cynical 'sacrifice', page 8**



Mrs Sonia Gandhi after announcing her decision to resign her Lok Sabha seat at a Press conference in New Delhi on Thursday. — AFP

Left caught in a cleft stick

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 23. — The Left parties on Thursday appeared caught in a moral cleft-stick as the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, resigned from the Lok Sabha and put in her papers to the Speaker, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, following accusations that she held an "office of profit" as chairperson of the NAC (National Advisory Council) in the UPA government. They also sought urgent legislation to protect other members from disqualification.

Mr Somnath Chatterjee faces the prospect of similar disqualification for holding the honorary post of chairman of Sriniketan Development Authority. It is believed that at least nine Left MPs who occupy similar posts may have to say good-bye to Parliament in the absence of any immediate succour to them either through an ordinance or new legislation from the government.

"The CPI-M is of the view that Parliament should immediately undertake legislation in order to put

EC to issue summons

NEW DELHI, March 23. — The EC will start issuing summons to all MPs and MLAs against whom it has received presidential reference for holding "office of profit". Though Rashtrapati Bhavan refused to reveal the number of complaints received against MPs, it said it had moved all such complaints to the EC for further action. — SNS

certain offices held by members of Parliament outside the purview of the 'office of profit' until Parliament comprehensively defines what is an office of profit," a Politburo note issued by the central committee of the party here said. It said under the Constitution, Parliament was "empowered" to decide on the definition of "office of profit" and "exempt any office from disqualifying its holder under the 'office of profit' clause". The party said it was against any sweeping and indiscriminate application of the disqualifying Article 102 of the Constitution on the MPs.

■ **See CPM on page 5**

BJP protests led to resignation: Advani

Press Trust of India

VARANASI, March 23. — BJP leader Mr LK Advani today sought to take credit for the resignation of Mrs Sonia Gandhi from the Lok Sabha as also chairpersonship of the NAC.

"The course of action adopted by the government was so outrageous that our immediate response was also very firm and this firm response has led to this sequence of events", said the

Leader of the Opposition while reacting to Mrs Gandhi's sudden announcement.

Mr Advani said the opposition NDA would oppose the Centre's decision to bring an ordinance for deletion of some posts from the list of office of profit in the apparent bid to "protect" Mrs Gandhi as there cannot be two standards on the issue, one for Ms Jaya Bachchan and the other for the Congress president.

Similarly, there cannot be dou-

ble standards on the issue, one for Uttar Pradesh and the other for the Centre, he said.

Mr Advani, who was here to visit the Sankat Mochan Temple which was rocked by the terror attack on 7 March, castigated the Centre for adjourning Parliament since die yesterday in order to bring an ordinance on the issue of delisting some posts from the office of profit-MP and chairperson of the National Advisory Council on CMP as a "desperate attempt to save her face."

He said such a move could not have been possible if Parliament

Twin Sonia resignations to correct double fault

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THE OPTIONS

What can be done now?

New Delhi, March 23: Two months from the second anniversary of her renunciation of the Prime Minister's post, Sonia Gandhi made a double "sacrifice" today to pull the government led by her party out of a hole it had dug for itself.

"Upholding the ideals of public life and politics and personal belief, I resign from Lok Sabha membership," she said, reading from a statement, clad in a sari whose colour could be mistaken as the hue of sacrifice, saffron, though a little pale.

Congress MPs Karan Singh and Gurudas Kamat followed suit.

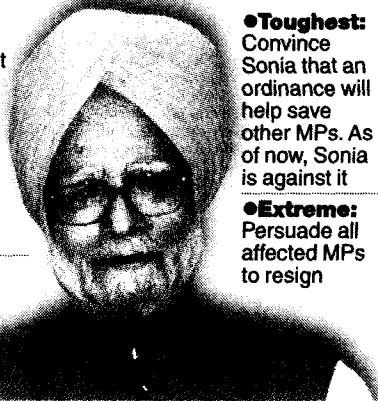
Sonia also resigned from the post of head of the National Advisory Council, deemed an "office of profit" by the Opposition that yesterday singled her out for attack after being handed the opportunity by the government.

In an unprecedented double measure, the government had cut short the budget session, deciding to issue an ordinance to exempt certain offices of profit from the purview of the Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Act.

Several complaints had gone to the President and the Election Commission about MPs — among them, Sonia and Speaker Somnath Chatterjee — holding such offices of profit. After Samajwadi member Jaya Bachchan's disqualification on this ground, there

●**The law offers only one option:** Amend the Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Act, 1959, to include more exemptions through either a bill or an ordinance. An executive order will not suffice

●**Easiest:** Call a brief special session of Parliament and exempt more offices from the profit ambit



●**Toughest:** Convince Sonia that an ordinance will help save other MPs. As of now, Sonia is against it

●**Extreme:** Persuade all affected MPs to resign

were fears that these MPs would also be handed similar punishment by the commission, the deciding authority.

Although MPs of all parties are affected under the law, the Opposition had picked out Sonia. BJP leader L.K. Advani had said everything else was an excuse, "Sonia ko bachana hai", a slight that struck the Congress president straight at the heart, sources said.

"Some people were trying to create an ambience suggesting as though the government and Parliament were being used only to promote my interests," Sonia said. "My only pledge is to serve the nation and Bharatiya society and protect its secular values."

Downcast after the outrage yesterday over the closing of the budget session and the announcement of the ordinance, her decision whipped the Congress back to life as supporters

descended on 10 Janpath in a throwback to the scenes of May 18, 2004, when she heard the "inner voice" and declined to be Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Sonia had once again proved she was the country's "tallest leader and has a rare commitment to moral values which you don't find in plenty in our country".

Later, when she climbed the fender of a vehicle outside her residence and the party of fice that stand cheek by jowl to wave to the supporters gathered outside, she towered over everyone around.

For the moment, though, by standing tall she appeared to have rescued the government from a deep crisis. Not only has the BJP put the government on the mat for the ordinance, its ally, the Left, too, has opposed the method of amending the law. It does not,

however, dismiss the grounds for changing the law, with 10 of its MPs being affected.

Nor does the BJP for that matter or the Samajwadis, the two that are causing the maximum noise about Sonia, because their MPs are in similar trouble. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, the parliamentary affairs minister, said several MPs, like the BJP's Arun Jaitley and Samajwadi member Amar Singh, had been pressing for an amendment.

The Prime Minister said: "There is no explicit decision as of now (on bringing the ordinance)... We have not considered the ordinance. All options are open. We will discuss with other political parties and strive to have the widest possible consensus."

Why this consensus was not worked out before announcing the ordinance and ending the Parliament session was a question that went unanswered. Singh did say, though, that Parliament was adjourned as all parties wanted it to be for the Assembly polls.

"This decision was not made yesterday. This decision was made with the consent of all political parties many days ago that the House will reconvene after the elections."

After Sonia's resignation, it is more than likely that all parties will agree to pass a bill to amend the law. In that case, all that this drama will have as its denouement is another election in Rae Bareilly.

"Main jaroor ladoongi, Rae Bareilly se hi ladoongi," Sonia said.

24 MAR 2006

Capital account convertibility: CPI (M) expresses opposition

"Significant departure from the Common Minimum Programme"

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Expressing strong opposition to the move to introduce full capital account convertibility, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Wednesday demanded that the decision to form the S.S. Tarapore Committee to chalk out a road map for it be rescinded.

Reacting to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's announcement in Mumbai, the CPI (M) termed it as a significant departure from the Common Minimum Programme. It said the CMP, far from advocating capital account convertibility, is committed to reducing the "vulnerability of the financial system to the flow of speculative capital."

Disagreeing with the view that the "comfortable" position of the Indian economy, both "internally and externally," warrants a "revisiting" of capital account convertibility, the party Polit Bureau said in a statement that it was shelved after the contagion of severe currency crises hit the South-East Asian countries in 1997-98, from which India could insulate itself

risen steadily to nearly \$ 15 billion

in 2005-06. According to the RBI, the ratio of volatile capital flows (defined to include cumulative portfolio inflows and short-term debt) to reserves, which was 36 per cent on March 2004, had increased steadily to 40.5 per cent in September 2005. In contrast, the share of net FDI in total private capital inflows was around 10 per cent. Far from generating any sense of comfort, such rising proportions of volatile capital inflows increase the possibility of financial turbulence.

"In fact, the combination of an unsustainable stock and real estate bubble fuelled by 'hot money' inflows, currency appreciation and a widening current account deficit, being witnessed in India currently, looks eerily similar to the situation prevailing in the South-East Asian countries in the period preceding the currency crises of 1997-98.

Introducing capital account convertibility at this stage would further encourage such speculative inflows and reckless commercial borrowing," the statement

said. It said the UPA Government's tendency to "gratify the speculators" was evident in the decision to abolish the long-term capital gains tax in its 2004 interim budget.

The lure of tax-free speculative gains have attracted billions of dollars of portfolio investments into the Indian capital markets over the past two years, which in turn has led to an unprecedented stock market boom. FII equity holdings currently comprise over 13 per cent of market capitalisation in the Indian stock market in contrast to less than 3 per cent in China.

This increased risk within the country's financial system and had the potential of hurting the common people, who would have to bear the brunt of adjustments once the boom came to an end. Besides, increasing the number of billionaires in India, that too not through entrepreneurial profit but through untaxed capital gains, this massive inflow of portfolio investments does not have any positive impact on the productive sectors of the economy.

• Withdraw S.S. Tarapore Committee, says CPI (M)

• Disagrees that condition of economy warrants the move

only because of the extant capital controls.

More harm than good

Following the experience of successive financial crises in countries such as Mexico, Russia, Brazil, Turkey and Argentina, besides South-East Asian countries over the past decade, it is now widely held within policy circles in developing countries that full capital account convertibility, which allows any entity to transfer their funds at will in and out of a country, causes more harm than good.

Out of the foreign exchange reserves of \$ 143 billion currently being held by the Reserve Bank of India, \$ 44 billion, that is over 30 per cent, is on account of the FIIs. External Commercial Borrowings by domestic companies have also

23 MAR 2006

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SAVING OFFICES OF PROFIT ■ Both Houses adjourned sine die on Govt request; NDA takes protest to President

To bring in ordinance, UPA winds up session

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 22

WITH *The Indian Express* report on the UPA government arming itself with an ordinance to exempt certain posts from offices of profit rocking both Houses today, the Government moved swiftly to get Parliament adjourned sine die, saying "there was no government business for the remaining part of the Budget session". The "traditional recess" of

the session done away, the decks are now clear for the Government to bring in the ordinance which, as *The Indian Express* reported today, will change the law on offices of profit and ensure that prominent MPs, including Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, escape a Jaya Bachchan-type disqualification. In fact, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met Sonia Gandhi this morning. In the House, Opposition MPs, especially Bachchan's

colleagues from the Samajwadi Party, stalled proceedings and waved copies of *The Indian Express* to slam the Government over its "double standards". Some were heard shouting "*Ordinance to bahana hai, Sonia Gandhi ko bachana hai* (Ordinance only an excuse to save Sonia Gandhi)".

Protesting the sine die adjournment of both Houses, the NDA, led by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, marched to Rashtrapati Bhavan and urged President A P J Abdul

fortunate event in the history of Parliament".

The sine die adjournment of Parliament is necessary to bring in the ordinance since Article 123 of the Constitution empowers the President to promulgate an ordinance on the advice of the Council of Ministers only when Parliament is not in session.

The "traditional recess" of the Budget session would have been an impediment to the promulgation of the ordinance. "During recess" of Parliament, the President may promulgate an ordi-

nance only in an emergency situation. With both Houses adjourned sine die, Parliament "technically" would not be in session and an ordinance can be promulgated.

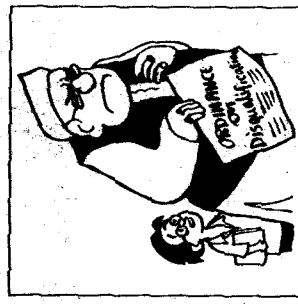
The UPA hurry stems from the fact that there are at least 44 complaints against prominent MPs with the President. These include Sonia Gandhi (chairperson of National Advisory Council and several Govt-aided trusts), Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee (chairman, West Bengal Industrial

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

98-1-28

What may happen in next few days

- President prorogues Parliament, promulgates ordinance at the earliest
- Complaints against Sonia Gandhi and others remain with the President
- Even if complaints are sent to EC for opinion, ordinance will be law of land when complaints are decided

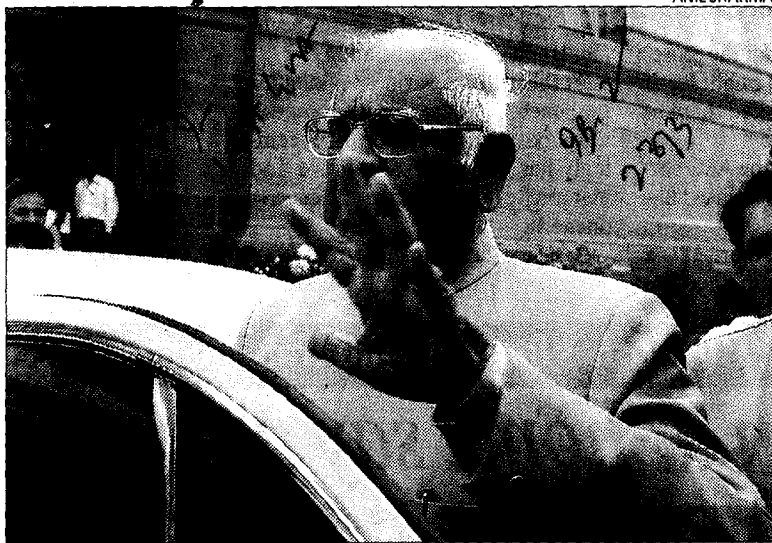


Every ruler enjoys a huge office of profit—the ordinance factory.

Kalam not to prorogue Parliament. Leader of Opposition L K Advani said the move was "a singularly un-

To bring in ordinance, UPA winds up session

ANIL SHARMA



Development Corporation), Karan Singh (chairman, Indian Council for Cultural Relations), Union Minister T. Subbirami Reddy (chairman, Tirupati Trust).

In fact, Somnath Chatterjee stayed away from presiding over Lok Sabha today on the ground that he had been named as one of the persons holding an office of

profit. "Since my name has been involved by some members, it will not be appropriate for me to sit on the chair," he told reporters.

The Government move was made formal when Lok Sabha re-assembled at 4.30 pm. Deputy Speaker Charanjit Singh Atwal said he had received a request from the Government and urged leaders

of political parties to meet in the Speaker's chamber. Following this announcement, he adjourned the house for ten minutes.

Atwal returned and said the Government had requested the Speaker that since there was no government business for the remaining part of the budget session, the House should be adjourned sine die.

23 MAR 2006

INDIAN EXPRESS

It's a deal with Russia, let US sulk

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 17

AFTER MORE than two hours of talks with Mikhail Fradkov, Prime Minister of "tried and tested friend" Russia, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Friday appreciated Russia's positive response to India's fuel needs at Tarapur. India envisioned a "substantial increase" in the nuclear segment of its overall energy mix and appreciated Moscow's decision to supply 60 tonnes of uranium to the safeguarded reactors, Tarapur 1 and 2, Singh said.

There was no signing ceremony or elaborate mention of the subject, with both leaders staying low-key on an issue that has caused US displeasure.

Washington appreciates India's energy needs but wants Delhi to wait for the US to change its laws to facilitate implementation of the Indo-US nuclear deal and the Nuclear Suppliers Group to change its practices. "We think the proper sequencing would be that if India needs nuclear fuel for its reactors at Tarapur...The proper way to do this would be to have the US Congress act and hopefully change our laws, have the NSG, more particularly, act



PTI

All bonhomie between the two PMs.

— US, France, Russia — would be free to engage, at that point, in civil nuclear trade with India," US under-secretary of political affairs Nicholas Burns said on Thursday.

But Singh expressed confidence on Friday that India and Russia would utilise opportuni-

ties in the civil nuclear energy sector to give "new depth" to their strategic partnership.

Fradkov, too, had said on Thursday that the Russian decision to supply fuel to Tarapur was within "international framework". "We have served this issue within international framework and it does not contradict international commitments," he said.

Addressing a joint press meet with Fradkov after Friday's talks, Singh said, "We envision a substantial increase in the share of nuclear energy in India's overall energy mix". The Kudankulam atomic power project, being built by Russia in Tamil Nadu, was the "flagship" of Indo-Russian nuclear energy cooperation, Singh said.

India was "desperately short of hydrocarbon resources", and was interested in discussing ways of involving Russia in the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, he said. Singh had been asked whether Russia could be coopted in the project.

Fradkov said energy cooperation between India and Russia was "evolving" and any suggestion for Moscow's involvement in the pipeline project would be considered.

How the US rates India: P3

The Prime Minister must continue to remake India's place in the world by being innovative in dealing with China and Pakistan, says C. RAJA MOHAN

Walk the middle path, be neo-liberal



C. RAJA MOHAN

HOLI. BASANT. Nauroz. Spring-time arrived this week on the Indo-Gangetic plain and on its western edges from Afghanistan and Iran to the mountains and steppes of Central Asia. As this vast and turbulent region celebrates the end of winter and the beginning of a new season of hope, it should be a moment for some spring cleaning in India, especially the cluttered foreign policy cupboard.

Unless some old mind-sets are discarded, quickly, India would find the dead weight of the inherited baggage preventing it from taking full advantage of the foreign policy opportunities at hand.

The biggest concern for the government should be that the price tag for whipping up ultra-nationalism and sectarianism against the US, by the CPM and the BJP could soon show up in India's delicate negotiations with China and Pakistan.

Short-term opportunism always has long-term costs. In May 1998, the communist parties opposed the nuclear tests and demanded, much like US President Bill Clinton and the Chinese leader, Jiang Zemin, that India stop weaponisation and deployment of nuclear weapons. When President Bush was reversing Clinton's policy, the Left rallied the most hawkish forces in the country demanding an expansive military nuclear programme in the name of an "independent nuclear policy".

The BJP, which in fact offered to place 14 reactors under international safeguards, was now raising the bogey of a cap on India's nuclear programme.

Both the CPM and the BJP chose to fire their guns from the shoulders of the atomic energy establishment, which brought to the fore all the excessive fears of the foreigner

nurtured during three decades of technological isolation.

With the US largely conceding the many demands of the DAE, the scientists are now smiling and have begun to reap the first fruits of the nuclear engagement — the Russian decision to supply fuel to the Tarapur reactors.

All that the government has to say now in response to the BJP and CPM is that the "sci-

entists are happy".

Since they were not willing to pose even the most obvious questions to the scientists, the two parties now have no leg to stand upon. The tragedy is only partly about the fact that both the government and the opposition have allowed one department to define the national security parameters by projecting that science should be the faith. What about the dredging up of the worst fears about the external world, the over-determination of national security, and the pandering to ultra-nationalism and religious sectarianism?

These negative forces might look good to the CPM when dressed up as anti-imperialism. But those very forces would now undermine the effort to resolve the two most sensitive issues on the government's foreign policy agenda — the boundary question with China and the Kashmir issue with Pakistan. While chauvinism disguised as anti-imperialism

Pakistan will not succeed without tempering India's territorial nationalism and the slogans that have gone with it — sovereignty, self-reliance and deep suspicion of the outsider. The boundary talks with China and the Kashmir negotiations with Pakistan demand a conscious decision to side-step long-held notions of territorial sovereignty.

The Left is all for reconciliat-

tion to both the 1994 resolution of Parliament which stipulates that the entire J&K is part of India and the 1972 Shimla Agreement.

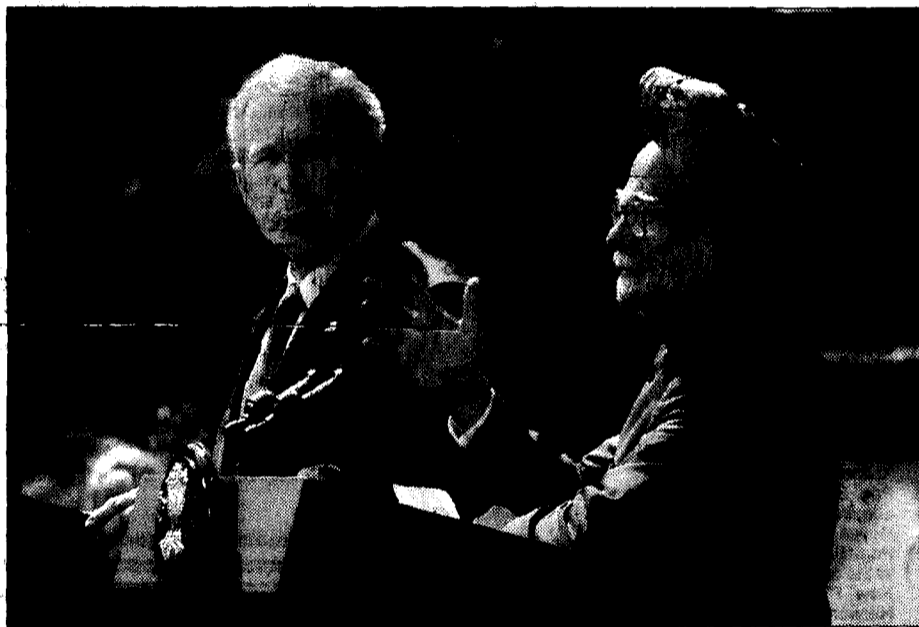
The liberals, who reject ultra-nationalism and over-blown security concerns, believe the policy changes towards China and Pakistan are welcome and long overdue. But conservatives, hawks and xenophobes, who were mobilised in droves against the nuclear deal with the US, would be the very same ones at the frontlines resisting much needed compromises with China and Pakistan.

The Left, which believes China was always right on the boundary issue, would find it hard to sell that idea to those who throw back notions of territorial sovereignty at it.

It was Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Brajesh Mishra who, by stealth, engineered a pragmatic shift in India's policies towards China and Pakistan. When the BJP back-benchers realise what Vajpayee-Mishra policies really meant, you can expect them to disown both initiatives.

Just as he got the nuclear diplomacy with the US right, Manmohan Singh should continue to take risks on foreign policy towards China and Pakistan. In the end the nuclear pact with the US was not about technical details on the nuclear separation plan. It was the marginalisation of ultra-nationalist forces by Manmohan Singh and Bush that clinched the nuclear deal. Building on the successful nuclear diplomacy, Manmohan Singh should be able to say that a rising India need no longer see itself as a besieged national security state.

That liberalism, or neo-liberalism if you will, is opening historic opportunities for the transformation of India's condition within the region and the world should be the conviction that should guide Manmohan Singh's foreign policy experimentation with China and Pakistan.



It was the marginalisation of ultra-nationalist forces by Manmohan Singh and George Bush that clinched the nuclear deal. Building on that, Dr Singh should be able to say that a rising India need no longer see itself as a besieged state

might be a cheap tactic against the faraway US, ultra-nationalism is an uncontrollable monster in the negotiations with China and Pakistan.

If the Left found it easy to tap into Muslim resentment against the US, mobilising Hindu national chauvinism against China and Pakistan is bread and butter for the BJP. Unlike the nuclear question with the US, the issues with China and Pakistan are about territory — which is at the core of modern nationalism and vulnerable to manipulation.

Negotiations with China and

ion with China and Pakistan. If negotiations with these countries are, however, put to the same scrutiny as the nuclear pact with the US, ultra-nationalism will trump them in no time.

When Parliament wakes up to read that declaration on guiding principles for the boundary settlement with China signed last April, it would find a huge departure from the Parliament resolution of 1962 that demands the return of all territories "occupied" by China.

Similarly the Kashmir talks with Pakistan are in contradic-

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CPM warns Centre, again

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 13. — Opposing the Indo-US strategic partnership and moves to introduce FDI in retail and mining sectors, the CPI-M today warned the government that the Left would join hands with other "like-minded" parties to protest the UPA's "violation" of the Common Minimum Programme on foreign and economic policy issues.

"On a number of policy matters, the UPA government is going ahead despite opposition by us and other parties. The CPI-M will work with other parties to raise these matters inside and outside Parliament and chalk out the future course of action after the Assembly elections," party general secretary Mr Prakash Karat told reporters here.

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Elaborating on the just-concluded central committee meeting, he said other Left parties, like the CPI-M, would also make an overall assessment of the political situation after the Assembly poll.

Maintaining that the party was "totally opposed" to the Indo-US strategic partnership and India's participation in the US-led democracy initiative, Mr Karat said there has been no official word as yet to object to President George Bush's statements during his visit here about "regime change" in several countries, including Iran, Cuba and Zimbabwe.

He said institutions like International Center for Democratic Transition where India would be represented "is a known CIA platform where the US agency pumps in dollars for seeking to overthrow regimes."

THE STATESMAN

PM in LS: Deal not cap on N-programme

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI | MARCH 11

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh today put up a strong defence of the Indo-US nuclear deal in the Lok Sabha, saying it had in no way compromised India's strategic nuclear programme, nor limited options for now or the future in dealing with nuclear threats.

India has not agreed to any formula that amounts to capping its strategic nuclear programme, Singh said while replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on his statement on civilian nuclear energy cooperation with the US.

Maintaining that India retained the right to determine its credible minimum nuclear deterrent, the Prime Minister said the Department of Atomic Energy, the armed forces and others had been consulted on what constituted it.

He said while Cirus reactor would be permanently shut down in 2010, only the fuel core of Apsara reactor would be shifted from Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and not the reactor itself. "We will not allow any international inspections in BARC," he asserted.

The PM said the US had given a number of assurances for uninterrupted

Govt has failed to ensure parity, claims Joshi

NEW DELHI: The Rajya Sabha witnessed a heated debate on the nuclear negotiations with the US. The debate was initiated by BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi.

M M Joshi said the government has failed to ensure parity or reciprocity in its nuclear negotiations with the US and has even compromised India's sovereignty. He said the deal does not ensure energy security as India will continue to be dependent on others for nuclear fuel. "This will increase energy dependency whereas India's strategic security will be compromised because of stringent monitoring of our nuclear facilities," Joshi said. "Americans are claiming that they have brought India under an international regime for the first time in 50 years. This is a matter of concern," he said.

CPM leader Nilotpal Basu demanded the constitution of a special parliamentary committee to discuss the issue in detail. "India's nuclear separation plan has made it clear that it is subject to the opinion of the Parliament and the public," Basu said, urging the Prime Minister to use this "exit route". He accused the government of being obsessed with nuclear energy, "the use of which is coming down the world over".

Dr Karan Singh of the Congress said the deal not only safeguarded India's present and future energy needs, but also opened gates for high technology. Singh said India, which is importing large amounts of crude oil, needs to be energy independent by developing other sources of energy including nuclear and this agreement would pave the way for it. Describing the agreement as a breakthrough, he said it will open new vistas for transfer of nuclear related and other technologies from supplier countries.

supply of nuclear material for use in civilian reactors but in case of any stoppage, the country has the "right to take corrective measures". He also assured the house that the confidentiality of the strategic programme has remained "fully protected and will remain fully protected".

Singh also dispelled apprehensions about the Indo-US deal adversely impacting on India's relations with China, Russia and other countries. He said while working towards strengthening relations with the US, India has not for-

gotten traditional friends like Russia, France and China with whom the ties are "stronger and warmer today than ever before".

"Pursuit of enlightened national interest is the dominating concern. It is this concern which has guided us in dealing with the US," he said, adding, "there is no reason to doubt that we will do anything behind the back of Parliament... We have not compromised our autonomy with regard to our strategic nuclear programme".

Besides, the separation plan under which 14 of the 22 nuclear reactors would be placed under international safeguards, he said, "does not undermine the integrity of our nuclear doctrine".

The plan "will not limit our option now or in future" or restrain India from making "appropriate responses" to any future threat.

Singh said the India-specific safeguards agreement to be negotiated with the International Atomic Energy Agency would be "unique". New Delhi "will not accept" the safeguards agreement applicable to non-nuclear weapon states, he said. "We will take all possible steps to ensure there is no adverse fallout on our research and development activities."

An informed debate please, Manmohan urges elders

VARGHESE K GEORGE
NEW DELHI | MARCH 11

DURING the Rajya Sabha debate on the Indo-US nuclear deal, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh intervened at least thrice, asking members to undertake "an informed debate".

The usually calm PM seemed agitated when BJP leader M M Joshi chided him for "discussing with junior officials of the US like Nicholas Burns". "The impression given out is that the junior US officials are discussing with India's Prime Minister," Joshi said.

Singh intervened and clarified that "Burns had no substantial talks with me... He had come for a courtesy call and I welcomed him."

A few minutes later, Joshi quoted an article written by nuclear expert A Gopalakrishnan on the ITER - International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor - and said India is being reduced to a "client state of the US."

The prime minister rose again. "These are two different things. ITER and the present nuclear deal are two different things. Let's have an informed debate on this topic," Singh said.

Manmohan Singh intervened again during Nilotpal Basu's speech. Basu said "India being co-opted into the club of nuclear haves do not change the fact that international nuclear regime is discriminatory. We are now claiming credit for being part of something we have been opposing all through."

The PM immediately responded saying India still wants a "nuclear weapons free world. Even in the July 18 statement, we have made clear our desire for a nuclear weapons-free world," the Prime Minister said.

07 April 2006 The Economic Times

PM plays peacenik on Iran impasse

PTI
NEW DELHI

SEEKING mutually acceptable compromise solutions to the Iran nuclear issue, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday said India did not favour confrontation or "coercive" measures as these would only heighten tension in the region and beyond. "We remain hopeful that solutions acceptable to all sides will be found," he said. Replying in both the Houses of the Parliament, he said there can be no two opinions that government should not take pre-determined positions or positions at the behest of other nations.

Gurudas Dasgupta, CPI, and Subrata Bose, CPI(M) had contended in the Lok Sabha that foreign policy should be guided by national interests and not based on the position of other countries. "No one can dispute it

lution adopted last month mentioned certain steps Iran and the international nuclear watchdog would be taking. "The government's approach will be based on our consistent policy of promoting efforts for a resolution of issues through dialogue and discussions," he said.

Noting that there have been discussions between Iran and Russia in the efforts to explore various options, Dr Singh, who spoke to President Vladimir Putin on Saturday night, said: "We do not favour confrontation, rhetoric or coercive measures as these only exacerbate tensions in the region and beyond." He said: "India has consistently stated that all sides must work to find mutually acceptable compromise solutions, and that confrontation should be avoided at all costs." "For this to be possible, time must be given for diplomacy to work," he said. Dr Singh said: "I think there is consen-

sus in the Parliament and in our country that confrontation is not in the interests of India or of our region."

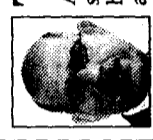
He said whenever the matter is taken up, India would work with like-minded countries, including those from NAM, for a mutually acceptable resolution of the issue. On concerns voiced by members of the adverse faction on India's relations with Tehran in the wake of New Delhi's vote against it, he said: "The government is committed to widening our diverse and mutually beneficial ties with Iran."

He said the government will continue to monitor the situation closely and deal with the Iran issue with the seriousness it merits. "In dealing with this issue, we will pay due attention to our relationship with Iran, the need to maintain peace and stability in the Gulf region and safeguarding our own security," he said.



IAEA hopeful about deal

Reuters
VIENNA



THE International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief said on Monday he hoped a deal to defuse a stand-off over Iran's nuclear aims could be reached soon, as the IAEA board met in a possible prelude to UN Security Council action. Mohamed ElBaradei cited a surge of diplomacy involving Russia and European Union (EU) powers in which Iran has offered not to pursue industrial-scale uranium enrichment for up to two years.

However, its insistence on doing sensitive research is a key sticking point. "I am still very much hopeful that in the next week or so an agreement could be reached," Mr ElBaradei said. He acknowledged that Russia's proposal to enrich uranium for Iran had snagged.

অবস্থানে অনড় থেকেই জয় মনমোহনের

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

৪ মার্চ: যে বিরোধী শিবির কথায় কথায় তাঁকে বলত 'দুর্বল' প্রধানমন্ত্রী, ভারত-মার্কিন পরমাণু চুক্তি পাকা হওয়ার পরে সেই বিজেপিকেই এখন চোঁক গিলতে হচ্ছে। একই রকম অস্বস্তিতে পড়েছেন বাম নেতারাও। এই ভাবে বিস্তর ঝুঁকি নিয়েও ভারতের শর্তে রাজি হয়ে চুক্তি করতে যে প্রেসিডেন্ট বুশ রাজি হয়ে যাবেন, এতটা আগাম ভাবেননি বাম নেতৃত্বও।

আর তাই এক নিমেষে 'দুর্বল' প্রধানমন্ত্রী হয়ে উঠেছেন অরণ্যদেবের মতো শক্তিশালী। অতীতের দীর্ঘ ঠান্ডা যুদ্ধের কুপমত্বকতা ভেঙে দিয়ে মনমোহন সিংহ যে ভাবে ভারতকে এক লহমায় পরমাণু শক্তির রাষ্ট্রের শীর্ষ তালিকায় স্বীকৃতি পাইয়ে দিয়েছেন, তাতে সামগ্রিক ভাবে গোটা সরকারের ভাবমূর্তি উজ্জ্বলই হয়েছে।

বুশকে স্বাগত জানানোর জন্য প্রথা ভেঙে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বিমানবন্দরে যাওয়া নিয়ে বামেরা যতই সমালোচনা করুন, বস্তুত প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাজ শুরু হয়েছিল সেখানেই। দু'দেশের শীর্ষ প্রশাসনিক কর্মীদের ভিড়ে দাঁড়িয়ে বুশ-মনমোহনের আলাপচারিতার বিষয়বস্তু মোটেই হালকা ছিল না। অবশ্য দু'জনকে দেখে তখন সে রকমই মনে হয়েছিল। আসলে মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব কন্ডোলিজা রাইস ফোনে যে সব শর্তের কথা বলেছিলেন, তাই মোটেই গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়, সে কথা বিমানবন্দরেই মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্টকে জানিয়ে দেন মনমোহন। এবং শেষ পর্যন্ত প্রেসিডেন্টের ইচ্ছার কাছে হার মানে মার্কিন প্রশাসনের জেদ। কিন্তু বিমানবন্দরেই গোটা ব্যাপারটি সুনিশ্চিত করার কৃতিত্ব অবশ্যই দাবি করতে পারেন মনমোহন সিংহ।

এ সপ্তাহেই সংসদে পরমাণু চুক্তি নিয়ে বিবৃতি দেবেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। পরমাণু নিরস্ত্রীকরণ চুক্তিতে সই না করেও, ফাস্ট ব্রিডার রিঅ্যাক্টরকে অসামরিক তালিকাভুক্ত না করেও, কী ভাবে বুশকে মার্কিন আইন বদলাতে বাধ্য করেছেন— মনমোহন যখন সংসদে দাঁড়িয়ে সে কথা বলবেন, তখন শুধু বিজেপি কেন, বাম নেতৃত্বের পক্ষেও

তার বিরোধিতা করা কঠিন হবে। বিজেপি জমানাতেই অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী এবং ব্রজেশ মিশ্র এই পরমাণু চুক্তি নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করেছিলেন। কিন্তু তাকে চূড়ান্ত রূপ দিলেন মনমোহন সিংহ। গত জুলাইয়ে খসড়া চুক্তি করতে আমেরিকা পাড়ি দেওয়ার আগেও ব্রজেশ মিশ্রের সঙ্গে বৈঠক করেছিলেন মনমোহন। এ বারও বুশের সফরের আগে তিনি কথা বলেছিলেন বাজপেয়ী, যশোবন্ত সিংহ, ব্রজেশ মিশ্র এবং আডবাবীর সঙ্গে। তাই বিজেপি নেতা মুরলীমনোহর জোশী প্রথম দিনেই বিবৃতি দিয়ে পরমাণু চুক্তিকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছেন। আর দলের মুখপাত্র সুবমা স্বরাজ বলেছেন, প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বিবৃতি দেখে দল আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে বক্তব্য জানাবে।

একই অবস্থায় বাম নেতৃত্বেরও। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বিবৃতির খুঁটিনাটি দেখার জন্য তাঁরাও উৎসুক। সোমবারই আবার ইরান প্রশ্নে আন্তর্জাতিক পরমাণু সংস্থায় ভোটাভুটি হওয়ার কথা। সে ক্ষেত্রে ভারত ফের কী অবস্থান নেয়, সেটাও তাঁরা দেখতে চান।

অবশ্য বাম নেতৃত্ব এই মুহূর্তে যতটা বুশ ও আমেরিকার সমালোচনায় মুখর, ইরান প্রশ্নে কেন্দ্রের বিরোধিতায় যতটা ব্যস্ত, পরমাণু চুক্তি নিয়ে মনমোহনের সমালোচনায় কিন্তু ততটা সরব নন। বাঙ্গালোরে সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি আজ বলেছেন, "চুক্তির ব্যাপারে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বিবৃতির জন্য আমরা অপেক্ষা করছি।" তবে সেই সঙ্গে তিনি বলতে ভোলেননি, "চুক্তির ব্যাপারে বামেরদের উদ্বেগের কারণগুলি নিয়ে সরকার যদি সতর্ক হয়ে থাকে, তা হলে সরকারের বিপদের কোনও কারণ নেই।" এই চুক্তি 'ততটা ক্ষতিকর নয়' বলেই এখন ইয়েচুরি মনে করছেন।

আর্থিক সংস্কারের সূচনা করে মনমোহনই অর্থনীতিতে নয়া মোড় এনেছিলেন। অধিকাংশ কূটনীতিকের মতে, এ বার বিদেশনীতিকেও তিনি সাবালক করে তুলতে চান। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর উপদেষ্টা সঞ্জয় বাডুর কথায়, যে দিন মনমোহন আর্থিক সংস্কারের ধ্বজা উড়িয়েছিলেন, সে দিনও অনেকে সন্দ্বিগ্ন ছিলেন। 'গোল গোল' রব তুলেছিলেন। পরে তাঁরাও কিন্তু

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়



অবস্থানে অনড় থেকেই জয় মনমোহনের

প্রথম পাতার পর

বুকেছিলেন, সার্বভৌমত্ব জলাঞ্জলি দেননি মনমোহন। এ বারও যারা সার্বভৌমত্ব বিপন্ন হচ্ছে বলে অভিযোগ করছেন, তাঁরা ভালই জানেন, মনমোহন তা হতে দেননি।

শুধু বাম বা বিজেপি নয়, কংগ্রেসের বেশ কিছু নেতার মনেও আশঙ্কা ছিল। অর্জুন সিংহের মতো নেতারা সংখ্যালঘু ভোট হারানোর ভয় পাচ্ছিলেন। একই আশঙ্কা ব্যক্ত করেছিলেন লালু প্রসাদ, রামবিলাসের মতো শরিক মন্ত্রীরাও। অনেকেই বলছিলেন, বুশ 'ইসলাম বিরোধী' এমন একটা ধারণা প্রচলিত। সেই বুশের সঙ্গে চুক্তি করায় মনমোহনকেও 'মুসলিম বিরোধী' বলে চিহ্নিত করতে পারেন সংখ্যালঘুরা। বুশের সফর নিয়ে সংখ্যালঘু ভাস খেলে অনেক আগেই কংগ্রেস বিরোধিতায় নেমে পড়েছিলেন মুলায়ম সিংহও। প্রধানমন্ত্রী কিন্তু সে দিনই সহকর্মীদের বলে দিয়েছিলেন, বিদেশনীতিকে কেউ সাম্প্রদায়িকতার প্রিজমে ফেলাবেন না। বরং মনমোহন বুশের সঙ্গে বৈঠকের জন্য লখনউ থেকে মুসলিম নেতাদের আমন্ত্রণ জানিয়ে দিল্লি এনেছিলেন।

মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট আসার এক দিন আগে জামায়েত উলোমা-ই-ইন্দের মতো সংগঠন রামলীলা ময়দানে সমাবেশ করে সরকার বিরোধী অসন্তোষ ব্যক্ত করে। সংগঠনটি গত বছর মে মাসে একটি বড় জনসমাবেশ করেছিল, যাতে সনিয়া গাঁধী নিজে হাজির ছিলেন। জামায়েতের প্রধান মৌলানা সঈদ আসাদ মাদানি সে দিন সংসদে এবং বিধানভায় মুসলিমদের আনুষ্ঠানিক প্রতিনিধিত্বের দাবি জানিয়েছিলেন। সনিয়াও মৌলানার পরে বক্তৃতা দিতে গিয়ে সেই দাবি মানার প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়েছিলেন।

পাঁচ রাজ্যে বিধানসভা নির্বাচনের মুখে মনমোহনের উপরে রাজনৈতিক চাপও কিছু কম ছিল না। কিন্তু এত সব ওজর-আপত্তি তোয়াক্কা না করে পরমাণু চুক্তি পাকা করার সঙ্কল্প থেকে এক চুলও পিছু হটেননি প্রধানমন্ত্রী। তাই এ যেন এক নতুন মনমোহন সিংহ। তাঁর রাজনৈতিক রূপান্তর। আমেরিকার সঙ্গে ঠান্ডা যুদ্ধের অবসানের পরে সম্পর্ক ভাল করাটা যে কূটনৈতিক বাধ্যবাধকতা, তা তিনি বোঝেন। তাই তাঁর ছুতমার্গ সেই। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ঘনিষ্ঠ এক কূটনীতিকের ভাষায়, স্থালিনের সঙ্গে ভারতের বোঝাপড়ায় সমস্যা হয়নি। যদিও তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে বহু মানুষকে হত্যার অভিযোগ ছিল। একই ভাবে মাও জে দংয়ের সঙ্গেও বোঝাপড়ায় পিছপা হয়নি ভারত। ভূট্টোর সঙ্গেও সিমলা চুক্তি করেছিলেন ইন্দিরা। ভূট্টোর বিরুদ্ধেও অভিযোগ ছিল বহু পাক জেনারেলকে হত্যার। কাগিল যুদ্ধের পরে বাজপেয়ী মুশারফের সঙ্গে আগরা বৈঠক করেছিলেন। তা হলে আমেরিকার সঙ্গে বোঝাপড়াতেই বা বাধা কোথায়? বরং পৃথিবীর সব থেকে শক্তিশালী দেশের সঙ্গে সুসম্পর্ক গড়ে তোলাতেই ভারতের লাভ।

সংসদের অধিবেশন শুরু হলে বিরোধীরা কী ভাবে এই 'শক্তিশালী' মনমোহনের সোকাবিলা করেন, সেটাই এখন দেখার।

0 MLU

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Govt pledges more for poor, banks on growth

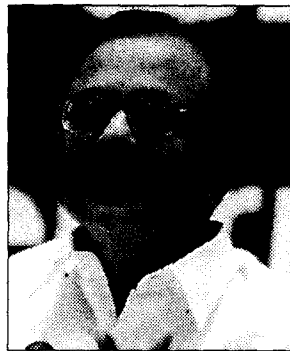
of Rs 1,72,728 crore and non-plan expenditure of Rs 3,91,263 crore. With total expenditure pegged at Rs 5,63,991 crore, revenue collections are estimated at Rs 4,03,465 crore and revenue expenditure at Rs 4,88,192 crore.

Consequently, revenue deficit is estimated at Rs 84,727 crore, which is 2.1 per cent of GDP. The fiscal deficit is estimated at 1,48,686 crore, which is 3.8 per cent GDP, returning back to adhering to the FRBM target of reducing revenue and fiscal deficits by 0.5 and 0.3 per cent of GDP annually.

Providing a number of innovative measures to boost agriculture and rural development, Chidambaram announced concessional interest of seven per cent for short-term loans taken by farmers for kharif and rabi crops. This will cost the exchequer Rs 1700 crore in 2006-07.

Abolishing the one-by-six scheme for mandatory filing of income tax returns, he recast the provisions relating to savings. Fixed deposits of more than five years in banks will now be brought under Section 80 C of the Income Tax Act. He also removed the limit of Rs 10,000 in respect of pension fund contributions under Section 80 CCC subject to overall ceiling of Rs one lakh.

Chidambaram said the government was determined to boost the rate of economic expansion to 10 percent in coming years from an estimated 8.1 percent in the current fiscal year. "The assault on poverty and unemployment continues. I believe that growth is the best antidote to



poverty," he told Parliament.

Markets mostly liked the budget. The Sensex, which hit a record at the start of trade, was nearly one per cent up on the day. The rupee was firm against the dollar but the yield on the benchmark 10-year government bond rose on the prospect of slightly higher net borrowing. Analysts also welcomed government measures to improve India's weak infrastructure and promote consumption. Progress in both areas is seen as key to growth.

"It is a budget for the long-term investor in the Indian economy," said Uday Kotak, Executive Vice-Chairman and Managing Director, Kotak Mahindra Bank.

Chidambaram set a fiscal deficit target of 3.8 percent of gross domestic product for the next fiscal year which, if achieved, will be the lowest since economic reforms began in 1991. He said the 2005/06 deficit would come in lower than expected at 4.1 percent.

He said the government had focused on fiscal prudence in the financial year ending March 31. "However, our success should not tempt us to stray from this path and we shall not do so."

— (With agencies)

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INDIAN EXPRESS

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THE EXPRESS

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Govt pledges more for poor, banks on growth



The Numbers

- ▶ Fiscal Deficit beats target by 0.2%, closing at 4.1%; so does Revenue Deficit, by 0.1%, closing at 2.6%
- ▶ Corporate Tax, Excise Duty receipts miss target by Rs 16,533 crore
- ▶ Income Tax receipts meet target
- ▶ Service tax collections beat target by Rs 5,500 crore
- ▶ Government aims to raise GDP growth to 10%

REFORMS

- ▶ Roadmap for Goods and Services Tax set, it's April 1, 2010
- ▶ Introduces a tax expenditure statement that will annually map revenue forgone for all kinds of exemptions
- ▶ Exemptions for Customs as well as Excise tariffs set to go
- ▶ A single, unified exchange trade market for corporate bonds in the works
- ▶ Increases Fil limit in government securities from \$1.75 billion to \$2 billion; on corporate debt from \$0.5 billion to \$1.5 billion
- ▶ Mutual Funds can now invest \$2 billion overseas, requirement of 10% reciprocal shareholding removed. MFIs can also invest \$1 billion in overseas exchange traded funds

SOCIAL SECTOR

- ▶ 43% increase in allocation to UPA's 8 flagship schemes, to Rs 50,015 crore. Specifically, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme gets Rs 14,300 crore
- ▶ Allocation for education up 31.5 per cent to Rs 24,115 cr; and for health Rs 12,546 crore, an increase of 22%



- ▶ Girl child who clears Class 8 will have Rs 3,000 deposited in her name, which can be withdrawn when she turns 18
- ▶ Focus on North-East: 18% increase in allocation, to Rs 12,041 cr

COMPANY/MARKET

- ▶ No change in Corporate Tax rates, but Minimum Alternate Tax rates up from 7.5% to 10%
- ▶ Peak Customs Duty for non-agricultural products reduced from 15% to 12.5%; a countervailing duty of 4% on most imports to address India Inc's fears of being swamped
- ▶ An across-the-board increase in Securities Transaction Tax (STT) by 25 basis points
- ▶ All services get more expensive: Service Tax rate up to 12%, new services included
- ▶ Fringe Benefit Tax modified, rate on travel and tour down, free medical samples exempted, Rs 1 lakh exemption for contribution to superannuation fund
- ▶ Cash Withdrawal Tax to stay



AGRICULTURE

- ▶ Farm credit raised to Rs 175,000 crore as against Rs 141,500 crore last year, covering an additional 50 lakh farmers
- ▶ Farmers to get short-term credit at 7% interest rate
- ▶ 58 per cent of allocated resources to go towards irrigation sector

THE CONSUMER

- ▶ No changes in personal income tax; interest on five-year fixed deposits to be included under deductions in Section 80C

- ▶ One-By-Six scheme to expand tax net has been abolished

- ▶ CHEAPER: Soft-drinks; small cars; footwear; pasta; condensed milk; package and instant food mixes; meat; fish; poultry; computer storage devices like DVD drives, printing and writing paper, LPG stoves; fluorescent lamps; MP3 players



- ▶ COSTLIER: Cigarettes, international air travel (business class and above), cruises, goggles, folders, diaries, internet telephony, share transfer, money transfer



তৈরি হচ্ছে সংঘাতের নয় ফ্রেত্র

শ্রম সংস্কার হবেই, ইঙ্গিত চিদম্বরমের

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি: কাল বাজেট আর তার আগের দিনই আর্থিক সমীক্ষায় বামেদের উদ্দেশে নতুন চ্যালেঞ্জ ছুড়ে দিলেন পি চিদম্বরম।

আজ অর্থমন্ত্রীর পেশ করা এই সমীক্ষায় আর্থিক খুঁটিনাটির পাশাপাশি যে-সম্প্রদায় স্পষ্ট, তা হল রাজনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রে বামেদের থেকে আরও দূরে সরে গিয়েছেন তিনি। দেশের সমৃদ্ধির উঁচু হার ধরে রাখতে এ বার তাঁর আর পাঁচটা দাওয়াইয়ের সঙ্গে রয়েছে শ্রম সংস্কার ও শিল্পের উপর করের বোঝা কমানো। শ্রম সংস্কারের ক্ষেত্রে তিনি আবার চিনের প্রসঙ্গ টেনেছেন। সমীক্ষায় বলা হয়েছে, এ বার শ্রমের বাজার সংস্কারের প্রয়োজন। অতীতে চিনে শ্রমিকদের কর্ম-নিরাপত্তার উপর জোর দেওয়া হত। কিন্তু আজ নতুন চিনে নতুন নিয়মে প্রয়োজন মতো শ্রম ব্যবহারে সক্ষম শিল্প সংস্থাগুলি বাড়তি কর্মী রাখার দায় নেই তাদের।

স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই কালকের বাজেটে চিদম্বরমের এই মনোভাবেরই প্রতিফলন দেখা যাবে বলে ধরে নেওয়া যায়। আর এই দুটি ক্ষেত্রেই বামেদের মত হল সম্পূর্ণ বিপরীত। তাঁরা শ্রম সংস্কারের বিরোধী ও 'ধনী'দের উপর আরও কর বসানোর পক্ষপাতী। কর আদায় কী ভাবে বাড়ানো যায়, তার বিভিন্ন পথও তাঁরা বাতলেছিলেন, যেখানে মূল বিষয়ই ছিল করছাড় না-দেওয়া ও করের পরিমাণ বাড়ানো। এ ছাড়া, বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ নিয়ে বামেদের আপত্তি সামলানোর চ্যালেঞ্জ চিদম্বরমের সামনে।

এই পরিস্থিতিতে কাল বাজেট পেশ করবেন তিনি। তাঁর যেমন রয়েছে বাজার অর্থনীতিকে আরও এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার দায়, তেমনই বামেদের হাতে রয়েছে ব্রহ্মাস্ত্র—লোকসভায় শাটটি ভোট।

বাজেটের দু'মাস আগে সরকার ও বামেদের মধ্যে বাজেট নিয়ে কিছুটা বোঝাপড়া গড়ে উঠেছিল। দু'পক্ষের মধ্যে আরও আলোচনার কথা ছিল। কিন্তু ইরান ও পরমাণু প্রসঙ্গ চলে আসার পর সমন্বয় কমিটির গত বারের বিতর্কিত বৈঠকে যেমন বাজেট আলোচিত হয়নি, তেমনই তার পরেও অর্থমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বাম নেতাদের আর বৈঠক হয়নি। সেই শূন্যতার মধ্যে চিদম্বরম আরও বেশি আঁকড়ে ধরেছেন শ্রম সংস্কারের মতো বিতর্কিত বিষয়, আর বামেরা অপেক্ষা করে দেখছেন সরকার বাজেট কী করে।

সরকারের এই মনোভাব নিয়ে প্রশ্ন করায় সি পি এমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাটি আজ বলেন, "মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার তো এ সব কথাই বলবে। কিন্তু এই সব বিষয় তো সরকারকে সংসদে পাশ করাতে হবে। আমাদের সমর্থন ছাড়া সেগুলি কী ভাবে পাশ হবে, সেটাও তো ওদের ভেবে দেখতে হবে।" সরকার যে বিজেপির সমর্থন নিয়ে তা করতে পারে, সেই বিষয়টি উল্লেখ করলে তিনি বলেন, "সেটা সরকার করে দেখুক না।"

কারাটের এই মনোভাব বাজেটের ক্ষেত্রেও প্রযোজ্য হলে অবশ্য সরকারের সামনে কাল বাজেটে খুব বেশি বুকি নেওয়া সম্ভব হবে না। সিপিএম সূত্রের খবর, সরকার করের ক্ষেত্রে কী করছে, তার চেয়েও বড় প্রশ্ন হল সামাজিক প্রকল্পগুলিতে যথেষ্ট টাকা তারা বরাদ্দ করছে কি না। অর্থমন্ত্রীর সামনে এখন এটাই সবচেয়ে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ। কী ভাবে তিনি করের বোঝা না-বাড়িয়ে ও লাভজনক রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব সংস্থার বিলম্বিতকরণ না-করে সামাজিক প্রকল্পে আরও টাকা ঢালবেন, তা তাঁর কালকের বাজেটে বোঝা যাবে। কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী সনিয়া গান্ধীও কিন্তু চিদম্বরমকে কর আদায় বাড়িয়ে সামাজিক প্রকল্পে টাকা

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

বাম-বিক্ষোভ বন্ধের আর্জি সোমনাথকে

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি: বাজেটের চব্বিশ ঘণ্টা আগে স্পিকার সোমনাথ চট্টোপাধ্যায়ের সঙ্গে দেখা করলেন চিদম্বরম। অর্থমন্ত্রীর সনির্বন্ধ অনুরোধ, কাল লোকসভায় যেন তুমুল সঙ্ঘাতের পথে না যান বামেরা।

স্পিকার তাঁকে জানিয়েছেন, লোকসভা যাতে নির্বিঘ্নে চলে, তা দেখার দায়িত্ব তাঁরই। কিন্তু বাজেট প্রসঙ্গে দলগত অবস্থান কী হবে, সেটা কোনও ব্যক্তির বিষয় নয়। শুধু চিদম্বরম নন, সনিয়া গান্ধীর নির্দেশে তাঁর রাজনৈতিক সচিব আহমেদ পটেল একই ভাবে সিপিএম নেতাদের সঙ্গে আজ একই উদ্দেশ্যে আলোচনা চালিয়েছেন। অর্থ মন্ত্রক সূত্রে এ খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে।

সোমনাথবাবু অসুস্থ হয়ে কয়েকদিন হাসপাতালে ভর্তি ছিলেন। বাড়ি ফিরেছেন কাল। অসুস্থতার পরে মঙ্গলবারই প্রথম তিনি কাজে যোগ দিলেন। প্রধানমন্ত্রী, সনিয়া গান্ধী ও অন্য কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রীরা অনেকেই স্পিকারের সঙ্গে দেখা করেছেন, আরোগ্য কামনায়। কিন্তু বাজেটের ঠিক আগের দিনে অর্থমন্ত্রীর আকস্মিক আগমন রাজনৈতিক দিক থেকেও যথেষ্ট তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ।

এ বারের বাজেট নিয়ে বেশ কিছু দিন থেকেই চিদম্বরম চাপের মধ্যে আছেন। বাম নেতৃত্ব তাঁর সঙ্গে বৈঠক করে এক ডজন দাবি পেশ করেন। আবার শিল্পমহল থেকে আরও একগুচ্ছ দাবি পেশ করা হয়। মাত্র কয়েক দিন আগে চিদম্বরম বণিকসভার এক কর্তাকে বলেন, এই দুটি তালিকার মধ্যে কোনও মধ্যপন্থা বেরোতে পারে না। একটা মানলে অন্যটা মানা যায় না। কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব আজ বাম নেতাদেরও বুঝিয়েছেন, চিদম্বরমের পক্ষে সংস্কারের পথ থেকে সরাসরি অসম্ভব। অর্থমন্ত্রী নিজেও বাম নেতাদের বোঝান, সব চেয়ে বেশি রাজস্ব আসে কর্পোরেট সেক্টর থেকে। সুতরাং সেই ক্ষেত্রটির উন্নয়নকে অবহেলা করে বাজেট করা সম্ভব নয়।

চিদম্বরম অবশ্য যতই অনুরোধ করুন, বাম নেতৃত্ব কিন্তু বাজেট নিয়ে সরকারের সমালোচনায় মুখর হওয়ার জন্য সব রকম প্রস্তুতি নিয়ে রেখেছেন। তবে অর্থনীতির চেয়েও কৌশলগত ভাবে বেশি অগ্রাধিকার দেওয়া হচ্ছে মার্কিন-বিরোধিতার প্রসঙ্গে। এ দিকে, সরকারও প্রথম দিকে যে ভাবে বাম নেতৃত্বের চাপের কাছে নতিস্বীকার করছিল, এখন আর তা করছে না। ফলে ভেলের প্রসঙ্গে বাম নেতৃত্ব আন্দোলন করে যে সাফল্য পেয়েছিল, তা বিমানবন্দরের বেসরকারিকরণ অথবা ইরান প্রসঙ্গে পায়নি। বিধানসভা নির্বাচনের আগে সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে বাম দলগুলি আরও বেশি করে সঙ্ঘাতের পথে যাওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে। অন্য দিকে, কংগ্রেসের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বের সিদ্ধান্ত, বামেদের সঙ্গে তাঁরা একশো বার আলোচনায় বসতে রাজি, বার বার অনুরোধ করতে প্রস্তুত, কিন্তু তারা রাজি না হলে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত সরকার নেবে। এই কঠোর অবস্থানে বাম নেতৃত্ব পাল্টা কৌশল কী নেবে, সেটা এখনও চূড়ান্ত নয়। দলের মধ্যেও এ ব্যাপারে নানা মূনির নানা মত আছে। পলিটবুরোর বৈঠক বসার কথা মার্চের দ্বিতীয় সপ্তাহে। সেখানে এ ব্যাপারে চূড়ান্ত রণকৌশল স্থির হবে।

এ বারের বাজেট রূপায়ণে অবশ্য শুধু অর্থমন্ত্রী নন, বিশেষ ভাবে সক্রিয় ছিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অর্থনৈতিক উপদেষ্টা সি রঙ্গরাজন এবং যোজনা কমিশনের ডেপুটি চেয়ারম্যান মর্টেক সিংহ অহলুওয়ালিয়া। সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতার প্রসঙ্গে আগ্রহ দেখালেও এরা কেউই সরকারের সংস্কারের অভিমুখ বদলাতে রাজি নন।



More gap now between Government, Left: Bardhan

"Stability of the Government hinges on adherence to common minimum programme"

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Admitting that the gap between the Government and the Left parties had "widened" over the past few months, the Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary A. B. Bardhan on Sunday said, the "stability and longevity" of the present dispensation would depend on its "strict adherence to the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP)."

Further, he accused the Government of taking unilateral decisions — particularly on issues relating to the economy and foreign policy — and said the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-Left coordination committee meetings had been turned into an exercise akin to a "post-mortem." On the foreign policy front, the CPI charge is that the Government was toeing the line taken by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). "The NDA foreign policy was not only tilting towards the U.S. but also surrendering to it."

Briefing mediapersons after a daylong meeting of the CPI national executive — called specifically to review the performance of the Government over the past 20 months — Mr. Bardhan said,

- Government toeing the line of NDA in foreign policy
- CPI would pin the government to its commitment
- Would oppose FDI in retail sector

"we want to stay in [this arrangement] but it is not our job alone to keep the UPA in power."

Also, he laid down the basic measures the Government ought to take to ensure its longevity. These include introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill in its original form besides the Unorganised Workers' Bill and a separate legislation for agricultural workers; accepting the Left parties' amendments to 'The Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2005'; and

withdrawal of the proposed move to introduce Foreign Direct Investment in the retail sector.

Making an oblique reference to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's comment in the Lok Sabha on some members having a greater concern for organised workers while reiterating his Government's commitment to all workers in all sectors of the economy — which CPI member Gurudas Dasgupta immediately stated was a dig at the Left par-

ties — Mr. Bardhan said: "if this is so, then we want to pin the Government to this commitment."

However, Mr. Bardhan refused to set a time limit for the Government to implement the basic steps the CPI wants it to take to ensure its longevity. To a specific question on how much time the CPI was willing to give the Government for meeting its demands, he said, "let us see how they respond."

The national executive also adopted a resolution on the Railway Budget and described it as "disappointing if not highly distressing" as its thrust "appears to be in the direction of privatisation, outsourcing, and catering mainly to the needs of the affluent middle-class."

"Modi has lost moral right to continue"

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party of India on Sunday said the Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat had lost the moral right to continue in office after its indictment by a Mumbai Sessions Court in the Best Bakery case. A resolution to this effect was

passed by the national executive of the party which met here.

In view of the twists and turns of the Best Bakery case, the CPI is also of the view that other major cases of the Gujarat carnage of 2002 — particularly the Nadia Patia and Gulmarg Housing Society killings — should also be independently investigated by

Central Government agencies and trials transferred to courts outside Gujarat.

The national executive also adopted a resolution on the Jessica Lal murder case and demanded that the Delhi police reopen the trial and set up mechanism of investigation to bring the guilty to book.

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THE HINDU

Lalu Discovers AC's Cool

Trains Sights On High-Fliers | Offers Off-Season Discounts

By Shankar Raghuraman/TIG

New Delhi: Lalu Prasad may have built his political career on emotive pitches to the "garib", but his budget on Friday has plenty of goodies for the well-heeled, aimed at wooing them away from airlines.

He, therefore, took the unprecedented step of slashing first class AC fares by up to 26% and AC 2-tier fares by up to 30%, while leaving second class fares largely untouched. On average, first class AC fares will drop 18% and AC 2-tier fares by 10%.

The strategy is based on the "increase volumes-reduce unit costs" mantra that has served the railways handsomely in 2005-06, leaving it with a record fund balance of Rs 11,280 crore. The strategy — helped by the boom in the economy and in exports — also meant that almost 16 paise of every rupee earned through freight and passenger traffic was

available after taking care of working expenses, a far cry from only five years ago when just a little more than a paisa for every rupee was left over after covering routine expenses.

Buoyed by healthy finances, Lalu has offered off-season discounts for passengers between January 15 and April 15 and then from July 15 to September, though there is a flip side to that — you might have to pay more during peak season.

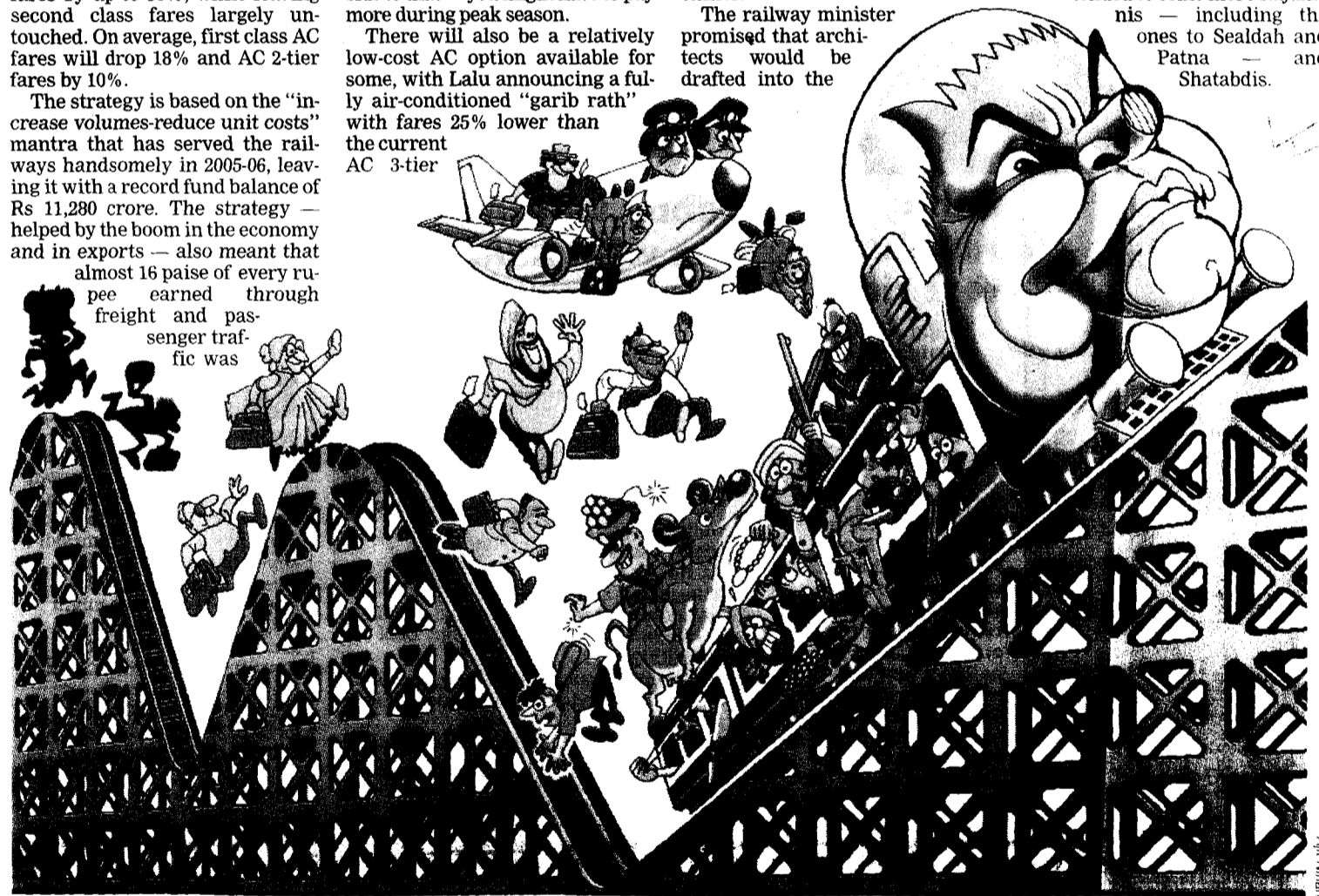
There will also be a relatively low-cost AC option available for some, with Lalu announcing a fully air-conditioned "garib rath" with fares 25% lower than the current AC 3-tier

rates. This, however, will start only as a pilot project on four yet-to-be-announced routes.

Among other good news for passengers is the fact that charges levied for issuing e-tickets will come down and i-tickets and e-tickets can also be bought through rail travel service agents. The Mumbai suburban area will also have 200 automatic ticket-vending machines.

The railway minister promised that architects would be drafted into the

task of making stations more beautiful, comfortable and modern-looking. If you happen to travel on the Taj Express, Sampurn Kranti Express, Vrindavan Express or Vaishali Express, you could check out the new coaches with "world class passenger amenities and interiors". The LHB coaches now used on the Delhi-Lucknow Shatabdi and Mumbai Rajdhani will be extended to some more Rajdhani — including the ones to Sealdah and Patna — and Shatabdis.



Clock ticks on N-deal, Iran rows

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 22: The government urgently wants to placate the Left on the Iran vote and Indo-US nuclear pact, but is struggling to find the time before President George W. Bush's visit.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made his Iran statement in both Houses on February 20 and will make one on the nuclear deal on February 27. But it's unclear if he can concede the second and tougher part of the Left's demand — for clarifications on his statements.

The Lok Sabha lacks a rule allowing members to ask questions on a minister's statement, but the Rajya Sabha has one. Often, it is the question-answer session that throws light on the stickier aspects of an issue, drawing the government out on areas concealed or glossed over in a statement.

Given the political implications of Iran and the nuke deal, the Left expects to get more out of the Prime Minister's clarifications than his statements.

An earlier schedule, drawn up by the business advisory committees and parliamentary affairs minister P.R. Das Munshi, had slated a discussion on Iran for February 23 in both Houses, leaving enough time for clarifications.

The assumption was that Parliament would have finished its other crucial pre-budget business — adopting

the motion of thanks on the President's address — today. This exercise is preceded by speeches from the leaders of the Opposition and the Prime Minister's reply.

But L.K. Advani, leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, upset the timetable by insisting he needed an hour for his speech. So, Advani's speech and the Prime Minister's reply were put off for tomorrow (the Upper House covered the motion today).

The Iran discussion will begin immediately after that. Das Munshi said there would be no question or zero hours and no lunch break either. But because every political party has lined up one or more speakers, sources said, the proceedings may drag on till late at night and it wasn't certain if the Prime Minister could give his clarifications in the Upper House.

"There is no hard-and-fast rule that clarifications must be given immediately (after a statement). So it doesn't matter when the PM replies," a source said.

Ditto for the nuke pact statement. Singh will make it on February 27 after the economic survey is tabled.

The Union budget will be presented on February 28. The House can resume business after this, but the Centre wants the budget to hold complete sway on Tuesday.

After that, Bush would be in India. "We hope the Left would not demand the Prime Minister's clarifications when Bush is here," the source said.

THE TELEGRAPH

PM says no to Mulford recall

Stateaman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 22. — In a friendly, diplomatic gesture, seen as India's determination not to vitiate the atmosphere ahead of the visit of the US President George W Bush, the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, today made it clear that there was no question of recall of the US ambassador Mr David Mulford on account of his recent remarks. He rejected the demand for Mr Mulford's recall, mainly made by the Left supporters, but sought to commiserate with them, saying that he "shared the sentiments of the members" (Left parties).

He dismissed criticism over the Muslim head count in the Armed Forces and the charge of appeasement by creation of a separate ministry for minority affairs. He also deprecated attempts to play politics over the cartoon issue and asked parties to exercise "utmost restraint". He was replying to a three-day discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the motion of thanks to the President's address. The motion was adopted by the House by voice vote.

About the alleged move for a head count of Muslims in the Armed Forces, Dr Singh asserted that the forces would continue to remain "apolitical, secular, professional and merit-based". He denied the charge of minority appeasement by the creation of a separate ministry of minority affairs. In a democracy

the government must be committed to welfare of weaker sections, he pointed out. There was need for "relevant data" about welfare of minorities and the Rajindar Sachar Committee's questionnaire in this regard was an "academic exercise" for better targeting of development programmes, he said.

"We assure the House that the Armed Forces will continue to remain apolitical, secular, professional and merit-based", he said alluding to the BJP's criticism that such a move would lead to communalisation of forces. "We are committed to the welfare of minorities and their social and economic development," he said.

"We have the greatest respect for all religions. India's commitment to tolerance is unshakable but statements by some sections of our people are not acceptable. I am sure all political and religious leaders would do nothing to inflame public opinion and exercise utmost restraint in a democratic way to make our point of view reasonably restrained." His apparent allusion was to a statement by a Uttar Pradesh minister who had offered a reward of Rs 51 crore and gold to anyone killing the Danish cartoonist.

He also dismissed charges that his government was deviating from the National Common Minimum Programme and asserted the UPA coalition stood by it. His scheduled reply in the Lok Sabha was postponed to tomorrow.

‘পাকিস্তান’ তাস খেললেন মনমোহন

৯-১০-১৯৭৭

ইরান-প্রশ্নে ফের

বেকাযদায় বামেরা

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি: ইরান-প্রশ্নে আর এক প্রস্তু কোণঠাসা হতে হল বামেদের। এ বার পাকিস্তান-প্রসঙ্গ ব্যবহার করে তাদের বিরত করে তুললেন মনমোহন সিংহ।

রাষ্ট্রপতির বক্তৃতাতাই গত কাল যথেষ্ট ইঙ্গিত ছিল। আর সেই পথে হেঁটেই ইরান-প্রশ্নে সরকারের অবস্থান কেন নির্ভুল, সংসদে তা সবিস্তার ব্যাখ্যা করলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। পাকিস্তানের পাচার করা প্রযুক্তির সাহায্যে ইরানের পরমাণু শক্তিধর হয়ে ওঠার বিপদের কথা বুঝিয়ে মনমোহন ফের বামেদের প্যাঁচে ফেলে দিলেন। ভোটের আগে তাতে বেশ ভালই অস্থিতি বাড়ল বামেদের। অস্থিতিতে পড়ে বামেরা আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বক্তব্যের স্পষ্ট জবাবও দেয়নি।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী আজ দু’টি কথা স্পষ্ট করেই জানিয়েছেন। এক, পরমাণু অস্ত্রপ্রসার রোধ চুক্তির শরিক হয়েও ইরান তাদের বিভিন্ন কাজকর্মের কথা গোপন করে নানা সংশয়ের জন্ম দিয়েছে। তাদের এই গোপন কাজকর্মের মধ্যে এমন সব বিষয় রয়েছে, যা শুধু অস্ত্র তৈরির কাজেই লাগে। দুই, এই ধরনের প্রযুক্তি পাচার করা হচ্ছে ‘আমাদের প্রতিবেশী’ (অর্থাৎ পাকিস্তান) থেকে। সহজ কথায়, পাকিস্তানের পাচার করা প্রযুক্তি কাজে লাগিয়ে ইরান পরমাণু শক্তিধর হয়ে ওঠার চেষ্টা করছে বলে বুঝিয়ে দিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী।

এই পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে ইরানের সঙ্গে দ্বিপাক্ষিক সমস্ত ক্ষেত্রে (এমনকী, পাইপলাইন প্রসঙ্গেও) সুসম্পর্কের উপরে জোর দিয়েও তিনি বলেছেন, “ইরানের অধিকার ও কর্তব্য তুলে ধরা এবং আমাদের উপমহাদেশে পরমাণু অস্ত্র ছড়িয়ে পড়ার বিপদজনিত উদ্বেগ মাথায় রেখেই আমরা আমাদের অবস্থান স্থির করেছি।” এই অবস্থান থেকে সরার প্রশ্ন নেই বলে বুঝিয়ে দিয়ে তিনি জানিয়েছেন, এই প্রশ্নটির মীমাংসা যাতে শান্তিপূর্ণ ভাবে হয়, তার জন্য ভারত চেষ্টা করে চলেছে।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এই বক্তব্যকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছে বিজেপি। বামেরা এ নিয়ে বিশেষ মুখ খোলেনি। সি পি আইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক এ বি বর্ধন শুধু বলেছেন, “এ সবই পুরনো কথার পুনরাবৃত্তি।” তবে সরকারের তরফে পাল্টা আক্রমণ যে ক্রমশই কোণঠাসা করে তুলছে, তা প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বক্তব্যের আগেই স্পষ্ট হয়ে গিয়েছিল। লোকসভায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলতে ওঠার অব্যবহিত আগে চার বাম দলের যৌথ সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে সি পি এমের সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি বলেন, “আমরা মোটেই চাই না, ইরান পরমাণু শক্তিধর হয়ে উঠুক। আমরা কমিউনিস্টরা মনে করি, পৃথিবী থেকে পরমাণু অস্ত্রের বিলোপ হওয়া উচিত। কিন্তু যার কাছে সব চেয়ে বেশি পরমাণু অস্ত্র আছে, সেই আমেরিকা চাইছে ইরানের

বিষয়টিকে নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে নিয়ে গিয়ে ইরাকের পুনরাবৃত্তি করতে। আমরা চাই, দিল্লি সেই প্রয়াসের বিরোধিতা করুক।” স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই তাঁদের বক্তব্যের এই অংশটি নিয়ে কোনও মন্তব্যই করেননি প্রধানমন্ত্রী। কারণ, কটর মার্কিন-বিরোধীরা ছাড়া কোনও দেশই এ সব বিষয়ে প্রকাশ্যে মুখ খোলে না।

প্রধানমন্ত্রীর বক্তব্যের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে বামেদের জবাব না-মিললেও বাম-রাজ্য পশ্চিমবঙ্গে বিধানসভার ইরান বিষয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের বিদেশ নীতির সমালোচনা করে একটি প্রশ্নাব গৃহীত হয়েছে। তাতে বলা হয়েছে, কেন্দ্র সাম্রাজ্যবাদী শক্তিগুলির প্ররোচনার কাছে আত্মসমর্পণ করছে। ওই সাম্রাজ্যবাদী শক্তিগুলি ইরাকের পরে যেন তেন ভাবে ইরানও দখল করতে চায়। এবং তারা এ দেশের পরমাণু গবেষণা কর্মসূচিতেও নাক গলাচ্ছে।

বামেদের মোকাবিলা কী ভাবে করা হবে, সেটা কাল রাষ্ট্রপতির বক্তৃতাতাই স্পষ্ট ছিল। সেই বক্তৃতার পরে কাল রাতে প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় ও জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা উপদেষ্টা এম কে নারায়ণনের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসে প্রধানমন্ত্রী ঠিক করে নেন, স্বতঃপ্রণোদিত বিবৃতিতে কী বলবেন। এ ভাবে একতরফা শুধু প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে বলতে দেওয়ার বিরুদ্ধে অবশ্য আজ লোকসভায় সরব হন সি পি এমের বাসুদেব আচারিয়া, সি পি আইয়ের গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তেরা। কিন্তু স্পিকার সোমনাথ চট্টোপাধ্যায় জানান, বিষয়টির গুরুত্ব মাথায় রেখে তিনি প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে বলার অনুমতি দিয়েছেন এবং সরকার জানিয়েছে, এ ব্যাপারে পরে (২৩ তারিখ) পুরোদস্তুর বিতর্ক হবে।

বামেদের পক্ষে আশার কথা হল, সরকার এখনও বলছে যে, ইরান-প্রশ্নের শান্তিপূর্ণ মীমাংসার জন্যই দিল্লি চেষ্টা করছে। তা ছাড়া, ইরান-পাকিস্তান-ভারত গ্যাস পাইপলাইন প্রকল্পও বহাল রয়েছে বলে তিনি জানিয়েছেন। এর পরেও যদি ভোটভুক্তির মাধ্যমে ইরান-প্রশ্ন নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে যায় এবং ভারত প্রশ্নাবের পক্ষে ভোট দেয়, তা হলে বামেরা কী করবে? এই প্রশ্নের স্পষ্ট জবাব বামেদের কাছে থেকে মেলেনি। সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি শুধু বলেছেন, যত ক্ষণ সরকার ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি মেনে চলছে (ইরান-প্রশ্নে ভারতের ভোটকে তাঁরা ওই কর্মসূচির লঙ্ঘন বলেই মনে করেন), তত ক্ষণ তাঁরা সরকারকে সমর্থন করবেন। কিন্তু তা বলে এখনই সমন্বয় কমিটি ছাড়ার কথা তাঁরা ভাবছেন না বলেও তিনি জানিয়েছেন। আর গুরুদাস বলেছেন, “আমাদের সামনে সব রাস্তা খোলা রয়েছে। আমরা দাস শ্রমিক নই।” তবে এ সবই শুধু কথার কথা বলে সরকার মনে করছে।



NATIONAL INTEREST GUIDES POLICY: KALAM

Closer ties with

USA on the anvil

Stateman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 16. — Spelling out the Centre's policies and its agenda in the midst of attacks from various quarters, especially the UPA government's Left allies on an Iranian nuclear imbroglio, President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam today sought to counter such criticism asserting that "enlightened national interest" determined the government's economic and foreign policies.

The President showcased the Manmohan Singh government's "achievements" in economy and international relations, spoke of its growing association with world powers and highlighted its reform measures, including the move to boost foreign direct investment (FDI), to place the country's economy on the fast track. Dr Kalam was addressing a joint session of both Houses of Parliament.

Strongly defending India's growing bonds with the US, the President spoke of major initiatives that were underway for expansion of investment, trade and technology transfers and a framework for defence cooperation with Washington.

Clearly warming up to President George W

Better airports

NEW DELHI, Feb. 16. — Declaring the government's intention to create world class airports in the country, the President today said a comprehensive civil aviation policy was on the anvil and "plans are being made for the modernisation and development of Kolkata and Chennai airports." — SNS

Bush's forthcoming visit, Dr Kalam noted that the relations between the two countries were undergoing a "substantial" transformation. "We attach high importance to strengthening our relations with our global economic partners. Our relations with the US underwent a substantial transformation in 2005 and we carry forward our strategic partnership based on the 18 July (2005) joint statement of the Prime Minister and the US President," Dr Kalam noted.

He said the government expected that the country may gain access to international cooperation for enlargement "of our nuclear energy sector based on the reciprocal commitments of India and the US in the joint statement," adding Parliament would be "apprised of the on-going discussions on this subject

in this session."

He iterated the government's commitment to a composite dialogue process with Pakistan. He expressed India's determination to wage a relentless war against terrorism.

Dr Kalam said the government would step up infrastructure development in ports, roads, power, airports, telecom and railways to sustain high growth.

The President said efforts would be made to make India an IT hardware manufacturing hub. The President announced a Rs 14,000 crore package for reviving cooperatives and hinted at amendments to the Essential Commodities Act, APMC Act to boost farm development. Promising to keep inflation moderate despite the surging global oil prices, he said the government would launch a 10-year National Manufacturing Initiative that would act as a driving force for employment and economic growth and evolve a policy framework for development of petroleum, chemical and petrochemical investment regions with \$10 billion in each location.

The BJP today described the President's address as lifeless, dull and lacking in direction.

Kalam predicts over 8 per cent growth, page 9

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Policies Are Made On Merit, Not Programmed, Says Manmohan

sticking to its stand that the reality of the threat from a nuclear Iran and the obduracy of its Mullahs are too obvious to be ignored.

Talking about the concept of non-alignment, regarding which the Left has accused the government of diluting its commitment, Singh said it was "always an expression of our enlightened national interest and I dare say, will remain so... The underlying philosophy was that issues would be judged on merits rather than in a mechanical or deterministic manner". Incidentally, several NAM members had voted against Iran at the IAEA. But in Parliament, the UPA may find few partners to tango with on crucial issues. The government, however, put up a brave front and said that it was ready to face any possible no-confidence motion or the Left's threat to bring the government "on its knees"



over the Iran issue.

With Iran, Quattarocchi, Volcker and Buta Singh echoing in the House, the government may find itself being targeted not just by the opposition but by its own allies. "We are a competent government.

We have in-built efficiency to confront any situation. Let those bringing the motion (no-confidence) tell the date and the issue. We are ready," parliamentary affairs minister P R Dasmunsi said at a press conference on the eve of the session when asked about SP's plans to bring a no-confidence motion. Mr Dasmunsi said while the government was ready for a debate on any issue, it will appeal to party leaders and the chair to give priority to financial business.

The Left-Congress sparring in Parliament is likely to get louder on economic issues as well during the session, being held in the shadow of assembly elections in states like Kerala and West Bengal. The Left, which has been opposing FDI in retail trade and privatisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports, has already given its wish list for the budget and would like it to look like a 'pro-

people' budget. While the budget is being presented in Parliament on February 28, the Economic Survey will be on February 27 and the Railway Budget on February 24 after Question Hour.

India's policy on Iran's nuclear programme, the Supreme Court judgement on Bihar assembly dissolution last year and farmers' problems will be discussed on a priority in the session, Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee said after a meeting with leaders of political parties.

The government, which has listed 25 bills for introduction during the session, is planning 20 bills, including the Communal Harmony bill, for consideration. However, the women's reservation bill does not find place in the list of priorities. "Stormy setting is not a new thing. Government should cool the opposition by giving positive information to counter the disinformation campaign," Mr Dasmunsi said.

16 SEP 2006

The Economic Times

NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE | Party board unanimous SP to grill UPA over Iran in Parliament

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 15

THE Samajwadi Party parliamentary board has unanimously decided to bring in a no-confidence motion against the Congress-led UPA government during the Budget session of Parliament, if India votes in favour of a non-nuclear Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency next month.

Speaking to the media, parliamentary board leader Ram Gopal Yadav and party whip Mohan Singh said, "We have watched the UPA government vote against Iran twice before, and we have never been in favour of it. The party will wait and see how the government votes on March 6. If it votes against Iran again, we will bring in the no-confidence vote."

Both Yadav and Singh said the party was confident of garnering the support of 55 MPs required to bring in the confidence motion. The SP has only 38 MPs in the Lok Sabha, and the rules require that the party must garner the support of at least 10 per cent of the total strength of the House.

Said Yadav, "We will disclose the names of those who



Samajwadi Party leader Ram Gopal Yadav, Left leader D Raja and BJP leader V K Malhotra during the all-party meeting called by the Election Commission at Nirvachan Sadan in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

will support us after March 6."

Mohan Singh waved away suggestions of support from the Left, which has also taken a similar stand on Iran, saying, "If the Left supports the motion, then the government falls."

The party has decided to take the government to task on a range of issues during the Budget session, from the Quattrocchi tangle to FDI in retail businesses. Said Yadav, "We will certainly bring up the Quattrocchi issue and the government's role in de-freezing the Italian's bank accounts in London. We know about the close relations between Quattrocchi and important people in this government."

The SP leaders have also asked for a "sitting judge to

look into all the lakhs of telephone tapping cases ordered by the central government".

On the charges raised by rebel MP Raj Babbar, Yadav said, "We know who is paying him to say these things. He has been commissioned by DD to produce a 150-part serial—you can draw your own inferences."

Singh, however, said there was no need to "draw inferences" from the visit of Israel Ambassador to SP leader and UP CM, Mulayam Singh Yadav. The Congress had accused Mulayam Singh Yadav of duplicity, as he hobnobbed with representatives of pro-US countries, even as he decried the Iran vote. Said Singh, "He was in Lucknow and it was just a courtesy call on our leader."

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INDIA
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Left parties convey "deep concern" over the Centre's decisions

To insist on debate in Parliament on the Iran nuclear issue

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Left parties on Monday conveyed their "deep concern" at the manner in which the Manmohan Singh Government had gone ahead with important policy decisions, and said that they would insist on a debate in Parliament on the Iran nuclear issue.

"People should know how Parliament looks at the Iran nuclear issue. The Government should heed the voice of Parliament at the March 6 meeting [of the International Atomic Energy Agency]. What the Government does, we would take stock after that," said Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Prakash Karat. He was addressing media persons at a briefing by the Left parties after the coordination committee meeting with the United Pro-

gressive Alliance.

The Government had voted with the United States and the European Union-3 in the IAEA Board, preparing the ground for referral to the U.N. Security Council.

There was, therefore, a need for a full discussion on the implications. The Left parties were clear that if the Government voted against Iran, they would mark their protest in an effective manner.

During the meeting, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee explained the Government's stand vis-à-vis Iran and sought to know the nature of dis-

cussion sought by the Left parties in Parliament.

The Left leaders said their approach was not related to the coming elections in West Bengal and Kerala. Their stand on Iran had nothing to do with the minorities, and their attitude would be the same even if Iran consisted of people from another community.

"Unproductive exercise"

Mr. Karat said the Left parties had told the UPA that during the past 20 months they had submitted 19 notes on a range of issues. But in their assessment, the exercise was not as productive as it should have been. (In a

separate briefing, Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said the effort was to reduce the areas of disagreement and enlarge the areas of agreement.)

The Left leaders said the Government had decided to hand over the Delhi and Mumbai airports to private companies even though there were serious questions about the bidding process. Similarly, on foreign direct investment in retail trade, the Government's decision to allow 51 per cent for single brand category was taken despite the Left's opposition.

The Left parties told the UPA that they would be raising these issues both inside and outside Parliament and also talk to other parties.

See also Page 12

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THE HINDU

'Army census not what it seems'

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 13. — As a controversy raged over reports that a head count of Muslim personnel in the armed forces had been commissioned, the Congress-led UPA government and the high-level committee purportedly entrusted with the job said its mandate was different from what the people were being given to understand. The Army chief, General JJ Singh, stressed: "The Army is and will remain an apolitical, secular and professional force".

Soon after the BJP-Sangh Parivar and the JD-U described the supposed census as "divisive, communal and anti-national", the Justice Rajindar Sachar Committee and the Prime Minister's Office contended that the panel's mandate was to prepare a report on the current "social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India".

The committee spokesman, Mr S Zafar Mahmood, said no specific questions had been put to any wing of the defence forces or the defence ministry regarding any action that ever had been taken by the forces in the past.

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The committee also said it had not asked the armed forces any question about the 1948 Hyderabad "operation" and the 1999 Kargil war with Pakistan.

The Prime Minister's media adviser, Mr Sanjaya Baru, said: "After having constituted the committee (in March last year), the PMO has not been involved with its functioning". The seven-member committee was given 15 months to submit its report.

In his statement, Mr Mahmood said the information the panel had sought about Muslims did not pertain to only those in the armed forces. "The committee also denies the media report that specifically mentions (that) information (had been sought) about the level and number of Muslims in the Army. In fact, the committee is deeply upset to see these references associated with the media," the statement read. Stressing that it was fully aware of and valued the intrinsic importance of the armed forces, the committee said there was no way it would ever ask any question that might in any manner be even "remotely prejudicial to the interests of the nation which must always remain supreme".

Editorial: Sad precedent, page 6

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THE STATESMAN

Left parties to talk tough with UPA

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No agenda set for Coordination Committee meeting, says Karat

K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI: The Left parties plan some plainspeaking at the Coordination Committee meeting with the United Progressive Alliance on Monday. The meeting takes place in the backdrop of their disagreement with the Manmohan Singh Government over its approach to economic policies and on the Iran nuclear issue.

"We will tell them there is no point in taking up issues at the Coordination Committee if the Government does what it wants to. There is no agenda [for Monday's meeting]," Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Prakash Karat told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Karat said the Left parties saw little point in making a contribution in the form of exhaustive notes. For instance, the Government decided to open up the retail sector for foreign direct investment even as the note submitted by the Left parties was under discussion.

Similarly, they had prepared a note, making out a case against privatisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports, that had suggested the Airports Authority of India carry out the modernisation. Yet, the Government went ahead with its own decision.

There is considerable disquiet among the Left parties, especially in the wake of a perception that the Coordination Committee meetings — of which eight have been held so far — end up with the Government "merely

informing" them of its plans. For some time now, constituents in the Left have articulated the inefficacy of the mechanism.

The All-India Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party have been vocal in criticising the attitude of the Congress. The leaders of these parties, be it Debabrata Biswas (AIFB) or Abani Roy (RSP), have maintained that the Government took decisions in spite of their opposition, which led to a perception that the Left parties had given their consent.

Since Monday's meeting comes ahead of the Budget session, the Left parties are likely to tell the Government of their plans for a full discussion on the Iran issue, their opposition to the privatisation of airports and FDI in the retail sector.

Separate press meet

Indicating that the Left parties planned to keep their distance from the Congress-led Government, their representatives would hold a separate press conference after the Coordination Committee meeting instead of sharing the platform, as has been the practice.

The meeting would be preceded by a meeting of the CPI (M), the CPI, the AIFB and the RSP.

The CPI(M) plans to coordinate with other parties in Parliament. At its Kolkata meeting, the Polit Bureau decided to review the UPA Government's performance and work out appropriate steps in consultation with other Left parties.

CPI (M) steps up campaign against Government on Iran

Complete understanding with SP, says Karat

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Initiating steps to broad-base the campaign on the Iran nuclear issue and increase pressure on the Manmohan Singh Government ahead of the March 6 meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) held discussions with the Samajwadi Party here on Saturday.

The SP, which like the Left supports the United Progressive Alliance Government from outside, has backed the Left stand on Iran.

The SP chief and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav on arrival from Lucknow drove down to the CPI (M) party office for a 30-minute meeting with its general secretary Prakash Karat.

First step

The meeting was the first step taken by the CPI (M) after it announced in Kolkata to seek the support of other political parties within and outside the UPA and forge joint platforms with them on issues including Iran, Foreign Direct Investment in retail trade and other contentious issues.

TDP backs SP

It also came in the backdrop of the Telugu Desam Party offering

support to the SP on the proposed no confidence motion it planned to move against the UPA Government in the coming Parliament session. The TDP offer came at Lucknow after a meeting between Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav and TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu. However, it is understood, that the SP would take a view on this after a discussion at its parliamentary party meeting.

Mr. Karat told correspondents here after meeting Mr. Mulayam Singh that there was complete understanding with the SP on various issues including Iran and in opposing the visit of U.S. President George Bush, next month.

He said the meeting was to further the decision of the Polit Bureau to coordinate with different political parties, both inside and outside the UPA.

Full-fledged discussion

He said the plan was to have a full-fledged discussion in Parliament on the Iran issue ahead of the March 6 meeting.

"This would determine what Parliament feels and if, even af-

ter this, the Government goes ahead [and votes against Iran] we will see how to express our disapproval in Parliament..."

The SP president said there was a need for a non-Congress, non-BJP political alternative in the country.

He said while the Bharatiya Janata Party was keen on pushing the 'Hindutva' agenda, the Congress was taking decisions that went against the interests of the people.

Mr. Yadav said that opening up of the retail sector would hit hard thousands of small and retail traders in the country.

Earlier, in Lucknow the TDP joined the attack against the UPA Government for opposing Iran's nuclear programme, with Mr. Naidu saying that the Manmohan Singh Government had acted against the spirit of non-alignment.

"India is a big and secular nation... supporting the United States' policy under pressure is not a good omen for the country politically," Mr. Naidu was quoted by agencies as saying after a meeting with the SP president there.

● Chandrababu Naidu supports SP's no-trust plan

● 'Meeting in furtherance of Polit Bureau decision'

● Congress policies hurting interests of people: SP chief

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THE HINDU

Government will be put in the dock: Karat

'We want discussion on Iran'

Marcus Dam

KOLKATA: The United Progressive Alliance Government will face problems if it insists on referring Iran's nuclear programme to the United Nations Security Council, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Prakash Karat said here on Friday.

"We are prepared to put the Government in the dock in Parliament on the Iran nuclear issue prior to the next meeting of International Atomic Energy Agency on March 6," he said.

Every discussion between the Left parties and the UPA on contentious issues is being taken as a concurrence and a consensus, and alternative proposals made by the Left were not being taken seriously.

"The UPA Government seems to think that discussions are sufficient for it to go ahead with steps to implement piecemeal things it wants to do," he said.

"We are asking for a discussion and not a vote on the Iran issue. The Government will have to explain its stand [on the matter]...after that we are free to take any step in Parliament to bring the Government to heel. We will ensure that it is not made possible for the Government to take a stand against Iran's interests".

Mr. Karat pointed out that it was not just a question of India's relations with Iran. "It is a wider one over an independent foreign policy. The Government is talking on the basis of 'enlightened national interest'; we believe it is succumbing to American

pressure."

Widespread opposition

The party's Polit Bureau, which met here over the past two days, has "expressed its unhappiness at the way policy matters are being decided by the UPA Government", Mr Karat said. "There is widespread opposition to allowing foreign direct investment in retail trade... it [the Polit Bureau] has decided to mobilize all political parties and support the traders and merchants organizations in the country to put up an effective resistance to the opening up of retail trade."

On privatisation of the Mumbai and Delhi airports, he said, "Here again, the Left parties had given a written note objecting to the move after repeated efforts to dissuade the Government not to proceed with the privatisation."

Review of performance

The Polit Bureau, he said, has decided to review the Government's overall performance. It had decided to consult other Left parties and take appropriate steps after all the parties had consultations on the matter. "We are going to meet the other Left parties in the morning and convey our stand [on the contentious issues] to the UPA at the UPA-Left coordination committee meeting later in the day on February 13."

Mr. Karat said, "We are not bound by any coalition. We are taking stock of these developments."

CCPA | Foreigners Act to be amended, person to be given fair hearing before he's judged: Govt

Eye on Assam polls, UPA to amend law on illegals

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 10

WITH an eye on the Assam elections barely three months away, the UPA government today decided to amend the Foreigners Act to ensure "fair hearing" to a person before declaring him a foreigner.

The decision was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister. In July last year, the Supreme Court struck down the controversial Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunals (IMDT) Act. After the court decision, a Group of Ministers (GoM) was set up to study the ruling and decide on further action.

The GoM, headed by the Prime Minister who's a Rajya Sabha MP from Assam, decided to utilise provisions under the Foreigners' Act and set up tribunals for determination of illegal migrants.

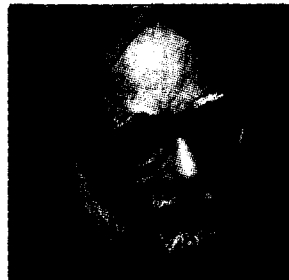
Briefing reporters, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said that the CCPA took a decision that before a person is declared a foreigner, his or her case shall be referred to a tribunal and he or she will be given full opportunity of being heard.

The tribunals would be set up under the Foreigners Act that give authority to the Government for setting up such tribunals, he said.

The Prime Minister, during his visit to Assam last month,

had assured minorities that all necessary steps would be taken to protect their legitimate interests in the wake of the scrapping of the IMDT Act and there would be no harassment of genuine citizens.

But today's decision means that any illegal Bangladeshi immigrant in Mumbai or Delhi slum can now demand a fair hearing just as he would in Assam. In short, it won't be easy



He chairs the CCPA

deporting illegal immigrants.

The IMDT Act was brought forward some 20 years back by the Congress government. The BJP and AGP had been opposed to the Act from the very beginning. They were of the view that the law had failed in identifying and deporting illegal migrants.

Under the IMDT Act, the onus of proving one's nationality or otherwise was on the complainant. The previous AGP government in Assam had initiated the process to repeal the IMDT, but the Congress, after coming to power, overturned its decision and supported its continuance.

ভেল নিয়ে পিছোনের ভুল আর হবে না

সংস্কার প্রশ্নে আপস

নয় বামেরদের সঙ্গে

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

৮ ফেব্রুয়ারি: আগামী অর্থনৈতিক বছরেই কার্যকর না হলেও বিমা ক্ষেত্রে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ ২৬ শতাংশ থেকে বাড়িয়ে ৪৯ শতাংশ করার সঙ্কল্প ঘোষণার কথা ভাবছে কেন্দ্র। প্রধানমন্ত্রী নিজে অর্থমন্ত্রী চিদম্বরম, অর্থনৈতিক উপদেষ্টা সি রঙ্গরাজন ও যোজনা কমিশনের ডেপুটি চেয়ারম্যান মস্টেক সিংহ অহলুওয়ালিয়ার সঙ্গে নিয়মিত বৈঠক করছেন বাজেট নিয়ে। বাজেট শুধুমাত্র সরকারের আয়-ব্যয়ের হিসাব নয়। এটি সরকারের দীর্ঘমেয়াদি অর্থনৈতিক দর্শনেরও দলিল। বাম নেতৃত্বের বাধায় সরকার কিছু বিষয়ে এখনই এগোতে না পারলেও ভবিষ্যতে তারা যে সেগুলি করতে চায়, বাজেটে তা বোঝানো হবে। শুধু বাম দলই নয়, নির্বাচনী রাজনীতির স্বার্থে কংগ্রেসেরও বেশ কিছু চাহিদা আছে সরকারের কাছে। সেই সব জনপ্রিয় সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতার কথা ঢাক পিটিয়ে বাজেটে প্রচারের কৌশল যেমন নেওয়া হয়েছে, পাশাপাশি ঠিক হয়েছে সংস্কারের মৌলিক নীতির প্রশ্নে বাম নেতৃত্বের সঙ্গে আপস করা হবে না।

ইউপিএ সরকার আসার পরে প্রথম দিকে বাম চাপের কাছে অনেকটাই নতিস্বীকার করেন কংগ্রেস শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব। কিন্তু সরকারের তৃতীয় বাজেট পেশের আগে সনিয়া গান্ধী ও মনমোহন সিংহের সিদ্ধান্ত, সংস্কারের প্রশ্নে যতখানি সম্ভব কৌশলে এগোবেন তাঁরা। 'ভেল' নিয়ে যে ভাবে পিছু হটা হয়েছিল, তার পুনরাবৃত্তি চলবে না।

ইতিমধ্যে খুচরো ব্যবসায় একক 'ব্র্যান্ড'-এর বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ, বিমানবন্দরে বেসরকারিকরণ, এমনকী ইরান প্রশ্নে বাম নেতৃত্বের দাবি কার্যত অগ্রাহ্য করেই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে সরকার। আবার বামেরদের সঙ্গে আলোচনাই করা হয়নি, এমনও নয়। কংগ্রেস শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব মনে করছেন, বামেরা যত গর্জন করছেন, ততটা বর্ষাতে পারবেন না। কারণ সমর্থন তুলে নেওয়া বাম নেতৃত্বের পক্ষেও সম্ভব নয়। বিজেপির সুবিধা হবে এমন কোনও কাজ করতে পারেন না বামেরা।

পশ্চিমবঙ্গে বিধানসভা নির্বাচনের আগে বাম নেতৃত্বকে যে কংগ্রেস বিরোধিতায় আরও সরব হতে হবে, সেটা কংগ্রেস ভালই বুঝতে পারছে। কিন্তু প্রথম পর্যায়ের কৌশল বদলে এখন সরকারও অনেক বেশি সংঘাতে যেতে প্রস্তুত। বামেরদের সঙ্গে কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বের কৌশলগত ফারাক একটাই। বাম নেতৃত্ব সংঘাত-আন্দোলনের ছমকি দিচ্ছেন, কিন্তু কংগ্রেস তা না করে সারাক্ষণ আলাপ-আলোচনার কথা বলে যাচ্ছে। মুখে রাজনৈতিক সম্পর্ক মধুর রেখে আলোচনার মাধ্যমে সংস্কার চান মনমোহন। সম্ভবত তা বুঝেই বাম নেতৃত্ব বেশি করে মনমোহন-বিরোধী হয়ে উঠছেন। পরিবর্তে তাঁরা নির্ভর করছেন সনিয়ার রাজনৈতিক সহযোগিতার উপরে। চিদম্বরম বলেন, "রাজনৈতিক সহিষ্ণুতাই আজ আমায় সবচেয়ে বড় অস্ত্র। অতীতে যুক্তফ্রন্টের আমলে আমি যখন অর্থমন্ত্রী ছিলাম, তখনও দু'জন কমিউনিস্ট মন্ত্রী ছিলেন। সে দিনও তাঁদের

বোঝাতে পেরেছি। আশা করি আজও বোঝাতে পারব।"

আপাতত নানা ক্ষেত্রে প্রত্যক্ষ বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের বিষয়টি পর্যালোচনা করতে চাইছে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার। এ ব্যাপারে খুব শীঘ্রই মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠক বসবে। খুচরো ব্যবসায় একক বিদেশি ব্র্যান্ডের লগ্নির ব্যাপারে ইতিমধ্যেই মন্ত্রিসভায় সিদ্ধান্ত হয়ে গিয়েছে। তবে বাম নেতারা যাতে আপত্তি তুলতে না পারেন, সে জন্য শিল্পমন্ত্রক একটি নির্দেশিকা প্রকাশ করবে। কোন কোন ব্র্যান্ড এই বিনিয়োগের ছাড়পত্র পাবে, তা নির্দেশিকায় স্পষ্ট করে দেওয়া হবে। বাজেটে বিদ্যুৎ বিপণন, বিমানবন্দর এবং খনির ক্ষেত্রে এফডিআই নিয়ে আসার ব্যাপারেও সরকার সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে চলেছে। প্রেস নোটের ভিত্তিতে বিদেশি লগ্নির সাবেক পদ্ধতি বদলানোর ব্যাপারে আলোচনা চলছে। 'পোর্টেবল অ্যালকোহল'-এর ক্ষেত্রে বিদেশি লগ্নিকে ছাড়পত্র দেওয়ার কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে। অনাবাসী ভারতীয়দের শেয়ার হস্তান্তরের ব্যাপারেও একটি অটোমেটিক রুট তৈরির কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে, যাতে বিশ্বায়নের প্রক্রিয়া অনেক সরল হয়ে ওঠে।

চিদম্বরম বাম নেতৃত্বকে বোঝাচ্ছেন, বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ এবং বেসরকারিকরণ ছাড়া শুধু কর চাপিয়ে রাজস্ব ঘাটতি মেটানো সম্ভব নয়। প্রধানমন্ত্রীও বলেছেন, একতরফা কর চাপিয়ে রাজস্ব সংগ্রহে তিনি উৎসাহী নন। সম্প্রতি দাভোসে প্রাতরাশ বৈঠকে চিদম্বরম-কমলনাথ এবং মস্টেক পৃথিবীর শ্রেষ্ঠ সিইওদের সামনে বলেছেন, বিদেশি বিনিয়োগে সরকার দারুণ

ভাবে উৎসাহী। পরিকাঠামো এবং উৎপাদন শিল্পের ক্ষেত্রে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগকে সবচেয়ে জোর দেওয়া হবে। তাঁরা আরও বলেছেন, এই বিদেশি বিনিয়োগে দেশে কর্মসংস্থানের সম্ভাবনা বাড়বে বই কমবে না। এই কারণে, বণিকসভাগুলি এ বার বাজেটে স্বাস্থ্য সেস বসানোর প্রস্তাব দিলেও তাতে এখনও রাজি হননি চিদম্বরম। এখনও পর্যন্ত যা ঠিক আছে, স্বাস্থ্য পরিষেবায় ২ শতাংশ সেস বসানোর প্রস্তাব মানা হবে না। ক্যাবিনেট সচিব বি কে চতুর্বেদী সেস নিয়ে একটি বৈঠক করেছেন। সেখানে স্বাস্থ্য ছাড়াও শিক্ষা, রাস্তা, তামাকের উপরে সেস চাপানো নিয়ে কথা হলেও সিদ্ধান্ত হয়নি। শিল্পপতির বাম নেতাদের সঙ্গে দু'বছরে বেশ কয়েক বার বৈঠক করেছেন। কালই সিআইআই-এর প্রতিনিধিরা সিপিএম নেতা সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি এবং সিপিআই নেতা ডি রাজার সঙ্গে দেখা করেন। তাঁরা সম্পত্তি কর বিলোপ, ফ্রিঞ্জ বেনিফিট কর বিলোপ এবং শিক্ষা সেস বিলোপের প্রস্তাব দেন।

সম্প্রতি হায়দরাবাদে কংগ্রেসও তাদের অর্থনৈতিক প্রস্তাবে অনেক সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতার কথা বলেছে। সনিয়া বোঝাতে চেয়েছেন, দারিদ্র দূরীকরণ বা কর্মসংস্থান নিয়ে কংগ্রেস নিজেই প্রথম থেকে চিন্তাভাবনা করেছে। আবার অধিবেশনে এই কথা বলার পরেই দিল্লিতে মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠকে সরকার খুচরো ব্যবসায় বিদেশি লগ্নির প্রস্তাব পাশ করেছে।

মনমোহন সিংহর পথনির্দেশিকা স্পষ্ট।



COORDINATION PANEL MEETING LIKELY

Left for House debate on Iran

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SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, Feb. 5. — Unhappy over India's stand at the IAEA on Iran's disputed nuclear programme, Left parties today said the government's move was not in conformity with its independent foreign policy and demanded a debate on the issue in Parliament ahead of the crucial March meeting of the nuclear watchdog.

The Left also expressed concern over the manner in which the Congress-led government is going ahead with the policies of privatisation and the recourse to FDI in certain vital sectors in "violation" of the Common Minimum Programme of the UPA and warned that this would have serious consequences for the country and its economy.

UPA chairperson Mrs Sonia Gandhi is likely to convene a meeting of the UPA-Left coordination committee to discuss contentious issues like Iran and privatisation, in a bid to find their amicable solutions through dialogue before the Budget Session of Parliament.

Left parties have taken no decision to boycott the Left-UPA coordination committee meeting likely to be held in the near future.

"In the light of certain media reports (that the Left may boycott the

All options open, says Rumsfeld

BERLIN, Feb. 5. — US defence secretary Mr Donald H Rumsfeld said all possibilities are still open in the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme, including military action, a German newspaper reported today. "All options — including the military one — are on the table," the daily *Handelsblatt* quoted Mr Rumsfeld as having said in an interview to appear tomorrow. "Any government that says Israel has no right to exist is making a statement about its possible behaviour in the future," added Mr Rumsfeld, who attended a weekend security conference in Munich. — AP

coordination committee meeting), I would like to make it clear that there is no such decision," CPI-M general secretary Mr Prakash Karat said here today.

He said 8 February had been proposed as the next date of the Left-UPA coordination committee meeting. However, since the CPI-M Politburo is meeting on 9-10 February in Kolkata, no other date has yet been finalised, Mr Karat said.

The Left parties have been raising their level of criticism of the UPA government on various issues, including the airports privatisation and the Iran nuclear issue.

Attacking the government for its stand at the IAEA, the JD-U said India had become a "direct party to the designs of the US" in voting against Iran on the nuclear issue.

"India's vote in the IAEA is clearly against our own national interest and breaches the broad national consensus on foreign policy. India has, for the first time, become a direct party to the designs of the US to limit the sovereignty of other countries not convenient to it," JD-U president and NDA convenor Mr George Fernandes said.

The Left parties, which provide outside support to the UPA government, felt that the resolution adopted by the IAEA in Vienna yesterday was "questionable." Meanwhile, the RSP warned that it could consider withdrawing support to the government "within a short time".

Contrary to their earlier tough posturing against India voting in favour of any resolution which calls for referral of Iran's nuclear programme to the UNSC, the Left said the country's stand was "regrettable" and "not in conformity with the pursuit of an independent foreign policy and maintenance of good relations with Iran which is in our national interests."

6 FEB 2008

THE STATESMAN

পাল্লা ভারী বিষয়ভিত্তিক সমর্থনে

সমস্বয় কতটা জরুরি, খতিয়ে দেখবে বামেরা

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি: বিমানবন্দরের বেসরকারিকরণের রেশ কাটার আগেই ভিয়েনায় ভারতের ইরান-বিরোধী ভোট। গত কাল এই ভাবেই তাঁদের সামলাতে হয়েছে জোড়া ধাক্কা। তার পর আজ আচমকাই প্রত্যাঘাত করলেন বামেরা। নীতিগত ক্ষেত্রে সরকারের কাছ থেকে বারবার ধাক্কা খাওয়ার পরে তাঁরা প্রস্তুত হলেন সমস্বয় কমিটির প্রয়োজনীয়তা নিয়েই।

এই কারণেই ৮ ফেব্রুয়ারি সমস্বয় কমিটির বৈঠকে যোগ দিচ্ছে না চার বাম দল। আজ বামেদের বৈঠকে সেই সিদ্ধান্তই হয়েছে। কিন্তু তাকে 'বয়কট' বলতেও রাজি নন তাঁরা। রাতে সিপিএমের সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাট সংবাদ সংস্থাকে বলেন, "বয়কটের কোনও সিদ্ধান্তই হয়নি আজ।" ঘোষিত ভাবে 'বয়কট' না-করেও একাধিক কারণ দেখিয়ে বৈঠকে থেকে দূরে থাকা যায়। সেটা করেই সরকারকে প্রাথমিক ধাক্কাটা দিতে চাইছেন বামেরা। সিপিএম পলিটবুরোর বৈঠক ৯ ও ১০ তারিখ। সেখানে সমস্বয় নিয়ে আলোচনা হবে। বিষয়টি নিয়ে আলোচনা করবে সিপিআই এবং ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লক শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বও। তবে, আরএসপি সম্ভবত এই ধরনের বৈঠক ডাকছে না। কারণ, তারা আগেই সরকার সম্পর্কে অনেক বেশি কঠোর মনোভাব নিয়ে রেখেছে।

শেষ পর্যন্ত কী সিদ্ধান্ত হবে, তা আন্দাজ করা কঠিন হলেও এই মুহূর্তে সমস্বয় কমিটি শেষ করে দেওয়ার পক্ষেই পাল্লা ভারী। দুই কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির অনেকে চান, এখনই বিষয়ভিত্তিক সমর্থনের পথে চলে যাওয়া হোক। আবার আর একটি অংশ সরকারকে এক বার সুযোগ দেওয়ার এবং এর পরে সরকার কী করে, তা

দেখে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার পক্ষপাতী।

এ দিনের বৈঠকে বামেরা সরকারের সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক পুনর্বিবেচনা করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে মূলত চারটি কারণে। প্রথমটিই ইরান। এ ক্ষেত্রে বামেদের পরামর্শ অগ্রাহ্য করে মার্কিন প্রস্তাবের পক্ষে ভোট দিয়েছে সরকার। তবে বামেরা আন্তর্জাতিক পরমাণু শক্তি সংস্থার পরবর্তী বৈঠক পর্যন্ত সময় দিতে তৈরি। তার আগে বিষয়টি তাঁরা সংসদে তুলবেন। দুই, দিল্লি-মুম্বই বাদে বাকি বিমানবন্দরগুলির বেসরকারিকরণ করা হবে না বলে সরকারের স্পষ্ট প্রতিশ্রুতি দেয়নি। সেই প্রতিশ্রুতি পেলে বামেরা একটু নরম হতে পারেন। তিন, সাধারণ ভাবে সরকার তাঁদের অগ্রাহ্য করে এগিয়ে চলেছে বলে সর্বত্র যে ধারণা তৈরি হয়েছে, সেটা এখন বামেদের কাছে বড় মাথাব্যথা হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে। এবং চার, বামেদের একমাত্র মিত্র সমাজবাদী পার্টি এ বার সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন তুলে নেওয়ার

বিষয়টি ভাবতে শুরু করেছে।

আজকের বৈঠকে গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত বলেন, যে সব বিষয় সংসদে উঠবে, সেখানে সরকার নমনীয়। কিন্তু বেসরকারিকরণ বা বিদেশি লগ্নি যে হেতু সংসদে আসে না, তাই সে সব নিয়ে তারা বামেদের অগ্রাহ্য করছে। সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি বলেন, সরকার বিমানবন্দরের ক্ষেত্রে কোনও ছাড় দেয়নি। এ বি বর্ধন বলেন, সরকারের জনপ্রিয়তা ক্রমশ কমছে। তাঁর এই মন্তব্যের পর কারাট বলেন, একই সঙ্গে বামেদের অবস্থাও খারাপ হচ্ছে কি না, সেটা খতিয়ে দেখা দরকার।

ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের জি দেবরাজন ও আরএসপি'র অবনী রায় এই অবস্থার প্রেক্ষিতে সমস্বয় কমিটির বৈঠকে না-যাওয়ার কথা তোলেন। তার পরেই চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়। এম কে পাঙ্কে বৈঠকে উপস্থিত থাকলেও বিশেষ মুখ খোলেননি।

পরে এক বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়, বিমানবন্দরের ধর্মঘট ও অন্যান্য অর্থনৈতিক প্রশ্নে সরকারের ভূমিকায় বামেরা উদ্বিগ্ন। সরকার নূনতম অভিন্ন কর্মসূচি উপেক্ষা করে বেসরকারিকরণ ও বিদেশি লগ্নির বিষয়টি নিয়ে এগিয়ে চলেছে। এই অবস্থায় চার বাম দল আলোচনা করে পরবর্তী সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে।

কিন্তু অবনী রায় বলেছেন, "আরএসপি'র অবস্থান খুব স্পষ্ট। সরকার আর্থিক নীতি এবং বিদেশনীতির ক্ষেত্রে যে ভাবে চলছে তাতে সমর্থনের কথা পুনর্বিবেচনার সময় এসেছে। অন্ততপক্ষে বিষয়ভিত্তিক সমর্থনের কথা এখন বিবেচনা করা প্রয়োজন।" ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের মনোভাবও একই রকম। দুই সহযোগী দলের এই কঠোর অবস্থানে চাপ বাড়বে কারাট-বর্ধনদের উপরেই।

● বিমানবন্দর নিয়ে...পৃঃ ৫

আপনার মতে

বিধানসভা ভোটের কথা
মাথায় রেখেই কি কেন্দ্রের
উপরে চাপ বাড়াবে বামেরা?

এসএমএস করুন ৮২৪৩ নম্বরে

'হ্যাঁ' হলে লিখুন: Apoll a

'না' হলে লিখুন: Apoll b

উত্তর পাঠান হাট, এয়ারটেল, টাটা
ইন্ডিকম, রিলায়েন্স ইন্ডিয়া অথবা
বিএসএনএল মোবাইল থেকে।

ভগবতীবাবুর বাড়ি নিলামের
পরে সন্টলেকে জমি বিভর্ক
কি আরও বাড়বে?

হ্যাঁ ৯০% না ১০%

ANADAEZAR PATRIKA

- 6 F . C 2008

বামেদের সঙ্গে এক অশান্তির অবসান, অন্য অশান্তি শুরু

চাকরি নিয়ে লিখিত আশ্বাসে সমস্যা মিটল বিমানবন্দরে

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি: বিমানবন্দর কর্মীদের চাকরির নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে ভাবতে রাজি, এ কথা লিখে দিয়েই এ যাত্রা কাজ উত্তরোলেন বিমানমন্ত্রী প্রফুল্ল পটেল। পাশাপাশি বিক্ষুব্ধদের শান্ত করে কাজে ফেরাতে বিমানমন্ত্রী জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, তাদের বিরুদ্ধে কোনও শাস্তিমূলক ব্যবস্থাও নেবে না সরকার। অর্থাৎ কিছু শুকনো প্রতিশ্রুতির বিনিময়েই শেষমেশ সাদ্ধ হল বিমানবন্দর ধর্মঘট।

কর্মীদের চাকরির নিরাপত্তা সুনিশ্চিত থাকছে, এ কথা আগেই স্পষ্ট হয়ে গিয়েছিল। শুধু এই মর্মে একটি চিঠি আজ বাম শ্রমিক নেতাদের হাতে তুলে দিয়েছেন প্রফুল্ল। চিঠিতে তিনি জানিয়েছেন, এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটির হাতে বিভিন্ন বিমানবন্দর আধুনিকীকরণের দায়িত্ব দেওয়া এবং চাকরি সংক্রান্ত যাবতীয় বিষয় খতিয়ে দেখার জন্য বিমানমন্ত্রক, এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটি অফ ইন্ডিয়া (এএআই) ও এএআই কর্মচারী সংগঠনকে নিয়ে একটি ত্রিপাক্ষিক কমিটি তৈরি হবে। এই প্রতিশ্রুতিকে ঢাল করেই বিকেলে ধর্মঘট তুলে নিয়েছে এএআই কর্মীদের জয়েন্ট ফোরাম।

অবশ্য দিল্লি ও মুম্বই বিমানবন্দর আধুনিকীকরণের বিষয়টি ফের খতিয়ে দেখা হবে, এমন কোনও প্রতিশ্রুতি দেননি বিমানমন্ত্রী। সব মিলিয়ে, দিল্লি-মুম্বই ছাড়া অন্য বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারিকরণের প্রক্ষেপে আবার সরকারের সঙ্গে বামোদের সংঘাত ফলাশ্বে।

কিন্তু, গত কাল পর্যন্তও এই ত্রিপাক্ষিক কমিটি গড়তে বা তা লিখিত ভাবে জানাতে বিমানমন্ত্রী রাজি ছিলেন না। প্রকাশ করাট ও এ বি বর্ধনের মধ্যস্থতায় শেষ পর্যন্ত সরকারকে পিছু হটতে হয়। এই দুই নেতাই বিমানমন্ত্রীকে জানিয়ে দেন, আর কোনও বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারিকরণ হবে না বলে প্রাথমিক প্রতিশ্রুতি না গেলে, তারা ধর্মঘটদের

দলীয় সমর্থন জোগাবে। এর পরে দুই বাম দলের শ্রমিক সংগঠনের হয়ে এম কে গাঙ্গে ও গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তও আজ পটেলের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করতে যান। তার পরেই এই লিখিত প্রতিশ্রুতি দেন বিমানমন্ত্রী। “ধর্মঘটে অংশ নেওয়ার জন্য কোনও শাস্তি হবে না,” সে কথা স্পষ্ট করে দেন তিনি।

পরে বিমানমন্ত্রক সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, দিল্লি-মুম্বই বিমানবন্দর তো বেসরকারি হাতে যাচ্ছেই, পরে অন্য বিমানবন্দরের ক্ষেত্রেও সেই এক পথেই অনুসরণ করা হবে। অন্য দিকে, গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত বলেছেন, “সরকারের বেসরকারিকরণের নীতি ধাক্কা খেয়েছে। বিমানমন্ত্রী স্পষ্ট ভাবে বলেছেন, এর পরে অন্য কোনও বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারিকরণ হবে না। কথা না রাখলে সরাসরি সরকারের সঙ্গে সংঘাত বাধবে।”

ভবিষ্যতে কী হবে, তা আন্দাজ করা শক্ত। কিন্তু এ কথা ঠিক যে, মন্ত্রীর আশ্বাসে নির্ভর করেই আজ কর্মীদের পিছু হটতে হয়েছে। রাজনৈতিক ভাবে দু’টি বামদলও তাতে ধাক্কা খেয়েছে। তার ফলে দিল্লি-মুম্বইয়ের পরে অন্য কোনও বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারিকরণের প্রক্ষেপে তারাও এখন অনড় মনোভাব নিয়েছেন। সিপিএম ও সিপিআই, দু’দলের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব আলানাতা বৈঠক করে এবং পরে নিজেদের মধ্যে কথা বলে স্থির করেছেন, কাল চার বাম দলের নেতারা ইরানের পাশাপাশি বিমানবন্দর নিয়েও আলোচনা করবেন।

কাল বিকালে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের সঙ্গে কর্মচারী ফোরামের নেতাদের বৈঠকের পরেই ইঙ্গিত মিলেছিল, আজ সকালেই ধর্মঘট তুলে নেওয়া হতে পারে। কিন্তু, গভীর রাতে পরিস্থিতি খানিকটা অন্য দিকে মোড় নেয়। দিল্লি বিমানবন্দর বিক্ষোভরত কর্মীদের সঙ্গে পুলিশের এক প্রান্ত এর পর কুড়ির পাতায়

● কলকাতায় ধর্মঘট উঠল শেষে... পৃ: ২০

ইরান-বিরোধী প্রস্তাবে ভোট, আজ বৈঠকে ক্ষুব্ধ কারাটেরা

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি ও রোম, ৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি: সুদূর ভিয়েনায় ভোটাভূতিকে কেন্দ্র করে নয়াদিল্লিতে ফের বাড়ছে উত্তেজনার পারদ। এবং টানা পোপোভের দুই প্রান্তে কুশীলবেরা অভিমুখ— এক দিকে বাম দলগুলি, অন্য দিকে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার।

বিমানবন্দর নিয়ে সবে একটা অশান্তি শেষ হয়েছে। এর মধ্যেই কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সঙ্গে বামোদের নতুন সংঘাতের সঙ্কেত। এ দিনই ভিয়েনায় আন্তর্জাতিক পরমাণু শক্তি সংস্থা বা আই এ ই এর জরুরি বৈঠকে ইরান গ্রসঙ্গে ইউরোপ-আমেরিকার প্রস্তাবের পক্ষে ভোট দিয়েছে ভারত। এবং এই নিয়ে বামোদের বার বার বিরোধীতা অগ্রাহ্য করেই। শুধু তাই নয়, ভিয়েনায় ভোটাভূতির ফল ঘোষণার কিছু ক্ষণের মধ্যেই নয়াদিল্লিতে বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের মুখপাত্র সরকারের সিদ্ধান্ত ব্যাখ্যা করতে গিয়ে জানান, যে প্রস্তাবের পক্ষে ভারত ভোট দিয়েছে তাতে ভারসাম্য পূন্দর ভাবে বজায় রাখা হয়েছে।

হতাশ বামপন্থীরা বিষয়টি নিয়ে আলোচনার জন্য কাল চার বাম দলের বৈঠক ডেকেছেন। এদিন ধরে মার্কিন প্রস্তাবের বিরোধিতা করে আসা বামপন্থীদের কাছে পরিস্থিতি এখন অনেক কঠিন। কারণ, এ বারে প্রস্তাবের পক্ষে ভোট দিয়েছে চীনও। এক দিকে তাই বামপন্থীদের সাম্প্রতিক অতীত, অন্য দিকে চিনের সিদ্ধান্ত। এই দোটানার মধ্যে কাল তারা কুল রাখেন না চিন রাখে, সেটাই দেখার।

ঠিক কী ঘটেছে ভিয়েনায়? আই এ ই এর জরুরি বৈঠকে নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে বিষয়টি নিয়ে রিপোর্ট করা হবে কি না, সেটাই ঠিক হয়েছে। প্রস্তাবটি ইউরোপের তিন দেশের। তাকে প্রধান থেকেই সমর্থন জানিয়ে আসছিল আমেরিকা। চীন এবং রাশিয়া এর বিরোধিতা করলেও ভোটের

দু’দিন আগে তাও শেষ হয়ে যায়। খসড়াটিতে সামান্য অদলবদল এবং ইরানের জন্য এক মাস সময় বের করার শর্তে তারাও রাজি হয়। এই অবস্থায় ভারতের পক্ষে বিরোধিতা করা কঠিন হয়ে পড়ে। বিশেষ করে এর আগে সেক্টরবহেই তারা ইরান-বিরোধী অবস্থান নিয়েছিল।

ইরান গ্রসঙ্গে নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে প্রস্তাবের পক্ষে ভারত ছাড়াও আরও ২৬টি দেশ ভোট দিয়েছে। এবং নয়াদিল্লির কাছে কিছুটা হস্তির, ১৬ নিজেই দেশের আটটিই দাঁড়িয়েছে প্রস্তাবের দিকে। বিপক্ষে ভোট দিয়েছে কিউবা, সিরিয়া ও ভেনেজুয়েলা। ভোটদানে বিরত থেকেছে দক্ষিণ আফ্রিকা, আলজিরিয়া, বেলারুস, ইন্দোনেশিয়া ও লিবিয়া। প্রস্তাবে বলা হয়েছে, ইরানের পরমাণু প্রকল্প ‘পূরোপুরি শান্তিপূর্ণ উদ্দেশ্যে নাও হতে পারে’ এবং সেই কারণেই বিষয়টি সম্পর্কে নিরাপত্তা পরিষদকে অবহিত করা হবে। তবে বিষয়টি এখনও মূলত শক্তি সংস্থার আওতাতেই রয়েছে এবং পরিষদকে রিপোর্ট করার আগে আরও দু’সপ্তাহ সময় হাতে রাখা হয়েছে ইরানকে বোঝানোর জন্য।

বামোদের পক্ষে প্রথম সমস্যা, যে রাশিয়া ও চীন গত বারে ভোটদানে বিরত ছিল এ বারে তারা প্রস্তাবের পক্ষে। দ্বিতীয় সমস্যা, মার্কিন রাষ্ট্রদূত ডেভিড মালকোভ ভারতকে যে পক্ষে হাটতে বলেন, সেই পক্ষেই যেতে হয়েছে দিল্লিকে। যে তিনটি দেশ বিক্রেছে ভোট দিয়েছে তারা কুটন মার্কিনবিরোধী। আর যারা বিরত থেকেছে তারা ওজনে ভারতের ধারেকাছে আসে না।

এই অবস্থায় আজ এ বি বর্ধন বলেন, “বিষয়টি অত্যন্ত উৎসাহের। যে ভাবে ইরানকে কোণঠাসা করা শুরু হয়েছে তাতে উল্টো ফল হতে পারে।” তবে কালকের বৈঠকের আগে এর বেশি বলতে কেউই রাজি হননি।

5 FEB 2006

ANADABAZAR PARIJKA

TU LEADERS MEET MANMOHAN ■ CENTRE STICKS TO ITS STAND

Airport strike may end

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 3. — There were signs of an imminent breakthrough in the continuing airport strike today following the Prime Minister's meetings with leaders of Leftist parties as well as the agitating airport employees' unions. The Centre stuck to its stand that the decision on awarding the Delhi and Mumbai airport contracts to GMR and GVK-led consortiums was final.

The government has no plans to privatise AAI and the Prime Minister assured the unions that no AAI employee would lose his/her job.

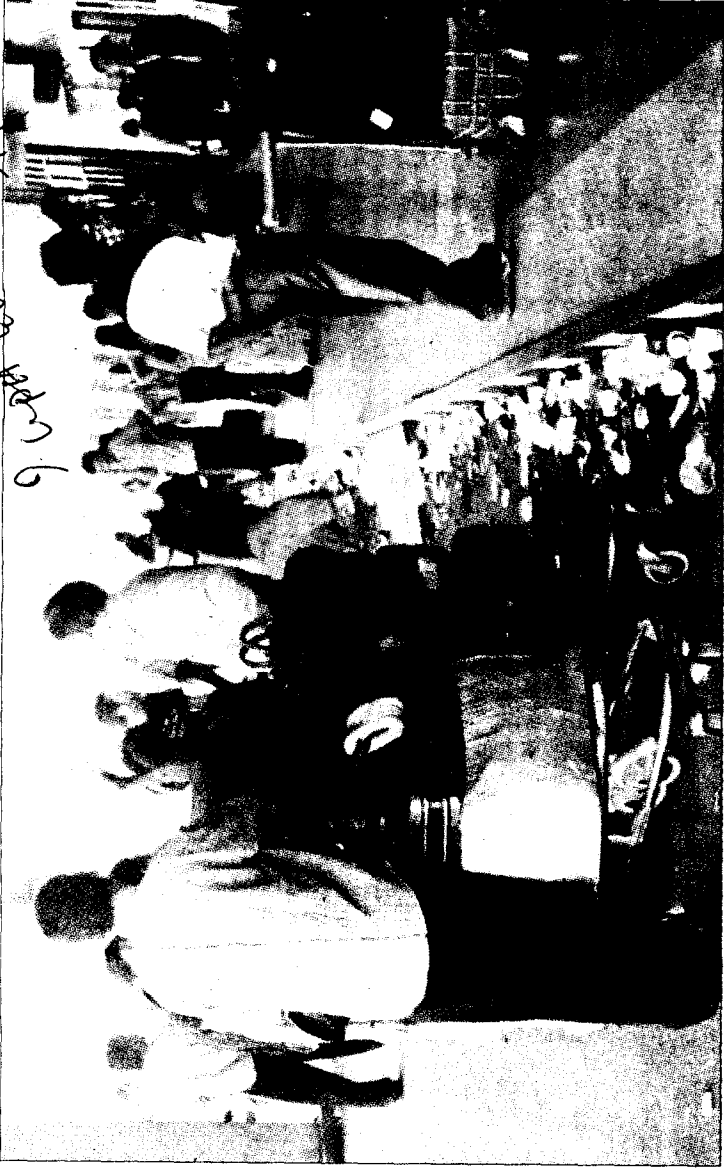
Signalling the possibility of an end to their three-day stir against the government's decision on Delhi and Mumbai airports, the joint forum of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) employees' unions decided to meet tomorrow to discuss the Prime Minister's request to call off their strike that had caused harassment to air passengers. The PM's effort was also perceived as a "face-saver" for the striking AAI employees.

The AAI Employees Joint Forum held several rounds of meetings after their discussions with the Dr Manmohan Singh.

The Forum convenor, Mr MK Ghoshal, said that they would "seriously consider" the Prime Minister's appeal as also his assurance that a tripartite committee would be set up to chalk out modernisation plans for various airports. "A decision will be taken keeping in mind both these points," he said.

Mr Praful Patel said the PM had assured the striking employees that the AAI was not being privatised as alleged by their joint forum.

Mr Patel said the government has also made the pledge that no



Passengers wait for taxis at the NSC Bose airport on Friday. — UNI

employee of the AAI would lose his/her job in the wake of the modernisation of the two major metro airports.

The Prime Minister earlier held a meeting with senior Left leaders, including the CPI-M general secretary, Mr Prakash Karat, and the CPI general secretary, Mr AB Bardhan, which set the stage for the subsequent PM-joint forum negotiations.

According to the Left leaders, the Centre also agreed to consider the joint forum's "alternative plan" for modernising the two airports submitted to the PM last year. This plan envisages the AAI's central role in the move.

The Left-PM talks on the airport strike were also attended by Mr Patel, Mr Abani Roy (RSP), Mr G Devarajan (Forward Bloc), the CITU chief, Mr M K Pandhe,

and the AITUC chief, Mr Gurudas Dasgupta.

"We informed the Prime Minister of our full support to the employees of the Airports Authority of India. We requested him to invite the workers for talks. He agreed and assured us that the alternative plan would be taken up for consideration," Mr Karat said. "The veteran Marxist leader, Mr Jyoti Basu, conceded in Kolkata that the government, despite appearing to accommodate the unions, would not go back on privatisation.

Earlier, striking a defiant posture in the face of a Delhi High Court order restraining the agitating employees from impeding the functioning of airports, the Left union leaders said their stir would continue.

Mr Dasgupta said: "We'll not

obey any court orders" when asked about the High Court's ruling yesterday stopping the employees from disrupting the functioning of airports and from protesting within a 500-metre radius of airports.

A scuffle broke out between angry AAI employees and the police at Delhi airport as the indefinite strike continued for the third day today. The protesters alleged that buses bringing employees to the airport were being diverted.

The Union finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram, tonight said that the decision to involve the private sector in the modernisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports was taken only after obtaining the consent of Left leaders, including the CPI-M Politburo member, Mr Sitaram Yechury.

Left in a spot after PM's job promise

KOLKATA, Feb. 3. — Even as flight operations at NSC Bose Airport were largely normal on the third day of the nationwide strike by Airports Authority of India employees, most airlines witnessed cancellation of bookings while filth at both the international and domestic terminals continued to pile up with the lounge and the airport's approach resembling a garbage vat.

The Left parties, meanwhile, found themselves in a spot after this evening's assurance by the Prime Minister to their agitating unions about the government's intention to ensure private bidders absorb a high percentage of existing employees. The state CPI-M secretary, Mr Anil Biswas said the party will accept whatever decision the trade unions take on the ongoing cease-work in Kolkata, Mumbai and Delhi airports.

Asked whether it would be a political setback for the Left parties if their trade unions accept privatisation of airports, Mr Biswas said: "Its too early to comment. The government has given some proposals. So have the workers. Let the union leaders discuss the issues among themselves. As I said earlier this strike has not been called by any political party."

The percentage of cancellations varied from from airline to airline but ranged between 10 and 20 per cent of bookings. Most passengers who cancelled bookings were either travelling with children or were scheduled to travel with ailing family members. Most of them were forced to cancel their tickets due to the non-availability of various essential passenger amenities.

"I was scheduled to travel to Delhi with my ailing mother. However, it would be extremely difficult for me to travel with no passenger amenity available. I don't want to risk any emergency situation," said Mr Dilip Sood, a resident of Salt Lake.

His concern was echoed by Mrs Anjali Mitra who was to travel to Chennai with two daughters.

"Though the flight is on schedule I don't want to risk the journey with the current situation inside the airport," she said. Security was beefed up at Kolkata airport following yesterday's violence at Delhi and Mumbai airports with CISF reinforcements being brought on from its Kolkata Port Trust unit and the Durgapur Steel Plant unit.

Women CISF personnel have also been reinforced at the airport and they were also seen assisting old, ailing and women passengers by arranging trolleys, helping collect their baggage and escorting them to different parts of the terminal building. — SNS

SONIA CALLS FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

PM launches job guarantee scheme

SNS & PTI

BANDLPALLY/HYDERABAD, Feb. 2. — In a major anti-poverty initiative, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today launched the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, that legally guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a year to each rural household in an identified district.

This sleepy village in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh became the launching pad for what the Prime Minister termed as "revolutionary programme that is set to transform the rural India".

In the backward Rayalseema region, NREGP

job cards were handed to five villagers, signifying the launch of the scheme aimed at enhancing livelihood security of people living in rural areas. In the first phase, will be implemented in 200 districts across the country, including 13 in Andhra Pradesh. The entire country will be covered within four years.

"It is a landmark in our history in removing poverty," the Prime Minister said addressing a large public meeting after launching the scheme.

Before Dr Singh launched the programme, Congress chairperson Mrs Sonia Gandhi called on the women to participate in the scheme for its successful implementation.

"Women and self help groups have a special role

in this programme. Forty per cent of the women members of self-help groups in the country are from Andhra Pradesh," she said.

The scheme, which Mrs Gandhi described as historic and revolutionary, is backed by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Under this legislation, if 50 families do not have access to work, they can demand livelihood from the government for at least 100 days a year, Union minister for panchayati raj Mr Mani Shanker Aiyer said.

If the government fails to provide employment within 15 days of receiving an application, it is bound by law to pay an unemployment allowance to the applicant.

THE HINDU

NEW ERA FOR RURAL INDIA

NATIONAL LAUNCH OF PROGRAMMES UNDER NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (NREGA)



Dr. Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India

9-UPA C.M.

BY

Dr. Manmohan Singh

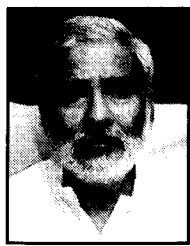
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India

on 2nd February 2006 at 11:00 A.M.

at Bandlapalle Gram Panchayat, Narpala Mandal, District Ananthapur (Andhra Pradesh)



Smt. Sonia Gandhi
Chairperson
National Advisory Council

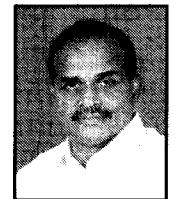


Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh
Union Minister for Rural Development

Smt. Sonia Gandhi

Hon'ble Chairperson

National Advisory Council will grace the occasion



Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy,
Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh

GRACIOUS PRESENCE

Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, Union Minister for Rural Development

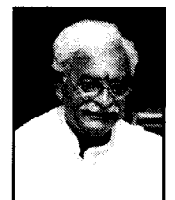
Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and Youth Affairs & Sports

Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh

Shri A. Narendra and Smt. Suryakanta Patil, Union Ministers of State for Rural Development



Smt. Suryakanta Patil
Union Minister of State for
Rural Development



Shri A. Narendra
Union Minister of State for
Rural Development

SIMULTANEOUS LAUNCHING OF NREGA TODAY ALL OVER THE COUNTRY IN GRAM SABHAS IN ABOUT 80,000 GRAM PANCHAYATS OF DISTRICTS SELECTED IN THE FIRST PHASE. CENTRAL MINISTERS, CHIEF MINISTERS, MINISTERS OF STATE GOVERNMENTS, MPs, MLAs, MLCs AND PRI FUNCTIONARIES WOULD PARTICIPATE.

**100 Days of Work in
Rural Areas becomes a
Legal Right**



THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NREGA STARTS FROM TODAY i.e. ON 2nd FEBRUARY 2006

RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN THE NOTIFIED DISTRICTS CAN NOW EXERCISE VARIOUS RIGHTS UNDER THE ACT :

- ❖ The right to demand employment
- ❖ The right to get employment within 15 days of their demand
- ❖ The right to get unemployment allowance if the employment is not given within 15 days
- ❖ The right to be paid statutory wages prevalent in a State
- ❖ The right to worksite facilities like drinking water, sheds for children and first aid

The application for employment may be given to the gram panchayat or To the Programme Officer at the Block level.

SALIENT FEATURES OF NREGA

- NREGA is not just a scheme but an Act providing legal guarantee to work.
- Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) will have principal role in planning and implementation.
- Transparency, accountability, social audit and people's participation will be ensured through institutional mechanism.
- Grievance redressal mechanism will be put in place.
- One third beneficiaries will be women.
- Any adult person in the notified area willing to do unskilled manual work, can apply for registration with Gram Panchayat. He/She will then be issued a job card.
- The job card is the legal instrument that will entitle the registered person to apply for employment under the Act.
- Registration will be open throughout the year.
- Employment will be given within 5 km. of the applicant's residence, else additional wages will be paid.

List of 200 Districts Identified for implementation of NREGA in First Phase

Andhra Pradesh: Adilabad, Ananthapur, Chittoor, Cudappah, Karimnagar, Khammam, Mahbubnagar, Medak, Nalgonda, Nizamabad, Rangareddy, Vizianagaram, Warangal, **Arunachal Pradesh:** Upper Subansiri, **Assam:** Bongaigaon, Dhemaji, Goalpara, Karbi Anglong, Kokrajhar, North Cachar Hills, North Lakhimpur (Laksha), **Bihar:** Araria, Aurangabad, Bhojpur, Darbhanga, Gaya, Jamui, Jehanabad, Kaimur(Bhabua), Katihar, Kishanganj, Lakhisarai, Madhubani, Munger, Muzaffarpur, Nalanda, Nawadah, Patna, Purnia, Rohtas, Samastipur, Sheohar, Supaul, Vaishali, **Chhattisgarh:** Bastar, Bilaspur, Dantewada, Dhamtari, Jashpur, Kanker, Kawardha, Koriya, Raigarh, Rajnandgaon, Sarguja, **Gujarat:** Banaskantha, Dangs, Dohad, Narmada, Panch Mahals, Sabarkantha, **Haryana:** Mohindergarh, Sirsa, **Himachal Pradesh:** Chamba, Sirmour, **J&K:** Doda, Kupwara, Poonch, **Jharkhand:** Bokaro, Chatra, Dhanbad, Dumka, Garhwa, Giridih, Godda, Gumla, Hazaribagh, Jamtara, Kodarma, Latehar, Lohardagga, Pakaur, Palamu, Ranchi, Sahibganj, Saraikela, Simdega, Pachim Singhbhum, **Karnataka:** Bidar, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Gulbarga, Raichur, **Kerala:** Palakkad, Waynad, **Madhya Pradesh:** Balaghat, Barwani, Betul, Chattarpur, Dhar, Dindori, Jhabua, Khandwa (East Nimar), Mandla, Satna, Seoni, Shahdol, Sheopur, Shivpuri, Siddhi, Tikamgarh, Umaria, West Nimar (Khargone), **Maharashtra:** Ahmednagar, Amravati, Aurangabad, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Dhule, Gadchiroli, Gondya, Hingoli, Nanded, Nandurbar, Yawatmal, **Manipur:** Tamenlong, **Meghalaya:** South Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, **Mizoram:** Lawngtlai, Saiha, **Nagaland:** Mon, **Orissa:** Bolangir, Boudh, Debagarh, Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Ganjam, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Keonjhar, Koraput, Malkangiri, Mayurbhanj, Nabarangpur, Nuapada, Phulbani, Rayagada, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Sundargarh, **Punjab:** Hoshiarpur, **Rajasthan:** Banswara, Dungarpur, Jhalawar, Karauli, Sirahi, Udaipur, **Sikkim:** North Sikkim, **Tripura:** Dhalai, **Tamil Nadu:** Dinidigul, Nagapattinam, Sivagangai, South Arcot/Cuddalore, Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, **Uttanchal:** Chamoli, Champawat, Tehri Garhwal, **Uttar Pradesh:** Azamgarh, Banda, Barabanki, Chandauli, Chitrakoot, Fatehpur, Gorakhpur, Hamirpur, Hardoi, Jalaun, Jaunpur, Kaushambi, Kushinagar, Lakhimpur Kheri, Lalitpur, Mahoba, Mirzapur, Pratapgarh, Raebareilly, Sitapur, Sonbhadra, Unnao, **West Bengal:** South 24 Parganas, Bankura, Birbhum, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Murshidabad, Purulia, Dakshin Dinajpur, Midnapur West, Uttar Dinajpur



**MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**



I'm here to stay: PM

Q. UPA Govt
New Delhi: Unfazed by the strident attack of crucial Left allies over the Centre's economic and foreign policies, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday said his government would complete its full five-year term despite differences in the coalition and dismissed suggestions that he was "weak".

He also said Sonia Gandhi had a "legitimate influence" on his government as Congress president and UPA chairperson and the arrangement of division of work between them was functioning well. In his second full-fledged press conference after taking over as Prime Minister in May 2004, Manmohan handled with ease questions ranging from domestic political and economic issues to India's relations with the US, Pakistan and the government's stand on the controversial Iran issue.

"We are a coalition government. There can be differences and without consensus we will not do anything. There is no fear that the government

will fall. I will run for five years," he said, replying to a question on the Left opposition forcing the government to deviate from the CMP on issues like disinvestment of navratna companies and the Iran vote.



Manmohan Singh makes a point at Wednesday's press meet in Delhi

Expressing optimism of double digit growth in the coming years, Manmohan outlined the need to carry out reforms in power sector, increase credit to farm sector and cut the government's fiscal deficit.

"The economy has recorded 7-7.5% growth in the last three years and we are inching towards 8-10%," he told a press conference here. "All our macro-economic indicators are robust and point to another year of over 7% growth," he said, referring to the UPA's commitment to sustain 7-8% growth.

The economy had logged over 8.1% growth in the first half of 2005-06 after clocking 7.5% last fiscal. "Today India is the fastest growing nation. At the world economic forum, India was the star attraction," he said. Agencies

We will not buckle under pressure: Manmohan

9-UPA GWT 410 1

“Enlightened national interest guides foreign policy; division of labour with Sonia Gandhi is working well”

Harish Khare

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said here on Wednesday that “enlightened national interest” guided his Government’s foreign policy and “we will not, have not, buckled under” any kind of external pressure.

Addressing his second “national press conference” at Vigyan Bhavan, he said his coalition Government was stable despite some “expected tensions” with the Left parties. He predicted that his Government would complete its five-year term. He said the “division of labour” between him and the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi was “working well.” She had a

“legitimate” role and “she was a source of strength, not a source of weakness for me.”

He claimed credit for sound economic management and said the country was inching towards a growth of eight to ten per cent. He cited the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, Right to Information Act and National Rural Health Mission among the three major achievements of his Government.

Answering a number of questions on ties with the United States in the context of the civilian nuclear agreement and the Iran issue, he said India’s stand would be based on an assessment of “what shall be in our national interest.” The India-

U.S. relationship had not become hostage to the July 2005 Civilian Nuclear Agreement because it was “not a one shot relationship.” India was now an “honoured dialogue partner” for the international community and this indicated the “winds of change” in its global standing.

On the nuclear front, he said, “we are seeking a new brave world order” which would “cease to discriminate against” India.

On how his Government had handled various domestic political controversies such as Jharkhand, Volcker, Bihar Assembly dissolution, he said, “I do not disown” some of those dicey decisions but argued that “ultimately, and our Government did

the right thing”. As for the defreezing of the Quattrocchi accounts, he repeated his Guwahati statement that the decision to freeze or defreeze was not taken “at the level of the Government” and it was for the CBI to make the call.

In a bit of sparring with his political rivals, he took on the BJP leaders who had called him various names. “I have done nothing to deserve all these epithets.” He added that he would like to be judged on the basis of his performance rather than on “what Mr. Advani says.”

Acknowledging that there were contradictions within the United Progressive Alliance coalition, he said it was “my privilege to reconcile them” and to

“harmonise these economic and social forces.” On the possibility of a conflict between the judiciary and the legislature, he said it was “incumbent upon all constitutional functionaries” to work in a cohesive manner. And, in the recent Supreme Court verdict on Bihar, there was “a difference of opinion, a difference of perceptions” even on the Bench but the Supreme Court “was entitled to respect, and we respect it.”

The 90-minute media interaction saw Dr. Singh handle (mostly friendly) questions competently, with an occasional display of wit and humour.

More reports on Page 12



SPEAKING OUT: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PHOTO: V. SUDERSHAN

BIDS Patel says satisfied with revenue share; GMR-Fraport matched Reliance-ASA bid for Delhi with 45.9% revenue share, GVK-SA offered 38.7% for Mumbai

GMR-Fraport bags Delhi airport project, Mumbai goes to GVK-SA

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 31

PLANS for modernisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports took off today with the Government announcing that the GMR-Fraport consortium had won the bid for the Delhi airport project while the Mumbai airport work was bagged by the GVK-South Africa combine.

Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel, who made the announcement, said the proposals of the two consortia were approved at a meeting of the Empowered Group of Ministers that considered various bids. They will now be placed before the Cabinet for a decision tomorrow.

According to Patel, the GMR-Fraport combine had matched the highest bidder Reliance-ASA for Delhi airport by offering 45.99 per cent revenue share to the Government. For Mumbai, GVK-South Africa offered 38.7 per cent revenue share.

In a bid to placate agitated employees of the Airports Authority of India (AAI), who threatened to stop work after the announcement of the financial bids, Patel said all employees were mandatorily going on deputation for three years to the two airports.

The two successful bidders had agreed to absorb a minimum of 60 per cent of employees working at the two airports, although they were asked to take a minimum of only 40 per cent of the employees after a three year period. The AAI would retain 10-15 per cent of the workers.

In view of the employees' threat to strike work, the Centre has instructed state authorities to immediately put systems and arrangements in place to ensure there is no disruption in regular services at the airports. The Government is also understood to have

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Why striking airport unions should visit comrades in China



AAI employees protest outside the AAI office in New Delhi. Raaj Dayal

PALLAVI AIYAR
BEIJING, JANUARY 31

SOON after the financial bids were opened and the job of revamping Delhi and Mumbai airports awarded to two private consortia, the Left-backed airport unions announced a strike. While they cool their heels tomorrow, they could look next door to their comrades in China.

Already boasting several world-class gleaming international gateways, the world's biggest airport is currently under construction in China's capital, Beijing. Not just Beijing, as of now, more than 20 airports are undergoing extensive upgradation, an estimated 80 are being built to provide passenger and cargo feeder line service for the largest airports.

"Every city in China wants to have its own international airport and so this is really an exciting emerging sector for public-private partnerships," says Patrick Horgan, President of the British Chamber of Commerce in Beijing. The problem, he says, is actually "restraining excess investment rather than making things happen."

"For China, airports are a No. 1 priority because as our economy grows they need to match that growth," says Wang Kun Zhi, Director, Airport Construction Division, Civil Aviation Authority of China.

And while India has taken just the first step on the reforms path, China has been aggressively setting its house in order over the past few years.

Until 1979, the Government

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE NEW HANDS

For Delhi, GMR-Fraport

■ **Fraport:** Owner, operator of Germany's Frankfurt International Airport (below), Peru's Lima Airport, Turkey's Antalya International Ter-



minal and five other international airports

■ Involved in building, management, consulting, personnel training, ground handling in Athens, Vienna, Hong Kong, Brussels and Shanghai

■ **GMR Group:** Already cleared to build, own and operate the Hyderabad International Airport

For Mumbai, GVK-Airports Company South Africa

■ **ACSA:** Largest airports authority in Africa, owns and operates South



Africa's nine principal airports, including Johannesburg (top), Cape Town and Durban

■ Has extensive experience in managing - from the smallest to Johannesburg International Airport, which is larger than Mumbai and Delhi airports

■ **GVK Industries:** Implemented core infrastructure projects from Nagarjunasagar Dam to the six-lane Jaipur-Kishengarh expressway

Stop-work at all airports

Privatisation despite threat

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Planes will fly after 10 am tomorrow but baggage may not get on board.

Airport employees will stop work from tomorrow morning in protest against the government awarding Delhi and Mumbai airport modernisation contracts to private parties.

The employees' forum is not calling the industrial action a strike, which is all-pervasive, but a stop-work without a time limit.

As of now, the indication is that air traffic controllers, who guide planes in and out of airports, will not join the action. Nor would security personnel.

This means that while flights may not be affected, all other airport services — like baggage handling, aerobridge, electricity, water supply, air-conditioning, conveyor belt operations, X-ray checks and cleaning — could come to a halt.

Expecting disruption, the government has kept air traffic controllers, communication experts and technicians of the Indian Air Force on alert in the country's 20 top airfields. These include the airports in the metropolitan cities.

The Centre also wrote to state governments, requesting them to protect air traffic from

getting disrupted. But a state government official said they could do little to keep airport services going in a strike or stop-work.

Civil aviation minister Praful Patel, who earlier in the day announced that GMR-Fraport (Frankfurt airport) had bagged the Delhi airport contract and GVK-South Africa Airport Mumbai, said "we have made alternative plans" to keep services running.

He also promised to keep talking to the employees' forum, which is being backed by the Left parties. The employees' demand is that modernisation should be carried out by the government-owned Airports Authority of India (AAI) alone.

Airlines were not sure how well the "alternative plan" would work and said they would decide whether or not to reschedule flights according to how the situation develops tomorrow.

Earlier in the day, a group of ministers, set up to vet the bids for modernisation, picked GMR-Fraport and GVK-South Africa Airport as the winners.

The Anil Ambani-owned Reliance Airport Developers, which had bid for both, did not get any of the contracts and raised a stink over the process followed for the awards.

Two hours before the bids were opened today, the bidders

Who won the Delhi and Mumbai airport projects?

GMR-Fraport bagged Delhi. GVK-South African Airport Operator won Mumbai.

Who are they?

GMR-Fraport is a consortium. GMR is an infrastructure development company based in south India while Fraport owns and operates Frankfurt airport. GVK, also from south India, partners a South African group that operates that country's 10 principal airports.

Didn't Anil Ambani's Reliance bid higher than GMR?

Yes. Reliance Airport Developers had offered to share 45.99% of the revenue with the government. GMR's bid offered a 43.64% share.

Then how come GMR won Delhi?

GMR, the runner-up in Delhi and Mumbai, was given the option to match either of the top bids because it was the sole "technically qualified" bidder. It matched the Reliance offer in Delhi

How did Reliance react?

It has expressed shock. If a cabinet meeting on Wednesday sticks to the table award, legal options are on the table.

Has the government offered any carrot to the airport employees?

Yes. For three years, they will remain government employees. After that a minimum 60% will be absorbed by the consortiums. The Airports Authority of India will retain 15%. The rest will be absorbed "elsewhere"

How did airport employees react?

They have decided to "stop work" from Wednesday morning.



An Indian Airlines plane at Delhi airport. File picture.

DOG FIGHT ON THE GROUND

Calcutta question

JAYANTAROY
CHOWDHURY

New Delhi, Jan. 31: After Delhi and Mumbai, it's the turn of Calcutta and Chennai airports to be modernised.

While Chennai poses no apparent political challenge, Calcutta, the capital of the Red bastion, may be a difficult airport to privatise. Officials connected with the effort said the government is divided.

It is considering setting up a special purpose vehicle, which will source funds from banks and other investors, and letting the Airports Authority of India (AAI) carry out the modernisation in tie-up with foreign airports. The Left supports this model.

But many, including finance minister P. Chidambaram, want the two airports to be privatised.

The third alternative is to let the AAI modernise and manage the airside of the airport — parking bays, etc. — while letting private bidders upgrade the cityside with its malls, hotels, aircraft counters and baggage handling.

The two airports that their jobs were not under threat as all of them would be on compulsory deputation for three years. Both bidders had promised to take in 60 per cent of the workforce at the end of three years.

"Another 15 per cent would remain at these airports on our rolls while the rest would be absorbed elsewhere."

See Page 6

demanding scrapping of the controversial bidding process and called it "vitiated", reacted sharply.

"This sets the stage for a major confrontation," said Nilotpal Basu, CPM leader in the Rajya Sabha.

Politburo member Sitaram Yechury went several steps further. "The Rajiv Gandhi government had to go because

among other things, why GMR was given the opportunity.

"To our utter shock and surprise, substantial changes to the published tender conditions have been telephonically communicated, in strange circumstances, barely two hours before opening of financial bids," Reliance said.

The threat of stop-work is not the only problem the gov-

ernment faces. There is a strong possibility that aggrieved bidders will go to court.

Patel, who made the announcement after the ministerial group's meeting, said: "We will go to the cabinet with these awards tomorrow... We have talked to everyone and I think we have come to a middle path on all issues."

The Left, which had been

were informed that tender conditions had been changed. GMR-Fraport was the only one to qualify as a technical bidder and when the bids were opened, it was asked to match the financial offer of Reliance of a 45.99 per cent revenue share for the government.

It was awarded the contract once it agreed to do so. Reliance is questioning,

among other things, why GMR was given the opportunity.

"To our utter shock and surprise, substantial changes to the published tender conditions have been telephonically communicated, in strange circumstances, barely two hours before opening of financial bids," Reliance said.

The threat of stop-work is not the only problem the gov-

MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2006

An unedifying exercise

A key to understanding a government's overall direction and policy thrust is the composition of its Council of Ministers. In May 2004, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance wrested power from a communal regime of impatient liberalisers with an unmistakable agenda of aligning India closely with the United States. The overarching foreign policy commitment of the new Government, as stated in the National Common Minimum Programme, was to reverse that thrust and "pursue an independent foreign policy keeping in mind [India's] past traditions. This policy will seek to promote multipolarity in world relations and oppose all attempts at unilateralism." Twenty months on, much has happened to indicate that the Manmohan Singh Government has turned its back on that solemn promise. The message to be read in Sunday's reshuffle and expansion of the Union Council of Ministers is that this Government is headed Rightward — in economic policy but even more so in foreign affairs. Notable among Cabinet Ministers who have had key portfolios taken away from them are Mani Shankar Aiyar, by common consent the best-performing Minister in the Cabinet, and Jaipal Reddy. A few months ago, Mr. Reddy lost the Information and Broadcasting portfolio and in this round he has been divested of the Culture Ministry, which suffered enormous institutional damage under National Democratic Alliance rule. Mr. Aiyar has been shifted out of the crucial Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, where he demonstrated an independent and bold strategic thrust. He doggedly pursued the Iran-Pakistan-India strategic pipeline through New Delhi's denials and obfuscations. More recently, he concluded a path-breaking agreement with China on a joint bid for energy assets in third countries.

It is hard to avoid the reading that Mr. Aiyar paid with his job for advocating a vision of energy security that was seen as going against the Government's strategic pro-U.S. policy and its increasing acceptance of unilateralism and unipolarity. The Prime Minister has chosen to retain the Ministry of External Affairs, which fell vacant following the exit of Natwar Singh, another senior Minister seen to be out of sync with the Government's changed foreign policy orientation. A perception, confirmed by official sources, is that this has been done to avoid embarrassment to the U.S. ahead of President Bush's March visit. The chop and change exercise is the more intriguing for the retention of heavyweight portfolios by Ministers with an undistinguished record. A case in point is the retention of the Law portfolio by H.R. Bhardwaj, whose chief contribution to good governance has been secretly to help Ottavio Quattrocchi get his bank accounts, frozen in the Bofors case, freed. The UPA Government's first major team change is of course Congress-centric. The allies have lost nothing and gained nothing despite being represented by a number of underperforming Ministers, some of them with dubious records and far from clean. Most of the new Ministers, it seems, have been rewarded for nothing other than loyalty to 10 Janpath and sycophancy. All in all an unedifying exercise in tuning up the functioning of the Government.

30 JAN 2006

THE HINDU

Antulay, Shinde in Union Cabinet

18 new faces, Shibu Soren re-inducted, three elevated to Cabinet rank



NEW LINE-UP: President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam administering the oath of office to new Union Ministers Sushil Kumar Shinde, A.R. Antulay, Vayalar Ravi, Murli Deora. (Below) Ambika Soni, Shibu Soren, Santosh Mohan Dev, P.C. Gupta, Kapil Sibal and Saifudin Soz at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Sunday. — PHOTOS: V.V. KRISHNAN



Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The United Progressive Alliance Government on Sunday effected its first major expansion of the Council of Ministers, inducting 18 new faces, elevating three to Cabinet rank and re-inducting Shibu Soren.

All the new entrants are from the Congress while the only one re-induction and elevation apiece are drawn from the allies.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will continue to look after the Foreign Affairs portfolio while four new Ministers have not been given any charge.

The swearing-in ceremony at

noon at Rashtrapati Bhavan saw 10 new Cabinet Ministers, one Minister of State with Independent charge and 11 more Ministers of State. Among the Cabinet Ministers are three senior Congress leaders from Maharashtra — Sushil Kumar Shinde, A. R. Antulay and Murli Deora. Mani Shankar Aiyar has been relieved of the Petroleum portfolio, which has been allocated to Mr. Deora. Mr. Shinde is the new Power Minister in place of P.M. Sayeed who passed away, while Mr. Antulay is the Cabinet Minister for Minority Affairs, a newly created portfolio.

With the nomination of Vaya-

lar Ravi as Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Kerala gets its first Cabinet Minister in the present dispensation. Congress general secretary Ambika Soni is Minister for Tourism and Culture and Saif-ud-Din Soz, Water Resources Minister, filling the slot vacated by Priyaranjan Dasmunsi.

Santosh Mohan Dev, Prem Chand Gupta and Kapil Sibal are now of Cabinet rank with all of them retaining their portfolios. G. K. Vasani is the sole new Minister for State (MoS) with independent charge of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Oscar Fernandes has been re-

tained as MoS with independent charge without a portfolio.

Three without portfolio

Apart from Mr. Fernandes, no portfolio was allocated to three Ministers of State — Subbarami Reddy, Jairam Ramesh and Dinsha Patel. The other new Ministers of State are Anand Sharma (External Affairs), M. Pallam Raju (Defence), D. Purandareswari (Human Resource Development), Pavan Kumar Bansal (Finance), Ajay Maken (Urban Development), Chandra Sekhar Sahu (Labour), Akhilesh Das (Steel) and Ashwani Kumar (Industry).

The expansion of the Cabinet also saw a minor change in some portfolios. Minister of State for HRD Kanti Singh will now handle Heavy Industries, B. K. Handique has been moved from Defence to Chemicals and Fertilizers, and Parliamentary Affairs, E.V.K.S. Elangovan from Commerce to Textiles, and Rao Inderjit Singh from External Affairs to Defence. Renuka Chowdhury has been shifted from the Tourism to Woman and Child Development.

More reports on Page 12

HINDUSTAN TIMES

UPA shifts gears

YOU CAN almost hear the page turn to Chapter Two in the book called the United Progressive Alliance. Sunday's reshuffle of the Union cabinet was a measured exercise to fill gaps brought on by the attrition of 20 months of the government, to reward loyalty, promote performance and balance the coalition. It also shifts gears to increase the speed and imparts enhanced torque to the governmental vehicle. Nearing its third year mark, the Congress-led UPA government has gained experience in running a coalition, as well as the management of the central government itself.

The reshuffle is clearly a part of the exercise of revitalising the party and the government on priorities set out by its leader Sonia Gandhi at the recent Hyderabad plenary. It also bears the stamp of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His hand is clearly visible in the appointment of Murli Deora and Sushil Kumar Shinde, as well as the decision to elevate Kapil Sibal to cabinet rank, and have Ambika Soni join his team with the tourism and culture portfolio.

The PM's decision to retain the exter-

nal affairs appears to be in keeping with his commitment to keep the position vacant till the judicial commission on the Volcker affair submits its report. The fact that the top cabinet positions have remained untouched indicates that the aim was to make changes without disturbing the overall positive equilibrium of the government. However, the PM's decision to divest Mani Shankar Aiyer of the petroleum portfolio seems to be a signal that, though mild he may be, the PM will insist on ministers' following the *dharma* of collective responsibility on matters of policy by his council of ministers.

The clutch of new appointments at the cabinet and junior level will certainly lubricate the machinery of the government: some are highly regarded for loyalty to the party and public service, others represent the need to maintain a regional balance. And some clearly target the coming state assembly polls. Whether it is promotion of ministers, induction of veterans or coalition partners, the reshuffle signals the government's aim to uphold the *dharma* of coalition politics, as well as of good governance.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 JAN 2006

Union Cabinet reshuffle today

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 28. — The much-awaited expansion and reshuffle of the Union Council of Ministers will take place tomorrow. This will be the first such exercise since the Congress-led UPA government assumed office in May 2004.

Dr Manmohan Singh had an hour-long meeting with the UPA chairperson, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, today. The matter of choosing the right person for the external affairs ministry apparently took up much of their time. Unconfirmed reports have it that the veteran Congress leader, Dr Karan Singh, may get the plum portfolio. His appointment would come well ahead of President George W Bush's visit to New Delhi in early March.

Significantly, Dr Singh today took oath as a third-time Rajya Sabha member on the expiry of his second term. He was elected to the Upper House in the recent elections.

The names of the commerce minister, Mr Kamal Nath, and the UP Congress chief, Mr Salman Kurshid, were also reported to be doing the rounds for the external affairs portfolio that fell vacant after the resignation of Mr Natwar Singh over the Volcker report last month.

Besides, there are at least six vacancies in the UPA ministry. The deaths of PM Sayeed and Sunil Dutt had left the power and sports and youth affairs slots open. Another vacancy arose from the resignation of Mr Jagdish Tytler in the wake of the Nanavati Commission's report that indicted him over the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad

shifted to Srinagar early last month to take over as the Jammu and Kashmir chief minister, while Mr K Rahman Khan quit his ministerial post to become the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, thereby creating two vacancies — one Cabinet rank and the other minister of state.

Tomorrow's exercise is to be mainly Congress-oriented. The Congress' allies barely have any vacant slot from their respective quotas unless they reach some deal with the Congress over swapping of non-heavy-weight portfolios.

The JMM chief, Mr Siby Soren, who has been anxiously waiting to retain his coal ministry, is likely to be inducted tomorrow. The RJD might be asked to nominate its alternative candidate to fill the vacancy of Mr JFN Yadav, who resigned over a criminal case following the Bihar Assembly polls.

The Cabinet expansion might also focus on certain regions and communities not accommodated. Kerala, Punjab, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal Pradesh do not have any representative in the ministry now. Mr AK Antony, Mr Giridhar Gamang, Mrs Ambika Soni, Mr Anand Sharma, Mr GK Vasan, Mr Saifuddin Soz, Mr Mauli Deora and Mr Veerappa Moily are also said to be in the reckoning. Mrs Mohsina Kidwai is likely to be inducted to fill in the blank from the Muslim community.

The chances of any heads rolling in tomorrow's exercise are slim. There could be some surprises in filling up berths at the junior level, though.

THE STATESMAN

29 JAN 2006

26 JAN 2006

বুটা সরলে লক্ষ্য মনমোহন, বুঝেই সময় নিচ্ছে নিচ্ছে কংগ্রেস

নিষ্কণ্ঠ সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৫ জানুয়ারি: বুটা সিংহকে যেতেই হচ্ছে। কিন্তু কবে এবং কি ভাবে, তাই নিয়ে এখনও স্থিধা ক্যাটনিক কংগ্রেসের।

কালই মন্ত্রিসভার বৈঠকে এ ব্যাপারে সর্বসম্মত সিদ্ধান্ত হয়েছে। কিন্তু রাজ্যপালকে অপসারণের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে বিরোধীদের আক্রমণের লক্ষ্য যে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ হয়ে পড়বেন, তাই নিয়ে বিদ্রোহী দলনেতা লালকৃষ্ণ আভাবাণীর দাবিও সেই ইঙ্গিতই দিচ্ছে। এই অবস্থায় তাই আজ সনিয়া-মনমোহনহনের মনোভাব বুটাকে জানিয়ে দিয়েও তাঁর উপরে প্রবল চাপ তৈরি করেনি কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল।

বুটা নিজেও কাল প্রজাতন্ত্র দিবসের কটকাওয়াজে অতিবাহন গ্রহণে অনড়। কিন্তু সূত্রিম কোর্টের রায়ে পরে অন্তত ২৪ ঘণ্টা সময় পেয়েও তাঁর এই

কোমর বেঁধেছে, তার আভাস মিলল আজ তাদের নতুন উদ্যমে। এনডিএ-র এক প্রতিনিধিগণিল আজ রাষ্ট্রপতি এ পি জে আব্দুল কালামের সঙ্গে দেখা করতে যান। রাষ্ট্রপতি নিজেও সরকারের গভিমসি দেখে ফুঁক। কারণ সূত্রিম কোর্টের স্পষ্ট রায়ের পর বুটা সিংহকে পদে রেখে দেওয়ার কোনও যুক্তি নেই।

সূত্রিম কোর্ট রাজ্যপালের পদ নিয়ে নতুন নির্দেশনায় তৈরি করার যে প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে, তা নিয়ে আলোচনা শুরু করার প্রসঙ্গে মোটামুটি একমত তৈরি হয়েছে। কংগ্রেসের মুখপাত্র আনন্দ শর্মা আজ বলেন, এ বিষয়ে সর্বদলীয় বৈঠক ডাকা যেতে পারে। একই মতের শরিক বিজেপিও। আর কমিউনিস্টরা তো আগেই এই দাবি জানিয়েছেন। এ বিষয়ে প্রকাশ কারাটের বক্তব্য, রাজ্যপালের একশমীর নির্দিষ্ট করে দেওয়া জরুরি ইচ্ছার বিরুদ্ধে, তাঁরা এক সময়ে



রাজ্যপালের পদই বিলোপ করার পক্ষে ছিলেন। তবে শুধু রাজনৈতিক ব্যক্তিত্ব রাজ্যপাল হতে পারবেন না, এমন কিছু মধ্য বিধায়টি সীমিত রাখার পক্ষপাতী তিনি নন। কারণ অ-রাজনৈতিক ব্যক্তিত্বও রাজনৈতিক পক্ষপাতদোষে দুষ্ট হতে পারেন।

অর্থাৎ আঞ্চলিক দলগুলি প্রায় সব সময়েই কিংবদন্তি মজিমাফিক রাজ্যপাল নিয়োগের শিকার হয়ে থাকে। কাজেই তাঁদের আগ্রহ তো আছেই। এমনিতেই রাজ্যপালের পদ নিয়ে দীর্ঘদিন ধরে বিতর্ক চলে আসছে। সরকারি মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে শুরু করে ইন্ডিজিং ওয়র্কিং কমিটি সকলেই এই পদের সংস্কার চেয়েছিল। কিন্তু যখন কোর্টে যারা ক্ষমতাসীন তারা আগ্রহ দেখাননি। এখন সূত্রিম কোর্টের পর্যবেক্ষণের ভিত্তিতে বিষয়টি একটা পরিণতির দিকে যেতে পারে।

আভাবাণী আজ বলেন, "আজই বুটা সিংহকে ইস্তফা দিতে বলা হোক। কাল স্যাটুট নিলে নির্লজ্জতা হবে। সেটা হবে অত্যন্ত দুর্ভাগ্যজনক।" তিনি রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে গিয়ে বুটা সিংহকে বরখাস্ত করা ও প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পদত্যাগের দাবি জানান। রাষ্ট্রপতি ওই সিদ্ধান্তেই সই করলেও তাঁর বক্তব্য, রাষ্ট্রপতির ইস্তফা তাঁরা চাইবেন

না, কারণ রাষ্ট্রপতি সরকারের পরামর্শমতো কাজ করেন। তবে তিনি রাষ্ট্রপতিকে অনুবোধ করেছেন সরকারের কাছ থেকে কয়েকটি বিষয়ের ব্যাখ্যা চাইতে। যেমন রাত চারটের সময় তাঁর কাছে সই করার জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পদত্যাগ চাইলেও পাঠানো হল কেন। রাজ্যপালই বা সেই রায়ে রিপোর্ট পাঠালেন? সব কিছুর পিছনে কে ছিলেন— প্রধানমন্ত্রী, স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী না কি সনিয়া গাণ্ধী? বিজেপির বক্তব্য, বুটা দায়ী ঠিকই, কিন্তু তিনি বলির পাঁঠা হচ্ছেন। ভোলকার কাণ্ডে নটবর সিংহ এবং বর্কস কাণ্ডে হংসরাজ ভরদ্বাজকে বলির পাঁঠা করা হয়েছে। এটা এ বার বন্ধ হওয়া উচিত।

সমাজবাদী পার্টিও প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পদত্যাগ দাবি করেছে। জমর সিংহ বলেন, যখনই অসুবিধায় সরকার জড়িয়ে পড়ছে তখনই প্রধানমন্ত্রী

বলছেন, তিনি সে সম্পর্কে অবহিত ছিলেন না। কিন্তু সিপিএমের সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি বলেছেন, সরকার রাজ্যের পরিস্থিতি সম্পর্কে অবহিত হয় রাজ্যপালের মাধ্যমে। তাই তাঁরা রাজ্যপালের পদত্যাগ চাইলেও প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পদত্যাগ চাইছেন না।

রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে এনডিএ-র স্মারকলিপিতে বলা হয়েছে, প্রধানমন্ত্রী সে সময় বলেছিলেন, রাজ্যপালের রিপোর্ট ছাড়াও তাঁরা জেনেছেন, রাজ্যে মোড়া কেনাকাটা হচ্ছে এবং সে জমাই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পদত্যাগ চাইছেন। রাষ্ট্রপতিকে তাঁরা দেখিয়েছেন সর্বোচ্চ আদালত রাজ্যপাল সম্পর্কে কী বলেছে। ৪৬০ পৃষ্ঠার রায়ে 'অসাংবিধানিক' শব্দটি বারবার বলা হয়েছে। কিন্তু 'অসদুদ্দেশ্যপ্রসঙ্গিত' কথাটি এক বার আছে এবং 'সদুদ্দেশ্যপ্রসঙ্গিত' নম্বর রয়েছে তিন বার।

Keep freeze on Q account, SC tells govt

HT Political Bureau
New Delhi, January 16

THE SUPREME Court on Monday directed the Union government and the CBI to take steps to ensure that status quo was maintained vis-à-vis the two bank accounts of Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, a key accused in the Bofors payoff case.

"Respondents to take necessary steps for maintenance of status quo so that defreezing of accounts do not take place. If it has already taken place, money should not be withdrawn from the accounts," a Bench presided over by Chief Justice Y.K. Sabharwal said in its order.

It directed the petitioner, Ajay Aggarwal, to delete from the list of parties to the petition the names of law minister H.R. Bhardwaj and additional solicitor-general B. Datta, who purportedly carried an authorisation letter to the British Crown Prosecution Service clearing the defreezing of the accounts.

In Guwahati, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh rejected the Opposition's charge of interference in the matter. He said the action related to the defreezing of the accounts was taken by the CBI. "Action relating to both freezing and unfreezing of these accounts were taken at the level of the CBI in consultation with law officials..."

Earlier, while listening to the arguments of the petitioner, who sought the court's intervention to stop the transfer of a sum of Rs 26 crore lying in these accounts, the court observed: "The accounts were lying frozen for over two-and-a-half years. It should stay that way."

In the evening the CBI said that while it was officially yet to



OTTAVIO QUATTROCCHI

The CBI has questioned others named in the Bofors case outside India. I am willing to be subjected to similar questioning.

hear about the Supreme Court's order, it had taken steps to inform the CPS of the development. CBI joint director A. Majumdar asserted that he was not aware of the British High Court order regarding defreezing of Quattrocchi's two accounts or whether the money had been withdrawn.

From Milan, Quattrocchi issued a statement saying since the CBI had no evidence linking his London accounts with Bofors, the UK had no option but to defreeze the accounts. He demanded that the case against him be ended. "The CBI questioned others named in the case such as the Hindujas and Win Chadha outside India. I am willing to be subjected to similar questioning," PTI quoted him as saying.

See also Page 2

N-pact throwback to reforms days for PM

By Indrani Bagchi/TNN

New Delhi: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh presided over the first review meeting on the Indo-US nuclear deal over the weekend. The meeting, attended by top officials of the ministry of external affairs (MEA) and the national security adviser, was the first threadbare discussion of negotiations with the US after the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) developed cold feet during talks with the US last week, leading to an open spat with the MEA which is the nodal body for the negotiations.

According to sources, the PM has signalled that he will continue to oversee the implementation of the deal, including allowing for consensus between the warring sections of

the government. It is also a sure sign that the PM will use his political clout to see the agreement through.

In many ways, for the Prime Minister, said sources, the experience was similar to the liberalisation of the Indian economy that he presided over in 1991. Then too, opposition came from the "Bombay Club", and this time another "Bombay Club" (read DAE) is objecting to the liberalisation of Indian nuclear energy sector.

The DAE's objections centre around the number of reactors that will be put in the civilian list, which will come under a safeguards agreement with the IAEA. But the crux is the IAEA inspections that the civilian nuclear reactors and their processes will be subject to.

The problem here is that India's nuclear establishment, like India's protected industry, has existed in a cocoon for decades. The very mention of competition and inspections, invite the "patriotic" complaint that a sellout of India's nuclear sovereignty was on the cards. India's nuclear scientists, protected so long by a thick veil of secrecy, not only have not been subjected to peer review, they continue to labour under some serious but misplaced insecurity.

Which, said government sources, is unfair to the scientists. From the US' Nuclear Regulatory Commission chief to a recent international team that toured the Tarapur reactors, India's nuclear establishment came in for unqualified praise.

Hence, the government is

inclined to be slightly indulgent to the holdouts, waiting for a consensus to evolve. The PM will only step in at the last minute, said sources.

But a political interest has been re-injected into the process, because left to itself, the DAE, said sources, had convinced itself that it needed no international cooperation at all.

The bottomline that will be imposed by the government is this: the nuclear deal is India's gateway to energy security, that the deal is about energy, not weapons. The separation list has to reflect that basic demand that is India's reason for importing fuel, technology and reactors.

If only, sighs top officials involved in the negotiations, the deal wasn't mixed up with Iran.

VERDICT: BUTA GUILTY

SC says Bihar Governor misled Centre by recommending dissolution of House



WHAT THE SC SAID

- There was no evidence before the Governor to conclude allurement and inducement of legislators to join a particular group
- The opinion formed by the Governor had no basis and his action was only to prevent Nitish Kumar from forming an alliance and staking his claim
- When mala fide exercise of power was writ large, the court could not remain a silent spectator to the subversion of democracy
- Political persons are being appointed Governors, who, because of their ideologies, behave as agents of the party in power
- It is time political parties work out a national policy on the choice of Governors based on the report of the Sarkaria Commission

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 24

IN A searing indictment of Bihar Governor Buta Singh, a five-judge Supreme Court bench said on Tuesday that his recommendation for dissolution of the state Assembly in May 2005 was "hasty, drastic and extreme".

The Governor's action was tainted by "mala fides" and was intended to "prevent a particular political party" (the Nitish Kumar led JD(U)-BJP combine) "from staking claim to form a government", the bench said in a 3:2 verdict.

The order was endorsed by Chief Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Justices B.N. Agarwal and Ashok Bhan, while Justices K.G. Balakrishnan and Arijit Pasayat disagreed with their view.

"The drastic and extreme action under Article 356 cannot be justified on the mere... whims and fancies of the Governor," the majority of the bench observed, substantiating the court's October 7 order striking down the May 23 presidential proclamation dissolving the House.

Nitish has since taken over as Bihar chief minister following fresh polls and the court's refusal to restore status quo ante. The court observed that the council of ministers should have veri-

fied the Governor's report before acting on it. "In the facts and circumstances, the Governor may be the main player but the council of ministers should have verified facts stated in the report before hurriedly accepting it as gospel truth. Clearly the Governor misled the council of ministers which led to aid and advise being given by the council of ministers to the President leading to the issue of the presidential proclamation," the court said.

The three judges also held that though the Governor enjoyed complete immunity from judicial scrutiny under Article 361, the court could go into his actions in case of mala fides.

The court said that the Governor could not refuse to entertain a claim by a majority to form a government on the ground that the majority was cobbled through "illegal means". That would be going against the principle of majority enshrined in the Constitution and would have "dangerous and unwarranted consequences" in a democratic system, the court said.

In this context, it reflected on the practice of appointing active politicians to the post of Governor without a "cooling off" period and urged political parties to frame a national policy.



BUTASPEAK

"I haven't said anything on it (resignation). I am going to take salute in Patna on Republic Day"

SHEKHAR IYER
New Delhi, January 24

THE BJP has scaled up its demand: it wants the Prime Minister's head.

When the Supreme Court on Tuesday delivered its full verdict on the Bihar Assembly's dissolution, the BJP realised that the government had got away without a very sharp rebuke by the apex court, and only Buta Singh found himself in the dock. So, it targeted the Prime Minister in the hope of getting a bigger political head.

Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani hurriedly called a news conference at this home to demand the resignation of Manmohan Singh. He said the NDA would go to President Abdul Kalam with a memorandum, seeking action on the basis of the verdict.

NDA convener George Fernandes, too, demanded the PM and the entire Cabinet's resignation. The NDA will launch a nationwide strike highlighting the government's role.

Advani said the judgement "suggests if the Governor misled the council of ministers, the Prime Minister as head of the council of ministers had misled the President in committing an unconstitutional act". As he put it, "the Supreme Court's observations may seem harsher against Governor Buta Singh. But the culpability of the PM is evidently greater because it was he who had convened a meeting of the council of ministers and it was he who had been instrumental in misleading the President".

Advani refused to buy Congress leaders' argument that it was a split verdict and hence lacked complete condemnation of the Bihar act. "I would say the Supreme Court is undoubtedly polite in respect of the council of ministers. But it has found the council guilty of non-application of mind."

See also Page 2

REACTIONS

Democratic accountability demands that both the Prime Minister and the Governor should quit

— BJP leader L.K. Advani

I don't see any way other than Governor Buta Singh stepping down

— CPM leader Prakash Karat

Leave it (Buta's resignation) to the conscience of the Governor. How can I say whether he should remain or go?

— Rly minister Lalu Yadav

I don't think it is proper to comment on the Supreme Court judgement

— Bihar CM Nitish Kumar

I never favoured dissolution, but given the circumstances, there was no other option (other than dissolution) left

— Union minister Ramvilas Paswan

উন্নয়নের তিন মন্ত্র জানালেন মনমোহন

হায়দরাবাদ, ২৩ জানুয়ারি: সাত শতাংশ উন্নয়নের হার সুনিশ্চিত করা গেলেও এখন তা বাড়ানোই কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের মূল লক্ষ্য। এখানে এ আই সি সি-র বার্ষিক অধিবেশনে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ আজ এ কথা জানিয়ে কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন জোট সরকারের তিনটি 'মন্ত্র' নিয়ে এগিয়ে চলার কথা উল্লেখ করেন। এই তিন মন্ত্র হল:

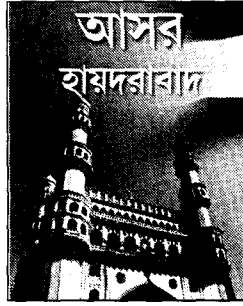
- কৃষির বিকাশ
- বিনিয়োগ বৃদ্ধি,

বিশেষ করে পরি-কাঠামোয় যথেষ্ট পুঁজি আনার ব্যবস্থা

● কর্মসংস্থান বাড়ানো নতুন প্রয়াস উন্নয়নের চড়া হারে পৌঁছতে আর কোনও বিকল্প নেই বলে প্রধানমন্ত্রী উল্লেখ করেছেন। ৭ থেকে ৮ শতাংশ উন্নয়নের হার ধরে রাখতে দারিদ্র কমানোর অঙ্গীকারও করেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। কর্মসংস্থানই এর রাস্তা।

গত ন'বছরে এই প্রথম ভারতে শিল্পোন্নয়নের হার ১০ শতাংশ ছাড়িয়েছে বলে দাবি করেন মনমোহন। তাঁর মতে এটা উৎপাদন শিল্পের পুনরুজ্জীবনে ইউপিএ সরকারের

প্রচেষ্টার ফল। ভারতের অর্থনীতির উপর দেশ-বিদেশের শিল্পমহলের আস্থাও বেড়েছে। ভারত যে উন্নয়নের মাপকাঠিতে আরও উপরে উঠতে প্রস্তুত, সেই সঙ্কেত সারা বিশ্বে



পৌঁছেছে, জানান মনমোহন।

ভারত নির্মাণ প্রকল্প প্রসঙ্গে প্রধানমন্ত্রী জানান, এর আওতায় এক লক্ষ হেক্টর জমি সেচের আওতায় আনার কথা। গ্রামে তৈরি হবে ৬০ হাজার ঘর-বাড়ি।

২০০৯ সালের মধ্যে প্রতিটি গ্রামে পৌঁছে দেওয়া হবে বিদ্যুৎ, জল, তৈরি হবে পাকা রাস্তা।

মনমোহন বলেন, চেষ্টা করতে হবে আর্থিক নীতিগুলি যাতে রাজ্য স্তরে রূপায়িত হয়। এ প্রসঙ্গে জাতীয় কর্মসংস্থান গ্যারান্টি প্রকল্পের উল্লেখ করে তিনি জানান প্রাথমিক ভাবে ২০০টি জেলায় প্রকল্প শুরু হবে।

তথ্যের অধিকার সংক্রান্ত বিলটি পাশ করাতে সনিয়া গাধীর প্রয়াসের প্রশংসা করেছেন মনমোহন। ওই অধিকার ঠিক মতো রক্ষা করতে সচেষ্ট হতে বলেন তিনি। — পি টি আই

Kamal Nath refutes Left allegations

NEW DELHI, Dec. 20. — Commerce and industry minister, Mr Kamal Nath, today refuted the misgivings raised by the Left Front over India's negotiations at the just concluded World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial at Hong Kong. "The Left needs to see and examine in detail the ministerial text," Mr Kamal Nath told reporters. "Their apprehensions are misplaced," he added.

Even as the minister said a good deal had been swung at the week-long sixth ministerial that ended on Sunday, the Left parties said not only had the government failed to protect the interests of India's farmers but also compromised on the services sector, but giving in to the US and EU. The Left also criticised Mr Kamal Nath for not standing up for the developing countries.

"I will talk to them (Left parties)," the commerce minister said. " He pointed out that India had not compromised on any of the issues listed out by the UPA government's allies. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

'QUATTROCCHI BEYOND CENTRE'S REACH'

Pranab pleads helplessness

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 17. — After the CBI's bid to bolster the wobbly position of the Union law minister, Mr HR Bharadwaj, through a U-turn on unfreezing UK bank accounts of Ottavio Quattrocchi, and barely a day after the Supreme Court directed the Centre and the CBI to ensure status quo so Quattrocchi could not withdraw money from them, the defence minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, today pleaded the Centre's "helplessness", saying the government had no "jurisdiction" over foreign countries.

"We have no jurisdiction on other countries. We can at best make a request to them (UK authorities to enforce the apex court's directives)," Mr Mukherjee said here. The irony is that, following the Indian government's recent communication — through the additional solicitor-general, Mr B Dutta — to the British Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), London High Court ordered the unfreezing of Quattrocchi's bank accounts a few days ago. It is believed that he has already withdrawn his 3 million Euros and \$1 million (totalling nearly Rs 21 crore) from them. London High Court's order came after the British prosecution agency had conveyed to it the Indian law ministry's virtual go-ahead for the unfreezing on the grounds of the CBI's failure in linking Quattrocchi's booty with Bofors kickbacks. When Mr Pranab Mukherjee was asked if the government would make any formal request to the UK author-



CBI may seek handover

NEW DELHI, Jan. 17. — With Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi coming out of "hiding" and talking freely to the media about his London accounts, the CBI may ask Italian authorities to honour a Red Corner notice issued against him by Interpol. The agency today said it was charting out a strategy to bring Quattrocchi to India and to maintain status quo on his unfrozen bank accounts. The Crown Prosecution Service today confirmed to the CBI that it had unfrozen his two London accounts with about Rs 21 crore in them.

ities to ensure that Quattrocchi did not withdraw the money, he said the "views of legal experts will be taken" on the matter. Mr Mukherjee is known to be the principal trouble-shooter of the Manmohan Singh government.

On the CBI's role in the episode, the defence minister echoed the Prime Minister's views that the the government did not interfere in the agency's func-

The CBI will try to have him extradited to India as he is wanted in a criminal case here, said a senior agency official.

CBI officials today had a long discussion with the Prime Minister's Office.

After the official confirmation from the CPS, the investigating agency has lost all hopes of maintaining status quo on Quattrocchi's bank accounts. "How shall we come to know that Quattrocchi has not withdrawn his money?" a CBI official asked. — SNS

Another report on page 4

tioning.

Mr Bharadwaj was caught at the centre of the Quattrocchi storm after Mr Dutta's visit to the CPS came to light last week amidst reports that the law ministry had gone ahead with the move overriding the CBI's objections, but the CBI sprang a surprise yesterday, claiming that Mr Dutta was carrying the agency's brief on his London mission.

কুত্রোচ্চি-কাণ্ডে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে চিঠি জেটলির, বিতর্ক চলছেই

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৫
জানুয়ারি: বফর্স-কাণ্ডে নিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয়
আইনমন্ত্রী হংসরাজ ভরদ্বাজ আপাতত
'রেহাই' পেলেও তাঁর ভাগ্য এখনও
মেঘমুক্ত নয়।

ওস্তাডিও কুত্রোচ্চির ব্যাঙ্ক
অ্যাকাউন্টকে ছাড়পত্র দেওয়ার বিরুদ্ধে
জনস্বার্থ মামলাটি কাল সুপ্রিম কোর্টে
উঠছে। প্রধান বিরোধী দল বিজেপি
আজ প্রশ্ন তুলেছে, সরকার এ বারে কী
করবে? বিশেষ করে জনস্বার্থ মামলায়
সর্বোচ্চ আদালত যদি ভরদ্বাজকে
কাঠগড়ায় দাঁড় করায়, তা হলে
সরকারের অবস্থান কী হতে পারে?
বিরোধীদের বক্তব্য, সরকার কি
আদালতকে না জানিয়েই কুত্রোচ্চির
অ্যাকাউন্টের উপরে জারি নিষেধাজ্ঞা
প্রত্যাহারের অনুমতি দিতে পারে?

সরকারের পক্ষেও সুপ্রিম কোর্টের
এই শুনানি অত্যন্ত তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ হতে
চলেছে। তবে, সরকারি শীর্ষ সূত্রের
বক্তব্য, মামলাটি আইনি প্রক্রিয়ার অঙ্গ।
ভরদ্বাজের সিদ্ধান্তকে 'গতানুগতিক
প্রশাসনিক বিষয়' বলেই সরকারি ভাবে
অ্যাখ্যা দেওয়া হচ্ছে। গত কাল
প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে ভরদ্বাজ
জানিয়েছেন, তিনি 'বেআইনি' কিছুই
করেননি। লন্ডন থেকেই বারবার
জানতে চাওয়া হয়েছিল, আর কত দিন
ব্রিটেনে কুত্রোচ্চির অ্যাকাউন্টের উপরে
নিষেধাজ্ঞা জারি থাকবে। আইনমন্ত্রী
এমন কথাও মনমোহন সিংহকে
জানিয়েছেন যে, সিবিআই-ও এই
অ্যাকাউন্ট দু'টির ব্যাপারে কোনও

'আপত্তিকর' তথ্য পায়নি।

তবে, কেন্দ্রীয় আইন মন্ত্রকের
পরামর্শে ১১ জানুয়ারি কুত্রোচ্চির দু'টি
অ্যাকাউন্টের উপর থেকে নিষেধাজ্ঞা
তুলে নিয়েছে লন্ডন হাইকোর্ট।
সরকারি ভাবেই আজ এই খবর
জানানো হয়েছে। আর তার পরেই
অ্যাকাউন্টে জমা ৩০ লক্ষ ইউরো এবং
১০ লক্ষ ডলার অন্যত্র পাচার হয়েছে
বলেই সিবিআই সূত্রের সন্দেহ।
বিজেপি নেতা এবং আইনজীবী অরুণ
জেটলিও আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে চিঠি
লিখে বলেছেন, কুত্রোচ্চির অ্যাকাউন্ট
থেকে টাকা কোনও অজানা জায়গায়
জমা পড়ে গিয়েছে বলেই তাঁর ধারণা।

স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই প্রশ্ন উঠেছে, টাকা
যদি সরে গিয়েই থাকে, তা হলে
অ্যাকাউন্ট ফ্রিজ করে কী লাভ? কিন্তু
সেই পরিস্থিতিতেও সিবিআই-হাল
ছাড়াই সিবিআই-এর তরফে ওই টাকা
কোথায় জমা পড়েছে, তা জানার জন্য
একটি নতুন চিঠি সুইস কর্তৃপক্ষকে
পাঠানো হয়েছে। কারণ, ব্রিটেনে
কুত্রোচ্চির অ্যাকাউন্টে জমা থাকা প্রায়
২১ কোটি টাকা সুইৎজারল্যান্ড থেকেই
এসেছিল। সিবিআই কর্তৃপক্ষের বক্তব্য,
"আমরা ওই টাকার পাচার ঠেকাতে সব
রকম চেষ্টা চালাব।"

বফর্স কাণ্ডের সাম্প্রতিক পর্বে
প্রধানমন্ত্রীর জানানো উচিত, তিনি কী
'ভূমিকা' পালন করেছেন। খোদ
মনমোহন সিংহকে চিঠি লিখে এই দাবি
জানিয়েছেন বিজেপি নেতা অরুণ
জেটলি। তিনি দাবি তুলেছেন,

ব্রিটেনের ব্যাঙ্ক কুত্রোচ্চির দু'টি
অ্যাকাউন্ট খুলে দেওয়ার ব্যাপারে
প্রধানমন্ত্রী কি আদতে অন্ধকারেই
ছিলেন? না কি, তিনি সবই জানতেন?
জেটলির বক্তব্য, "সরকারের কাছ
থেকে এ সর্বের উত্তর জানতে চাওয়ার
অধিকার আছে আমজনতার। বিশেষ
করে, কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার কোনও সদস্য
নিয়মবহির্ভূত কোনও কাজ করেও
যখন পার পেয়ে যাচ্ছেন, তখন
সরকারের দায়িত্ববোধ সম্পর্কে প্রশ্ন
ওঠে, সন্দেহ জাগে।" বিজেপি নেতার
অনুযোগ, কেন্দ্রীয় আইনমন্ত্রী হংসরাজ
ভরদ্বাজের বফর্স তদন্তের ব্যাপারে নাক
গলানোর কোনও আইনি অধিকারই
নেই। শুধু সিবিআইয়েরই এ ব্যাপারে
এগনোর অধিকার রয়েছে।

ওই চিঠিতে আরও কতগুলি প্রশ্ন
তুলেছেন জেটলি। এর মধ্যে যেমন
রয়েছে, আইনমন্ত্রীকে বফর্স-এর
ব্যাপারে হস্তক্ষেপের অধিকার কারা
দিয়েছে সেই প্রশ্ন, তেমনই রয়েছে,
অতিরিক্ত সলিসিটার জেনারেল বি
দত্তকে ব্রিটেনে যাওয়ার ছাড়পত্র কে
দিল, বা তাঁর সঙ্গে সিবিআই অফিসারের
ব্রিটেনে যাওয়ায় বাদ সাধল কোন মহল।
জেটলির মতে, "এটা পরিষ্কার যে,
সিবিআইয়ের কর্তারাও অতিরিক্ত
সলিসিটার জেনারেলের সঙ্গে নানা
বিষয়ে সহমত নন। আসলে, কুত্রোচ্চির
সঙ্গে রাজীব গান্ধী ও সনিয়া গান্ধীর
ঘনিষ্ঠ সম্পর্কের কথা কারও অজানা
নেই। সেই সম্পর্কের জেরে রাজনৈতিক
মহলেও প্রভাব ছিল কুত্রোচ্চির।"

Reverse policies favouring the rich, says Left

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The country is witnessing an investment boom, says Chidambaram

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Left parties on Thursday submitted a 13-point note on resource mobilisation as against the Government's plan to disinvest in profit-making public sector undertakings for funding social welfare schemes.

In their note, submitted at the UPA-Left Coordination meeting here, they said while resource mobilisation in any economy entailed taxing the rich, successive governments at the Centre in the past 15 years had not only not done so but also handed out largess to the affluent sections through all kinds of tax cuts.

Besides contributing to rising inequalities, this constrained the Government's ability to undertake development expenditure.

"The UPA Government has to muster the required political will in order to reverse such policies," the note said.

The Left proposals include collection of Rs 1,15,000 crore in tax arrears including Rs. 90,000 crore in income tax and Rs. 16,000 crore by way of customs and excise; tapping of Rs.2.21 lakh crore in cash reserves in public sector undertakings; restoration of the capital gains tax with at least a 15 per cent flat rate; strengthening of the securities transaction tax; levying of a 0.5 per cent tax on all purchases of foreign exchange; rationalisation of corporate tax exemptions; review of export incentives; broadening of the service tax base; raising wealth tax to three per cent including tax on conversion of farm land for non-agricultural purposes; introduction of an inheritance tax; raising excise duty on luxury vehicles run on diesel; increasing the Value Added Tax/sales tax rate on times of luxury consumption including a surcharge payable at shopping malls.

'Exemptions area specific'

According to the Left leaders, Mr. Chidambaram said collection of tax arrears collection had improved and some portion was disputed. Tax exemptions, he said, were based on the recommendation of Ministries and area-specific in Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal and the northeast. He said the country was witnessing an investment boom with the economy recording a seven per cent growth rate.

Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who heads the em-



IN COORDINATION: Finance Minister P. Chidambaram and CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury coming out of the Prime Minister's residence after a UPA-Left coordination committee meeting in New Delhi on Thursday. - PHOTO: PTI

powered Group of Ministers (EGoM) on airports, briefed the Left leaders on the urgency of completing modernisation in Delhi and Mumbai. The national capital was due to host the Commonwealth Games in 2010.

In view of the urgency, it was decided that the Government might take a suitable decision and the eGoM would take into consideration the Left note, Mr.

Chidambaram said. CPI (M) general secretary Prakash Karat said the Left parties suggested that the Airports Authority of India be given the go ahead for its modernisation plan for metro and non-metro airports. There was no need for the Government taking up the bids as the AAI had the capacity and a Rs. 3,000-crore cash reserve. It could raise loans from the market to meet

the anticipated expenditure.

Besides Mr. Karat, CPI (M) Polit Bureau member Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan, national secretary D. Raja and Mr. Biswas attended the meeting on behalf of the Left.

UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Ahmed Patel joined the Prime Minister and his colleagues.

Govt faces fire from CPM & BJP

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 12. — The spectre of the multi-crore Bofors kickbacks scam has returned to haunt the ruling Congress party with the Opposition as well as its UPA allies asking the Manmohan Singh government to explain its alleged bid to “help” the fugitive Italian businessman, Ottavio Quattrocchi, get off the hook.

A prominent one among those accused, Quattrocchi, a “proclaimed offender”, is yet to face trial in Indian courts, with the prosecuting agency, the CBI, which filed a chargesheet against him, failing to secure his extradition.

Unleashing a blistering attack on the Congress, the BJP, while pinpointing the “unseemly haste” shown by the Congress-led UPA government in requesting the UK government to “de-freeze” Quattrocchi’s two London bank accounts, today demanded an explanation from the Prime Minister and the law minister, Mr HR Bhardwaj.

“Now a formal request is illegally made through a law officer of the govern-

CBI admits Bofors failure

NEW DELHI, Jan. 12. — In a U-turn, the CBI today admitted that it had “failed” to link the frozen UK bank accounts of Ottavio Quattrocchi with Bofors payoffs, besides conceding that it had conveyed its revised viewpoint to the authorities concerned in order to let his accounts being de-frozen. A designated court here has asked the CBI to file a status report by 31 March on the steps taken to extradite Quattrocchi to face trial in the country. A lawyer today moved the Supreme Court through a PIL challenging the Centre’s stand vis-a-vis the British authorities on the Quattrocchi accounts. — SNS

Details on page 4

ment of India to the appropriate authorities to even release the illegal funds frozen in Quattrocchi’s accounts,” the senior BJP leader, Mr Arun Jaitley, said.

Asked whether the government would not appeal against the unfreezing of Quattrocchi’s accounts, the law minister said: “the CBI has given the details sought by the Crown Prosecution and it is up to it.”

Asked why the government had not filed a special leave petition before the Supreme Court against the High Court’s order quashing the proceedings against the Hinduja brothers in the Bofors payoff case, the minister said the CBI director (prosecution) had said there was no case for an appeal and that the

additional solicitor-general, Mr B Dutta, had agreed with this view.

The CPI-M asked the government to explain how and why legal opinion on Quattrocchi’s frozen bank accounts had been conveyed to the British authorities.

Referring to reports that Mr Dutta had told the Crown Prosecution authorities that there was no evidence to link Quattrocchi’s two accounts in London with the Bofors payoffs, the CPI-M Politburo said the government had to explain when and how this had happened, describing the move as “questionable”.

The Samajwadi Party also questioned the government’s decision to absolve Quattrocchi in this matter.

9-UPA a.m. Sri

New Bofors charges put govt in spot

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The ghost of Bofors refuses to go away. Just as the infamous Howitzer kickback case was turning cold, revelations that a senior law officer sought to facilitate de-freezing the London bank accounts of a key payback link, Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, has re-ignited the politically sensitive case.

The new Bofors developments, aired by a TV channel on Wednesday, could plunge the government into fresh fire-fighting as it has been alleged that additional solicitor-general B Dutta on December 22 last year informed the UK's Crown Prosecution Service that there was no case against the controversial Italian for freezing two accounts holding Euros 3 million and \$1 million.

The accounts were frozen following an earlier CBI request which successfully argued before the British courts that they contained Bofors' scam money. In the recent development, Dutta told the British court that there was no case pending against Quattrocchi—a position which would allow Quattrocchi access to the millions locked in the frozen accounts.

The BJP instantly slammed the move, accusing the government of misrepresenting facts and going to the length of sending a senior law



Quattrocchi is back in the news as a senior law officer visited London to defreeze his accounts

officer all the way to the UK to bail out the Italian when the case in which he was chargesheeted was still pending in a special CBI court trying the Bofors case. "If Quattrocchi himself wanted to access the funds, CBI would have opposed it. But what can the agency do if the government is itself trying to help a fugitive get the kickback money?" said BJP leader Arun Jaitley.

Significantly, Congress did not deny the government's move. "What the additional solicitor general did was only to convey the factual position on a query from the Crown Prosecution Service," party spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said. He claimed that it was a matter of "one court being entitled to ask a foreign jurisdiction for information", he said.

► **BJP gets fresh ammo, Page 8**

BACKWARD HO!

The cabinet committee on economic affairs took the decision to reduce the foodgrain limit for below-poverty-line families and increase the price for households above the poverty line. But Mr Sharad Pawar, the Union minister for food and agriculture, announced yesterday that the decision was being stayed. This is a weak-kneed response to criticism voiced by the left and other allies like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The original rationale offered by the government was very simple — now that poor households will have an additional source of foodgrains under the rural employment guarantee scheme, they can make do with less under the public distribution system. According to the mid-year review of the economy, foodgrain stocks were marginally lower than the buffer stock norms, so reducing the limit will actually help matters.

Increasing issue prices, however, is not really the solution to the problem of burgeoning food subsidies. Most people seem to think that foodgrains subsidy is a consumer subsidy alone. That is far from being the case — it is also an open-ended farm support programme, since the Food Corporation of India has to buy whatever foodgrains are offered to it and it also pays for the creation of the buffer stock of foodgrains. Even if issue prices are raised in tandem with the rise in the minimum support price paid to farmers, off-take will drop, stocks will rise and the subsidy will increase. The food subsidy scheme currently in operation therefore has conflicting objectives, that of ensuring a remunerative price to farmers on the one hand and of providing foodgrains to the poor at affordable prices on the other. Under the circumstances, what needs to be done, on the supply side, is to take away the open-ended character of the scheme. The quantity procured should be limited to the amount of off-take expected, and the price should be arrived at through some market mechanism such as competitive bidding. On the demand side, solutions such as food stamps have been advocated. Studies have shown that the cost of transferring a rupee to the poor through the PDS is Rs 6.68 and that administrative costs account for 85 per cent of the total expenditure. A report by the Centre for Civil Society suggested that only 25 per cent of the grain actually reaches the poor. And a study by the Planning Commission pointed out that leakages from the targeted PDS or TDPS are higher than those under the PDS, which it was meant to replace. In short, the current system is extremely inefficient, and the recent cost-cutting measures by the FCI and the decision to increase issue prices address only the fringe of the problem. Populism is the biggest enemy of economic logic.

Left has way on one, govt on other

Subsidy give and PF take

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 10: Food subsidy cut will have to wait, but not the reduction in the interest rate on employees' provident fund.

Officially, neither the government nor the Left is linking the two, but the connection is hard to gloss over when the announcements are made on the same day.

Bowing to pressure from the Left, which was joined by sections of the Congress on this particular issue, the government today put on hold the proposed cut in supplies through the public distribution system.

At the same time, it made formal the decision taken last month to cut the interest on EPF contributions to 8.5 per cent from 9.5 for 2005-06, issuing a notification over the objections of the Left trade unions.

The decisions come two days before the coordination committee of the ruling United Progressive Alliance meets its Left allies.

Unhappy at the EPF rate cut, the unions have scheduled a meeting tomorrow. They had earlier met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh requesting him to intervene and overturn the decision taken by the EPF trustees to cut the interest rate to 8.5 per cent, which itself was higher than the 8.2 per cent recommendation made by the finance ministry.

Singh has stood firm this

RED LIGHT

Brake on cut in Rs 4,524-crore grain subsidy

GREEN LIGHT

Cut in EPF interest rate to 8.5% notified

WISH LIST

Left wants stock deals, diesel cars, five-star hotels, discos and malls to be taxed more

time, unlike on a previous occasion when he had held the rate at 9.5 per cent, as demanded by the Left unions, after a cut to 9 per cent was recommended for the last financial year.

On the same day the government announced the relief, it also raised the ceiling on foreign investment in telecom to 74 per cent, a move that had been opposed by the Left.

The two decisions on the same day had been interpreted as a give-and-take between the government and the Left. Today's moves could be open to the same interpretation.

Agriculture minister Sharad Pawar announced putting in abeyance the decision to cut foodgrain subsidy. Last week, he had piloted the proposal to reduce rations through the public distribution system and increasing prices families above the poverty line pay.

Anxious that the decision would hit their popularity ratings ahead of polls in Bengal and Kerala, the Left as well as sections of the Congress,

wanted a rethink.

"For the time being, I have decided to stay the decision. I will discuss it with my coalition partners," said Pawar.

"I am going to explain the entire position behind the food subsidy cut to Congress, CPM and CPI," he added.

The move was supposed to save Rs 4,524 crore in subsidies, though critics also felt a cut in ration ran contrary to government interests in lowering the food mountain of 150 lakh tonnes it is carrying at substantial storage cost.

Subsidy to keep foodgrain, fertiliser, kerosene and cooking gas prices low costs the government nearly Rs 48,000 crore a year. Most ministers are being prodded by finance minister P. Chidambaram to stem the drain.

The decision, now on hold, would have meant reduced monthly supply of wheat and rice of 20 kg to families above the poverty line and 30 kg to those below — both down from 35 kg. Prices at which grain was to be sold to families above the poverty line were also raised marginally.

By putting the decision on hold, while the government surrenders a possible saving of Rs 4,524 crore, paying a 9.5 per cent interest would have meant a deficit of Rs 716 crore for the EPF managers.

Even at 8.5 per cent, there will be a deficit, but labour minister K. Chandrashekharao believes that is manageable. (See Page 6)

পি এফের সুদ ৮.৫% রেখেই বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ১০ জানুয়ারি: রেশনের বরাদ্দ কমানো ও দাম বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্ত আপাতত স্থগিত হলেও ভোটের আগে সিপিএমের জন্য আবার দুঃসংবাদ নিয়ে এল প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ড। তাদের সমর্থনের উপর নির্ভরশীল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার আজ প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুদের ৮.৫ শতাংশ হারই চূড়ান্ত করেছে এবং এই মর্মে সরকারি বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারিও হয়ে গিয়েছে।

খাদ্যে ভর্তুকি কমানো নিয়ে বাম দলগুলির বিরোধিতার পাশাপাশি কংগ্রেসের মধ্যে থেকেও প্রতিবাদ ওঠার পরে কেন্দ্রীয় কৃষিমন্ত্রী শরদ পওয়ার আজ জানিয়েছেন, এই সিদ্ধান্ত এখনই কার্যকর হচ্ছে না। পওয়ার আজ বলেন, “কেন এই সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছিল তা আমি কংগ্রেস, সিপিএম এবং সিপিআই নেতাদের বুঝিয়ে বলব। সকলের সঙ্গে কথা বলার আগে এই সিদ্ধান্ত কার্যকর হবে না।”

ভেলের বিলম্বীকরণের পরে এটা দ্বিতীয় বিষয়, যেখানে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভায় সিদ্ধান্ত হওয়া সত্ত্বেও তা স্থগিত করা হল। এ ক্ষেত্রে তফাৎ একটাই। রেশনে বরাদ্দ কমানো এবং দারিদ্রসীমার উপরের লোকদের জন্য খাদ্যের দাম বাড়ানোর সিদ্ধান্তের বিরোধিতায় বামদের সঙ্গে গত কাল কংগ্রেসও যোগ দিয়েছিল।

কিন্তু প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের ক্ষেত্রে ঘটল উল্টো ঘটনা। বামদের এত দিনের প্রতিবাদ গ্রাহ্য না-করে সরকার আজ ৮.৫ শতাংশই সুদের বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করে দিয়েছে। তবে বাম নেতারা এখনও আশা করছেন যে, ঠিকমতো চাপ তৈরি করতে পারলে সরকারকে এই বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রত্যাহার করিয়ে নতুন বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করতে বাধ্য করা সম্ভব।

বাম নেতা গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত বলেছেন, “আমরা এই সিদ্ধান্তের তীব্র প্রতিবাদ করছি। আমরা শীঘ্রই এ নিয়ে আন্দোলনে নামব এবং সরকারকে বাধ্য করব আগের হার (৯.৫ শতাংশ) ফিরিয়ে আনতে।” তাঁর বক্তব্য, “সুদের হার নিয়ে আমাদের সঙ্গে বিএমএস এবং ইনটাকও একমত হয়েছে। আমরা সবাই মিলেই কর্মসূচি স্থির করব।” সম্ভবত খাদ্যে ভর্তুকির সিদ্ধান্ত রদই তাঁকে বাড়তি মনোবল জুগিয়েছে।

প্রধানমন্ত্রী এর আগে কী ভাবে কত বেশি সুদ দেওয়া যেতে পারে, তার উপায় খুঁজতে বলেছিলেন শ্রম মন্ত্রককে। কিন্তু তিনি জানিয়ে দিয়েছিলেন, বাড়তি বাজেট বরাদ্দের সম্ভাবনা বাদ দিয়েই পথ খুঁজতে হবে। এমনিতেই প্রভিডেন্ট ফান্ডের সুদ দেওয়ার জন্য বাজেট থেকে ভর্তুকি দেওয়ার আইনগত পথ নেই। অন্য উপায়টা হল ফান্ডের টাকার সিংহভাগ যেখানে থাকে, সেই স্পেশাল ডিপোজিটেরি স্কিমে সুদের হার বাড়ানো। সেটা করতে হলেও তার অর্থসংস্থান বাজেট থেকে করতে হয়। সেই সম্ভাবনাও না-থাকায় ফান্ডের পক্ষে বাড়তি সুদ দেওয়া আর সম্ভব ছিল না।

ঘটনা হল, বিষয়টি বুলিয়ে না-রেখে এখনই নোটিস জারি করে দেওয়ার ফলে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের ভোটে সিপিএম সমস্যায় পড়বে। বিষয়টিকে তারা কংগ্রেসের বিরুদ্ধে প্রচারের অস্ত্র করতেই পারে, কিন্তু প্রশ্ন উঠবে, তাদের সমর্থনের উপর নির্ভরশীল সরকারের উপরে তারা প্রভাব বিস্তার করতে ব্যর্থ হচ্ছে কেন। আগামী বৃহস্পতিবার বাম-সরকার সমন্বয় কমিটির বৈঠকে বাম নেতারা বিষয়টি নিয়ে আবার চাপ তৈরি করতে পারেন বলেও ইঙ্গিত মিলেছে।

EXPRESS EXCLUSIVE

UPA's plan for minorities: we will fix govt spending as per their population share

SC disapproved of religion as basis; Law Ministry says this violates Constitution, Govt brushes it aside

AMITAV RANJAN | NEW DELHI | JANUARY 7

IN what could open the floodgates to political and legal controversy, the UPA Government is ready to announce a "15-point programme" for what it calls the "welfare" of minorities despite a categorical opinion from the Union Law Ministry that the plan violates the Constitution.

For, unlike existing welfare schemes, this plan earmarks 18.4%—the percentage of minority population in the country—of all key social sector programmes and their outlay for minorities.

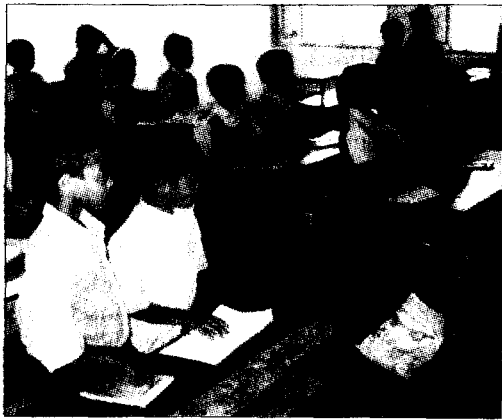
Not only this, the plan, prepared by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, says that the schemes and funds shall be "further split state-wise for each minority community in the ratio of the populations of the minority community in each state."

Even a new Cabinet Committee on Minorities has been proposed to monitor the programme's implementation every three months. And the Ministry has asked the Government earmark a percentage of Plan allocation for minorities.

Not surprisingly, the Law Ministry has put on record its objection. While Article 38 of the Constitution certainly talks of "minimizing inequality" among individuals or groups, it does not provide "special protection only to a particular section," the Ministry has said. Therefore, to make a special provision for the minority community alone, may not be "constitutionally permissible"

under Article 14 which forbids "discrimination on the ground of religion."

The Supreme Court, too, in a judgment last August, strongly disapproved of notifying minority groups on the basis of religion alone in the "fond hope" of special privileges. "Encouragement to such fissiparous tendencies would be a serious jolt to the secular structure of constitutional democracy... We should guard against making our country akin to a theocratic state based on multi-nationalism. Our concept of secularism is that 'state' shall have no religion."



What's my religion, what's my percentage?

However, brushing aside all this, the Government has argued that the plan draws from a similar programme initiated by former Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi in 1983 and Rajiv Gandhi in 1985. Allocating funds according to the percentage of population is a UPA addition. The Government's rationale: "to sharply focus action on issues intimately linked with social, educational and economic uplift of the minorities."

Blueprint for Controversy

Govt says it's not reservation but its 15-point program underlines quotas in all key social sector schemes:

'CERTAIN PERCENTAGE'

It specifies that "certain percentage" of the following be earmarked in areas with "substantial population of minority communities."

- 1 Integrated Child Development Services projects and Anganwadi Centres
- 2 Schools under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and other schemes
- 3 Employment programmes Swarnjayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojna (rural areas), Swarnjayanti Sahari Rojgar Yojna (urban areas) and Sampurna Grameen Rozgar Yojna for BPL minorities



- 4 National Slum Development Programme funds

- 5 "Appropriate" share of priority sector lending by domestic banks for agriculture, small scale business, education and housing loans.

- 6 Upgrading Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) to "centres of excellence"; proportion of new ITIs in minority areas

- 7 Financial help in rural housing under Indira Awaas Yojna.

'AFFIRMATIVE ACTION'

- 8 Central assistance for hiring Urdu teachers in schools that serve a population in which at least one-fourth belong to that language group.

- 9 Strengthening Madrasa Modernisation Programme

- 10 Matric and post-matric scholarships for students.

- 11 More grant to Maulana Azad Education Foundation to strengthen educational infrastructure.

- 12 "Special consideration" for minorities in recruitment in state and central police forces as well as Railways, banks and state-run enterprises.

SPEEDY JUSTICE

- 13 District and police officials with highest known efficiency, impartiality and secular record to be posted in communally sensitive and riot-prone areas. Record in communal tension important factor in promotion.

- 14 Special courts to try communal offences

- 15 Immediate relief with financial assistance to riot victims.



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Reforms on agenda: PM

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2. — The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh's New Year resolutions are implementation of his government's national common minimum programme (NCMP), generation of employment and prioritising investment and infrastructure.

The Prime Minister will also try for economic policy reforms aimed at encouraging new investment in all sectors as part of his agenda for 2006. Dr Singh reviewed the implementation of the NCMP during 2005 and unveiled his vision for 2006 during a meeting with his top officials at his office here today. While outlining his priorities for 2006, the PM stressed sound macro-economic policies and prudent fiscal management, according to his media adviser, Mr Sanjaya Baru.

The PM's tips included regular monitoring of the economic, social, political and security trends within the country, regionally and globally. Dr Singh also suggested monitoring the implementation of various programmes at district, state and Central levels — among others, by the PMO too.

The Prime Minister took stock of the implementation of the Central programmes launched in 2005 and looked at the agenda for 2006. It was a detailed meeting covering all areas including defence and foreign policy," said Mr Baru.

The PM-chaired today's deliberations focused sharply on the need for close monitoring of implementation of various programmes, launched last year, like National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Bharat Nirman, National Urban Renewal Mission, National Rural Health Mission. The Congress-led UPA government will give priority to the infrastructure sector — including power, coal, road, railways, airports, housing — and employment generation in 2006. The government's slogan this year will be "Rozgar Badao (generate employment)".

The meeting decided to ensure quarterly monitoring of implementation of various programmes in each area, said Mr Baru. It was also decided to pursue "new initiatives" to ensure increased investment in the economy, especially labour-intensive ones. The Manmohan Singh government would undertake policy initiatives to encourage employment- gen-

Left criticises Centre

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2 — Left parties today criticised the government for disinvestment of profit-making public sector units. The parties would submit a note to the UPA government on their proposals for resource mobilisation at the next meeting of the coordination committee meeting, likely to be held next week, said Mr Prakash Karat and Mr AB Bardhan, general secretaries of the CPI-M and CPI, respectively. — PTI

crating investments in agriculture, manufacturing and the services sectors. The government would also supervise, said Mr Baru, various initiatives in the field of education, such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the mid-day meal scheme. The two-hour meeting also saw presentations made by senior officials on the implementation of various programmes.

The Planning Commission deputy chairman, Mr Montek Singh Ahluwalia was also present on the occasion. The key initiatives of the government could be broadly grouped under the ambit of two overarching programmes — Bharat Nirman and Rozgar Badao —, said Mr Baru.

পেনশন বিল নিয়ে ফের কঠোর সিপিএম

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২ জানুয়ারি: চার বাম দলের বৈঠকের পর বিলগ্নিকরণ এবং পেনশন নিয়ে আবার চড়া সুরে ফিরে গেল সিপিএম। বৈঠকের পরে বাম দলগুলির তরফে দেওয়া বিবৃতিতে বলা হয়েছে, রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব ক্ষেত্রের বিলগ্নিকরণ অর্থ সংগ্রহের 'উপযুক্ত পথ নয়' এবং তাঁরা পেনশন বিলের 'বিরুদ্ধে'।

পেনশন বিল এবং বিলগ্নিকরণ, এই দু'টি বিষয়েই গত বেশ কয়েক দিন ধরে সিপিএম নেতারা সরকারের সঙ্গে আলাপ-আলোচনা চালাচ্ছিলেন। পেনশন বিল নিয়ে তাঁদের বক্তব্য ছিল, পেনশন ফান্ডের দায়িত্ব দিতে হবে রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব সংস্থার হাতে এবং কর্মচারীদের বর্তমান হারেই পেনশন দিয়ে যেতে হবে। তাঁদের বক্তব্য মানা যায় কি না, সরকার তা খতিয়ে দেখছিল। আজও প্রথমে বিবৃতিতে 'বর্তমান আকারে বিলটির বিরোধিতার' কথা লেখা হয়েছিল। কিন্তু আরএসপির অবনী রায় তাতে আপত্তি তোলার পর সকলে একমত হয়েই

বিলগ্নিকরণ ও পেনশন

লেখেন, "বামপন্থীরা আবার জানাচ্ছেন যে পেনশন ফান্ডের বেসরকারিকরণই তাঁদের কাছে গ্রহণযোগ্য নয় এবং সেইজন্যই তাঁরা পিএফআরডিএ বিলের বিরুদ্ধে।" অর্থাৎ বিলের 'বর্তমান আকার' নিয়ে আপত্তি তুলে সিপিএম নেতারা দর কষাকষির যে সুযোগ রাখছিলেন, তা আজকের পর আরও কমে গেল। এবং আজকের সম্মিলিত সিদ্ধান্তের পরে সিপিএমের পক্ষে আলাদা ভাবে সরকারের সঙ্গে রফায় পৌঁছানো আরও কঠিন হয়ে দাঁড়াল।

নবরত্ন বাদে বাকি লাভজনক রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব সংস্থার বিলগ্নিকরণের প্রস্তাব সরকারের তরফে বামদলের দেওয়া হয়েছিল। যে সব ক্ষেত্রে সরকারের শেয়ার অনেক বেশি সেখানে তা পঁচাত্তর শতাংশ পর্যন্ত নামিয়ে আনার পক্ষে সিপিএম নেতারা কার্যত সায় দিয়েই দিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলির নেতারা, বিশেষ করে

এম কে পাক্কে, গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত এবং অবনী রায় ক্রমাগত সেই প্রয়াসের বিরোধিতা করে যাচ্ছিলেন। তাঁদের বক্তব্য, এক বার বিলগ্নিকরণে সায় দিলে সরকার শেয়ার বিক্রির পরিমাণ ক্রমাগত বাড়াবে। আজ দেড় ঘণ্টার বৈঠকে শেষ পর্যন্ত সেই মতই আজ সিপিএম নেতৃত্বও মেনে নিয়েছেন। সরকার যে হেতু সম্পদ সংগ্রহের সীমাবদ্ধতার কথা বলে, তাই বিলগ্নিকরণের প্রস্তাব নাকচ করে দেওয়ার পাশাপাশি সরকারের কাছে বিকল্প প্রস্তাবও দেবেন বাম নেতারা। আগামী সপ্তাহে সরকার-বাম সমন্বয় কমিটির বৈঠকে সেই প্রস্তাব সরকারকে দেওয়া হবে।

গত বাজেটের আগেও এমন একটি প্রস্তাব অর্থমন্ত্রীকে দিয়েছিলেন বামেরা। সেই প্রস্তাবে কর আরও বাড়ানোর কথাই বলা হয়েছিল। আজকের বৈঠকে সিপিএমের পক্ষে সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাট ছাড়াও দুই পলিটবুরো সদস্য সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি এবং এসআর পিল্লাই উপস্থিত ছিলেন।

ছিলেন সিপিআইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক এবি বর্ধন এবং ডি রাজা, ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের সাধারণ সম্পাদক দেবব্রত বিশ্বাস এবং আরএসপির অবনী রায়।

বাম নেতারা জানান, দিল্লি ও মুম্বই বিমানবন্দরের আধুনিকীকরণের বিষয়টিও আগামী সমন্বয় কমিটির বৈঠকে তোলা হবে। বিশ্ব বাণিজ্য সংগঠনের হংকং রাউন্ড নিয়েও তাঁরা একটি 'পেপার' তৈরি করবেন বলে স্থির হয়। আমেরিকার প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ ডব্লিউ বুশের ভারত সফরের সময়ে প্রতিবাদ দেখানোর সিদ্ধান্তও নিয়েছেন বাম নেতারা। তবে এই প্রতিবাদ দেখানোর জন্য তাঁরা যে সফরের সময়ে প্রেসিডেন্টের ধামেকাছে পৌঁছতে পারবেন না তাতে সংশয় নেই। তাঁদের উদ্দেশ্য, কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের উপর চাপ তৈরি করা।