

Trade unions flay oil price hike

To observe June 13 as day of protest against Government policies

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The trade unions have condemned the hike in the prices of petrol and diesel as an "outrageous and atrocious" decision that will hurt the interests of the common people. "We shall move into action at the earliest," All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) general secretary Gurdas Dasgupta said after a meeting of the sponsoring committee of the unions here on Monday.

The committee expressed concern over the deterioration in the working and living conditions of the working people, as a result of the Government's "anti-people" policies. The unions have decided to observe June 13 as a national protest day against Government policies and hold a national convention in August where an effective action plan

HD-12 7/6
• Concern expressed over decline in working, living conditions of people

• August national convention to decide on effective action plan

will be decided, Mr. Dasgupta said.

Enormous hardship

The rising prices of all essential commodities, particularly petroleum products, have hit the people hard. The Government is planning to hike the issue price of food grains under the Public Distribution System, besides cutting down the allocations, said an AITUC statement. The Government failed to step up the procurement programme in time, allowing private traders and multinational companies to stock and hoard. It also began

large-scale import of wheat, thus endangering the country's food security. The agrarian crisis, with more farmers committing suicide. The Government is yet to attend to this critical problem.

The Government has not kept its promise on the implementation of minimum wage law for farm workers and the enactment of a comprehensive protective legislation for them. Similar is the fate of its promise to enact legislation for workers in the unorganised sector, to ensure guaranteed minimum wage, social security and employment pro-

tection. There is rampant violation of labour laws and workers are attacked by employers and police in various States.

The judiciary passed verdicts favouring employers and placed fetters on the working class even in matters of exercising their democratic, labour and employment rights.

The Government has cut down drastically the interest rates on Employees Provident Fund, General Provident Fund, Public Provident Fund and small savings instruments affecting the interests of ordinary workers and senior citizens, the unions said. There is disinvestment of profitable and strategic sector PSUs, including nationalised banks, insurance, telecom, airports; coal, oil and mineral blocks are handed over to private vested interests; private and foreign capital is allowed entry even in defence production.

07 JUN 2006

THE HINDU

Unions oppose plan to hike foodgrain prices

"Move will endanger livelihood, food security of millions of people"

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The All-India Workers' Union (AIWU), the All-India Agricultural Labour Association (AIALA) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) on Monday protested the proposed increase in the prices of foodgrains and cut in allocations to beneficiaries under the Targeted Public Distribution System.

The CPI-ML and AIALA announced a nation-wide protest against the move on June 7. "Any such measure is tantamount to a direct attack on the livelihood and food security of millions of people and will increase fears of more starvation deaths. It will further deepen the crisis already engulfing rural India," said Swadesh Bhattacharya, CPI-ML Polit Bureau member and vice-president of the AIALA.

In a letter to Union Food and Agriculture Minister Sharad Pa-

war, the AIWU expressed "grave concern" at the Food Ministry's recommendations on "prudent food management", submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.

"Let it be clear that the sort of subsidies being provided ought to be increased — not decreased — as is evident from the Government's policy to allow the Australian Wheat Board, Cargill and other foreign grain companies to buy wheat at Rs. 750 to Rs. 850 per quintal from the market and hoard it. They have deprived government procurement agencies which pay Rs. 650 to Rs. 700 per quintal, and that too not cash down as private companies do. This will lead to spiralling wheat prices and starvation of those unable to afford them."

Norms changed for U.S. firms

The AIWU alleged that the Government had contracted five

lakh tonnes of wheat at Rs. 950 per quintal. "Now, the U.S. companies with sub-standard wheat have strong-armed the State Trading Corporation for another contract of 30 lakh tonnes, for which moisture content and safety norms have been changed." They demanded that all wheat imports from multinational companies be stopped and all instances of hoarding in the market place be strictly monitored. The AIWU said all agricultural labourers and marginal farmers should be given Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards and cheap foodgrains be made available to them through a uniform Public Distribution System.

The grain component under welfare schemes should not be reduced. All fallow and ceiling surplus lands should be distributed to the landless at subsidised rates in order to increase farm production and to ensure food security.

06 JUN 2006

THE HINDU

9-
Pioneer
Group

CII against job quota, sets up task force

21/4

New Delhi: Industry chamber CII on Thursday strongly objected to mandatory reservation of jobs in the private sector for the socially underprivileged, even as it set up a task force to recommend affirmative action for the weaker classes.

"Mandatory reservation in any form is not conducive to competitiveness of the industry. It is not acceptable," R Seshasayee, the new President of CII, said in his inaugural press conference.

He, however, said that industry needed to take positive action to empower the backward classes to join the mainstream and help them develop abilities to compete and empower them with education and employment skills.

"To ensure that SCs, STs and OBCs are able to compete and acquire job skills and as our response to the government's call for reservation in the private sector, we are setting up a task force on affirmative action under

the chairmanship of J J Irani," said Seshasayee, who is also the managing director of Ashok Leyland.

Asked if the government brings in a legislation making reservation mandatory he said: "I do think the government will be responsive to a dialogue. We are committed for positive action. I do not think legislation is a solution. If there is a law you have to abide by it."

Pointing at business related problems if a legislation is introduced, Seshasayee said: "We are an externally engaged economy. We have many global companies here. If such a law is brought in, these MNCs might say why should we set shop here and they will move out. If the legislation is only for domestic industry even then it will be detrimental."

"The industry should take active steps to develop technological skills of SCs and STs and support their education," Seshasayee said. Agencies

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THE TELEGRAPH

Quota stir hits hospitals

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A student shouts slogans in Bangalore on Sunday. ■ AFP (Another photo on page 6)

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, May 14: The anti-reservation stir intensified in the Capital and other parts of the country today as medical students and junior doctors struck work, disrupting services at state-run hospitals.

About 100 students and resident doctors of five medical colleges began an indefinite hunger-strike at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences here and medics disrupted normal and emergency services in some facilities like RML Hospital.

Official sources said emergency services in most hospitals were being run by senior doctors. The AIIMS has cancelled the leave of all senior doctors to man its OPDs and emergency services.

The medics also intensified protests at Amritsar, Ahmedabad and Cuttack, Burla and Berhampur in Orissa, halting work and forcibly shutting OPDs of hospitals to protest the Centre's proposal to introduce a 27 per cent quota for OBCs in elite educational institutions.

Medical and engineering students in Bangalore staged a protest rally while students of the King George's Medical University in Lucknow wore black badges. In Bangalore, the protest rally taken out by

'No relook'

NEW DELHI, May 14: Unfazed by widespread protests, Union human resources development minister Mr Arjun Singh rejected suggestions for a "re-look" at the proposal to introduce a quota for OBCs. He said it was up to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to decide when to bring the matter to the Cabinet. "As soon as the Prime Minister takes up the issue for a Cabinet discussion, a decision will be taken," he told reporters who wanted to know whether the Bill for reservations would come up in the ongoing session of Parliament. ■ PTI



Deshmukh.

In a related development, a group of MPs has decided to meet Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh on 17 May to pressurise the UPA government to take a "speedy" decision on the matter.

The Indian Medical Association, which has called a "total medical bandh" in Delhi tomorrow, has sought a judicial probe into the Mumbai incident.

Kolkata protest

Medical students and junior doctors of Kolkata would attend classes and perform their duties tomorrow in black badges to demonstrate their protest against police atrocities on agitating medics in Mumbai.

Dr Satyajit Das, a Calcutta National Medical College student, said they would not go in for a strike at this stage as that would inconvenience patients. "Strike would be our last option," he said.

Medical students plan a series of demonstrations and rallies demanding withdrawal of the reservation proposal. On Wednesday, medics would take out a procession from Calcutta Medical College and Hospital which would end with a memorandum to the Governor demanding his intervention.

Enter, four wise ministers to defuse crisis

PM takes shelter behind quota panel

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 17: When in trouble, form a committee. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has bought time on the reservation row through this time-tested method by constituting what is known as a GoM, group of ministers.

Led by Pranab Mukherjee, it will have P. Chidambaram and Arjun Singh as members while Sushil Kumar Shinde will be involved informally. The committee will do the spadework for a resolution of the controversy.

Law minister H.R. Bhardwaj, who burnt his fingers with the request to de-freeze Ottavio Quattrocchi's bank account, excused himself from the exercise and said he would give legal inputs "as and when necessary".

The defence minister was initially unwilling to engage himself in the reservation project because of Arjun, the human resource development minister, but was reportedly persuaded by the Prime Minister because he values Mukherjee for his "political astuteness and perspective".

Chidambaram was included for his ability to marshal arguments on both sides of the reservation divide and "package" the government's position "convincingly and credibly" and Shinde has been associated with the committee because he is a Dalit.



A policeman tries to prevent a pro-reservation activist from entering AIIMS where anti-quota doctors are on hunger strike. (AFP)

- The junior doctors of Medical College and Hospital, Calcutta, will continue a token strike against quotas on Thursday.
- Earlier report in Metro

As for Arjun, Congress sources said, Manmohan was learning to "live with him" after the HRD minister presented his government with a fait accompli.

Sources said the ministers would first speak to political leaders and academics and pool their inputs with an official in the Prime Minister's Office or the HRD ministry.

The Prime Minister, who yesterday gave the impression of taking the matter into his hands, apparently got cold feet today and decided he must stay in the background and let his colleagues do something "substantive" before stepping in, the sources said.

They said the four ministers "have been tasked to talk and allow temperatures to cool before a formula is worked out."

The government is unlikely to make a public announcement until the strikes by some doctors are completely called off.

To wind down the mood of confrontation, the Congress leadership asked the parliamentary forum of OBC MPs to call off their scheduled meeting with the Prime Minister today. The forum is headed by V. Hanumantha Rao, a Congress MP and a pillar of support for Arjun.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7 ►

Quota

► FROM PAGE 1

The sources said there was no "tearing hurry" to bring a bill to implement the 93rd constitution amendment on reservation for educationally and socially backward classes because admissions for the next academic year in most institutions, government and private, were under way.

"It is too late for this year. Most of the entrance exams have been held and though final admissions have yet to be granted, we cannot evolve new guidelines at this stage. Hopefully, by the time the academic year begins in 2007, we will have the rules in place," said a minister.

The formula the government is looking at is a law to bring in OBC reservation and a parallel package to soften the blow to students in the general category. The components could include more seats, phased introduction of quota and scholarships to deserving students.

The IITs have also been asked to look at options of how to implement quotas.

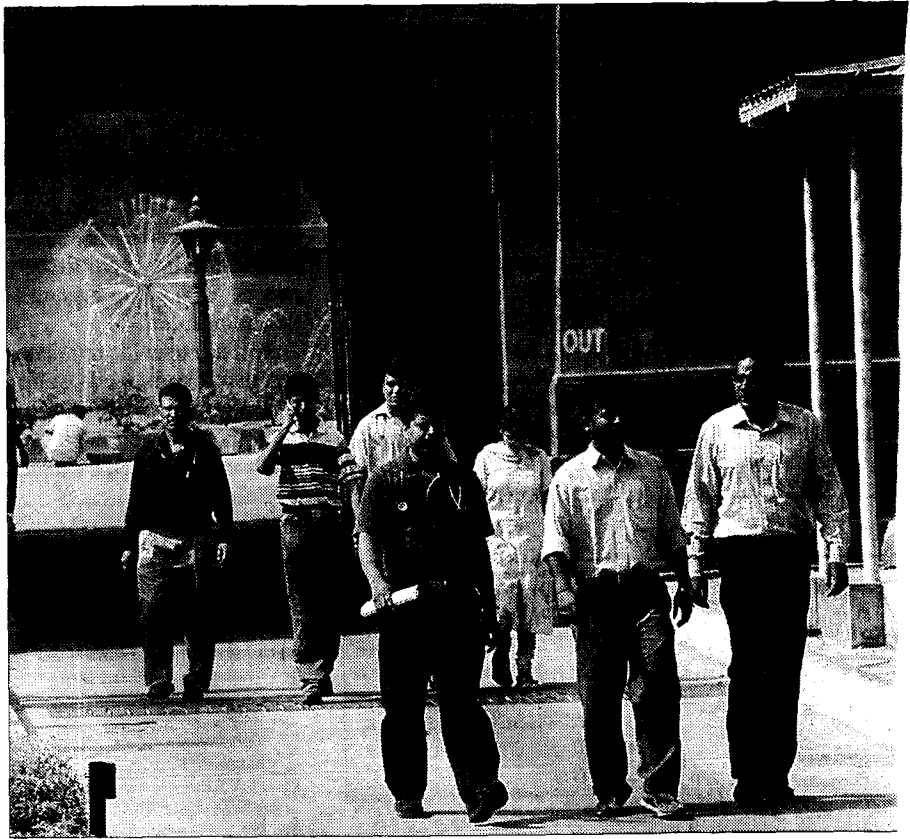
Ministers work on quota formula, talk to students

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

WITH protests against the proposed quota for OBCs in educational institutions showing no signs of ending, the government today began an exercise to evolve a formula to satisfy other sections. Alongside, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, part of the three-member committee set up to look into the issue, met representatives of the agitating students to bring about a breakthrough.

Besides Mukherjee, Finance Minister P Chidambaram and HRD Minister Arjun Singh were present at the meeting also attended by Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar and Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss. Pawar and Ramadoss are not part of the group constituted yesterday by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to hold talks with political parties and academicians to evolve a comprehensive package in the wake of protests against the quota crippling healthcare services across the country.

Sources said the first meeting deliberated on ways and means to cushion the effect of implementing the quota by increasing the intake and raising the number of institutions. The government has already told Parliament that there would be no dilution of its commitment to provide an OBC quota in elite educational institutions. However, it was also pointed out that working out such a mechanism would take time as increasing the number of seats was not easy as it was coupled



Medical students after meeting Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Thursday. Ravi Ba

with infrastructural problems like raising the number of teachers and other facilities.

As talks began today with the protesting students, the government assured them that the seats in the general category would not come down due to reservation. The striking doctors maintained that the government had not given them any assurance on their demands for a rollback of the proposed quota and setting up of a non-political judicial commission to look into the entire issue. "We put forward our point of view and they came out with their suggestions. Talks are expected to continue," said Dr Harsh, a representative of the Resident Doctors' Association of AIIMS.

CWC meeting on quota likely on May 20

NEW DELHI: Facing a politically sensitive situation on the reservation issue, a meeting of the Congress Working Committee is likely to be held on May 20. It will be the first meeting of the highest policy making body of the party heading the coalition at the Centre since the issue of OBC quota in elite educational institutions took centre stage. The meeting is expected to provide the party's backing to the Manmohan Singh government which has set up an informal Group of Ministers to evolve a comprehensive package in the matter which would be acceptable to all the sides. Congress sources said plans were also afoot for a meeting of the UPA coordination committee on May 22, when the UPA coalition would be completing two years in office. —PTI

The Government has constituted the committee, which is an informal group and is neither a Group of Ministers nor a Cabinet committee after it failed to evolve a consensus on the implementation of the proposal.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, meanwhile, plans to

begin consultations with political parties from Monday. The Prime Minister met a delegation of CPI leaders and told them that the government was committed to the proposed reservation but added that there were "apprehensions" among some sections and "we have to find a way out".

GoM SUBMITS REPORT

PM plea

to striking medicos

Suburban News Service

NEW DELHI, May 20.— Amid the raging reservation storm, the Prime Minister tonight appealed to the agitating medicos and students to call off their stir and trust the government's "sincerity", while assuring all sections of an "amicable" end to the quota tangle.

Dr Manmohan Singh's appeal was made at the end of a day during which the group of ministers (GoM) on the issue submitted its report to him, even as there were indications of a breakthrough in the matter soon. The PM will be consulting all political parties from Monday.

The GoM's report favoured implementation of the proposed 27 per cent quota for OBCs in Central institutions of higher education as soon as possible but also recommended ~ as part of a balancing, middle-path formula to accommodate the interests of the non-reserved category students as well ~ an increase in the number of seats.

Continuing his bid to defuse the crisis, the head of the GoM, defence minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee today met representatives of the striking medicos. There were reports that both sides were inching towards achieving a breakthrough.

The GoM report is believed to have recommended a phased imple-

IIM-C to increase seats

NEW DELHI, May 20 — The Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, has reportedly decided to increase the number of seats from the next academic session. A senior HRD ministry official said IIM-C had taken the decision of its own. The number of seats for full time postgraduate, PGP programmes has been increased from 265 to 335. IIM-Ahmedabad, however, has decided not to increase the number of seats saying it was not feasible. SNS

mentation of the OBC quota proposal to be carried out over a span of next few years in sync with a corresponding increase in the number of seats and institutions in order to find a solution acceptable to both sides of the quota divide. There could also be a proposal to provide reservation for economically weaker sections among the non-reserved category students.

In an interview to a private TV channel, Mr Arjun Singh, dismissed suggestions that his pro-reservation proposal was intended to embarrass the Prime Minister of whom he was "jealous". This is a lie, he said, bolstering his assertion with a paean of praise for the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

21 MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

Medicos turn down Manmohan's plea

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, May 21: The deadlock over the anti-quota agitation by medicos continued today, with students and junior doctors sticking to their demands of a total rollback of the proposed OBC quota and a review of the reservation policy.

The striking medicos turned down the Prime Minister's appeal made last night to end their stir and their talks with health secretary Mr PC Hota this evening failed to find any breakthrough.

Rejecting the Prime Minister's call, a student leader said: "The appeal carries no meaning as it does not address our main demands."

They have urged citizens to turn off all lights in their homes between 8 p.m. and 8:10 p.m. tomorrow as a mark of protest against introduction of 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in elite educational institutions.

Esma in UP

LUCKNOW, May 21: The Uttar Pradesh government today invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (Esma) declaring the strike by junior doctors at Sanjay Gandhi Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences in Lucknow illegal and asked them to resume duty within 24 hours. ■ PTI

Interviews for the appointment of resident doctors are expected to begin tomorrow and the striking doctors of AIIMS have also been issued notices to vacate their hostels immediately. The AIIMS Resident Doctors' Association president said: "We have decided to ignore notices from the AIIMS administration".

In Kolkata, strikers said they would organise a mass rally next week involving the guardians and students who appeared for the joint entrance examination this year.

Defence minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee said there would be no rollback on the reservation issue. "However, we are responsive to all concerned and are considering all aspects to reach an amicable settlement acceptable to all".

At a press meet at the Tea Board office in Kolkata, Mr Jairam Ramesh, minister of state for commerce and industry, said caste is one of the three identities of a citizen in India. So reservation on the basis of caste is a constitutional requirement.

In Bihar, pro-quota medicos continued with their agitation paralysing functioning of major hospitals for the third day to protest against the police lathicharge on them on Friday, even as the superintendent of Patna Medical College and Hospital Mr Anil Pandey resigned.

He said, "I felt hurt by the allegations of the pro-quota medicos that police action against them was due to me".

22

MAY 2006

THE STATESMAN

Airport strike called off

Statesman News Service

'CPI-M to review support'

NEW DELHI, Feb. 4. - The striking airport employees today called off their four-day-old stir after the Central government, while sticking to its plans for modernisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports by private players, assured them that their concerns would be redressed.

The airport impasse was resolved this afternoon after a 90-minute meeting between the Left-backed striking union leaders and the civil aviation minister, Mr Praful Patel. The minister gave the airport employees a written undertaking that the government would constitute a tripartite committee to "look into the issues and proposal of modernising (other) airports by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and employees-related issues, including their job security".

Mr Patel's also made it clear that there would be "no job loss" owing to modernisation of airports and that there would be "no victimisation" of the agitating employees.

"In view of the assurances given by the government, I am calling off the strike," Mr MK Ghosal, convener of the Airports Authority of India Employees Joint Forum spearheading the stir, declared at a gathering of airport workers. The agitating employees were expected to join duty according to their shifts with immediate effect, union leaders said.

KOLKATA, Feb. 4. - "If the Congress thinks Leftists have no option but to support the UPA government, it is wrong," the CPI-M state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, said today shortly after the Union civil aviation minister, Mr Praful Patel, had reached an agreement with airport employees' unions. The CPI-M Politburo will meet in Kolkata on the 9th and 10th of this month

to review its support to the UPA, Mr Biswas said. The meeting, previously scheduled for today in New Delhi, was deferred in view of the strike. "The Congress cannot follow Rightist policies with the Leftists' support. Private participation in airport modernisation marks a major departure from the UPA's common minimum programme and the Congress used repressive measures to end the agitation. This is the party's real, authoritarian face." The veteran Politburo member was conveying the view of the CPI-M's central leadership. Although the party, even when supporting the employees, felt that the strike was not a political matter, Mr Biswas today made it clear that the Left parties had become involved in it.

"Airports modernisation is a matter we are concerned about. The strike by trade unions cannot go ahead without political support and we have decided to support the unions in the future. The stalemate is over but it taught us some lessons", said Mr Biswas. The CPI-M though, will not demand fresh tenders. "We are not interested in the companies whose bids were accepted," Mr Biswas said. **SNS**

At his meeting with the union leaders, including Mr Ghosal, the AITUC general secretary, Mr Garudas Dasgupta, and the CITU president, Mr MK Pandhe, Mr Patel assured them of setting up a tripartite committee, comprising representatives of the civil aviation ministry, AAI and the employees' joint forum.

Mr Dasgupta said he was satisfied with the assurances of the government, even as Mr Patel expressed the hope for

restoration of "full normalcy" in the next few hours.

As the strike was called off, the situation started improving at the IGI airport. At the IGI Airport, which looked a veritable garbage yard for the last two days, the staff started cleaning operations.

NSC Bose Airport returned to normal with power and water supply being restored and garbage being cleaned within 20 minutes of the strike being called off.



1-5 FEB 2008

THE STATESMAN

IT'S OFFICIAL: EPF RATE IS

8.5%

*Govt rejects demand
for hike; unions livid*

PRESS Trust of India
New Delhi, January 10

TRADE UNIONS have lost this round of the EPF battle. Rejecting their demand for retaining the EPF interest rate at 9.5 per cent, the government on Tuesday notified the 8.5 per cent rate as recommended by the Central Board of Trustees of the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).

"The subscribers of the Employees Provident

Fund are to get 8.5 per cent interest on their deposits for 2005-06," said a notification issued by the labour ministry. An official release said the EPFO would meet the deficit of Rs 365.89 crore on account of the 8.5 per cent interest rate from its own resources.

It said the total payout would be Rs.6,889.04 crore as interest to its four crore subscribers for the current fiscal as against the projected interest income of Rs.6,523.15 crore.

The notification comes after the CBT, chaired by labour minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao, met for a few rounds. Rao had recently met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and finance minister P. Chidambaram and discussed the strong demand from trade unions for retaining the 9.5 per cent interest paid in the last fiscal.

Food subsidy cut on hold

The Cabinet's decision to reduce the quantum of food-grain under the Public Distribution System in order to cut food subsidy has been put on hold, Union agriculture and food minister Sharad Pawar said on Tuesday. He told reporters, "I am not executing the decision on food subsidy cut. The entire decision has been stayed. I will discuss this issue with the UPA."

See Page 2

As expected, the decision left trade unions livid. Demanding a rollback, the CPI's D. Raja said the government had ignored strong opposition. Aituc's Gurudas Dasgupta said: "We shall oppose the government decision. We will plan mass action in consultation with other trade unions to compel the government to retain the rate." CITU leader M.K. Pandhe said they would stick to their demand for 9.5 per cent.

Earlier, in a joint letter to the labour minister, trade unions had demanded that the rate should not be reduced from 9.5 per cent. Instead, they had demanded that interest on the special deposit scheme and government bonds be raised to enable EPFO retain the interest rate at 9.5 per cent for 2005-06.

The EPF board suggested the reduction in interest rate as EPFO had ended up with a deficit of Rs 716 crore in 2004-05. The deficit was met through the reserve fund which is now left with a corpus of Rs 250 crore.

✓

EPF rate: unions to take up issue with Minister

Special Correspondent

✓ **NEW DELHI:** Representatives of major trade unions met here on Thursday to discuss the issues confronting the working people. They decided to take up the issue of the reduction of the interest rate of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) during the pre-budget consultations with Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on January 12.

The meeting was the first in a series before the representatives meet Mr. Chidambaram and submit a memorandum on budget proposals. The second meeting is scheduled for January 9.

✓ "The trade unions have decided to continue dialogue among themselves on the question of presenting a common memorandum and will explore the possibilities of having a common action programme to highlight the basic issues confronting the working people of the country," a statement issued by nine unions said.