

Debt killed a lakh

NDA's India shining campaign backfires with suicide deaths up

SUTIRTHO Patranobis
New Delhi, May 19

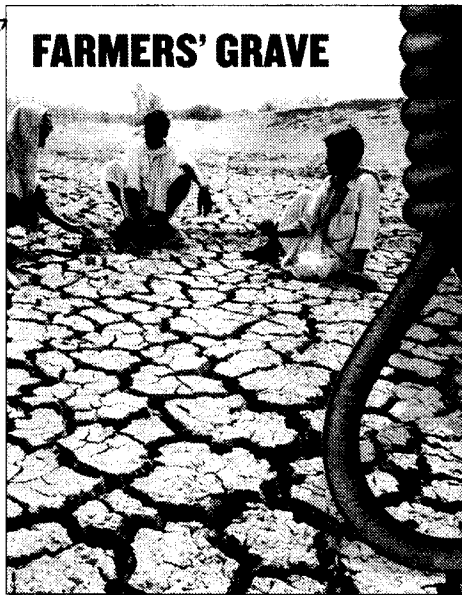
IT'S NOW clear why the NDA's India Shining campaign backfired. Figures compiled by the home ministry reveals that pushed to the brink by mounting debts, nearly a lakh of farmers and their family members committed suicide between 1998 and 2003.

The statistics give a glimpse of the crisis that devastated the rural economy — and one which perhaps, continues to do so. How's this for a shocker? On an average, almost 17,000 members of the farming community committed suicide every year during these six years. The deaths accounted for more than 12 per cent of all suicides committed in the country.

The worst year was 2002. That year, of the 1.10 lakh suicides, the farming community accounted for 17,971 — more than 16 per cent of the deaths. To get an idea of the scale of the tragedy, here's the national suicide average. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), for every lakh of people, only 10.4 kill themselves. Countrywide suicide figures have only been compiled till 2003. The 2004 figures are expected to be out shortly.

On Thursday, Union minister of agriculture Sharad Pawar quoted these figures in the Rajya Sabha during a discussion on agrarian distress. A number of expert committees had been constituted by the state governments, including that of Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, to

FARMERS' GRAVE



Between 1998 and 2003, debt drove 1 lakh members of farming community to suicide, says govt.

FATAL FIGURES*

17,000 farmers and their kin killed themselves each year for six years

12% of all suicides in the country was in the farming community

2002 worst year, 16% of suicides among farmers

* Figures only till 2003

WHY

High interest rate, crop failure

Diversion of loans for family emergencies like weddings or illnesses

Graphic: SANJAY KAPOOR

look into the issue, Pawar said. "Their reports have been submitted... One of the main conclusions (about the reason behind the suicide) was indebtedness", Pawar said.

According to the minister, this is how farmers falls into the debt trap. A farmer takes a loan from a bank (say a co-operative bank) and uses it to buy seeds, pesticide, arrange irrigation and pay for electricity. The monsoon fails and he can't pay the bank back.

The bank refuses to loan him more money to tide over the crisis. The farmer, desperate by now, has no al-

ternative but to knock on the door of a private moneylender, who charges interest rates between 20 per cent and 40 per cent.

The second scenario is when a farmer takes a "...consumption loan to use in agriculture, but diverts it for other uses", Pawar said. For example, if a family member falls seriously ill or the farmer needs to arrange funds for his daughter's marriage, he diverts the loaned money to disastrous consequences.

Whatever be the reasons, one thing is for clear: it's time to wake up and save the countryside.

AGRARIAN DISTRESS

20 MAY 2005

TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2006 ✓

Job guarantee report card

Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister in 1966 but it was in 1971 that she exploded on the national political scene — thanks to a single slogan that captured the mass aspiration of the time. Garibi Hatao (abolish poverty) fetched the post-split Congress an overpowering majority in the mid-term general election of 1971 as well as stunning victories in the State Assembly elections of 1972. Thirty-five years later, the Congress, unrecognisably shrunken, has set out to attempt a similar leap of the imagination with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Can the initiative do for Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi what Garibi Hatao did for Indira Gandhi? Potentially, the NREGA is a bigger winner. Garibi Hatao worked because the political will of the Indira regime was evident in the bold measures she adopted — abolishing privy purses and princely titles, nationalising banks and the wholesale trade in foodgrains, and so forth. But soon Garibi Hatao became a caricature slogan, more sound than substance, as the reverses suffered by the Congress from the mid-1970s showed. On the other hand, the NREGA is a progressive rights-based approach to development conceptualised in the National Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance: a first-of-its-kind legal entitlement guaranteeing 100 days of minimum wage employment to rural households.

The NREGA's socio-political value is obvious: it has the sweep and the scope to reach the farthest corners of India and, if properly implemented, to transform the countryside. So why has the Congress not seized the opportunity in the manner of an Indira Gandhi? Why has it not gone on the offensive? The party leadership was confronted with these questions at a conference of district-level functionaries convened by the All India Congress Committee to review the implementation of the NREGA. In their speeches to district Congress chiefs, the Prime Minister and the Congress president stressed the political nature of the NREGA. As Sonia Gandhi put it: "The issue figured only in the Congress manifesto, it is part of the National Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance, and it has been enforced by our Central Government." Manmohan Singh noted that "the message has to reach every corner that this right has been conferred by Soniaji, by the Congress party." Yet for all the posturing, the NREGA is a long way from capturing the imagination of the masses. This is, in part, because the Congress machinery is virtually defunct except in the party's traditional strongholds. Crucially, the AICC review highlighted better implementation of the NREGA by Opposition-ruled States. Among Congress-ruled States, Andhra Pradesh posted the best results. Worryingly for the Congress, the NREGA appeared to be a non-starter in Uttar Pradesh, due for election in February 2007. Why has the Congress leadership failed to show the political will to go for broke on a project it has extolled as 'historic' and 'revolutionary'?

THE HINDU

Govt issues blacklist of 118 defence suppliers

■ Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has similarly banned 20 firms since the year 2001. While some firms have been banned permanently, others like Eloptro, a member of the Denel group of South Africa, have been banned in 2005.

Besides these PSUs, other Government concerns like the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) and Bharat Dynamics Limited

(BDL) have also added companies on the MoD's ban list.

On the list, foreign vendors like Samtem of South Africa and Basin Spa of Italy find a place along with small Indian private firms manufacturing pipes, racks and wires.

While the BEL, for instance, has put a Mumbai-based scrap dealer on its list, HAL put the National Co-operative Consumers Federation.

'Scrap Official Secrets Act'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 9

SUGGESTING THE repeal of the archaic Official Secrets Act (OSA), 1923, the second Administrative Reforms Commission has recommended that safeguards for protecting the security of the state could be suitably incorporated in the National Security Act. The 83-year-old Official Secrets Act was "incongruous with the regime of transparency in a democratic society", it stated.

In its first report, submitted to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh by commission chairman Veerapa Moily, it suggested that the Official Secrets Act, 1923, be repealed and suitable safeguards to protect the state's security be incorporated into the National Security Act (NSA). The report said the Official Secrets Act in its current form was "incongruous" with the regime of transparency in a democratic society.

Emerging from a 40-minute meeting with the PM, at which minister of state for personnel Suresh Pachauri was also present, Moily said the OSA had a shadow of colonial regime. Some of the provisions of the Act could be incorporated in NSA, he said.

The ARC has also recommended sev-

VEERAPA MOILY COMMISSION

eral changes in the implementation of the Right to Information Act (RTI), including the appointment of at least half the members of the Information Commission (IC) with non-Civil Service background.

With special focus on several subjects — the RTI Act, Rural Employment Guarantee Act, crisis management and public order and conflict management, Civil Service reforms, local governments and ethics in governance — the report has suggested that the IC be entrusted with greater authority and responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the RTI Act in all public authorities.

Calling for clear and unambiguous guidelines to determine the domain of the IC beyond government to non-government organisations, the report has suggested safeguards to discourage frivolous and vexatious requests so that the system is not overloaded threatening the discipline and harmony of the IC-functioning.

The report suggested revamping of the information commissions, saying at least half the members of such commissions should be drawn from non-civil service background so that they represent the rich variety and varied experience in society.

Among other recommendations, the ARC constituted in August last year has suggested complete reorganization of public records, establishment of independent public grievance redressal authorities in states, a roadmap for the implementation of the RTI Act in legislature and judiciary at all levels apart from reforms in Civil Service rules and office procedures.

One per cent of the funds of all flagship programmes of the Centre should be earmarked for five years for updating all records and building necessary infrastructure. Clear and unambiguous guidelines needed to be evolved to determine which NGOs would come under the purview of the Act, an executive summary of the report said.

About his report, he said, "Whatever recommendations we gave are practicable for implementation". He added that the Prime Minister was happy and had assured him that a roadmap would be worked out for its implementation.

10 JUN 2006

THE HOUSTON TIMES

International call

9-19 1996

The information and broadcasting minister, Priyaranjan Das Munshi, must be the only Union minister this summer who is not junketing abroad on government expense. That is because he has gone to oversee World Cup matches in Stuttgart, Germany for two weeks on an all-expenses-paid trip by FIFA, fully sanctioned by the prime minister. (Oh yes, there's the civil aviation minister, Praful Patel, too, who has gone to Alaska on a personal holiday.) But check out the other peripatetic ministers of the United Progressive Alliance escaping the searing heat of the Indo-Gangetic plain, and the one motif that currently unites them is the desire to cross the seven seas as soon as possible.

So commerce minister Kamal Nath has just returned from work in Paris, agriculture minister Sharad Pawar is in the United States of America to meet his counterparts, Oscar Fernandes was last heard attending an HIV-AIDS conference in New York, and even Somnath Chatterjee has embarked on a trip to the reindeer country, Finland. (Chatterjee will later travel to England on a personal tour, from where he is expected to travel to watch some matches in Germany.)

Evidently, the prime minister was so perturbed by the unwritten slogan of his cabinet — 'have UPA minister-ship, will travel' — that in collaboration with the ministry of external affairs, a *fatwa* was issued to all scrambling for first-class tickets on Air India: Only those *mantris* who urgently needed to travel on work should go, lest so many official travellers disturb the work of missions abroad.

Only the defence minister, Pranab Mukherjee, seemed to have received the full support of the prime minister for his trips to Japan and China. In Japan, Mukherjee was given the red carpet treatment, the Japanese inviting India to join a much more robust defence of the Indian Ocean waters, especially around the Straits of Malacca. For the Japanese, the protection of oil frigates from west Asia is as crucial to Japan's recovery from recession as is the fact that Chinese ships may be carrying missile parts and nuclear components for North Korean/Pakistani ports.

But it was in China that Pranab

While most ministers try to escape the Indian summer, a few have more important things on their plate, writes Jyoti Malhotra



Making common cause

Mukherjee closed the chapter of antagonism, at least for form's sake, that blew open with the nuclear tests in 1998. Mukherjee was taken on a tour of the major People's Liberation Army sites, amidst stories that certain Chinese records pertaining to the 1962 war with India had been declassified. And even though both parties seem to be making a realistic sense of their strengths as well as redetermining that the border problem must be resolved as quickly as possible, Beijing is also simultaneously aware that the US seems to be single-mindedly focussing on building India as a major power as a counterweight to China.

India's response to any such query is a resounding no, worth just as much as the emphatic denials that periodically emerge from China when it is accused of helping Pakistan or North Korea with both nuclear and missile technology. Meanwhile, ask Beijing why it continues its worldwide campaign against India acquiring a permanent security council seat, especially if both are the fast friends they make

themselves out to be? The answer is that both establishments know that although they pay lip friendship to each other (world's greatest and most ancient civilizations, third world powers, Asian neighbours, Panchsheel, and so on), the truth is that both are angling for the same space in the international balance of power: the number two slot.

To be fair to India, it has no such pretensions, not currently anyhow, what with poverty levels so high, literacy levels still low and the Indo-US nuclear deal coming down to the wire. That is why the nuclear deal is so important, because it gives New Delhi a special place in the world of nuclear realpolitik. Not part of the 'permanent-five', who are both security council permanent members as well

as the only acknowledged nuclear powers in the world. But a notch above the rest of the world, which has voluntarily ceded its nuclear weapons. It is this special place created by America that China abhors, because India then becomes too close for comfort 'up there'.

'In Japan, Pranab Mukherjee was given the red carpet treatment, while in China, he closed the chapter of antagonism'

The moment of truth for the nuclear deal — and India's prestige, worldwide — will come later next month, at the end of July or the beginning of August, when the US congress votes on this special, strategic relationship with India. Domestic opposition within the US continues to be high, especially as a number of strategic analysts like Michael Krepon — who have, ironically, made their career from the analyses of India's nuclear programme — continue to sponsor free lunches-cum-seminars opposed to the deal. Meanwhile, George W. Bush's ratings continue their free fall... Still, with Bush having put his weight behind the agreement, many are hoping that it will pass. If it doesn't now (that is in July-August), India can more or less kiss it goodbye.

Manmohan Singh, clearly, has set his heart on giving the Congress a leg-up worldwide, especially since internal criticism of his government's pro-US policies seems to be growing. In the interim, though, the Congress has decided that it must balance its pro-US image with paying lip service to its traditional constituency, that is the non-aligned world.

And so, the prime minister will be travelling to Havana, Cuba for the non-aligned summit later this September, after a trip to Brazil to participate in the India-Brazil-South Africa partnership. Interestingly, though, he is not likely to go on from there to the general assembly in New York, with government sources emphasising that the prime minister "doesn't have that kind of time to stay out of the country". There is another explanation: both the Americans and the ministry of external affairs have agreed that it would be too embarrassing for Bush to be seen shaking the hand of Manmohan Singh, who had only a few days before shaken the hand of the US's mortal enemy, Fidel Castro.

Then there's that other possibility of a trilateral summit between Manmohan Singh, Pervez Musharraf and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in Tehran in August, to finalize the pipelines from Iran to India, via Pakistan. So will the summit ever take place? The answer is, more than likely. With the Iranians and the Americans getting into direct talks, New Delhi's sense of comfort with Tehran is likely to increase proportionately.

13 JUN 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

Lash & push for AIIMS director

CHARU SUDAN KASTURI

New Delhi, June 16: Senior faculty members at AIIMS today wrote a letter to the Prime Minister complaining against director P. Venugopal, whom they described as "autocratic", and blaming him for the hospital's deterioration.

Resident doctors who have been protesting against OBC quotas and count Venugopal as a supporter are framing another memorandum, which they plan to give Manmohan Singh tomorrow, demanding the resignation of health minister Anbumani Ramadoss.

Venugopal and Ramadoss are involved in a public spat — after the director threatened to resign yesterday, the minis-

ter told him he was welcome to do so.

The faculty members said India's premier teaching hospital had been deteriorating since Venugopal was appointed director in 2003. They blamed him for "total absence of transparency and accountability in administration", and wrote that the director was apathetic towards the needs of common people.

"He has been very unpopular from the time of his appointment," said Dr H. Verma, a senior pathologist, and one of those who signed the letter.

Resident doctors and faculty members who had gone with Venugopal to meet the Prime Minister about 10 days ago to seek a hundred per cent in-



Singh, Venugopal: Letter trouble?

crease in seats were labelled as his "coterie" in the letter.

The doctors alleged that the Rs 120-crore trauma centre at AIIMS has been unused for the past three years although it is ready. According to them, 30 MDs and 60 senior residents hired specifically for the trauma centre were made to work



doss's resignation "at all costs". "If Dr Venugopal is persuaded to resign, so will all the 1,500-odd resident doctors," said Dr Sudipto Mazumdar of the AIIMS Resident Doctors' Association. A list of signatures of resident doctors who will resign if Venugopal does will be attached to the memorandum.

Venugopal refused to comment but close aide Dr V.K. Khaitan accused Ramadoss of "changing his statements every day". "The minister said in March that even retired doctors should be employed to prevent a shortage of staff, and now he says the director himself is welcome to leave," he said.

The BJP, whose govern-

ment had appointed Venugopal, today jumped to his support, calling him "one of the greatest doctors of India."

"This public humiliation is completely unwarranted. The government should not interfere in the functioning of AIIMS," BJP spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

The resident doctors also plan to submit a letter to the health ministry asking it to revoke its decision to not pay the doctors for the days they were on strike last month.

Health secretary P.K. Hota wrote to cabinet secretary B.K. Chaturvedi yesterday seeking confirmation that the decision was in line with government policy, suggesting the ministry was feeling the heat.

PM's mela after Vidarbha suicides

SATISH NANDGAONKAR

Waifad, Maharashtra, June 29: In the whirl of trucks and the thunder of roadrollers, Manoj Chandurkar almost says it feels like a carnival celebrating death.

"For 48 months no one came to mourn the 1,600 farmers who killed themselves, but in the past 48 hours, it's like a mela," the cotton farmer said, almost hating the national attention on his village Waifad in Wardha district.

In Andhra, where the Prime Minister had gone immediately on taking over because farmers were killing themselves, or in Maharashtra's Vidarbha, it's the same pattern — first the deaths and then the camera and lights.

Waifad is only 20 km from Wardha town, known for Seva Gram, the ashram Mahatma Gandhi established and spent time in from 1934 to 1948 and which Manmohan Singh will visit. Land for the ashram was given by Jannalal Bajaj, the grandfather of businessman Rahul Bajaj, whom the Congress recently declined to support for the Rajya Sabha.

Populated largely by adivasis, the village woke up to a flurry of activity on Tuesday when it was chosen to be one of the three the Prime Minister would visit to talk to farmers and understand why they have been killing themselves. It's been going on for five years.

Today, hundreds of workers toiled to get ready the helipad where Singh's chopper would land. Roadrollers were flattening the freshly tarred 2-km stretch from the helipad to the 51-year-old Central Primary School, painted peach for the occasion, where 35 farmers from nearby villages would gather to listen to Singh.

"We thought the Prime Minister would come to meet all of us. But the authorities are not allowing that. Only 35

would get to go in," says 42-year-old Chandurkar, among the fortunate.

The majority of Waifad's farmers carry crop loans they are unable to repay because of a sharp mismatch between rising cultivation costs and low returns from cotton. Once the cotton procurement scheme offered a minimum support price of Rs 2,700 per quintal, but the rate is now Rs 1,740.

With farmers unable to repay loans, the rural credit mechanism broke down in Vidarbha and money-lenders took over. In 2005, the government announced a Rs 1,075-crore relief package and ordered a massive crackdown on money-lenders and private credit lines also dried up.

Interest waivers on defaulted loans have not helped farmers like Kisanji Masram, who borrows Rs 7,000 and repays it each year. His cotton and tuar crop was washed away by last monsoon's rains, forcing him and his two sons to work others' fields.

"*Male kahich maaf nahi* (No waivers for me)," says the 65-year-old.

Masram is one of the three farmers whose homes line the main road to Waifad's primary school and were chosen by the SPG for the prime ministerial visit. Neither Masram nor wife Laxmi knows who's visiting tomorrow. "I don't know how the Prime Minister looks," she says, adding as an afterthought, "I will ask him to give me a new house."

As soon as she finishes, a cavalcade of at least 20 cars stops briefly by the house on way to the school.

The roads in Waifad are muddy from the first monsoon showers. A cover of black crushed stone lies over the slushy ground like a black carpet on which the Prime Minister will step as he looks up Masram. The visit to Gandhi's ashram comes first, then the second ritual, Masram.



A woman wades through a flooded canal in Vidarbha.

File picture

THE HINDU

CCEA ■ Rs 1,189-cr agricultural innovation project from July, Rs 200 cr for strengthening agricultural education

Cabinet plans dual thrust to boost farm sector

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, JUNE 29

AT A time when farmers' suicides and the agricultural growth rate are causes of national concern, the Union Cabinet today took two decisions that are expected to give a fillip to the ailing farm sector.

A Rs 1,189.99-crore National Agricultural Innovation Project, with 75 per cent funding by the World Bank, has been approved to start in July 2006. The six-year project would facilitate research on production to consumption systems, sustainable rural livelihood security as well as basic and strategic research in agricultural sciences.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, that also met today, has approved an additional Rs 200 crore for strengthening agricultural education in the rest of the Tenth Plan. At the same time, the CCEA also gave an in-principle nod to make the



DEFENDING THE FARMERS: Pranab Mukherjee and Sharad Pawar

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) the regulator for higher agricultural education in the country.

The Cabinet also extended the deadline for compliance with different conditions for enhancing Foreign Direct Investment in the telecom sector from 49 per cent to 74 per cent. The government had already extended the deadline from March 2006 to July 2, 2006. This second

extension will last till October 2, 2006. This will give more time for further consultation with different stakeholders and in the meantime maintain the continuity of operation in the telecom sector.

When the Cabinet raised FDI ceiling in November 2005, the telecom industry had sought more time for complying with the new conditions on issues such as remote access, appointment of resident Indian citizens on key posts, FDI calculations, among other things.

The Cabinet also approved the opening or reopening of Indian diplomatic offices in Congo, Solvenia, Melbourne, South Sudan and Bhutan, at a cost of Rs 2.02 crore.

The National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources has been authorised to sign a non-disclosure agreement with International Patent Offices. This would allow the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library accessible to patent examiners.



Pritya Ranjan Dasmunsi, Sushilkumar Shinde and Murl Deora leaving the PMO after the Cabinet meeting on Thursday. Express photos by Ravi Batra

Stark reality awaits PM in Vidarbha

Ramu Bhagwat | TNN

Koljhari (Yavatmal district): Two days before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Vidarbha visit to study the farmers' suicide issue, a visit to the villages in this worst-hit district left one wondering whether it was time a warning notice was put at the entry points saying 'Feeble hearted, stay out.' Two bodies were lying in this village, one which the PM is scheduled to tour, and another two km away, awaiting funeral.

Of course, the district administration, under the able guidance of Special Protection Group, was busy building a helipad after leveling a farm where cotton was already sown in the fields of Vinod Sangeetrao on the outskirts of the village. Naturally, there was no one listen to the cries of daughter of Tanabai who died this morning for want of medical attention. Her son, Tukaram

Ranjit Deshmukh



The house of Gosawi Dhansingh Pawar in Kolezari village in Yavatmal district which the Prime Minister is scheduled to visit on Saturday

Kumre, a farm labourer told TOI that she was sick (suspected to be suffering of Chikunguniya infection) that has spread in the area, for the last eight days. But had no money to buy her medicines or take her to the nearest doctor at a PHC, 10 km away. Ironically, now he was saddled with a bigger expense of funeral.

At nearby Dabha Mankar village, the body of Maroti Tanba Kulkarni was also awaiting funeral. Unable to raise money for the fresh crop even as kharif season has already advanced, Kulkarni (58) committed suicide by consuming poison on Tuesday night. After post mortem at Pandharkawda town, the

body was handed over to relatives. Kulkarni was the 24th farmer to end his life in the killing cotton fields of Vidarbha in last six days.

As many as 592 farmers, unable to bear the burden of mounting debts and facing recurring losses of uneconomical cotton cultivation, have preferred to embrace death.

There were demonstrative signs of government officials having woken up. The house of Gosavi Dhansingh Pawar that the PM is to visit on Saturday had an unexpected visitor. The local MLA and state's education minister Vasant Purke finally found time two days ago to come here to tell that family that a Rs 1 lakh compensation was sanctioned to the family. "But he said we will get only Rs 10,000 cash as Rs 20,000 would be adjusted against outstanding loans and the remaining Rs 70,000 would be in form of fixed deposit bonds," said Prakash.

Package for farmers in 31 districts proposed

Prime Minister expected to make announcement during his Vidarbha visit this week

Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is expected to announce a rehabilitation package for farmers in suicide-prone districts of four States when he visits Vidarbha, in Maharashtra, on Thursday. Farmers' suicides have shown a spurt in the region over the past two years.

The Union Agriculture Ministry has proposed a Rs. 121210-crore rehabilitation package over five years, which is likely to be finalised on Tuesday. For this year, the Ministry has proposed a figure of about Rs. 1100 crore. Of the 31 districts identified for intervention, 16 are in Andhra Pradesh, six each in Maharashtra and Karnataka, and three in

Kerala. The package includes complete institutional credit cover to farmers, one-time settlement on repayment of loans by small and marginal farmers, launch of pilot Modified National Agriculture Insurance Scheme which will provide cover for crops, farmers' health and assets, enhancement of seed replacement rate to at least 50 per cent for various crops, schemes for irrigation, water harvesting and check dams.

It calls for a shift from monocropping to multiple cropping agriculture in the drought-affected regions. For supplementary income, the proposal is to help farmers initiate livestock, dairy, poultry and horticulture ventures with enhanced

and in Maharashtra replacing the cotton crop with pulses. For Kerala, the emphasis is on improving productivity of plantation crops.

The Ministry's proposal, made in March when Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar announced the package in his reply to demand for grants in Parliament, was mired in financial constraints.

However, at the recent meeting of the Agriculture Coordination Committee, it was decided that the Centre should intervene in a visible manner.

By linking its proposals with NABARD, Bharat Nirman programme, the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, Accelerated Irrigation Benefit

Programme and National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, the Agriculture Ministry has limited its spending to about Rs. 1100 crore this year for the package.

According to official sources, between 2001 and 2006, as many as 5,910 farmers committed suicide in Karnataka, 1,835 in Andhra Pradesh, 981 in Maharashtra and 201 in Kerala.

Countrywide, between 1995 and 2003, 9.26 lakh farmers are reported to have committed suicide according to statistics put out by the Home Ministry. The main causes are reported to be indebtedness, crop failure, and other economic and psychological reasons.

• **Proposed figure for this year is Rs. 1100 crore**

• **31 suicide-prone districts in Andhra, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala to benefit**

subsidy. The extension services are to be strengthened and marketing opportunities would be enhanced.

The package proposes bringing larger areas under hybrid seeds, particularly cotton, maize and coarse grains, and for integrated pest management. In Andhra Pradesh it is proposed to enhance the area under maize

High on highways: PM hikes fund for NH

Ups National Highway Project Corpus To Rs 2,20,000Cr

Bangalore: After the success with green and white revolutions, India is now fostering a similar exercise in the roads sector, what with the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announcing in Bangalore on Saturday a government decision to enlarge funding to the national highway project to Rs 2,22,000 crore.

The Prime Minister is in the IT city to lay the foundation stone for the Bangalore-Electronics City elevated highway project.

Stating that the UPA had "speeded up construction and development of national highways, the PM said, "We now have a road programme, a national highway development project (NHDP) costing Rs 2,20,000 crore to be implemented in 7-8 years."

The Bangalore project is expected to take the pressure off the city's woefully inadequate road infrastructure.

"We are six-laning the Bangalore-Nelamangala stretch of NH-4, including a four-km-long elevated corridor...four-laning the



GO AHEAD: PM Manmohan Singh waves after laying the foundation stone of the ten-lane mixed corridor as Union minister for shipping, road transport & highways T R Balu looks on in Bangalore on Saturday

Bangalore-Devanahalli section of NH-7....Bangalore-Kolar section of NH-4 is being four-laned," he said.

Noting that the country is witnessing a road revolution, similar to the green and white revolutions of the past, Singh said the NHDP, which originally had two phases, has been expanded to include seven

phases covering the entire country. "To NHDP-I and NHDP-II, we have added NHDP-III under which 11,000 km of high traffic density highways connecting state capitals and important centres of tourism and economic activity are being developed. "The investment on this phase was Rs 55,000 crore," he said.

'Bangalore a global brand'

Hailing Bangalore as a global brand, PM Manmohan Singh said people across the world knew more about this city than they did about India. "Kannada people have become the symbol of a new India, an India on the move," he said, adding that, "Investors from across the world flock to Bangalore, because 'Kannadigas are gracious, gentle, talented and forward-looking.'" What Bangalore has done over the past decade, the rest of the state should do over the next decade, he added. AGENCIES

Besides, the government would be six-laning the entire golden quadrilateral project connecting the four metros. With the government's commitment to bridge the rural-urban divide, Singh said there would be demand for road connectivity and for rapid transport system with urban centres and rural areas, the PM said. AGENCIES

Lab tests find traces of cocaine

Tests on Rahul indicate a cocktail of drugs

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: The mystery surrounding the toxic screen test done on Rahul Mahajan, son of the slain Bharatiya Janata Party leader, Pramod Mahajan, deepened on Sunday. A private pathology laboratory here reported traces of cocaine and a cocktail of restricted drugs, non-narcotic sedatives and alcohol in his urine and blood samples. This comes a day after authorities at the Apollo Hospital claimed he tested negative for any narcotic drug.

Rahul Mahajan was brought to hospital in an unconscious state early on Friday morning from his father's 7 Safdarjung Road residence. Bibek Moitra, personal secretary to Pramod Mahajan, was declared dead on arrival at the hospital.

As a matter of protocol, the hospital authorities had sent Rahul Mahajan's blood and urine samples to Dr. Lal's Path Labs for quantitative analysis on Friday. While the reports shared by the hospital authorities indicated "negative toxic screen," the tests carried out at Dr. Lal Path Labs revealed the presence of 3.9 milligrams of cocaine per litre of urine. Besides, traces of cholinesterase, opiates, barbiturates, benzodiazepine and cannabinoids were found. The presence of alcohol within permissible limits was also detected in the blood sample.

Apollo Hospital authorities maintained that they stood by their test report. They asserted that what the hospital laboratory carried out was a "qualitative" test that had proved negative, as the levels of drugs found in the body were negligible. "We, how-



Sahil Zaroo

ever, have to understand and read through all test reports to know what really triggered the condition in the patient," said Medical Director Anupam Sibal on Sunday.

Sahil "bought the stuff"

In a related development, Sahil Zaroo, who was arrested in Srinagar on Saturday, was brought to the capital on Sunday by air on transit remand. He was produced in a Delhi court that recommended him to eight days of police custody.

According to Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Manish Aggarwal, Sahil has admitted that he had bought the "stuff" that was consumed at 7 Safdarjung Road on Thursday night. "We will interrogate him further," he said.

The police have rounded up three Nigerian nationals, including one Abdullah who allegedly sold the "stuff" to Sahil at Vasant Vihar in South-West Delhi. Abdullah, who lives in Vasanth

Kunj, is alleged to have confessed that he sold the drug to Sahil.

The detainees will be confronted with Sahil to corroborate their disclosures.

Mr. Aggarwal said that after a section of the media reported that Rahul Mahajan's condition had improved considerably, a police team went to question him. But around 11.25 a.m. the hospital authorities issued a letter stating that he was still medically unfit to make a statement. The police are expected to question him on Monday.

Rahul's condition better

A medical bulletin issued by the hospital said Rahul Mahajan had made further progress in his overall clinical condition and was on non-invasive ventilator intermittently. "All his vital parameters are stable. He continues to be under close observation in the Intensive Care Unit. He is tolerating oral diet and fluids," said Dr. Sibal.

Earlier, the police reiterated that the post-mortem examination report on Moitra did not give any conclusive cause for his death and they were awaiting the viscera report. Moitra's body was flown to Mumbai on Saturday and cremated at Navi Mumbai on Sunday. The police have not yet decided what action to take against the three young men, Rahul, Karan and Tishay, who visited Mr. Mahajan's residence on the fateful night. The police have added two new Sections, 21 and 29, of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act in the First Information Report. These sections relate to facilitating and abetting crime.

Questioned In ICU With Video Cameras, Mahajan Claims Visitors Were Invitees of Moitra

Rahul held, tries to blame it on the dead

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI

DELHI Police on Monday arrested Rahul Mahajan, son of late BJP leader Pramod Mahajan, under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

The arrest, made on charges of sale and purchase and consumption of drugs, came soon after Rahul's detailed interrogation by the police at Apollo Hospital on the events leading to his indisposition and death of Vivek Moitra, late Pramod Mahajan's personal secretary. The police are checking with the hospital authorities on how early Rahul can be discharged.

Justifying Rahul's arrest, the police claimed that they had "credible evidence" to prove that he had indeed

consumed drugs on Thursday night along with Moitra who died due to an overdose. The narcotics were allegedly brought in by the four youths who visited the Mahajan household on Thursday night.

While Moitra, who himself had asked the men to get the drugs, died, Rahul fell seriously ill and had to be revived by doctors at the Apollo Hospital.

After the authorities at Apollo Hospital declared Rahul as "fit" for questioning, a police team led by Mandir Marg SHO Ram Kishen arrived at the ICU of the hospital armed with video cameras to record his statement. As the questioning proceeded, ACP Suman Nalwa and Tughlaq Road SHO Madanjit Singh too joined in.

According to police sources, Rahul denied having snorted heroin, as alleged by the four men who visited the Mahajan house on the night of the incident, and claimed that the visitors that night were invitees of Moitra and he had nothing to do with them.

Sources in the police said that during the interrogation, Rahul attempted to pin the blame on Moitra.

The police also summoned the doctors of Apollo Hospital to Tughlaq Road and questioned them about various aspects of the case including delay in informing the police about admission of Rahul in the hospital and his medical reports.

A close aide of late Pramod Mahajan, Harish Sharma, was interrogated again on Monday as the police set out to establish the sequence of events on the fateful night of June 1. The police will also interrogate another of Late Mahajan's aide Sudhanshu Mittal. Mittal, it be recalled, was in news recently for benefiting from the allotment of Reliance Infocomm shares.

Police also confronted Sahil with three other persons — Karan, Tishay and Rahul Malhotra — who were also present during the small gathering, to ascertain what actually transpired during the party.

Interestingly, Sahil Zaroo's lawyer Majeed Memon on Monday said the statement reportedly made by the 21-year-old Kashmiri youth that he had procured drugs for Vivek Moitra and Pramod Mahajan's son "does not hold good".

Memon also claimed that Sahil went to the 7, Safdarjung, residence of Rahul on Thursday night to meet Moitra to get an air ticket to Srinagar released from the VIP quota as the two had known each other earlier.

"Moitra had called Sahil to Rahul's residence on Thursday night where he consumed some liquid or powder after which he fell sick. The story that Sahil gave drugs to Moitra is mere speculation," he said. Sahil on Sunday admitted during his interrogation that he had procured the drugs for Rahul and Vivek.



Not So High: The Three Nigerian drug dealers who supplied pure cocaine to Sahil Zaroo arrested in New Delhi on Monday — PTI

Apollo under police scanner

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI

NOTWITHSTANDING its U-turn on the presence of drugs in Rahul Mahajan's blood and urine samples, the Apollo Hospital has come under the police scanner for putting out conflicting versions on the issue. The doctors treating Rahul, have been served a notice by the Delhi police on the discrepancies in its version on whether or not drugs were used by their high-profile patient.

They will also be questioned on the hospital's "haste" in going to the press about the negative results of the toxicity screening done on Rahul.

Senior doctors at Apollo have also been asked to furnish all documents regarding prescriptions and medicines administered to Rahul.

Even as the hospital declared Rahul fit on Monday it is to be questioned by the police. There has been a sense of suspicion among investigators on the initial delay on the hospital's part in either declaring Rahul fit or shifting him out of the ICU even when he was capable talking and taking diet and fluids orally.

The anxiety on part of Apollo Hospital to announce that Rahul had tested "negative" for 14 drugs including cocaine, heroin and ecstasy had the Delhi police wondering about

the alleged drug-overdose theory. The suspicion on the hospital's motive behind this "clean-chit" only increased as a similar toxicity screen by an independent agency confirmed the presence of multiple toxic substances, including drugs, and alcohol in Rahul's blood and urine.

The results of the tests done by Dr Lal's Path Labs, an independent agency, showed the presence of traces of cocaine (3.9 units), cholinesterase, barbiturates, benzodiazepine and cannabinoids in his blood.

The presence of alcohol in Rahul's blood was tested at 18.4 (within permissible limits) as against 100, considered to be the legally intoxicated level.

According to forensic experts, there is no reason for the presence of cocaine and other such toxic substances in a normal person unless he has consumed them.

Soon after the independent toxic screen results were out, Apollo Hospital went into damage-control and was eager to explain that the "cocktail of

drugs" found in Dr Lal's tests did not show in Apollo's tests as they were under permissible limits. Dr Karan Thakur, spokesperson for Apollo Hospital, said that it was "normal" to have that much cocaine in the system. "We stand by our reports. The qualitative analysis does not detect drugs unless they're present in high quantity," he claimed.



In The Dock: Sibal

So, cocaine it was

9.6 96
871

SNS & PTI

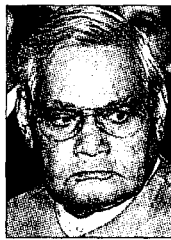
Such mistakes happen in young age: Vajpayee

NEW DELHI, June 4: In a volte-face, Delhi's Apollo Hospital today disclosed that traces of cocaine and a cocktail of drugs have been found in the urine sample of Rahul Mahajan, although its doctors had categorically said yesterday that he had tested negative for drugs.

Hospital Medical Director Dr Anupam Sibal stood by his yesterday's statement that the late BJP leader Pramod Mahajan's son had tested negative for drugs, but at the same time, in a hair-splitting exercise, revealed that urine sample tested at a well known private lab found traces of a cocktail of drugs, including cocaine.

He explained the contradiction by stating that the hospital did not conduct quantitative tests and only performed tests for the qualitative presence of drugs. But the test reports by Dr Lal's Pathological Lab, which conducted the quantitative tests on the urine sample, showed the presence of traces of drugs.

"It could be said that cocaine was present even though in a very minute level. It is very much nor-



MANALI, June 4: "Such mistakes happen in young age" - was Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's comment on the alleged drug abuse by Rahul Mahajan.

"There are chances of making such mistakes when you fall in bad company and that is what happened to Rahul," Mr Vajpayee told reporters after a party meeting here. Asked whether the episode had tarnished the image of the BJP which was planning to give some responsibility to Rahul, he replied in the negative.

"We will try to find the truth first," he said when asked whether the party would take any action against Rahul.

Regarding who would be BJP's next ****Laxman****, the title given to Pramod Mahajan by him, Mr Vajpayee quipped: "Only one Laxman is born." ■ PTI

mal," he said.

The hospital authorities also distributed copies of the Lab's report which showed the presence of drugs, including cocaine metaboloids and cannabinoids. A test was also conducted on the blood sample of Rahul at Lal's pathological lab which showed traces of alcohol.

Delhi Police today said Sahil Zaroo, the Kashmiri youth arrested in connection with Thursday's late night party at Pramod Mahajan's house here, had got the drug for Rahul and Bibek Moitra. A combina-

tion of drugs and alcohol apparently caused Moitra's death.

Additional DCP Mr Manish Aggarwal said the interrogation of Sahil was at a very "preliminary" stage. "He was very much there and he had got the drugs for them. That is what he has disclosed," Mr Aggarwal said. However, he said, police could not take Rahul's statement as he was declared "unfit" by the Apollo Hospital.

Sahil was interrogated by police for four hours today. A court remanded him in police custody till 12 June.

Mystery Shrouds Maitra's Death

Autopsy Reveals Traces Of Poison | Rahul's Condition Improves, Taken Off Ventilator

New Delhi: The mystery surrounding the death of murdered BJP leader Pramod Mahajan's secretary Vivek Maitra and the illness of his son Rahul deepened on Saturday with Maitra's postmortem report suggesting traces of poison and doctors treating Rahul saying they could not spell out the cause of his clinical condition although his blood tests did not show any traces of cocaine or any other drug. However, the doctors said Rahul condition had improved significantly in the last 12 hours and he had been taken off ventilator.

A source at AIIMS, where the autopsy on Maitra was done, said the postmortem report was suggestive of poisoning. "There are traces of poison and we have sent the viscera to the Central Forensic Sciences Laboratory (CFSL) to determine the type of poison," the source said. However, a senior doctor at Apol-

lo Hospital, where Rahul was admitted in a critical condition in the wee hours of Friday after a late-night party, said they were unable to ascertain the cause of his condition. Dr Anupam Sibal said, "The tests were done for 14 drugs, including cocaine and ecstasy, but they were negative. However, there were traces of alcohol." He added that they were not sure if he had taken any other drug. Meanwhile, he said there was "significant improvement" in Rahul's condition with all his vital organs like liver and kidney functioning normally. "His situation has improved. The blood pressure has stabilised, urine output is normal and the oxygen status has improved. He has been put on non-invasive ventilator," the doctor said, adding that Rahul had regained consciousness for short spells and spoke coherently. "He was well-oriented and comfortable

BJP keeps a distance

Embarrassed by Rahul Mahajan's hospitalisation after a late-night bash, the BJP on Saturday sought to wash its hands of the controversy, saying it was a tragedy in the family of its late leader Pramod Mahajan and that it had nothing to do with it.



Sahil Zaroo is taken into custody in Srinagar on Saturday

and asked for water," Sibal added. On Rahul's condition when he was brought to the hospital, Sibal said, "There was alcohol in his body, but it was very low." Asked if the doctors had tried to ascertain what was inside Rahul's stomach, he said tests for the same has been done by the Central Forensic Sciences Laboratory. Declining to comment on what triggered such a clinical situation, Sibal said the tests done at the Apol- lo Hospital were part of the standard medical protocol. AGENCIES

Missing youth held in Srinagar

Srinagar: Sahil Zaroo, one of the four boys alleged to have supplied drugs to Rahul Mahajan and Vivek Maitra, was detained by the Jammu and Kashmir police here for questioning on Saturday.

Just before he was detained, 21-year-old Sahil told reporters that he was innocent and only knew Maitra. He said he had not supplied drugs to Rahul, who took critically ill after a late-night party at his 7, Safdarjung residence in New Delhi in the wee hours of Friday.

The police are expected to search Sahil's Nigeen area residence to look for clues related to the case. A special team of the Delhi police has also arrived and he may be taken to the capital on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Delhi police are still interrogating Rahul Malhotra, Tishay Khanna and Karan Ahuja, the other three youths who were part of the gang of four that supplied Rahul and Maitra cocaine on Thursday night. The trio surrendered before the Mandir Marg police on Friday night. Additional DCP Manish Aggarwal said they were trying to establish the sequence of events that took place before Maitra and Rahul were rushed to hospital. AGENCIES

Apollo, docs may be booked

Rahul Claims To Be Ill, Faints Outside Court 9/6

New Delhi: The Patiala House court on Thursday directed the police to register a case against the doctors and management of Apollo Hospital for giving false information to public servants in the Rahul Mahajan drug abuse case.

Additional chief metropolitan magistrate Kamin Lau also allowed the investigating officer to seize relevant records of the hospital, such as the casualty register and medico-legal certificate register, if required, for the probe. The court has ordered the station house officer of the Sarita Vihar police station to register an FIR under section 182 of IPC and investigate the allegation involved.

Meanwhile, the court sent Rahul Mahajan, arrested on charges of drug abuse, to judicial custody until June 22. Metropolitan magistrate A K Chaturvedi remanded Rahul to 14-day judicial custody after he was produced in the court following the completion of his two-day police remand. The judge also directed the police to have a medical check up of Rahul done after he collapsed when being brought to the court. The court will take up for hearing a bail application filed by Rahul's lawyers on Friday.

Speaking to reporters after undergoing a routine



A policeman holds on to Rahul Mahajan after he fainted outside the court on Thursday

check-up at RML Hospital, Rahul said, "I am innocent. I am very ill." Dressed in white shirt and blue denims and sporting a stubble, a haggard-looking Rahul was later taken back to the police station.

Meanwhile, BJP leaders Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Kalraj Mishra visited Rahul at the police station and spent about five minutes with him. AGENCIES

09 JUN 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Vidharbha: slowing down the suicides

P. Sainath

VIDHARBHA'S INFAMOUS 'Register of Deaths' closed on May 31 at 540 farmers suicides. Only to allow for the opening of a new register for the fresh agricultural season starting June 1. The latest list already has a dozen entries in it. As the agrarian crisis deepens, there is a real fear that the new book will match the old.

The 540 suicides listed in the closed register occurred between June 2005 and this May. Of these, over four-fifths took place after November 1 last year. As many as 325 farmers have killed themselves since January. And May was terrible, with nearly 80 farmers taking their own lives during that month. Ten of them doing so on a single day. Some weeks, there have been suicides every eight hours.

The register is the painstaking effort of the Vidharbha Jan Andolan Samiti. It has forced the authorities to tighten up their own count. And has also inspired others, including newspapers, to keep their own lists to make sense of what is going on.

Why were the suicides worst this May? Because that's when highly indebted people found themselves unable to raise the credit to buy inputs on the eve of the new season. March, too, was bad, when many either failed to sell their cotton, or were forced to do so at distress rates. The steady rise in the numbers has been on since November, though. That's when it became clear that the 'advance bonus' of Rs.500 a quintal — cancelled by the Maharashtra Government — would not be restored. The loss borne by farmers because of that alone could be over Rs.1,000 crore.

Meanwhile, the fields of Vidharbha have been prepared for cultivation. But there's no money for inputs. Despite much talk of greater credit, crop loans elude many farmers. Whatever the promises, the banks find ways of subverting them. And those at the top turn a blind eye to the process. The banks claim their effort was to cut

There are several immediate steps both the Centre and the Maharashtra Government could take to ease the situation in Vidharbha. These would not solve the long-term crisis, but would surely slow down the farm suicides that continue to rise. There were almost 80 in May. And 540 since last June.

out 'defaulters.' But after seven desperate years, everyone here is a defaulter. The default amounts are mostly below Rs.25,000 (because bank credit was anyway less). But do what they will — people cannot pay. Where's the money?

Bank pressures mean *khande palat* is spreading even amongst once better-off farmers. Take a farmer seeking a crop loan of Rs.65,000 for seven acres, who has a pending bank loan of Rs.50,000. He clears this by taking a private loan of Rs.50,000 for a single day. He gets the Rs.65,000, but has to pay the lender Rs.52,500. That is, interest of Rs.2,500 for a single day. Which means he is left with Rs.12,500 for seven acres. He also has new debt of Rs.65,000. This is *khande palat* (or switching the burden from one shoulder to another). You can find many such cases in every village.

So things are quite explosive at the start of the season. Yet, there are several steps the Government can take, if it wants to. Quick measures that would at least slow down the deaths. Allowing for more solid, medium, and long-term solutions to follow.

To start with, the State could restore the 'advance bonus' of Rs.500 a quintal. On 210 lakh quintals (taking the previous year's output as the base), the cutting of the bonus implies a loss of Rs.1,050 crore to farmers — every year. That's why the suicides shot up after its withdrawal.

Alongside this, the State could ensure — rather than just speak of — fresh crop loans for every farmer this new season. The kind of emergency Vidharbha is in, the loans should carry minimal interest. For non-irrigated farmers, they should be interest free (China, as Dr. M.S. Swaminathan has pointed out, has a zero per cent interest rate for farmers.) Without the crop loans, the Andolan Samiti's new register will outdo its predecessor.

The crop loans must be based on the new costs of production per acre and not on outdated prices. Getting this and the "defaulter" issue wrong will push many lakhs of people deeper into the grip of moneylenders.

It's heresy of course, in this era, to suggest writing off farmers' loans of up to Rs.25,000. (Most of these were smaller sums that have bloated with interest.) You could modulate the measure according to the acreage held by the farmer. And one can endlessly debate the wisdom of such a step. The truth though is simple. Whether you write them off or not, people cannot pay.

There's another vital zone where the State has no excuse. It must procure and provide cheap inputs to prevent fleecing of the farmer. Since they will be starting their season late, input costs will soon reach scarcity rates. The State must — and can — provide decent quality seed free. And

some other inputs at nominal rates. In any case, it must monitor and regulate the costs of agricultural inputs. The prices extracted from farmers for these have been a quick route to debt. The input dealers are the new, powerful *sahucars* of the countryside.

Time does not favour the farmer. The State needs to press the entire agriculture and extension machinery into the process at once. And they have to work to a clear mandate. They must distribute free or very cheap inputs — but not Bt seed, which would prove disastrous.

To propagate Bt in this unirrigated region, as this State has done, is to court chaos. Many farmers have gone broke putting borrowed money in Bt. Countless others even now take that risk in despair. In Maharashtra, Ministers and film stars promote Bt. There are MLAs, too, with close links to input dealers. This includes some opposition figures. This is a mess Maharashtra needs to get out of.

Incentives for food crops

It also makes sound sense to give incentives to those who grow food crops. Jowar once held 30 per cent of acreage in the region. Today, that's 5 per cent. This has not only meant loss of a vital food crop, but also a severe scarcity of fodder. An incentive of Rs.1,000 per acre for jowar cultivation would have many benefits. It would give poor farmers sustenance. It would revive a crucial crop of this region. And it would allow real space for animal husbandry with fodder making a comeback.

The State could also ask the Centre to impose a 60 per cent duty on cotton imports. (Equal to that on sugar, Maharashtra's other major crop.) This is needed as western subsidies on cotton have gone over the top. The United States last year gave its 20,000 growers a subsidy of \$4 billion. The damage that has done to world cotton prices allows for extra cheap imports that crush cotton growers here.

There's a big need to strengthen the rural employment guarantee programme. There is a huge demand for it where people learn of it. Landless labourers, hit by the fall in farming, are in the worst of shape. You can also see landed farmers with six acres in the queues for work. So great is the pressure. Imagine the plight of the landless.

The Government should move fast to curb medical expenses and health debt. This is a rapidly growing component of family debt here. Lots of farmers have mortgaged acres of land to pay their costly private hospital bills. It would make a difference if the State were to set up more public medical centres and bring in more doctors for these. Also, private hospitals must be made to lower their charges.

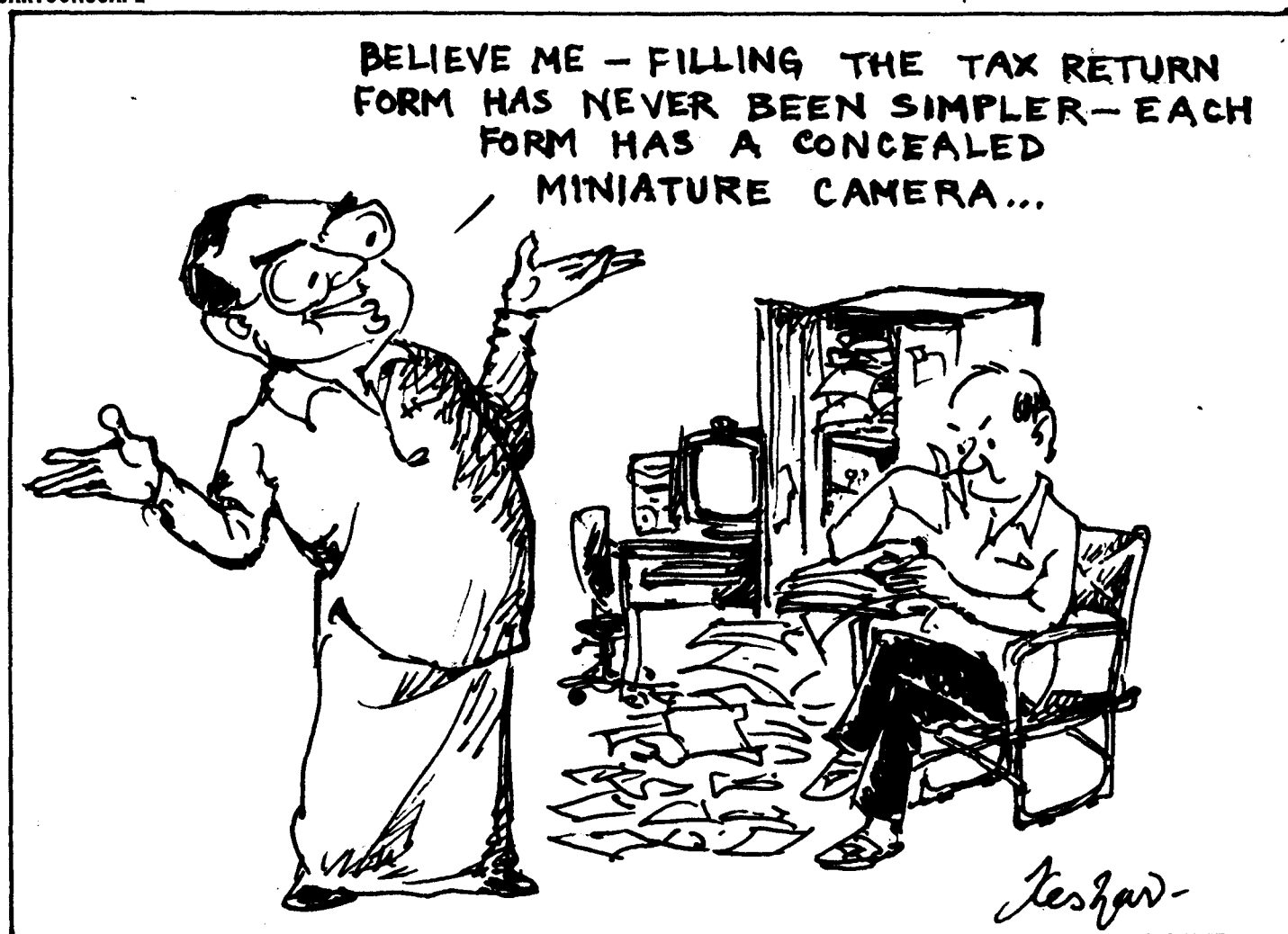
Education is one of the badly hit sectors here. It is within the State's power to declare a fees waiver for the children of farm families unable to pay school fees and thus dropping out. Rural children should also not be required to pay for bus tickets when journeying to school.

At higher levels, many children who have got into professional institutions are now unable to now meet the costs. Their parents are bankrupt. Here too, the State could step in to help ease the burden.

Both Centre and State could get their act together and set up a Price Stabilisation Fund. And link the minimum support price to the wholesale price index. The National Commission for Farmers has already asked for this. Price volatility has been one of the things that has hit farmers hardest. Getting shock absorbers in place to ensure them a decent price would make things a lot better.

These measures do not add up to a solution to the agrarian crisis. That requires a far more radical approach. And needs us to junk present economic theology. However, many of these are short-term steps that can be taken at once. They would impact on several current aspects of the crisis. Failure to act now could add many hundreds of more entries to the new register of deaths.

CARTOONSCAPE



Chandrayaan 1: Nasa on board

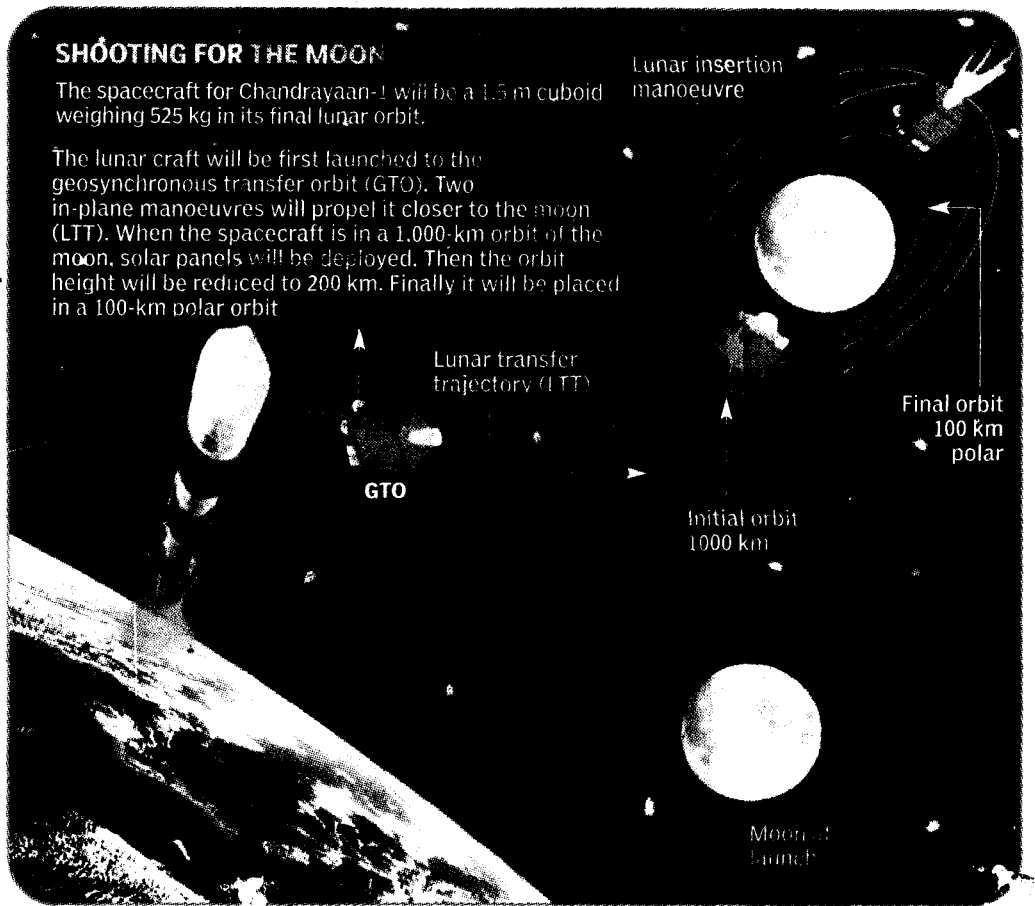
Chandrayaan-1, India's first unmanned mission to the moon, will carry two US payloads. An MoU was signed by Isro chief G. Madhavan Nair and Nasa's Michael Griffin on Tuesday

- Chandrayaan-1 will map the entire lunar surface. Will search for minerals and water and take high-resolution images of the permanently shadowed polar regions
- Will be launched in early 2008 by a polar satellite launch vehicle from the Satish Dhawan spaceport at Sriharikota
- Will carry two US scientific devices: a miniature radar to map ice deposits in the polar regions, and a mineralogy mapper that will assess mineral resources
- There will also be four payloads from Europe besides five Indian instruments, including a terrain-mapping camera and a high-energy X-ray spectrometer
- The mission is expected to have an operational life of about 2 years

SHOOTING FOR THE MOON

The spacecraft for Chandrayaan-1 will be a 1.5 m cuboid weighing 525 kg in its final lunar orbit.

The lunar craft will be first launched to the geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO). Two in-plane manoeuvres will propel it closer to the moon (LTT). When the spacecraft is in a 1,000-km orbit of the moon, solar panels will be deployed. Then the orbit height will be reduced to 200 km. Finally it will be placed in a 100-km polar orbit



“ I am sorry about the past. But I would certainly take forth a good word about Indian space capabilities

Nasa administrator Michael Griffin on US sanctions on India

Graphic: SAI JAY KAPUR

But no berth for India on US shuttle

B.R. Srikanth
Bangalore, May 9

INDO-US TIES are under a lunar spell. First, a deal is signed between Nasa and Isro to carry two US payloads on Chandrayaan-1, India's first unmanned moon mission. Second, an apology from Nasa for the US' tech sanctions.

Nasa administrator Michael Griffin signed an MoU with Isro chairman G. Madhavan Nair in Bangalore on Tuesday. Two US instruments — a mini-synthetic aperture radar and moon mineralogy mapper — will be on board.

After the deal, Griffin, the first Nasa chief to visit India in three decades, regretted the technological sanctions on Isro centres. "I am sorry about the past," he said. "But

I would take forth a good word about Indian space capabilities."

During his two-day visit, Griffin will visit VSSC in Thiruvananthapuram and the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota — two space facilities which, ironically, still figure on the US' technology embargo list. Griffin and Nair said they were willing to share hi-tech knowledge.

But there was a damper. Nasa cannot train an Indian astronaut for a flight onboard the US space shuttle. "There's no seat... (for) the next four years," Griffin said.

The US administration had offered in recent years to train an Indian astronaut for a flight onboard the space shuttle as part of enhanced cooperation between the two nations. Such a training pro-



REUTERS
Isro and Nasa chiefs Madhavan Nair and Michael Griffin (right).

gramme also figured in the joint statement released by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President George W. Bush during

Singh's US visit last year.

But Griffin on Tuesday threw a wet blanket on all such hopes. "We could not train an Indian astronaut at the Johnson Space Centre although we would have been happy to do that. As we are restricting space shuttle flights to only those missions necessary for completing the International Space Station and one mission for the Hubble space telescope, there aren't any seats left for an Indian-trained astronaut on board the shuttle over the next four years," Griffin said.

"In view of the existing agreements we have with the other member countries for the ISS and other constraints, we could not promise a flight for the Indian-trained astronaut though we will be happy to train one," he said.

MAY 2000

MAY 2000

INDIAN MOON MISSION TO CARRY AMERICAN RADAR Partners in outer space

Press Trust of India

Sorry for sanctions: Nasa chief

BANGALORE, May 9: India's first mission to the moon Chandrayaan-1 will carry two US-made instruments that will look for mineral resources and ice deposits on the lunar surface, giving a boost to joint efforts by the two countries to harness space for development.

The main objective of India's unmanned mission, slated for early 2008, is to investigate the distribution of minerals and chemical elements and to carry out three-dimensional mapping of the lunar surface.

BANGALORE, May 9: The Nasa chief today said he "was sorry about" American sanctions on some Indian space units. Asked at a Press conference here if he would use his "good offices" to see that sanctions which continued to be imposed on some Indian space units were lifted, he said: "I am sorry about the past. But I would certainly take forth a good word about Indian space capabilities" and Indian technical capability. Ironically, Mr Griffin will travel to the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram and the Sriharikota launch centre of Isro, which continue to be on the US entity list, during his two-day visit to Isro facilities. ■ PTI

An agreement for including the American devices in the mission was inked today by the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) chairman, Mr G

Madhavan Nair, and the visiting US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) chief, Dr Michael Griffin, at the Satellite Centre here.

The instruments are a Mini Synthetic Aperture Radar (Mini SAR) developed by the Applied Physics Laboratory at John Hopkins University and funded by the Nasa, and the Moon Mineralogy Mapper jointly built by Brown University and Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. "It is my hope and belief that as we extend the reach of human civilisation throughout the solar system, the USA and India will be partners on many more technically challenging and scientifically rewarding projects," Dr Griffin said.

10 MAY 2008

Hidden Hunger

Unicef reports India has highest number of malnourished children

A Unicef report says India has the highest number of malnourished children in the world: One in three of the world's malnourished children is Indian. Of the world's 146 million malnourished children, 57 million are in India; they are 47 per cent of under-fives in the country. The corresponding figure for China is only 8 per cent but in Ethiopia (47 per cent) and Bangladesh (48 per cent) the scale of the problem is the same as India's. Malnutrition occurs when there is insufficient nutrition intake — so necessary to maintain optimum bodily functions. The poor are the worst hit, though it does surface, to a smaller extent, in developed countries too. The reason: inadequate diet on the one hand and inappropriate food intake on the other. Besides poverty, absence of balanced diet is due to a dysfunctional public distribution system that, if run efficiently, could reach subsidised or even free nutritious food to the hungry. There are other factors, too, that engender malnutrition, that have deep social reasons.

Gender inequality makes women feed better and more to the male child at the cost of the girl child. In middle-income groups, substituting breast milk with bottle feed deprives the infant of natural nutrients and immunity found in mother's milk, and formula feeds are often over-diluted either due to ignorance or as a money-saving measure. Poor hygiene is another factor. Also, since not all children are immunised against childhood diseases, they are vulnerable to weight loss and weakness. Illiteracy and ignorance are other major reasons why mothers — often very young and undernourished themselves — fail to take good care of infants. The ICMR's National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, did a study that found 50 per cent of school-going children suffering from multiple micronutrient deficiency despite eating a 'balanced' diet that was high on quantity but low on protein, calories, vitamins and minerals, often falling far below the recommended daily allowance. They appear to be 'healthy' when in fact they're not. Merely talking about achieving millennium goals is not enough; efforts to improve nutrition intake should be stepped up via education, public awareness, good sanitation and an efficient public distribution system.

05 MAY 2006

Mittal offers to hike Arcelor bid

REUTERS

Paris/Rotterdam, May 9

MITTAL STEEL proposed sweetening its 20 billion euros (\$25.53 billion) offer for rival Arcelor on Tuesday, provided Arcelor's board ends its resistance to a takeover and recommends a revised deal.

The move heightened speculation that Mittal may be getting restless after unveiling an unsolicited cash and share offer for the Luxembourg-based firm in January. The offer was rejected as too low and lacking a clear industrial strategy.

As well as showing willingness to up its bid, Mittal Steel said it was ready to offer "significant corporate governance changes" including the introduction of one class of shares and give Arcelor the right to name six out of 12 Mittal directors.

"We said that in the context of a recommended transaction, Mittal Steel would be prepared to revise the value of its offer," chairman Lakshmi Mittal told a news conference.

The Indian-born billionaire said any changes in Mittal's offer would be "marginal" but Arcelor's shares climbed to a fresh high on expectations of an improved offer.



Lakshmi Mittal

Testing waters

Mittal has so far offered four new shares and 35.25 euro in cash for five Arcelor shares with a limit to the cash portion at 25 per cent of the total value.

One Arcelor board member said the board was likely to reject the idea of talks with Mittal if its suitor fails to provide new information on its offer.

"We hope that this is not another pretext not to engage in discussions with us or to put another roadblock in the way of this combination," Mittal said. The Mittal-Arcelor feud has become one of Europe's hottest and most politically fraught corporate battles in years. A deal would combine the world's largest and second-largest steel firms.

THE HOUSTON TIMES

10 MAY 2006

India not eased out of pipeline project: Iran

New Delhi: Iran on Tuesday said India was very much part of the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project and the three countries might decide to build a parallel pipeline as the demand grows.

Iranian deputy oil minister Hadi Nejad Hosseinian, who is here to meet petroleum minister Murli Deora, told reporters that Teheran had set a July deadline to sign the deal for the over \$7 billion pipeline project, failing which it would pursue bilateral exports to Pakistan. He said the pipeline would have a capacity of 110 million standard cubic meter (MM-SCMD) per day of which 30-35 MM-SCMD would be used to meet the demand in the eastern part of Iran. Pakistan has indicated

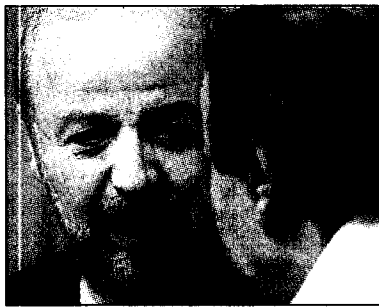
a requirement of 30-60 MM-SCMD, while India needs 90 MMSCMD from the pipeline.

"The demand will ramp up over five years and initially the capacities can be divided on a pro-rata basis," he said, adding that to meet further demand, a parallel pipeline could be laid.

Earlier in the day, Deora asserted that India was serious about the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and the US could not pressurise New Delhi into walking out of the project. "I don't think America is pressurising us on the issue. I think America cannot pressurise us. We are very serious on this issue and it's not me but the Prime Minister

who made the statement that the pipeline is for peace and progress of the region," he said.

Meanwhile, India's largest ever overseas deal—worth over \$22 billion—for the import of LNG from Iran is in a limbo with Teheran indicating that it will not honour the contract signed in June 2005 unless New Delhi paid a higher price. Iran's supreme economic council feels the pre-



Hosseinian with Deora on Tuesday

vious regime "undersold" when it agreed to supply five million tonnes per annum of LNG for 25 years beginning 2009-10 for a cap price of \$3.25 per million British thermal unit (MBTU). "As far as we are concerned, the deal is not implementable unless the supreme council ratifies it. The council has not done it till now because it wants certain changes," Hosseinian said.

Although he did not specify the changes sought, Deora said, "The main difference was on price. Let's face it." He maintained that although the Centre would continue the negotiations, it would not revisit the price. AGENCIES

03 MAY 2005

Farmers' suicides nothing but genocide, says Vandana Shiva

"Artificial scarcity is being created to justify wheat imports meant to kill the domestic market"

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Farm organisations and groups are organising a movement across the country against farmers suicides and the recent decision of the Centre to import 35 lakh tonnes of wheat during the rabi harvest season.

The Director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, Vandana Shiva said the suicide by more than 40,000 farmers since 1997 to date was nothing but "genocide."

"This genocide is a result of deliberate policy imposed by the World Trade Organisation and implemented by the Government. It is designed to destroy small farmers and transform Indian agriculture into large-scale corporate industrial farming."

Releasing the fourth edition

- **The policy is to transform Indian agriculture into large-scale corporate industrial farming**
- **Farmers to be trained in low cost ecological organic farming**
- **Farm organisations planning countrywide movement**

of 'Navdanya' report on Farmers Suicides and Seed Monopolies, she said the suicides were a result of debts which were a consequence of the rising cost of production and falling prices, both linked to free trade and trade liberalisation policies in agriculture. In this context she said Congress president Sonia Gandhi had recently cautioned Prime Minister Manmohan Singh not to rush headlong into Free Trade Agreements.

The report shows the trends of growing dependence of farmers in the suicide belt on hybrid and genetically modified seeds, which were costly and could not be saved. It also refers to the growing attempts to privatise seed supply and emergence of multi-national seed monopolies.

'Bija Yatra'

To press their demand for a moratorium on Bt cotton planting and for a full and independent study of the socio-economic impact and the effect on health and environment of Bt cotton with citizens' participation, the

Foundation and several farmers groups will organise a "Bija Yatra" through the three cotton growing States of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh where farmers suicides had occurred in large numbers.

The Yatra would be launched from Sewagram in Maharashtra on May 10 to mark the 150 years of India's struggle for independence by building a movement to stop the genocide of farmers and reclaim India's food sovereignty. The Yatra will create awareness amongst farmers on GM crops, corporate farming and seed monopolies. Farmers would also be trained in low cost ecological organic farming. It would also distribute indigenous seeds as "seeds of hope."

On March 10, the farmers organisations would go on an indefinite dharna at Jantar Mantar demonstration.

in New Delhi to oppose wheat imports. Dr. Shiva alleged that an artificial scarcity was being created to justify wheat imports that were meant to "kill the domestic market, the mandi system and the Public Distribution System."

She alleged that at the same time the government was changing the norms of food safety by lowering standards of safety for imported wheat.

Farmers groups such as the Bharat Krishak Samaj, Vidharba Organic Farmers Association, Maharashtra Organic Farmers Association, Andhra Pradesh Ryatu Sangham, Modern Architect for Rural India, All-India Kisan Sabha, Bharat Krishak Samaj, Shetkari Sangathana and Kisan Sabha would participate in the "Yatra" and

Agriculture cannot wait

M.S. Swaminathan

AN article published in the December 31, 2005, issue of *The Hindu*, I had summarised the main features of the Year of Agricultural Renewal programme recommended by the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) in its 3rd Report presented to Sharad Pawar, Union Minister for Agriculture and Food. The 4th Report of NCF submitted in April 2006 contains the draft of a National Policy for Farmers, titled "Jai Kisan," for widespread discussion.

For the purpose of this policy, the term "farmer" includes landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, small, marginal and sub-marginal cultivators, farmers with larger holdings, fisher men and women, dairy, sheep, poultry and other farmers involved in animal husbandry, pastoralists, as well as those rural and tribal families engaged in a wide variety of farming related occupations such as sericulture, vermiculture, production of biofertilizers and biopesticides, and agro-processing. The term also includes tribal families sometimes engaged in shifting cultivation, and in the collection and use of non-timber forest products. In all cases, both men and women will receive equal attention.

The Year of Agricultural Renewal, better referred to as the Year of the Farmer, is due to begin on June 1, 2006, with the onset of the South West Monsoon. Soon after Independence in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru remarked: "everything else can wait, but not agriculture." He said this in the context of the Bengal Famine of 1942-43 and the acute food scarcity prevailing in the country in 1947. In fact, I recall that at the wedding of my elder brother in September 1947, there was a strict rule that not more than 30 guests could be provided with food. Our population was then 350 million. Today, our population is over 1.1 billion and thousands of persons are fed in the weddings of the rich, since where there is money, there is food. However, a recent report by UNICEF says India has the largest number of malnourished children in the world, nearly 57 million out of a total world figure of 146 million, an index of widespread poverty and deprivation.

Farmers' indebtedness is rising and farmland even in Punjab, the heartland of the green revolution, is being referred to by the electronic media as "killing fields." Yet, the economy is estimated to have grown at 8.1 per cent during 2005-06, on top of the 7.5 per cent growth recorded in the previous year. The services sector continued to be the major driver of economic activity, accounting for almost three-fourths of overall GDP growth. Indian companies raised an unprecedented \$40 billion in equity and debt.

The Indian tragedy of extensive poverty and deprivation persisting under conditions of impressive progress in the industrial and services sectors will continue so long as we refuse to place faces before figures.

Merchandise exports rose by 25 per cent crossing the \$100 billion level. Unfortunately, more than 50 per cent of our population living in rural areas have no option except to remain silent onlookers of this new-found urban prosperity, conveyed night and day on television channels. This is the Indian enigma.

Having declared failure in achieving most of the Tenth Plan goals in agriculture, the Union Planning Commission is now busy preparing the Eleventh Plan. The NCF in its 4th report has pointed out that a business as usual approach in agriculture, ignoring Jawaharlal Nehru's "agriculture cannot wait" exhortation, would have at least the following three major consequences:

- Spread of agrarian distress and rural discontent, and spread of the Naxalite movement;
- Returning to a "ship to mouth" era, and the consequent erosion of national sovereignty in foreign policy;
- Jobless or even job-loss growth resulting in the expansion of urban slums.

What then should we do to end this sad chapter in our agricultural history and fulfil the "Jai Kisan" commitment made by Lal Bahadur Shastri? The steps to be taken are simple, doable, and affordable. They, however, need a change in mindset from regarding farmers as "beneficiaries" of small government programmes to treating them as partners in development and custodians of food security. Integrated action on the following five points will help to get our agriculture back on the rails.

Five-point plan

First, undertake soil health enhancement through integrated measures in improving organic matter and macro- and micro-nutrient content, as well as the physics and the microbiology of the soil. Gujarat has already issued soil health cards to farm families and other States can do likewise.

Secondly, promote water harvesting, conservation, and efficient and equitable use by empowering gram sabhas to function as "pani panchayats." Such "pani panchayats" should foster the establishment of community managed water banks and the recharge of the aquifer. A

sustainable water security system should be put in place, particularly in rainfed areas lacking assured irrigation facility. This will be facilitated by mandatory water harvesting and greater attention to dryland farming.

Thirdly, initiate immediately credit reforms coupled with credit and insurance literacy. The Finance Minister has announced a reduction in the interest on short-term loans to 7 per cent; this should be regarded as the first step in a series of measures including the revitalisation of the cooperative credit system. The farm families' agricultural, health, and domestic credit needs should be attended to in a holistic manner. Also in chronically drought-prone areas, the repayment cycle should be extended to four to five years. Credit delivery systems should be made gender sensitive — only a small proportion of women cultivators have been issued kisan credit cards. Adequacy and timelines of credit availability are vital for institutional credit to be meaningful to small farmers.

Fourthly, bridge the growing gap between scientific know-how and field level do-how both in production and post-harvest phases of farming. This could be done through a slew of measures including the training of one woman and one man of every panchayat as farm science managers, establishing farm schools in the fields of outstanding growers, adding a post-harvest technology and agro-processing wing in every Krishi Vigyan Kendra, and organising nationwide lab-to-land demonstrations in the areas of agricultural diversification, food processing, and value addition.

Also knowledge connectivity as proposed under Bharat Nirman should be accomplished by establishing village knowledge centres or "gyan chaupals" throughout the country. Small farmers should not be subjected to administrative and academic experiments in the area of crop diversification without first linking the farmers with the market for the new commodities. Crop-livestock-fish integrated production systems are ideal for small farmers since this can also facilitate organic farming. Success in agricultural progress should be measured by the growth rate in farmers' income and not just by production figures. Low economic risk, high factor produc-

tivity, avoidance of ecological harm, and assured income must be the bottom line of all agricultural research and development strategies. Had we adopted a pro-small farmer biotechnology strategy, we would by now have had Bt-cotton varieties whose seeds farmers could keep and replant, unlike in the case of the hybrids marketed by private companies.

Scientific strategies should include attention to both on-farm and non-farm livelihoods. We should confer the power and economy of scale on families operating one hectare or less through management structures such as cooperatives or group farming as well as contract cultivation based on a win-win model of partnership for both the producer and the purchaser. Institutional structures such as small holders' cotton, horticulture, poultry, and aquaculture estates can be promoted by stimulating the formation of self-help groups at the farm level. Concurrently, we should launch an integrated rural non-farm livelihood initiative by revamping and integrating numerous isolated non-farm employment and income generation agencies such as the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, Small Farmers' Agri-business Consortium (SFAC), textile, leather and food parks, agri-clinics, and agri-business centres.

Unless market-driven multiple livelihood opportunities are created, the pressure of population on land will grow, the indebtedness of small farmers will increase, and the agrarian distress will spread. Poverty will persist so long as asset-less rural families remain illiterate and unskilled. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme provides a unique opportunity for imparting functional literacy using computer-aided joyful learning techniques. We should use new technologies to leapfrog in the area of human development in villages. At the same time, knowledge without access to the inputs to apply that knowledge will have no meaning. Input supply systems need review and reform.

Finally, the gap between what the rural producer gets and the urban consumer pays must be made as narrow as possible, as has been done in the case of milk under Dr. V. Kurien's leadership. The National Horticulture Board was created for this purpose over 23 years ago, but like the SFAC, it also lost its way. It can only be hoped other expensive new programmes such as the Fisheries Development Board, the National Rainfed Area Authority, and the National Horticultural Mission will learn from the success achieved by agencies such as the National Dairy Development Board, the Indian Space Research Organisation, and the Atomic Energy Commission in achieving specific goals in a time-bound manner, and benefit from strong professional leadership.

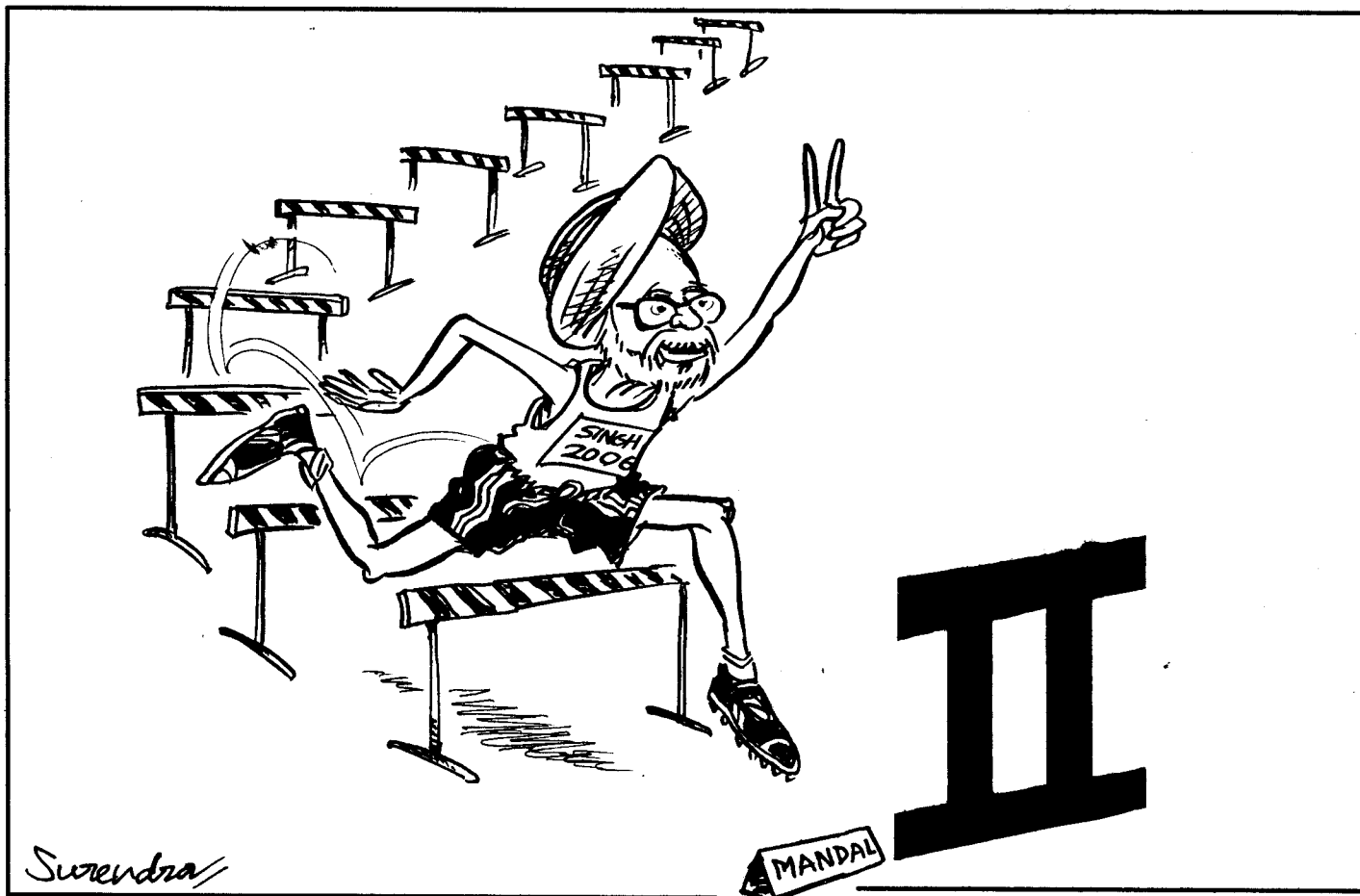
There is an urgent need for a National Land Use Advisory Service, structured as a virtual organisation on a hub and spokes model. The spokes would cover the major agro-climatic zones and farming systems, for providing proactive advice to farmers on land and water use through an integrated analysis of meteorological, agronomic, and marketing data. There is also need for an Indian Trade Organisation mandated to protect the livelihood and income security of farm and fisher families. At the same time, there should be a risk stabilisation fund and a farmer-centric Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Market Intervention Scheme (MIS).

Agriculture in our country is based on the technology of production by the masses. As a consequence, it is the backbone of the national livelihood security system. The Indian tragedy of extensive poverty and deprivation persisting under conditions of impressive progress in the industrial and services sectors will continue so long as we refuse to place faces before figures. The NCF has suggested the mainstreaming of the human dimension in all agricultural programmes and policies, the adoption by the National Development Council of a National Policy for Farmers, and the establishment of a State Farmers' Commission by every State Government.

This is to give voice to the voiceless in the formulation of farm policies including the preparation of the 11th Five Year Plan. Let the Year of the Farmer help to shape our agricultural destiny in a manner that farming once again becomes the pride of the nation on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of our Independence on August 15, 2007.

(Dr. Swaminathan is Chairman, National Commission on Farmers.)

CARTOONSCAPE



Postal sustenance

Efficiency is the key

Dangerously 'sarkari' is the underlying philosophy of the proposed Bill to amend the Indian Post Office Act of 1898. For while the stated intention is to regulate the functioning of private courier services (which obviously did not exist when the parent Act was legislated), in reality it sets out to strangle them. For by "reserving" - fast becoming a dirty word - mail of less than 300 grams for the postal department, the draft amendment excludes the couriers from handling what the common man perceives as "letters", and which provide the bulk of their business. There is much sugar-coating to the bureaucratic ligature, advocates of the Bill point out that private services function only in "creamy" urban/metropolitan centres while the khaki-clad postman is required to serve rural communities. Also trotted out is the line that the 300 grams limitation is also imposed in western countries, how selectively we ape them. Not a word is mentioned about efficiency, the absence of which has cost the post office dear. Surely those drafting the Bill ought to have realised that the public is not downright stupid, and if it is prepared to pay more (from its own pocket rather than the exchequer) than double the postal rates there must be valid reason for doing so. That reason is simple, the letters are delivered, quickly at that. Something which is not guaranteed if the letter is dropped in the pillar-box. For all its attempt at the IndiaPost makeover, and the range of "new" services it claims to offer, the post office has not been able to extricate itself from its origins - a government department whose staff think that they are doing you a favour by performing their duty. A visit to most post offices would testify to that sad reality. And couriers do not hang on to greeting cards and demand 'baksheesh' during festivals.

Private courier services are by no means perfect, there is need for some kind of control over them. But killing them is not the way to resurrect the post office. Why should the paying public be forced to accept gross inefficiency? It will not. Witness Doordarshan's diminished viewership. Witness also how competition kick-started "Indian" into an upgrade. The post office can survive only if it delivers - literally and figuratively. The life-support system the Bill seeks to provide is no panacea, it is too 'sarkari' to prove successful.

THE STATESMAN

Kharif season brings fears of suicide surge

By Ramu Bhagwat/TNN

Nagpur: The air of anticipation associated with an approaching crop season has vaporised. In its place hangs a pall of disquiet in the cotton-growing districts of Vidarbha. With only a month to go before the kharif season, the farmers are edgy and, in most cases, despondent.

In this belt, where cotton was once described as 'white gold', 451 farmers have committed suicide over the last 10 months. The suicide rate, which was about one a day in December, has already risen. Now, there are fears of another spurt. "We have no resources to buy seeds and other inputs which are becoming costlier by the day. Don't be surprised if you find the suicide rate going up further in the next two months," said Bhimrao Naitam, a tribal farmer at Pandharkawda in Yavatmal district.

The district, along with four others in western Vidarbha's Amravati division, has witnessed most of the sui-

cides. The money-spinner of yesterday has become an unremunerative crop, with even once-progressive farmers with 20 to 40 acres balking at sowing another crop. Increasing cost of inputs, piling debts and dwindling incomes that have made repayment difficult are pushing the farmers over the brink.

With 95% farmers in the region defaulting on old loans which rules out the possibility of fresh borrowings from banks, private lenders are coming into the picture. They too charge a heavy interest, defeating the purpose of the government's crackdown on the traditional money lenders, whose fleeing ways have often been the doom of poor farmers.

When returns from cotton was handsome in the 1970s, over 3.4 million families depended on it as the main cash crop. Within two decades, 'white gold' began losing its sheen. Falling demand, degraded land, exorbitant seed prices, rising costs com-



bined to break the farmer's back. The death knell was sounded by the government, which failed to run the monopoly cotton purchase scheme on the lines it was formulated three decades ago and decided to pay Rs 500 less from last year.

Today, the farmer has little hope. Not even the special Rs 1075-crore relief package announced by CM Vilasrao Deshmukh on December 9 could enthuse them. It is being seen as too little too late.

In Yavatmal's Saikheda village, 36-year-old Chandrakant Gurnule, who used to till his 16-acre ancestral holding, set himself ablaze in his house on April 1. "The relief amount of Rs 15,000 was not even enough to meet the cost of the last rites," said his 75-year-old father Baburao. Gurnule has left behind debts amounting to over Rs 1 lakh and unpaid electric bills of Rs 50,000.

22 APR 2006

Centre's bid to bail out postal service

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 20: Faced with fierce competition from booming private courier companies, the Indian postal service could have the last laugh, going by the Central government's latest proposal.

In a move that would certainly not be music to private courier operators, the government is planning to bar them from delivering

letters weighing up to 300 grams, making the exercise the exclusive monopoly of state-run post offices.

This proposal is part of the proposed draft bill the government has worked out to amend the Indian Post Office Act of 1898 in order to 'legalise' and regulate the operation of private courier players in the country.

The government officials say that the plan to restrict

private couriers from delivering letters up to 300 gm is in tune with the practice followed in a slew of Western and Asian countries - including France, Germany, United States, China, Malaysia etc - in a more stringent form. They say the world over, including most of the developed countries, certain areas of postal service are a government monopoly. And this is clearly mentioned in the

present IPO Act. "As per Section 4 of the IPO Act, the Department of Posts (DoP) has a monopoly over letters' irrespective of the weight limit. That means, DoP has exclusive privilege for carrying them," said a senior DoP officer.

The DoP officials made it clear that the existing operation of private courier companies on this score has therefore been "illegal". The provisions of the

draft bill do not only seek to ensure DoP's monopoly in letters segment (below 300 gms), but also provide for support to the department through an USO (Universal Service Obligation) fee proposed to be levied on major courier players. The USO fund thus generated is planned to boost the Indian postal service's operations in rural areas.

Holdings that the private courier companies are

operating only in urban and "creamy" areas like big business groups with the main motive of earning profits, the DoP officials made an urgent pitch for keeping a small segment of postal business exclusively for the department.

The draft bill might have been worked out to tame the private courier companies who have severely undermined the monopoly

■ Turn to page 4

Accords for joint venture

Modernisation of Mumbai and Delhi airports

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Government on Tuesday signed two agreements to set up joint venture companies involving the public sector Airports Authority of India and the GMR and GVK groups for handing over the Delhi and Mumbai airports for modernisation.

"With the signing of the OMDA [Operations, Maintenance and Development Agreement] and the shareholders agreements, joint venture companies are now in place," Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel told reporters here. These were signed by AAI Chairman K. Ramalingam and Director V.D.V. Prasada Rao in the presence of Mr. Patel.

Even as the agreements were being initialled, AAI employees took out a procession and staged a demonstration at the Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan, headquarters of the Ministry.

The process of modernisation of the two key airports — money-spinners for the AAI — faced stiff opposition from employees and the Left parties earlier this year. They wanted the AAI plan for

1-0
90 94

- Initial deposit of Rs. 150 crore each to be paid by companies within a week

- Employees stage protest

modernisation considered and approved. It was Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's intervention that saved the day and the employees were assured their jobs in the new joint venture companies.

Mr. Patel said the initial deposit of Rs.150 crore each would be paid by the two private consortia within a week. Thereafter, the transition process would start.

Asked whether the Left concerns about the proceedings of the tripartite committee on airport modernisation were considered, the Minister said, "We have made it clear that the issue of Delhi and Mumbai airports cannot be revisited and there is no room for negotiations on this front."

More reports on Page 13

PATEL ■ 'Security, ATC functions will remain with Govt, every employee will be absorbed'

Revamp takes off, airport pact signed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

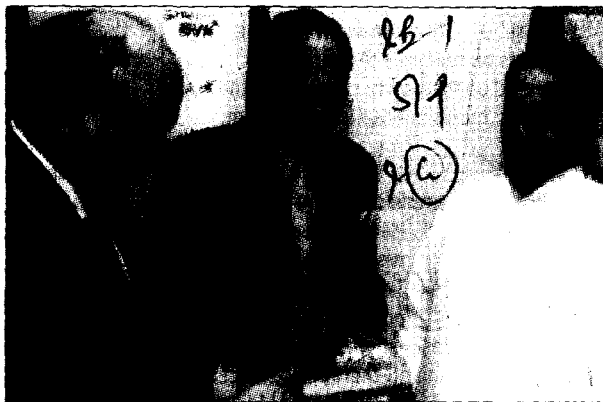
TAKING a major step towards modernisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports, the Government today signed the Operations, Maintenance and Development Agreement (OMDA) with the GMR and GVK groups. The shareholders agreement effecting the joint-venture companies was also signed.

Civil Aviation Minister Pratul Patel made it clear that functions related to security and Air Traffic Control would still remain sovereign functions of the Government.

"Every single employee will be absorbed by either the joint-venture companies or the AAI. Nobody will lose his job," Patel said.

Delhi International Airport Ltd, the joint venture company floated for the project, will have nine directors from GMR group and three from Airports Authority of India. AAI's Joint Secretary, Director (Personnel and Administration) and Director (Operations) will be on the Board with G M Rao as Chairman and Srinivas Bommidala as the managing director.

The mother document for the modernisation process, the OMDA will act as a roadmap for private players



Serious consequences, CPM warns Govt

NEW DELHI: The CPM on Tuesday warned the Government of "serious consequences" for going ahead with the privatisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports.

In a statement, the party politburo described the modernisation process as not only "a mockery of transparency" but "breach" of agreement with the AAI employees.

to undertake activities related to operations, maintenance and development of the two airports.

The OMDA will come into operation only after the Government finalises a series of agreements with the joint venture companies. These agreements include Land Lease Agreement (30 years, extendable on performance by another 30 years), State Support Agreement and Sub-

Patel with GMR's GM Rao and GVK's GV Krishna Reddy in New Delhi on Tuesday

stitution Agreement.

The Government, Patel said, was also set to table the Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) Bill in Parliament when it reconvenes on May 10. "The AERA Bill has been sent to the Cabinet for clearance following which it will be tabled in Parliament," he said.

Incidentally, this announcement came on a day when the Kaw Committee Report on review and restructuring of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) called setting up of such a body "inadequate".

The committee said that because of the DGCA's involvement in most areas of aviation, it should be made responsible for enforcing compliance of economic regulations.

Airline duo to catch merger flight

OURSPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 4: Civil aviation minister Praful Patel today said the merger of the two national carriers — Indian Airlines and Air-India — would take place this year. The proposal will be sent to the cabinet for approval after which the companies will be formally merged.

"The government has decided in principle to merge the two airlines," he told reporters at a function organised to sign the agreements to privatise the Delhi and Mumbai airports.

Patel said the Prime Minister's Office had given the go-ahead to the formulation of a plan to synergise the services of the two government-owned airlines.

Patel and senior officials of the two airlines had discussed the issue with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last month. Senior airline officials had made presentations on the economics of the merger.

The civil aviation minister said no holding company would be set up for the merger. "It doesn't work that way. It has to be a merger. One culture, one company," he added. Asked whether the proposed initial public offers (IPOs) of the two carriers would take place before the merger, Patel said, "We are considering that. We will know about it and the road forward in the next few months."

The A-I and Indian Airlines merger will result in a Rs 13,000-crore flagship carrier that will have a fleet strength of over 130 aircraft. The fleet size will exceed 200 planes as both airlines have already initiated the process to acquire over 100 Airbus and Boeing planes between them during the next few years.

Patel also said the government would not interfere in the Jet-Sahara deal and would let the private management decide whether to merge the two airlines or set up separate companies.

"If they want to run a sepa-

rate company, they can. If they want to merge, they can. It really does not matter to me," he told reporters when asked whether the government would allow Jet Airways to set up a new company in its Rs 2,200-crore deal to acquire Sahara Airlines.

"Consolidation and mergers are now the order of the day and they will take place. That is none of the government's business," he said.

Last week, the ministry had approved fresh guidelines on mergers and acquisitions.

Both Indian Airlines and Air-India have been losing market share as they do not have enough planes to meet the rising passenger demand. The inordinate delay in buying new aircraft has forced them to depend on ageing fleets, which has further affected their performance.

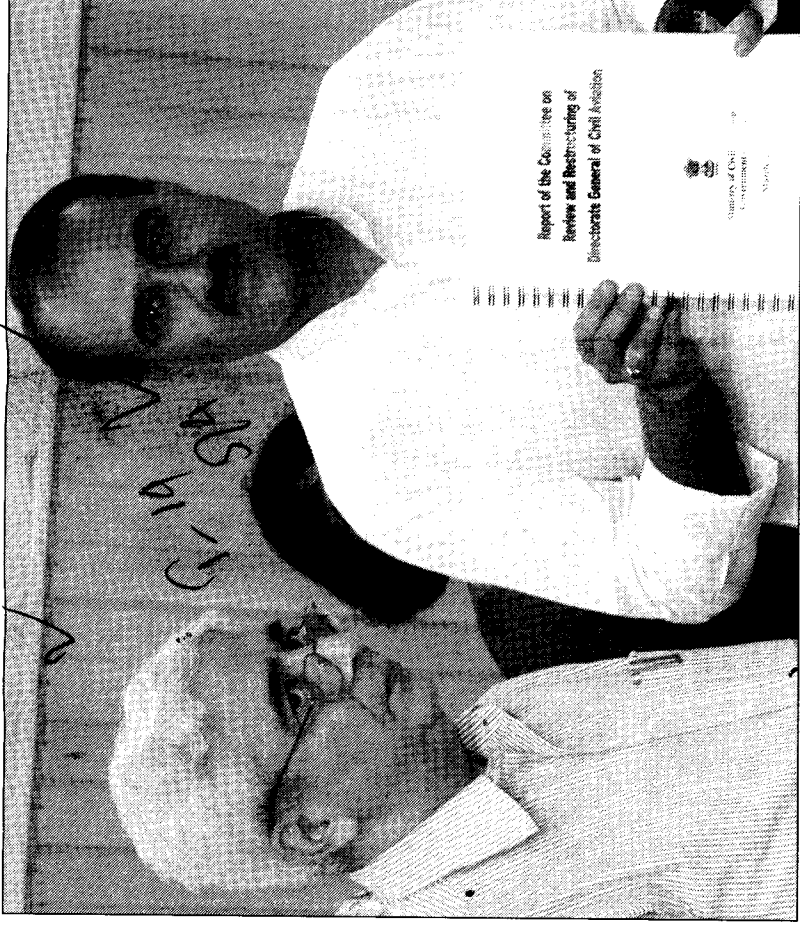
The fact that size has become an advantage in the aviation business is reflected in the trend of mergers of even giant airlines like KLM-Air France and Lufthansa-Swissair.

Indian Airlines and Air-India are expected to become a sizeable regional airline, even if not a global giant. This would enable them to take on the merged Jet and Sahara Airlines entity which is expected to give it stiffer competition, especially in the domestic sector.

The other argument in favour of merger is economies of scale in several areas like maintenance, ground operations, use of landing slots and parking rights.

But the most powerful argument is that a merged company can effectively deliver the classic hub and spoke system that the largest airlines have been operating: Emirates in Dubai, Lufthansa in Frankfurt and Munich, British Airways in London, and Delta in Atlanta.

The domestic leg will bring passengers to the two main gateways of Delhi and Mumbai. Air-India's domestic flights can be dovetailed with the Indian Airlines schedule.



Civil aviation minister Praful Patel with former Union secretary M. K. Kaw in New Delhi on Tuesday. (PTI)

New policy this month

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 4: A new civil aviation policy has been sent for cabinet approval and will be unveiled this month. The policy is expected to contain safety regulations and guidelines and redefine the role of the directorate general of civil aviation (DGCA).

"The new civil aviation policy has been sent to the cabinet secretariat. So far as the ministry is concerned, all discussions in this respect is over. We expect the policy to be in place this month," said civil aviation minister Praful Patel.

Patel added that the government was open to the idea of creating multiple airports in big cities such as Delhi and Mumbai. "We are not averse to the idea of creating multiple airports in metropolitan cities," the minister said.

On the merger and acquisition guidelines recommended recently by the aircraft acquisition committee, he said: "It is not for the government to decide who buys whom or who merges with whom. The only thing that has to be seen is whether the entities are security

cleared or not and whether they adhere to the rules and guidelines of the DGCA."

Meanwhile, the committee on review and restructuring of DGCA today recommended a series of measures, including notifying DGCA as sole apex body for safety and economic regulation of the sector.

"It (DGCA) should also act as a catalyst for the growth of the manufacturing sector in civil aviation," said the report.

The committee, however, suggested that there is no need to convert it into an authority. "This might make it commercial in outlook and lower its effectiveness in performing the sovereign function of regulation," the report said.

The seven-member committee, headed by former union secretary M.K. Kaw, which submitted its report to civil aviation minister Praful Patel today, also suggested introduction of an 'Indian civil aviation service' for these personnel.

The committee said a policy should be drafted for route rationalisation to make full use of the reciprocal gains in the bilateral and multilateral agreements.

Agreement on airport update

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 4: The Airports Authority of India (AAI) today signed the agreements to hand over Delhi and Mumbai airports to joint venture companies led by GMR-Fraport and GVK-South Africa Airport, respectively.

The operations, maintenance and development agreement and the shareholders' pact were signed by AAI chairman K. Ramalingam and director finance V. D. V. Prasad Rao in the presence of civil aviation minister Praful Patel and secretary Ajay Prasad.

"The agreements have been signed. The joint venture companies are in place and their boards are meeting today," Patel told journalists.

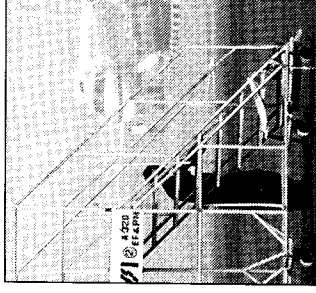
The operations, maintenance and development agreement specifies the work to be undertaken by the private partners at the two airports in the areas of maintenance, development, design, construction and management.

The government has already issued letters of intent to the two consortia. Both GMR-Fraport and GVK-South Africa Airport have given bond guarantees of Rs 500 crore each in February.

GMR-Fraport and GVK-South Africa Airport will now form joint venture companies with the Airports Authority of India (AAI).

AAI, which is owned by the government, will hold 26 per cent equity in the joint venture, while the private partner will have a 74 per cent share.

Both the winning consortia have an Indian and a foreign element. For instance, while GMR is a south India-based company, it has a tie-up with Fraport, which runs the



ROAD CLEARED

Frankfurt airport. Similarly, GVK is the Indian partner for South Africa Airport.

GMR will give the government 45.99 per cent of the revenue earned every year from operating the Delhi airport, while GVK will part with 38.7 per cent of the revenue earned from Mumbai airport.

The first phase of modernisation, to be completed by 2010, will cost Rs 2,800 crore in the case of Delhi airport and Rs 2,400 crore for Mumbai.

Patel allayed fears of retrenchment at AAI. "Every single employee will be absorbed either by the joint venture or the AAI. There will be no job loss," he said.

Left ire

The CPM has criticised the deal as a "breach of agreement" between the government and the airport employees. In a statement the party politburo said: "The deal is a clear breach of the government's commitment that all issues will be discussed at a tripartite forum of the government, Airports Authority of India and employees."

The party said it strongly "disapproved" of the deal which violated the UPA government's common minimum programme (CMP).

Airport revamp pact inked

New Delhi: Overlooking opposition from the Left parties and airport employees, the government on Tuesday signed two agreements to set up joint venture companies between Airports Authority of India and the GMR and GVK groups to hand over the Delhi and Mumbai airports for modernisation.

"The OMDA (operations, maintenance and development agreement) and the shareholders agreements have been signed. The JV companies are in place," civil aviation minister Praful Patel said after signing of the agreements.

The OMDAs and the shareholders agreements were signed by AAI chief K Ramalingam and AAI director V D V Prasada Rao in the presence of Patel and civil aviation secretary Ajay Prasad.

Even as the agreements were being signed at the Ashoka Hotel here, the employees took out a procession and later staged a demonstration at the ministry headquarters at Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan here. A large posse of police and CISF

We have made it clear to the Left parties that the issue of Delhi and Mumbai airports cannot be revisited and there is no room for negotiations on this front.

personnel were present to prevent any untoward incident.

Responding to questions, Patel said the initial deposit of Rs 150 crore each would be paid by the two groups "within a week, following which the process of transition will take place".

Asked whether the concerns of Left parties about the proceedings of the tripartite committee on airport modernisation were considered, the minister said: "We have made it clear that the issue of Delhi and Mumbai airports cannot be revisited and there is no room for negotiations on this front."

However, the committee, comprising representatives of the employees, the AAI and the ministry, would consider all issues concerning the employees' future and the modernisation of other airports, Patel said. The Left parties have been demanding that the tripartite panel consider the issue of modernisation of the two metro airports too.

Patel wouldn't comment on the case filed by Anil Ambani's Reliance group against the modernisation process in Delhi high court, but said the HC has "permitted us to proceed" with signing the OMDA and shareholder agreements.

Meanwhile, G V Krishna Reddy, CMD of the GVK group who signed the agreement for the modernisation of Mumbai airport, said: "We have the provisional license to operate the airport." Asked when the airport would actually be handed over to them, he said: "The ball is in the government's court, but I believe they are planning to do this as soon as possible." Agencies

05 APR 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2006

Counselling mutual accommodation

The judgment of the Madras High Court that the Election Commission does not have the authority to direct the transfer of the Greater Chennai Police Commissioner before elections are formally notified calls into question many of the assumptions under which the Commission has been functioning in the recent period. The Commission "requested" the transfer on the ground that in a newspaper interview on the occasion of the International Women's Day, the police official held up Chief Minister Jayalalithaa as "the perfect example of the ideal woman"; and such remarks raised doubts over his impartiality in the conduct of the elections. On the statement itself, the Court delivered a mild rebuke to the Commissioner, observing that there was "a slim possibility of its being misconstrued" and concluding that he "could have been more circumspect." More significant was its ruling that the Election Commission would gain powers to effect such transfers only after the election was notified and the election process was set in motion. The Commission's general power of superintendence over the conduct of elections under Article 324 of the Constitution would operate in areas where there was no legislation, and in this case the Representation of the People Act, 1951, specifically provided that officers designated for election work would come under the control of the Commission after the election process began.

The Madras High Court order has brought into focus the critical issue of the reach of the Commission — whether in its crusade for fair elections it can fall back on its constitutional mandate when it finds the legislative and administrative support inadequate. Where the object is unexceptionable as, for instance, in requiring candidates to declare their assets and any serious criminal charges they may be facing, the Supreme Court has upheld the Commission's authority to fill the gaps in the law. On the other hand, there have been cases of overreach, particularly in dealing with State administrations, and the courts have had to restrain the Commission. In its new and activist post-1990 phase, the Commission has, by and large, been a force for the good, preventing malpractices and cleaning up the electoral process. If at times its actions amounted to constitutional aggrandisement, orders such as the one issued by the Madras High Court have served to bring a sense of realism. As the Supreme Court counselled on several occasions, on issues such as force requirements to handle security during elections and the transfer and posting of specific officers, it is essential that the Commission and the Central and State administrations hold consultations, function in cooperative spirit, and avoid confrontationist postures. Also at issue is the propriety of top civil servants expressing admiration for one political leader or another. Whether such sentiments are genuine or are made in the expectation of some reward, they smack of non-professionalism and sycophancy and are best avoided.

RS 5-7b TO BE SPENT ON FOUNDATION

PM's pvt cure for public health care

90 51 28/3
FIANS & SNS

Bharat Nirman

NEW DELHI, March 28. — Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today launched a major public-private initiative for establishing five world-class institutes in the country to train over 5,000 public health professionals annually to improve the quality of services and make it a "global destination" for health care.

Called the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), the venture aims at training in multi-disciplinary knowledge through a network of public health schools to improve services, revitalise existing institutions and introduce greater levels of expertise. The project cost is estimated to be around Rs 5-7 billion (over \$100-150 million) over five-to-seven years. Simultaneously, the PHFI would proactively stimulate demand for public health professionals in the public and private sectors and pursue its research agenda.

The project has been mooted based on a report by consultants McKinsey & Company and has been propelled by over 20 distinguished individuals, including Professor Amartya Sen and Unicef adviser Mr AK Shiv Kumar, who are part of the founding governing board of PHFI.

While the idea of establishing schools of public health in India has long been discussed and reported, the PHFI initiative has been collaboratively developed over the past two

NEW DELHI, March 28. — The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, today reviewed implementation of Bharat Nirman projects. Apparently, UPA chief Mrs Sonia Gandhi recently wrote to Dr Singh expressing her displeasure over the slow pace of implementation of the projects. — SNS

years under the leadership of Mr Rajat Gupta, the senior partner of McKinsey and Dr Srinath Reddy, head of the department of cardiology of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. "PHFI plans to establish five-to-seven world class and relevant Indian Institutes of Public Health (IIPH) within the next five years, with the first two institutes opening by 2008," Mr Gupta said.

While public sector health care is found woefully lacking, private sector efforts are also wanting, the Prime Minister said while launching the initiative in the company of Prof. Sen. "Regrettably, on the whole, the record of the private sector in health care provisioning in India has not been very good even though it is the dominant source of health care provisioning," said Dr Singh.

"We are all familiar with reports of unethical practices, including commissions given in return for referral and diagnostic work. We must have appropriate measures to tackle this," the Prime Minister added.

Urban renewal projects, page 5

29 MAR 2006

THE STATESMAN

Capital account convertibility in full will help India: Manmohan ^{19/3}

“Mumbai has human skills, connectivity, location to become financial capital of Asia”

Oommen Ninan

MUMBAI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday said there is merit in India moving towards fuller capital account convertibility (free float of the rupee) and this would facilitate the transformation of Mumbai into, not only a regional, but also a global financial centre.

“I have requested the Finance Minister and the Reserve Bank of India to revisit the subject and come out with a roadmap on capital account convertibility based on current realities,” said Dr. Singh, while inaugurating Asia Society’s 16th Asian Corporate Conference on ‘Driving Global Business: India’s New Priorities, Asia New Realities,’ here.

Dr. Singh said Mumbai has the human skills, connectivity and advantage of location to become the financial capital of Asia. “It will get the infrastructure it rightfully deserves to realise this dream” to become the bridge between Asia and the West in the world of finance.

Dr. Singh said India is building a web of partnerships with countries of the region through free trade and economic cooperation agreements. “We have concluded Free Trade Agreements with SAARC, Singapore, Thailand and ASEAN. We are working on similar arrangements with Japan, China and Korea. This web of engagements may herald an eventual free trade area in Asia covering all major Asian economies and possibly extending to Australia and New Zealand. This pan-Asian FTA could be the future of Asia and, I am certain, open up new growth avenues for our own economy.”

He said India has to reduce



FINANCIAL WIZARDS ALL: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with RBI Governor Y.V. Reddy and former Governors in Mumbai on Saturday to release the third volume of the History of the Reserve Bank of India. From left: S. Venkitramanan, C. Rangarajan, M. Narasimham, Bimal Jalan and Y.V. Reddy. — PHOTO: SHASHI ASHIWAL

the transaction cost of doing business in the country, adding, “We have to bring our infrastructure in line with global standards. We have to ensure global best practices in our regulatory institutions and system. We need to simplify regulatory and approval procedures.”

“I recognise that there has been a relative neglect of manufacturing in India in recent years,” said Dr. Singh. “To revive

manufacturing industry, to make it globally competitive and to make it the driving force for employment and economic growth we have unveiled ten-year National Manufacturing initiatives. Emphasis will be placed on labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and garments, leather and leather goods, food processing, IT hardware and electronics and auto components.”

Dr. Singh said focused attention would be given to the growth of India’s dynamic services sector, including software, outsourcing, tourism, education and healthcare. At the same time India is reforming the institutional architecture within which enterprises function. “We are trying to reform the legal system to reduce arrears and improve the speed of the justice delivery system. We are examining the

possibility of having alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly for commercial disputes.”

Dr. Singh said the telecommunication boom of the past decade had to be sustained for which “we are working towards releasing additional spectrum to mobile telephone firms. We do hope to raise India’s annual growth rate to the range of 9 to 10 per cent.”

Special package coming for farmers

It will benefit 30 districts in A.P., Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Centre will announce in May a special package, including institutional credit, insurance and financial aid, for farmers in four States, where thousands of them committed suicide in the past few years. To be announced in the second half of the Parliament session, the package will benefit 30 districts in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra, where farmers took their own lives due to their inability to repay loans and crop failure.

Expressing concern over the suicides, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said the package would be prepared within a

month and a multidisciplinary team would be constituted to ensure effective implementation.

The Ministry would also modify its agriculture insurance scheme, making panchayats the base for covering crops, instead of the present block system.

This was done to include under the scheme smaller, affected farm areas, which would be deprived of the insurance money if the entire block was not entitled to the benefit.

Mr. Pawar said all States approved the modified scheme and it would be implemented before the kharif season. The Finance Ministry also gave its approval.

However, over 60 per cent of the farmers continued to be out-

side agricultural insurance. The aim should be to bring them under the cover.

Enough foodgrains

Replying to a debate on the demands for grants to the Agriculture Ministry in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, Mr. Pawar said there was enough stock of foodgrains.

The agricultural growth rate was expected to be about 3.4 per cent, close to the targeted 4 per cent.

Giving credit to farmers for the buffer stock and the increasing growth rate, he said it had been stagnant at 1.3 per cent in the past three years.

Admitting that policies and

9 (u) Agriculture
strategies needed changes to improve the lot of farmers, Mr. Pawar said the Government was formulating a policy to increase agricultural production.

Pointing out that its decision to bring down the interest rate on crop loan to 7 per cent was a major step to benefit the farmers, the Minister said efforts would be made to reduce it further in the coming years.

Referring to the M.S. Swaminathan Commission recommendations, he said that in a bid to revive rural credit institutions and free farmers from the clutches of moneylenders, the Constitution would be amended to empower cooperative institutions and banks.

GLOBAL DEMOCRACY

India, Not America, Should Take Lead

By RAJINDER PURI

Speaking at Delhi's Old Fort President Bush during his recent visit described freedom as the strongest human urge. He said the whole world should be freed from dictators. He added that America and India together could transform the world by striving to achieve this goal.

It is a laudable goal. Socialism or capitalism may come and go. They reflect economic arrangements of societies to suit contemporary needs. But democracy should be permanent. It signifies the method by which societies make their choice. People must choose in freedom and through consent.

So first one must identify the basic postulates of democracy. Societies may be governed by Presidents or Prime Ministers, through many parties or one party or no party. They remain democratic if there is freedom of speech and association, if there is rule of law, and if decisions reflect the majority view.

Bush's commitment

President Bush's commitment to democracy has acquired the fervor of an evangelist. It is a recent development. In an exclusive interview to the *Washington Times* in January 2005, President Bush said: "If you want a glimpse of how I think about foreign policy read Natan Sharansky's book". People sat up and took notice. Who was Natan Sharansky? Anatoly Natan Sharansky was a Soviet dissident and served nine years as a political prisoner in Russia. In the mid-1980s he left the Soviet Union for Israel. He rose to become a minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs.

Drawing from personal experience Sharansky passionately argued for spreading democracy worldwide by not appeasing dictators and tyrants. He wrote a book, *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*. Bush read that book. He invited Sharansky to the White House shortly after his re-election. Western media reports described Sharansky as the "intellectual godfather" of Bush's advocacy of a "global democratic revolution".

During his meeting with President Bush, Sharansky disclosed what he had told the President: "In spite of all the polls warning you that talking about spreading democracy in the Middle East might be a losing issue — despite all the critics and the resistance you faced — you kept talking about the importance of free societies and free elections. You kept explaining that democracy

is for everybody. You kept saying that only democracy will truly pave the way to peace and security. You, Mr President, are a dissident among the leaders of the free world!"

In a sense Sharansky's compliment to President Bush was not misplaced. In the pursuit of his beliefs Bush has not hesitated to take unpopular decisions. And who can deny that freedom for mankind is the noblest pursuit?



India should certainly endorse this goal. But it must do so only after introducing vitally important caveats.

On any objective assessment America's efforts to spread democracy thus far have been disastrous. Before taking up this mission therefore it must be understood why. Sharansky has provided a simple litmus test for recognizing democracy. He divided the world into free societies and fear societies. If any citizen can speak his heart out in the city square without fear of punishment he lives in a free society. Otherwise he lives in a fear society. This is a good test as far as it goes. It doesn't go far enough. If the preacher doesn't practise what he preaches he is seen as a hypocrite. And if nevertheless he tries to impose his views he is seen as a bully.

Butcher as surgeon

President Bush's efforts to spread democracy are like those of a butcher attempting bypass surgery. An authentic mission to spread democracy worldwide will have to be slow, patient and long. To accept democracy peoples and governments would have to be convinced of its advantages. Those who preach democracy would have to lead by example. So of necessity the first step would entail leaders of the movement to look within their own societies and systems and introduce necessary reform to be-

come credible role models. Today neither America nor India qualifies to be a role model.

After 9/11 the quality of American democracy plummeted. It is a fallacious argument that to fight terrorism democratic norms must be ignored. Strong action does not imply circumventing law and procedure. This is what the Bush administration did in its first term. Many of its actions destroyed American values and

even attracted threats of impeachment.

A few are worth recalling. The administration deliberately falsified intelligence inputs and lied to the nation for justifying its invasion of Iraq. During the war it initiated systematic torture of prisoners which violated American law and human rights. The President authorized illegal wiretapping of private conversations of citizens without following due process. All these actions violated law and strictly speaking could justify the President's impeachment.

The President got away with his excesses because mainstream US media failed to fulfil its responsibility. It appeared to further a political agenda. It distorted facts. Thereby it did not serve the American nation but certain vested interests which exploited terrorism to further partisan ends. Just one example of media's failure should suffice. Over a year ago the *New York Times* learnt that the government had authorized illegal wiretapping. The President prevailed on the paper to withhold the report. The paper obliged. Recently it published the report. Why was it withheld? And if withheld, why was it later published? Both decisions appeared to be inspired by the newspaper's changing attitude to the President and had little to do with professional norms.

India's condition is no better.

The failure of the system and the need to reform it is a recurring theme in these columns. India's saving grace is that it has a strong democratic culture. People can and do speak their minds. But this is offset by an alarming breakdown in the rule of law. Liberty therefore has degenerated into licence. The rich and the powerful can and do get away with murder. Hopefully the public will bestir itself before the system disintegrates.

These facts must be kept in mind if a serious effort to spread democracy across the world is undertaken. It is up to the American people to reform their system. As far as India is concerned our priorities should be clear.

India must reinterpret the Constitution and amend it suitably to fulfil the aspirations of its founding fathers. It must make necessary amendments that help tone up its institutions including the bureaucracy, police and judiciary. After doing this it must develop zero tolerance towards violation of law. That would contain both corruption and crime. It would also end much of the hate inspired by communalism which strictly speaking invariably involves violation of law.

Through example

After achieving this, then, and only then, might India aspire to spread democracy through example. Bold initiatives could be taken with neighbours. One example should suffice. After the recent Bush visit a frustrated President Musharraf said that for its nuclear aspirations Pakistan had apart from America a second option in China. Our PM could offer him a better option: India. After negotiating safeguards why can't both nations share knowhow and jointly provide a nuclear umbrella to all South Asia? Saarc members could even comprise a Saarc body authorized control over the use of nuclear weapons. Only such an arrangement would give South Asia the moral stature to hasten nuclear disarmament as well as reform of the UN.

Is this too utopian? Perhaps. But for a meaningful effort to spread democracy across the world some such measures would be necessary. India can take the lead. Sometimes people say that in time India could be as great as America.

They are wrong. In time India can be greater. It can be the greatest. In this information age the future does not belong to big bombs or big business. It belongs to nations that deliver justice. It belongs to nations displaying the requisite moral strength. Nobody can stop India except Indians themselves.

Police file FIR against Jessica case investigators

Special team to probe "conspiracy" of omission and commission to save accused

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: In a path-breaking development, the Delhi police on Monday registered a case of destruction of evidence, fabrication and criminal conspiracy with the intent of saving the accused in the Jessica Lal murder case. Though no one has been named in the First Information Report (FIR), it would seek to fix responsibility for acts of omission and commission that led to the acquittal of all nine accused in the trial court that heard the much talked about case.

Addressing a press conference, Delhi Police Commissioner K. K. Paul said the trial court judgment was carefully studied in consultation with legal experts including the Additional Solicitor-General of India. "The police found that some of the evidence was tampered with to save the accused."

Also, it came to light that some evidence available with investigating officers was not produced in the court during trial, added the Police Commissioner. The police came across several instances wherein officials deliberately gave wrong information to save the accused. "A lot of material has come up in the aftermath of the judgment on the basis of which the Mehrauli Station House Officer today registered a case under Sections 120 (B), 201, 218 and 34 of the Indian Penal Code," announced Dr. Paul.

The FIR mentions that efforts to save the accused through various acts of omission and commission by some officials, by illegal means, had taken place on several occasions, clearly indicating that the entire exercise was a result of criminal conspiracy.

"The criminal conspiracy was



aimed at obstructing and deflecting the course of justice," says the FIR, adding that the conspiracy should thus be investigated.

Dr. Paul said that to ensure speedy investigation a special team was being constituted which would be answerable only to Special Commissioner of Police (Intelligence) U. K. Katna. "To make sure that there is no delay, competent police officers are being picked up to form the team today itself," said Dr. Paul.

It is learnt that during their investigation the police would gather information from all witnesses in the case and also summon the investigating officer, Surender Sharma, and his fellow officers who were actively involved in the probe. If necessary, the police can also summon the supervisory officers of the case, including the then Joint Commissioner of Police, Amod Kanth; Deputy Commissioner of Police (South Delhi) Sudhir Yadav; Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Vivek Gogia; and the then Assistant Commissioner of Police O. P. Mishra.

Dr. Paul said the appeal was being finalised in consultation with legal experts and it would be filed within a couple of days. "We will comply with the directive of the High Court," he added.

Panel suggests changes to govt on e-governance

Mukesh Ranjan in New Delhi

March 5. — While presenting his report to the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, the Knowledge Commission chairman, Mr Sam Pitroda, contended that instead of adopting e-governance technologies to help government employees process the data, it should be citizen-friendly to serve their purpose of getting things done quickly in a transparent way.

In its report, the Knowledge Commission has urged the government to take up various e-governance projects pertaining to ministries on a mission mode and prioritise them according to their respective needs. It said, in the first phase, eight sectors of Central ministries, like Income Tax (Ministry of Finance/Central Board of Direct Taxes), Passport & Immigration project (Ministry of External Affairs/Ministry of Home Affairs), DCA21 (Department of Company Affairs), Insurance (Department of Banking), National Citizen Database (Ministry of Home Affairs)

Registrar General of India), Central Excise (Department of Revenue/Central Board of Excise & Customs), Pensions (Department of Pension & Pensioners Welfare) and Banking (Department of Banking), should be taken up.

According to the commission, they have identified these ministries and departments on the basis of the frequency of the citizens having direct interface with the government. And, if the services in these areas could be made available online, this will help the nation save valuable time, energy and money in serving the citizens, the report contended. The report also presented a list of areas falling under state governments in which the Union government could take initiative on mission mode. But for these, the Central government has to work in close consultation with the state governments. The areas include land records, road transport, property registration, agriculture, treasuries, municipalities, gram panchayats, state commercial taxes, police (UTs initially) and employment exchange.

Lalu presents a passenger-friendly budget; 55 new trains to be introduced

Handwritten notes: 25/1/06, 9-10, 2006-07

P.K. Bhardwaj

NEW DELHI: Amid loud non-stop protests by the Opposition and the Left, Railway Minister Lalu Prasad on Friday presented in Parliament the Railway Budget for 2006-07 that left both passenger fares and freight rates untouched. Also, AC I and AC II fares were reduced by 18 and 10 per cent respectively. In freight services reduction up to 30 per cent has been provided and the common man has been promised four air-conditioned trains at discounted fares.

In his third consecutive budget as part of the United Progressive Alliance Government, Mr. Prasad announced introduction of a "Dynamic Pricing Policy" and upgrading of 200 mail and express trains to superfast — a move that could push up the fares.

The carrying capacity of 190 mail and express trains would be enhanced by adding a total of 500 coaches.

Under the new policy, rates for non-peak season, non-premium service and empty flow direction both for passengers as well as freight will be less than

the existing rates and the rates for peak season and premium services "could be higher than normal," said Mr. Prasad.

New trains, services

He announced 55 new trains, extension of 37 services, increase in frequency of a dozen trains and rerouting of two services.

The new trains include four fully air-conditioned 'Garib Rath' — initially on a pilot basis — with fares that will be 25 per cent lower than present AC-III tier fares.

Some of the new trains were started as "holiday specials" during peak season and have now been converted into regular ones.

The renewal period for monthly season tickets (MST) has been increased from 3 to 10 days and superfast charges reduced to one-fourth of the current level.

On the freight front, the business community could avail of 30 per cent reduction in charges during non-peak and 20 per cent in peak season subject to certain conditions.

Besides several other initiatives, including Loyalty Discount and Mini Rake schemes, were announced. Freight rates of diesel and petrol have been reduced by eight per cent.

Furore in Lok Sabha

The Lok Sabha witnessed a furore as soon as the Minister started reading out the list of new trains. The NDA and TDP demanded justice, accusing Mr. Prasad of a "Bihar bias" and discrimination — a charge he denied.

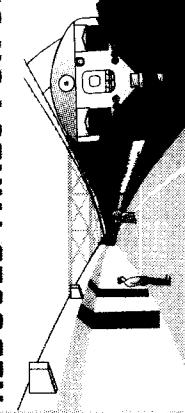
The din rendered Mr. Prasad's speech inaudible. While their protest was continuing, the announcement about the Rs. 22,000-crore Dedicated Rail Freight Corridor brought the Left to its feet as the stretch in West Bengal had been left out.

The Minister also announced a number of proposals envisaging laying of new lines, Gauge Conversion besides line augmentation.

Opposition spares a non-combative Railway Minister: Page 12

REDUCED FARES FOR UPPER CLASSES

Existing and proposed basic fares in Rs. of Mail/Express trains at selected distances



Distance in Kms.	AC 2-Tier		AC First Class	
	Existing fare	Proposed fare Reduction	Existing fare	Proposed fare Reduction
100	322	226 30%	542	400 26%
200	430	369 14%	794	653 18%
300	556	502 10%	1081	888 18%
400	693	626 10%	1347	1107 18%
500	830	749 10%	1613	1325 18%
600	945	853 10%	1837	1509 18%
750	1118	1009 10%	2173	1785 18%
1000	1352	1221 10%	2628	2159 18%
1250	1532	1383 10%	2978	2447 18%
1500	1712	1546 10%	3328	2734 18%
1750	1892	1708 10%	3678	3022 18%
2000	2072	1871 10%	4028	3309 18%
2250	2162	1952 10%	4203	3453 18%
2500	2252	2033 10%	4378	3597 18%
2750	2342	2114 10%	4636	3740 19%
3000	2432	2196 10%	4947	3884 21%
3500	2612	2358 10%	5562	4172 25%

Source: Railway Budget 2006-07 documents

NDK Infographics

25/1/06 2006

THE HINDU

LALU SPECIAL: GARIB RATH

Opp, Left ruckus drowns out Lalu speech, couplets

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 24

IT COULD have been Lalu Prasad's dream budget speech. Except that no one listened to him. Not when he announced his plan for next year; nor when he announced innovations in freight and passenger pricing to improve capacity utilisation.

Lalu Prasad spoke about record-breaking achievements by the Indian railways due to "historic policy decisions" under his leadership. But he was not the only one making history. The Left and the Opposition, too, chipped in to make history of a different kind. They made this the first rail budget in recent times when nearly half of the rail minister's speech was inaudible, thanks to the unprecedented pandemonium that prevailed.

Yes, the BJP started the protests complaining that the minister had ignored Opposition-ruled states - in between some of them even trooping to the well of the House - but they did not have to work too hard. Not for long.

The Left soon took over and set the tone for a high-decibel round of disruptions that ensured Lalu Prasad's innovative ideas were lost in the din. Left MPs Basudev Acharya and Md Salim were piqued that the East-West dedicated freight corridor would not touch Kolkata as the Prime Minister had announced from Red Fort last year, but end at Sonmagar in Bihar.

Finance minister P Chidambaram walked up to them several times to persuade them, but it was clear they were not willing to relent: not till the minister was on the verge of completing his speech. But that did not make it any easier for Lalu Prasad who had to run through his speech faster than any of the 200 trains he was upgrading to the super-fast category. He would, however, have preferred to go slow like a passenger train, especially since he had taken care to intersperse his speech with couplets that shared his optimism and vision.

It wasn't clear what exactly the BJP was protesting but references to Patna or Bihar seemed to provoke them into shouting slogans or sniggering. "Budget nahi, voh dhoka hai", they shouted at an unperturbed Lalu Prasad. Obviously, they seemed to have forgotten that, even if this was the case, they, too, would stand to gain since the BJP is part of the Nityush Kumar government in the state.

Lalu Prasad later brushed aside charges of partiality to Bihar. Releasing a state-wise list of his announcements, he said Uttar Pradesh was the biggest gainer; Maharashtra the next. But other states that did not directly figure in the list would benefit, too, he said. "Unlike planes, trains do not fly... States through which the train will travel, too, stand to gain", he said wondering what all the noise about being partial to Bihar was about.

Railway Board chairman Jai Prakash Batra later suggested the Left's insistence on the freight corridor being extended to Kolkata arose out of the Prime Minister's reference to the East-West corridor by the Prime Minister as a Delhi-Kolkata route in a "colloquial" sense. He said extending the corridor to Kolkata at this stage would waste crores of rupees. Each kilometre of the dedicated corridor would cost Rs 60 crore.



Porters at Mathura railway station huddle around a transistor radio set, listening to the Railway budget 2006-07 on Friday.

Left grumbles, PM acts pacifist

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Kolkata, February 24

THE SHIFTING of one end of the dedicated freight corridor from Kolkata to Sonmagar has peeved the Left parties. They were so vociferous in their protests that the Prime Minister sought to soothe them by hinting that the rail budget was open to change.

The Left parties warned they could even vote against the rail budget if the freight corridor was not corrected. "If there is no change in this, we will vote against it," warned CPI(M) leader Nilotpal Basu.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, "We're amenable to be convinced by members who have suggestions to make. The concerns of all members will be addressed."

CPI leader Gurudas Dasgupta is not con-

vinced, saying the language of the budget was not Lalu's and it had the government's backing anyway. "It is definitely the government's economic policy. There is a big departure from the culture of Lalu and the rail budget, which has been overshadowed by the finance minister. P. Chidambaram is synonymous with privatisation and outsourcing, which is what has been reflected in the budget," the CPI leader said. For Left parties, the corridor decision was yet another snub following the Iran vote and airport privatisation. "Just because we're supporting the government, we can't be taken for granted. We're answerable to the people," CPI(M) MP Rupchand Pal said.

Observing that the eastern freight corridor should be linked to Kolkata, Basu said, "We are not being parochial and it is not merely a question of Kolkata. Even good economics

says that freight corridors should link ports. How can you delink freight corridors from ports?" In Kolkata, CPI(M) state secretary Anil Biswas said, "Good economics suggest freight corridors should link ports. How can you delink freight corridors from ports?"

He criticised privatisation of catering and station maintenance services, saying it would result in job loss. He expressed dismay at the manner Bengal was denied suburban trains. He welcomed introduction of ATM counters and food plaza in big stations but said, "This budget won't help the poor," Biswas said.

CPI(M) MP Basudeb Acharya, chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways, said he had submitted the longest list of demands from Bengal. "This is the worst railway budget I have ever seen," Acharya said.

55 NEW TRAINS in Rail budget

There are 27 weekly, 5 bi-weekly, 5 tri-weekly and 14 daily trains

Weekly	Bi-weekly	Tri-weekly	Daily
1. Valsad-Udhna (Surat)-Chhapra-Sonpur Shramik Express	1. Bankura-Ranchi Passenger	1. Bhubaneswar-Baripada Express	1. Saharsa-Patna Kosi Express
2. Ahmedabad-Patna Azimabad Express	2. Darbhanga-Kolkata (Chitpur)	2. Delhi-Rae Bareilly Express	2. Link Exp between Darbhanga and Guwahati with Avadh-Assam Exp
3. Muzaffarpur-Kolkata (Chitpur) Tirhut Express	3. Rae-Bareilly-Pratapgarh-Lokmanya Tilak (T) Link Express	3. Chennai-Mangalore Express	3. Chennai-Tpura Express
4. Kishanganj Garib Nawaj Express	4. Vishakhapatnam-Nizamabad Express	4. Bhubaneswar-Baripada Express	4. Nagpur-Raipur Intercity Express
5. Yeswantpur Garib Nawaj Express	5. Jaipur-Amritsar Express	5. Delhi-Rae Bareilly Express	5. Indore-Bhopal Intercity Express
6. Ranchi Garib Nawaj Express		6. Delhi (New Azadpur)-Saharsa Poorbiya Express	6. Radhikaipur-Sealdah
7. Sonpur-Chhapra-Jammu Twai Mour Dhvaj Express		7. Valsad-Udhna (Surat)-Kanpur Udyogkarmi Express	7. Mathura-Alwar Passenger
8. Delhi-Patna Garib Rath		8. Durg-Gorakhpur Express	8. Gudur-Tirupati Passenger
9. Delhi-Mumbai Garib Rath		9. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	9. Hajipur-Sonpur-Chhapra-Siwan-Thawe Passenger
10. Delhi-Chennai Garib Rath		10. Chennai-Tpura Express	10. Malani-Palla Express
11. Bangalore-Darbhanga Express		11. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	11. Jalandhar City-Nakodar DMU
12. Delhi (New Azadpur)-Saharsa Poorbiya Express		12. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	12. Nanded-Adilabad Passenger
13. Valsad-Udhna (Surat)-Kanpur Udyogkarmi Express		13. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	13. Madurai-Rameshwaram Passenger
14. Durg-Gorakhpur Express		14. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	14. Kumharhat-Agartala
15. Chennai-Tpura Express		15. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
16. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express		16. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
17. Chennai-Coimbatore Express		17. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
18. Bhubaneswar-Pondichery Exp		18. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
19. Madurai-Tirupati Manmad Express		19. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
20. Tatanagar-Yeshwantpur Express		20. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
21. Chennai-Bilaspur Express		21. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
22. Pune-Lucknow Express		22. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
23. Jabalpur-Jammu Tawi Express		23. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
24. Purna-Nanded-Patna Express		24. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
25. Purna-Adilabad Passenger		25. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
26. Howrah-Mumbai Express		26. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	
27. Asansol-Bokari (MEMU) and		27. Chennai-Egmore-Nagercoil Express	

In addition, 37 trains will be extended and the frequency of 12 trains increased

No human affected by bird flu: Centre

Culling operations begin in Maharashtra, Gujarat

Aarti Dhar

NEW DELHI: The Government said on Sunday that no cases of humans affected by the avian influenza had been reported, even as it began massive culling operations in poultry farms in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

The preliminary report of a 28-year-old man, suspected to have died of the disease in Surat two days ago, said the death had been caused by bacterial infection. The final report was awaited, N.K. Ganguly, Director-General, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), told reporters here.

Describing the outbreak as "localised," and the situation as under control, officials said that of the 60 Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) formed on Saturday, 45 had begun culling operations. The rest were in a state of readiness and would be pressed into service, when needed.

Culling was being done by gassing and decapitation, and the dead birds were being buried immediately. Clean-up operations would be carried out in the four farms falling within the infected zone, and backyard poultry would be culled, Upma Chowdhry, Joint Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry, said. Six patients had been ad-

• **Outbreak localised; situation under control**

• **Rapid response teams pressed into service**

• **Dead birds being buried immediately**

mitted to the Navapur Sub-Divisional Hospital on Saturday and one on Sunday with complaints of common cold and fever. None had shown any sign of the bird flu infection in preliminary tests.

Of the 95 clinical samples collected so far, 51 had been sent to the Pune-based National Institute of Virology, and 44 to the National Institute of Communicable Diseases in Delhi, Prof. Ganguly said.

A ban has been imposed on the movement of poultry; trading in poultry and poultry products had been stopped in 19 villages and Navapur town to contain the infection. Veterinary teams had been deployed for surveying the neighbouring area for signs of sickness or mortality in birds.

All States had been asked to strengthen surveillance, and carry out focussed collection of

samples in the "possible high-risk" areas, besides a house-to-house survey.

On reports of the disease being detected at a poultry farm in Etawah, Uttar Pradesh, Ms. Chowdhry said initial reports suggested that the birds had been kept in extremely unhygienic conditions.

Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil said a committee, comprising the Cabinet Secretary and other Union Secretaries, was constantly monitoring the situation in Maharashtra.

Addressing mediapersons on the sidelines of a function, he said the National Disaster Management Authority had been activated, and it was monitoring the situation.

The Centre had rushed vaccines for use in Maharashtra and Gujarat, and these were stocked at Aurangabad and Navapur. Additional stocks were being procured from Holland for strengthening the Central Strategic Reserve. Each dose of vaccine cost about Rs. 1.50.

While the number of birds culled would be known only after the operations got over, Ms. Chowdhry said all farmers would be given compensation, of which 50 per cent would be paid by the Centre and the rest by the State Governments.

Govt issues tapping guidelines

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 8. — In a face-saving exercise, the department of telecommunication today issued phone-tapping guidelines to all telecom operators. These make them responsible, though indirectly, for any mischievous phone-tapping in the future.

The guidelines issued by the government aim at tightening the noose around telecom service providers rather than security agencies, which are authorised to issue phone-tapping instructions.

The government has asked telecom operators to make intensive verifications of anyone applying for a telephone connection to guard against misuse by anti-social and anti-national elements.

Going by the guidelines issued under Section 4 of the Indian Telegraph Act, that was circulated to all telecom operators today, the Central government asked service-providers to appoint nodal officers with 24 X 7 duty arrangements so that they could inform the security agency concerned within two hours in a sealed cover on receipt of any intimation for interceptions.

If a nodal officer fails to inform a security agency within two hours and the phone-tapping instructions are found forged as in the Amar Singh case, the responsibility of the nodal officer would be fixed. Though the Centre has put the onus on service-providers in case of any goof-up, the guidelines do not give any instructions to security agencies to avoid misuse. Instead of DIGs or officers of an equivalent rank, authorisation powers have been given to superintendents of police or senior SPs.

The instructions state that, "the names of nodal officers/ alternative nodal officers should be communicated to all security agencies along with details of their office and residential telephone numbers and addresses, every quarter.

In case of any change, it should be communicated as and when it takes place," the guidelines said. The names of the officers authorised by security agencies to authenticate pro formas for intimation of interception orders to service-providers shall be provided by the agencies, the guidelines stated. Designated nodal officers of the service-providers and security agencies would meet every fortnight to discuss interception authorisation lists received by telecom companies, which would minimise misuse. DoT has also asked telecom operators not to entertain untidy or tinkered-with instructions.

Government tightens phone-tapping norms

These come in the wake of complaints by Amar Singh

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Government has issued fresh guidelines, tightening phone-tapping norms in the wake of the allegations by Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh that private persons bugged his phone for months on the basis of forged police authorisation papers.

Phone service companies will have to appoint officers to acknowledge requests within two hours of intimation from security and law enforcement agencies for interception. On all intimations sent by the agencies, the service providers will make 24x7 arrangement. The names of nodal officers/alternative nodal officers, along with details of office and residential telephone numbers and addresses, should be communicated to all security agencies every quarter. Any change should be communicated as and when it takes place. "The names of the officers authorised by the security agencies to authenticate the form for intimation of [the] interception order to the service providers shall be provided by the security agencies."

The Government has asked the designated nodal officers of phone companies to meet representatives of security agencies every fortnight for discussing the list of interception or authorisation orders.

The companies have been told to provide interception facilities to the State police for a roaming subscriber, irrespective of his location. "Interception facility to the police for a non-roaming subscriber outside the territorial boundaries of the State shall be provided with the approval of the Union Home Secretary or

the Home Secretary of the State concerned".

Asking the companies to keep phone-tapping authorisation a secret, the guidelines say that in case of emergency, they should seek confirmation within three days and the authorities should issue orders with the approval of the head or second seniormost officer of the agency, not below the rank of Inspector-General of Police.

The phone companies should install effective in-house checks

to ensure that "unauthorised interception of communication does not take place and extreme secrecy and confidentiality of intimation of interception authorisation is maintained."

The guidelines were issued on Tuesday night, a week after senior Union Government officers discussed with phone company representatives the new norms and total compliance with the existing ones. That was the first meeting on the entire gamut of issues after a decade.

U.P. moves Supreme Court

Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Uttar Pradesh Government on Wednesday moved the Supreme Court challenging the territorial jurisdiction of the Delhi High Court in entertaining petitions in the Amar Singh telephone tapping case and issuing contempt notice to the Special Task Force (STF). The State said the special leave petitions (likely to be mentioned on Friday for early hearing) were the result of a controversy over the High Court quashing the First Information Report registered by the Government on a complaint from a resident of Noida alleging illegal tapping of personal and intimate conversation he had with Amar Singh, Member of Parliament and general secretary of Samajwadi Party.

The petitions alleged that the U.P. police suspected that the actual culprits were the complainants in Delhi who were out to shield the real accused and prevent the

detection of the crime. The State pointed out that the High Court by an interim order on January 20 restrained the Government from interfering with the investigation of the complaint registered by the Delhi Police.

And the High Court later issued a contempt notice for violating the interim orders.

The petitioner pointed out that the High Court had only restrained the U.P. police from interfering in the investigation of the FIR registered by Delhi police and had not enjoined the police from conducting an investigation in relation to the FIR registered by the Noida police. Hence there was no contempt of the Court order. The Delhi High Court on Wednesday restrained the STF from summoning and interrogating the Delhi Government Principal Secretary (Home) R. Narayanswami and the Delhi Police Joint Commissioner Ranjit Narayan in connection with the tapping case.

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THE HINDU

Towards smoother modernisation

After the four-day strike by the forum of employees of the Airports Authority of India (AAI), most of the airports had been reduced to garbage dumps. That a majority of the flights were operated from the second day of the strike was some comfort to the passengers, who were put to a lot of inconvenience and trouble. On the third day itself, there were indications that the public and political mood would make the continuance of the strike difficult beyond a period. But even after the meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the AAI employees did not call off the strike. They had another meeting with Union Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel after an inconclusive round of discussions in their forum. To Mr. Patel's credit, he did as much as he could to reassure the employees that their jobs would be protected, their grievances addressed, and their alternative proposal for modernisation considered for other airports. But he made clear that the decision to go ahead with the New Delhi and Mumbai projects would stay. Having got such a comprehensive assurance, part of it in writing, the employees were expected to withdraw the strike. But apparently, there were some difference of opinion among the unions, which perhaps explains why one more day was needed for them to take that decision. The backing that they got from the influential Left parties, whose leaders also met the Prime Minister to discuss their demands, has certainly helped the AAI employees reach this far.

Aside from the core issue of whether the Government should stop with just modernisation and not push for even partial privatisation — on a Build Operate Transfer (BOT) basis — the concerns voiced by the striking employees need to be addressed. Now that a section of the employees and the Anil Ambani-led Reliance group have challenged the Centre's decision on awarding the Delhi and Mumbai airport projects, the right thing to do will be to wait for the courts to decide whether the procedures and processes followed were in order. One key issue will be whether the decisions of the Empowered Group of Ministers were in keeping with the conditions laid down at the 'Request for Proposal' stage. Having failed to clinch the deal, the Reliance enterprise is not going to leave any stone unturned in asserting its rights under the terms of the bidding. Considering the importance of these two airports and the need to upgrade them to international standards, it may be worthwhile pushing ahead with this exercise through the legally correct forum. Now that the AAI employees can pursue the option of their alternative proposal for other airports, it is up to them to convince the Government and the public that they can design and build world-class terminals and facilities that will be able to cope with future demands. A dialogue with them will certainly make the process of modernisation of airports much smoother.

- 6 FEB 2006

THE HINDU

Airport strike called off

New Delhi: The four-day-old strike by more than 20,000 airport employees that turned airports across the country into near garbage dumps was called off on Saturday evening after the Centre gave the striking AAI workers a written assurance that it would go into the issue of their job security on account of modernisation.

The strike against the modernisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports by private developers that barely affected flight schedules but led to uncleared filth and garbage and overflowing sewers was called off soon after the leaders leading the protest met civil aviation minister Praful Patel. "In view of the assurances given by the government, I, as the convener, call off the strike," M K Ghosal, convener of the AAI Employees Joint Forum, announced at a gathering of workers outside the Delhi airport. The workers will join duty according to their shifts with immediate effect.

Earlier, breaking the news after his meeting

with a three-member delegation of forum leaders, Patel said he was confident that the strike would be called off and normalcy restored in airports following his assurances to them. The AAI leaders had met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Friday and he appealed to them to return to work in national interest.

At the 90-minute meeting, Patel gave a written undertaking that the Centre would set up a tripartite panel to go into the issues and proposals of modernisation of airports and employee-related issues, including their job security. The committee will comprise representatives of the ministry, AAI and the joint forum (of employees). The letter said, "In addition, it is also made clear that there will be no victimisation of any kind for participation in the agitation." Patel said, "I hope this letter will assuage the feelings of all those connected with the agitation and necessary steps will be taken to end the stalemate immediately." Agencies

5 FEB 2008

THE TIMES OF INDIA

'LINKS WITH CONG LEADER HELPED SURPASS TECHNICALITIES'

Airport bidding rules twisted to suit GMR, claims RSP

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 3 FEBRUARY

IN what could give credence to allegation that the UPA government was promoting crony capitalism, a constituent of the Left on Friday said airport modernisation bids were rigged to favour a company close to a Congress politician.

RSP leader Abani Roy, who shot off a letter to the Prime Minister, alleged the government changed the rules to favour the GVK Group, which bagged the contract for modernising Mumbai airport. For the Delhi airport, although the Reliance financial bid was the best, GMR was selected.

The government gave GMR a chance to match the best financial bid since it was the "only" technically qualified bidder. It treated all bidders as the same in the case of Mumbai — something that helped GVK win the Mumbai project. Reliance, which was pushed out of the race, has moved the court on the ground that the government violated the tender conditions.

RSP appears to be in a agreement with the allegation levelled by Reliance that the government shifted the goalpost to benefit GVK. "The Mumbai airport was awarded to GVK consortium inspite of the fact that its technical bid got low marks. The decision was made on the basis of the highest financial bid, which is

contrary to the yardstick adopted for the Delhi airport," Mr Roy said in his letter to the prime minister.

The Left leader then went on to allege the government was prompting crony capitalism. "I would like to bring to your notice that the owner of the GVK Group, GV Krishna Reddy, is very close relative of a Central minister from Andhra Pradesh, T Subbarama Reddy. Mr Krishna Reddy's sister is married to Mr Reddy and the daughter of Subbarama Reddy is married to Mr Krishna Reddy's son," Mr Roy said.

The Left leader said all these only strengthened the charge that there was no transparency in the bidding process. He also sought the Prime Minister's intervention. Meanwhile, the Congress strongly backed the government's decision to modernise airports.

In a stinging attack on the Left, Congress spokesman said, "The politics of protest" should end. "It is a democratic country and we do not certainly object to the right to protest. The government also has every right to take a decision and it has taken this decision in the interest of the aam aadmi," party spokesman Abhishek Singhvi told reporters here. Criticising the strike and protests by Left backed trade unions, Mr Singhvi said: "We strongly believe that in time and place politics of protest has to stop."

Left now finds PM appealing

THE Left, which is desperately looking for a face-saver to end the airport strike, appears to be clutching on to the Prime Minister's "appeal" for ending the agitation.

While the Prime Minister held on to his ground and made it plain there would be no reversal of the Cabinet decision to modernise Delhi and Mumbai airports, Left leaders — who had three meetings with government bosses — indicated their willingness to call of the strike.

At all three meetings — two of which were with Dr Singh — the Left conveyed its anxiety to find an immediate solution. Realising the issue was deadlocked, Left leaders had sought a meeting with Dr Singh. At the meeting on Friday, they urged him to meet striking employees. There was some hesitation on Dr Singh's part. He is understood to have told the leaders that as civil aviation minister Praful Patel was handling the issue, there was no need for any intervention by him.

- 4 FEB 2006

Economic Times

AAI employees may give up fight

PM Appeals To Protesters As Situation Worsens In Airports

Reliance plea hearing put off

New Delhi: Indicating an end to their three-day-long protests, the joint forum of the employees of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) on Friday said it would "seriously" consider Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's appeal to call off the protest against the modernisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports.

"The Prime Minister has appealed to us to end the stir. We will seriously consider it. We will meet soon to take a decision," joint forum convener M K Ghoshal told reporters after a 90-minute meeting with the Prime Minister. Civil aviation minister Praful Patel and civil aviation secretary Ajay Prasad also attended the meeting.

Ghoshal said they were urging the Centre to set up a tripartite committee comprising officials of the ministry, AAI and forum representatives to study the alternate plan for modernisation of the two airports, the future of AAI and other related issues.

Earlier, Patel said the government had no plans to privatise AAI and the Prime Minister had assured the forum that no AAI employee would lose his/her job. He, however, made it clear that the decision to award the Delhi and Mumbai airport contracts to GMR and GVK-led consortia was final.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister held a meeting with Left leaders on Friday hoping to diffuse the situation. CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat said the Prime Minister had agreed to consider the alternative plan for the modernisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports that was submitted by the forum to him last year. The plan gives the AAI the responsibility of modernising the two major metro airports. Agencies



With the AAI protest entering the third day on Friday, passengers were forced to queue up near garbage strewn outside the Delhi airport

New Delhi: The Delhi HC on Friday deferred till Monday the hearing on Reliance Industries' plea challenging the airports bidding process.

The deferment came amid scramble with the case being tossed from one court to another. The matter was initially taken up by a division bench of Chief Justice Markandeya Katju and Justice Madan B Lokur as soon as they assembled for the day. But the Chief Justice, without making any remarks, transferred it to a division bench of Justices M K Sharma and O P Dwivedi.

However, the court of Justice M K Sharma sought some time to peruse the documents relating to the case and suggested that the matter be taken up on Monday. At this stage, R Karanjwala, counsel for the GVK Group of Industries, intervened and urged Justice Sharma to refer the matter to another bench as he did not want the it to be heard by a bench that had Justice Dwivedi as a member as it involved judicial propriety because the judge's daughter was working with him. Agencies

4 FEB 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

চরমপন্থায় গিয়ে বামেদেরই অস্বস্তিতে ফেলে দিল সিটু

দীপেন্দ্র রায়চৌধুরী • নয়াদিল্লি

৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি: প্রকাশ কারাট-এ বি বর্ধনেরা এখন এক জনকেই খুঁজছেন। সেই ব্যক্তি, যিনি বিমানবন্দর কর্মীদের আচমকা ধর্মঘটে যাওয়ার সবুজ সঙ্কেত দিয়েছিলেন।

কারণ, সেই ব্যক্তির হঠকারিতার ফলেই এখন একটা অজুত পরিস্থিতির মধ্যে জড়িয়ে পড়তে হয়েছে কমিউনিস্ট নেতাদের। তাঁরা ধর্মঘটী কর্মীদের ফেলতে পারছেন না। কারণ, শ্রমিক স্বার্থ রক্ষা করা কমিউনিস্টদের কর্তব্য। তার উপর আবার ধর্মঘটী কর্মীদের একাংশ বকলমে তাঁদের অনুগত। কিন্তু তাঁদের জন্য খুব বেশি দূর এগোতেও নেতারা রাজি নন। এক শীর্ষ কমিউনিস্ট নেতার কথায়, “এই বিষয়ে সরকারের সঙ্গে বড় ধরনের সংঘাতে যাওয়া আমাদের ভাবনাচিন্তার মধ্যে নেই।”

অথচ এই ধর্মঘটের সঙ্গে জড়িয়ে যাওয়ার ফলে এখন আন্দোলনের পরাজয়ের দায়ভাগ বাম নেতাদেরও নিতে হবে। আর তার ফলে ডেল-এর বিলম্বিতকরণ রুখে দেওয়ার পরে তাঁদের যতটা বিশ্বাসযোগ্যতা তৈরি হয়েছিল, এ বার তাতে ঠিক ততটাই চিড় ধরবে। সিপিএমের অভ্যন্তরে বিবাদও বাড়বে।

প্রকাশ কারাট অবশ্য সুকৌশলে আজ সকালেই নিজেদের দায়িত্ব অনেকটা ঝেড়ে ফেলেছেন। তিনিই আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে বলেন, ধর্মঘটীদের সঙ্গে সরাসরি কথা বলতে। এই প্রস্তাবে এম কে পান্ডে আপত্তি জানালেও সঙ্গে সঙ্গে তা সমর্থন করেন গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত। কারণ, মুখে স্বীকার না-করলেও এটা ঘটনা যে, গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্তেরাও সেই ব্যক্তিকেই খুঁজছেন, যার জন্য এখন তাঁরা গভীর জলে। এইটুকু সূত্রের খবর, গুরুদাস ও তাঁর ঘনিষ্ঠ সহযোগীরা এ ভাবে প্রথমেই ধর্মঘটে চলে যাওয়ার পক্ষপাতী ছিলেন না। এখন অবশ্য পান্ডে ও ধর্মঘটী কর্মী সংগঠনের সঙ্গে ঘনিষ্ঠ যোগাযোগ রেখে চলেছেন গুরুদাস। কিন্তু কারাট বা বর্ধন বা গুরুদাস, সকলেই দ্রুত সফট কাটানোর পক্ষে। কারণ তাঁরা

জানেন, আন্দোলন চললে সরকার বলপ্রয়োগ করতে বাধ্য হবে ও বিষয়টি অন্য চেহারা নেবে। আন্দোলনের শেষ অস্ত্র ধর্মঘটের পথ কেন প্রথমেই বেছে নেওয়া হল, তা নিয়েও প্রশ্ন উঠেছে। যদি শুধু চাকরির নিরাপত্তার বিষয়টিকে জড়িয়ে ধর্মঘট ডাকা হত, তা হলে মিটে যেত। কিন্তু এ ক্ষেত্রে বৃহত্তর প্রসঙ্গ বেসরকারিকরণ-বিতর্ককে আনা হয়েছে ধর্মঘটের কারণ হিসাবে। সেখানেই সমস্যা জটিল হয়েছে।

ঘটনা হল, সব বাম দল এবং বাকি সমস্ত কেন্দ্রীয় ট্রেড ইউনিয়নের উপর এই দায় কিন্তু চাপিয়ে দিয়েছেন সিটু নেতারা। আজও প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে কর্মচারী ফোরামের নেতারা সিটু নেতাদের সঙ্গেই আলোচনা করেন। পরে তাঁদের একাংশ যান এইটুকু অফিসে। রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির নেতারা কিন্তু অন্ধকারেই ছিলেন।

প্রশ্ন হল, কেন সিটু নেতারা সংঘাতে গেলেন? সেটা কি নিজেদের অস্তিত্ব জাহির করার জন্য? সিপিএমের পলিটব্যুরো সদস্য সীতারাম ইয়েচুরিই বা কেন তিন দিন আগে বলতে গেলেন, বিষয়টিকে তাঁরা রাজনৈতিক লড়াইতে পরিণত করবেন? তার ফলে যে কর্মী সংগঠনের নেতারা উৎসাহিত হয়েছিলেন, তাতে তো কোনও সংশয় নেই।

এই প্রশ্নগুলোর উত্তর বাম মহলে কারও জানা নেই। তবে আগেই জানা ছিল যে, বাম নেতারা সরকারের সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে আন্দোলন চালালেও বড় ধরনের সংঘাতে যাবেন না। এই যেখানে পরিপ্রেক্ষিত, লাগাতার ধর্মঘটে যাওয়া কর্মচারী সংগঠনের পক্ষে যে সেটা হঠকারিতা, তাতে কোনও সংশয় নেই।

বামেদের একাংশ এখনও সরকারের কাছ থেকে অন্য কিছু ছাড় পাওয়ার জন্য চেষ্টা করে যাচ্ছেন। কর্মীদের চাকরির নিরাপত্তার আশ্বাস পাওয়া গিয়েছে। এখন অন্য দুটি প্রশ্ন হল, বিমানবন্দরের আধুনিকীকরণ এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটির নেতৃত্বে করানোর আশ্বাস এবং বিমানবন্দরগুলির ভবিষ্যত ঠিক করার আগে কর্তৃপক্ষ ও কর্মচারীদের মধ্যে আলোচনার জন্য কমিটি তৈরি করা।

- 4 FEB 2006

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Reliance moves HC against bid

Seeks cancellation of entire bidding process, flights normal

HT Corporate Bureau
New Delhi, February 2

HAVING LOST out in the race for modernisation of Delhi airport despite being the top financial bidder, Anil Ambani's Reliance Airports Developers moved Delhi High Court on Thursday seeking cancellation of the entire bidding process, terming as "illegal and arbitrary" the decision to award the contract to GMR Fraport. Late on Wednesday evening it sent a missive to the Empowered Group of Ministers (EgoM) members stating that it was disturbed to note how "GMR Fraport is being favoured".

It stated that AAI chairman B. Ramalingam and joint secretary, civil aviation, Sanjoy Narayan — who were both members of the inter-ministerial group that vetted the proposal — were both on the board of directors of GMR-owned Hyderabad International Airport Ltd, hence alleging that there was a clear case of conflict of interests. Asserting that the company had emerged as one of the two highest technically qualified bidders for the two airports, he said Reliance had also emerged as the highest financial bidder for Delhi airport. In its petition filed through counsel Manali and Mahesh Agarwal, the company sought cancellation of the entire bidding process stating that the decision of the authorities to grant the right to GMR-Fraport was "arbitrary and illegal" and made the AAI, Union government and GMR consortium respondents.

On Wednesday evening, the company had protested to the EGoM against the manner in which they were informed at the last minute of the changes in the request for proposal (RFP) or tender conditions.



The scene at Delhi airport

Raw deal for passengers

AIR TRAFFIC was largely unaffected on Day 2 of the nationwide strike by airport employees but passenger amenities suffered and travellers had to face the ire of protestors who blocked entry and exit points at terminals, mainly in Delhi. Protesting against the privatisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports, protesting employees blocked all entry and exit points at the domestic terminal in Delhi, throwing traffic out of gear. However, flight operations were reported to be largely normal. Airline officials claimed air traffic was normal, but passengers arriving at the airport complained of delays. Protesting employees of the AAI, however, vowed to continue their road blockade until the government withdrew its airport privatisation plans. "The road blockade will continue indefinitely", Joy Lal, joint general secretary of the AAI Employees' Union, said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

03 FEB 2006

PM launches rural job guarantee scheme

Bandlapalli (AP): The much-touted rural job guarantee programme of the UPA government was launched on Thursday across the country with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh formally kick-starting it, saying it will give the impoverished a chance to live with dignity and self-respect.

Simultaneously the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which the PM described as the greatest achievement of the Congress-led government at the Centre, saw the light of the day in 200 selected districts spread over 27 states.

The entire country will be covered within four years.

Singh, in his address, said though substantial progress had been made by the country, the problem of unemployment and poverty continued to haunt. "The founding fathers of our nation dreamt of a country which was free from poverty, hunger and unemployment. It is a serious concern that many people of the country still suffer from the age-old problems," he said. Terming the programme as "historic", the PM said his government had fulfilled the promise made in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP). In her speech, UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi said the programme was "a new beginning" towards poverty eradication. Agencies

THE TIMES OF INDIA

03 FEB 2006

Flights normal on second day of airport strike

Protesters Block Entry, Exit Terminals In Delhi

New Delhi: Air traffic was largely unaffected on day two of the nationwide strike on Thursday by airport employees but passenger amenities suffered and travellers had to face the ire of protesters who blocked entry and exit points at terminals, mainly in Delhi.

Protesting against privatisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports, striking employees blocked all entry and exit points at the domestic terminal in Delhi which threw traffic out of gear. However, flight operations were reported to be largely normal. Airline officials claimed that air traffic was normal, but passengers arriving at the airport complained of delays. The striking employees of the Airports Authority of India (AAI), however, vowed to continue their road blockade until the government withdrew its airport privatisation plans.

RESTRAINT ON STAFF: The Delhi high court on Thursday restrained the agitating employees from staging any form of protests within a 500-metre radius of the Delhi airport.

"The road blockade will continue indefinitely," Joy Lal, joint general secretary of the AAI Employees Union, said. Security was tight at the airport in view of the strike with personnel of the CISE, the CRPF and the Delhi police deployed in large numbers. Passenger amenities also took a hit at the NSC Bose International Airport in Kolkata where flight operations remained almost normal, with



Airports Authority of India employees lie in front of a mini van and block the road during a protest outside the airport in New Delhi on Thursday

Reliance moves Delhi HC on bids

Having lost in the race for modernisation of Delhi airport despite emerging as the top financial bidder, Anil Ambani's Reliance Airport Developer on Thursday moved the Delhi high court seeking cancellation of the entire bidding process terming it as "illegal and arbitrary" the decision to award the contract to GMR Fraport. Immediately after moving the court, a spokesperson for the company said "We have filed a petition in the Delhi high court seeking fairness and transparency in the awards of the contracts of both airports." Asserting that the company had emerged as one of the two highest technically qualified bidder for the two airports, he said Reliance had also emerged as the highest financial bidder for the Delhi airport. The move follows the decision of empowered group of ministers on Tuesday to give GMR-Fraport a choice between the two airports provided they matched the top financial bid on the ground that the combine was the sole technically qualified bidder scoring over 80 marks. Agencies

most of the planes taking off and landing as per schedule.

Passengers had to carry their own luggage as conveyor belts were not working, aero-bridge was not in service, the toilets were stinking and airconditioning system was not functioning properly in some pockets. Outside the terminal buildings, the striking employees continued their dharna and shouted slogans against the

Centre's decision to privatise the two airports but flight operations were not disturbed. In Mumbai, the flight schedule was not disrupted as police maintained heavy bandobast and cordoned off the entry point at the terminal building to facilitate passenger movement.

Two companies of Rapid Action Force and extra police force were deployed to prevent any untoward incident, police said. Agencies

বেসরকারিকরণ রোখা নয়, এখন চাকরি রক্ষা নিয়েই আলোচনায় রাজি বামেরা

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি, ২ ফেব্রুয়ারি: শেষ পর্যন্ত মনমোহন সিংহ সরকারের কঠোর অবস্থানে পিছু হটতে বাধ্য হলেন বাম নেতৃত্ব। বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারিকরণের বিরোধিতা থেকে সরে এসে এখন মূলত কর্মীদের চাকরি রক্ষা নিয়ে আলোচনা করতে তাঁরা রাজি হয়েছেন। এ কথা জানার পরে আগামিকাল বাম নেতাদের সঙ্গে কথা বলতে রাজি হন প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও। কর্মীদের চাকরি নিশ্চয়তা বিষয়ে একটি সূত্র নিয়ে কর্মীদের ফোরাম ও ট্রেড ইউনিয়নের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করবেন বিমানমন্ত্রী প্রফুল্ল পটেল।

বিমানবন্দরের বেসরকারিকরণের বিরোধিতায় ৪৮ ঘণ্টা ধরে চলতে থাকা আন্দোলন আজ দিল্লি হাইকোর্টের একটি রায়ে প্রথম ধাক্কা খায়। সরকারের নির্দেশে এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটি অফ ইন্ডিয়া (এএআই) হাইকোর্টে মামলা দাখিল করে। বিক্ষোভকারীদের জন্য যাত্রী পরিষেবা ব্যাহত হচ্ছে জানিয়ে তার বিহিত চায়। আদালতের নির্দেশ, বিমানবন্দর ও দিল্লিতে বিমানমন্ত্রকের সদর দফতর, রাজীব গান্ধী ভবনের ৫০০ মিটার দূরত্বের মধ্যে আন্দোলনকারীরা ঢুকতে পারবে না। বিমানবন্দরের কাজকর্মে ও যাত্রীদের যাতায়াতে কোনও রকম ব্যাধাত ঘটানো যাবে না। আদালতের আদেশ অমান্য হলে গ্রেফতারের ক্ষমতা পেয়ে যায় কর্তৃপক্ষ। আদালতের রায় জানার পরে বিমানমন্ত্রী বলেন, এসমার মতো কোনও আইন প্রয়োগ করার কোনও ইচ্ছে তাদের নেই। আলোচনায় তাঁরা

রাজি। তবে সরকার তার সিদ্ধান্ত থেকে পিছু হটবে না।

আন্দোলনের সমর্থনকারী বাম নেতৃত্বও বুঝতে পারেন, বিমানবন্দর আধুনিকীকরণে বেসরকারি সংস্থা বাছাই হয়ে যাওয়ার পরে এ বার আর ভেলের মতো মন্ত্রিসভার সিদ্ধান্ত স্থগিত রাখার প্রশ্ন নেই। ফলে তাঁরা যে এখন কর্মচারীদের চাকরি রক্ষা করতেই

আলোচনায় রাজি, তার ইঙ্গিত দেন। তার পরেই প্রফুল্ল পটেল হায়দরাবাদে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে আলোচনা করেন।

ইতিমধ্যে বিষয়টি নিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রী ক্যাবিনেট সচিবের সঙ্গে কথা বলেন। ক্যাবিনেট সচিব জানান, এসমা প্রয়োগ না করলেও সরকার বিমানবন্দরে আন্দোলনকারীদের ঢোকা এবং বিক্ষোভ দেখানো নিষিদ্ধ করতে পারে।

সেই সাংবিধানিক ক্ষমতা সরকারের রয়েছে। কারণ, বিমান চলাচল জরুরি পরিষেবা এবং সেই পরিষেবা ব্যাহত হচ্ছে। এ ছাড়া ডিআইপিদের ‘সিকিওরিটি জোন’ হিসাবে বিমানবন্দরে নিরাপত্তা রক্ষাও একটা বড় দায়িত্ব। আর এই দায়িত্ব এখন ব্যুরো অফ সিভিল অ্যাভিয়েশন সিকিওরিটির। এ সংক্রান্ত আইন অনুযায়ী বিমানবন্দরে নিরাপত্তা রক্ষায় বিক্ষোভ দেখানো বন্ধ করা এবং গ্রেফতারের সংস্থান রয়েছে।

তবে বাম নেতৃত্ব বেসরকারিকরণ রোখার মূল দাবি থেকে সরে আসায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীও আলোচনায় বসতে রাজি হন। আসলে মুখে তাঁরা যা-ই বলুন, বাম নেতৃত্ব বৈঠকে বসার এই শর্ত মেনেই নিয়েছেন যে, আলোচনা হবে বেসরকারিকরণ নিয়ে নয়, কর্মীদের চাকরি রক্ষা নিয়ে। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বৈঠকে সিপিএম ও সিপিআইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক যথাক্রমে প্রকাশ কারাট ও এ বি বর্ধন, সিটি সভাপতি এম কে পাক্কে এবং এইটাকের সাধারণ সম্পাদক গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত থাকছেন।

বিমানমন্ত্রী ইতিমধ্যেই পাক্কে এবং গুরুদাসবাবুর কাছে কর্মীদের চাকরি রক্ষার প্রস্তাব ব্যাখ্যা করেছেন। সরকারি সূত্রের খবর, ৬০ শতাংশ কর্মীকে নয়া সংস্থায় নিয়ে নেওয়া হবে। পনেরো শতাংশ কর্মীকে এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটি নিজের কাছে রাখবে। ১০ থেকে ১৫ শতাংশ কর্মীর অল্প দিনের মধ্যে অবসর নেওয়ার কথা। বাকি কর্মীদেরও যাতে নতুন সংস্থা নিয়ে নেয়,

এর পর সাতের পাতায়

যত্রতত্র জঞ্জাল, শৌচাগার উপচে বিমানবন্দর নরক

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা: ফিকির সভায় যতই দুঃখপ্রকাশ করুন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বৃদ্ধদের ভট্টাচার্য, বৃহস্পতিবারেও কলকাতা বিমানবন্দরে ন্যূনতম সুযোগ সুবিধা থেকে বঞ্চিত হয়েছেন যাত্রীরা।

বাম ইউনিয়নের কর্মবিরতি সারা দিন চলছে। ভারতীয় বায়ুসেনার সাহায্য নিয়ে বিমানও ওঠানামা করেছে। তবে, কর্মবিরতির ফলে বৃহস্পতিবার কলকাতা বিমানবন্দরের যে ভয়দশা বেরিয়ে পড়েছে, তা বিমানবন্দরের ইতিহাসে কখনও দেখা যায়নি।

দেশ বিদেশের যাত্রীরা এ দিন কলকাতায় নেমে প্রচণ্ড অসুবিধার মধ্যে পড়েন। কনভেয়ার বেল্ট বন্ধ। বিমান যেখানে দাঁড়িয়েছে, সেখান থেকে মূল ভবনটি বেশ কিছুটা দূরে। ফলে যাত্রীদের নিজের মালপত্র টেনে নিয়ে বাইরে আসতে হয়েছে। মালপত্র টেনে আনার ট্রলিরও অভাব। শিলচর থেকে কলকাতায় পৌঁছে নূপুর অগ্রবাল যথেষ্ট বিরক্ত হয়েই জানালেন, “অনেক উড়ানের যাত্রীদের ব্যাগ রাখা ছিল। সেই স্তূপ থেকে নিজের ব্যাগ খুঁজতে আমার মাথা খারাপ হয়ে গিয়েছে। অনেকটা হেঁটে বিল্ডিংয়ের অন্য প্রান্ত থেকে কোনও রকমে একটা ট্রলি যোগাড় করে এনেছিলাম, তাই রক্ষা।”

নূপুরের মতো রক্ষা পাননি সকলে। মুহূর্ত থেকে কলকাতায় এসে রণজয় চট্টোপাধ্যায়ের প্রশ্ন, “কই, মুহূর্তের তো এত খারাপ অবস্থা নয়? সেখানে

এর পর সাতের পাতায়

● বিমানবন্দরেই পচতে বসেছে অর্কিড, ফুলফল...পৃঃ ৪

চাকরি রক্ষা নিয়ে আলোচনা

প্রথম পাতার পর

তার জন্য চাপ দেবেন বিমানমন্ত্রী নিজে। এই সূত্রটি নিয়ে কাল তিনি ধর্মঘটী ফোরাম এবং ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন নেতাদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করবেন।

আসলে সরকারপক্ষের সঙ্গে এই সংঘাত মূলত ট্রেড ইউনিয়নগুলিরই। ট্রেড ইউনিয়নকে সমর্থন করতে বাধ্য হলেও (পাক্কে চাপেই পলিটব্যুরো বৈঠক পিছাতে হয়েছে) এই আন্দোলন নিয়ে বাম নেতৃত্বের মধ্যেও যথেষ্ট মতভেদ রয়েছে। নেতাদের একাংশ বুঝতে পারছেন, এই আন্দোলন চলতে থাকলে শহুরে ভোটারদের একটা বড় অংশের সমর্থন হারাতে পারেন। অন্য দিকে, কড়া ব্যবস্থা নিলে কেন্দ্রের জনপ্রিয়তা বাড়বে বই কমবে না।

তাই বাম দলগুলির তরফে দেওয়া বিবৃতিতে ধর্মঘটকে সমর্থন জানানো হলেও তার মূল কথা হল, ধর্মঘটীদের সঙ্গে আলোচনায় বসুক কেন্দ্র। বাম নেতাদের একাংশ এ-ও মনে করছেন, প্রথমেই কর্মবিরতি শুরু করায় আন্দোলন ‘কানাগলিতে’ চলে গিয়েছে। কর্মীদের চাকরি নিরাপত্তাই এখন তাঁদের কাছে এখন সবচেয়ে বড় প্রশ্ন। বেসরকারিকরণের বৃহত্তর প্রশ্নে বামদের আশা, বিষয়টি আদালতে চলে যাওয়ায় (রিলায়েন্স আদালতে গিয়েছে) এখন সেখান থেকেই দিগনির্দেশ আসবে।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

03 FEB 2006

Fight of fancy

PLAYING HARDBALL can take on various forms. The Left's preferred version happens to be the one that's wrapped in a fervent demand for social justice. Not only does this serve the purpose of our communists doing something — anything — to remain under the spotlights, but it also makes them come across as a righteous lot doing their bit to save the 'unprotected masses' from the onslaught of State aggression. The latest proletarian show is the agitation unleashed by airport employees, backed by Left parties, against the Delhi and Mumbai airport modernisation programme launched by the central government. The Left has already started displaying its usual calisthenics by insisting that it is not against modernisation but against the project going into private hands. Considering that the Airports Authority of India's track record is there for all to see, this is nothing short of being a dog in the manger.

The agitation — that the protestors insist is not a 'strike' but a 'stop-work without a time limit', the difference being too subtle for the rest of us to figure out — has already made Indians think twice about air travel in this country. Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel has clearly stated that there is no fear of an en masse retrenchment. According to the

terms of the contract, all AAI employees in Delhi and Mumbai will be on "compulsory three-year deputation" to the two private companies, after which at least 60 per cent of the workforce will be absorbed. This is not something that has been chalked out in a shadowy boardroom, but an issue that's out in the open. So what is the reason for the Left's heavy-duty arm-flailing? The only answer we can think of is that, once again, it is playing to the gallery.

Used to a work culture that considers productivity and efficiency to be mere digressions — if not downright obstacles — the Left has held a whole nation to ransom. It is creditable that Mr Patel has stated he will continue to try to bring around the agitators and convince them that the government has no nefarious plans up its sleeves. But he must also be prepared to take stern action if things get out of hand. A strike of this nature in a sector that is bursting to expand is not a matter to be taken lightly. The Civil Aviation Ministry alone cannot handle such an eventuality. If need be, the entire government and the prime minister should step in and take action. India can't be held hostage to the whims of 22,000 AAI employees; a nation needs to be served. Surely, this is something that the Left can understand.

Violence in city, flights hit in Kolkata

Five Hurt As Cops Wield The Baton To Disperse Mob At Mumbai Airport

New Delhi: Protesting the privatisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports, hundreds of workers of the state-owned Airports Authority of India (AAI) began a nationwide indefinite strike on Wednesday. However, flight schedules remained unaffected except in all the places except Kolkata, where the Air Traffic Control (ATC) had declared the airport "non-operational".

The ATC at Netaji S C Bose international airport in Kolkata issued a notam (notice to airmen) in the afternoon saying no flight can take-off or land. The order came after fire brigade personnel and those in charge of lighting at the runway joined the agitation. The ATC was forced to issue the notice as these two services are essential for landing and take off.

In Mumbai, the AAI strike was marred by violence on Wednesday with the police resorting to lathi-charge to disperse workers on a sit-in at Chhatrapati Shivaji terminus here.

At least five persons, including a policeman, were injured after the police resorted to lathi-charge to stop the employees from breaking the police cordon in their attempt to enter the airport terminal building. "Five persons were injured in the commotion following the lathi-charge, but no one was injured in the lathi-charge," said DCP Ravindra Shengaonkar.

However, the AAI employees' union claimed that about 25 people were injured and taken to Nanavati Hospital and other nearby medical centres for treatment. In fact, the cops had to resort to lathi-charge thrice. First to prevent workers from breaking the cordon, then to stop them from entering the airport and finally to disperse the agitators as they blocked the car parking area to disrupt passenger movement.

Joint secretary of the AAI employees' union Nitin Jadav, however, condemned the police lathi-charge and claimed it was unprovoked.

After the lathi-charge, workers dispersed but returned after a while and once again staged a sit-in dharna at the airport entrance. However, the air traffic and passenger movement remained unaffected as air traffic controllers did not join the strike. Most airlines, including Jet Airways and Indian, reported normalcy of flight operations. Agencies



A policeman (top) thrashes a protestor at Chhatrapati Shivaji airport in Mumbai while the Indian Airlines counter (below) at the Bangalore airport wears a deserted look with the staff staying away from work

Bidding process gets cabinet seal

The Union cabinet on Wednesday approved of the bidding process for the modernisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports. While GMR-Fraport will revamp the Delhi airport, GVK-South African airports consortia will do the Mumbai job. "The process of bidding dealt with by the empowered group of ministers on the basis of the recommendations of the inter-ministerial group and the group of technical experts was reported to the cabinet. The entire process of bidding was approved," parliamentary affairs minister P R Dasmunshi told reporters after the cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Asked about the questions raised by Reliance about the bidding process, he said, "Any individual, group or industry has the right to go to court. The cabinet does not discuss these matters." Agencies

Batons can't beat airport employees

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, Feb. 1. — Employees of the Airports Authority of India began their indefinite strike today to protest the privatisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports. In Mumbai, police and Central Industrial Security Force personnel baton charged the protesting employees this morning outside the Mumbai airport when they attempted to break a determined barricade and force their entry into the premises. About 22,000 employees gathered outside the airport shouting slogans against the sell-off. They turned more aggressive and a section of them started throwing stones at the security personnel which invited instant response with a moderate baton charge. That the agitators were blocking entrance for the passengers was given as the justification for the baton charge. According to AAI Employees' Union joint secretary Mr Nitin Jadhav, about 25 women agitators received injuries and were treated at nearby Nanavati Hospital. He echoed the Delhi agitators when he said the workers were bent upon indefinite strike and were in no mood to relent unless the Union government rescinded the privatisation decision.

Workers shouted slogans and burnt effigies of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, UPA chairperson Mrs Sonia Gandhi and civil aviation minister Mr Praful Patel at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. The Palam branch secretary, Airport Authority Employees Union, Mr



A traveller laden with baggage walks to catch a taxi outside the domestic terminal of Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi. (Right) Airport Authority of India employees protest outside the Mumbai airport. On Wednesday. — AFP & UNI



Pramod Sharma, said: "Unless the government heeds our demand to withdraw its decision to privatise Mumbai and Delhi airports, we will not stop our agitation. We are ready to even sacrifice our lives. We are only opposing handing over the modernisation process to private players. The AAI is fully capable of doing that."

The AAI officers association also started a relay hunger strike. Though Air

Traffic Controllers are not on strike, the ATC guild has expressed solidarity with the agitating workers.

Earlier in the day, about 500 members of the Airports Authority Employees' Union staged a sit-in agitation. They blocked the exit terminal, leading to chaos. Police intervention led to heated exchanges and clashes. The roadblock was eventually cleared and normal traffic flow was resumed after sometime. According

AAI files caveat

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, Feb. 1. — The Airports Authority of India today filed a caveat in Bombay High Court, Delhi High Court and Supreme Court saying that they should be heard in the matter if a petition is filed challenging sanction of bids for privatisation of Mumbai and Delhi airports. The International Airports Authority of India Officers' Association also moved the Supreme Court against a Delhi High Court verdict dismissing its petition challenging government's decision to allow 74 per cent private equity in joint ventures for modernisation of airports. —PTI

to sources, nearly 80 per cent of personnel were on strike with house-keeping work being affected severely. Authorities have

sought help from Sulabh International. Delhi Police, Central Industrial Security Force and Central Reserve Police

Force were deployed at the airport to monitor the situation.

Meanwhile, AAI director-general Mr BK Arora said that the stir did not affect airport operations. "All flights ran as per schedule and there were no reports of any passenger being inconvenienced," he stated.

The air traffic at Mumbai airport was unaffected despite the agitation since the Air Traffic Control personnel report-

ed for work. Passenger check and luggage clearance went off without a glitch. Only services affected were ground handling, cleaning and electrical maintenance. Bagdogra airport too felt the heat owing to the agitation. Air Deccan cancelled its flight from Kolkata to Bagdogra today and the Jet Airways flight for Kolkata, which was scheduled for take off at 1.45 p.m. from Bagdogra left five hours late.

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 1. — The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, declared today that India attached great importance to having most friendly relations with Pakistan and stressed that history and destiny obliged both to "stay engaged" to sort out differences.

Answering a wide range of questions on India's external relations — from Pakistan to US-India

nuclear cooperation and its stand on the Iran issue at a nationally televised press conference here, Dr Singh said: "I do not wish to minimise the difficulties (involved in India's ties with Islamabad), but I believe the destiny and history of our two countries oblige us to stay engaged," he said.

"We have to stay engaged despite the difficulties that may be on the horizon. I

attach great importance to having the friendliest possible relations with Pakistan," he stressed.

Responding to a question on Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's reported remarks at the World Economic Forum at Davos that the two countries were enemies, Dr Singh said: "We can choose our friends, but we have no choice when it comes to our

neighbours." He said the government was committed to a "pragmatic and practical" solution to all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir, but made it clear there was no question of transferring any Indian territory in the process.

On the positive side, he noted that there had been real progress in terms of greater people-to-people

contact, bus services connecting each other and opening up of five points along the LoC, all of which had helped long divided families on either side to meet.

About tackling the Kashmir problem, he said the government was willing to interact with all shades of opinion in the state provided they were ready to eschew violence, recalling

'History, destiny make India, Pak stay together'

that he had already met a number of separatist leaders such as Yaseen Mallik and Sajjad Lone.

He said India had a "legitimate" claim for a permanent seat in an expanded UN Security Council and said there was a growing recognition worldwide about this but admitted there could be "some difficulties on the way". He also spoke about

India's growing relations with countries across the world, particularly the USA, Asean, China, Singapore, Thailand, South Africa and Brazil.

'India under no pressure' India is not acting "under any type of pressure" on foreign policy issues, including the nuclear deal with the US and Iran's referral to the Security Council, he said. There was "no question of bending" to the USA over civil nuclear agreement, the PM said.

Airport employees stage protest demonstrations

Nod for selection of firms for Delhi, Mumbai airports revamp

Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the selection of two consortia for modernisation of the Delhi and Mumbai airports, even as employees of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) across the country staged demonstrations against the privatisation decision.

However, air services throughout the country remained by and large unaffected.

Civil Aviation Secretary Ajay Prasad said operations of all domestic airlines remained normal in most parts of the country. There had been no drop in passenger loads carried by airlines.

Disruption in Kolkata

Only Kolkata witnessed some disruption. This was mainly be-

cause some personnel were not able to man the fire engines. "We have to ensure the safety of passengers," he said.

Mr. Prasad said the Government had explained to the AAI employees the steps being taken to protect their best interests even after the modernisation process began.

The two successful bidders have agreed to absorb 60 per cent of the AAI staff, though the Government had mandated that they need to absorb only 40 per cent of the workforce. Besides, the process will see the AAI grow and have more revenues to focus attention on developing more airports," he said.

Minister of State for Civil Aviation Praful Patel told reporters after the Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh: "The Cabinet

has accorded its approval to the report of empowered Group of Ministers (eGoM) on Delhi and Mumbai airports modernisation and restructuring plan. The final approval has been given. The process will now move ahead."

The eGoM, headed by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, on Tuesday cleared the financial bids of GMR-Fraport and GVK-South African Airports consortia for the Rs 5,200 crore airport modernisation projects.

To ensure that the flights to Kolkata returned to their normal schedule at the earliest, Mr. Patel said, he had requested the West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya to help in maintaining normality at the airport.

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THE HINDU

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সঙ্কটে বিমানবন্দর

দিগ্নি এবং মুম্বই বিমানবন্দরের বেসরকারিকরণের সিদ্ধান্তটি অবশেষে বাস্তবায়িত হইল। বিমানবন্দরগুলিকে আন্তর্জাতিক মানে উন্নীত করিবার জন্যই এই সিদ্ধান্ত। বিমানবন্দরগুলির দায়িত্ব পাইয়াছে জি এম আর-ফ্র্যাণ্ডস্‌ এবং জি ডি কে নামক দুইটি সংস্থা। দুইটি সংস্থাই ভারতীয় এবং বিদেশি যৌথ মালিকানার। বিমানবন্দরের বেসরকারিকরণের সিদ্ধান্তে প্রত্যাশিত ভাবেই বামপন্থীরা অসন্তোষ প্রকাশ করিয়াছেন এবং তাঁহাদের অনুগামী শ্রমিক সংগঠনগুলি কর্মবিরতির সিদ্ধান্ত লইয়াছে। বামপন্থীদের দাবি, বিমানবন্দরের যাবতীয় উন্নয়নের ভার রাষ্ট্রীয় সংস্থা এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটি অব ইন্ডিয়া-র হস্তেই রাখিতে হইবে। আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দর মাত্রেই দেশের প্রবেশদ্বার। আর এই কারণেই বিমানবন্দরগুলিতে নিরাপত্তার প্রশ্নটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। বিদেশি সংস্থার হস্তে এয়ারপোর্টের ভার সমর্পণ করিলে কোনও বিশেষ সময়ে এই নিরাপত্তা বিঘ্নিত হইতে পারে কি না, সে বিষয়ে কাহারও সংশয় থাকিতে পারে। সুতরাং, নিরাপত্তার প্রশ্নে যদি বিমানবন্দরে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের প্রশ্নে কেহ আপত্তি তোলেন, তাহা এক কথায় উড়াইয়া দেওয়া চলে না, বিষয়টি তর্কাতীত নহে।

কিন্তু আপত্তির কারণটি যদি হয় বিমানবন্দরে বেসরকারি বিনিয়োগ, তাহা হইলে বলিতে হয়, বিরোধীরা বাস্তবকে অস্বীকার করিতেছেন। যাঁহাদের বিদেশি বিমানবন্দর সম্বন্ধে ন্যূনতম অভিজ্ঞতাও আছে, তাঁহারা জানেন, ভারতের প্রতিটি বিমানবন্দরই আন্তর্জাতিক মান হইতে শত যোজন পিছাইয়া আছে। বর্তমানে এ দেশে বিনিয়োগের পরিমাণে অ-পূর্ব বৃদ্ধি ঘটিয়াছে, এই বিনিয়োগের একটি বড় অংশই বিদেশি। সুতরাং, বাণিজ্যিক প্রয়োজনেই ভিনদেশি পুঁজিপতিদের ভারতে আসিবার প্রয়োজন বাড়িয়াছে। অন্য দিকে, বিভিন্ন বেসরকারি বিমানসংস্থার বিমান চালু হওয়ায় বিমানবন্দরগুলির উপর চাপ বাড়িয়াছে। এই পরিস্থিতিতে যে দেশের ভগ্নপ্রায় বিমানবন্দরগুলির সংস্কার এবং আধুনিকীকরণ একান্ত প্রয়োজন, এই কথা একমাত্র কোনও বাস্তবজ্ঞানহীন ব্যক্তিই অস্বীকার করিতে পারে। বিমানবন্দরগুলির আধুনিকীকরণের তীব্র প্রয়োজন মানিয়া লইলে দুইটি বিকল্প থাকে: এক, সরকারি ব্যয়ে সংস্কার, আর দুই, বেসরকারিকরণ। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের বর্তমান আর্থিক পরিস্থিতি এবং সংস্কারের উৎসাহ দেখিলে সেই উদ্যোগে কী পরিমাণ আধুনিকীকরণ সম্ভব, সে বিষয়ে সংশয় জাগে। অর্থাৎ, হাতে থাকে একটিমাত্র উপায়: বিমানবন্দরে বেসরকারি বিনিয়োগ।

কিন্তু বামপন্থীরা সচরাচর যুক্তি-তর্কের অপেক্ষায় থাকেন না। তাঁহারা বিমানবন্দরগুলিতে কর্মবিরতি ঘোষণা করিয়াছেন। নিশ্চিত ভাবেই, তাঁহাদের এই সিদ্ধান্তে বিমান পরিষেবা ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হইবে। তাহাতে দেশের কিছু অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষতি হইবে নিশ্চয়, কিন্তু বামপন্থীদের এই অবস্থানটির ফলে আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্যমহলে ভারত সম্পর্কে যে বার্তা পৌঁছাইল, তাহার ফলে হওয়া ক্ষতির তুলনায় এই ক্ষতি নিতান্তই স্বল্প। বর্তমানে আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্যের বাজারে ভারত পুঁজির একটি অন্যতম গন্তব্যে রূপান্তরিত হইয়াছে। এই অবস্থায় যদি বিদেশি বিনিয়োগকারীদের ধারণা হয়, ভারতে বিনিয়োগ করিতে গেলে স্বল্প অথবা বিনা প্ররোচনাতেই জঙ্গি বিরোধিতার সম্মুখীন হইতে হইবে, তাহা হইলে তাঁহারা বিনিয়োগের প্রশ্নে কতটা উৎসাহী হইবেন, সে বিষয়ে সংশয় থাকিয়া যায়। আর যে কোনও গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ক্ষেত্রেই বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের প্রশ্নে বামপন্থীদের বিবেচনামূলক বিরোধিতার ইতিহাস স্মরণে রাখিলে এমন ধারণা হওয়া বিচিত্র নহে। বামপন্থীদের অনর্থক জঙ্গিপন্যার ফলে বিনিয়োগের বাজারে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের যে বদনাম হইয়াছিল, তাহা ঘুচাইতে প্রায় তিন দশক কাটিয়া গিয়াছে। বস্তুত, এই বারেও যখন সারা ভারতে কর্মবিক্ষেপ সত্ত্বেও বিমান উঠা-নামা করিয়াছে, একমাত্র বামপন্থী কলিকাতাতেই বিমান পরিষেবা একেবারে স্তব্ধ করিয়া দেওয়া হয়। বামপন্থীদের এই আচরণ 'যে ডালে বসিয়া আছে, সেই ডালেই কুঠারাঘাত' করিবার প্রকৃষ্ট উদাহরণ। এ রাজ্যে যখন বহু প্রচেষ্টার শেষে বিনিয়োগ আসিতে আরম্ভ করিয়াছে, তখন এই রূপ অবিশ্বাস্যকারী আন্দোলন রাজ্যের ভাবমূর্তির কী পরিমাণ ক্ষতি করিতে পারে, সে ধারণা বোধ হয় বামপন্থীদের নাই, আর যদি থাকে, তবে বলিতে হয়, তাঁহারা রাজ্যের স্বার্থ লইয়া বিন্দুমাত্র ভাবিত নন, তাঁহাদের রাজনৈতিক স্বার্থ চরিতার্থ হইলেই যথেষ্ট।

Airport projects head southwards

GMR, GVK Set To Bag Delhi, Mumbai Contracts

IAF men on standby as employees threaten strike

New Delhi: Indian Air Force personnel, including air traffic controllers, have been put on emergency standby in view of the threat to go on strike by Left-controlled Airports Authority of India Employees unions.

A defence ministry spokesman said all IAF air traffic controllers and ground controlling staff have been told to be on 24 hours standby in case the unions carry out their threat and disrupt civil flight operations.

The Airports Authority of India Employees Joint Forum on Tuesday threatened to stop work immediately after formal announcement of the contract for modernisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports. As soon as formal announcement of the bids are made, airport employees and officers across the country would stop work, M K Ghoshal, convener of the Forum said.

In a bid to assuage the agitated employees, Union civil aviation minister Praful 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.

Meanwhile, the government could consider imposing Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) to prevent any disruption of air traffic. Sources said the option to impose ESMA was open in case the employees went on a flash strike. However, no decision has been taken as yet.

The civil aviation ministry headquarters at Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan here, which also houses the AAI head office, was under a virtual siege by police and paramilitary personnel, even as hundreds of employees gathered there for a lunch-hour demonstration. Agencies



Airport employees raise slogans outside Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan, the aviation ministry office where the meeting on the modernisation of airports was held, in New Delhi on Tuesday

New Delhi: Two South India-based industrial groups GMR and Reddy's GVK are all set to get the contracts for modernisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports respectively.

Even though GMR-Fraport was the second highest financial bidder for the modernisation of the two metro airports, with an investment of about Rs 5,400 crore, it is going to opt for Delhi by matching the top bidder, Reliance-ASA in terms of revenue share to government, sources said.

GMR-Fraport was given the option to match the top bidder at either of the airport, as it was the sole technically qualified bidder among the five aspirants for Delhi and six for Mumbai airports. In the process, GMR which had bid 43.6 per cent revenue share for Delhi would match that of Reliance's 46 per cent.

For Mumbai, Reddy's GVK emerged as the top bidder offering a revenue share of 38 per cent, followed by GMR 33 per cent, DS group's 28.12 per cent and Re-

liance's 21.33 per cent. A final decision on awarding of the contracts would be taken later by the empowered Group of Ministers, headed by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee.

Losing Delhi airport project to rival GMR-Fraport consortium despite emerging as the top financial bidder, Anil Ambani's Reliance Airport Developers on Tuesday lashed out at the bid process, saying changes in tender conditions hours before the final decision were 'untenable'.

Immediately after the financial bids for the Rs 5,400 crore airport modernisation projects at Delhi and Mumbai were opened, a Reliance spokesperson said: "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. "We are advised these changes are a complete departure from the tender conditions and are untenable," he said in a statement.

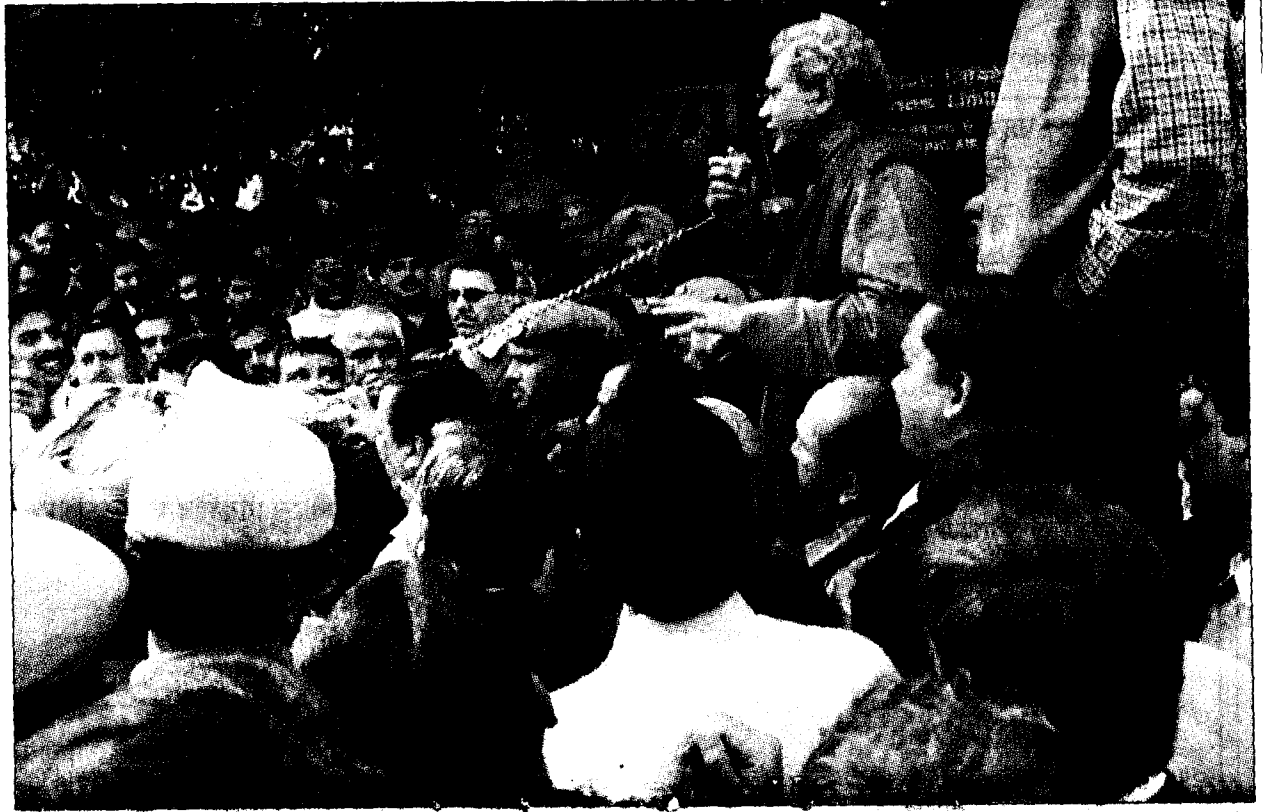
A spokesperson of DS group, yet another aspirant for the two airports, declined to comment. GMR-Fraport, the sole technically qualified bidder in the race, was given the option of choosing one of the two airports and matching the highest bidder and accordingly, it matched Reliance's 46 per cent revenue share bid for Delhi airport, although the group had finished second with 43.64 per cent.

GMR was also the second highest bidder for Mumbai airport with a revenue share bid of 33 per cent, behind top bidder GVK who had quoted a revenue share of 38 per cent. Stating that the company was among the two highest technically bidder for both the airports, the Reliance spokesperson said that the last-minute changes were a complete violation of tender conditions as stipulated in request for proposal (RFP).

"There was no provision in RFP or tender condition to give any bidder an option to match the highest bid, that too selectively for only one airport," he said. Agencies

২ বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারি হাতে, আজ ধর্মঘট দায়িত্ব পেল ২ দক্ষিণী সংস্থা, ক্ষুব্ধ রিলায়েন্স

আজকালের প্রতিবেদন: দিল্লি ও কলকাতা ৩১ জানুয়ারি— তুমুল বিক্ষোভ আর বিতর্কের মধ্যে দিল্লি এবং মুম্বই বিমানবন্দরের ৫,৪০০ কোটি টাকার বেসরকারীকরণের প্রথম ধাপ চুকিয়ে ফেলল সরকার। দর প্রক্রিয়া শেষ। দিল্লি বিমানবন্দর 'আধুনিকীকরণ'-এর ভার নিচ্ছে জি এম আর-ফ্র্যাণ্ডেট কনসোর্টিয়াম। অনিল আস্থানির মুখের গ্রাস ছিনিয়ে নিল তারা শেষ মুহূর্তে। মুম্বই বিমানবন্দরও দখল করেছে হায়দরাবাদের আরেক সংস্থা জি ভি কে। এদের বাণিজ্যিক সহযোগী দক্ষিণ আফ্রিকার সংস্থা সাউথ আফ্রিকান এয়ারপোর্টস। কাল মন্ত্রিসভায় আনুষ্ঠানিক অনুমোদন। ধর্মঘটের পথে কর্মী ইউনিয়নগুলি। কাল সকাল দশটা থেকেই কাজ বন্ধ করে দেবেন বিমানবন্দর কর্মীরা। মাঝরাতে দমদম বিমানবন্দরের সিটু ইউনিয়ন অফিসে পোস্টারে লিখতে ব্যস্ত হয়ে পড়েন কর্মীরা। কর্মবিরতি ও ধর্মঘটের হুঁশিয়ারি দেওয়া পোস্টার। ধর্মঘটের সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষিত হবে সম্ভবত মন্ত্রিসভার সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণার পর। মুম্বইয়ের বিমানবন্দরে মঙ্গলবার রাতেই কাজ বন্ধ করে দেন কর্মীরা। তবে এয়ার ট্রাফিক কন্ট্রোলার কর্মীরা কাজ চালিয়ে যাওয়ায় বিমান চলাচল এখনও অব্যাহত আছে। বায়ুসেনার সহযোগিতায় বিমানবন্দর চালু রাখার প্রস্তুতি চলছে। নামে 'আধুনিকীকরণ' হলেও আদতে বিষয়টি বেসরকারীকরণ। ৩০ বছরের জন্য বিমানবন্দরের আধুনিকীকরণ ও পরিচালনার ভার চলে যাবে বেসরকারি সংস্থার হাতে। এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটি অফ ইন্ডিয়া হাতে ২৬ শতাংশ অংশীদারি থাকবে। বেসরকারি ৭৪ শতাংশ। বেসরকারি অংশীদারির মধ্যে বিদেশি শেয়ার ৪৯ শতাংশের বেশি হতে পারবে না। বিমানে পরিবহনমন্ত্রী প্রফুল্ল প্যাটেল দর প্রতিযোগিতার ফলাফল ঘোষণার সঙ্গে ধর্মঘটমুখো কর্মীদের উদ্দেশে আশ্বাসের কথা শুনিয়েছেন, কার্যত কোনও কর্মীই ছাড়াই হবেন না। আগামী তিন বছর বর্তমান কর্মীদের রাখতে বাধ্য নতুন বেসরকারি পরিচালকরা। তারপর ৬০ শতাংশ কর্মী তারা রাখবে। এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটির কাজকর্মের জন্য আরও দশ-পনেরো শতাংশ কর্মীকে সরকার রেখে দেবে। অনেকে এই তিন বছরে অবসর নেবেন। তা ছাড়া বেসরকারি সংস্থাগুলি যাতে আরও কিছু বেশি কর্মীকে নিয়ে নেন, সে ব্যাপারে আমরা অবশ্যই কথাবার্তা চালাব। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক রাজ্যে রাজ্যে নির্দেশ পাঠিয়েছে, বিমানবন্দরগুলি স্বাভাবিক রাখতে যেন সমস্ত ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়। শোনা যাচ্ছিল, এসমা জারির কথাও নাকি ভাবা হচ্ছে। প্রফুল্ল প্যাটেল এ খবর উড়িয়ে দেন। কর্মীদের কাছে সহযোগিতার আবেদন জানিয়ে বলেন, যে রকম দর পাওয়া গেছে, তাতে বোঝা যাচ্ছে, এয়ারপোর্ট অথরিটির হাল মজবুত থাকবে, দেশের অন্য বিমানবন্দরগুলির আধুনিকীকরণ ও সম্প্রসারণের কাজে সুবিধে হবে। অন্য দিকে বামীপন্থীরা ক্ষুব্ধ। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বাম নেতারা জানিয়ে দেন, এসমা জারি হলে রাস্তায় নেমে জবাব দেবেন কর্মীরা। এবং সম্মতের সম্ভাবনা। রাজীব গান্ধী ভবনের সামনে বিমানবন্দর কর্মীদের জমায়েতে সি পি এম নেতা সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি বলেন, সরকার লক্ষণরেখা ছাড়িয়ে যাচ্ছে। বোফর্স কলেঙ্কারির জেরে রাজীব গান্ধীর সরকার পড়ে গিয়েছিল। এই বেসরকারীকরণ সেদিকে ঠেলে দিতে পারে মনমোহন সিংয়ের সরকারকে। দেশের বৃহত্তম বেসরকারীকরণের এই উদ্যোগ নিয়ে সরকারকে সতর্ক করে দিয়েছে সবক'টি কেন্দ্রীয় ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন। সিটু, এ আই টি ইউ সি, এইচ এম এস-এর সঙ্গে যৌথভাবে আই এন টি ইউ সি এবং বি এম এস বিবৃতি জানিয়েছে, তারা বিমানবন্দর কর্মীদের পাশে আছে। দরপত্র খোলা নিয়ে একদিকে এখন বাণিজ্যিক মহলে তুমুল উত্তেজনা, অন্য দিকে দিল্লি, মুম্বই, কলকাতা-সহ দেশের বিভিন্ন বিমানবন্দরে ছিল তীব্র কর্মীবিক্ষোভ। বেশ কড়া নিরাপত্তার মধ্যেই অসামরিক বিমান দপ্তরের সদর দপ্তর রাজীব গান্ধী ভবনে খোলা হয় দরপত্র। এই দরপত্রের দুটি দিক আছে। একটি আর্থিক— কোন সংস্থা সরকারকে আয়ের কতটা অংশ দিতে প্রস্তুত, তার দরপত্র। অন্য দিকটি প্রযুক্তি-সংক্রান্ত। দরপত্র খোলার পর দেখা যায়, দিল্লি বিমানবন্দরের জন্য পাঁচ প্রতিযোগীর মধ্যে সর্বোচ্চ আয় ভাগাভাগির প্রস্তাব দিয়েছে রিলায়েন্স এয়ারপোর্ট ডেভেলপারস-মেম্বিকান এ এস এ কনসোর্টিয়াম। ৪৫.৯৯ শতাংশ। দ্বিতীয় স্থানে জি এম আর-ফ্র্যাণ্ডেট ৪৩ শতাংশ। মুম্বই বিমানবন্দরের ক্ষেত্রে ছয় প্রতিযোগীর



বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারীকরণের বিরুদ্ধে দিল্লিতে রাজীব গান্ধী ভবনের সামনে বাম বিক্ষোভে টায়ের চরি। মঙ্গলবার। কনি. স্যামানথ পাকডাশী

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

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২ বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারি হাতে, আজ ধর্মঘট

১ পাতার পর
মধ্যে এক নম্বরে জি ভি কে-এ সি এস এ। আরও ৩৮.৭ শতাংশ দিতে প্রস্তুত তারা। এখানেও দ্বিতীয় স্থানে জি এম আর। দর দিয়েছে ৩৩ শতাংশ। অনেক পেছনে রিলায়েন্স ২১.৩৩ শতাংশ। জি এম আর-এর মতো জি ভি কে-ও হায়দরাবাদের সংস্থা। প্রশ্ন হচ্ছে, দিল্লিতে জি এম আর কী করে এক নম্বরে চলে এল? প্রযুক্তিগত উৎকর্ষের বিচারে। হায়দরাবাদে বিমানবন্দর বানাচ্ছে তারা। প্রযুক্তি-সামর্থ্যের বিচারে শুধু জি এম আরই উপযুক্ত দরদাতা বলে গণ্য হয়। ৮০ নম্বর পেয়ে গেছে তারা এক্ষেত্রে। তাদের সুযোগ দেওয়া হয়, রিলায়েন্স যে সর্বোচ্চ দর হেঁকেছে, তার সমান দর হাঁকায়। জি এম আর লুফে নেয় এই সুযোগ। নতুন করে দর দেয় ৪৫.৯৯ শতাংশ। প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়ের নেতৃত্বে সংশ্লিষ্ট মন্ত্রী গোষ্ঠীর বৈঠকের পর প্রফুল্ল প্যাটেল জানিয়ে যান, জি এম আর এবং জি ভি কে গোষ্ঠীর নাম। রিলায়েন্স স্কিপি। আদালতে যাওয়ার কথা ভাবছে। রিলায়েন্স এয়ারপোর্ট ডেভেলপারস-এর মুখপাত্র অভিযোগ করলেন, টেন্ডারের শর্ত পরিবর্তন নিয়মনীতির বিরোধী এমনকি অসাংবিধানিক। আমরা সবচেয়ে বেশি বাজস্ব দেওয়ার কথা দিয়েছিলাম। তবু কেন বাদ পড়লাম আমরা? রিয়ায়ন্সের ক্ষোভ ও বিস্ময়, শেষ মুহূর্তে টেন্ডারের শর্তে কিছু রদবদল করে কেন তা টেলিফোনে জানানো হল? শেষ মুহূর্তের এই রদবদল নিয়মবিরুদ্ধ। এতে বাছাই করা দরদাতাদের প্রতি সরকারি নেকনজরের এবং দুটোর একটাও বিমানবন্দর রিলায়েন্সকে না দেওয়ার ব্যাপারটা স্পষ্ট। নির্ধারিত বিধি ভেঙে কোনও বিশেষ এক দরদাতাকে সর্বোচ্চ দামের সঙ্গে খাপ খাওয়ানোর সুযোগ করে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

কলকাতার খবর: দিল্লি, মুম্বই বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারীকরণ সরকারিভাবে ঘোষিত হয়নি। তাই কলকাতা বিমানবন্দরে ধর্মঘট মঙ্গলবার শুরু হল না। তবে সারাদিনই বিমানবন্দরে চলেছে কর্মীদের আন্দোলন, বিক্ষোভ কর্মসূচি। বিমানবন্দর এমপ্রয়িজ ইউনিয়নের সাধারণ সম্পাদক দীপঙ্কর ঘোষ জানালেন, বুধবার সকাল ১০টায় হবে কেন্দ্রীয় কমিটির বৈঠক। তাঁর পর ঠিক হবে আন্দোলনের মাত্রা। তবে ধর্মঘটের কর্মসূচি থেকে তাঁরা সরছেন না। সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা নিয়ে কেন্দ্র সরকার কৌশল করছে। তাই তাঁরাও আন্দোলনের কর্মসূচি আগাম জানাচ্ছেন না। কলকাতায় এদিন পলিটব্যুরো সদস্য, সি পি এমের রাজ্য সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাস বলেন, বিমানবন্দর আধুনিকীকরণ নিয়ে আমাদের কোনও আপত্তি নেই। কিন্তু একতরফাভাবে বেসরকারি সংস্থাকে দায়িত্ব দেওয়াতে আমাদের আপত্তি রয়েছে। অনিল বিশ্বাস জানান, প্রকাশ কারাত ইতিমধ্যেই এ ব্যাপারে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে আপত্তি জানিয়ে এসেছেন। ৪ ও ৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি পলিটব্যুরোর বৈঠক রয়েছে। তার আগেই বাম দলগুলোকে নিয়ে আমরা বৈঠক করব। অন্য দল এবং ট্রেড ইউনিয়নের সঙ্গেও কথা বলব। যে ভাবেই হোক আমরা এটা বন্ধ করতে চাই। চেম্বাই এবং কলকাতা নিয়ে এরকম সিদ্ধান্ত নিলেও প্রতিবাদ জানাব। আন্দোলনে কেন্দ্রীয় কর্মচারীরা: ষষ্ঠ বেতন কমিশন গঠনে টালবাহানা এবং বিমানবন্দর বেসরকারীকরণ নিয়ে সরকারের সঙ্গে সঙ্ঘাতে নামছে প্রায় সমস্ত কেন্দ্রীয় ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন। ১ মার্চ থেকে দেশ জুড়ে লাগাতার ধর্মঘটে নামবে দেশের ৩৪ লাখ কেন্দ্রীয় কর্মচারী। ৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি এ ব্যাপারে নোটিস দেওয়া হবে রেল, ডাক, প্রতিরক্ষা ইত্যাদি দপ্তরকে।

Phone-tapping serious crime: SC

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: After criss-crossing the country to build up opinion against the tapping of his phones, Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh on Tuesday got unexpected support from the supreme court which agreed with him and termed the matter "very serious".

Issuing notices to the Union ministries of telecom and home, Delhi government, Delhi Police Commissioner and others on his petition, a bench comprising Chief Justice Y K Sabharwal and Justices C K Thakker and R V Raveendran said it seemed that further guidelines were required to be laid down.



FINDS SUPPORT: Amar

Giving two weeks' time for filing a reply, the bench said for the time being it was not issuing notices to Congress and other telecom operators, who have been made respondents by Singh in his writ petition.

The court had initially issued notices to all. But at the request of Solicitor General G E Vahanvati, it limited the notices only to the ministries, leaving out

Congress and other private telecom service providers.

Appreciating the concerns of counsel Mukul Rohatgi and Rajinder Sachar, who appeared for the SP leader, the bench said if phones were being tapped on the basis of forged letters, then "we should lay down guidelines to see what more precautions be taken in future to stop this". It asked the parties to keep politics out of the serious issue. "We are not today on a political issue. Let none take political mileage of it," the Chief Justice said.

Sharing the court's concern, the SG said that the government was holding high-level meetings to put in course a possible mechanism to stop illegal tapping.

At present only 323 phones were under surveillance, he said, evoking request from the petitioner to provide the court with the names of those whose phones were being tapped.

"Not at the present," the court came to the rescue of SG, and asked him to file an affidavit about the steps being taken by the government to meet the challenge posed by technology.

The SG said that when the SC in 1997 laid down the guidelines on phone-tapping, there were only two service providers. At present, there is a proliferation of service providers and technology has taken a quantum leap, he said, agreeing with the SC for additional guidelines.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

26 JAN 2006

JET AGE IS HERE

HT Corporate Bureau
New Delhi, January 19

JET AIRWAYS has struck a deal to buy Sahara Airlines Ltd for a little over \$ 500 million (Rs 2,250 crore) inclusive of all its existing debt. The all-cash deal is the biggest aviation acquisition in India.

The debt includes Rs 398 crore being raised from the group companies. After adjustment, the net enterprise value would be around Rs 1,800 crore.

The deal makes Jet the dominant player in Indian skies as the combined domestic market share of both airlines will be around 48-50 per cent and the combined turnover will be over Rs 7,000 crore. In addition, Jet will have a fleet size of 80 aircraft with 426 flights per day. The majority of these flights are during rush hour. Sahara Airlines currently has 27 air-

craft — all taken on lease — with 126 daily flights.

It is believed that of the \$506 million paid to the Subroto Roy-owned Sahara Airlines, \$375 million is the accumulated debt, while the balance is the profit which will be ploughed back into the housing, realty and media and entertainment businesses headed by sons Sushanto and Seemanto Roy.

Analysts say the acquisition makes Jet a gargantuan operation with enormous infrastructure economies of scale. A huge pool of pilots, co-pilots and technical support staff will now be available to Jet.

In an environment where domestic carriers are battling infrastructure inadequacies, Jet will be able to leverage Sahara's 22 parking bays, including nine in Delhi, seven in Mumbai, three in Kolkata, two in Chennai

and one in Hyderabad. Jet already has around 40 parking bays. The merged entity will have around 62 parking bays, which is more than that of Indian (Airlines).

The combined entity will also have more than 75 per cent space in prominent airports like Delhi and Mumbai. Experts say it would virtually control terminal 1B in Delhi and the private operators' terminal in Mumbai.

Go Air managing director Jeh Wadia says, "In the emerging scenario, there is a need for the government to revisit the allocation of existing and upcoming infrastructure, in the main checking counters, parking bays and take-off and landing slots. Government needs to allocate appropriate infrastructure equally to all airlines."

The acquisition gives Jet control over hangers with a total built up area of 32,000 sq ft in Delhi and a

huge area in Hyderabad airport. Ajay Singh, executive director of SpiceJet, says, "We will stay in the low cost space, while they will consolidate in the full fare space."

Pending confirmation of regulatory approvals, both airlines would continue to operate independently. Once the transaction is completed after the regulatory approvals, Jet will be the undisputed leader over Indian skies.

Jet chairman Naresh Goyal said there was no plan to convert Sahara Airlines into a low cost carrier. It would be run as a full service carrier. The Sahara brand would eventually be replaced by Jet, he added. The Jet board will meet on Friday to consider raising money from a FCCB issue to fund the acquisition. It already has cash available from its IPO proceeds. Goyal said Jet would not retain all the employees of Sahara Airlines.

'Tap was sting, not politics'

*Home secy says probe still
on, rules out Congress hand*

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 14

THE GOVERNMENT on Saturday dismissed the possibility of any "political motive" behind the phone tapping of Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh and said it was a mere sting operation.

Home Secretary V.K. Duggal said the report received from Delhi Police chief K.K. Paul states that the case was a sting operation organised by a private detective for monetary and other gains.

Duggal ruled out the involvement of a political party or a political personality in the case. Police probe, he added, had also given a clean chit to the Centre and the Delhi Government. Both Amar Singh and UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav have been targeting Congress president Sonia Gandhi, alleging that she had issued directions for the phone tapping.

Duggal said the probe, still in progress, revealed that the documents on which the tapping was permitted were forged. The Delhi Police special cell, meanwhile, questioned Ashok Chaturvedi, the head of Flex Industries. Amar Singh had told the police on Friday that Chaturvedi had tipped him about the phone tapping. "He told me I should meet a person called Rahul who had told him about it," Singh had said. Chaturvedi told the police that Rahul had told him about the phone tapping. Rahul is none other than Anurag Singh, who has been arrested in the case.



Amar Singh

IT'S STILL ON

■ **IT'S HOGWASH**
Amar Singh said the "sting operation claim was a hogwash"

■ **CONGRESS HITS BACK**
Ambika Soni said one shouldn't base charges on mere hearsay

■ **ANOTHER PROBE**
Mulayam has ordered the UP police to conduct a parallel probe

Airports modernisation contracts by month-end

Details not known as minutes need to be signed by EGoM chief

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The process of modernisation of Delhi and Mumbai airports inched forward on Tuesday with the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) deciding to award the contracts for total revamp of the two metro airports by January 31.

The minutes of Tuesday's meeting that reiterated the Government resolve to go ahead with modernisation and restructuring of the two airports through the joint venture route would need to be signed by EGoM Chairman and Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, before the details are known.

After the EGoM meeting, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Praful Patel announced the deadline for the award of contracts for the two projects, estimated to be worth Rs. 5,500 crores.

Mr. Patel rejected a suggesti-

• **All issues resolved, no re-bidding, says Praful Patel**

• **Financial bids to open in a day or two**

• **EGoM held to consider a revised report from the expert committee**

on that there could be re-bidding in view of the valuation controversies.

The Minister said financial bids would be opened in a day or two, adding that the contracts for the two airports would be awarded within the deadline. The EGoM was held to consider a revised report from the expert committee, headed by Delhi Metro Chief E. Sreedharan, on the basis of a clarification sought by the EGoM earlier this month.

On how many bidders would

be shortlisted, Mr. Patel said: "Let the minutes be finalised and signed by the EGoM Chairman. We have considered all the views that were expressed in the matter, including those of the Committee of Secretaries, the panel led by E. Sreedharan and various others. All issues have been resolved. There will be no re-bidding. The modernisation of both the airports will start. They will be modernised through the joint venture route and final details would be announced shortly."

The shortlisted bidders would have to form two joint venture companies with the Airports Authority of India for the development of the two airports. Besides Mr. Mukherjee and Mr. Patel, other members of the EGoM are Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, Commerce Minister Kamal Nath and Law Minister H. R. Bhardwaj.

The EGoM decision comes in

the wake of opposition by Left parties who have been against the "privatisation" process, with the latest development being a letter shot off by Revolutionary Socialist Party leader Abani Roy complaining of lack of transparency in the process.

The Left has asked the Government to put the process on hold and hand over the task to AAI.

The EGoM is understood to have discussed possibilities of broad-basing the criteria for the bid process in the light of the recommendations of the Sreedharan-led Group of Eminent Technical Experts, so as to allow more than one bidder for each of the two metro airports. If the proposal for broad-basing the criterion is adopted, the bids of GMR-Fraport, Reliance-ASA (Mexico), D. S. Construction-Munich Airport and GVK-South African airport are likely to be considered as per the rankings.

সর্বজনীন আড়ি-পাতা

ফোনে আড়ি পাতার বিরুদ্ধে সমাজবাদী পার্টির নেতা অমর সিংহ তাঁহার অভিযানকে প্রায় ধর্মযুদ্ধের স্তরে লইয়া যাইতেছেন। তিনি বিরোধী নেতা ও অকংগ্রেসি

মুখ্যমন্ত্রীদের দরজায়-দরজায় ঘুরিয়া এ ব্যাপারে একটি আন্ত যুক্তফ্রন্টই গড়িয়া তুলিতে চান। জয়ললিতা, চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুকে ইতিমধ্যেই সেই ফ্রন্টের শরিক করা গিয়াছে। বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য, নীতীশ কুমার'ও আসিলেন বলিয়া। মুলায়ম সিংহ যাদব আবার সমগ্র আড়ি-পাতা কাণ্ডটিকে 'ইতালীয় মافیয়ার কায়দায় সনিয়া গাঁধীর অপকর্ম' আখ্যা দিয়া বাজার গরম করার হাস্যকর চেষ্টা করিয়াছেন। তবে এই কুনাট্যোচিত বিস্তারের নেপথ্যে মূল প্রশ্নটি হইল, ফোনে আড়ি-পাতা উচিত কিনা। অমর সিংহের, চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুর কিংবা জয়ললিতার টেলিফোনে আড়ি পাতা হইয়াছে কি না, তাহা তদন্তসাপেক্ষ। তবে ফোনে আড়ি-পাতার ঐতিহ্যটি যে প্রায় দূরভাষ যন্ত্রের আবিষ্কারের সমসাময়িক, তাহাতে সন্দেহ নাই।

ভারতেও ঐতিহ্যটি সুপ্রাচীন। ১৯৫০ সালে স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী স্বয়ং বল্লভভাই পটেলের বিরুদ্ধে ফোনে আড়ি পাতার অভিযোগ করিয়াছিলেন রফি আহমেদ কিদোয়াই। '৬৯ সালে কংগ্রেস দ্বিধাবিভক্ত হইলে আদি কংগ্রেস নেতারা ইন্দিরা গাঁধীর বিরুদ্ধে তাঁহাদের ফোনে আড়ি-পাতার অভিযোগ করেন। জরুরি অবস্থা তো আড়ি-পাতার জন্য কোনও অজুহাত রচনারও প্রয়োজন মনে করে নাই। রাজীব গাঁধীর আমলে রাষ্ট্রপতি জৈল সিংহের ফোনই শুধু নয়, রাষ্ট্রপতি ভবনের সব ফোনেই আড়ি পাতা হইত, গোয়েন্দারাই পরে তাহার সাক্ষ্য দেন। বিরোধী নেতা চন্দ্রশেখর প্রধানমন্ত্রী বিশ্বনাথপ্রতাপ সিংহের বিরুদ্ধে এই অভিযোগ আনেন, চন্দ্রশেখর প্রধানমন্ত্রী হইলে রাজীবের ফোনে আড়ি-পাতা শুরু হয়। কেন্দ্রে বিজেপি শাসনের সময় কংগ্রেস নেতাদের ফোন এবং কংগ্রেসের চলতি জমানায় বিরোধীদের ফোনে যদি আড়ি-পাতা হইয়া থাকে, তাহাতে হতবাক হওয়ার কিছু নাই। অমর সিংহের সরকার উত্তরপ্রদেশেও হয়তো মায়াবতী সহ বহুজনসমাজ পার্টির নেতাদের ফোনে আড়ি পাতিয়া রাখিয়াছে। প্রশ্ন তাই কে সাধু, কে চোর, তাহা নয়, প্রশ্ন আড়ি-পাতার ঔচিত্য লইয়া। রাজনীতিকদের বক্তব্য, জাতীয় নিরাপত্তার স্বার্থে, সন্ত্রাসবাদী, কালোবাজারি, মافیয়া ডনদের মতো সংগঠিত অপরাধী চক্রের পাণ্ডা কিংবা মাদক পাচারকারীদের ফোনে আড়ি-পাতা চলিতে পারে, কিন্তু রাজনীতিকদের, কাউন্সিলর, বিধায়ক, সাংসদের মতো নির্বাচিত জনপ্রতিনিধি বা মন্ত্রীদের ফোনে আড়ি-পাতা অনুচিত।

আপাতদৃষ্টিতে যুক্তিটি গ্রহণযোগ্য মনে হইতে পারে। কিন্তু যদি রাজনীতিক তথা জনপ্রতিনিধি, এমনকী মন্ত্রীরাও অপরাধ জগতের সহিত ঘনিষ্ঠ থাকেন, তাঁহারা যদি জাতিকে প্রতারিত করেন, তবে জনপ্রতিনিধিদের রক্ষাকবচ দিয়া তাঁহাদের সম্পর্কে সত্যানুসন্ধানের জন্য ফোনে আড়ি-পাতা সহ অন্য বন্দোবস্ত লওয়া হইবে না কেন? বিশেষত 'দাগি' মন্ত্রী যখন একবিংশ শতকের ভারতীয় রাজনীতির অন্যতম অলঙ্কার, কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রীদের নামে যখন খুন-ধর্ষণ-ডাকাতির মতো জামিন-অযোগ্য গ্রেফতারির ছলিয়া জারি হয় এবং সংসদীয় বিশেষাধিকার বা জনপ্রতিনিধিদের অনাক্রম্যতার বর্মের আড়ালে আত্মগোপন করিয়া তাঁহারা পুলিশের চোখের সামনেই বুক ফুলাইয়া ঘুরিয়া বেড়ান? রাজনীতির দুর্বৃত্তায়নের এই পরিস্থিতিতে প্রায়শ সংগঠিত অপরাধী তথা মافیয়া ডনের সহিত রাজনীতিকের প্রভেদ ঘুচিয়া যায় এবং তাঁহাদের অসামাজিক, অসাংবিধানিক, অসংসদীয় ক্রিয়াকলাপের হৃদিশ পাইতে ফোনে আড়ি-পাতা সহায়ক হয়। বিশ্বের সকল গণতন্ত্রেই (মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র ও ব্রিটেন সহ) এই প্রক্রিয়া চালু আছে। তবু রাজনৈতিক প্রতিপক্ষকে কোণঠাসা করার লক্ষ্যে এই পদ্ধতি ব্যবহৃত না হওয়াই বাঞ্ছনীয়। পদ্ধতিটির যথেষ্ট ও অনিয়ন্ত্রিত অপব্যবহার গণতন্ত্রে মঞ্জুর ব্যক্তিগত নিভৃতির অধিকারে অন্তর্গত ঘটাইতে পারে।

Police question Amar Singh on phone tapping

It is only to tie up loose ends in the case: police

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh was on Friday questioned by the Delhi Police special cell in connection with the illegal tapping of his telephone. His friend, an Uttar Pradesh-based industrialist, who had purportedly tipped him off about the tapping, will be summoned later as he expressed his inability to appear due to "health reasons."

Mr. Singh arrived at the Lodhi Road office around 2 p.m. to answer queries about the identity of the man who informed him about the tapping. Joint Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Karnal Singh was present to question him. Sources said Mr. Singh told the police that his close friend, Ashok Chaturvedi, owner of Flex Industries in Noida, had a month ago informed him that his Reliance Infocomm telephone was being tapped.

Mr. Chaturvedi is said to have told Mr. Singh that a person by name Rahul met him recently and told him that some people were tapping Mr. Singh's telephone.

Mr. Singh reportedly inquired from the officers about the three accused, Bhupender, Anurag Singh and Kuldeep, who have been arrested in the case.

After a two-hour questioning session, Mr. Singh said: "The police have arrested only small fries so far. The mastermind is



Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh arriving at the Special Cell of the Delhi Police in connection with the telephone tapping issue, in New Delhi on Friday.

PHOTO: V. SUDERSHAN

still at large."

He alleged that his telephone was being tapped by Central intelligence agencies.

Mr. Chaturvedi has been admitted to Fortis Hospital in Noida and can be questioned only after doctors declare him fit.

Police said they questioned Mr. Singh only to "tie up loose ends."

Investigations indicate that Rahul was none other than Anurag Singh, who has already been arrested. He has a detective

agency at Connaught Place and was said to be an expert at computer-related probes.

It is alleged that he came to know about the tapping from Bhupender, the owner of Metro Intelligence Agency, who, according to the police, had got Mr. Singh's telephone tapped with the help of Kuldeep.

The police are looking for Vijay Dhawan, a freelance detective, who operated as a link between Kuldeep and Bhupender.

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THE HINDU

Threat to open can of worms

Sacked staff city foul

GAJINDER SINGH

Hardwar, Jan. 11: For eight months, 115 sacked workers of Swami Ramdev's Divya Yog Trust have been taking turns going on hunger strike in the nagarpalika office premises.

Now they are threatening to let crabs, turtles, wild animals' testicles and more out of the bag if they are not reinstated with respect and the controversial pharmacy brought under the Factories Act.

"Too many things happening inside the Divya Yog pharmacy have still not been revealed. (We have to be reinstated), *nahin to aur pole khohenge. Abhi tak to kuch bhi nahin janta ko aur sarkar ko Divya pharmacy ke bare mein maalum hai,*" a striking worker said.

The workers are, surprisingly, less furious with Ramdev and more cut up with officials actually running the show, especially pharmacy secretary Acharya Balkrishan Shastri.

"The swami has never entered the pharmacy. He probably does not know what has been going on inside. We, however, hold him responsible because it is due to his work that the pharmacy is making huge profits. He, too, has been calling us goondas," another worker Chandra Pal Bishnoi alleged.

Bishnoi claimed he and his colleagues were not making a noise just to attract attention or gain publicity. The pharmacy they used to work for is in the middle of a storm since CPM leader Brinda Karat

alleged last week that human and animal parts were being used in its drugs.

"First, the trust exploited us by denying our rights. Then they kicked women workers for revealing bones were being mixed in some medicines and refused to honour the May tripartite agreement to solve the labour problem. A conspiracy of crabs and turtles was confiscated by police," he alleged.

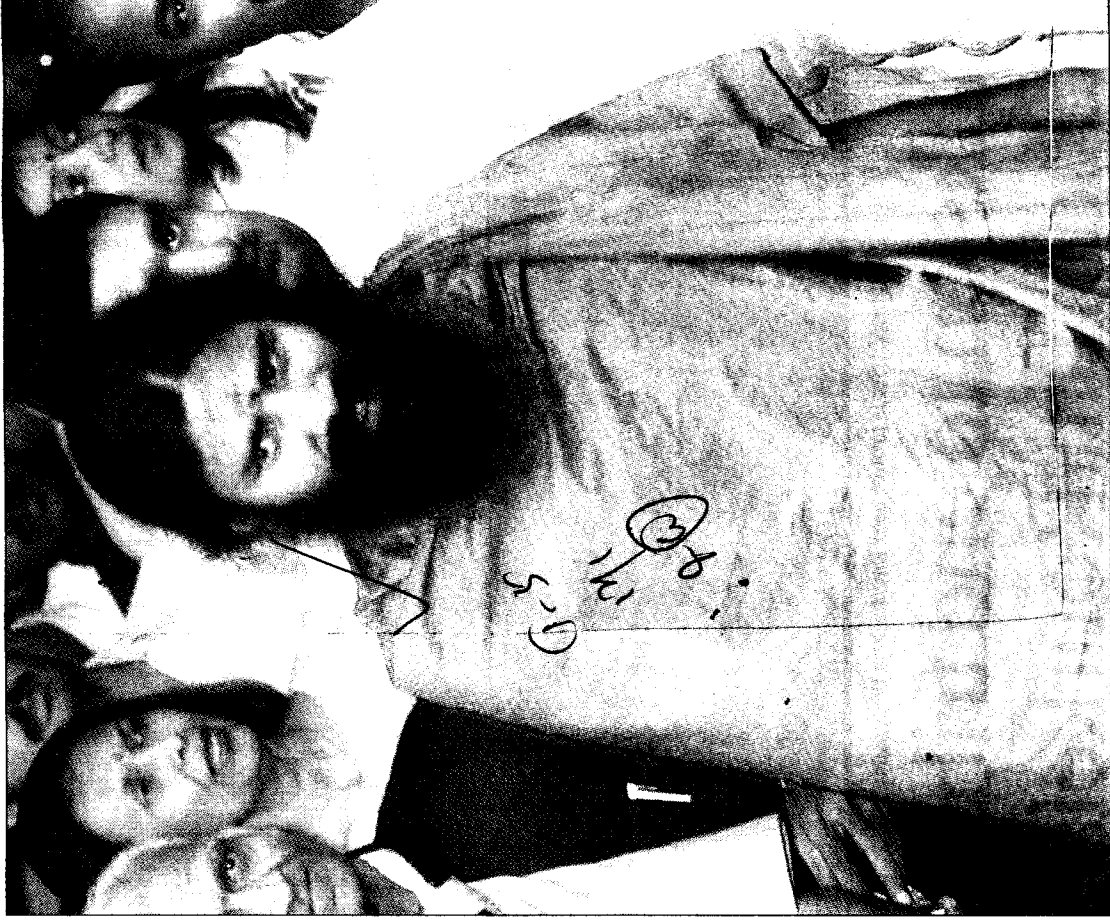
The workers are demanding that a CBI probe be held into the goings-on at the pharmacy. No government official, including district magistrate R.K. Sudhanshu, has visited them since they went on strike although he did write to the government on the matter.

"The government is silent on the action that should be taken into the affairs of the pharmacy. We can do nothing without orders from the top in this particular case," an official said.

Bishnoi said the whole issue would not have snowballed had the pharmacy honoured its part of the bargain. "Had the agreement with us been honoured in May, it would have been smooth sailing. Nobody would have called the Baba a black sheep and there would have been no bones controversy."

Another sacked employee Promilla Verma, squatting on the nagarpalika premises and discussing with women colleagues how the workers' union should proceed, said she had begun to get nightmares about the work she had done.

RAMDEV'S TARGET: MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES



Baba Ramdev has declared war on multinational companies.

The yoga guru (in picture on left), who has dubbed CPM MP Brinda Karat's allegations against his medicines a conspiracy hatched by MNCs, has said his "next big campaign" would be against their products, reports our special correspondent.

"You have to use swadeshi if you stay in India," Ramdev told a new meet on Wednesday.

"The popularity of my yoga camps has resulted in huge losses for multinational companies. The sale of colas and fast food has slumped by 60 to 70 per cent in the last two years. That's why they are trying to get back at me."

Ramdev rubbished Karat's charges that human skulls and animal extracts were used in medicines manufactured by his pharmacy. "I cure people's heads with medicines. I don't use their heads for my medicines."

He reiterated that the CPM leader had planted party workers disguised as labourers in his pharmacy. "Two of them, Dara and Deepu, are already in jail. Another man who tried to sell tortoise and crab parts as my medicines in Hardwar was caught by local people," he said. (Picture: PTI)

truckloads of them every day and not small packets carried by individuals. The workers are simple people and they have been lured to make statements against the pharmacy and Swami Ramdev. We have nothing to hide," he said.

The sacked workers had a lot to say about the amount of money the trust was making. They claimed the Rs 3 lakh figure the trust was portraying as the value of its sales last year was just a drop in the ocean.

"The pharmacy has been selling medicines worth lakhs daily. They have even been buying rejected medicines from other pharmacies, pasting Divya Yog's labels and sending them back into the markets," accused Shehata, another sacked worker.

"We don't even remember everything that was happening in the pharmacy. There was this lady from Ludhiana who used to come every week to buy sex prowess medicines worth lakhs."

"She was one of many customers who bought medicines worth lakhs regularly. The medicines were being bought by over 2,000 persons daily and each would take back medicines worth at least Rs 1,500," she claimed.

The workers are peeved that Uttaranchal politicians have been rallying behind Ramdev. "In May, the government was intimidated that human bones and skulls were being mixed in medicines. Then why did chief minister N.D. Tiwari open the pharmacy's second unit in December second week?" asked Manju.

Another worker said alternative jobs had not been hard to come by. "I have not been able to buy rice or wheat for months now. I am living on alms like the others. I hope I get back to working as early as possible, otherwise my children will die."

The swami's brother, Ramdhar, purportedly the "receiver" of bones from people coming to the pharmacy, claimed the allegations were "a direct attack against Indian civilisation".

"If bones were indeed being mixed with other ingredients to make ayurvedic medicines, we would have needed

Pharmacy officials vehemently denied human bones were used in their medicines. As for the man at the centre of the feud with the workers — the yog trust's human resource department head Lalit Mohan — he dismissed whole thing as a "conspiracy".

"It is a conspiracy to defame our guru who is teaching the world their illnesses can be cured through yoga and ayurvedic medicines that do not cost much," Mohan claimed. "All of them (workers) were only volunteers who needed a job. That they received some emoluments was due to swami who cared for their well-being. They have insulted the trust swami ji had on them."

"It sends shivers down my spine when I think that what I had been turning to paste were human bones. I wake up with nightmares."

"My relatives tell me my harrowing dreams are caused by the souls whose bones I had crushed inside the pharmacy for months without knowing what I was doing," she said.

Modernisation of airports "on track"

EGoM to take final decision
on bids today

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: After missing the deadline of December 31, the process of modernisation and restructuring of Delhi and Mumbai airports is likely to receive a shot in the arm with the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) scheduled to meet here on Thursday to take a final decision on the bids.

The meeting of the EGoM, headed by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, comes in the backdrop of the Sreedharan committee report which recommended that the Reliance bid for participating in the modernisation and restructuring process of the two major metro airports be rejected as it did not meet the stipulated benchmark of 80 per cent based on a set of technical criteria. Reliance had tied up with ASA Mexico to bid for the two metro airports.

Report submitted

The report by Delhi Metro man E. Sreedharan was submitted to the Government on Tuesday and if the EGoM decided to go along with it, the only one left in the race would be the GMR group. Earlier, the global advisers to the project had recommended that only GMR and Reliance were eligible to participate in the process as their technical bids were above the laid-down minimum criteria.

• If this is accepted, then only the GMR group will be in the race

• Manmohan had called for adhering to the January 31 deadline

The process of modernisation and restructuring of the Delhi and Mumbai airports would remain on track. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave a firm indication to this effect to Minister of State for Civil Aviation Prafu Patel on Tuesday night. Dr. Singh is learnt to have told Mr. Patel to keep the process on track and adhere to the deadline of January 31 for finalising the bids. The Left parties have been asking the Government to scrap the process, suggesting that the Greenfield approach for developing the two airports be considered and the public sector Airports Authority of India (AAI) also be given a chance.

'Objectivity in report'

The Sreedharan panel was constituted by the Government to advise the Committee of Secretaries, headed by Cabinet Secretary B.K. Chaturvedi, on the airport modernisation process. "There is a certain amount of objectivity in the report. It decided to evaluate only one of the six bidders that fell short of minimum criterion.

Govt 'cleared' of tapping, CPM for probe

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 10. — The Delhi police, in a report to the Union home ministry, gave a clean chit to the Centre over its alleged role in tapping of phones of Samajwadi Party leaders. Three people, including two owners of private detective agencies, have been arrested in the tapping case so far.

The CPI-M Politburo member, Mr Sitaram Yechuri, said "the CPI-M is not making charges of phone tapping. However, some political leaders have levelled some allegations and they should be investigated properly in accordance with the Prime Minister's statement that the charges will be probed."

Mr Yechury said since several private players have come into the telecom field in the recent past, the government should "evolve certain rules and procedures so that these private parties cannot misuse the system". Speculation is rife that a Bill may be introduced in the Budget session of Parliament to stop phone-tapping.

Meanwhile, in a veiled criticism of SP leader Mr Amar Singh, the Prime Minister today said it was "very unfortunate" that the names of the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, and his office are being dragged into the episode. Dr Manmohan Singh's comments came a day after Mr Amar Singh apologised to him for dragging some PMO officials into the controversy. The PM said phone tapping should never take place except in cases relating to national security.

More reports on page 5

CPM wants law on phone tapping

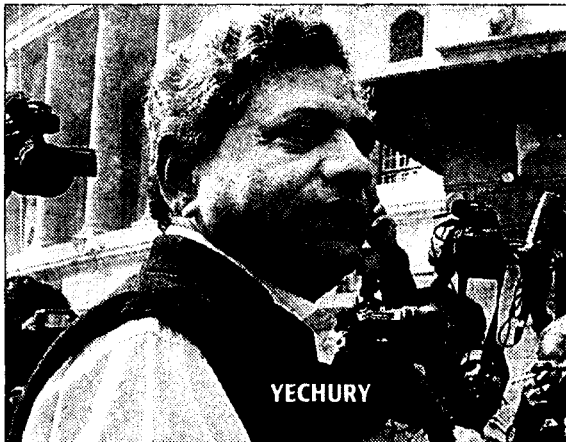
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 10 JANUARY

JOINING the chorus of voices making phone-tapping allegations, the CPM today said there was no political party that did not suspect its phones were being tapped. Therefore, the party demanded a legislation to ensure that tapping was done only in "national interest".

CPM polit bureau member Sitaram Yechury said that while such suspicions had existed for over 40 years — al-

learnt for the government, which has raised the FDI cap in the telecom sector to 74%. He also recalled that the Left parties had warned the government about security implications of allowing private players and said the dangers have increased manifold now. After meeting with Mr Singh, Mr Karat also said the phone tapping indicated a conspiracy and asked the government to order an inquiry into it.

When asked today if he ever felt his phone conversations were being spied, Mr



luding to former prime minister Chandra Sekhar's allegations of Indira Gandhi tapping his phones while he was still a Congress Working Committee member in the 70s — there were no private telecom operators earlier. "With the entry of private domestic operators and international players in the telecom sector, the government should set down proper rules and procedures for them," he said.

Less than a week back, the CPM had come out in support of SP leader Amar Singh. CPM general secretary Prakash Karat turned the telephone-tapping controversy into a bigger policy issue by repeating the Left's pet anti-FDI theme. Mr Karat had said there was a "lesson" to be

Yechury replied that he had felt it several times. However, he soon added that irrespective of the party in power, all political parties harboured such suspicions. Mr Yechury talked of two instances when governments were toppled over spying scandals — the RK Hegde government in Karnataka in 1987 and the Chandra Sekhar government in 1991.

The CPI has asked the government to come clean on the issue in the wake of allegations made by leaders of several opposition parties. CPI leader D Raja had said the reports of phone tapping were a matter of "serious concern" and that the government should "set the record straight".

ফোনে আড়ি পাতা রাখতে বিল আনতে পারে কেন্দ্র

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি ও গুয়াহাটি, ১০ জানুয়ারি: ফোনে আড়ি পাতার বিষয়টি আদালতে যাওয়ার এক দিন পর রীতিমতো নড়েচড়ে বসল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক ফোনে আড়ি পাতার মতো ঘটনা রাখতে সংসদের আগামী অধিবেশনেই একটি বিল আনার কথা বিবেচনা করছে। বিজেপিও সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়ে আইন সংশোধনের দাবি তুলেছে। গুয়াহাটিতে এক সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে দলের সর্বভারতীয় নেতা প্রমোদ মহাজন দাবি তোলেন, আগামী সংসদ অধিবেশনেই কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার এ ব্যাপারে প্রয়োজনীয় পদক্ষেপ নিক।

অমর সিংহ, জয়ললিতা, চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডু, লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানীর পর আজ সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি। তিনি আজ বলেন, “আমাদের দলের অনেকের ফোনেই আড়ি পাতা হচ্ছে। এমনকী, শুনেছি আমার ফোনেও আড়ি পাতা হচ্ছে।” অমর সিংহের প্রথম অভিযোগের পর থেকে প্রত্যেক দিনই জলঘোলা হচ্ছে এই বিষয়টি নিয়ে। প্রতি দিনই দেশের কোনও না কোনও প্রান্ত থেকে কোনও না কোনও নেতা এই বিষয়ে নিজেদের মন্তব্য রাখছেন। আন্দামানে বিবৃতি দেওয়ার পর প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ আজ ফের দিল্লিতে মুন্সি প্রেমচাঁদ স্মরণে এক অনুষ্ঠানে জানান, যে ভাবে এই বিষয়টি নিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতর এবং কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী সনিয়া গান্ধীর নাম জড়ানো হচ্ছে, তা অত্যন্ত দুর্ভাগ্যজনক। তিনি বলেন, “আইনভঙ্গকারীদের এ দেশের বিচার ব্যবস্থা ছেড়ে দেবে না। জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা সংক্রান্ত কোনও বিষয় ছাড়া কারও ফোনে আড়ি পাতা যাতে না হয় তা-ও দেখা হবে।” উল্লেখ্য, অমর সিংহ গত কালই মনমোহনকে জানান, প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কার্যালয়ের কিছু কর্তার নাম জড়ানায় তিনি অনুতপ্ত।

এ দিকে, অমর সিংহ দিল্লি পুলিশের কাছে অভিযোগ জানিয়ে বলেছেন যে, যুব কংগ্রেসকর্মীদের একাংশ তাঁর ও তাঁর পরিবারের জীবন বিপন্ন করে তুলতে পারে। অমরের বাড়ির সামনে যুব কংগ্রেস কর্মীরা বিক্ষোভ দেখানোর পরেই ওই অভিযোগ লিখিত ভাবে জানান সমাজবাদী পার্টির নেতা। পুলিশ ওই বিক্ষোভকারীদের আটক করে ও পরে সতর্ক করে ছেড়ে দেয়।

গোটা বিষয়টিতে সরকার নিঃসন্দেহে বিপাকে। তাই এই ধরনের ঘটনা এড়াতে কেন্দ্র তড়িঘড়ি একটি বিল আনার কথা ভাবছে। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক সূত্রের মতে, ভারতীয় টেলিগ্রাফ আইনের অধীনে জনস্বার্থে ফোনে আড়ি পাতা যায়। তার জন্য একটি নির্দিষ্ট প্রক্রিয়া অবলম্বন করতে হবে। কিন্তু সমস্যার বিষয় হল, এই জনস্বার্থের বিষয়টি স্পষ্ট নয়। এ বিষয়ে কোনও আইন না থাকলেও ১৯৯৭ সালে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের নির্দেশে কিছু নির্দেশাবলি রয়েছে।

এ ধরনের ঘটনা মোকাবিলা করার জন্য টেলিকম নিয়ন্ত্রণ সংস্থার (ট্রাই) হাতেও ততটা ক্ষমতা নেই। ট্রাইয়ের চেয়ারম্যান প্রদীপ বাইজাল আজ জানান, নিরাপত্তা সংস্থা আমাদের কাছে এলে আমরা কোনও পদক্ষেপ নিতে পারি। তাঁর মতে, লাইসেন্স দেওয়ার সময় ফোনে আড়ি না পাতার ব্যাপারে বিধিনিষেধ দেওয়া থাকলেও কার্যক্ষেত্রে শাস্তিমূলক ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার সময় ট্রাইয়ের হাত-পা বাঁধা। বর্তমানে এত বেসরকারি সংস্থা টেলিকম ক্ষেত্রে এসেছে তাতে নিয়ন্ত্রণ রাখাটা দুষ্কর হয়ে উঠেছে। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক এই সব ক্রটিগুলিই দূর করে একটি বিল আনার কথা ভাবছে।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

11 JAN 2000

PARTY SAYS ADVANI'S PHONE WAS BUGGED

BJP joins tapping call

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 9. — The phone-tapping controversy continues to rage, with the BJP today joining the fray by alleging that the phones of several senior leaders, including Mr LK Advani, had been recently tapped by the Centre.

"Senior leaders of the BJP received credible information four days ago that the (land-line) phones of Mr Advani had been tapped during the Volcker controversy. Details have been provided to BJP leaders," party spokesman Mr Prakash Javadekar said today, echoing the allegation voiced by the senior BJP leader, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu. He said Tamil Nadu chief minister Miss J Jayalalitha and former Andhra Pradesh chief minister Mr N Chandrababu Naidu having expressed doubts based on "credible information" that their phones were tapped, "the matter has become serious."

And to add fuel to the fire, yet another non-Congress Opposition party, the Akali Dal, today said former Punjab chief minister Mr Prakash Singh Badal's phones too had been bugged. Indeed, the allegations of the Samajwadi Party and Mr Amar Singh now seem to

Assassination plot alleged



KANPUR / NEW DELHI, Jan. 9. — The Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, today alleged the Congress and a top industrialist of the country had hatched a plot to kill him and he would disclose the details at a "suitable" time. The Supreme Court today issued notices to Mr Yadav and other members of his family on a petition alleging that they had amassed wealth more than the known sources of income. — PTI

have found takers across the spectrum.

On his return from a holiday in Jaisalmer, Mr Advani told reporters at Delhi airport: "When I was in Jodhpur, I was told that my phones too had been tapped when the Volcker Report came. But I am not aware of it. I will find out. This is a serious issue because this matter went to courts and the Supreme Court issued stern directives which we used to follow when in government. I don't recall a single similar

incident during the NDA's six-year tenure." The BJP said the Congress-led UPA government should come clean on the issue and party president Mr Rajnath Singh demanded an all-party meeting to decide on an "impartial probe" into the phone-tapping episode.

Dismissing such allegations as a "populist controversy", the AICC general secretary, Mrs Ambika Soni, questioned the BJP's motive in "waking up" to the issue after a long time. "Mr Venkaiah Naidu is recalling today that Mr Advani's phones were being tapped a few months ago," she said, asking him whether he had then lodged any complaint. The Congress spokesperson, Mrs Jayanti Natarajan, said: "The BJP is so bereft of ideas that it is now forced to borrow Amar Singh's allegations." Charging the BJP with "politicising" the matter, Mrs Natarajan said: "The timing of the BJP's charges is suspect."

Mr Amar Singh today moved the Supreme Court seeking a judicial probe into the case.

Meanwhile, Trinamul supremo Miss Mamata Banerjee said in Kolkata today that her phone and those of her party leaders were being tapped at the behest of the Left Front government.

Now, BJP sees a bug in Advani telephone

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 9

L.K. Advani on Monday became the latest politician to be highlighted as a phone-tapping victim.

The chorus of allegations got louder, the list of new victims longer, as Mamata Banerjee and two Punjab leaders followed Amar Singh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Jayalalithaa and Chandrababu Naidu as self-professed victims.

In Advani's case, the allegation came from the BJP, which said his landlines were tapped during the Volcker heat. The other leaders made their allegations themselves. Mamata blamed "the CPI(M)" (who else?) for eavesdropping on her calls. In Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal and Simranjit Singh Mann blamed security agencies, but chief minister Amarinder Singh dismissed their charges.

BJP spokesman Prakash Javadekar said, "Party leaders received credible information four days ago that the phones of Advani and other leaders were tapped during the Volcker controversy." He demanded a probe.

Advani stopped short of agreeing. "When I was in Jodhpur, I was told that my phones had been tapped. But I am not aware of it. I will find out. This is a serious issue...I don't recall a single such case during the NDA's six-year tenure," he said.

The Centre dared the BJP to lodge an FIR. "We can take action only if an FIR is lodged, not on the basis of the allegations levelled in the media," minister of state for home Sriprakash Jaiswal said. The Congress mocked the BJP, saying it was "merely jumping onto the bandwagon".

Amar Singh took his charges to Supreme Court and made it clear his war was against Sonia and not Manmohan. He apologised to the Prime Minister for dragging the names of some PMO officials. "I have mentioned only those who have been close to 10 Janpath. If the PMO is hurt over what I have said, I offer my apology."

Reacting to Amar Singh's case, the minister of state for home said, "Let him go anywhere."

See also Page 4

10 JAN 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Amar Singh moves SC on phone tap

Names Congress President And Reliance Info Among Respondents

New Delhi: Carrying forward his charge on the telephone tapping issue, Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh on Monday knocked at the doors of the supreme court seeking a judicial probe into the entire incident.

He filed an application before the registry for a direction to prosecute those found guilty in the probe. Among the eight respondents, the SP general secretary has named Congress party through its president and private telecom major Reliance Infocomm. Besides the two ministries—telecom and home—he has also included Delhi government and Delhi Police.

Singh claimed that apart from his telephone, the personal telephones of Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and his son Akhilesh Yadav, who is a Lok



Sabha MP, were being also tapped.

The SP leader also referred to the reported statement of Tamil Nadu chief minister expressing concern on the issue of phone tapping of opposition leaders. "A full fledged and honest investigation must be carried out to unearth the conspiracy behind illegal phone tapping and this can be done by an impartial judicial inquiry and not by investigating agencies like the CBI which are under the control of the parties in power at the Centre," Singh said in the application.

He alleged that his phones were intercepted in violation of the guidelines of the apex court and the provisions of the Indian Telegraph Act and Rules. Singh said that the guidelines laid down by the apex court were aimed at preventing the arbitrary exercise of the powers conferred under Section 5(2) of the Act as it would amount to serious violation of an individual's fundamental right to privacy.

He said with the tremendous expansion of mobile services and the entry of private players in the telecom sector, it was necessary to strictly enforce the guidelines laid down by the apex court. He cited the 1996 judgment of the apex court which said that an order of the tele-

Advani's phone was tapped: BJP

New Delhi: In a new twist to the phone tapping controversy, the main opposition BJP on Monday alleged that the telephones of many of its senior leaders, including leader of opposition L K Advani, were tapped during the Volcker controversy.

"According to the information, many telephones of several senior party leaders were tapped during the Volcker controversy," party spokesman Prakash Javadekar said.

He said that the government should come clean on the issue. Party vice president M Venkaih Naidu had made similar allegation in Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh on Sunday.

Earlier, Tamil Nadu CM J Jayalalithaa and former Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu had joined Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh in alleging that their phones were being tapped. BJP deputy leader in Lok Sabha V K Malhotra had demanded a probe by a joint parliamentary committee into the telephone tapping allegations. Agencies



phone-tapping in terms of the provision of the Act cannot be issued except by the home secretary and home secretaries of the state government.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police on Monday carried out raids in some parts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in connection with the tapping of the telephones of SP leaders in search of the mastermind behind the operation.

Similar raids had been carried out earlier to nab the person on whose direction the letters of senior police and government officials were forged to enable the tapping of phones of Amar Singh, police sources said in Delhi.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 JAN 2006

Thank you, FM tells diaspora

HT-3
9/11

B.R. Srikanth
Hyderabad, January 8

9. (a)

FINANCE MINISTER P. Chidambaram doffed his hat to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs).

The reason: their remittances were proving to be the most stable source of private funds flowing into the country and a key factor in catalysing development here. The balance of payment (BOP) position was no longer a cause for concern with reserves standing at a 'healthy' \$137 billion, he said.

The country has moved to the top position in terms of remittances from migrant workers with an inflow of \$21.4 billion in 2004 and likely to cross \$25 billion in 2005, the finance minister told NRIs at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, on Saturday.

Chidambaram launched "Insta Remit", an integrated remittances gateway to help the Indian diaspora send money to places in the country within 24 hours. The remittance gateway was developed by the ministry of overseas Indian affairs in partnership with UTI Bank and Doha Bank. It provides faster and cost-effective means for the diaspora to send money from anywhere to India within 24 hours. The system was demonstrated to the delegates by UTI Bank chairman P.J. Nayak and Doha Bank CEO P. Seetaram.

Chidambaram assured the NRIs that the government would pursue "sensible economic policies" to ensure that the economy surges ahead at a decent pace, adding "you can send the money to your families with greater confidence".

The economic reforms would continue for fiscal prudence, controlling fiscal deficit and inflation, liberalising trade and investing in physical and social infrastructure. The government plans to amend the Reserve Bank of India Act in order to strengthen the banking regulatory mechanism.

In the queue

There are 8,000 people waiting to get Overseas Indian Citizen card. Oscar Fernandes, minister of state for overseas Indian affairs, said. The majority of them were from the United States. "We expect around 50,000 more applicants for overseas Indian citizenship," Fernandes said.

1000

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

My phones too are tapped, says Chandrababu

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday joined Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh's tap dance, alleging that his phones too were probably being tapped for more than a year. Naidu—who, however, said he has no concrete evidence of the tapping—is the latest non-Congress leader to join the controversy, which is quickly becoming a platform for the usual suspects of Third Front politics to coalesce together.

Describing phone-tapping as 'mean', 'unethical', 'shameful' and 'a threat to democracy', Naidu said only an in-

quiry by a joint parliamentary committee or a judicial commission or by a non-Congress chief minister would bring out the facts of the case.

Addressing a joint press meet after Amar Singh called on him on Sunday, the former AP chief minister said, "I strongly suspect that my phones too are being tapped, but I do not have concrete evidence of it. Now that my friend Amar Singh has shown me documentary evidence of the order issued by the home ministry to tap his phone, it is time for all political parties to debate the issue and ensure that there is no scope for such things in future."

Naidu said, "When the phone of a former prime minister (Deve Gowda)

ough probe. We have never heard anything of this kind in the past 10 years."

The TDP thus joined the CPM and Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalithaa (AIADMK) in support of Amar Singh on the issue.

Earlier, the Samajwadi Party leader gave a letter to Naidu in which he enclosed copies of the 'top secret' orders authorising tapping issued by principal secretary (home) R Narayanaswami dated Nov 9, 2005 and Delhi joint commissioner of police Ranjit Narayanan on Oct 22, 2005.

In the letter, Amar Singh told Naidu, "If private companies using state-of-the-art electronic surveillance equipment can be used for phone-tapping,



Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh with Telugu Desam Party supremo N Chandrababu Naidu in Hyderabad on Sunday

and former deputy prime minister (L K Advani) are tapped, it is a matter of serious concern and calls for a thor-

then I believe all terrorist outfits can do the same and put the whole nation under an unprecedented security threat."

Accusing Sonia Gandhi of stooping to levels unthinkable in a democracy, Amar Singh said, "I am convinced that the Prime Minister is unaware of the unconstitutional act that is being done at the behest of 10 Janpath."

Indicating his move the Supreme Court to seek an impartial probe into the telephone-tapping, Singh said the phones of 70 other leaders too were being tapped. "None of the leaders in the opposition has been spared. The BJP would soon realise that after Advaniji and others, Pramod Mahajan would be the Congress party's biggest target.

AMBITION TO OUTSHINE RAJNEESH, SET UP RS 100-CR YOG PEETH

Crorepati guru guns for No. 1 crown

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Lucknow, Jan. 7: Whether he is talking of things spiritual or temporal, Baba Ramdev likes to think in "crores".

So, yoga is "Bharatiya swabhiman, karoron sal purana vigyan (the pride of India, a science one crore years old)".

And his ambition is to set up a Rs 100-crore "Patanjali yog peeth" and become, his followers say, the country's tallest guru eclipsing the likes of Mahesh Yogi and Rajneesh.

The swami in his early forties is believed to make crores from his Divya Yog Mandir Trust, which runs a hospital, "pharmacy", herbal garden and a cowshed in Hardwar, besides a chain of residential "Vedic schools" across north India.

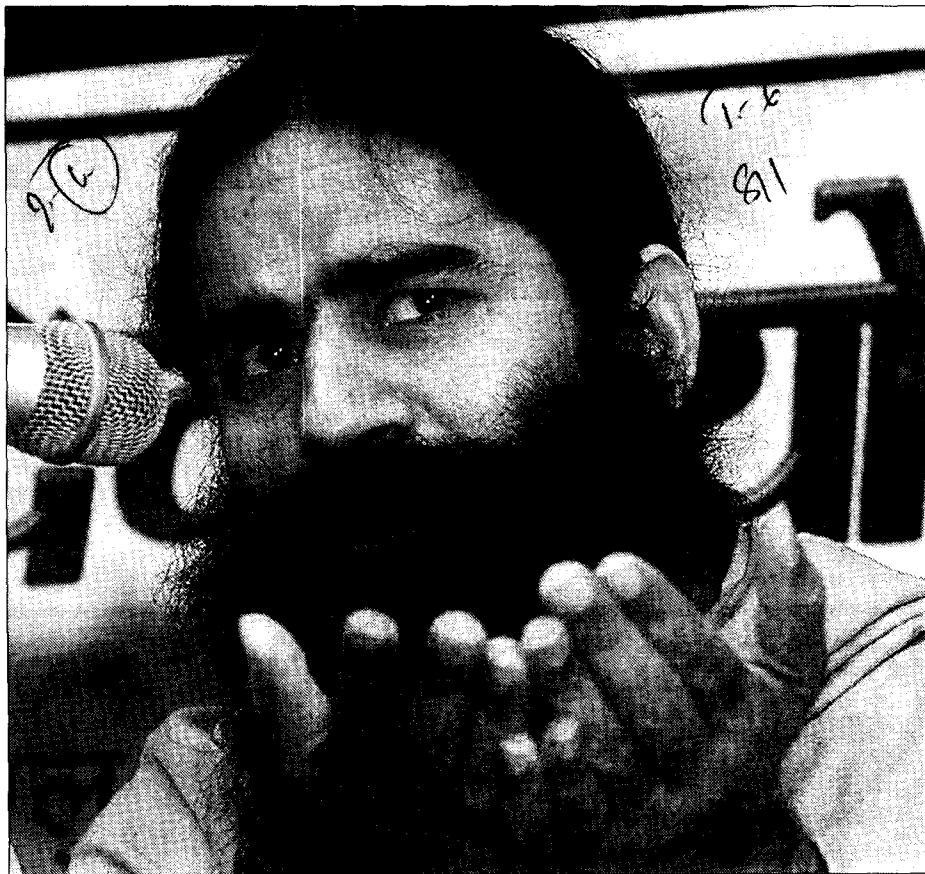
But the silver tongue that built the empire in just 10 years by promising magic cures finds it just as easy to fashion persuasive "socialist" slogans, as the CPM has found out to its chagrin.

"Bargar ka matlab barbaadi (burgers mean ruin)," the Baba advises his followers. "Maggi ka matlab kire ho jana (eating Maggi will turn you into insects)."

As for the soft drinks manufactured by multinationals, they are no better than toilet cleaners. So what's a healthy diet? Vegetables and milk, of course.

That has had the "anti-multinational" Mulayam Singh Yadavs and Lalu Prasads eating out of his hands, splitting the CPM's "secular" alliance. Dividing the men of science had been just as easy.

The Baba had come under



Ramdev defends his trust at a news conference in Lucknow. (PTI file picture)

fire a few months ago from eminent doctors and rationalists. Dr Purushottam Lal, a cardiologist with Delhi's Metro Hospital, said the yoga guru's claim that "he can cure critical heart blocks has led to several heart attacks".

He warned that practitioners of traditional medicine should be closely monitored because "some patients develop slow heart rate and low blood pressure after taking their medicines".

In no time, the Baba had found specialist doctors to en-

dorse his claims. Dr K. Mishra, senior heart specialist with Lucknow's Sahara Hospital, was one.

The Baba's yoga books now proudly quote him: "Yoga is more effective in curing diseases than other systems. Yoga has given miraculous results in curing cancer and hepatitis B. Yoga, Ayurveda and allopathy are now linked to one another."

Which is why his associates scoff at CPM leader Brinda Karat's campaign to brand him a fraud whose "herbal"

cures are laced with animal parts and human bone powder.

"The Baba's dream (of emerging India's no. 1 guru) is unlikely to be spoilt by these controversies," says a smug Swami Abhutananda.

The Baba, in true "godman" style, does talk about "awakening the self" and meditation, too. But what has earned him the faith of millions is primarily his "medicines" and the "yoga-made-easy" courses taught through cassettes, CDs, books, television and the Net.

The price for a first-hand

view is rather steep. Make enquiries about attending any of his yoga camps and you are told to contact Punjab National Bank for registration.

A front row seat costs Rs 2,100 and a view from the back Rs 251. The average fee for a city doctor is about Rs 200.

The Baba says his high ideals justify the high rates. "I take the money for a sacred cause and for nation-building. I have to build the yog peeth (at Bhadarabad near Hardwar) to serve the people."

What about the charge that he doesn't pay his labourers?

"An ashram is not an industry," he explains coolly. "Those who work for me are not workers but volunteers."

His associates believe his star is on the rise. Ramdev has powerful friends across the political spectrum.

While N.D. Tiwari, Uttaranchal's Congress chief minister, praises him for "popularising Hardwar and Uttaranchal abroad"; Mulayam salutes the guru for "curing people through yoga and Ayurveda, vindicating our traditional science".

They as well as the BJP chief minister of Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje, have promised to make Ramdev's yoga books compulsory reading in schools. Jharkhand's Arjun Munda, too, is an admirer.

Ramdev, a Haryanvi, is said to have studied Sanskrit grammar, Ayurveda and Vedic philosophy at the gurukul of an acharya named Baldev. He became an ascetic and, on the strength of "severe austerities" in the Gangotri caves, achieved "self-realisation" and acquired "extraordinary powers".

8 JAN 2006

Industrialist, MP behind tap: Amar

Says Sonia's Got Phones Of Other Leaders Too Tapped

New Delhi: Under Congress attack over the phone-tapping issue, embattled Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh on Friday demanded that the tapes purported to show him in poor light be made public and alleged that a big industrialist and a journalist-turned-MP were involved in the "conspiracy".

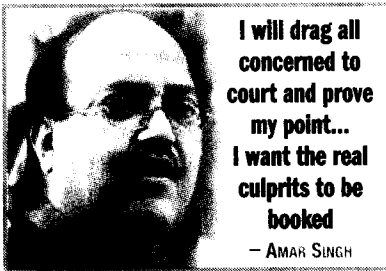
"I am not afraid of blackmail and will expose those behind the entire operation," he said, addressing a press conference here soon after he informed Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about the industrialist and the MP behind the operation. "The campaign against me has been produced and directed by 10 Janpath," Singh said, claiming that at least 60 tapes involving leaders of different political parties, including the BJP and the Congress, were in the possession of Sonia Gandhi. He said he would meet non-Congress leaders soon to caution them about the tapes.

He alleged that the phone-tapping operation had been executed by AICC general secretary Ambika Soni, former Sonia aide Pulak Chatterjee, principal secretary (home), Delhi government, R Narayanswami, the journalist-MP and several others associated with 10 Janpath. The Congress and the Centre have already denied the charge.

Singh, who met TN CM Jayalalitha on Thursday, said he would also meet President Abdul Kalam, TDP chief Chadrababu Naidu, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar and other non-Congress leaders. Without naming the journalist,

Singh said he was openly distributing video cassettes of the alleged conversation he had with several people, including "family members, film stars and politicians".

Saying that he feared for his life, Singh said, "If the industrialist could provide Rs 80 lakh for the tapes, he could also give Rs 10 crore to



kill me." Claiming that the supreme court directives on the Telegraph Act were not being implemented properly, he said he was seeking legal opinion on whether he could file a case against Reliance Infocomm, the service provider for the telephone allegedly tapped.

Taking objection to AICC spokesperson Ambika Soni describing him a "fund raiser and Majnu", he said, "She has no right to question my morality or fund raising. Soni is calling me Majnu. I, too, can talk about her character. Only my wife and daughters can question my morality." Taking a dig at railway minister Lalu Prasad for demanding that the tapes be made public, Singh said he agreed with *chara chor* (fodder thief) and Soni. "First, let Sonia, Lalu, Ambika and Rajiv Shukla address a press meet and name the persons behind it. On the one hand, they say the tapes have been forged, on the other they demand that it must be made public," he said. Agencies

Ramdev men clash with Left activists

New Delhi: Supporters of yoga guru Swami Ramdev on Thursday took to the streets protesting the allegations levelled against their guru by CPM leader Brinda Karat, leading to clashes outside the Left party's office which prompted the police to resort to a mild lathicharge.

The protestors and CPM activists pelted stones at each other when a delegation of Arya Samaj sought to present a memorandum taking objection to Karat's charges about animal parts being found in medicines produced at a pharmacy run by the Swami. The protestors also burnt an effigy of Brinda Karat outside the CPM office. One person was injured in the stone pelting incident, deputy commissioner of police (New Delhi) Anita Roy told reporters here.

Arya Samaj members had also taken out a march to protest Karat's charges, but they were stopped by the police about a kilometre away from the CPM office, she said. "We have detained several protestors, who are not members of the Arya Samaj, but freelancers who had raised slogans denouncing Karat," Roy said.

She said a delegation of the Arya Samaj had gone to the CPM office to present a memorandum to register

their protest over allegations against the Swami when a few "freelancers" joined in and raised slogans. CPM activists shouted slogans against the police for "escorting" a delegation of Arya Samaj members, who had come with a copy of the memorandum for submission at the Left party office.

The CPI on Thursday condemned the attack on its offices in the Delhi and Lucknow by the followers of Swami Ramdev. "What the followers of Ramdev are doing is nothing but sheer violation of the law of the land. It needs to be condemned squarely. So-called godmen and gurus are not above law, and not above disclosures about their business. The obvious instigators behind the attack must be caught," the CPI central secretariat said in a statement in Delhi. Agencies



Neelabh

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6, 2006

Phone tapping issues

The controversy over the tapping of the telephone of the Samajwadi Party General Secretary, Amar Singh, is a disquieting reminder of the urgent need to review the safeguards of the surveillance system. The circumstances of the case, in which a private detective and an employee of a private telecom company have been arrested, suggest that it is a very serious matter. The charge that Mr. Singh's phone was tapped cannot be rebutted, as Congress representatives have sought to do, by insinuating that it was levelled to settle political scores. Neither can it be convincingly dealt with by declaring that the Home Ministry is conducting an in-house inquiry into the matter. Such responses suggest a cover-up. A full-fledged, honest investigation must be carried out to unearth the conspiracy behind the illegal phone tap. Over the past two decades, controversies over telephone tapping have broken out intermittently. President Zail Singh accused the Rajiv Gandhi Government of bugging Rashtrapati Bhavan telephones. Ramakrishna Hegde was forced to resign as Chief Minister in 1988 following an uproar over phone tapping of his political rivals. In 1990, Chandra Shekhar, who was to become Prime Minister soon, alleged that his telephone was tapped by the National Front Government. These are only the high-profile cases.

Even if the truth varies from case to case, the general pattern of allegations suggests that those in power are not averse to bending the law when it comes to tracking telephone conversations. Surveillance through the interception of messages and conversations may be necessary under certain circumstances, especially when terrorism is a live threat. The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 gives the Centre and State Governments the power to intercept any message in case of a "public emergency" or "in the interest of public safety." It was to prevent the arbitrary exercise of this power that the Supreme Court framed guidelines in 1996 to regulate such surveillance. Observing that illegal phone tapping was "a serious violation of individual privacy," the Court laid down the following conditions: orders for taps must originate at the Home Secretary level; such orders must apply only for a limited period; and they must be issued only when the required information cannot be collected by other means. With the tremendous expansion of mobile phone services and use, the advances in snooping techniques, and the entry of a number of private players into the telecom sector, it is necessary to review the 1996 safeguards rigorously, from the standpoint of citizens' rights. There are two sets of problems that need to be resolved here. One is the apparently frequent abuse by intelligence agencies of their limited, supposedly regulated legal power. Such abuse is made easier by the obligation imposed on mobile service providers to make dedicated surveillance lines available to the agencies. The other set of issues arises from the new technological capabilities available for privatised, freelance, rogue tapping. If India is not to become an eavesdropper's paradise, there must be a serious attempt to tighten the regulations that govern the tapping of telephones and crack down on violations of the citizen's right to privacy.

■ TAMIL NADU CM SAYS HER PHONE IS BEING BUGGED TOO ■ AMAR TO MOVE SC

Jaya joins tap dance

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, Jan. 5. — Adding considerably to the political heat generated by the phone-tapping row kicked off by Samajwadi Party leaders, Tamil Nadu chief minister Ms Jayalalitha today said she felt that her telephones, too, were also being tapped by the Centre.

"I have so far refrained from making this public because I knew that there would be a flat denial by the Centre," she said in a statement after Samajwadi Party leader Mr Amar Singh called on her at the state secretariat here. Ms Jayalalitha demanded an immediate and impartial probe into the phone-tapping.

Mr Singh said today that he would move the Supreme Court for an impartial investigation. He seems to have had a very fruitful meeting with Ms Jayalalitha. After a 30-minute meeting with Ms Jayalalitha at the state secretariat, the SP leader said he had been assured of the chief minister's unwavering support as "she was a victim herself and this was the first case where people had been caught red-handed."

"I do not want to make this political. But interference in the personal life of individuals is condemnable. What happened to me can happen to anyone," said Mr Singh, who repeated his contention that he did not

consider the CBI capable of fairness. He said he expected at least Mr Mr Singh was on his guard against questions about the formation of a third front at the Centre. He said he did not want to mix politics into his meeting with Ms Jayalalitha. Yet, he called the Central coalition an "opportunistic one" and said there was a need for a strong alternative. "There

is a need for a strong alternative alliance. The Left parties have to be a part of it," Mr Amar Singh said, admitting that numbers mattered more nowadays than ideology.

Asked if his party planned to discuss the phone-tapping row with the DMK, Mr Singh said he did not wish to as the communications ministry was a party to the SP's complaint

and had a DMK minister heading it. "But I am not blaming them," said Mr Singh. He criticised the Congress spokeswoman, Mrs Ambika Soni, without naming her.

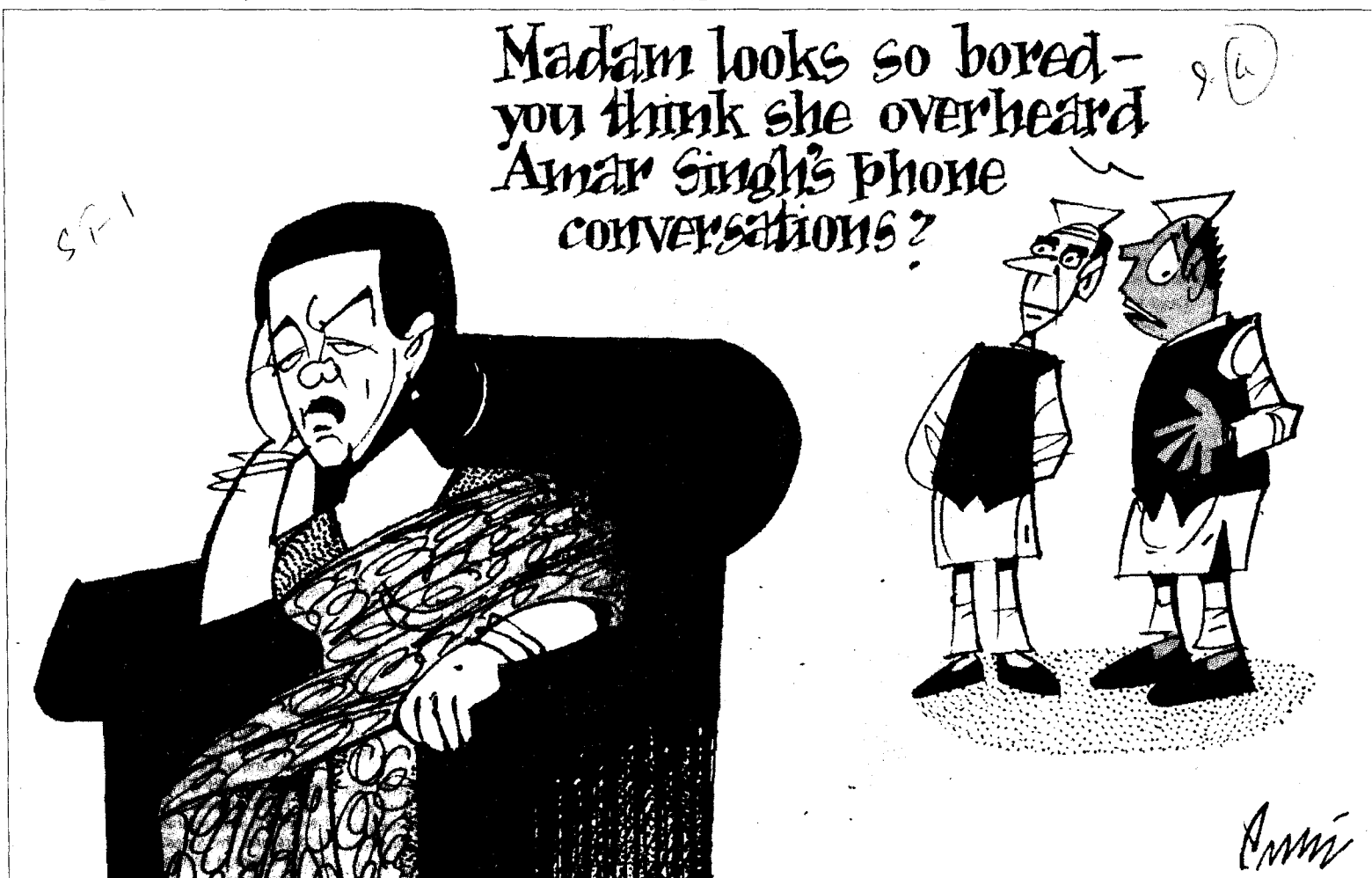
Giving the Prime Minister a clean chit on the matter, Mr Amar Singh remarked: "The constitutional authority is concerned. But the unconstitutional authority is quite

gleeful over the matter." He said he would meet the President, the Vice-President, the Prime Minister and the Rajya Sabha leader on the issue.

The phone-tapping issue acquired a new dimension today with Mr Lalu Prasad coming out in support of Mrs Sonia Gandhi and embarrassing the Samajwadi Party by demanding that the con-

tents of the recorded conversations of SP leaders, including Mr Amar Singh, be made public.

One more person has been detained in connection with the phone-tapping case. He is an associate of Bhupendra who was arrested on 30 December. Bhupendra has been demanded in judicial custody till 7 January.



Probe and politics in guru clash

OUR BUREAU AND PTI

New Delhi, Jan. 4: Confirming that the herbal medicine samples provided by Brinda Karat tested positive for animal and human parts, the Centre has asked the Uttaranchal government to carry out an independent probe into allegations against the drugs promoted by yoga guru Swami Ramdev.

The popular television guru, however, found support at two ends of the political spectrum. The Samajwadi Party and the BJP felt that the controversy is linked to an attempt to malign traditional forms of medicine.

Union health minister Anbumani Ramadoss said the Uttaranchal government has been requested to carry out fresh tests as the samples given by Karat were not lifted directly by the Centre. Ramdev's pharmacy is based in Uttaranchal's Hardwar.

"CPM leader Brinda Karat supplied those samples to us, which we got tested. Now we have asked Uttaranchal's drug controllers to investigate the case," Ramadoss said.

The tests were done at three centres, including one in Calcutta.

Ramadoss said the alleged samples of Ramdev's impotency drug contained animal and bone parts. Ramdev's pharmacy stocks herbal medicines that claim to treat conditions ranging from epilepsy to cancer to impotency.

Ramdev has dismissed the allegations, saying he was being framed by multinationals opposed to his indigenous medicines.

"There are several issues. We did not pick the samples. She (Karat), being an MP, supplied those samples to us and it was my duty to get them examined," Ramadoss said.

The minister said high levels of calcium and phosphorous were found in two samples.

If found guilty by Uttaranchal authorities of mislabelling his medicines as purely herbal, Ramdev could be charged under the Drug and Cosmetics Act, the minister said.

In Agra, Uttar Pradesh

chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav said he was with Ramdev on the issue as the yoga guru had taken up cudgels against multinational drug companies. Ramdev was also promoting indigenous medicines, the chief minister said.

Mulayam Singh's traditional foe, the BJP, too, saw in the controversy an attempt to "destroy" Indian faith in Ayurveda.

BJP spokesperson Prakash Javadekar flashed copies of Karat's statement and the health ministry's letter. "Where does the letter say that hum-



Textbook

Jaipur, Jan. 4 (PTI): The BJP government in Rajasthan today decided to introduce a Class XI textbook, *Jeevan Kaushal Shiksha*, which includes a chapter on yoga by Swami Ramdev.

"It is not a sex education course but to make adolescents aware of their biological changes, medical and health tips, and behavioural and personality development," education minister G.S. Tiwari said.

The book will be taught compulsorily by male and female teachers in all government and private schools following the curriculum of the board of secondary education. But "no examination will be conducted on this subject", Tiwari said.

an skulls and animal parts are being used in medicines produced in Divya Yog Pharmacy owned by Baba Ramdev?" Javadekar asked. "There is a deliberate attempt here to destroy Indian faith in Ayurveda."

The RSS tonight said the controversy is a "conspiracy hatched by retrograde Leftists to demean reputed persons of Bharatiya culture".

05 JAN 2006

Uncover plot in tapping issue: Karat

Amar Singh to meet Jayalalitha

NEW DELHI: CPI (M) general secretary Prakash Karat on Wednesday termed the alleged phone-tapping of Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh as a "serious matter" and demanded a proper investigation.

Emerging from a meeting with Mr. Singh, he told reporters that "it has been established that through a private telephone company tapping has been done illegally. There should be a proper investigation to uncover the conspiracy behind it."

The Samajwadi Party leader met Mr. Karat in a bid to mobilise the support of the non-Congress political parties on the issue and apprised the latter about the tapping operation by a detective agency.

He sought the CPI (M)'s support to the SP demand to expose those who were behind the tapping. He said the issue concerned not just any particular party or individual.

Mr. Singh told the media that he had 'learnt' that the CBI, RAW and IB had held a meeting, where two persons at the level of the CBI Joint Director gave instructions to "fix him once and for all."

The Samajwadi Party leader intends to meet in Chennai on Thursday noon Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha, one of the three CMs the party wants to probe the matter.

The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh had declared at a press conference here on Tuesday his mistrust of the CBI and sought a probe into the phone tapping case either by his state's Special Task Force or by a trio of West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Ms. Jayalalitha and Bihar Chief

Minister Nitish Kumar.

Mr. Mulayam Singh had vehemently defended Mr. Amar Singh's conversations with some film actresses, saying that he had the right to privacy. These telephonic conversations had been reportedly tapped.

The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister termed the incident as "a grave threat to national security", and said he would also raise the issue with President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee and Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. He wanted a probe by a joint Parliamentary committee. — PTI, UNI

Serious matter: Manmohan

Aarti Dhar

PORT BLAIR: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday said tapping of telephones was a serious matter" and it should be given a thought."

There are no two opinions that there should be no tapping of telephones," he said when asked to respond to the demand of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh that a special task force be constituted to look into tapping of phones.

Dr. Singh said he learnt about Mr. Singh's demand from newspaper reports. He had been away from New Delhi for the past two days and was yet to ascertain the exact details, he added.

0 5 JAN 2006

First overseas citizen: Wait will be over on Jan 7

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: If President Kalam is the 'first citizen of India', there will soon be a proud claimant to the title of the 'first overseas citizen of India'.

Actually, there will be two claimants to that honour: For, at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Hyderabad on January 7, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is due to confer 'dual citizenship' on two overseas Indians — one living abroad and the other who has been staying in India on a long-term visa.

The identity of the lucky two who will be getting the first Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) certificates has not been announced yet. They will be selected from

like Fiji, South Africa, Guyana and Surinam.

Any person of Indian origin, except those who had taken up citizenship of either Pakistan or Bangladesh, can apply for OCI.

The scheme, however, is silent on the prospects of applicants from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir; that India considers part of its territory. But a senior home ministry official told *TOI* that adequate security checks would be made to ensure that "trouble makers" are kept out.

The scheme could attract applications from Mirpuris of PoK, based in UK, US and other places, who have been constantly engaged in anti-India campaign.

Though it is loosely referred to as dual citizenship,

a person with an OCI certificate does not legally have the same status as an Indian citizen. This is because the Constitution does not allow anybody to hold Indian citizenship and citizenship of a foreign country simultaneously.

Article 9 of the Constitution says: "No person shall be a citizen of India ... or be deemed to be a citizen of India ... if he has voluntarily acquired the citizenship of any foreign state."

So, overseas citizens will

not be entitled to equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and will not have any political rights. They can neither contest elections nor cast votes.

Benefits that persons with OCI get are still substantial: ● Multi-purpose, multiple



Manmohan Singh

Within the US, the highest number of 370 applications

were received from Chicago. However, the idea is yet to sink in way with descendants of indentured labour — *girmityas* — settled in places

entry, lifelong visa for visiting India. Every overseas citizen will be issued a registration certificate printed like an Indian passport, though in a different colour to avoid confusion. The government will also paste an OCI visa sticker on the person's foreign passport.

● Unlike foreign citizens, persons with OCI are exempt from reporting to Foreigners Regional Registration Officers (FRROs) for any length of stay in India.

● Parity with the Indian citizens who are registered under the income tax law as NRIs. The only respect in which they are worse off than NRIs is that overseas citizens cannot buy agricultural and plantation properties.

Brinda sees skeletons in Yogi pillbox

SUTIRTHO Patranobis

New Delhi, January 3

SWAMI RAMDEV, whose popular yoga classes are beamed to lakhs of Indian homes daily, came under a cloud of controversy on Tuesday after CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat alleged that ayurvedic medicines manufactured at his Hardwar-based pharmacy contained human bone powder and animal parts.

Citing a health ministry lab report on two medicines used for treating epilepsy and impotency, Karat said, "The impotency drug contains testicles of animals, crushed to powder. Bone and skull powder was also detected." A ministry spokesperson said a complaint had been received that Ramdev's pharmacy had not mentioned the ingredients of two medicines sent by Karat. "Tests have been done and the report has been made available to the Uttaranchal government," the spokesperson said.

Ramdev's Divya Yogi pharmacy at Kankhal manufactures over 160 types of medicines, which, he claims, can cure acidity, impotency and even control cancer.

Six months ago Karat had collected two medicine samples from the pharmacy and sent them to the health ministry for testing. The samples were then sent to three Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha labs.

On December 29, Karat received a letter from the department of AYUSH (Ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy, unani, siddha and homeopathy) saying the samples revealed "a violation of licensing and labelling provisions of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act (DCA), 1940". It added that action should be taken under the "licensing and labelling provisions of chapter 4A" of the Act.

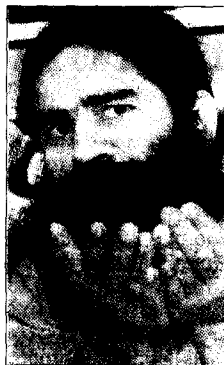
In Lucknow, Ramdev told reporters he was open to any kind of inquiry into the contents of the ayurvedic medicines. About Karat's allegations, he said an attempt was being made to frame him under pressure from MNCs whose businesses had suffered because of his 'swadesi' campaign.

(With inputs from Lucknow, Dehradun)



Brinda's charge

Impotency drug manufactured at Swami Ramdev's Hardwar-based pharmacy contained powdered testicles of animals, bone and skull powder



Swami's defence

Open to any inquiry into contents of the medicines. Alleges MNCs were framing him as their business was hit by his 'swadesi' campaign

MULAYAM CALLS INVESTIGATIONS A COVER-UP ✓✓

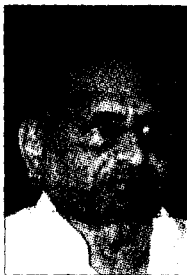
SP taps anti-Cong vein

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 3. — The controversy over the tapping of the telephones of Samajwadi Party leaders, including Mr Amar Singh, acquired a new dimension today with Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav advocating an inquiry by the STF or by any non-Congress chief minister — Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Ms J Jayalalithaa or Mr Nitish Kumar — while rejecting the suggestion of a CBI probe.

He dismissed as a “cover up” the Centre’s investigations into the case and stuck to his charge that Ms Sonia Gandhi had masterminded the operation to glean information about the SP’s political plans by eavesdropping on its leaders’ conversations.

The Congress as well as the Union home ministry have dismissed these allegations as “baseless and unfounded”, with the former accusing the SP leader of voicing such charges “periodically”.



One more arrested

NEW DELHI, Jan. 3. — One more person was arrested today in connection with the alleged tapping of the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr Amar Singh’s telephone. The accused, Kuldeep, is an employee of Reliance Infocomm. According to sources, he made it easy for the main accused, Bhupendra, to access Mr Singh’s telephone number and tap it. He has been remanded in police custody for three days. — SNS

Addressing a press conference here, Mr Yadav criticised the home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil, for his stand and announced his party’s

intention to speak to the President, the Vice-President, the Prime Minister and the Lok Sabha Speaker about the matter.

The UP chief minister also released two letters purportedly written by the principal secretary (home), Delhi Government, Mr R Narayanswami, and the joint commissioner, Delhi police, Mr Ranjit Narayan, to a nodal officer of a private telecom operator recently, urging interception of some phones (belonging to SP leaders) for public safety and in the national interest.

The home ministry has said that this was “prima facie a case of forgery”. The Delhi police also filed a case of forgery and arrested a private detective in this connection a few days ago.

The UP chief minister told non-Congress leaders to beware of the “designs of the Congress” to tarnish their image. Mr Yadav said the SP would demand a joint parliamentary committee probe. He said the controversy had raised questions about the security and safety of the country.

Man with Reliance connection held

Strange link in phone tap

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Jan. 3: Mulayam Singh Yadav raised the tone of his attack on the Centre for allegedly tapping his and his aide Amar Singh's phones, but in a strange twist police arrested a second person in the case who has a Reliance Infocomm connection.

Reliance Infocomm is owned by Anil Ambani, a close friend of Amar and Mulayam Singh.

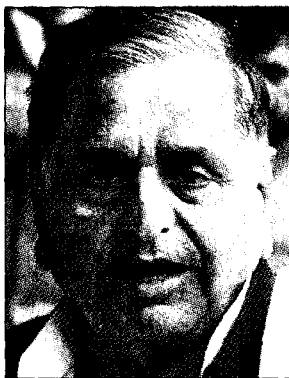
"He is an employee of Reliance Infocomm," said Karnail Singh, the joint commissioner (special branch) of Delhi police, referring to the arrested man, Kuldeep Singh.

Sources in Reliance Infocomm, however, described Kuldeep as a franchise-holder who sells its services.

"We are cooperating with the investigating agencies. We will not comment any further," a company spokesperson said in Mumbai. Last week, the police had arrested Bhupendra, the owner of a private detective agency in Delhi.

Bringing his battle to the capital, Uttar Pradesh chief minister and Samajwadi Party head Mulayam Singh alleged a "cover-up" in the Centre's investigations to "protect" Sonia Gandhi.

He demanded the Centre constitute a committee of non-Congress chief ministers to investigate the "tapping" and



Mulayam Singh Yadav in New Delhi on Tuesday. (PTI)

named Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Nitish Kumar and Jayalalitha as his nominees.

"The Centre cannot object to any of these names. Between them, they represent the north, south and east of India. I left out the west because then I would have had to pick a BJP chief minister (Narendra Modi) and he would have been rejected as communal," Mulayam Singh said.

He, however, added that he had not yet spoken to the chief ministers.

Mulayam Singh contested the Union home ministry's statement that the two letters he had released earlier were forged. The letters — one attributed to the principal secretary (home) of the Delhi government, R. Narayanaswami, on November 9, 2005, and the other to Ranjit Narayan, joint commissioner (crime), Delhi police, on November 22, 2005 — asked the nodal officer of Re-

liance Infocomm to intercept phone number 011-39565414 and mobile number 9811358986 in the "interest of public safety and the nation".

"How did the home ministry conclude within a few hours of my bringing the matter to their attention that the letters were forged? How did they give details of the arrest so soon?" asked Mulayam Singh, who went public with his charge on December 30 in Lucknow and the day after Bhupendra was arrested.

He said the issue raised questions about national security because "it proved anyone can acquire sensitive information on forged papers about the country's defence and foreign affairs. If Samajwadi leaders' phones can be tapped using forged letters, what is the guarantee that the same process cannot be used to get information about our nuclear programme and the Prime Minister's Office?"

Home minister Shivraj Patil, who, along with Sonia, was the target of Mulayam Singh's attack, held a meeting with home secretary V.K. Duggal later.

It is believed the two agreed that certain provisions of the Indian Telegraph Act must be amended to "streamline" the procedures for tapping and prevent the use of forged documents.

The home ministry had also called private telecom operators for a meeting but it was cancelled without reason.

INSIDE STORY Detective was given forged letters, he forwarded it to telephone company and got a parallel line

Police zero in on mastermind of phone tapping

AMAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 1

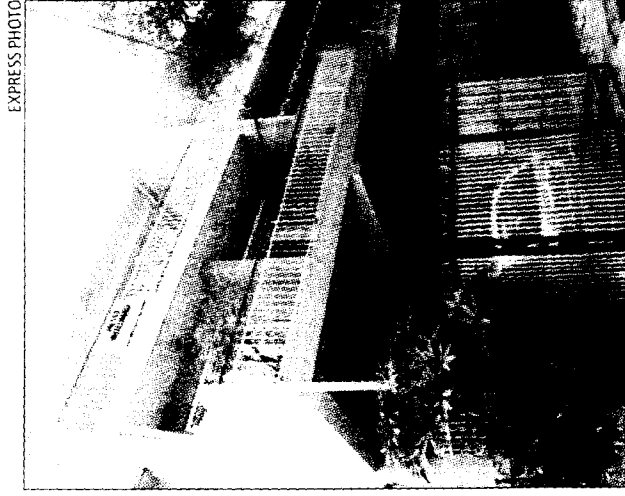
SAMAJWADI Party leader Amar Singh's telephone conversations had been recorded for over two months by a private detective in New Delhi's South Extension.

Investigating officers of the Delhi Police's Special Cell say that the detective, 32-year-old Bhupendra Kumar, "was used as a pawn for the operation" for a "handsome amount." They say the mastermind has been identified. "The case will be cracked in a day or so," said Joint Commissioner (Special Cell) Kamal Singh.

Kumar was approached by a person, who identified himself as a police officer, at the rented second-floor office of his Metro Intelligence in South Extension in October. The man who posed as the officer had two letters. One purportedly written by Delhi Joint CP (Crime) Ranjit Narayan on October 22

to Principal Secretary (Home) R Narayan Swamy asking for permission to tap Amar Singh's phone. The other, the permission granted by Swamy. "Both letters were forged—the despatch number of the first one is the same as that of a commendation written for an official by Joint CP Narayan and the despatch number of the second is that of a letter written by Swamy dismissing some corrupt Thar jail officials," says Special Cell officers.

Investigators say that Kumar was offered a huge sum to carry out the tapping operation. Kumar forwarded both the letters to Reliance Infocomm, seeking access to telephone number 011-39565414. Believing this to be official request, the telecom company through a programme in their system gave a parallel line from 011-39565414 to Bhupendra's mobile phone number (9811358986), say Special Cell sources. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh on Friday had alleged that this mobile number be-



EXPRESS PHOTO



Office of the detective agency that organised the tapping of SP leader Amar Singh's phone

longed to Joint CP Narayan.

The tapping went on for almost two-and-a-half months till an alert Reliance official realised that the number under surveillance was installed at the Lodhi Estate residence of Amar Singh. He soon passed on the information to his superiors. The news reached Mulayam Singh

Yadav who sent an SOS to Delhi Police Commissioner K K Paul and Home Minister Shivraj Patil who did not have any information about the tapping. "The CM, who obtained the two letters as well, then went to the media saying Delhi police had tapped Amar Singh's phone under the Centre's instructions," say investigators.

When the news channels began flashing Mulayam Singh Yadav's press conference, no one—Kumar and his four employees—turned up to work at the detective agency's South Extension office. "Bhupendra has been running this office here for two years now. He said he worked for banks as a recovery agent and paid me Rs 12,000 as monthly rent. I never suspected anything," says the landlord, Babu Ram, a retired income tax advocate.

Ram says the office has been locked since Friday when the news came out. Sources say the police arrested him the same night from his residence in Alipur's Hirnik area.

Central probe into phone tapping a cover-up: Mulayam

Get any non-Congress Chief Minister to look into the issue, says Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav on Tuesday demanded that allegations of phone tapping of certain Samajwadi Party leaders by the Centre be looked into by any non-Congress Chief Minister, including West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa or Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Addressing a press conference here, Mr. Yadav said Congress president Sonia Gandhi was behind the tapping of party general secretary Amar Singh's phone and alleged a conspiracy against his Government.

He said the party would take the matter to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and get in touch with other non-Congress parties including the Left to caution them against Congress "designs". The Samajwadi Party would raise the issue in the next session of Parliament and seek a Joint Parliamentary Party probe.

Demanding that the matter be investigated, he said he had no faith in the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which was under the control of the Central Government, especially after the



"HERE IS THE PROOF": Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav showing photo copies of documents on 'phone tapping' from the Delhi Government's Home Department and Office of the Joint Commissioner of Police, at a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PHOTO: SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

agency recommended dropping of cases against former Union Petroleum Minister Satish Sharma and former UP Chief Minister Mayawati in the Taj Corridor case. Alleging that the Centre's investigations into the phone-tapping incident were a "cover-up", Mr. Yadav said he would prefer that the matter be investigated by the Special Task Force of the Uttar Pradesh Government. "If that is not acceptable to the Centre, then the matter

phones of political leaders are being tapped and the Government is not in the know of it."

Mr. Yadav said he had brought the incident to the notice of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Patil on the night of December 30. Mr. Patil returned his call the next morning to confirm that the phone tapping was done based on forged letters. "How could the matter be investigated within a few hours?" he asked, and added that the Government probe was a "cover-up."

Mr. Yadav was also cut-up about the UP Government not being taken into confidence about the arrest of a suspect from Noida who was allegedly involved with the detective agency used for phone tapping.

Asked whether the Samajwadi Party would withdraw support to the United Progressive Government at the Centre, Mr. Yadav said that was a separate issue. His party was giving out-side support like the Left that was opposing several policies of the Government but had not withdrawn support.

- **Accuses Sonia Gandhi of being involved**

- **Warns Left of Congress' "designs"**

- **"An indication of a grave threat to security"**

can be looked into by any of the non-Congress Chief Ministers suggested by me." Mr. Yadav said he had not spoken to any of these Chief Ministers so far.

The Chief Minister released copies of two letters purported to have been written by R. Narayanswamy, Principal Secretary (Home) of the National Capital Region Government, and Ranjit Narayan, Joint Commissioner of Police, reportedly authorising interception of phone calls to a landline and a mobile number ostensibly belonging to Mr. Amar Singh.

"Serious matter"

Referring to Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil's denial of any phone tapping and dismissal of the letters as "forged", Mr. Yadav said if that was true, it was the indication of a "grave threat" to the security of the country. "This is a serious matter. The

One more arrested: Page 12

Finish land reforms: Amartya Sen

'There is considerable stagnation in the agriculture sector'

Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD: The rapid growth of the country's economy in the recent past notwithstanding, India cannot become a major player in the global economy unless it completed the land reform process, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen said here on Tuesday.

It was important to unleash the kind of energy that China had done to emerge as a global player, for which land reforms were extremely important. The land reform process, which kept the economies of States like West Bengal, where it was fairly complete, floating, was substantially incomplete in the country.

Delivering a lecture on "science and practical reason" at the 93rd Indian Science Congress which got off here on Tuesday, he expressed concern that there was considerable distress in the agriculture sector due to the sharp contrast it had with the upwardly mobile industrial and urban segments. There was considerable stagnation in the sector causing asymmetries and inequalities within the country.

"Our vision of India cannot be one that is half California and half sub-Saharan Africa," he said. The country could draw lessons from the second phase of land reforms initiated in China, which helped the country achieve extraordinarily rapid expansion over the past two

"Our vision of India cannot be one that is half California and half sub-Saharan Africa"

decades.

The development of social infrastructure in health and education also could make a "dramatic difference" in rural India. The rural schools were dogged by problems of teacher absenteeism, neglect of pupils from poor and disadvantaged sections and non-functioning of the inspectorate system.

The absenteeism of health-care officials in many areas coupled with the inadequate facilities for primary healthcare was another area where efforts should be made to strengthen public health services. This was giving scope for exploitation of the patients by quacks.

Quoting a survey conducted in a district of Jharkhand, he said while 62 per cent of the people depended on quacks, another 14 per cent go to ojhas and magic healers, "who are mercifully somewhat less expensive than quacks."

"There is a strong need for reducing the dependence of the people, particularly the rural poor, on exploitative private healthcare," he said.

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