

PART A: News pertaining to Planning Commission



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(महापुरुषों के प्रेरणात्मक विचार)

(Christmas is the day that holds all the time together)

Alexander Smith

1. Planning Commission's absence has created uncertainty: Virbhadra

India Tribune (Magazine): 25.12.2014

Shimla, Dec 25 (IANS) Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh Thursday slammed the central government for scrapping the **Planning Commission** without consulting the states, and said this action has created uncertainty.

"The Planning Commission had played a great role in giving direction to the states. But the centre's decision to scrap it without giving an alternate has created uncertainty," he told reporters on the completion of two years of the Congress government.

He said the centre should spell out its policy for the states at the earliest in the absence of the Planning Commission.

But at the same time, the chief minister said the Narendra Modi government has allocated all funds to the state.

"So far, the state has not faced any problem in fund allocation. May be the allocation was done by the previous UPA government. We will get to know about the Modi government's attitude towards the state after April next year."

Taking a jibe at the main opposition BJP in the state, Virbhadra Singh, who is at helm for the sixth time, said it was the most irresponsible opposition party in the history of the state.

"The BJP has failed to play the role of a constructive opposition and had only tried to destabilise the government ever since the Congress came to power. It even boycotted the assembly in different sessions at the cost of public issues," he said.

He flayed the BJP for blaming the government for the financial mess.

"The BJP is responsible for financial mess. My government is streamlining the finances. There is no financial crunch at present," he said.

On the demand by BJP leader and two-time former chief minister Prem Kumar Dhumal for a white paper on the financial position, Virbhadra Singh said: "We have no problem. But the white paper would only highlight the wrongdoings of the previous BJP regime too."

Listing out his priorities, he said education and health were two vital sectors which would be strengthened further.

2. Govt staring at empty power sector pipeline in 13th Plan period

Shreya Jai, Business Standard: 26.12.2014

The Centre's talk of round-the-clock power supply and preparation for new coal auctions to reduce fuel shortage has failed to enthuse project developers. All measures being taken by the Bharatiya Janata Party government will bail out only stuck projects. Top private power producers are denying any investment in new projects.

The signal is loud and clear: Investment in the power sector is likely to enter a lull phase in the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2017-2022). After the 12th Plan ending in 2017, the power sector is looking at an empty pipeline, both by capacity addition and capital investment.

"The pipeline is clearly dry for future projects. Stranded projects might start in another two to three years but then financials of companies would still remain an issue," said the chief executive of one of India's top private power companies.

Around 48,389 megawatts (Mw) of projects of the targeted 88,537 Mw for 2012-17 have been commissioned and the balance is expected to come on stream during the last leg of 2015-17. Half of the commissioned 46,000 Mw in thermal (coal- and gas-based) is stuck mainly because of fuel supply issues.

In 2011-12, more capacity was added than targeted. A record 52 projects, most of these allocated in 2007-09, were commissioned by the private sector. The next financial year, too, saw capacity addition of 20,121 Mw, including in ultra mega power projects (UMPP) of 4,000 Mw, compared with the targeted of 15,154 Mw. Of the four UMPPs awarded, Mundra (Gujarat) and Sasan (Madhya Pradesh) have been commissioned but are battling tariff-related issues.

Capacity addition started slowing down in 2013-14, when less than 40 per cent of the target was met. Local gas supply dwindled, coal linkages with state monopoly Coal India were left unmet and captive coal allocations went under litigation. In 2014-15, 5,658 Mw capacity has been added so far, against the target of 14,988 Mw till March.

The Union government is looking to auction close to 40 million tonnes of coal to the power sector. It also plans to kick-start at least 28,000 Mw of coal-fired plants.

"But all these projects are stuck and awaiting coal block allocation after they lost mines because of the September Supreme Court judgment. Where is the new capacity? There is no new capacity coming in till 2017," said senior executive of one of the top privately held power generation companies.

Even for power projects that would be awarded next financial year, if they find any takers, they would be commissioned only after 2019. The two UMPPs, in Tamil Nadu and Odisha, the government bid out found no takers except state-owned companies NTPC and NHPC. The private players pulled out of the bid citing regulatory issues in the bid document. The whole bidding process is expected to be scrapped.

"Our company is not looking to invest in any new project for another two financial years at least. There isn't a conducive environment to do that," said a senior executive of one of the UMPPs.

The major deals in the power sector this year involved only transfer of equity and debt. "New players are unlikely to come in the power sector at this point of time. Look at the big names in the power industry - they are just scouting for projects to acquire. Not a penny of fresh capital investment is going to come in the power sector," said A K Khurana, director-general, Association of Power Producers, the apex representative body for private power companies. Adani Power is acquiring a 1,200-Mw Udupi plant from Lanco Infrastructure for Rs 6,000 crore and another 600-Mw Korba West power plant from Avantha Group for Rs 4,200 crore. Both the sellers were looking recasting their debt through these deals. Recently, Tata Power acquired a 540-Mw thermal plant from Ideal Energy for an estimated Rs 3,500 crore, again a transfer of debt.

A power sector executive said: "As an investor, all I need is long-term fuel-supply assurance and power-purchase agreement. Growth in the sector would come only when bidding happens in case-I or case-II projects. We would not take up projects only on assurance of fuel linkage from Coal India." In case-I projects, clearances, land and other infrastructure are provided by the government authority. In case-II bidding, project promoters take up the responsibility of setting up the power project with the state or central government acting just as a facilitator.

Though the power industry appreciates the speed with which the National Democratic Alliance government went ahead with changes in law for auctioning coal blocks and commercial mining, they didn't have any high hopes. "The onus is on the government to accelerate the growth of the sector. Power demand would keep going up but if there is no policy environment, '24X7 power for all' would remain a distant dream," said a chief executive of one of the India's largest power company with interests in generation, transmission and distribution.

3. National workshop on women empowerment inaugurated

The Times of India: 25.12.2014

KANPUR: A two-day national workshop on women empowerment was inaugurated at Chandra Shekhar Azad Agriculture University on Wednesday. Experts from all over the country spoke on 'Women

Empowerment during 12th Five Year Plan through agricultural mechanisation'. JP Mishra, advisor, **Planning Commission**, Government of India, who was the chief guest on the occasion, inaugurated the event. AK Tiwari, director, Planning Commission, Bhopal, was the special guest.

Speaking at the workshop JP Mishra said that participation of women in agriculture is around 70% in the country, therefore it is important that we design agricultural machinery keeping women workers in mind.

"Agriculture in the present scenario is not possible without modern technology and machinery. Even today machinery is designed keeping male farmers in mind, which makes it difficult for women to handle and work on it. We need to work on redesigning machinery keeping women farmers in mind," he said.

He said that though 56% population of the country is agriculture dependent, their contribution in national GDP is only 18%, which is quite low when compared to other countries.

"Women's contribution in agricultural sector can be utilised to increase agricultural sector's contribution in GDP," he added.

A total of around 15 experts and 180 delegates from all over the country participated in the workshop. Eleven NGOs and farmers were honoured for their work and contribution in the field of agriculture.

सुशासन दिवस पर मोदी विजन



पीएम बनने के बाद नरेंद्र मोदी ने गुरुवार का वाराणसी का दूसरी बार दौरा किया। बीजेपी के सांसदों को सुशासन दिवस पर अपने क्षेत्रों में मौजूद रहने को कहा गया था। इस मौके पर मोदी ने कई बातों से अपना विजन सामने रखा।

रेलवे निजी हाथों में नहीं : मोदी ने रेलवे के प्राइवेटाइजेशन की संभावना खारिज कर दी है। वाराणसी में रेलवे से जुड़े एक कार्यक्रम में उन्होंने कहा कि इस मुद्दे पर भ्रम हो गया है, लेकिन हमारा प्राइवेटाइजेशन का इरादा नहीं है। उन्होंने कर्मचारी यूनियनों को इस सेक्टर में आने वाले विदेशी और निजी निवेश को लेकर चिंतित न होने की सलाह दी। गौरतलब है कि यूनियनों ने इस मुद्दे पर विरोध की योजना बना रखी थी। मोदी ने कहा कि विदेशी निवेश के पैसे का इस्तेमाल रेलवे के विकास में होगा।



'शिक्षा में हम तैयार नहीं' : बनारस हिंदू यूनिवर्सिटी (बीएचयू) में हुए कार्यक्रम में मोदी ने कहा कि दुनिया में शिक्षकों की कमी है और इसे भारत ही दूर कर सकता है। दुनिया हमें उम्मीद की नजरों से देख रही है और हम तैयार नहीं हैं। उन्होंने यह भी कहा कि शिक्षा रोबोट पैदा करने वाली न हो। प्रधानमंत्री ने 'पंडित मदन मोहन मालवीय नेशनल मिशन ऑन टीचर्स एंड टीचिंग' की शुरुआत भी की। मोदी ने बारहवीं तक की स्कूली शिक्षा के बाद पांच साल के टीचर ट्रेनिंग कोर्स का विचार सामने रखा।



स्वच्छता में लोगों का साथ: मोदी ने अपने निर्वाचन क्षेत्र में स्वच्छ भारत अभियान को भी आगे बढ़ाया। उन्होंने अस्सी घाट पर मलबे के ढेर को हटाने और इसके पुराने वैभव को बहाल करने में सहयोग के लिए लोगों का आभार व्यक्त किया। मोदी ने सफाई अभियान से जुड़ने के लिए नौ लोगों को नामित किया। इनमें किरण बेदी, हास्य कलाकार कपिल शर्मा, सौरव गांगुली, मुंबई के डिब्बेवाले आदि हैं। (एनबीटी)

वाराणसी में स्वच्छता अभियान में शामिल मोदी

'सरकारी कामकाज आसान हो'



पूर्व पीएम अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी के जन्मदिन को देश भर में सुशासन दिवस के रूप में मनाया गया

पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी के जन्मदिन पर गुरुवार को मनाए जा रहे सुशासन दिवस पर मोदी ने कहा कि मेरी सरकार पारदर्शी और जवाबदेह प्रशासन देने के लिए प्रतिबद्ध है। सरकारी कामकाज की प्रक्रिया को आसान कर आसानी से सुशासन सुनिश्चित किया जा सकता है। वाराणसी जाने से पहले मोदी गुरुवार को वाजपेयी से मिलने उनके आवास पर गए और उन्हें उनके 90वें जन्मदिन पर बधाई दी। मोदी सरकार वाजपेयी को भी भारत रत्न सम्मान देने का फैसला कर चुकी है। (विस) ▶▶ पेज 9

पीएम का पारदर्शी प्रशासन का वादा

■ विशेष संवाददाता, नई दिल्ली

प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने कहा कि 'पारदर्शी और जवाबदेह प्रशासन' मुहैया कराने के वादे के तहत सरकारी प्रक्रियाओं को नए सिरे से आकार देने की कोशिश की जा रही है। उन्होंने कहा कि सरकार ने पिछले सात महीनों में सिटिजन फर्स्ट के मंत्र को आधार बनाकर काम किया है। पूर्व पीएम अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी के 90वें जन्मदिन को 'सुशासन दिवस' के तौर पर मनाते हुए मोदी ने अपने संदेश में कहा कि एक पारदर्शी और जवाबदेह प्रशासन देने का हमने वादा किया था और हम यह करेंगे।

उन्होंने कहा कि सरकार एक आसान आंतरिक कार्य प्रणाली पर काम कर रही है जिसे ई लर्निंग मॉड्यूल के जरिए उपलब्ध कराया जाएगा। भारत सरकार के मंत्रालयों और विभागों को निर्देशित किया गया है कि वे अपने कामकाज के एरिया को देखें, अपनी आंतरिक प्रक्रियाओं की



वाराणसी के डीएलडब्ल्यू में बने डीजल इंजन को पीएम मोदी ने झंडी दिखाकर रवाना किया पड़ताल करें और इस डायरेक्शन में काम करें कि उन्हें किस प्रकार सरल और तार्किक बनाया जा सकता है।

सिटिजन फर्स्ट को सरकार का मंत्र बताते हुए मोदी ने कहा कि यह मंत्र हमारा ध्येय और हमारा पथ प्रदर्शन करने वाला सिद्धांत है। सुशासन के युग में प्रवेश अभी शुरू हुआ है और यह शुरुआत आशावान तरीके से हुई है।

PART B

NEWS AND VIEWS

Friday 26th, December 2014

Polity

: Omar, Shah meet over J&K govt?

Economy

: Centre raises import duty on crude,
refined edible oils

Planning

: Govt plans rolling list for PSU stake sale

Editorial

: Honouring complex legacies

Communication, IT Information Division
Phone # 2525

■ Both parties deny meeting ■ Differences likely over CM's post
Omar, Shah meet over J&K govt?

YUSUF JAMEEL
with bureau and
agency inputs
SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI,
DEC. 25

Amid speculation that outgoing Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and National Conference (NC) leader Omar Abdullah met the BJP leadership, including party president Amit Shah and Union minister Arun Jaitley, in New Delhi late on Wednesday evening to discuss the possibility of government formation in the state, a fuming Congress, the NC's ally for six years, has, without naming Mr Abdullah,



Omar Abdullah

called him and his party "power hungry".

The BJP, however, on Thursday denied that any such meeting took place with Mr Abdullah. The outgoing CM also took to Twitter to make this asser-

BJP, PDP start talks as well

Srinagar: The PDP and the BJP, which emerged as the top two parties in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections, on Thursday night began talks here on government formation. **PAGE 2**

tion. "So many stories doing the rounds about a BJP-NC deal. Let me say this as strongly as possible — THERE IS NO DEAL NOR ANY DISCUSSION going on (sic). I hope someone from the



Amit Shah

PDP/BJP/Cong steps up & forms a government in J&K quickly. Denying stupid rumours is fast becoming a full-time job," Mr Abdullah tweeted.

Mr Jaitley, along with minister of state in the

PMO Jitendra Singh and BJP general secretary Ram Madhav, reached Jammu on Thursday and held discussions with party MLAs. Mr Jaitley asserted that the saffron party has several options in government formation and holds the "veto power" in the state.

"All options are open for us. The newly-elected MLAs of the party have decided that they will go with the decision of party president Amit Shah, who will take a decision which is good for the party, the state and the country... The central leadership of the party will decide where it wants to sit in the

■ Turn to Page 2

Omar, Shah meet over govt?

■ Continued from Page 1
Assembly or how to form the government," Mr Jaitley said while addressing the media.

The NC, which was till Wednesday evening speaking in many voices, which included extending support to the PDP in government formation, and, at the same time, proclaiming it will not take the lead for talks on the issue on the plea that "government formation is the responsibility of the BJP and the PDP because they have more numbers than the National Conference", is now reportedly holding discussions with the BJP.

Mr Abdullah, who has delayed his visit to London where his parents have recently undergone surgery, has called some senior NC leaders and his close associates to Delhi for consultations and to assist him in talks with the BJP leadership. He flew back to Srinagar from Delhi on Thursday afternoon and tweeted:

"All the camera crews outside my home are going to be very disappointed when I leave Srinagar tomorrow having met no one 'interesting' here."

Reports emanating from Delhi and NC and BJP sources in Srinagar said that the BJP is adamant on having its chief minister in the state for a full six-year term but the NC wants a rotational chief minister, besides three major portfolios.

As the two sides have agreed to continue with the discussions, the BJP has conveyed to Mr Abdullah that a final decision will be taken only after Mr Jaitley meets state party leaders.

However, a Jammu-based senior leader of the NC ruled out tying up with the BJP, saying: "We don't believe in marriage of convenience and sacrificing our fundamental principles." The leader made it clear that his party had strong funda-

mental differences with the BJP and that the possibility of the NC joining hands with the saffron party was "next to nil".

Though the BJP has not yet closed other options, the party sources said that it is reluctant to go with the PDP as there are many ideological differences between the two and would, therefore, continue to explore the possibility for forming a government with the NC.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti had on Wednesday said her party "is in no hurry" as it assesses likely partners.

But party sources said that though its "natural choice" remains the Congress, the two together fall short of four seats to reach the magic number of 44 to form the government.

One of the Independents, Hakeem Muhammad Yasin, it was banking upon has already announced his support for the BJP.

Talking to NC, waiting for PDP

BJP keeps all options open

Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI: After initiating talks with National Conference leader Omar Abdullah on government formation in Jammu and Kashmir, the Bharatiya Janata Party on Thursday reverted to saying that "all its options were open," indicating that it wants to keep its channels open with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as well.

The BJP, which has won 25 seats against the 28 won by the PDP and 15 by the National Conference, is 19 short of the half-way mark to form a government in the 87-member J&K Assembly.

The BJP has made it clear that the party wants to participate in government and would prefer to have its own Chief Minister.

It is trying to project itself as the largest alliance of 31 members after claiming the support of the two members of Sajjad Lone's People's Conference and four Independents.

On the other hand, the



BJP leaders Arun Jaitley, Jitendra Singh and Ram Madhav address a press conference in Jammu on Thursday. — PHOTO: PTI

PDP is weighing its options carefully, especially about going along with the BJP with whom it has ideological differences over Article 370, the AFSPA and the Uniform Civil Code.

The PDP may not want to go with the National Conference, against whom it ran a bitter anti-incumbency campaign, or with the Congress.

However, with an eye on the advantage of having a working relationship with the NDA government at the Centre, the PDP has hinted its openness to a partnership with the BJP.

In such a scenario, the

major issue for the BJP is getting the Chief Minister's post.

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who has been appointed central observer along with party national secretary Arun Singh, visited Jammu after establishing contact with the National Conference.

Mr. Jaitley came back with a resolution passed by the newly-elected MLAs authorising party president Amit Shah to take decisions about government formation.

BJP keeps up J&K suspense

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi, 25 December

Keen to capture power in politically sensitive and militancy-hit Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP today opted to play a guessing game and said it is in touch with "untouched members" of the new assembly.

"We are in touch with the untouched members of the new assembly," said Arun Jaitley, Union Finance Minister and the BJP central leadership's special emissary for government formation.

Amid a virtual deadlock in the post-poll parleys among parties, sen-

ior BJP leader Ram Madhav denied that they had any discussions with the outgoing Chief Minister Omar Abdullah of National Conference.

Contradicting media reports that Omar had met BJP president Amit Shah here last night, Mr Madhav, the BJP general secretary who oversaw the BJP's poll strategy in J&K, tweeted today, "News about BJP leaders meeting NC leadership in Delhi is baseless".

In Jammu, he said, "we are working to provide a stable government to the people". His remarks came shortly after a closed door meeting of the 25 elected

members of BJP with a central delegation led by Mr Jaitley.

A section of the BJP in J&K favours allying with the PDP of Mufti Mohammed Sayeed but insists that the chief ministership should come to BJP. However, murmurs on a possible alliance with the National Conference have made things complicated. The BJP's claim for chief ministership is based on the highest percentage of vote share it got, party leaders said.

Sources in Delhi said the newly elected MLAs have authorised Mr Amit Shah and the BJP's high-

est policy making body, the Parliamentary Board, to take a final decision.

Omar Abdullah, who left for Srinagar after an overnight stay here, refused to be drawn into any speculation and said he had come to the Capital preparatory to departure to London on Saturday to meet his ailing father Farooq Abdullah and his mother, Molly, who donated her kidney to her husband.

"I don't want to spoil a good story but I haven't cancelled or postponed my trip to England. I was always booked on the 27th of December," Omar tweeted.

Centre raises import duty on crude, refined edible oils

Increases duty on crude edible oils to 7.5% and on refined edible oils to 15%

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE & PTI
New Delhi, 25 December

To protect the interests of farmers and provide a level-playing field to domestic oilseed processors, the government has raised the import duty on crude edible oil from 2.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent and that on refined edible oils from 10 per cent to 15 per cent.

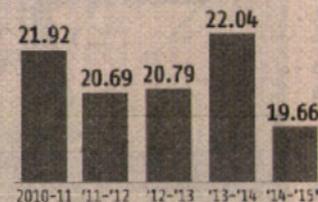
"Yes, the government had raised the import duties on edible oils because international prices had climbed up in the last few weeks," a senior finance ministry official, who did not wish to be named, told *Business Standard*.

The increase means the duty differential between crude and refined edible oils has been kept at 7.5 percentage points, as suggested by the agriculture ministry.

The food ministry had favoured increasing the import

YET TO RISE

Kharif oilseed production (in million tonnes)



*According to first advanced estimate
Source: Department of agriculture



duties to five per cent in case of crude oils and 15 per cent in case of refined, thus maintaining a duty differential between the two oils at 10 percentage points.

Welcoming the government's decision, Solvent Extractors' Association Executive Director B V Mehta said: "It would have been better for the domestic proces-

sors if the duty difference between the crude and refined edible oils was kept at 10-12 per cent as it would have resulted in capacity utilisation and value addition by the domestic refiners."

Mehta forecast the prices to increase marginally following this duty hike.

Echoing similar views, S P Kamrah, secretary-general of

Indian Vanaspati Producers' Association, said: "Something has been done but there was a need to do more. The government should consider keeping the duty difference between crude and edible cooking oil at 10 per cent."

The import duties were last increased in January 2014.

The farm ministry had also suggested that edible oil import duties should be suitably aligned with international rates, so that they move up or down automatically irrespective of a formal proposal.

India imported an estimated 11.6 million tonnes of edible oil in the 2013-14 oil marketing year, which ended in October 2014, compared with 10.4 million tonnes in 2012-13. The country is expected to import 13 million tonnes edible oils in the 2014-15 marketing year, due to a drop in domestic oilseed production.

About 60 per cent of India's

annual edible oil demand of 18-19 million tonnes is met through import, mostly from Malaysia and Indonesia.

The domestic oilseed crushing sector, too, has long been demanding that duties should be raised to protect the interest of crushers and also local farmers to sustain their interest in oilseed cultivation.

Palm oil futures in Malaysia rose to its highest in a month on Wednesday as heavy rains threatened harvest of palm fruits. The prices prior to that has also been on a higher side due to scrapping of an export tax by both Malaysia and Indonesia.

According to the government's official estimates, oilseed production in the current kharif season is estimated to be around 19.7 million tonnes, around 12.2 per cent less than last year due to uneven rains during the 2014 season.

Govt plans rolling list for PSU stake sale

New disinvestment process from 2015-16 may see year-round issues

ARUP ROYCHOUDHURY
New Delhi, 25 December

The government is set to try a new approach to stake sales in state-owned companies from early 2015-16, having learnt lessons from past failures to achieve disinvestment targets.

The new process starts with a multi-year rolling disinvestment list that will rely on cutting the time taken in regulatory processes to ensure market bears do not bring down the share prices of public sector undertakings (PSUs) up for divestment.

Additionally, unlike the usual practice of starting stake sales in the second half of any financial year, the plan envisages year-round issues hitting the market.

Business Standard has learnt the finance ministry's department of disinvestment (DoD) has in its new rolling list included almost all PSUs, among them those in which the government's stakes need to be brought down to 75 per cent in the next two-and-a-half years. This was mandated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in its June board meeting this year.

While yearly targets for disinvestment will likely be set in the Budget as usual, the DoD will choose from a basket of companies to meet them based on market conditions and ease of regulatory approvals.

At current prices, the government can raise close to ₹60,000 crore if it brings down its stake to 75 per cent in around 20 listed PSUs. First off the blocks, as early as May next year, would be companies in which the Centre's stake could be brought down to 75 per cent with a 5-10

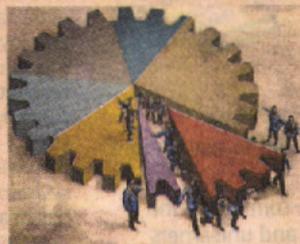


ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY

NEW DIVESTMENT ROAD MAP

A multi-year rolling divestment plan will replace yearly stake-sale plans. A list of some public sector undertakings in which the government has stakes above 75%

* Part of this year's divestment plan

Company	Centre's stake (in %)
Coal India*	89.65
NMDC	80.00
NHPC*	86.00
Neyveli Lignite	90.00
SIVN Ltd	90.00
National Aluminum Co	81.00
Mangalore Refinery & Petrochemicals	88.60
Hindustan Copper	90.00
MMTC Ltd	90.00
MOIL Ltd *	80.00
HMT Ltd	90.00
Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilizers	80.00
Fertilizers Chemicals Travancore	90.00
National Fertilizers	90.00
State Trading Corporation	90.00
India Tourism Development Corporation	87.00
Dredging Corporation	78.56
ITI Ltd	90.00
Andrew Yule	90.00
Scooters India	93.74

Source: BSE

per cent stake sale, sources said.

"We are first looking to divest companies in which the public shareholding can be taken up to 25 per cent in one tranche. After that we will look at companies that require multiple tranches to bring down the Centre's stake to 75 per cent," said a senior government official who did not wish to be named.

Some of the big public sector companies in which the government holds more than

75 per cent stakes include Coal India, National Aluminium, NHPC, NMDC, Indian Tourism Development Corporation, MMTC and National Fertilizers. Although Coal India and NHPC are part of the roadmap for 2014-15 and may be divested by January, the Centre will have to go in for another five per cent stake sale in the former after a 10 per cent divestment brings down its shareholding to 80 per cent.

On his Varanasi trip, PM says not privatising Rlys

SHAHIRA NAIM
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 25

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today visited his Lok Sabha constituency Varanasi as part of nationwide Good Governance Day celebrations being held by his government.

During his 5-hour visit, Modi paid tribute to Banaras Hindu University (BHU) founder-educationist Madan Mohan Malaviya on his 153rd birth anniversary, swept streets leading to the Jagannath temple, reviewed the cleanliness drive at Assi Ghat, flagged off a 4,500-horsepower diesel engine and laid the foundation of an inter-university centre for teachers' education at Swatantra Bhawan on the BHU campus.

At a function at the Diesel Locomotive Workshop (DLW), Modi categorically denied any plans to privatise Indian Railways. He said the speculation about privatisation of the Railways was baseless. "I am emotionally attached to the Railways as I have spent considerable time of my childhood in trains," he said.

Flagging off a 4,500-horsepower air-conditioned engine, he said: "It has been built with 96 per cent indigenous components. I want the remaining four per cent to be made in the country as well."



PM Narendra Modi during a cleanliness drive at Assi Ghat in Varanasi on Thursday. PTI

Vows to deliver open, accountable admn

- PM Narendra Modi said efforts were being made to "re-engineer" government processes as part of his promise to provide an "open and accountable administration"
- He said his government had worked for seven months with the mantra of "Citizen-First"
- "Today is the birthday of our beloved leader, our former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. We reiterate our commitment towards providing transparent, effective and accountable governance to the people of this country. Let us embark on this mission for good governance," he said.

Terming Railways one of his 'topmost priorities', he juxtaposed Railways with the development of the country. "We have to take the Railways ahead and it will take India ahead," he said.

Modi said he planned to make optimum use of the vacant spaces in small railway stations by using them for conducting skill development classes for youth and children.

He announced four specialised railway universities in the country that would directly be linked to jobs in the sector. He said he might seek help from China and Japan to set up the proposed universities. "Railways

should be the biggest and best example of Make in India," he said.

At the BHU function, he underlined the importance of education which should not produce robots but ensure the overall growth of a student's personality. He also laid the foundation of an inter-university centre for teachers' education to be named after Malaviya.

At Swatantra Bhawan, he called for specialised teachers who impart good education and produce better students. He underlined the need for creating an environment where children would want to take up teaching as a profession.

Govt staring at empty power sector pipeline in 13th Plan period

SHREYA JAI
New Delhi, 25 December

The Centre's talk of round-the-clock power supply and preparation for new coal auctions to reduce fuel shortage has failed to enthuse project developers. All measures being taken by the Bharatiya Janata Party government will bail out only stuck projects. Top private power producers are denying any investment in new projects.

The signal is loud and clear: Investment in the power sector is likely to enter a lull phase in the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2017-2022). After the 12th Plan ending in 2017, the power sector is looking at an empty pipeline, both by capacity addition and capital investment. "The pipeline is clearly dry for future projects. Stranded projects might start in another two to three years but then financials of companies would still remain an issue," said the chief executive of one of India's top private power companies.

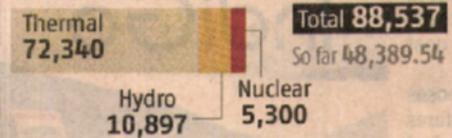
Around 48,389 megawatts (Mw) of projects of the targeted 88,537 Mw for 2012-17 have been commissioned and the balance is expected to come on stream during the last leg of 2015-17. Half of the commissioned 46,000 Mw in thermal (coal- and gas-based) is stuck mainly because of fuel supply issues.

In 2011-12, more capacity was added than targeted. A



TARGET VS CAPACITY

12th Plan capacity addition targets (in Mw)



Capacity addition during 12th Plan (In Mw)



12th Plan Period is 2012-17; *Till November
Source: Central Electrical Authority

NO NEW INVESTMENTS

- Top players in the power sector deny any new investment for another three years
- No new capacity likely to come till 2017
- Fresh bids, including ultra mega power projects, see dull response from the private sector
- Order book of BHEL, prime supplier for power plant equipment after the 12th plan, is thin
- Deal action merely transfer of debt and equity, no new capital investment
- Coal auctions and gas pooling, if and when happen, to bail out only stuck projects
- Close to 40 million tonnes of coal to be auctioned to power producers; to revive 28,000 Mw of coal-fired plants

record 52 projects, most of these allocated in 2007-09, were commissioned by the private sector. The next financial year, too, saw capacity addition of 20,121 Mw, including in ultra mega power projects (UMPP) of 4,000 Mw, compared with the targeted of 15,154 Mw. Of the four UMPPs awarded, Mundra (Gujarat) and Sasan

(Madhya Pradesh) have been commissioned but are battling tariff-related issues.

Capacity addition started slowing down in 2013-14, when less than 40 per cent of the target was met. Local gas supply dwindled, coal linkages with state monopoly Coal India were left unmet and captive coal allocations went under lit-

igation. In 2014-15, 5,658 Mw capacity has been added so far, against the target of 14,988 Mw till March.

The Union government is looking to auction close to 40 million tonnes of coal to the power sector. It also plans to kick-start at least 28,000 Mw of coal-fired plants.

Govt to Lure Investors to Gas-Rich Northeast

Ropes in global consultant to prepare an incentive package for companies

Rajeev.Jayaswal@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus on northeast India has prompted the government to engage a global consultant to prepare an incentive package for investors following its decision to extend subsidy on gas supplied by private producers in the region.

The subsidy on gas was until now limited to state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India.

"The move to allow 40% subsidy to gas producers would certainly create a level-playing field," the CEO of an energy explorer said on condition of anonymity. "But this subsidy is at the consumer's end and producers have no direct benefit. The northeast region has tremendous potential, investors require major incentives because the region lacks infrastructure and have inaccessible terrains." Besides ONGC and Oil India, companies such as Geopetrol International of France, Gail India, Hindustan Oil Exploration Company (HOEC) and Jubilant Energy are active players in the north-eastern states. Companies have already found oil and gas in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and Mizoram.

The government recently decided to extend subsidy on gas produced by private firms to send a positive signal to global investors, oil ministry officials said. In 2010, the government had announced a 113% hike in the price of gas produced from fields awarded without auction to ONGC and Oil India.

In order to protect customers in the northeast region from the steep hike, the government had decided to bear 40% of the gas price. But this subsidy was not available to customers who bought gas from blocks awarded to public or private explorers through auctions. The Cabinet recently corrected this anomaly, officials said. The development of the region is the focus of NDA government, officials said.

It's Quite Natural

Subsidy on gas is extended to gas produced by private firms

DGH to appoint a global consultant to suggest policy measures

The consultant to submit recommendations by **March 2015**



Govt to connect Northeast gas fields to national gas pipeline grid, consider fiscal incentives

Govt plans to create local demand for gas

BESIDES ONGC and Oil India, companies such as Geopetrol International of France, Gail India, Hindustan Oil Exploration Company (HOEC) and Jubilant Energy are active players in the north-eastern states

COMPANIES HAVE already found oil and gas in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and Mizoram



Myanmar and Bangladesh have proven gas reserves. The geology of the northeast is almost the same. Therefore, potential is huge and we are making every effort to attract global energy companies in the region

OIL MINISTRY OFFICIAL

"Myanmar and Bangladesh have proven gas reserves. The geology of the northeast is almost the same. Therefore, potential is huge and we are making every effort to attract global energy companies in the region," an oil ministry official said.

Govt recently decided to extend subsidy on gas produced by private firms to send a positive signal to the global investors

The Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) has been directed to appoint a global consultant by January to conduct a study, which aims to have a policy that would encourage exploration and production of oil and gas in the region, the official said. The consultant will examine issues that are limiting exploration and production of oil and gas in the region and will also suggest "prac-

tical workable solutions with action plan while identifying the government agencies, which will carry forward the plan," the official added.

"The industry has already raised two key issues that need to be resolved. Firstly, we need pipeline networks to bring the gas to the consumers located in industrially developed regions such as Maharashtra and Gujarat. The second issue is a higher gas price that would incentivise investment in this difficult region," said an executive of the Association of Oil & Gas Operators (AOGO).

Oil ministry officials said the consultant will identify infrastructure gaps and accessibility issues that are essential for exploration in the region. It will also examine needs and means to create common hubs of service providers in the region and resolve issues related to skilled manpower.

Good Governance Day: e-book, e-files, and 5 kg LPG cylinders on demand

Ministries roll out slew of programmes to mark ex-PM Vajpayee's 90th birthday

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, December 25

Central Ministries observed 'Good Governance Day' on Thursday with a slew of programmes to mark the 90th birthday of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Ministry for Petroleum and Natural Gas re-launched and expanded the scheme for providing 5 kg LPG cylinders. Consumers can avail themselves of 34 such 5-kg cylinders at a subsidised rate of ₹155/ cylinder from the regular LPG distributor. The market-priced 5 kg cylinders at ₹351 can be bought over the counter without prior booking and minimal paper work at petrol pumps, gas agencies and retail outlets.

"This is not a new scheme, we are re-branding and re-launching it with an elaborate market-

ing plan," said Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

He said BPL [below poverty line] card-holders even in urban areas will get a discount of ₹1,600 (for security deposit and cost of pressure regulator) when applying for a new LPG connection. The cost will be borne by oil companies from their CSR fund.

Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Harsh Vardhan, kicked off an SMS-based weather information and disaster alert system. He said they were working on issuing SMS alerts to the public, who would be required to register on the India Meteorological Department website.

With an eye on improving governance and service delivery to the common man, the Finance Ministry launched an e-book on the occasion. "This provides easy



Digital connect Minister for Communication and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad at the launch of projects to commemorate Good Governance Day, in New Delhi on Thursday. SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

access to various initiatives, including good governance initiatives, taken under the Ministry and an IT-enabled platform," the

Ministry. Ravi Shankar Prasad, Minister of Communications & Information Technology, said that good governance could be ef-

fectively achieved through the vision of Digital India of digital infrastructure as a utility to every citizen, governance and services on demand and digital empowerment of citizens.

Civil Aviation Minister P Ashok Gajapathi Raju inaugurated the e-governance in his Ministry. All new files in the Ministry will be generated electronically, he said. The Information & Broadcasting Ministry said it would digitise its archival footage on eminent personalities, which would be available to the public through Doordarshan, All India Radio and social media platforms.

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar directed Ministry officials to evolve a policy to reduce court cases in service matters, including pensions. "Minimisation of litigation is a priority and issues of cantonments pertaining to land management and civilian interface should also be resolved without delay," he said.

NHAI to raise ₹60,000 cr via infra bonds

■ Ministry exploring ways to enable NHAI earn ₹10,000 cr a year from optical fibre network, power lines

Indronil Roychowdhury
Kolkata, Dec 25

With the road construction work gaining speed and funds already deployed for contracts awarded under the cash contract or EPC mode, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) may soon hit the bond market.

Union road transport, highways and shipping minister Nitin Gadkari said, "We plan to raise Rs 60,000 crore through infra bonds. The ministry is exploring opportunities so that NHAI can earn Rs 10,000 crore a year from sources like optical fibre network and 1 lakh km of 1,200-KV transmission lines under national highways. We are also exploring opportunities to

carry iron ore from Karnataka as well as a gas pipeline along national highways."

The highways authority till early this year was unable to deploy nearly 80% of the Rs 10,000 crore it had raised on tax-free bonds in FY12. NHAI had parked the funds in banks and the finance ministry had been pushing the authority to make use of the funds at the earliest.

Union road transport, highways and shipping minister Nitin Gadkari said that with NHAI firming up plans to award 5,000-km national highway construction by FY15, Rs 40,000-crore orders awarded under the EPC route and the ministry setting a target to construct 30 km a day, the highway authority would have to hit the



bond market soon to raise funds.

"All projects will have to be awarded in the EPC mode because contractors don't have the capability to take projects under the PPP (private-public partnership) model," Gad-

kari said, adding that a model EPC document has been framed in a manner that time overrun and cost overrun in implementation of national highways would be minimised.

The EPC approach is based

on assigning responsibility for investigation, design and construction to the contractor for a lump-sum price under a fixed timeframe determined through competitive bidding.

GAIL has, in fact, been facing a lot of implementation hurdles in adding 15,918 km of pipeline by 2017 above the existing 12,144 km gas pipeline across the country. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board, which monitors natural gas transmission and distribution, has projected doubling of natural gas transportation from 205 million standard cubic metres per day (mscmd) to 415 mscmd by 2017. Using the space along the highways for gas pipelines could benefit GAIL, said Gadkari, adding that he had already met GAIL

officials on this issue.

However, the income generated from pipelines and transmission would help in subsidising toll tax. So far, 110 toll booths across the country have been converted to e-tolls and the number will be increased to 350 in due course, Gadkari said. Citing example of the Mumbai-Delhi highway, he said there were 18 toll booths between the highway and a truck lost at least three hours in paying tolls at the booths.

According to estimates, the delay translates to Rs 60,000-crore of fuel wastage and generates dead assets worth Rs 28,000 crore a year. "The government would be able to reduce Rs 88,000 crore of national wastage a year by introducing e-tolls," Gadkari said.

PM rules out privatisation of railways

■ Wants to utilise funds from cash-rich investors, international agencies for railway development

fe Bureau
Lucknow, Dec 25

SETTING all speculation to rest, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday ruled out the possibility of privatising Indian Railways. Addressing a gathering after launching a Rs 213-crore expansion project at Varanasi-based Diesel Locomotive Works, Modi said the railways was the backbone of India's economic development and there was no question of privatising it.

"There are some who are spreading rumours that the railways would be privatised. That is totally wrong. This is not our thought or intention. I will not allow this as I love the railways the most as I am attached to it since my birth," he said. "What we want to do is that instead of putting the common man's money into the everyday running of the railways, put cash-rich investor's



money and get soft loans from international agencies for greater development of the railways," he said, adding that the railways' huge land parcels at almost every station can be used by investors.

Stating that his government wanted to set up railway universities in all four parts of India in

order to boost the capabilities of the railways, the PM emphasised on making the railways the backbone of India's economic development. "I will give you an example of how development can take place with help from the railways. The railways has electricity, infrastructure and a widespread network.

Scheme to boost teachers' training launched

■ Varanasi, Dec 25: Making a pitch for producing good teachers in large numbers, PM Narendra Modi on Thursday launched a mission in this regard amid his assertion that the whole world is looking at India with great expectations "but we are not ready". He advocated introduction of a five-year training course after schooling for those aspiring to pursue a career in teaching and said the country should aim to export top-class teachers across the world. On a visit to his constituency, Modi said an environment needs to be created for producing teachers who are rooted in the country's culture and tradition and can be exported in lakhs as there is a large demand globally. Observing that "good education does not fall in the realm of infrastructure," he asked: "Can't there be a scenario where children decide early to become teachers? We should create an environment where children can decide to become teachers after 10th or 12th." PTI

Even stations in small villages, where trains arrive only once in a day have these facilities. All through the day the stations lie vacant. Can't we build a few rooms at the station and utilise power and infrastructure facilities that the railways have in imparting skill development to the youth of the area?" he

asked, adding that he wants to show more development in the railways than what has happened in the last 60 years.

"There are thousand of such stations around the country. I have asked people to identify these villages so that we can establish two skill development centres at every such railway sta-

tion and utilise railway resources without investing extra money," Modi said, while dedicating to the nation a modern, air-conditioned passenger train engine and inaugurating a project for the expansion of the diesel locomotive workshop.

Asserting that he would not want the railways to be merely a means of transport, Modi said he wants to make it the engine of growth in the country.

"We don't see the railways only as a means to travel. We see it as the backbone of India's economic development. We have to take the railways ahead and through the railways we have to take the nation ahead," he said, adding that since becoming PM in May, he ended up talking mostly about railways.

Earlier, railway minister Suresh Prabhu said Modi had identified the railways as a priority sector and that very soon a blueprint of action plan for the years ahead would be issued.

Russia, Mexico, Brazil, Japan on radar; bid to cut US market risk
Indian pharma scouts for new geographies under USFDA fire

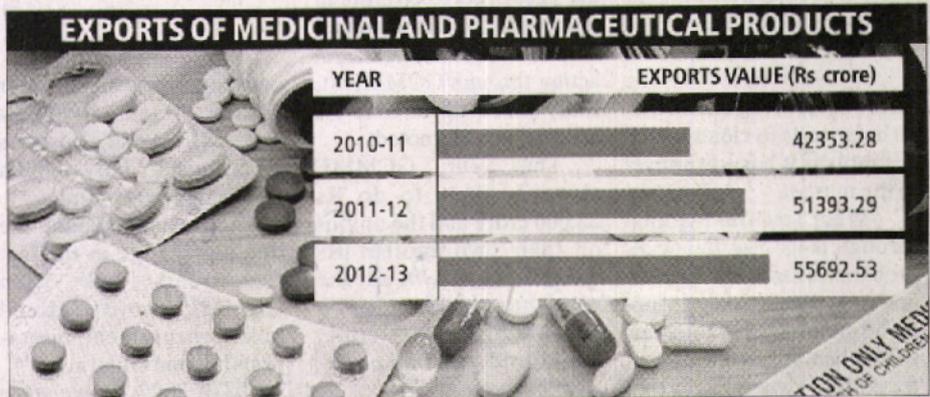
ANIL SASI

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 25

THE sharp recovery in the US economy notwithstanding, India has kicked-off a desperate diversification plan that aims to leverage inter-country partnership pacts for gaining market access in new geographies that include countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Japan and those forming a part of the ASEAN bloc.

Coming at a time when India's drug exports are increasingly coming under regulatory fire in the United States — its biggest market that accounts for 25 per cent of the country's cumulative drug exports — the proposal firmed up by the department of pharmaceuticals also mentioned a clutch of other non-traditional markets that it would want to now focus on, including South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Moreover, European countries such as Spain, Greece, Germany, France and Italy are also on this focus list that essentially aims



to counterbalance the heavy reliance currently on the US market for export of active pharmaceutical ingredients and niche formulations from the country.

The proposal, which has been presented by the department of pharmaceuticals in a deposition to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on chemicals and fertilisers, comes at a time when major drug companies which are dominant players in the Rs 80,000 crore Indian pharmaceutical industry are struggling with quality problems repeatedly highlighted through punitive regulatory interventions by the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA).

There is the also the

added problem of Indian drug companies witnessing a severe pressure on their pricing power in the conventionally lucrative US market, something that is evident in a Morgan Stanley analysis of 582 drugs sold in the US by six leading Indian pharmaceutical companies. The report shows that about 86 per cent of these drugs did not register any change in price during calendar years 2013 and 2014.

The market diversification plan also comes at a time when the Indian pharmaceutical exports registered their slowest growth in over a decade, surging a measly 1.2 per cent to \$14.84 billion last fiscal.

While the continuing

slowdown in the US is a prime reason, other hurdles include regulatory reverses in that market as well as intellectual property rights issues flagged by authorities in that country.

India's pharma exports are likely to miss the target of \$25 billion set for 2014-15, according to a government strategy paper issued earlier this year.

According to commerce ministry data, in 2012-13, the country's pharma exports totaled to \$14.66 billion.

The growth registered in 2013-14 was the slowest in nearly 15 years, the previous slowest growth having been clocked in 2009-10 when pharma exports grew by just 5.9 per cent.

Parliamentary panel orders more funding for Navy

AJAI SHUKLA
New Delhi, 25 December

A major trend in India's defence spending has been the Navy's growing share, which has risen from four per cent of the defence allocation in the early 1960s to a high of 18.12 per cent in 2012-13. This is seen worldwide as evidence of an increasingly muscular profile in the Indian Ocean region, where India will not just protect its 7,517 km of coastline and 1,197 islands, but also function as the premier maritime power that secures freedom of navigation over 6,000 km of international sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in its vicinity.

Parliament's Standing Committee on Defence fears this signal is being diluted. This year, the Navy was allocated just 15.72 per cent of the defence budget, down from 16.79 per cent last year. That amounts to ₹37,808 crore (\$5.95 billion). Unprecedentedly, the parliament committee has ordered the government to allocate more funds to the Navy. The committee says the alarming rise in accidents, including the 2013 sinking of INS Sindhurakshak — a frontline Russian Kilo-class submarine — indicates the Navy needs more money for purchasing modern equipment, maintaining it properly and training seamen to the required level of skill.

Citing the "spurt in accidents", the committee notes: "In most of the cases of accidents, the cause is either material failure or human error. This implies that either the equipment and machinery acquired are sub-standard or there are inadequate



The committee sharply criticises large cost overruns on major warship projects

facilities in training. The committee feels that the inadequate funding will further aggravate the condition of Indian Navy and lead to compromises in operational preparedness. Therefore, it is the absolute necessity to allocate ample funds to Navy under intimation to this Committee (sic)."

The panel reveals the Navy is significantly understrength. The report says: "In 2012, (the defence ministry) approved 198 ships and submarines for Indian Navy. The present force level is 127 ships, 15 submarines and 236 aircraft. There are at present 14 conventional submarines (including the Sindhurakshak) in the Indian Navy. Most conventional submarines are over 20 years old and are reaching the end of their service life."

Worryingly, this year's capital allocations, i.e., the funding for new equipment purchases, will be mostly expended on

"Committed Liabilities", i.e., on annual installments for equipment procured during previous years. Of the total capital allocation of ₹23,832 crore, about ₹17,313 will be expended on committed liabilities, leaving just ₹4,599 crore for new purchases.

The committee sharply criticises large cost overruns on major warship projects. It notes that Project 15A, for building three Kolkata-class destroyers,

The committee says the alarming rise in accidents indicates the Navy needs more money to purchase and maintain equipment, and to train seamen

was sanctioned at ₹3,580 crore, but eventually cost ₹11,662 crore, more than thrice what was initially envisaged. In Project 28, which involves building four Kamorta-class anti-subma-

rine corvettes, the sanctioned cost of ₹3,051 crore rose to ₹7,852 crore. The largest overrun was for the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier, INS Vikrant, which went up almost six-fold from the sanctioned ₹3,261 crore to ₹19,341 crore.

A key cause of these large

overruns has been the MoD's budgeting methodology, which involves sanctioning a project at a notional (invariably undervalued) cost and then arriving at a more realistic figure once the first ship of that project is physically built.

The committee has noted that the project cost for INS Vikrant was grossly underestimated in 2002. In somewhat garbled prose, the report says: "Cost overrun was mainly due to reasons of cost estimation for (Cabinet) sanction in 2002 at a time when (the vessel's) 'form & fit' was still emerging; limited information on many aircraft carrier specific equipment & material due to inadequate domain knowledge; equipment costs, emerging technological advances and new generation equipment in IAC (sic)." The MoD has been asked to resolve this issue and apprise the committee.

EPFO mulls social security agents to improve services

New Delhi, Dec 25: Retirement fund body EPFO is planning to engage agents to improve delivery of social security schemes as done by the income-tax department to facilitate tax payers and improve compliance.

"We will also have to bring in service centres directly or indirectly to facilitate our subscribers like income tax department where authorised tax agents provide service at reasonable price," Employees' Provident Fund Organisation's (EPFO) central provident fund commissioner KK Jalan said addressing a seminar on 'Good Governance in the labour ministry'. Jalan said that the EPFO is "working on a proposal to engage agents to provide specialised services such as claims settlements, filing EPF returns and other compliance issues."

He also said these agents would be trained to cater to employers as well as employees who could be educated or uneducated. A senior EPFO



official said, "The EPFO subscribers must have an option for such specialised service. There are a large number of tax payers who are well educated but they still prefer to consult a authorised tax agent registered with the Income tax department."

EPFO has a subscriber base of over 5 crore who are mainly organised-sector workers. The body settled 1.21-crore claims pertaining to transfer and withdrawal of PF, fixation of pension and insurance claims during the previous fiscal. These social service agents could also help the EPFO in a big way in case of Universal (portable PF) Account Number scheme. EPFO had issued over four crore UANs to

employers in July this year, but few lakh UANs have been activated so far, the official said adding that for activating a UAN, the member has to login himself after uploading of KYC documents by employer.

The official said a large number of organised sector workers may not be tech savvy and, thus, social security agents can help them to use of UAN scheme. Under the UAN, the PF account of the subscribers remains portable throughout his life despite changing jobs and shifting to different locations. Besides it also helps member to collate their accounts on real time basis.

Jalan said EPFO has provided online facility to its about 25,000 employees to register their service or HR-related grievance or complaints. Additional labour secretary Arun Kumar Sinha said the government has planned to launch a scheme to register 43-crore unorganised sector workers from April 1. *PTI*

Govt to Connect 55,000 Villages with Telecom Network by Dec 2016

Muntazir.Abbas@timesinternet.in

New Delhi: The telecom department plans to take mobile network by December 2016 to nearly 10% of Indian villages that are still unconnected, to make the government's ambitious Digital India programme more pervasive.

Of the 6,00,000 villages in the country, about 55,000 are still awaiting mobile connectivity. These villages fall primarily under the red corridor — a vast swathe affected by left-wing extremism — and in the Northeast.

"In sync with PM Narendra Modi's vision, it has become imperative to offer digital services on mobile platform," telecom secretary Rakesh Garg said, speaking at the 'Good Governance Day' programme hosted by the Ministry of Communications and IT.

In September this year, the Cabinet had approved spending of ₹5,300 crore to install 6,673 telecom towers across 8,621 villages

Under the ₹1.13 lakh crore mega Digital India initiative, the government aims to connect every nook and corner of the country with broadband Internet, and deliver services electronically through mobile phones.

The Trai had earlier in a study revealed major network gaps in the northeast region. Arunachal Pradesh had the highest coverage gap at nearly 56%, followed by Meghalaya with 38%, Mizoram with 32% and Manipur 24%.

In September this year, the Cabinet had approved spending of ₹5,300 crore to install 6,673 telecom towers across 8,621 villages, primarily boosting telecom network along national highways in the Northeast. "The department is setting up telecom towers in Northeast with a pecuniary budget of ₹5,300 crore and additionally deploying 2,199 towers in left wing extremism affected areas," Garg said.

Setting up mobile phone network in the Naxal-affected regions is one of the long-pending demands of the home ministry, which has recently asked the telecom department to fast-track deployment. Garg said the work would be completed by the end of September 2015.

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Honouring complex legacies

By conferring the highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, on former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who was president of the Indian National Congress more than once before Independence but was better known as the founder of the Banaras Hindu University, the country has recognised the contributions made by these leaders to public life and India's political evolution. The decision of the Bharatiya Janata Party government is also indicative of a certain resoluteness to emphasise its own political tradition — Mr. Vajpayee was the first BJP Prime Minister of India, for 13 days in 1996, and again, from 1998 to 2004; Malaviya was among the founding leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha in the early 20th century. Mr. Vajpayee, now ailing, still retains appeal that cuts across political divisions because he was particularly mindful of seeking a larger consensus on national issues. As Prime Minister his tenure was eventful, marked by a war with Pakistan, a series of terror attacks including the hijacking of IC-814 and the Parliament attack, and India's decision to go publicly nuclear. Through all this, Mr. Vajpayee's statesmanship and his ability to demonstrate strength and large-heartedness simultaneously, only got better. Freedom-fighter, journalist, educationist and social activist, Malaviya belonged to the Hindu nationalist stream within the Indian National Congress. He was fiercely opposed to Congress participation in the Khilafat movement and disfavoured separate electorates for different communities proposed by the British government. An important figure in the Non-Cooperation Movement, he was a delegate in the First Round Table Conference in 1930. But Malaviya's living legacy is the BHU that he founded in 1916 in the city of Varanasi with the help and support of Annie Besant.

Previous 'Bharat Ratna' awards have had their share of controversies, and accusations that many dispensations have used it to further their own political interests and negate those of opponents are not unfounded. The fact that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was conferred the Bharat Ratna only in 1990 when a government in which his followers had influence was in power is a telling example. Historical figures often leave mixed and complex legacies, and Mr. Vajpayee and Malaviya are no exceptions. Honouring a personality is not necessarily an endorsement of all of his politics, or being blind to his failures and shortcomings. It is also not about jettisoning disagreements in our public space. It would be unfortunate if the highest civilian award of the country becomes a matter of political disagreement rather than of collective celebration and endorsement of those who have contributed in significant measure to the making of India as a diverse and multifaceted nation.