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(महान लोगों के विचार)

(यदि आप खुद अपनी ज़िन्दगी की योजना नहीं बनाते हैं तो संभव है कि आप किसी और की योजना के अंतर्गत आ जायें. और ज़रा सोचिये उन्होंने आपके लिए क्या योजना बनाई होगी? ज्यादा कुछ नहीं.)

Jim Rohn जिम रॉन

1. Affordable healthcare is beyond compulsory licenses, US tells India

Nayanima Basu, Business Standard: 26.11.2014

The discussion took place under the much-awaited India-US Trade Policy Forum

The US asked India on Tuesday to take steps to aid affordable health care by looking beyond intellectual property rights (IPR) and compulsory licensing and addressing other concerns such as rate reduction, distribution of medicines and insurance coverage.

The discussion took place under the India-US Trade Policy Forum (TPF), which met here on Tuesday after a gap of more than four years, with both sides seeking to address outstanding issues concerning bilateral trade and investment.

The meeting was jointly chaired by Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and US Trade Representative (USTR) Michael Froman.

The TPF, which lasted for about one-and-a-half hours, was also attended by Rajeev Kher, commerce secretary; Amitabh Kant, secretary, Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP); J S Deepak, additional secretary, commerce department; and DIPP joint secretary D V Prasad, among others.

“We did discuss IPR in broad terms. On some of the more challenging issues like pharmaceuticals, we need to take a broad-based view of access to affordable health care and promotion of innovation. There is a lot that goes into access to affordable health care beyond intellectual property rights, beyond patents, beyond compulsory licences,” Froman said after the meeting.

The TPF was preceded by the first high-level meeting of the working group in IPR on Monday.

Froman said access to affordable health care entails a large number of factors from rates, logistics and insurance reforms, on which India needs to concentrate.

“Issue of access to affordable medicine is not only IPR... We are committed to promoting innovation and promoting affordable health care. We are focused on generics and maintaining cost efficient ways to access health care. But without innovation, there could be no generics,” the USTR added.

Froman said both sides did not discuss the contentious “out-of-cycle reviews”, launched to review India’s IPR laws as part of the USTR’s Special 301 Report. In the report, the US has kept India in the “priority watch list” for having an allegedly weak IPR regime.

“It was a very good meeting. They (the US) have understood our position. We will meet more often... The dialogue will continue. It's not that the dialogue will take place a after four-year gap. It will be more often. We have expressed all concerns and addressed their issues,” said Kher.

According to the joint statement, India had raised the issue of expanding the scope of professional visas such as the H1-B and L1 for easier access to US by Indian professionals. India also urged US to expedite the social security Totalisation Agreement for the Indian professionals based out of America.

India also apprised US about the work underway to unveil a 'National IPR Policy.' It also sought greater access of traditional Indian medicine in view of affordable healthcare.

On Monday, Froman met Indian industry chambers CII and FICCI where he highlighted issues relating to IPR protection, local sourcing norms, regulatory challenges and mobility of high skilled labor. He stressed on the high standards for IPR being adopted by the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations and suggested that as an innovative economy, India needs to look at IPR norms more closely.

The US' National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) in a letter to the USTR has urged him to take up "longstanding bilateral trade irritants and new barriers imposed by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

On the breakthrough with India over the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and food stockpiling, Froman said it might go through smoothly during the next meetings of the General Council.

"The agreement is that there will be implementation of the TFA and then when it comes to food security there will be intensified efforts to reach a permanent solution. As per the agreement, the PC will remain in effect unless a PS is found. There are no other changes to the Bali agreement, rest of the package remains the same," he added.

The TPF, which was established in 2005 is the premium forum for bilateral trade and has five main focus groups -agriculture, innovation and creativity, investment, services, tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

Both sides have set a target of achieving \$500 billion worth of trade in goods and services from the present \$100 billion by laying a roadmap for future.

2. India can be a \$5 trillion economy in 10-12 years: Jayant Sinha

Business Standard: 26.11.2014

India's GDP growth, after registering a sub-5% rate in two financial years, grew 5.7% in the first quarter of FY15

Minister of State for Finance Jayant Sinha said on Tuesday the Indian economy could grow to be a \$5-trillion economy in 10-12 years, if it could sustain seven-eight per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth a year and creates avenues to absorb its burgeoning youth workforce.

Speaking at an event organised by FICCI, he said a high growth rate was necessary if India were to absorb its rising youth work force and strengthen its currency. India's GDP growth, after registering a sub-five per cent rate in two financial years, grew 5.7 per cent in the first quarter of FY15.

India's expanding youth population, what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly termed as its 'demographic dividend, means that nearly half the population is under 25. Studies show that by 2020, the country may have the youngest population in the world, with a median age of 29 years, compared with a median age of 37 years in China at that point. This means more people coming out of an education and looking for jobs.

3. Why CEOs are less jubilant about Modi

A K Bhattacharya, Business Standard: 26.11.2014

Industry leaders were not as gushing with praise for the government of Mr Modi as would have been expected

All opinion polls should be treated with caution. The findings should not be interpreted as the final verdict on the issue that is being polled or surveyed. Yet they should not be completely ignored as they do serve a useful purpose. They provide a reasonable indication of the broad opinion on the matter that is being polled. This newspaper conducted an opinion poll among some chief executives of top Indian companies on what they thought of the first six months of the Narendra Modi government and the results are interesting, even after you take into account the caveats mentioned earlier.

One, industry leaders were not as gushing with praise for the government of Mr Modi as would have been expected. True, about a fifth of the chief executives polled gave Mr Modi 90 per cent marks on his overall performance, but the average score was a little less at around 70 per cent. This would mean the remaining four-fifths of the respondents gave him a much lower score to bring the average down. Rating the Modi government's economic policies, the chief executives were even less jubilant. The average score came down to 66 per cent. And almost 40 per cent of them felt that the Modi government's biggest weakness in the last six months was its slow pace of economic reforms.

If you compare these scores with the general rating industry leaders give to any government initiative or its annual Budget, you will see the relative lack of enthusiasm in the way these chief executives evaluated the first six months of Mr Modi as prime minister. It is likely that industry leaders are more forthright with their views when they offer them anonymously. And the poll that was published in this newspaper got those ratings from the CEOs on the condition that their identities would not be disclosed. But even then a score of 60-70 per cent for a government that came with such high expectations and excitement shows the extent of a downward slide the Modi government has experienced in its popularity. The slide is not steep, but the direction is unmistakable.

One of the reasons for the slide could be the hype that was created around the government's ability to deliver the Indian economy out of all its problems in a jiffy. Black money was to be repatriated without much delay. Harassment of taxpayers would come to an end. There was this promise of minimum government to provide maximum governance. Growth was to be revived soon and inflation reined in. Six months later, there is no clear road map on when and how black money would be brought back into the country. Apart from some statements of assurance, the government has not yet settled even one of those many controversial tax cases. The size of the council of ministers of the Modi government is only marginally smaller than the one that its predecessor had. Growth continues to remain patchy and if the inflation rate has become benign, it is largely because commodity prices have softened and international crude oil prices have fallen by around 30 per cent in the last five months. No chief executive of a company would give the Modi government much credit for taming inflation.

It is, therefore, time for the Modi government to look at the underlying message from such surveys and opinion polls. Mr Modi would do well to note that not one of the chief executives polled in that survey ranked either the Jan Dhan Yojana or the project to set up 100 smart cities in the country as the best idea promoted by his government. The precise reasons for their lack of interest in the two schemes are not clear, but it would be safe to assume that these chief executives must have seen through the weaknesses and loopholes in the Jan Dhan Yojana that has already led to the opening of 75 million bank accounts. But they must have also correctly diagnosed the problem of such a scheme that might lead to financial inclusion on paper, but it may not actually result in improving the people's access and use of the banking network. Similarly, the smart cities project appears to be a grand idea, but its implementation is fraught with risks and many problems. India's industry leaders have sensed the chinks in these ideas and Mr Modi's government, too, should not ignore them and get down to the task of addressing the gaps.

Equally important is the poll finding that the chief executives have ranked "Make in India" as Mr Modi's best idea. There could be no bigger challenge for the Modi government than reviving the manufacturing sector, whose share in the country's gross domestic product has slid to as low a level as 16 per cent. If the chief executives find that the government's biggest weakness in the last six months has been its slow pace of economic reforms, it is because the government has not taken any major concrete step to revive the manufacturing sector. Amendment to laws to facilitate labour reforms and land acquisition, along with necessary safeguards to ensure a safety net for retrenched workers and rehabilitation of land losers, would be necessary to realise Mr Modi's big idea of "Make in India".

Chief executives of India's corporate sector have hit the nail on the head. Manufacturing sector revival is a necessity and should be welcomed as an idea. But with slow pace of economic reforms, the chances of implementing that idea will be remote. Mr Modi should lose no time in responding to the challenges that the poll among chief executives has articulated.

4. Is services sector slowing further?

Renu Kohli, Financial Express: 26.11.2014

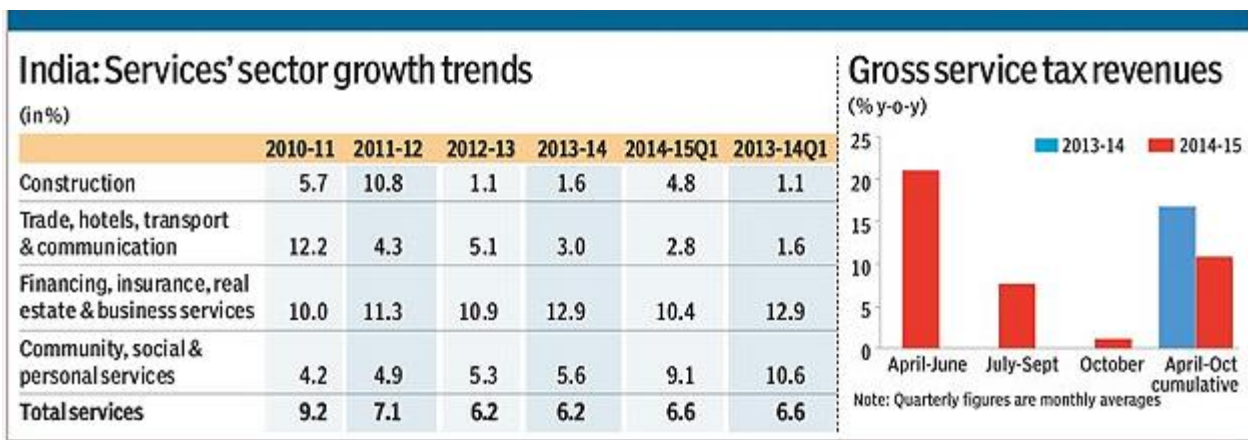
The services sector, which is more than half of India's production base, slowed sharply in the last two years: relative to the 2010-11 peak (9.2%), growth rates dropped three points as the sector decelerated to grow just 6.2% in 2012-13 and 2013-14 (see table). Much of this slowdown was concentrated in the trade, hotels, transport and communication category where the pace decelerated to one-fourth the rate of its growth in 2010-11; construction slowed thereafter. So it was somewhat reassuring to note signs of revival in some of the services' components in the first quarter GDP numbers (April-June 2014), although the sector's growth as a whole matched the previous year's pace, or 6.6%. Expectations were that the revival would strengthen ahead as other production in other sectors of the economy gathered pace.

So it is with some concern that we note the slowing trend in services that the HSBC's Services Purchasing Managers' Index pointed to for the month of October. This index, which tracks variables like sales, employment, inventories and prices, decreased steeply to 50 points in October 2014 from 51.6 in September, a six-month low. Beneath this stagnation, the fall in business activity was the quickest in hotels & restaurants category; best performing sub-sector was post & telecommunication. The stagnation in October was underpinned by weaker growth of new business, indicating slower services' output growth ahead.

This trend is buttressed by the quick deceleration in services' tax revenues in the past three months (see chart). Growth of gross service tax revenues, which averaged 21% monthly in the April-June quarter, fell steeply by one-third to average 7.7% monthly in July-September. The drop in service tax revenues compounded in October—revenue collections have grown just 1.2%, a sixth of the measured growth rate in the recently concluded quarter. And the cumulative growth of services' tax collection over April-October period is far slower at 10.9% in comparison to the 16.8% equivalent growth clocked in 2013-14.

Does this augur a further slowdown in the services sector? What are the prospects for the sector's growth ahead? A close scrutiny of trends so far reveals a mixed picture, with more pointers to the downside than otherwise.

To start with, government spending, which constitutes the bulk of community, social & personal services category in services' output, is set to grow more slowly in the year's second half as tax revenues lag behind projected targets, notwithstanding lower oil prices and subsidy expenditures. So the support rendered by this segment's 9% year-on-year growth to the overall increase in services' output in 2014-15Q1 is unlikely to accord a similar boost in the forthcoming period.



The slowdown in financing, insurance, real estate & business services component, which moderated to 10.4% growth in 2014-15Q1 relative to its 12.9% growth in 2013-14Q1, also appears unlikely to reverse that trend. Looking at the evolution of growth trends in some constituents like banking and insurance industries, the chances of its pick-up in the July-September quarter, and perhaps even in the October-December quarter, seem low at this point. Although scheduled commercial banks' deposit growth in April-October 2014 averaged 13.8% monthly, a bit more than the matching 13.3% last year, credit growth is down two points at 12.2% (April-October, 2013—14.3%). Growth of the insurance industry has weakened too. According to IRDA data, life insurers (24 firms) saw a 2% decline in new business premium collections in April-September 2014 relative to matching previous year's period. It remains to be seen if there is any pick-up in this segment in the coming months. Other indicators reveal somewhat improved picture up to October. For instance, goods handled at ports grew 4.6% in April-October 2014, against an annual 1.8% growth in 2013-14. Telecommunications (cellular) growth was a robust 10% in June-August 2014, way higher than the sub-1% growth in the same period last year. Passenger growth, domestic and international, has been higher too, growing 11% in 2014-15: H1 against an annual 8.3% growth in 2013-14. Likewise, air cargo carried grew 19% in April-September compared to last year's annual pace of 10.2%. Tourist arrivals grew nearly double the rate last year in April-October 2014, or 11.4%. Whereas growth in medium and heavy vehicles, which contracted nearly 50% from its 2011-12 peak (3 lakh units), rose 2% in April-October 2014 (1.22 lakh units), helped by generous offers; it is predicted to gain momentum in the coming months.

Goods' traffic movement at railways grew 4.8% in April-October 2014, marginally lower to last year's 4.9% equivalent growth. And there are recovery signs in the hospitality segment—average room occupancy rate in July-September was higher at 56.5% against comparable 53.2% last year, while hotel occupancies were 58.2% in January-September 2014, against an equivalent 56.4% last

year according to reported STR Global figures. Here too, it isn't easy to separate the effects of discounted room rates.

Whether the above signs strengthen in the forthcoming period or weaken depends significantly upon how other economic segments such as exports, industrial production and agriculture perform as each of these is connected with varying intensity to the services sector. Available data so far is not very encouraging in this regard; for example, the exports' contraction last month, feeble growth of industrial output and the likely slower growth of agriculture this year. In summary, it seems that indications of a sustained turnaround in the services sector are yet to emerge. The forthcoming GDP data for July-September quarter, to be released November 28, will shed further light in this regard. While services' growth performance in the first half of this year will be known soon, the second half still seems up in the air.

Renu Kohli is a New Delhi-based macroeconomist

PART B

NEWS AND VIEWS

Wednesday 26th November 2014

Polity

: BJP, CONG, BSP Leaders Join AAP

Economy

: Reserve Bank may give banks more leeway to deal with bad loans

Planning

: Power ministry for changes in RPO

Editorial

: A far too liberal Act?

Communication, IT Information Division
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BJP, CONG, BSP LEADERS JOIN AAP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi, 25 November

Many leaders from the BJP, Congress and the BSP joined the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi today in presence of party leaders Sanjay Singh and Ashutosh.

Former chairman of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation standing committee and BJP councillor Kartar Singh Tanwar joined the AAP with a large number of his supporters.

Tanwar is councillor from ward number 24, Bhati (Chatarpur). Tanwar has been elected a councillor for the second consecutive term from this ward in South Delhi. Tanwar promised to work for clean politics and expose the BJP misdeeds in the MCD, which the saffron party has been ruling since seven years and has been converted into a den of corruption.

BSP councillor Reeta Chauhan, who represents the Bakhtawarpur ward in Narela assembly constituen-



cy, also joined the AAP. She is currently an independent and had quit the BSP after the 2012 MCD elections. BSP leader from Narela, Sharad Kumar Chauhan also joined the AAP. He had contested the 2008 assembly election and had narrowly lost from Narela with a margin of 800 votes. He said the AAP is the only party in Delhi which is fighting for the

poor and downtrodden.

Former BJP youth leader Vijay Bansal, who has been the state secretary of the Delhi unit of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, attended the AAP press conference and announced his decision to join the party.

Congress leader from Mundka assembly constituency, Dharampal Lakra, who has been a member of the

Food Corporation of India and a former secretary of District Congress Committee also joined the AAP.

The AAP leaders made it clear that leaders from other political parties who do not have a past criminal record and do not face any other serious allegation are welcome to join the party for changing the politics of the country.

Reserve Bank may give banks more leeway to deal with bad loans

Defaulting large borrowers are like freeloaders, says Raghuram Rajan

ANAND (GUJARAT): The Reserve Bank of India can give banks more flexibility to restructure distressed loans in a bid to steer funding towards cash-strapped infrastructure projects, Governor Raghuram Rajan said here on Tuesday.

Dr. Rajan, however, said the RBI would continue to ensure lenders flag and deal with problematic loans quickly, given the dangers to the financial system should banks engage in 'ostrich-like' behaviour of 'hoping the problem will go away'.

Reviving investment and boosting infrastructure are two key objectives for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who won elections in May promising to rekindle the faltering economy after two years of growth below 5 per cent.

A major factor slowing credit flows to infrastructure projects has been the amount of bad loans on banks' books. Including restructured loans, stressed assets are estimated at Rs.6 lakh crore (\$97 billion), or nearly a tenth of total loans.

"The RBI is exploring ways to allow banks more flexibility in restructuring," Dr. Rajan said in a speech at the Institute of Rural Management here.

"This is a risk we are prepared to take if it allows more



Raghuram Rajan

projects to be set on the track to recovery," he said, without giving details of measures being explored.

Still, Dr. Rajan said the central bank would oppose any delay by banks to recognise bad loans.

About 45 per cent of stressed loans have already gone sour. The remainder is in the 'restructured' category, which means the loans have problems but banks only need to set aside minimal reserves.

From April next, new rules will abolish the 'restructured' category and prompt banks to chase customers for payment or set aside billions more re-

serves, once non-performing loans are recognised.

"The fundamental lesson of every situation of banking stress in recent years across the world is to recognise and flag the problem loans quickly and deal with them," Dr. Rajan said.

"So, regulatory forbearance, which is a euphemism for regulators collaborating with banks to hide problems and push them into the future, is a bad idea."

Dr. Rajan also warned of the negative consequences of borrowers defaulting without suffering a financial hit as this raised the cost of loans across the financial system — reit-

erating his previous comments.

Dr. Rajan estimated that power loans were three percentage points more expensive than home loans due to banks' concerns about recovering debts from these types of borrowers.

The central bank tightened rules against these defaulters in September.

'Riskless capitalism'

Accusing some large borrowers of enjoying 'riskless capitalism', Dr. Rajan said such entities were responsible for making banks' credit profile unhealthy and those big clients were in effect becoming 'freeloaders' in the banking system.

Dr. Rajan also said it was the taxpayers and honest borrowers who end up paying the price for losses suffered by state-run banks due to bad loans given to a few big borrowers.

A large borrower, whose loan has turned bad, should not be "lionised as a captain of industry, but justly chastised as a freeloader on the hardworking people of this country," the RBI Governor said. Asserting that he is not against risk-taking, Dr. Rajan said in cases of any stress, the promoter threatened to run an enterprise to the ground, asking the government, banks

and regulators to make necessary concessions to keep it afloat. "We have to ask if our system of credit is healthy. Unfortunately, the answer is that it is not. The sanctity of the debt contract has been continuously eroded in recent years, not by the small borrower, but by the large borrower," Dr. Rajan said. In scathing remarks on the misuse of the system by the large borrowers, Dr. Rajan said taxpayers and honest borrowers end up paying the price due to the excesses committed by large borrowers by way of losses to state-run banks and high pricing of loans.

"If the enterprise regains health, the promoter retains all the upside, forgetting the help he got from the government or the banks — after all, banks should be happy they got some of their money back!

"What I am warning against is the uneven sharing of risks and returns in enterprise, against all contractual norms established the world over — where promoters have a class of 'super' equity which retains all the upside in good times and very little of the downside in bad times," Dr. Rajan said.

Dr. Rajan acknowledged that there was a growing restlessness in the society about such reckless behaviour of corporates. — Reuters, PTI

Power ministry for changes in RPO

■ To seek stringent rules for renewable power deals

New Delhi, Nov 25: The power ministry will soon approach the Cabinet with a proposal to introduce stringent rules for buyers and sellers of renewable energy, besides making amendments to the provisions in the overall tariff policy, Union minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday.

"We have a particular focus on renewable energy and are looking at renewable power purchase obligation (RPO) for both the purchaser and generator...will be enforcing this more strictly," he said. At present, under the RPO (Renewable Purchase Obligation) mechanism, the state power distribution companies have to mandatorily purchase electricity generated through renewable energy sources during the year.

On similar lines, the government is contemplating the RGO (Renewable Generation Obligation), which will make it compulsory for thermal power producers to also generate electricity through renewables.

"Every policy over a peri-

Under the renewable purchase obligation mechanism, the state power discoms have to mandatorily buy power generated through renewable energy sources during the year



od of time you learn something new, those learnings we are trying to bring out what improvements are required," Goyal said when asked the need to make the amendments.

The changes in the tariff policy are also being looked at in order to provide for long term power purchase agreements (PPAs), trying to provide intermediary companies to make such PPAs more

bankable considering the poor health of several discoms.

The government may even bring in an entity which provides bankability, confidence to financiers that their money is secure through the intermediary who purchases the power that is generated and puts it into the grid. The move will bring down the interest cost and lead to certainty in the system. PTI

Record polling, Valley votes for azadi from separatists

VOTERS RULE DAY 71% polling in J&K, 11% jump in Valley; Jharkhand clocks 62%

HT Correspondents

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JAMMU / SRINAGAR / RANCHI: Defying separatists' calls for a boycott, Jammu and Kashmir came out in record numbers to vote in the first phase of assembly elections on a bitterly cold Tuesday.

The 71.28% turnout in 15 of the state's 87 constituencies was more than a 5% jump over the 2008 figure of 64.9% while the Valley alone saw an 11% rise to record its highest ever turnout (also 71%).

Jharkhand, the other state where assembly polls are being held, defied a similar boycott threat by Maoists to log a 62% turnout as a resurgent BJP takes on the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in a bid to offer stability after 14 years of coalition rule.

Deputy election commissioner Vinod Zutshi said in Delhi the J&K turnout was also higher than the 52.6% in the summer general elections while for Kashmir, it was



■ Women warm their hands on traditional kangris (firepots) as they queue up to vote in J&K's Bandipora district on a freezing Tuesday. PTI PHOTO

the "highest since Independence". He attributed it to adequate security and awareness among voters despite the recent floods.

Of the 15 seats, six were in Jammu, five in Kashmir and four in Ladakh, spread over seven districts. Both Kashmir and Jammu regions

recorded 71% polling (Jammu was 69.7% in 2008) and Ladakh 68%, down 2% from the last time.

Sonawari recorded the highest polling at 80%, a big 20% jump, and Ganderbal the lowest at 52.97%, over 1% higher than last time. The Election Commission (EC)

MY INDIAMY VOTE

A clear message in J&K

Record polling in J&K shows people are willing to defy separatists and make their own political choices. Analysts also attribute the high turnout to unprecedented polarisation. »PIO

'Have faith in a chaiwala'

On a day Jharkhand voted in the first phase of polls, PM Modi reached out to tribals, promising stability after 14 years marked by a string of coalition regimes. »PIO

said the figures could be updated by Wednesday. Kishitwar, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi had addressed a rally as part of an aggressive BJP campaign, saw a drop of nearly 6% when compared to the 2008 figure of 74%.

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Record polling, Valley votes for azadi from...

Except Sonawari, none of these constituencies were directly affected by the floods.

In the Lok Sabha polls, when the BJP and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had won from Jammu and Kashmir, respectively, the turnout was 70% in the former and 31% in the Valley. The math, thus, could be hard to interpret now as even in areas in Kashmir where the summer turnout was extremely low voters came out in large numbers.

The high turnout is also being seen as a result of massive mobilisation by parties. While both the PDP and BJP are vying to be the largest parties riding anti-incumbency, the National Conference

(NC) and Congress, having broken their alliance after being in power for six years together, have galvanised resources to bring their traditional voters to the booth.

Incumbent chief minister and NC working president Omar Abdullah tweeted, "Good luck to all my colleagues whose electoral fates will be determined today.. Reports of brisk polling in the Valley are very encouraging. Glad to hear turnout in Chenab valley seats also picking up."

State Congress president Saifuddin Soz said, "We appreciate the enthusiasm of people who had suffered in the floods. We are hopeful of repeating our performance."

But interpreting the heavy voting as "a reflection of people's desire for change", PDP spokesperson Nayeem Akhtar said, "When people want to punish someone, in a democracy, they come out in large numbers. Congress and NC will be the biggest losers."

Even though the poll percentage in Jammu is close to the 2008 figure, consolidation and polarisation of votes along religious lines could benefit the BJP. "The 2008 elections are far behind. Now it's a fight between PM Modi and the rest. People are going to vote either for or against him. The turnout shows people are rallying behind the PM, for change,"

claimed BJP campaign committee member Hari Om.

In Jharkhand, where voting was held in 13 of 81 seats in six Maoist-affected districts, the 61.92% turnout was an improvement of 3.8% over the last assembly polls in 2009 (58.04%) and also up from 57.84% in the general elections.

"The first phase was challenging as most constituencies were Maoist-affected. Rise in voting percentage indicates greater turnout in the next phases too," said state chief electoral officer PK Jajoria.

The next phase of polling in both states will be held on December 2.

INPUTS FROM HTC DELHI

Polling peaceful in Naxal-hit districts of Jharkhand

Amarnath Tewary

PATNA: Jharkhand recorded an impressive 62 per cent voter turnout in the first phase of Assembly elections on Tuesday.

Polling was peaceful in all 13 Naxal-affected constituencies despite a boycott call by Maoists.

"Barring sporadic incidents of damage to EVMs, polling in all 13 constituencies was peaceful with an impressive turnout of around 62 per cent," said Chief Electoral Officer P.K. Jajoria.

In view of the Maoist threat, voting started as early as 7 a.m. and ended by 3 p.m.

Officials said a landmine was detected at Hariharganj under the Hussainabad constituency in Palamu district but was defused. Significantly, a large number of women



A villager casts her vote at Mahuadanr in Jharkhand on Tuesday.

— PHOTO: MANOB CHOWDHURY

voters turned up at the polling stations to exercise their franchise.

The 13 seats that went to the polls on Tuesday are spread over the six Maoist-

affected districts of Palamu, Gumla, Lohardaga, Chatra, Garhwa and Latehar.

Altogether, 199 candidates, including 10 sitting MLAs and a Minister, were in the fray in

the first phase. The second phase polling for 20 seats will be held on December 2.

Modi woos Chaibasa

In the second leg of his poll campaign in the tribal-dominated areas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday addressed a rally at Chaibasa and asked the voters to give the BJP a full majority for complete development of the State.

"I appeal to you all not to give a fractured mandate as people know the difficulties of coalition politics. Have faith in a *chaiwala* [tea seller] and give majority to the BJP to form a stable government," he said. He cited examples of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh where the tribal communities had voted for the BJP to form a stable government.

Hindustan Times

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Obama to stay two days, hold summit-level talks with Modi

HTSPECIAL
OBAMA IN INDIA

JANUARY 2015



Shishir Gupta

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NEW DELHI: US President Barack Obama's state visit to India in January to attend the Republic Day Parade will be spread over two days and include summit-level talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Kathleen Stephens, the US Charge d'Affaires in New Delhi, told attendees at a lunch party on Monday in honour of visiting US Trade Representative Michael Froman that the dates of the Obama visit would be January 25 and 26.

"The Ambassador told us that Obama will be coming to India on

January 25 morning and leave on January 26 night so that he is well in time in the US for the State of the Nation Address on January 28," a chief executive of an American multinational present at the Embassy function told HT.

According to those present at the lunch, Stephens said it was still not clear whether Obama would be accompanied by a political or a business delegation or both. The function was attended among others by India representatives of MSD Pharma, Mastercard, Goldman Sachs, AT & T, Northrop Grumman, Textron, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Avon, American Chambers and US India Business Council.

While the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of External Affairs have started preparations for the Obama visit, the Indian Embassy in Washington said the programme was still tentative and the final dates would be decided after Thanksgiving Day on November 27.

In the run-up to Obama's visit, a number of senior officials from State Department and Pentagon are expected to be in India for preparation of the bilateral agenda. "We expect President Obama to arrive in India from a third country (though not Pakistan). Normally American Presidents like to club other countries in their schedule for long haul visits," said a senior MEA official.

President Pranab Mukherjee and Modi are expected to host banquets in the honour of Obama, who is the first American president to be the guest of honour at the R-Day festivities.



Russian President Vladimir Putin may visit India in December. REUTERS FILE

Putin may address both Houses during India visit

Jayanth Jacob

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NEW DELHI: Efforts are on in full swing to give Indo-Russia ties a big boost, including the possibility of President Vladimir Putin addressing a joint session of Parliament during his possible visit to India on December 11-12 — a month before India welcomes US President Barack Obama for his second visit here.

The agenda to give a new boost to the relationship is driven by economic, energy, space and defence ties. The 15th India-Russia summit comes at a time when Russia's ties with both China and Pakistan is gaining traction.

As Modi had invited Putin to visit an Indian city other than New Delhi, the idea of a Kundankulam trip was mulled but, "logistics were not working out", sources said.

Putin is likely to visit only the

capital now, though the exact schedule is yet to be finalised.

"Economic ties will have to be re-defined to bring more steam to the relations, especially in the field of oil and gas. Russian oil and gas firms are keen to expand ties with India in various aspects. For India, energy security is vital for higher growth," an official said.

Both the countries will also sign pacts for the development of potassium and magnesium deposits in Russia.

Moscow is also keen on joining the smart city project in India, and Sisma has already announced its plan for a smart city in the country.

Space cooperation, like satellite launches and nanotechnology are other areas where the two sides are hoping to make headway.

The government has already announced that it will provide visa on arrival facility for Russian businessmen in 18 airports.

Visa on arrival for 43 nationalities from Nov 27

HT Correspondent

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NEW DELHI: Visa-on-Arrival and Electronic Travel Authorisation for 43 countries, including United States, Australia, Fiji and Pacific Island countries is expected to be in place on November 27.

Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement in this regard, a draft Bill for amending the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which will enable merger of the PIO (Person of

Indian Origin) and OCI (Overseas Citizenship of India) schemes, is expected to be brought to the Cabinet for approval shortly, according to a release from the Prime Minister's Office.

The government has already announced fulfilment of the announcements made by the prime minister — such as granting visa for life to PIO card holders, exemption from police reporting for PIOs staying in India for long term and issuance of long term (10 year) visas to US nationals on a reciprocal basis.

Setting stage for change, RS okays labour law bill

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New Delhi: Amid the tussle between the government and the opposition over key bills, the Rajya Sabha approved a legislation aimed at simplifying archaic labour laws and laid the foundation for deeper changes in the country's labour laws in the months ahead.

The Upper House approved the bill exempting filing of returns and maintenance of records for units employing up to 40 workers. The definition of small establishments has also been proposed to be changed to firms hiring not less than 10 and up to 40 employees, against not less than 10 and up to 19 at



TIME TO GROW

present. The planned changes are expected to help small firms reduce paperwork, end harassment and encourage entrepreneurship and help create jobs.

The legislation, which amends the Labour Laws (Exemption from Furnishing Returns and Maintaining Registers by Certain Establishments) Amendment and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1988, seeks to widen the

ambit of the Act to more establishments and simplifies forms for various returns to be filed and the register to be maintained by employers under different labour laws.

Under the changes in the bill, the employer may maintain the returns filed and the registers on a computer, floppy disk, compact disk or other electronic media. Printouts will have to be made available to the inspector on demand. The information may also be furnished to the inspector by electronic mail.

CPM's Tapan Kumar Sen said the bill will throw the workers at the mercy of employers as all penalty clauses have been removed.

For the full report, log on to www.timesofindia.com

Modi signs 10 pacts with Nepal

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Piyal Bhattacharjee

New Delhi: Flagging off the Delhi-Kathmandu bus service, Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed more than 10 agreements with Nepal on Tuesday, showing that India is prepared to go the extra mile for its neighbours. But if Saarc fails to move to the next level, the responsibility will not be India's.

"We are moving with our neighbours on connectivity, power etc," said MEA spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin. "The PM presided over a large number of agreements with Nepal, and we have concluded similar agreements with other neighbours. Our commitment to regional integration is for all to see." India wants similar agreements through Saarc, but problems with Pakistan may put paid to the efforts.

On touching down in Nepal on Tuesday, the PM made it clear that India expected Nepal to draft an inclusive constitution. "I request all political stakeholders to draft the constitution by early next



Union highways minister Nitin Gadkari launched the Delhi-Kathmandu bus service in the national capital on Tuesday

year as committed through consensus, which will reflect aspirations of all communities, including Madhesis, Pahadis and Maoists... failing to do so can cause difficulties to Nepal and your difficulty despite our expertise to help you in this field is a matter of sadness," Modi said.

A number of strategic issues, including defence and security, were discussed during the talks between Modi and Sushil Koirala over nearly 40 minutes. Talking about bilateral ties, Modi said,

"When we trust each other, we can move forward very quickly."

"Projects that have been in limbo for 25 years are moving forward. I feel very satisfied," he said after inaugurating a trauma centre built by India.

The two countries finalized the \$1 billion line of credit announced during the PM's August visit. This will be utilized for hydropower, irrigation and infrastructural development projects.

For the full report, log on to www.timesofindia.com

First bus to Kathmandu flagged off

New Delhi/ Kathmandu: India and Nepal launched the first-ever government bus service between the two countries on Tuesday. To begin with daily buses will ply between Delhi and Kathmandu. Later, there will be similar buses which will ply on two other routes - Delhi-Pokhara and Varanasi-Kathmandu.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart Sushil Koirala flagged off the Kathmandu-Delhi bus service called Pashupatinath Express from Kathmandu, road transport minister Nitin Gadkari and tourism minister Mahesh Sharma launched the first bus from Delhi. In Delhi, the first bus carrying 14 passengers and three personnel from Seema Suraksha Bal started from Ambedkar stadium bus terminus. TNN

Changes to Electricity Act will focus on renewable energy

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, November 25

The Government proposes to make renewable energy generation obligations mandatory for power producers under the Electricity Act, 2003. To make the projects bankable, the Power Ministry is also looking at changes in the electricity tariff policy.

"We will ensure the renewable generation obligation is enforced strictly and levy penalties on those who do not adhere to it. We will go to the Cabinet very soon with the proposed changes," said Piyush Goyal, Minister of State for Power, Coal and New and Renewable Energy, on Tuesday. Goyal was speaking at an event organised by Ficci and the UN Environment Programme.

Viable model

The Minister said that subsidies cannot meet the target of 1 lakh MW of solar power by 2022.

"We have to ensure that the business model is viable and banks are enticed to lend to renewable energy. I want to ensure that when a home loan is provided, it also includes a rooftop so-



Piyush Goyal with Naina Lal Kidwai, Past-president, Ficci. RAMESH SHARMA

lar panel," said Goyal. On changes in tariff policy, Goyal said, "We want long-term power purchase agreements of 25 years, 12 years and so on. We are also looking at an intermediary bankable entity that will ensure the generated power is being purchased over a long-term to increase the bankability of the project."

While setting a target of 15 per cent power generation from renewable sources by 2019, the Minister added that India will remain a predominantly coal-based economy. On the issue of financing for sustainable development, Goyal emphasised that the financing needs to begin at the manufacturing level and then move on to specific projects.

3 Merged Depts to Replace Plan Panel

FULFILLING MODI'S VISION Key departments include the inter-state council, planning and monitoring division & UIDAI

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New Delhi: The new institution that will replace the Planning Commission is likely to be a combination of three key divisions, each headed by a secretary and placed under the umbrella of a more powerful planning ministry. These divisions include the inter-state council, planning and monitoring division and Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), which, along with direct benefit transfer or DBT will have a critical role in implementing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision.

Senior government officials told ET that the government is considering consolidation of these divisions under the ministry of planning, presently headed by a minister of state with independent charge Rao Inderjit Singh, and a decision to this effect could be taken before the end of this year.

"The PM is of the view that the states should play a greater role

in planning and hence the proposal is to move the inter-state council from home ministry to Yojana Bhawan to oversee development works of the state," an official said.

Besides, the new government is keen on eventually linking Aadhaar with DBT platform, which will require greater synergy between the two, the official said, adding, "Hence, it has been decided to shift out DBT from finance ministry to the new institution." According to the official, who did not wish to be named, the third vertical or division will be a new one that will be responsible for long-term planning for the country as well as evaluation of flagship social sector schemes through an existing but much stronger programme evaluation organisation existing within the commission.

"While all the three divisions will be headed by a secretary, the government may rope in experts at the advisor level to strengthen the planning and monitoring division," the official added.

As per the proposal, the inter-

Donning New Avatar

THE CURRENT STRUCTURE

PM TRADITIONALLY chairs the Planning Commission

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN of the commission is the executive authority

THERE ARE 8-10 members, handling at least three divisions each

THERE ARE 30 divisions within the commission

MINISTRY OF planning has been always headed by MoS & had the limited role of answering Parliamentary questions



WHAT IS BEING CONSIDERED?

The ministry of planning is going to be strengthened and is headed by MoS (independent charge)

There will be three divisions under this - inter-state council, planning and monitoring, UIDAI and DBT

EACH DIVISION WILL BE HEADED BY A SECRETARY



Inter-state council will carry the development agenda of the states forward to finance & other central ministries

The planning division will work on a long-term plan for the govt & evaluate the flagship social sector schemes

UIDAI-DBT division will co-ordinate with states for generation of Aadhaar

state council, which is headed by the prime minister, will be responsible for routing the state plans to finance ministry besides coordinating with central minis-

tries on all developmental schemes of the states. However, the security issues that were being handled by the council will continue to be vested with the

home ministry.

An email query sent to planning secretary Sindhushree Khullar did not elicit any response. Until last year, annual plans of the states were finalised by the Planning Commission after consultation with the finance ministry and the funds were routed through the commission.

However, since the BJP-led NDA government, which took charge in May, decided to replace the institution with a new one, the work of allocation of funds to states has been moved to the finance ministry.

The UIDAI, which is an attached office of the Planning Commission, is responsible for generating Aadhaar or a unique identity for all by March 2015.

Once the target is achieved, the government is thinking of making Aadhaar mandatory for doling out benefits under its social security schemes through a DBT platform and hence it has decided to move DBT out of finance ministry to the commission for better synergy and coordination between the two.

Select Panel on Insurance Gets Two More Weeks

Our Political Bureau

New Delhi: Opposition members came together in the Rajya Sabha to object to a resolution seeking more time for the select committee to examine amendments to the insurance bill, before it was finally approved. On a nosy second day, Congress MPs also protested against the renaming of the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad.

Although the Rajya Sabha extended the select committee's deadline by two weeks till December 12, it was not before CPM leaders P Rajeev and Congress leader Anand Sharma raised questions over the procedure adopted to seek extension.



OPPOSITION AFFECT

The House is free to not grant an extension to the panel. Govt is ready to bring insurance bill the next day

ARUN JAITLEY
Finance Minister

When committee chairman and BJP leader Chandan Mitra moved the resolution, Rajeev objected saying members of the select committee were not aware of the move and hence, Mitra was not authorised to do so. Other member Derek O'Brien of Trinamool Congress and JD Seelam of Congress joined in to say they were also unaware of the move and that a meeting of the committee be called to resolve this.

Rejecting their demand, an unusually aggressive Arun Jaitley said that the House was free to not grant an extension to the select committee and the government was ready to bring the insurance bill the next day. Deputy Chairman PJ Kurien then put the resolution to give the select committee an extension and it was passed by a voice vote.

RS passes Bill to simplify labour law procedures

BS REPORTER

New Delhi, 25 November

The government on Tuesday succeeded in getting one of the laws in its labour law reform kitty, the Labour Laws (Exemption from Furnishing Returns and Maintaining Registers by Certain Establishments) Amendment Bill, 2011, passed in the Rajya Sabha, with the Congress supporting the Bill.

The Left parties, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), opposed the Bill terming it "anti-labour and not labour reform". TMC's D Bandopadhyay termed the Bill "draconian".

The Bill increases the number of laws under which units and small establishments will be exempt from maintaining registers and filings returns. It also redefines "small establishment" to mean a unit employing between 10-40 people. (The original Act capped the limit at 19 workers.)

The Bill will now have to be moved in the Lok Sabha.

Moving the Bill in the post-lunch session, Labour Minister Bandaru Dattatreya said the main purpose of the amendment is simplification of laws. "Transparency, accountability and enforcement will be taken care of. The workers' interests will also be taken care of," said the minister. Even as the Left parties objected to the

minister saying there was consensus among trade unions on the move, the minister insisted it was aimed at making procedures simpler for establishments.

Congress' Madhusudan Mistry, a trade unionist himself, spoke out against the Bill, which according to him would "hamper the interests of labourers and workers". He, however, conceded his party was supporting the Bill.

Bahujan Samaj Party's Satish Chandra Mishra pointed out that the Bharatiya Janata Party had opposed the Bill while in Opposition but was now clearing it.

For full reports, visit
www.business-standard.com

PM 'lessons' make it to CBSE texts

Swachh Bharat campaign hailed, Mangalyaan propped as 'Make in India' product

MIHIKA BASU

MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 25

THE Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in its new study material for open text-based annual exams for Class IX students, has picked a clutch of themes straight out of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's list of favourites.

While the Swachh Bharat campaign and Mangalyaan are common themes for both English and Science, the texts on each of the topics differ for the two subjects. Riddled with grammatical errors, the texts contain questions and model marking scheme for teachers.

As many as 15,000-odd schools affiliated to CBSE fol-

low the open text book assessment system in which students are evaluated on topics announced before the exam. The idea behind the system is to help students understand a particular subject through analysis rather than mug it.

"Public spaces in India's cities are often an eyesore, full of rotting piles of trash along the streets, in neighbourhoods, public parks and outside fancy air-conditioned malls and five-star hotels. On Gandhi Jayanti, this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the clean India or Swachh Bharat Abhiyan campaign that aims to clean all places of human habitation in India of filth and litter," reads the text for the English paper.

THE TEXT also says that MOM has shown us 'yes, we can', a phrase picked up from US President Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign

Calling the Clean India campaign a "ten billion dollar" one, the English text reads: "Our Prime Minister said, 'I will not litter, I will not allow others to litter', is what we must resolve if we are true children of this motherland'. As we clean our homes every day, why can't this attitude not be extended to overall cleanliness and Swachh

Bharat?"

"India's tryst with Mars", another theme for English, reads clumsily: "Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) will map the Martian geography, study the atmosphere and look for signs of Methane gas, an indication of life on Mars. What is even more significant is that MOM proved the government's 'Make in India' push, eminently practical: the \$74-million Indian craft."

The text discusses the impact of space programmes on India's economy and society and the status of India in the field of space research. The material also says that MOM has shown us "yes, we can", a phrase picked up from US President Barack Obama's

2008 campaign, also used by Modi during his campaign.

The study material for Science focuses on understanding the environment of Mars. It has been prepared keeping in mind the scientific concepts Class IX students are familiar with. The material talks about the Mars mission, includes a press release by ISRO and a photograph of Modi addressing the scientists.

Additionally, one of the two themes in the math study material for Class IX students is 'Atithidevo Bhava' and talks about treatment of foreigners visiting India, another subject the PM has spoken about.

CBSE chairman Vineet Joshi did not respond to calls from *The Indian Express*.

'Not a cover for forbearance, misuse will be dealt with severely' Willing to be flexible on loan recast to aid growth: Rajan

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
ANAND, NOVEMBER 25

THE Reserve Bank of India is open to giving banks greater flexibility of stressed loans if it helps in the recovery of stalled projects, Governor Raghuram Rajan said on Tuesday.

"This is a risk we are prepared to take if it allows more projects to be set on the track to recovery," Rajan said while delivering the Dr Verghese Kurien Memorial Lecture at the Institute of Rural Management in Anand, Gujarat.

He did add that the central bank was wary of extending this benefit as bank managements had misused it in the past. "Nevertheless, recognising that it cannot micromanage the resolution of distress, the RBI is exploring ways to allow banks more flexibility in restructuring," he said.

Rajan, however, made it clear that a little flexibility does not mean that the central bank would tolerate regulatory forbearance. "Regulatory for-



RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan at the Institute of Rural Management in Anand on Tuesday. BHUPENDRA RANA

bearance, which is an euphemism for regulators collaborating with banks to hide problems and push them into the future, is a bad idea."

"Forbearance is ostrich-like behaviour, hoping the problem will go away. It is not realism but naivete..." Rajan said, adding that the RBI will keep an eye on possible misuse and will be severe in dealing with such cases.

The Governor lashed out at some large borrowers whom he held responsible for deterioration in banks' credit profile, calling them "freeloaders" who enjoyed "riskless capitalism".

He expressed concern at how such borrowers have eroded the sanctity of the debt contract. Rajan said that the

problem was not because of want of law but because of the way the system was making banks helpless when faced with promoters with deep pockets who can go beyond the debt recovery tribunals to the higher judiciary to fight their cases.

"Faced with this asymmetry of power, banks are tempted to cave in and take the unfair deal the borrower offers," Rajan said, adding, "how many large promoters have lost their homes or have had to curb their lifestyles despite offering personal guarantees to lenders?"

Total write-offs in the last five years stood at Rs 1.6 lakh crore, he said. "... given the size of stressed assets in the system, there will be more write-offs to come," he added. WITH PTI

PSU banks hold 90% of bad loans: Jaitley

NEW DELHI: Public sector banks accounted for over 90 per cent of total non-performing assets (NPAs) that the banking sector registered in 2013-14.

Of Rs 2.40 lakh crore gross NPAs reported by banks in 2013-14, Rs 2.16 lakh crore gross NPAs came from the public sector banks, Parliament was informed on Tuesday. Private banks had gross NPAs of Rs 22,738 crore as of March 31.

"The government has advised PSBs to constitute a board level committee for monitoring of NPAs and recovery, appointment of nodal officers for recovery at the head office ... to conduct special drives... and has instructed PSBs that write-offs should not be more than recovery," finance minister Arun Jaitley said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. PTI

India, Nepal ink 10 pacts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 25 November

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday held talks with Nepalese counterpart Sushil Koirala on key strategic issues after which 10 agreements, including a pact on \$1-billion assistance to Nepal, were inked.

A host of strategic issues, including defence and security, were discussed between Modi and Koirala during their talks that lasted 40 minutes.

Talking about bilateral ties, Modi said, "When we trust each other, we can move forward quickly. Projects that have been in limbo for 25 years are moving forward. I feel very satisfied," he said, inaugurating a trauma centre built by India at Kathmandu's Bir Hospital.

Following the talks, the two sides finalised terms of the \$1-billion Indian assistance for Nepal's infrastructure development, announced by Modi during his August visit.

The agreement for Line of Credit to the neighbouring state was signed between Nepal finance ministry's Joint Secretary Madhu Kumar Marasini and Deputy Managing Director of Exim Bank David Rasquinha.

Modi, who arrived here earlier on Tuesday for a three-day visit, will attend the two-day 18th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit, beginning on Wednesday, apart from holding bilateral meetings with other Saarc leaders.

India and Nepal signed the Motor Vehicle Agreement under which permit would be given to vehicles to ply on designated routes in each other's country.

They also inked three twin-city pacts between Kathmandu-Varanasi, Janakpur-Ayodhya and Lumbini-Bodh Gaya.

The 10 agreements also include, memoranda of understanding on training at Nepal Police Academy, tourism, traditional medicines and youth exchange.

A pact was also signed on a project



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (centre) with Nepalese counterpart Sushil Koirala (right) and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in Kathmandu on Tuesday. Showing India's commitment to strengthening ties, Modi handed over to Nepal advanced light helicopter Mark III Dhruv that will be used for military and civilian operations

PHOTO: PTI

development agreement over the 900 megawatt hydro-electric project on the Arun river in Nepal.

"We have decided to allow our nationals to carry ₹500 and ₹1,000 denomination notes up to the limit of ₹25,000," Prime Minister Modi announced.

India also gifted Nepal a mobile soil testing lab to boost soil health monitoring and adoption of best agricultural practices.

Modi made a strong pitch for the early drafting of Nepal's Constitution, saying if the country fails to do so, it may get into "difficulties".

He said India will not like to interfere but having expertise and not being able to help Nepal from getting into difficulty will be sad.

SIDELIGHTS

China wants to 'elevate' partnership with Saarc

On the eve of the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit in Nepal, China said it wants to "elevate its partnership" with the South Asian bloc, amid a debate in the official media in Beijing on enhancing China's role in the eight-member grouping from an observer to that of an active member. Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala said it will talk to other states in the grouping for Beijing's membership.

PTI

Ministers discuss trade issues

A host of key issues, including lifting of restrictions for easy movement of goods services, opening transport connectivity and ensuring food security, were discussed on Tuesday by foreign ministers of Saarc countries, ahead of the summit-level deliberations that begin Wednesday.

PTI

Kathmandu-Delhi bus service begins

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart Sushil Koirala on Tuesday flagged off the first Kathmandu-Delhi bus service, called Pashupatinath Express, from Nepal. Before the flagging off, both the Prime Ministers hopped into the bus and interacted with passengers. The bus will cover 1,250 km in 30 hours from Delhi. The fare is ₹2,300 a passenger.

PTI

Sharif puts ball in India's court

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said in Nepal "cancellation of talks was New Delhi's unilateral decision," and the "ball is now in India's court for talks between both the countries." There are indications the prime ministers might meet on the sidelines of the summit.

PTI

Pakistan blocks connectivity pacts

The proposed agreements for better regional connectivity, including a motor vehicle pact, to be signed during the Saarc Summit are unlikely to be inked with Pakistan opposing them, saying it was yet to complete its "internal processes".

PTI

A far too liberal Act?

The law pertaining to juvenile crimes has come under the scanner yet again. Last week, a Supreme Court Bench comprising Mr. Justice Dipak Misra and Mr. Justice U.U. Lalit described the punishment for juveniles committing serious crimes as being "far too liberal" and urged the Attorney General to suggest that the government have a relook at the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 (JJ Act). These comments arose in the context of adjudicating a crime that was committed 24 years ago by an accused who is now about 40 years old, and who has been appraised by the Supreme Court as having been a juvenile aged 16 years while committing the crime. Section 7A(ii) of the JJ Act states that if the court finds a person to be a juvenile on the date of commission of the offence, the case shall be immediately sent to the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB). The judges were of the opinion that if the accused, now a 40-year-old man, were presented before the JJB, he would be punished with an "admonition" or direction for "group counselling", which would be "too liberal" and hence "an exercise in futility and a travesty of justice".

There are three brief comments in response. First, the constitutionality of the JJ Act insofar as it allows all children to receive the benefits of the juvenile justice system irrespective of the gravity of the offence has been upheld by the Supreme Court in *Salil Bali* (2013) and *Subramanian Swamy* (2014). Hence, the issue of amending the JJ Act at this point is a purely policy or legislative issue, not warranting judicial intervention. Second, the interpretation of Section 7A of the JJ Act was settled in *Jitendra Singh*. Accordingly, cases such as this are to be sent to the JJB as the appropriate authority. Moreover, because judicial delays are common in our system, often the accused is much older by the time he/she is presented before the JJB, leading to a peculiar situation which no doubt needs to be resolved. But this too is a fault in our institutional design rather than a gap in the JJ Act *per se*. Third, there are several misconceptions about the rate of juvenile crimes in India. For instance, Mr. Justice Misra observed: "In a population of 1,000, one per cent may be juveniles who commit rape and murder. But even this one per cent can be a menace." These statistics seem grossly overestimated. The National Crime Records Bureau report states that juvenile crimes comprise only 1.2 per cent of the total number of crimes in India, and that 65 per cent of them are property-related crimes such as theft, while just about 5 to 8 per cent constitute serious offences such as rape and murder. Although media reportage of juvenile crimes might have increased, this may not mean that instances of juvenile crime as a whole are in themselves increasing.