

LABOUR/ EMPLOYMENT - 2005

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Job guarantee Bill in thick of controversy (14)

New Delhi: The UFA government's ambitious programme to provide 100 days of employment in a year to the rural poor has run into deep trouble with its original drafters finding fault with the Bill presented in Parliament. Some of the experts, who as members of the Sonia Gandhi-headed National Advisory Council had prepared the blueprint of the massive scheme, have called the Bill a "travesty" of the original. The Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 21 was "extensively reworked from the point of view of a bureaucrat who is anxious to minimise the responsibility of the state," said economist Jean Dreze, a NAC member who had contributed significantly to the draft. The clamour over the Bill being a "watered-down" version of the NAC draft, expectedly enjoys strong backing of the Left. "The Bill is a caricature of the original document, lack of funds cannot be an excuse for diluting it, since the draft had the approval of Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi and the government should follow it," said CPI general secretary A B Bardhan. The back-to-socialism programme, very much part of the ruling coalition's common minimum programme, has had a bumpy ride all through its passage to Parliament. While the Left and NAC activists pitched for it, pro-reforms politicians even within the Congress, had reservations about the wisdom of spending Rs 15,000 crore of the taxpayers' money on a programme which promised no tangible returns. (Times of India 4.1.05)

Compensation planned for retrenched workers (14)

NEW DELHI, JAN. 13. The Labour Ministry proposes to introduce a novel plan of providing compensation to workers who lose employment due to closure of an industry or face retrenchment owing to the liberalisation and privatisation policies. The social security plan will be applicable to the those covered under the Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme and the compensation limited to six months. Highly-placed Ministry sources told The Hindu that an affected worker would be entitled to a compensation of 50 per cent of the last drawn pay. The scheme allows the withdrawal of compensation at intervals in case the unemployed worker found suitable employment and lost the job once again due to distress in the industry. The Ministry will spend an accumulation of Rs. 10,000 crores lying with the ESIC for the scheme. The unutilised money has come from employees who have moved out of the scheme over the years. The ESIC gets an interest of Rs. 500 crores annually on the money and an equal amount is added to the fund every year. Besides, there are plans to use a portion of the fund to give grant/loans to the ESIC subscribers for housing, purchase of land, children's education or fulfilling other social obligations. (The Hindu 14.1.05)

Migrant labourers find no El Dorado (14)

Bhubaneswar: THE HUNGER zones of southern and western Orissa abound with stories of poverty-stricken labourers making long journeys to assumed El Dorados outside the state, only to return home shattered and disillusioned. Some even fail to make it back like, for example, this bunch of eight daily wagers from Koraput district whose plight has come into public focus, thanks to the local media. Hailing from Khinmung and Surmi villages in Nandpur block of the district, these farm hands left for Karnataka last year and have since been missing. Even as their families and friends wait in anguish, the local administration is yet to take any steps to trace or rescue them, according to reports. The families suspect that they are being held as bonded labourers by their unknown employers in the southern state. Sources said that the entire group including Mastu, Santosh, Dambaru, Sonia and Jinu were lured by a labour tout from Kancha village in Koraput. Promising handsome wages, he took the group along with him but never ever made any attempt again to communicate with their families. The labourers, too, became incommunicado making the families worry about their. SAFETY. (Pioneer 15.1.05)

EPF interest rate hiked to 9.5% (14)

New Delhi: The government on Wednesday made millions of employees break out in a wide grin by

hiking the employee provident fund (EPF) interest rate by 1% to 9.5%, but at the same time, pushed the deficit on earnings from EPF investments to over Rs 900 crore, thus betraying the patently political nature of the move. The EPF bonanza was announced by finance minister P Chidambaram late Wednesday evening after a meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The announcement is expected to placate the Left — which has welcomed the decision — smarting from the government's 'slight' to it on PSU disinvestment and FDI hikes in telecom and aviation sectors. The Left parties had demanded that EPF rate should be maintained at last year's level of 9.5% for the current fiscal at UPA-Left ^coordination meetings and the government had repeatedly assured them that the demand would be considered. Earlier in July, the EPF board had decided on an interim rate of return of 8.5% for 2003-04. (Times of India 3.2.05)

Glare on maid placement agencies (14)

New Delhi, February 6: DELHI POLICE have demanded a regulatory framework for the city's 10,000-odd servant placement agencies. South district police have already started a drive to keep tabs on 2,000 placement agencies which operate from their area. Police say it is a fallacy to think that employing domestic helps from a placement agency is safe. They say these agencies are encouraging bonded labour in the city and their operation is nothing short of human trafficking. Some maids from poorer areas of the country are exploited both sexually and monetarily. Police also claim these agencies are becoming "power centres". There have been cases of agents threatening and even using strong-arm tactics against middle-class people who have dared to complain against them or maids supplied by them. (Hindustan Times 7.2.05)

Doctors, engineers in queue for constable posts (14)

THANE (MAHARASHTRA), FEB. 6. When aspirants line up for interviews for filling 300 vacancies of police constables in Thane Commissionerate, doctors; besides engineers will be seen in the queue tomorrow. The DCP (Zone-I), Madhukar Pandey, said around 80,000 applications had been received for the posts. The candidates included around 20 doctors, a large number of engineers and graduates. Mr. Pandey said that unlike previous occasions this time a new system had been evolved. On the first day, the candidates would be allotted the date and time of their actual interview thereby avoiding endless wait for the candidates. The interview may go on for three to four months. (The Hindu (7.2.05)

Employment News scam: Rly exam results are out, Rly says what exams (14)

New Delhi, Feb. 6: IN a nation where millions are desperately seeking work, a trickster has used the official job bible Employment News to pull off an amazing scam. The publication's last issue carried a quarter-page advertisement listing the roll numbers of 67 candidates who had passed the Final Stage written examination conducted by the Railway Recruitment Board, Jabalpur.

The problem is that the railways did not conduct any such examination and as Ghan-shyam Goyal, General Manager, Employment News, says: "We discovered that there was no Railway Recruitment Board in Jabalpur." Railway officials now suspect that someone has duped countless job-seekers with the promise of employment in RRB Jabalpur and the advertisement in Employment News merely put the final touches on the scam. They have asked the CBI to look into the case. While investigations have begun, Employment News, which is published by the Publications Division of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, will not be able to provide many leads. For, it has carried the advertisement without knowing who the advertiser is. (Indian Express 7.2.05)

Panel asks for comments on law (14)

New Delhi, Feb. 4: There is scope yet for tinkering with the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Bill, 2004, criticised as being flawed by the Opposition and the Left Front. A parliamentary standing committee has invited suggestions from the public on the bill.

The government had introduced the bill in the Lok Sabha during the last session of Parliament, guaranteeing poor household a minimum 100 days of employment every year. But critics said the bill fell short of the promise made in the common minimum programme announced when the Man-mohan Singh government took over. Even while the bill was being tabled in Parliament, the Opposition suggested that the draft should be sent to a committee and its provisions re-examined. The Left, which felt that the bill had diluted the CMP promises, wanted a re-look by a joint select committee, and not just by a standing committee. But only half conceding the Left's demand, the government agreed

to the bill being referred to the parliamentary standing committee on rural development. (Asian Age 5.2.05)

Chennai top job generator: Survey (14)

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 10: MUMBAI seems to have lost again to its southern cousin when it comes to employment generation growth this quarter (January-March). A sharp growth in the healthcare and auto component export sectors has driven Chennai to the top of metres generating the most number of jobs in the current quarter, said HR consultancy firm MaFoi.

Amongst the metros, Chennai ranks first in the MaFoi Employment Index (MEI) with 10.29 per cent growth, followed by Hyderabad with 6.68 per cent, and Bangalore with 5.59 per cent. Mum-bai was at the fifth slot with only a 4.21 per cent growth. 'Almost 40 per cent of the total Rs 700 crore auto component exports comes from Tamil Nadu and Chennai is a major contributor,' said K. Pandia Rajan, MD and CEO of Mafoi Management Consultants Ltd, while releasing the findings of the MaFoi Employment Survey on Thursday. One of the primary reasons for Mumbai losing out is the lack of growth in the BFSI sector (Banking and Financial services). "Maharashtra is the hub of BFSI, but in the current quarter, the BFSI segment has registered lowest growth with no mega banking deals or investments," Rajan told The Indian Express. As a result, Mumbai limped and fell behind other metros. (Indian Express 11.2.05)

Government jobs" Age limit to be increased (14)

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 9. The age limit for joining Government service is proposed to be increased in view of the pendency of applications with the Public Service Commission, the Finance Minister, Vakkom Purushothaman, told the Assembly today. Replying to questions, he said there was no move to increase the retirement age at present as it would be against the interests of the large numbers of jobless persons among the younger generation. However, it was proposed to introduce the contributory pension scheme from April since 91 per cent of the State's revenues were being spent on pension and salary payments at present. He said 18,000 to 20,000 Government employees were retiring annually. Pension payments were increasing at the rate of 17 per cent year, while the expenditure on salary increased at the rate of 11 per cent. Kerala had the lowest pension age among the States, while the average life span was 72 years. This meant that pension was being paid for 17 years on an average. There were 3.53 lakh pensioners in the State as on March 31, 2003. Mr. Purushothaman said. (The Hindu 10.2.05)

Maids on dharna after one raped (14)

Noida: MAIDS today staged a dharna at Sector 21 in Noida after one of their fellow domestic helps was allegedly abducted and gang raped in a car for several hours by some unknown miscreants. The agitating maids were demanding the arrest of the culprits. The Noida district administration deployed a heavy police force to taring the situation under control. According to sources, the maid, who hails from West Bengal, was returning to her resident after the day's work. She used to work in the houses where mainly retired army officers live that is in Sectors 21 and 25. In the evening, near Sector 21, four people abducted her and allegedly gang raped her for several hours inside the car. Late in the night, the accused left her, in an unconscious stage, along the roadside near Sector 21. She was immediately admitted to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital at Delhi. Following this, maids started protesting demanding arrests. (Pioneer 11.2.05)

Right to strike work brainstormed at meet (14)

Kolkata, Feb. 11: The CPI(M) on Thursday made it clear that it was not willing to give up its right to strike. The issue was discussed at length in the 21st state conference of the party on the second day. The party went so far as to criticise the judiciary for some of its anti-strike and anti-bandh orders. Citing some orders of the Calcutta high court, the Kerala high court and the Supreme Court, the party alleged that the judiciary's anti-strike opinion seems to have been influenced by globalisation and liberalisation. The recent controversy within the Left Front over the issue also figured in the discussion. Sources said some members also pointed out that chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's frequent anti-strike statements were sending confusing message to the party supporters particularly the labour class. Some party delegates elaborated that the trade union movement had played an important role in the growth of the CPI(M) and now the party could not abandon it. The CPI(M) state secretary Anil Biswas also said that the UFA government was trying to bring in some reforms in Labour laws which may curtail the rights of the workers. "We will never accept such an anti-labour law," he added. (Indian Express 12.2.05)

Judicial custody for domestic help (14)

New Delhi, February 17: A CITY court on Thursday remanded Sabitri Minz, the domestic help accused of kidnapping her employers' 18-month-old son, to five days judicial custody. Sabitri's lawyer said she was innocent and should be given bail. However, the police opposed the appeal, stating the investigation was at an initial stage. When the court passed the order on judicial custody, Sabitri started crying and pleaded that she didn't want to go to jail. Her bail plea will come up for hearing on February 21. (Hindustan Times 18/2/05)

Mind your language with, the boss or lose your job (14)

NEW DELHI, FEB. 24. Abuse the boss — and get the sack. This age-old practice now has the highest court's seal of approval. The Supreme Court today held that the use of abusive language in office by an employee or workman against his boss or superior without provocation could be a ground for dismissal from service. A three-judge Bench, comprising Justice N. Santosh Hegde, Justice Tarun Chatterjee and Justice P. K. Balasubramanyan, allowing an appeal from Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd, against a judgment of the Bombay High Court said: "Punishment of dismissal for using abusive language cannot be held to be disproportionate." The Bench set aside three concurrent findings of the Labour Court and the High Court that punishment of dismissal would be disproportionate to the misconduct alleged. Writing the judgment for the Bench, Mr. Justice Hegde said that "in this case all the forums below have held that the language used by the workman [N.B. Narawade] was filthy. We, too, are of the opinion that the language used by the workman is such that it cannot be tolerated by any civilised society. Use of such abusive language against a superior officer, that too not once but twice, in the presence of subordinates cannot be termed to be an indiscipline calling for lesser punishment in the absence of any extenuating factor." The judges said that under Section 11 (A) of the Industrial Disputes Act, a certain amount of discretion was vested with the Labour Court in interfering with the quantum of punishment awarded by the management to a workman found guilty of misconduct. But that discretion would be in respect of certain factors in favour of the workman that should disturb the conscience of the court, the Bench noted and said that it was lacking in this case. (The Hindu 25/2/05)

Pension major drag on finances (14)

New Delhi, February 25: THE ECONOMIC survey for 2004-05 has given the government a clarion call to bring about a comprehensive financial security cover for the unorganised sector as well as to make comprehensive changes to bring down ever-increasing liabilities on the pension front. Pension burden has increased sevenfold to Rs 15,367 crore in the last 13 years. It was only Rs 2,138 crore in 1990-91. And this amount covers only 11 per cent of India's workforce. The government will have to find ways to provide financial security to the unorganised sector, which comprises 89 per cent of the nation's workforce. The burden of the pension bill has risen more steeply for the states, which are already reeling under a financial crisis, compared to the Centre. The economic survey points out that the annual average increase in pension outgo for states was 27 per cent since 1990 as against 21 per cent for the Centre. Unfunded pensions have been a major fiscal drag worldwide. The pressure of pensions on central and state finances is becoming increasingly burdensome. The total pension outgo of the Centre rose from 0.38 per cent of the GDP in 1990-91 to 0.74 per cent in 1999-2000. It then declined to 0.56 per cent in 2003-04. However, in absolute terms, the pension bill mounted to Rs 2,138 crore in 1990-91 and Rs 15,367 crore in 2003-04, it noted. (Hindustan Times 26/2/05)

Govt moves to overhaul labour laws (14)

New Delhi: The government is about to launch the much-promised labour law reforms and these would take off from the country's export-oriented textile sector, which employs the largest number of workers, next only to agriculture. The bold initiative to remove rigidity in the country's labour laws and practices has come from the textile ministry. The objective is to add 1.2 crore quality jobs in the next four years to the 3.5 crore existing employment in the textile industry by cashing in on the huge global opportunity following abolition of quota curbs. The Prime Minister's Office, it is learnt, is fully backing the proposal. The ministry will soon send a proposal to the Cabinet envisaging three key changes in labour laws and regulations. One, the industry will have the flexibility to adjust its workforce in keeping with export orders — it can hire a large number of workers to execute big international orders. Two, workers in textile export units can work up to 60 hours a week, instead of being restricted to 48 hours as at present. Three, the ban on

women working on night shifts would be withdrawn. Like in the export sectors of ITES, BPO and call centres, the regulation would not apply to textile export units. (Times of India 26/2/050)

Andhra poor brave Iraq death trap (14)

Karimnagar/Hyderabad, March 1: Andhra Pradesh's agricultural labourers prefer the scorching deserts of Iraq to the barren fields of their home state. The ever-present possibility of violent death does not terrify them: the alternative is a slow death from hunger. Hundreds of agricultural labourers from several drought-hit villages of Andhra Pradesh are migrating secretly to Iraq to make a living doing menial jobs in US military camps, construction sites and transport companies. As they leave their families behind, it is the prospect of decent pay packets that keeps their chins up. At least they don't have to resort to begging, like many of their compatriots, their families say.

The Indian government's "official ban" on visas to Iraq is no hindrance. Dubious agents from Mumbai, Hyderabad and Delhi help them slip into Iraq after they reach Kuwait and Dubai.

Most of them have no idea of the dangers. They have not heard about the Indian labourers who were kidnapped and held for ransom by resistance fighters. Even those who are aware of the dangers don't care. Several are working as dhobis (laundrymen), scavengers, cooks, drivers and construction workers in war-torn Iraq for salaries paid in US dollars. Officials said that about 500 workers from Karimnagar district fly to Gulf countries in search of work every month, and that a major chunk of them slipping into Iraq to make some quick money. "Dangerous terrain, decent pay is a formula acceptable to many them. (Asian Age 2/3/05)

Rural sector strikes gold with budget (18)

New Delhi, Feb. 28: It was "going back to the village" in the Budget 2005, which made major announcements for the rural sector, targeting two areas of infrastructure and employment.

Rural India, now, has a new employment guarantee scheme, a health mission and a package of Rs 1,200 crores for improving the telecommunication network. The budget provides an allocation of Rs 8,000 crores for the rural infrastructure development fund. Finance minister P. Chidambaram announced that the National Food for Work programme, launched in 2004, would now be converted into the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. He said that a provision of Rs 5,400 crores for the cash component and 50 lakh metric tonnes of food grains have been made. In overall terms, the allocation will increase to Rs 11,000 crores as against the estimated expenditure of Rs 4,020 last year. The minister said that the food processing, textile, irrigation and IT sectors are going to be the hub for generating employment in the next five years. These are the areas which will get the highest attention. The finance minister also announced the National Rural Health Mission that will be launched next year. The allocation for the department of health and family welfare has been enhanced from Rs 8,420 crores to Rs 10,280 crores to meet the finances of the new health scheme that will focus on strengthening primary health care.

In other steps, agriculture credit of Rs 10,8,500 crores will be disbursed in the current year and the credit will increase by another 30 per cent in the next year. (Asian Age 1/3/05)

No guarantee yet on jobs law for rural poor (14)

New Delhi: When finance minister P Chidambaram stood up to present his second Budget in seven months on Monday, he was playing to the gallery on an employment guarantee law for the rural poor. Nobody still has any idea on what to do with this hot potato. They cannot drop it, it's a crucial piece of UFA commitment. They are finding it difficult to swallow, there are too many reservations on its feasibility. There are differences on who would foot Rs 40,000 crore annual bill. The three players — the Planning Commission, the finance and rural development ministries — don't see eye to eye on it. Introduced in Parliament last December, the Rural Employment Guarantee Bill is being scrutinised by a standing committee of MPs. So, Chidambaram pitched

the rhetoric just right and promptly left it there. In fact, the differences in the government on this issue have come into sharper focus with how the Budget treats two food-for-work programmes — an old one, the Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojna (SGRY), and a new National Food for Work (NFW) Programme launched in November last for 150 backward districts. The new programme is supposed to be a precursor to the work guarantee Bill. Some say the two may eventually be merged. But some jugglery has already begun. Chidambaram's Budget gives less on paper in the coming year to SGRY and more to NFWP — about Rs 4,000 crore for the first, down from this year, and Rs 5,400 crore for the second. This is the cash component for both. (Times of India 4/3/05)

Jalan wants EGS put on trial first (14)

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9: DEALING a reality check to UPAs dream Bill on Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Rajya Sabha MP and former RBI governor Bimal Jalan today advised the government not to rush the legislation and put the scheme on trial instead. Jalan, in his letter to Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, has pointed out that the Bill in its present form was likely to give rise to a "gargantuan bureaucratic structure which will be overburdened with paperwork". Jalan proposes that since the scheme needs to be tried out at the grassroots soon, the government should come out with a resolution in Parliament, implementing the scheme without enacting a law for at least a year. In its present form, he says, the EGS was bound to fall prey to factors like the multi-tier and multi-agency system, which in the past have clogged the delivery of schemes. He claimed that at least 10 government agencies were involved in the delivery of EGS at the moment. Jalan, however, welcomed a proposal mooted at the National Advisory Council that the beneficiary should do a "self-selection" in the EGS. But the Bill gives unbridled powers to bureaucrats to identify and select the beneficiary, which would render the scheme purposeless, he says. (Indian Express 10/3/05)

Unemployment benefit scheme for labour from April (14)

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17. The Union Labour and Employment Minister, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, today announced an Unemployment Benefit Scheme for workers from April this year. The scheme called the Rajiv Gandhi Shramik Kalyan Yojana, would be implemented by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), he said while making a statement in the Lok Sabha. The opening sentence of the Minister's statement — wherein he said the decision was taken under the "guidance of the UFA chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, and the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh" — drew immediate protests from the Opposition and a counter from the ruling side. Demanding a clarification on Ms. Gandhi's status, V. K. Malhotra and Anantha Kumar of the Bharatiya Janata Party asked: "It is all right to mention the Prime Minister's name, but why is Ms. Gandhi being referred to." Mr. Rao said the workers losing employment on account of closure, retrenchment or permanent invalidity would be covered. They would be provided an unemployment allowance equivalent to about 50 per cent of their wages for a maximum six months. They, along with their families, shall also be eligible to receive medical care at the ESIC dispensaries and hospitals. The workers, however, should have to have contributed to the ESIC scheme for at least five years to become eligible for the scheme. (The Hindu 18/3/05)

Left pushes Pension Bill to standing Committee (14)

New Delhi: A DAY after the Left swallowed its declared opposition to the Patents (Amendments) Bill 2005 and ensured its smooth passage in Parliament, the UPA Government returned the favour by referring the Pensions Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Bill 2005, to a parliamentary standing committee. The Centre's move would lay to rest all controversies surrounding the proposed legislation in the current session of Parliament. Leaders of the four Left parties — CPI, CPI(M), RSP and Forward Bloc — were visibly relieved since the Centre till Tuesday was actively pursuing them to support the bill. The Left parties were opposed to the bill because the proposed legislation would allow private participation in the pension sector,

which went against the interest of the Left's core constituency, the worker class. According to Left sources, even if the Left leadership wanted to "negotiate" the matter with the ruling party, their frontal labour organisations and cadre were strictly against any compromise on the issue.

The Left leaders claimed victory after allowing the passage of the Patents Bill on Tuesday saying that the amendments they had suggested were incorporated in the bill, thereby, strengthening rights of consumers and domestic pharmaceutical industry in the world market. But, the Left sympathisers were not as happy as the leaders themselves. (Pioneers 24/3/05)

31. Plan to issue social security number to EPF subscribers shelved (14)

CHENNAI, MARCH 25. The Employees Provident Fund (EPF) has dropped its plan to give national social security number (NSSN) to subscribers. The scheme, envisaged by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government, has been dropped by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime, which is of the view that it will serve no purpose. It may be just one more ID card for the people. The NSSN, launched under the "Reinventing EPF India project and business process re-engineering," was for reducing the

period of claims (part-withdrawal benefit or final) settlement to 2 or 3 days from one month. It would also enable any EPF office to settle the claims of a subscriber. There would be no need for transfer of accounts from one office to another, when a member changed employment. Just the number would suffice to handle any request. Also the subscriber could get to know the balance in his account and the status of his loan application through the Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS). When the scheme was launched, the Centre announced that ID cards would be given to the subscribers within five years. It trained personnel for implementing the scheme and about 60 per cent of them completed it. (The Hindu 26/3/05)

Labour law reforms roll, women can do night shifts (14)

New Delhi: The government on Tuesday kicked off labour law reforms with a Cabinet decision to amend the Factories Act, 1948, that would allow women to work in late night shifts. After testing political waters, the government would push ahead with proposals to raise the ceiling of working hours in a week to 60 hours from 48 hours and to allow textile export units flexibility in employing workers depending on their order-book position, sources said. The government cleared the proposal to let women work between 7 pm and 6 am because that is likely to face the least political resistance. This would provide equal opportunity to women and benefit those working in special economic zones and IT, I&B minister S Jaipal Reddy said. The Cabinet stipulated safeguards, including those related to the "dignity, honour and safety" and the transportation of women workers from the factory premises to the nearest point of their residence, he said. State governments will be authorised to "allow employment of women workers between 7 pm and 6 am in such factory or group or class or description of factories subject to such conditions as may be specified therein." (Times of India 30/3/05)

Kalam moots 56 million jobs (14)

NEW DELHI, April 6.— President Dr A P J Abdul Kalam today mooted eight schemes to generate 56 million direct jobs in the next five years. Inaugurating an international seminar on Income and Employment Security in India, he said there are 36 million unemployed in the country and there is a need to find value-added employment for 10 per cent of those engaged in the agricultural sector. "Our attempt should be to find gainful employment for 76 million people," he said adding that schemes like cultivation of bio-fuel plants, water harvesting and bamboo mission have huge employment generating potential. While the proposed eight schemes will generate 56 million jobs, the remaining would come from other employment avenues in government and private sectors, he said. Bio-fuel plants grown in parts of wasteland, for example on 11 million hectares, can yield a revenue of Rs 20,000 crore a year and employ 12 million people, he said. Dr Kalam said the bamboo mission that envisages an integrated programme of expansion of plantations of bamboo species, can create 8.6 million jobs and has a market opportunity of over Rs 6,500 crore. While the task for recharging traditional water bodies and water harvesting can create six million jobs for the coming three to four years The textile sector was also identified as a big employment generator. By increasing the productivity, India can generate an increased revenue of over Rs 25,000 crore a year. Thus creating five million direct jobs and seven million indirect jobs. (Statesman 7/4/05)

Centre pays for denying pension to widow (14)

Jaipur, April 25: THE RAJASTHAN High Court has slapped a fine of Rs 20,000 on the Centre for denying a widow her husband's pension for 15 years. The court also pulled up the central and state governments for indulging in frivolous litigation and "proving to the biggest hurdles in providing speedy justice to people". A division bench of Justice V K. Ball and Justice Harbans Lal dismissed the Centre's appeal against a CAT order which had directed that the Santosh, widow of railway helper Ramniwas, be given the pension denied to her. Ramniwas, who joined the Indian Railways as a helper in 1979, died in 1988. When Santosh applied for family pension in 2003, the railway authorities turned down her application saying that since the application was filed five years after the employee's death, it was time barred. That is, she had come too late.

The widow approached the Central Administrative Tribunal, which on April 7, 2003 upheld her right to the family pension. The tribunal said family pension is not time barred. The Railways, however, chose not to grant her the pension and the woman approached the High Court.

Deciding against the railways, the High Court said, "We do not find any merit in this writ petition in as much as justified claim for family pension has been thwarted by the Union of India on wholly untenable

grounds." (Hindustan Times 26/4/05)

Workers' strike in Singareni Collieries near-total (14)

KOTHAGUDEM: The coal workers' strike was near total in the Singareni Collieries on Monday. The revolutionary unions, which called for 72-hour strike demanding the implementation of the seventh national coal wage agreement with 100 per cent DA neutralisation for the entire industry, brought the mining operations to a standstill in all the underground mines in the coal belt. The affected mines are spread in 12 areas in four districts — Khammam, Karimnagar, Adilabad and Warangal. No untoward incident has been reported so far. Nearly 75 per cent of the 92,138 men on rolls in the company were off the mines. No mine is working in the Bellampalli region. All the mines in Mandamarri, Srirampur and Chennur were completely affected by the strike. Some mines, especially the opencast projects, were partially working in Kothagudem and Ramagudam regions. The strike call, given jointly by the Singareni Karmika Samakhya (CPI- Maoist), the Go-davari Loya Boggukhani Karmika Sangham (CPI-ML New Democracy), the Shramika Shakti Godavarai Valley Coal Mine Workers Union (Jana Shakti), the Godavari Valley Coal Workers Union (CPI-ML Pratighatana), was supported by all the major trade unions, including the CITU, AITUC and TNTUC. The INTUC, the company-level representative union, stayed away from the three-day strike. (The Hindu 26/4/05)

Caught: Left on the Right path (14)

Thiruvananthapuram, April 26: AT A time when the CPM is making a noise over downsizing and anti-worker policies, a labour unrest is brewing in Kerala's largest cooperative society run by the party. Agitated by the denial of existing benefits, employees of the Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers Cooperative Society have hit the street. They recently besieged the society's headquarters in Kannur — something which has never happened before in party-controlled institutions. On an average, each worker at Dinesh rolls 900 beedis a day and earns between Rs 1,750 and Rs 2,000 a month. At its peak in the 1970s, 42,000 employees rolled beedis at Dinesh — once considered a role model for the cooperative movement. Today, the cooperative has been reduced to a shadow of its former self. For the current employees (their number has come down to 17,000), job cuts are a regular feature and bonus and gratuity are piling up like never before.

The ailing cooperative landed in its worst ever crisis last month, when beedis worth Rs 25 crore failed to find any takers. The management cited the setback while cutting working days to three a week and reducing production drastically. The workers, however, allege it was the cooperative's "hasty and unplanned" diversification into various sectors—like IT, food processing and hospitality — that made huge holes in its pockets. "Party leaders are more interested in amusement parks, super-specialty hospitals and resorts. If they really want, they can still save the 36-year-old cooperative society," said an employees' leader while citing the party's "indifferent attitude" towards the society. (Hindustan Times 27/4/05)

States join queue for new pension, but Bill hangs (14)

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27: THE number of states lining up to join the new pension scheme has gone up to 13 with Madhya Pradesh becoming the latest to enter the queue, opting for it on April 19. BJP-ruled Gujarat had joined on March 18. What is worrying these states though is the current stand-off in Parliament. With the Left parties deciding to vote against the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) Bill, only the coming together of the UPA and NDA can help realise the new pension scheme. In the case of the Centre, the New Pension System (NPS) covers departments, posts, railways and autonomous organisations: everything except the armed forces. In the case of states, the NPS covers departments, local governments, including panchayati raj institutions and autonomous organisations such as schools and colleges. Each state has chosen a different cut-off date, often with retrospective effect, after which new recruits are placed into the NPS. The NPS might already cover one million people and it is their pension that will be at stake as political parties bicker. States that have joined the NPS include Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Manipur, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (which issued orders even before the Central government). This diverse range of states highlights the non-partisan character of pension reforms. Only West Bengal has taken an explicit decision not to join the new scheme.

The decision by states to join up is being taken in view of the mounting pension payments to state employees that's eating into state developmental expenditure. This has declined from 68 per cent to 54 per cent of total state expenditure in the last twenty years, as pension payments have risen from 5 per

cent to 9 per cent. (Indian Express 28/4/05)

EPF interest rate to be 9.5% (14)

NEW DELHI, April 29. — The government today ratified the rate of interest on Employees Provident Fund accumulations at 9.5 per cent for the year 2002-03 and 9 per cent plus 0.5 per cent for 2003-04. This involves a net outgo of about Rs 66 crore, the finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram, announced, saying that these rates were recommended by the Central Board of Trustees (CBT). The hiked 9.5 per cent interest rate has been a long-standing demand of the labour ministry for about four crore subscribers. While the fund earned a surplus of Rs 204.92 crore during 2002-03, there was a shortfall of Rs 271 crore in the following fiscal. The 0.5 per cent additional interest rate announced for the year 2003-04 was a golden jubilee bonus, to mark the year. Asked about the last fiscal, 2004-05, the minister said the final recommendation of the CBT was awaited. The government has come under fire from trade unions for the delay in ratifying the interest rate. The EPF trustees had earlier decided an interim 8.5 per cent for 2004-05, a move opposed by trade unions. However, Mr Chidambaram had, after consultations with Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and Left leaders, announced a one per cent hike to 9.5 per cent. (Statesman 30/4/05)

"Crime Against Labour Cell" comes as a Mav Day gift (14)

NEW DELHI: The Union Law Minister, H R Bhardwaj, on Sunday inaugurated the "Crime Against Labour Cell" in the Capital to mark May Day celebrations. Speaking at the inaugural function, he greeted the workers of the nation and assured them protection and speedy justice. The Crime Against Labour Cell has been set up by the National Legal Services Authority (NLSA). Similarly, the National Legal Aid Resource and Communication Centre for Labour was also opened on Sunday. The Law Minister said his Government was committed to take legal justice to every corner of the nation. "Everyday there is increased participation of the people in the legal system, specially the women and the weaker sections and I assure you no wrong law, harmful to the poor or the worker will be sanctioned during my tenure," he said. To fight the social evils of poverty and exploitation, it was imperative that every citizen was aware about his legal rights to fight against injustice. Speaking at the function, the Supreme Court Judge, Y.K Sabharwal, said the major problem affecting the Indian legal system was its lack of proper and effective implementation. He also underlined the need for awareness among implementing authorities about each and every law, particularly the new ones. The Supreme Court Judge said both the cells inaugurated on Sunday were meant for the common man to help them get justice.

Congratulating the NLSA for opening the new cells, the Communist Party of India-Marxist's politburo member, Brinda Karat, said they would prove to be very effective tools for ensuring speedy justice for workers as well as common man. (The Hindu 2/5/05)

Employment has dropped in organised sector: Survey (14)

NEW DELHI: A survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation has showed that employment in the organised sector has gone down from 2.77 crore in 2001 to 2.70 crore in 2003. In Lok Sabha, Labour Minister K Ghandrasekhar Rao said the survey conducted in 1999-2000 found the unemployment rate on current daily status basis had gone up from approximately 6.03 per cent in 1993-94 to 7.32 per cent in 1999-2000. He said as the employment in the organised sector constituted only 7 per cent of the total employment in the country, a marginal decline in it "may not have significant impact on the overall employment rate". (Indian Express 3/5/05)

Crime against Labour Cell to Protect Rights of Workers (14)

New Delhi: The National Legal Services Authority has introduced Crime against Labour Cell in every district of India under the supervision of District Judge. This was announced at a National Dialogue on Protection of Rights of Workers at Talkatora Indoor Stadium on 1st May 2005 at 12:30 P.M. The programme was attended by 3,000 workers, eminent members of the Judiciary, Labour Leaders, Legal Aid Workers, prominent lawyers and celebrities in the field of art, media and cinema. The Crime Against Labour Cell, set up by the National Legal Services Authority, will enable exploited labourers to take direct recourse to law even if the authorities (such as the police and labour law enforcement departments) refuse to register their complaints. The cell shall be implemented through a nationwide network that has been envisaged under the Legal Services Authorities Act 1987. The Act envisages free legal aid programme to ensure that constitutional pledges are fulfilled in its letter and spirit and equal justice is

made available to the deprived, downtrodden and weaker sections of the society. The Government is under a constitutional obligation to ensure access to justice on the part of the deprived. Under the Act, the National Legal Services Authority is the apex body constituted to lay down policies and principles for making legal services available and to frame most effective and economical schemes for legal services. The National Legal Services Authority is chaired by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India. In every State, a State Legal Services Authority is constituted to give effect to the policies and directions of the Central Authority and to give legal services to the people and conduct Lok Adalats in the State. The State Legal Services Authority is headed by the Chief Justice of the State High Court. (The Hindu 4/5/05)

New data shows that on pension, Left bats for elite, not majority of the working poor (14)

NEW DELHI, MAY 5: THE Left may celebrate the ratification of the Employee Provident Fund rate hike to 9.5 per cent. What it does not mention is the fact that it benefits only 4 percent of India's working population, the bulk of whom belong to the top 25 percent of earners of the country. What the Left also will not mention is that it's stalling pension reforms which would benefit the huge majority of low-income workers who are now out of the EPF net. And have no trade union affiliation. The recently released ORG-AC Nielsen National Survey of Earning, Saving and Retirement, of 41,000 earners from across the country, has thrown up startling new evidence that the Left will find hard-pressed to explain. It shows that barely 4 percent of the country's workers have EPF accounts. • Less than half of one per cent (0.47%) of the poorest Indian workers, those earning less than Rs 19,000 a year, belong to EPFO. • Only 0.33 per cent (less than one in 300) of those earning between Rs 19,000 and Rs 35,000 a year are EPF members. • In the category of those earning between Rs 35,000 and Rs 60,000, only 1.3 per cent are EPF beneficiaries. In other words, of the bottom 75% of the workers across the country, only 2.1 per cent belong to the EPFO. (Indian Express 6/5/05)

Employment guarantee bill trapped in House deadlock (14)

NEW DELHI, MAY 5: A NUMBER of bills will be passed by both Houses of Parliament in the absence of the Opposition over the next few days but the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, the showpiece of the UPA government, is a casualty of the present deadlock. The UPA was keen—so was the Left—to pass the bill within a year of completing office since it aims to provide "at least one hundred days of guaranteed employment in every financial year" to poor rural households. With that deadline in mind, the government introduced the bill in the Lok Sabha on December 21, 2004 and was ready to pass it at once. But Speaker Somnath Chatterjee referred the bill to the standing committee on rural development which was expected to complete discussions on it by the budget session. Standing committee chairman Kalyan Singh of BJP say UPA and Left MPs, convened a meeting of the panel where members gave suggestions and decided to issue notices in newspapers to invite public opinion on the provisions of the bill. A total of 106 responses were received from the public but none could be discussed nor respondents interviewed since Kalyan Singh did not convene any further meeting. (Indian Express 6/5/05)

Labourers in TN to receive 2-month pay (14)

New Delhi, May 6: The Supreme Court on Friday directed Tamil Nadu to pay three months wages to nearly 10,000 road workers for two months, in addition to that for one month already given to them. The workers have been sacked, pursuant to the state government's policy to give the maintenance of state highways to private contractors. The Supreme Court Bench comprising Justice N. Santosh Hegde and Justice S.B. Sinha, in an interim order, said there would be no reinstatement of the workers, pending the disposal of the appeal. Taking up hearing of an appeal filed by the state government, challenging the Madras high court order asking it to consider taking them back on a preferential basis, the apex court said in the meantime there will be no reinstatement of the workers. The Supreme Court also directed the Tamil Nadu government not to deduct any outstanding loan amount from the three months wages that is to be paid within six weeks. The apex court asked the government to disburse the wages for two months within six weeks and said it would not deduct any loan amount outstanding against the workers.

The state government took a policy decision in 2002 to abolish the employment of 9728 workers engaged in the maintenance of state highways as it decided to award these works to private contractors. (Asian Age 7/5/05)

Price they pay for a job (14)

Kegalla (Sri Lanka), May 8: THE teacher held up an electric cake mixer and told the class to clean it properly. If it smells, "Mama," as the aspiring maids were instructed to call their woman employers, "will be angry and she will hammer and beat you." "This is where you go wrong," the teacher continued. "That is how Mama beats you and burns you—when you do anything wrong."

Eighteen women took down every word. Among them, Rangalle Lalitha Irangame was struggling to keep up, haggard after a sleepless night in the hospital. Her daughter was sick with fever, but a cause for panic for one about to leave for years abroad. After a year of thinking, 35-year-old Lalitha—who prefers that name—decided to trade her life as a Sri Lankan housewife for one as a West Asia-housemaid. After completing their 12-day training, she and her classmates would join a mass migration of women to the Persian Gulf. Behind those high-walled homes of the Arab world the women risk exploitation so extreme that it sometimes approaches "slaverylike" conditions, according to a recent Human Rights Watch report on foreign workers in Saudi Arabia. But while attention has focused on the failure of countries like Saudi Arabia to prevent or prosecute abuses, the de facto complicity of the countries that send their women abroad has largely escaped scrutiny. For developing countries, migration has become a safety valve, easing the pressure to employ the poor, according to a study by Devesh Kapur, an associate professor of government at Harvard. (Indian Express 9/5/05)

Job bill: Left holds NDA responsible for delays (14)

New Delhi: The UPA may be the predictable target for the Left when it comes to squaring the blame for the delay in the implementation of the National Employment Guarantee Scheme. But this time, it has directed its ire towards NDA, blaming the Opposition's boycott politics for holding up the employment Bill. CPI's D Raja has accused Kalyan Singh, chairman of the parliamentary Standing Committee to which the Bill has been referred to, for not convening the meeting. "The boycott by NDA has caused great damage to the Bill. As the BJP MPs are boycotting Parliament, Kalyan Singh has refused to call the meeting of the Standing Committee," he said. Raja met Congress president and UPA convener Sonia Gandhi on May 3 to discuss the issue. She on her turn, lambasted the NDA for not clearing important Bills before the standing committees headed by their men. On Wednesday, she said had the standing committee cleared the employment Bill, it would have been passed in the current session. But the Left is no mood to spare UPA either. Prominent Left leaders including CPM's general secretary Prakash Karat, CPI's A B Bardhan and Raja himself have decided to take their protest to the street. Under the forum, People's Action for Employment Guarantee, which also include economist and NAC member Jean Dreze, Swami Agnivesh, former Prime Minister V P Singh and writer Arundhati Roy, a country-wide Rojgar Adhikar Yatra will be launched from May 13. (Times of India 12/5/05)

Merger of 50 % DA with basic pay okayed (14)

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the merger of DA equal to 50 per cent of the existing basic pay for employees following the CDA pattern in public sector undertakings which are profit-making and in a position to absorb the additional expenditure from internal revenue. The merger will be with effect from April 1, 2004. It is only an enabling provision and the PSUs will be free to take their own decision, Jaipal Reddy, Union Minister and Cabinet spokesperson, said. It would apply to the Food Corporation of India also. A similar merger was allowed for government employees earlier. Chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Cabinet meeting also gave its nod for introducing a Bill to amend the Labour Laws (Exemption from Furnishing Returns and Maintaining of Registers by Certain Establishments) Act to simplify the forms of returns and registers. Consequently, it also approved amendments in the scheduled Acts to prescribe uniform penalty for obstructions and non-maintenance of records. Employers

would have to send only one annual return instead of numerous reports. They would need to maintain only two registers at the workplace. (The Hindu 12/5/05)

20,000 UP officers to be shifted under new policy (14)

Lucknow, May 12: In the next three weeks, about 20,000 officers in Class I and Class II category in Uttar Pradesh will be tossed, churned and whetted like never before. Transfers will be the flavour of the month and the mantra of the month will be to pack and move. The stale Cabinet, on Thursday, announced a new transfer policy for Class I and Class II rank officers, irrespective of cadres, under which laree-scale

transfers are now inevitable. Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting, chief secretary, Ms Neera Yadav, said that under the new policy, all officers who have been posted for six years or more in one district would be shifted with immediate effect. Those who have spent 10 years or more in one division will have to move to another division and Class I officers, under no circumstances, be posted in their home districts. This rule will also be applicable to those officers, except the heads of departments, who have served in one post for more than six years. The chief secretary said that the Cabinet had also decided that the number of transfers should not exceed 10 per cent of the total cadre strength of one category but in cases where the officer had exceeded the six-year term in a district and the 10-year-term in a division, this 10-per-cent ceiling will not apply. (Asian Age 13/5/05)

Centre flayed for delay in employment guarantee law (14)

JAIPUR: Activists marching to press for enactment of a full-fledged Employment Guarantee Act in the country on Saturday lamented lack of commitment on the part of the United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre for the cause. Despite a promise from the UPA Government when it took over a year ago to "immediately enact" such a legislation, the Bill was still languishing with the Standing Committee of Parliament, they pointed out. The draft of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2004, as such was a watered down version of the draft prepared by the National Advisory Committee and it lacked safeguards essential for effective employment guarantee, they said. The Government's commitment was suspect as financial allocation for rural employment programmes was moderate despite the Union Finance Minister's claims to the contrary, they observed. However not all blame went the UPA way. Like in Delhi on the previous day when the march was flagged off, the role of the Standing Committee of which former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Kalyan Singh is the chairman, came in for attack. "Kalyan Singh does not want this Bill to be passed," Annie Raja of the National Federation of Indian Women, who is accompanying the yatra charged. At the first stopover of the 48-day-long yatra which would cover 10 States before it returns to Delhi in June, the activists told mediapersons here that none of the 12 essential safeguards for such an legislation was present in the draft. (The Hindu 14/5/05)

Forced labour highest in Asia, ILO says 9.4 m (14)

New Delhi: Of the 12.3 million "forced labour" in the world, 9.4 million are in Asia. This was stated by ILO director in India, Herman Vanderlaan, while releasing an ILO report here on Wednesday.

Forced labour "affects millions of people and generates billions of dollars of profit for the exploiters of forced labour". The maximum forced labour is done through "private agents" who earn huge amounts through "trafficking in humans". ILO has estimated the figure at \$32 billion (half of it in industrialised countries and one-third in Asia). "By far the highest profits are made from forced commercial sexual exploitation (\$27.8 billion)," the report states. Forced labour, according ILO, is when the labour does not have any option, or when service is exacted from a worker under threat of penalty. Although ILO was not in a position to state the exact

status of forced labour in India, sources said it was considerable. ILO experts, however, clarified that forced labour should not be simply equated with low wages or poor working conditions.

While expressing satisfaction with the existing labour laws in India, Vanderlaan said it is necessary for "workers and employers" and other organisations and government to "work closely to eliminate all forms of forced labour". According to Caroline O'Reilly, senior specialist, "All child labour or even sex workers do not necessarily come under the category of forced labour." Forced labour meant exploitation or violation of basic human rights and where labour was exacted under threat of penalty She said this menace could take extreme forms such as physical violence, but also subtler forms such as confiscation of identity papers or threat of denunciation of irregular migrants to police authorities in order to extract unfair advantage from them. (Times of India 16/5/05)

Employees rally for right to work (14)

NEW DELHI: Har haath ko kaam do, kaam ka poora daam do" that is the mantra on the lips of every yatri who is part of the countrywide "Rozgar Adhikar Yatra" launched by a broad coalition of organisations committed to the right to work. Organised under the banner of the People's Action for Employment Guarantee, a coalition of various organisations, the aim of this yatra is to consolidate the campaign for a full-fledged, universal and irreversible Employment Guarantee Act. The yatra will travel through 10 states before returning to Delhi at the end of June. Moving in colourful buses painted with scenes depicting the common man in his day-to-day struggles, the yatriis will be holding state conventions, public meetings,

cultural activities and public demonstrations on the way. According to the activists, the Employment Guarantee Act must "guai antee" employment to every adult, should be irreversible, unrestricted, ensure payment of statutory minimum wage, extend to the whole of India and ensure equal wages and equal participation of women. The yatri hold that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill 2004 does not meet any of these, and falls far short of the commitment made by the UFA government.

Speaking at the flag-off on Friday, former Prime Minister V.P. Singh pointed out that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill 2004 was not as envisaged and was lacking in certain ways. This issue needs to be taken up, hence the yatra, he asserted. Noted economist Jene Dreze is also participating in the yatra. The flag-off drew participation from personalities from different walks of life, such as writer Arundhati Roy, trade union activists and academicians. (Asian Age 16/5/05)

64% labourers retire due to failing health (14)

New Delhi: A recent survey by the finance ministry shows that across occupations, an overwhelming 64% of wage labourers cited health as one of the constraints for them taking retirement while the age limit (21%) was not much of a reason. The reverse is true for government employees, 72% of whom felt that the mandatory retirement age and not health (19%) would decide when they stop working. About 28% of business owners, the highest amongst all occupations, were of the opinion that they would not need to work since children would be settled, an indication perhaps that they expect to pass on their businesses to their progeny. About two-thirds of all those expecting to retire expect their kids to take care of them. This is more pronounced in rural (75%) than urban (59%) India. About 28% feel they will have saved enough to fend for themselves, while 17% expected their pension plan to be adequate.

Farmers have the highest expectations from their children, about 78% believing children will take care of their expenses, while the same opinion was shared by about 49% of government employees. A little over 40% of private sector employees are confident that their savings would be enough by the time they retire, whereas only 13% of wage labourers share this confidence. Close to 51% of government employees expect their current pension plan to be adequate. But this proportion seems huge compared to other occupational categories like private sector (16%), business owners (4%) and wage labourers (2%). It highlights the need for a robust pension system outside the government sector. (Times of India 16/5/05)

Govt looks for consensus on labour reforms (14)

New Delhi, May 18: CONSCIOUS OF Left Front's reservations on labour reforms, the UPA Government is trying to evolve a consensus on some of the vital elements of changes in labour laws. These are perceived to be archaic in the prevailing globalized economy. India has a distinction of sorts: It has some 154 labour laws meant primarily to protect the interests of a fraction of its huge workforce, estimated to be around 40 crore in organised and unorganised sectors. To set the ball rolling, the Centre is set to call a meeting of State/UT labour ministers and secretaries ahead of the monsoon session. At present, one of the important issues is amending the Industrial Disputes Act (ID), for which the government has made up its mind. The proposed step will provide businesses employing 300 workers with flexibility in downsizing their workforce without government permission. The present exemption cap is 100. The other important subject of the proposed conference will be redrafting the Unorganized Sector Workers Bill-2004. The conference may also take an overview of streamlining the labour laws for optimum welfare of workers. Left parties have been pressing for major changes in the Unorganized Workers Bill drafted during the NDA rule. (Hindustan Times 19/5/05)

After RTI success, it's right to work (14)

JAIPUR: After the successful culmination of a nearly decade and a half long struggle for enactment of a law on the right to information, social activists have once again hit the road pioneering the cause of employment guarantee. There are many parallels between the two movements that have their origin in the people's struggle in Rajasthan. "I see many parallels. EGA too has come up from a grassroots level movement," observed Prof. Jean Dreze, noted economist and member of the National Advisory Committee (NAC) of the United Progressive Alliance on the Common Minimum Programme. "Both the Right to Information Act and the EGA are complementary. EGA would not be functional without Right to Information," he noted.

"EGA will provide basic security to the people. As long as people remain illiterate and unemployed democracy has no meaning," said Prof. Dreze, who has been closely associated with the movements for the right to information and right to work. The demand for right to information was first raised at the

grass-root level, in the pan-chayats, by Rajasthan's Bhim-based Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, before it was broad-based and handed over to the National Committee for Right to Information (NCPRI). Prof. Dreze, along with Aruna Roy, fellow member in NAC, who championed the cause of both the Acts, is happy about the final passage of the Right to Information Act on May 13, though he is not satisfied with the EGA draft pending with the Standing Committee of Parliament. (The Hindu 19/5/05)

Nathpa Jhakri workers overlooked (14)

JHAKRI (HIMACHAL PRADESH): Big speeches were made today on the occasion of the dedication ceremony of 1500 MW Nathpa Jhakri Power Project to the nation. But seldom a mention was made or a tribute given to the lives lost mainly of the workmen during the construction of this mega hydro project. More than 300 lives were lost according to the State CPI-M affiliated Centre of Indian Trade Union leader Mr. Rakesh Singha. In an exclusive interview to The Hindu he said, the workforce is as important for making any project as the management or the Company concerned. No exact data till date has come out of the exact number of deaths happened since 1993 when the construction of this mega project had started, he said. Thousands of workers had laboured in the project without any registration with innumerable sub-contractors and a number of them had died an unsung death in the project. None of the dependents of these workers had been established or given jobs. Only a "martyr's column" was erected in the remembrance of these workers which is no compensation, claimed the CITU which was actively associated with the workers from last 15 years of this project. Only the unionised workers were given some paltry compensation and the unorganised labourers were totally ignored, informed Singha. The workers had worked in a temperature of 60 degree Celsius at underground sites in totally inhuman conditions but no deaths were reported by the companies who avoided giving the compensation under the legal acts, he claimed. The workers who had survived had developed various internal injuries, tuberculosis and lung disease while working in the tunnels. (The Hindu 29/5/05)

Forest versus people: snatching livelihoods? (14)

KESLA (HOSHANGABAD DISTRICT, M.P.): Although the Centre tabled a Bill in Parliament last year to guarantee at least 100 days of work every year to poor households, the reality looks different. At least, in one case in this district, covered by the on-going Rozgar Adhikar Yatra.

The Madhya Pradesh Government, it is alleged, is trying to stop the Tawa Matsya Sangh (TMS), a fisheries cooperative run by Adivasis displaced from 40 villages by the dam on the Tawa river. The people fought a long struggle to get from the Government leasing rights for fishing in the reservoir in 1996. Over eight years, the Sangh has managed to reach an annual turnover of Rs. 1.25 crores, about 40 per cent of which goes to the people as wages and bonus. In the last two months, however, the authorities have clamped down on fishing and confiscated fishing nets and the catch. According to Bhurelal Manjhi of the Sangh, the Forest Department has put up undated notices everywhere saying the entire reservoir now falls in the precincts of the Satpuda National Park and fishing and agriculture are banned in the reserve. Even people cannot enter the

reservoir area without permission. The 40 villages displaced by the dam were not given land for rehabilitation and 27 of them being forest villages, were left high and dry. The displaced persons, led by the Kisan Adivasi Sangha-tana, struggled to gain control over the reservoir. The Sangh wrote repeatedly to the State Government, demanding a clarification on the issue but there is no reply, according to Sabbulal, chairperson. About 1,500 fisherfolk will lose their livelihood if the Government enforces the ban on fishing. (The Hindu 3/6/05)

5.92 LAKH employed in unorganised sector in Delhi (14)

New Delhi: ABOUT 5.92 lakh persons are employed in unorganised sector in the Capital. This includes hired and household, full time and part time, skilled and unskilled workers. Of these, 2.21 lakh are working in household enterprises and remaining 3.71 lakh persons are working in big establishments. While the total number of enterprises operating in unorganised service sector were 2,44,873. Of these, about 1.70 lakh were household enterprises and 75,296 were big establishments. Releasing a report on "Unorganised Service Sector in Delhi" prepared by Delhi Government's Directorate of Economic & Statistics, Finance and Planning Minister Dr AK Walia said that sex-wise distribution of employment in this sector revealed that out of the total, 15.50 per cent were females. It is interesting to observe that of the total full-time working females 25.5 per cent were employed in household enterprises while the remaining 74.5 were working in establishments. The report said that about 1.69 per cent of the total units operating

in unorganised services sector in the country are located in the city. Delhi's rank is 16th among all the states and Union Territories as far as total number of enterprises working in unorganised sector. (Pioneer 4/6/05)

No protection for labourers (14)

Bhopal: EVEN AS the unprotected labourers continue to work near toxic waste inside the abandoned Union Carbide plant, the government and NGOs squabble on the issue of existence of any clean up operation. Several members belonging to different NGO groups working with gas victims on Friday demonstrated outside the abandoned Union Carbide Plant. Carrying pictures of barefoot and unprotected workers sweeping the floors and moving toxic wastes with shovels, the NGO groups condemned the clean up operation as violation of "human rights." It has developed into a strange situation where the NGO allege that the Government has started cleaning up operation, the latter denies it. Principal secretary gas relief MM Upadhaya denied any work "as far as clean up operation is concerned." Minister for Gas Relief and Rehabilitation in the Madhya Pradesh Government, Uma Shankar Gupta, said that the work had started a couple of days back as part of the safety measure to contain toxic waste in the rainy season. He said the operation is being supervised by the State Pollution Control Board. But the board chairman PS Dubey has denied any involvement. "I am only constructing a wall," said Mr Rizwan Khan, the contractor whose men have been working without any safety gear. He said that he was not told of any hazard by the Gas Relief Department that involved his the job. "For the last two days I have been visiting the area and don't see any danger," Mr Khan said. The hasty 'clean up,' activist say has been taken in the light of a high court order asking for the first phase of temporary containment of waste to be over by the 20th of June. (Pioneer 4/6/05)

Power station workers face serious ailments (14)

DELHI, June 4. — Government needs to urgently carry out a health safety audit at Indra Pras-tha Power Station and Rajghat Power Station. Since employees are exposed to lethal chemicals and fly ash, several employees working at these two major power plants are suffering from severe ailments including lung disorders. For all the troubles these workers take, the government pays them "ash or dust allowance" of Rs' 100 per month, an amount which would be required to buy medicines for tuberculosis and lung disorder ailments. Recently, 2,700 workers of two power stations were taken to Metro Hospital, Noida, for "routine health checkup". However, sources said that this was done- after large workforce complained of lung ailments and feared that they are suffering from tuberculosis. The report is still awaited. For years, these two thermal power stations take water' for treatment from sewage treatment plants. The health hazard arises because before using the water to run the turbine it has to be treated with concentrated acids and chemicals like hydrazine and ammonia. Workers claim that absence of safety equipment, they are directly exposed to various chemicals. Officials brush aside fear of any major health hazard. However, doctors at two power stations admitted that some workers are exposed to chemicals but added, "only few work in- the treatment unit". Thermal power stations have coal handling units where lump of coal is broken and smashed into finer particles and then put into furnace. Workers in this unit are directly exposed to dust particles. Some have complained that they are suffering from asthma after working here for few years. (Statesman 5/6/05)

Jobless Indians throng embassy (14)

Dubai, June 12: Around 1,000 Indians, who lost their jobs at a garment factory in Bahrain, marched to the Indian embassy in scorching heat to draw attention to their plight. The workers said they have been left with no food, water or electricity after the light style garment factory in Salmabad closed down on May 14 declaring that it was bankrupt. The company had said then that it would provide accommodation for two weeks to the 1400 workers but the protesters claimed they are stranded with nothing in their pockets. After walking for over three hours yesterday, the workers reached the Indian embassy in Bahrain and were stopped at the gate by the guards, the Gulf Daily News said. Four of the workers were reportedly allowed to meet embassy officials. Indian ambassador Bhaskar Kumar Mitra said the embassy was trying to negotiate with the labour ministry to sort out the workers' problems and was trying its best to help them. Workers' spokesman P.V. Brijlal said they were desperate and did not know what to do. "We have been told that we can go home in due course but we are left without even 100 fils in our pockets. What will we do for our food and water?" he said. The workers include about 225 Bahraini women, 50 Bangladeshis and the rest are Indians. (Asian Age 13/6/05)

15 bonded labourers rescued (14)

ERODE: Under the guidance of the Collector, D. Karthikeyan, 15 bonded labourers were rescued and sent back to their respective districts. The Collector formed special squads consisting of officials belonging to various departments to rescue bonded labourers. During the last year, 15 bonded labourers were rescued and each were granted Rs, 1,000 as compensation and were sent back to their respective villages, where each would be given Rs. 19,000 as compensation.

Two bonded labourers of Erode district, who were rescued in another district, were provided with Rs. 19,000 each by the district administration. The Collector asked the public to inform him about bonded labourers employed in their area. They would be rescued and provided with all help, he said. The Hindu 15/6/05 in)

Jharkhand miners yet to be traced (14)

BANSGARHA, JUNE 16: The Coal Ministry today ordered an inquiry into the accident at the Central Coal Fields Ltd's Saunda mine in Bansgarha, Jharkhand, where 14 miners have been trapped since last morning after its roof caved in. Union Minister of State for Coal and Mines Dasari Narayana Rao ordered the inquiry after visiting the accident site today. Till 9 am today no contact had been established with the trapped miners. However, technical experts reckon the workers could survive if they are caught in an air pocket. The minister spoke to miners and trade union representatives, assuring them that the guilty would be given "maximum punishment".

Chief Minister Arjun Munda has directed the administration in Hazaribagh district, where the mine is located, to speed up the dewatering by using high-powered pump sets. The workers were trapped nearly 175 metres from the surface after the roof of the mine, which supports a water body, reportedly gave way after miners carried out explosions. Munda visited the site last night, ordering Hazaribagh Deputy Commissioner Rahul Kumar Purwar to probe the mishap and submit a report within three days. The Chief Minister said he was annoyed to find that there were no senior CCL officials at the mine until he reached there. (Indian Express 17/6/05)

Panel expands scope of job scheme (14)

New Delhi : Beneficiaries won't be only below poverty line families ---- The UPA Government may be forced to offer universal access to the proposed rural employment guarantee scheme, and not restrict it to only below poverty line (BPL) families, as outlined in the proposed legislation. The parliamentary standing committee of the Rural Development Ministry, which finalised its first report on the crucial National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill (2004) on Monday, suggested the pilot scheme should be made accessible to all job-seekers in rural India, and not only to those with the BPL tag. The standing committee, chaired by BJP MP Kalyan Singh, is learnt to have concluded after months of deliberations that since the "BPL statistics" are flawed, the programme need to be broadbased to avoid major discriminations during implementation. The panel's recommendations will be tabelled in the monsoon session of Parliament. Sources told The Pioneer that a consensus is believed to have emerged within the panel comprising even Left MPs, who are active proponents of the Bill, on the major amendments. Following the understanding, the committee is said to have recommended that any ration-card holder could apply for a job making the programme demand-driven. As per to the original Bill, only one able-bodied person per BPL family would qualify for up to 100 days of employment under the scheme. While the committee did not suggest any reservations based on gender, caste or religion, it said 3 per cent of the total employment should be reserved for the physically and/ or mentally challenged. The panel is said to have redefined the nature of employment avenues in contrast to the original Bill where the thrust is on "unskilled manual labour". (Pioneer 22/6/05)

17% of India's graduates jobless (14)

The number of jobless in India grew by more than three times in 10 years — from 13.8 million in 1991 to 44.5 million in 2001, according to recently-released Census figures. What's worse, education doesn't seem to improve your chances of getting a job. The unemployment rate of graduates (17.2%) is significantly higher than the overall unemployment rate of 10.1 %. Nearly 40% of graduates are not productively employed. Even among technical graduates, as many as 32% are "non-workers," only lower than the 39% figure for non-technical graduates. The Census also found over 4,200 graduates had been reduced to begging or vagrancy, including 419 technical graduates. To a large extent, these statistics are

>>i a result of the fact that a majority of female graduates—74 % among the non-technical ones and 49% among those;| technically qualified — are not work-1 ing. But among males, 22.6% of all; | graduates are not part of the work- : force. That includes more than 25% of male technical graduates. Surprisingly, graduates in rural India have a much higher work participation rate than those in urban India (68.4% vs 58.7%). (Times of India 22/6/05)

The Social Security Bill draft finalised (14)

NEW DELHI: The National Advisory Council, chaired by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, on Saturday finalised draft social security legislation for unorganised sector workers that will benefit about 30 crore workers not covered under labour laws. The draft Bill redefines workers to bring self-employed, casual, contract and home-based workers under its purview. It offers health insurance, maternity benefit, old age benefit, integrated insurance scheme and even schemes for conservation of natural resources on which workers depend for livelihood. Once passed in Parliament, the Act will be executed through a Central social security authority that will have a supervisory board. The proposed Bill empowers the Government to levy a cess or an appropriate tax, or even create an appropriate mechanism for collection of contribution from individual employers (or contractors). The proposed legislation seeks to create a participatory structure that builds on already existing civil society, government and semi-government organisations which have a good record and the benefits will be extended to children's education, housing and skill development, once the scheme gets going and adequate funds flow in. The Act will be implemented through worker facilitation centres in every village and mohalla. Workers will have to get registered for receiving the social security number for which he will be required to pay a nominal sum. Upon registration, every worker will be entitled to floor level scheme to be funded by the Centre directly, through cess, contribution or any other means, including donations. (The Hindu 26/6/05)

Demand for access to employment (14)

NEW DELHI: Echoing the Constitutional guarantee for universal adult suffrage, a conglomeration of nearly 150 civil society organisations, activists and other stakeholders in India have demanded universal and unrestricted access to employment. As a means of highlighting the desperate situation of the rural poor, the conglomeration - organised under the banner of "People's Action for Employment Guarantee" - took part in a 5,000-km. odyssey of the 50 poorest districts in the country. The participants, travelling by bus on the "Rozgar Adhikar Yatra", have returned to Delhi after having met and consulted with citizens whose voices are seldom heard. "The yatra has reinforced the urgent need for measures to combat poverty, hunger and persisting unemployment that is prevalent in marginalised communities and continues to hobble the country," said economist Jean Dreze who accompanied the Yatra. The conglomeration will hold a "Jan Manch" - People's Platform - this Saturday (July 2) to present some of their findings. They include the experience of Allahabad villagers who are forbidden by the State Forest Department to practise their traditional means of making a living. "We used to live by breaking stones but now not even that is possible," said Vimla Devi of Nimba-Logara, a deprived village in Allahabad. (The Hindu 2/7/05)

Road workers to protest by 'begging' (14)

Chennai, July 6: Over 5,000 road workers will undertake a novel protest by resorting to begging in the streets in the city on Thursday and on Friday demanding their reinstatement in service, according to Mr M. Shanmugaraja, president of the Tamil Nadu highways road employees association, who is among the leaders spearheading the agitation. These demonstrators are part of about 10,000 road workers sacked soon after the Jayalalithaa government assumed office four years ago. The workers have been holding public demonstrations and petitioning the courts for justice. The Madras high court had asked the state government to reinstate them, but the government went on appeal to the Supreme Court, where the matter is pending. Frustrated by the long and fruitless wait, the sacked workers are now planning a unique form of agitation hitting the roads with begging bowls "to demonstrate our pitiable condition, where we are unable to provide our families even one square meal a day," Mr Shanmugaraja told this newspaper. He said over 5,000 of his union members would participate in the agitation, split into two groups of 2000 on the first day led by him and 3,000 others on Friday. The union general secretary M. Marimuthu will lead the "begging" agitators on the second day. "We will start from Valluvar Kottam in batches of 100 men and move to different parts of the city. We will be dressed like beggars and carry begging bowls. We will beg in public and of course, we will also carry placards explaining our predicament to the public," he said. He said the "beggars" will visit all the important places in the city, including railway stations and bus terminals,

temples and shopping malls. The collections will be used for meeting the expenses in the Supreme Court. "We are completely broke, so the proceeds from this begging will come in handy for conducting our case," he said. (Asian Age 7/7/05)

Labour unrest casts its shadow on two more units (14)

NANJANGUD: Till a little over a decade ago, Nanjangud, about 21 km from Mysore, was a bustling economic centre with hundreds of its residents employed in nearby textile and paper mills. But not anymore. For, many among the thriving industries have succumbed to labour unrest and folded up. Consequently, those working in these industries lost their jobs and were forced to look for alternative sources of livelihood. After having led an economically secure life as workers in industrial units, most of them are now struggling to make ends meet as pushcart vendors, lottery ticket sellers or kerosene vendors. Nanjangud, probably, enjoys the dubious distinction of being home to more former employees than existing ones. With labour unrest casting its shadow on two more industrial units, Reid and Taylor Textile Mills and South India Paper Mills, in the past few weeks, the Labour Department is busy holding conciliation meetings to prevent a further addition to the growing number of former employees in Nanjangud. A number of units in Nanjangud Industrial Estate as well as Thandya Industrial Estate on the outskirts of the town have closed down in the past 15 years. Sujatha Textile Mills, Dunford Fabrics, Karim Silks, Ramgopal Paper Mills, Badeka Paper Mills and Kabini Paper Mills have all succumbed to labour unrest during the period. The closure of the industries saw more than 7,000 people lose their source of livelihood. Almost every other person on Kampalapura Street is a former employee of either a textile mill or a paper mill. Ashwath, 40, who sells cigarettes, beedis and other items at a street-corner shop, was earning Rs. 3,000 as a machine operator with Sujatha Textile Mills. After its closure in 1999, he barely manages to feed his family with his meagre income. (The Hindu 8/7/05)

Cashew workers stir: MP on fast (14)

KOLLAM: Raising the demand for revising the minimum wages of cashew workers and putting an end to the denial of statutory rights to the workers, the Adoor MP, Chengara Surendran, went on an indefinite fast from Thursday at the Press Club Maidan here. The fast is being undertaken under the banner of the pro-AITUC Kerala Cashew Workers Central Council. Before undertaking the fast, Mr. Surendran led a march joined by hundreds of cashew workers. The march which started from the MN Memorial at Chinnakada, passed through the Taluk Cutchery office, Chamakada, the Main Road to the Press Club Maidan. The all-India president of the AITUC, J. Chitharanjan, inaugurated the fast. In his inaugural address, Mr. Chitharanjan said that the agitation was forced upon the cashew workers by the State Government. Hence it is the duty of the State Government to settle the agitation amicably by considering the demands placed by the workers. (The Hindu 8/7/05)

Punjab Govt lifts ban on recruitment (14)

Chandigarh: IN A move to fulfill promises made in their manifesto, Punjab Government has lifted the ban on recruitment sending a clear message to the youth that they would get government jobs. Harnam Dass Johar, School Education Minister carried the message when he said that the existing vacancies of teachers and other subordinate staff in the department would be filled up soon. With the State Government taking a decision to lift the ban, the Education Department would soon work out the modalities to initiate the process to fill up the vacant posts under academic and non-academic categories. However, the Education Minister have directed their senior officers of the Department to make an assessment of the total vacancies of teaching and non-teaching staff so that a transparent recruitment policy could be evolved. He also assured that all recruitment would be made strictly on the basis of merit of the candidates. Mr Johar revealed that around 10,000 and 12,000 posts were lying vacant for secondary and primary schools respectively. Besides, another 3,700 posts of non-teaching staff of the schools were also vacant. All vacant posts of principals, head masters and other cadre would be filled up as per the recommendations of departmental promotion committees. Education Minister urged the teaching and non-teaching staff to concentrate only on the result oriented performance. They should focus on how to nurture the future of the nation. (Pioneer 8/7/05)

18 lakh applicants for 60,000 jobs (14)

Bhopal: WITH ABOUT 1.8 million aspirants for 60,000 teaching jobs conducting the examination is turning out to be a logistical nightmare for the Madhya Pradesh government. The response to the State

government's advertisement for teaching vacancies has beaten all the estimates of Professional Examination board that had estimated that no more than five lakh people would apply. "The sale of forms for the junior most category has been stopped as the printer cannot print more than 30000 application forms in a day," PEB chairman Dr Ajeet Raizada told The Pioneer. The response is unprecedented. Already 12 lakh application forms have been sold and the PEB expects to sell 6 lakh more, he said. "The number swelled immensely after the Supreme

Court described the right to employment as a fundamental right and struck down the need of proof of domicile. A large number of people from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat have also applied for the job." There are three categories of teaching jobs. A successful applicant for the highest category would work on a fixed monthly salary of Rs 4500 while teachers of grade two would get Rs 3500 and the junior-most teacher would get Rs 2500 per month. The salary would be all-inclusive and no appreciation in any form was guaranteed. Even passing the examination with flying colours would not help much as the PEB would only issue a mark-sheet on the basis that one could apply for posts which would be advertised at district level. Interviews for each district would be conducted locally. (Pioneer 9/7/05)

Voice of Bihar's unpaid govt workers fades away (14)

PATNA, JULY 14: The face and voice of the plight of Bihar's unpaid public sector employees, Parijat Bhattacharya, faded into eternal silence. Unlike the suicide of his son Chandan in 2002 that caused outrage, Parijat's surrender to cancer on July 7 was silent and unnoticed. The self-immolation of Chandan Bhattacharya on the Independence Day of 2002 and an Indian Express campaign titled Bihar's Bloodless Murder—the first report of August 25, 2002, was on Parijat—brought to national attention the plight of nearly 40,000 employees of the state's PSUs who had not been paid for a decade. Following a SC intervention, the state government paid Rs 50 crore into a corpus which is now being distributed among the unpaid employees as interim relief. Parijat's fight with cancer has pushed his children into further distress—they have borrowed nearly Rs 50,000 at interest rates ranging between 120 and 240 per cent per year. "After Papa's death, the moneylenders have become restless. They are telling us to clear off the debt immediately," says Pratima, his daughter. Her elder sister Celina is going through a marriage break-up, the younger one Aditi is at a dead-end after finishing school. All of them had to stop attending school ever since the salary stopped for their father. "We took tuition classes to make a living and appeared as private students in university exams," Pratima says. Celina is an English graduate. One brother had died earlier; Chandan, unable to continue to his studies, chose to commit suicide. (Indian Express 15/7/05)

Sreekumar faces criminal case: Gujarat (14)

AHMEDABAD, JULY 14: The Gujarat government today told the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) that senior IPS officer R B Sreekumar was denied promotion because he faces a criminal case. However, the government admitted that two other officers—Additional Commissioner D G Vanjhara and Additional Director-General S S Khandwavala—who had been convicted in criminal cases had been promoted. This, it said, was because the committee deciding on promotions did not know of the cases. In his April statement to the tribunal, Sreekumar had cited the promotion of these officers. Sreekumar, who was heading the state Intelligence Bureau during the Godhra carnage and some weeks of the post-Godhra riots, had complained to the CAT that he was denied promotion ever since he deposed before the Shah-Nanavati commission probing the riots. (Indian Express.15/7/05)

Social security law for unorganised sector workers being finalised (14)

NEW DELHI: : The Union Labour and Employment Ministry will soon initiate consultations with the National Commission on Enterprises for the Unorganised Sector to finalise the draft of the social security legislation, approved by the National Advisory Council (NAC) last month. The NAC, chaired by Sonia Gandhi, has written to the Government suggesting that the approved draft be posted on the Ministry's web site to facilitate discussion and debate. "After taking on board the responses from the public and the suggestions of the NAC and the Commission, the Ministry could prepare a final draft within a give time frame," the communication said. According to Jairam Ramesh, NAC member, the draft is likely to be introduced in the winter session of Parliament. The draft bill seeks to provide a social security system for 30-crore workers, and re-defines workers to bring self-employed, casual, contract and home-based workers under its purview. The proposed legislation offers health insurance, maternity benefit, old-age benefit, an integrated insurance scheme and schemes for conservation of natural resources on which

workers depend. The bill empowers the Government to levy a cess or appropriate tax, or create a mechanism for collection of the contribution from individual employers (or contractors). (The Hindu 16/7/05)

Rural job bill hits wage wall (14)

NEW DELHI, JULY 18: The Rural Development Ministry may have accepted some of the amendments suggested to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill by the Kalyan Singh-chaired Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development but differences persist over minimum wages and involvement of panchayats in implementation. The bill is meant to be introduced in the Monsoon session of Parliament that begins on July 25 but the Group of Ministers formed to finalise the 50-odd amendments proposed by the Standing Committee is yet to meet before the bill goes to the Cabinet for approval. Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh says: "On our part, we are ready to bring it (the bill) in the first week of the session. We are determined to make it pro-poor, but it is not practicable to impose uniform minimum wages across the country." He points out that Northeastern states have the lowest minimum wage of Rs 40 per day; Kerala has a minimum wage of Rs 120. The Standing Committee has recommended that minimum wages should take into account the national minimum wage requirement. "The recommendation is that (the) minimum wage should be fixed on the basis of whichever is higher — a particular state's (wage) or the national," a panel member said. The Ministry is also reluctant to hand over the entire implementation of the bill to the panchayats without Central supervision because it feels panchayats are not bound to be accountable. (Indian Exp 19/7/05)

Pension Bill stuck, heavy price paid by Bengal and Maharashtra (14)

NEW DELHI, JULY 19: Analysis by The Indian Express and Invest India Economic Foundation (IIEF) shows that the pension liability on account of existing workers of eight major states adds up to Rs 8.5 lakh crore. The biggest two of these, Maharashtra and West Bengal, have made little progress on adoption of the New Pension System. A recent study by Gautam Bhardwaj of IIEF and S A Dave of CMIE has estimated that India's implicit pension debt (IPD) on account of current civil employees of the Centre and states is Rs 17.35 lakh crore. The other states with a large IPD are Andhra Pradesh (Rs. 1.04 trillion), Gujarat (Rs. 0.96 trillion), Uttar Pradesh (Rs 0.92 trillion), Tamil Nadu (Rs. 0.73 trillion), Rajasthan (Rs 0.72 trillion) and Kerala (Rs 0.54 trillion). Put together, these 8 problem states account for around Rs.8.5 trillion crore, or 60% of India's civil service pension problem in the state government sector is in these 8 states. Pension promises of the government are similar to government bonds in that they are promises by the government to pay money in the future. The amount that is committed is not explicitly visible, as the stock of government bonds are. It has to be calculated based on the number of employees, their age profiles, their incomes and pension promises. The implicit pension debt has not been estimated for state governments until now because of the lack of data. The current calculations have been made possible by the Indian Retirement Earnings and Savings (IRES) survey. The analysis shows that Maharashtra and Goa jointly have an implied pension debt of Rs 2.13 lakh crore. This is followed by West Bengal at Rs 1.38 lakh crore. Thus Maharashtra, Goa and West Bengal are leaders in the pack in terms of problems on account of civil service pensions. (Indian Express 20/7/05)

Police savage striking Haryana workers (14)

GURGAON: A protest by workers of Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) seeking higher wages and re-employment of suspended employees snowballed into a major confrontation here on Monday with the police brutally assaulting them. Hundreds of protesters and some police personnel were injured, many of them critically. Trouble started after the protesters caught the policemen by surprise, attacking them with stones and sticks near the ITI on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road. Many policemen, including Deputy Superintendent Jag Pravesh Dahiya, were injured. The mob burnt a vehicle of the area sub-divisional magistrate and two police vehicles. The police retaliation was disproportionate a couple of hours later at the Mini Secretariat; they surrounded the workers and thrashed them, leaving many workers bleeding with broken limbs. The police said a large group of workers, protesting against the management of HMSI that sacked several employees earlier, gathered at the Kamla Nehru Park around 9 a.m. The workers later began marching on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road raising slogans and carrying banners decrying the management. At this point, the administration apparently did not have any information on the movement of the huge crowd. Around 1 p.m., the protesters were stopped near the ITI and asked to disperse as they had no permission to stage a demonstration. (The hindu 26/7/05)

Develop watersheds hiring contractors under job guarantee scheme: panel

MUMBAI: A Government-appointed panel to review the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) has suggested that it focus on developing the 44,000 watersheds in Maha-rashtra, instead of using mere unskilled workers to build roads and minor percolation tanks. To achieve this, the EGS should use contractors to have work done speedily and to technical specifications. But non-governmental organisations, under the aegis of the Maharashtra Landless Labour and EGS Workers Coordination Committee, meeting in Pune rejected these recommendations but welcomed the focus on women's role in developing farming. As not all of Maharashtra can lend itself to watershed development, the focus lacks merit, the NGOs say. The contractors would defeat the very purpose of the EGS —jobs on demand — by turning away claimants because intermediaries would have their economics in mind, they argue. A re-shaped EGS, the panel said, would help to develop watersheds to enable farmers to raise two crops instead of only one dependent on rains and without assured irrigation. Once this happened, migration to cities would decline. If durable 25-square metre houses were built with EGS funds — now Rs. 9,000 crores is lying unspent — for landless labourers, they too would be tied down to their villages. (The Hindu 27/7/05)

Parties see anti-worker face in Gurgaon violence (14)

NEW DELHI: Various political parties and trade union groups have criticised the police assault on the workers of Honda Motorcycles and Scooter India Limited on Monday and demanded a thorough probe into the matter and punishment for the guilty officials who planned, ordered and carried out the systematic attack. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) New Democracy Central Committee said the attack had shown the real anti-worker face of the Congress Government in Haryana and the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre. Stating that the workers were assaulted for protesting against the management, which had thrown out nearly 1,000 employees on the simple issue of formation of a union, the party said the workers' protest march blocked by the police and they lathi-charged in the name of protests not being allowed. Claiming that it was on the plea of talks with the management that they were led to assemble at Mini Secretariat, the CPI(ML) New Democracy said it was while they were holding their meeting that the police surrounded and assaulted them without any provocation. The pre-meditated action on part of the police and administration, it said, showed that the attitude of the present rulers was just like their colonial predecessors. (The Hindu 27/7/05)

Cong claims credit for the Bill (14)

New Delhi : The Congress on Wednesday appeared worried other political parties might run away with the credit for Rural Employment Guarantee Act, a scheme it always considered its own brainchild. The Left's pro-poor rhetoric and the late intervention of the BJP through its standing committee chairperson Kalyan Singh have struck alarm into the Congress. Congress president Sonia Gandhi spoke at length on the Rural Employment Guarantee Act at the parliamentary party meet on Wednesday morning. Congress leaders went to town about the party's involvement in origin of the idea and its impending culmination into an Act and stressed that the Congress championed the cause since long when "no political party" was talking about it. It also claimed Ms Gandhi suggested four more amendments to the pending Bill, which incidentally were also proposed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee. Ms Gandhi told the CPP that the legislation was first promised by the Congress at the Chief Ministers conference in Guwahati in 2002 and the next conclave at Srinagar reiterated its resolve to bring the Bill. "It was a key pledge in our manifesto for the 2004 general election. It quite naturally forms part of the National Common Minimum Programme." The party has indeed been presenting this scheme as part of its commitment to strengthen the welfare state concept. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh even went to the extent of telling reporters this was how the Congress planned to give a human face to economic reforms. Ms Gandhi also recalled the bill largely drew its inspiration from the employment guarantee scheme launched by a Congress government in Maharashtra almost three decades ago. (The Pioneer 28/7/05)

Textile workers protest in TN, are arrested (14)

Chennai, July 27: Thousands of textile workers including women were taken into custody in various parts of Tamil Nadu on Wednesday when they staged a demonstration in support of their demands, which include industry-wise wage settlement and the right to form associations. CITU leader A. Soundararajan

said demonstrations were held in 29 centres in various districts barring Thiruvavur, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur and Perambalur. The strike call was given by the joint action committee of trade unions comprising CITU, AITUC, LPF and MLF. Around 10,000 workers including hundreds of women participated in the demonstrations and courted arrest. In Coimbatore, the textile town of the state around 2,500 workers were taken into the police custody. CITU textile wing leader T.M. Kumaran, MLF general secretary Duraisamy and INTUC leader Sengaliappan were among those who were arrested. The police said the arrested workers were released in the evening. The demands of the workers included industry wise wage settlement instead of the present practice of unit wise settlement. The workers also urged abolition of employing daily wage workers and camp coolies who stay in industry complexes during the duration of their work. "We also demanded abolition of set-coolies, a system of employing women under a scheme of providing financial assistance for their marriage. On completion of three or five years they are given this amount, But this smacks of bonded labour as the workers are not allowed to move by their employees," Mr Soundararajan said. The demand of the workers also included implementation of gratuity and provident fund in the textile industry and the right to form association. "There is no union of workers in the 1500 textile units in the state," Mr Soundararajan said. (Asian Age 28/7/05)

Amend labour laws: DMK chief (14)

CHENNAI: : Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam president M. Karunanidhi has urged the Centre to view the Gurgaon violence as a "warning" and amend the labour laws to protect the rights of employees and trade unions. Condemning the "inhuman attack" on the agitating Honda workers, he demanded "early action" against police officials responsible for the attack and adequate compensation for the injured employees. Mr. Karunanidhi said the Haryana Government failed to intervene at the right time to sort out the issue. When the relatives went searching for the injured in a nearby hospital, they could not find them. This was the reason for the trouble to continue on the second day. "The DMK, along with the Left parties and the Opposition, condemned the attack in the Lok Sabha," he said. Both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister talked to the Haryana Chief Minister. Mr. Karunanidhi said that in the present scenario, governments should hold discussions with trade unions to ensure that genuine demands are met. "Foreign companies should not ignore the livelihood [concerns] of the Indian workers." "The basic tenet of the Constitution is that all are equal before law. If only this is scrupulously followed by the managements, be it Indian or foreign, industrial growth and economic development can achieved," he said. (The Hindu 28/7/05)

Don't limit rural job scheme to BPL category, says Sonia Gandhi (14)

NEW DELHI: With the Government planning to move the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill in the current session of Parliament, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday suggested four amendments to make it more efficacious. The amendments should guarantee employment to anyone who offered to work for the prescribed wage, instead of confining the scheme to below the poverty line job-seekers, she told a general body meeting of the Congress parliamentary party here. The guarantee, once applicable, must not be open to withdrawal at the government's discretion. The entire financial burden could be borne by the Centre with the States meeting the expenditure on unemployment allowance. Panchayats should play a central role in selection of works as well as in implementation and monitoring. Ms. Gandhi's suggestions come at a time when the Left parties have expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed legislation on counts such as restricting it to rural areas and putting the onus of funding on State Governments. Ms. Gandhi said the legislation was first promised at the Congress Chief Ministers' Guwahati conclave in April 2002 and reiterated at the next Chief Ministers' meet in Srinagar in July 2003. "It was a key pledge in our manifesto for the 2004 Lok Sabha polls as well. It quite naturally forms part of the National Common Minimum Programme... this Bill draws substantially from the Employment Guarantee scheme the Congress launched in Maharashtra three decades ago." Referring to the Congress Governments' commitment to social security, she said Indira Gandhi introduced rural landless employment programmes, Rajiv Gandhi started the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna and P.V. Narasimha Rao the Employment Assurance Scheme. (The Hindu 28/7/05)

CPI warns of 'political repercussions' (14)

New Delhi : Hardening its stand on the Honda workers' issue in Gurgaon, the CPI on Thursday warned of "political repercussions" if the matter remained unresolved for long. Blaming the Government of turning a blind eye to the workers' issue, the party asked Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president

Sonia Gandhi to intervene immediately for an early and amicable settlement of the matter. "We are holding no threat to the UPA Government. But we have many options including the party MPs sitting on hunger strike to protest against the corrupt district administration which has acted as an agent of the management," CPI's newly-elected parliamentary party leader Gurudas Dasgupta told mediapersons. The CPI leader, also the general secretary of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), had led a fact-finding team that included six party MPs to Gurgaon early in the day. "We are so far dealing with the Honda issue purely as a trade union matter, but if it is not settled without further delay, it is bound to have its repercussions at the political level as well," he said. At least 300 were wounded in the police action on Monday of which 50 had head injuries and were now languishing in jails without proper treatment. Mr Dasgupta severely criticised the Haryana Government for turning Gurgaon into a "city-in-siege" and converting it into a police camp. He alleged that the Hooda administration had failed to restrain police from committing "atrocities" against the workers and the people even now.

"It is sad the manner in which the concern and sympathy expressed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi are being translated on the ground," the CPI leader said. (Pioneer 29/7/05)

Honda employee attacked, Gurgaon is tense again (14)

Gurgaon: Just when Gurgaon was looking to settle down into normalcy, an attack on a manager-level employee from Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HSMI) has again raised the tension levels in the suburb. Anil Yadav, an engineer with the company was beaten up by about 15 men on Friday. The incident took place at 5.30 am when Yadav, left his Rajiv Nagar residence for work. According to Yadav, he saw two men armed with taihis and hockey sticks, waiting under a tree near his residence. As he tried to escape, they followed him and started beating him. About 15 more joined them and after thrashing him, managed to flee. The two men that Yadav saw waiting under the tree, according to him, were employees of HSIM. Yadav was rushed to the hospital after he was spotted by his neighbour who was coming back from a morning walk. Later in the day, he was moved to a hospital in Delhi and is reported to be stable. ((Times of India 30/7/05)

Honda official attacked (14)

NEW DELHI, July 29. — Close on the heels of the violence that rocked Gurgaon for two days, following clashes between workers of Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India Limited and policemen, a senior Honda engineer was assaulted today and a showroom containing the company's motorcycles was attacked. Mr Anil Kumar Yadav, a maintenance engineer at the company's Manesar factory, was beaten up by a group of people in Sector 14 of the satellite town, the Gurgaon deputy commissioner Mr Sudhir Rajpal said. An FIR has been registered against several employees of the company. They were charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code. No arrests had been made till late in the evening. At least six motorcycles in a Honda showroom in Kaithal town were damaged by a group that stormed into its premises after smashing the window panes. A passerby overpowered one of the attackers while they were escaping and handed him over to the police. The arrested person is being interrogated, said police superintendent. The police is conducting raids in the town to arrest the other five involved in the attack who are reported to be from Kaithal and the adjoining Jind district. (Statesman 30/7/05)

Honda workers to be reinstated (14)

CHANDIGARH: Workers and management of Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India Limited at Manesar in Gurgaon district signed an agreement late Friday night in the presence of Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda. Addressing the workers on Saturday morning, Mr. Hooda complimented them as well as the management on reaching an amicable settlement. A protest by the workers seeking higher wages and reemployment of suspended employees developed into a confrontation at Gurgaon on Monday. Hundreds of protesters were injured in police action. On Friday, it was agreed that all four dismissed workers would be reinstated and they would tender an unconditional written apology. All suspended workers would be reinstated and an ongoing investigation in their cases would continue. After the inquiry, the company could transfer them to any department, except the manufacturing wing. The workers would get full salary for May and June. After June 27, the principle of "no work no pay," stipulated by the Supreme Court, would apply. Injured employees who were not in a position to work now would be given paid leave. The workers would not submit any demand for the next one year. If they cooperated wholeheartedly, remained disciplined and met production targets, the company would increase their salary

within a year. For trainees, internal appraisal would continue and no test would be conducted. The number of contract labourers as on June 27, 2005 would be maintained. If apprentices too tendered an unconditional apology they would also be taken back. (The Hindu 31.7.05)

Gurgaon incident will not impact FDI inflows: MNC survey (14)

NEW DELHI: An overwhelming 80 per cent of the CEOs of the multinational companies, polled by the ASSOCHAM Business Barometer (ABB), say that the Gurgaon incident involving labour clashes at the Honda facility will not have any impact on the confidence of foreign investors in India. Most of them including a vast majority from the Japanese firms based in India responded to the ABB poll saying that Gurgaon-like incidents are not peculiar to India and such skirmishes can happen anywhere in the world including the most advanced industrial economies and that they do happen. As many as 73 per cent of the 150 CEOs said the incident was blown out of proportion and was given extra mileage. The overexposure to the scuffle between the police and the labour in the Delhi suburb could have damaged the country's image as an investment destination but for the Government's intervention at the highest level, they said. "The unfortunate Gurgaon incident was an isolated case and cannot be seen as a pattern as is clear from the informed perception of the MNCs including those from Japan, some of whom have been operating in India for the past 50 years," said ASSOCHAM president Mahendra K. Sanghi. Although over 50 per cent of the corporate heads believed that India has its institutional mechanism in place, as demonstrated in the past six decades, at times events overtake the system. They underlined the need for strengthening the mechanism at the operational level. (The Hindu 1/8/05)

Gurgaon unrest footage confirms role of outsiders' (14)

GURGAON: A couple of days after the violent clashes between workers of the Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI) Limited on July 25, the Administration had claimed that some "outsiders" had infiltrated the ranks of workers to incite violence. The footage of the clashes, now available with the police, seems to confirm their suspicion. However, the police are yet to establish the identity of the "outsiders". Captured by a local television news channel, the footage shows workers in large numbers marching towards Mahavir Chowk after a meeting at Kamla Nehru Park on July 25. They threaten a handful of policemen on the way making angry gestures. As per the footage, some of the "workers" are seen with stones and sticks. The police said these men had picked up stones on their way from Kamla Nehru Park as they marched through a road which was being widened. The first round of violence began when a 50-member strong police team tried to stop the mob -- which the police claimed were a little more than a thousand in numbers when they met at Kamla Nehru Park but had swelled along the way -- near Kalyani Hospital, which is near Mahavir Chowk. The footage shows the frontrunners in the mob pelting stones at the police. A group of men armed with lathis are then seen cornering the DSP, Jag Pravesh Dahiya, and beating him up badly. The mob is later seen overturning the gypsy of the SDM. In a subsequent shot, a jerry can is seen lying near the gypsy which was already set afire. The footage then shows the mob going berserk. They are seen chasing away a police vehicle apparently despatched to control them. According to the SSP (Gurgaon), Yoginder Nehra, the violence seemed to have been incited by some people who posed as leaders of the workers and vanished from the scene after the situation flared up. (The Hindu 4/8/05)

Several labour cases pending (14)

New Delhi, Aug. 4: Nearly 16,327 cases and 3,293 applications were pending before the Central Government Industrial Tribunal-cum Labour courts (CGIT's) as on March 31, 2005, Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday. In a written reply, the minister for labour and employment, Mr K. Chan-drashekhar Rao said that the government has taken several steps for expeditious disposal of industrial disputes including setting up of five new CGIT's at Ahmedabad, Ernakulam, Guwahati, Chandigarh and New Delhi during the 10th five-year-plan. He maintained that a new scheme for adjudication of disputes through Lok Adalats has been introduced during the 10th plan as an alternative grievance redressal mechanism. On the issue of emigration, he informed that said 11.99 lakh people obtained emigration clearances for going abroad for employment in the last three years between 2002-2004. With regard to the child labour he said that during the 10th plan, national child labour project scheme is being implemented in 250 districts of the country under which funds are given to the project societies set up at the district level headed by district magistrate. (Asian Age 5/8/05)

Lesson for Delhi? In model state, 9-cr job scheme fraud (14)

PUNE, AUGUST 7: At a time when the Centre plans to borrow Maharashtra's model Employment Guarantee Scheme to enact the Employment Guarantee Act, a Rs 9.1 crore EGS fraud in the state's Solapur district has set off alarm bells. In June, Solapur District Collector Manisha Varma suspected foul play when she found that labour attendance at EGS works had crossed one lakh. The number of works underway also appeared to be far higher than the approvals she remembered giving. She ordered an inquiry. Official sources said that this is what Varma found: • Rulebook was thrown out of the window to dole out EGS work • In a number of cases, her signature was forged to get the work approved • Masters were manipulated: some were blank but signed and endorsed by local agriculture officers; others bore signatures in English of illiterate labourers; names of the dead too appeared in some • All had been "paid" EGS money. Total loss to the exchequer: Rs 9.1 crore As per norms, two sets of approvals are needed to start EGS work. The first is a technical sanction, which a particular department, say agriculture, sends to the district administration, okaying EGS work—like building a bund— at a particular site. Only after the district collector sees the technical sanction, can an administrative approval be given. (Indian Express 8/8/05)

Cabinet nod to changes in Rural Employment Bill (14)

New Delhi : The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved certain amendments in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2004 and decided to introduce it in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, besides raising the number of Haj pilgrims, eligible for State subsidy, to 1 lakh for the year 2006. The Cabinet also cleared the Dabhol power project, fixed a statutory minimum price of Rs 79.50 per quintal for sugarcane for 2005-06 and enhanced the basic pension under the Swatantra Sainik Samman Pension Scheme, 1980 for freedom fighters and their spouses. Refusing to give details about the amendments approved by the Cabinet in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2004, Information and Broadcasting Minister S Jaipal Reddy, after a Cabinet meeting said the Bill will be introduced in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. The bill, originally introduced in Parliament in 2004, had been referred to a Parliamentary panel, which examined it and had sought certain amendments in it. The panel had sought jobs under the scheme for any poor and needy person striving for it and not merely those belonging to BPL category. Additionally, it had asked for jobs for all the members of a family. Earlier this week, the Group of Minister on the subject had approved substitution of BPL with the poor, but it had refused to allow more than one person of the family to get jobs under the scheme. (Pioneer 12/8/05)

Job guarantee: 65 pc don't get minimum wage (14)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 14: WITH the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill set to be tabled in Parliament this week, with crucial amendments by the Cabinet, the Rural Development Ministry is staring at some grim numbers on its job schemes—supposed beneficiaries do not receive even minimum wages. The findings came up in a survey by the Centre for Management Development. Sixty-five per cent beneficiaries of the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana were found to receive wages below the minimum set by various states. Ker-ala tops the list (Rs 140) while the north-eastern states come last, at Rs 60. Several beneficiaries of SGRY get less than Rs60. As against Rs 84 per man-day for skilled workers and Rs 60.23 per manday for unskilled workers (minimum wage fixed by the Centre and states) — majority of beneficiaries receive between Rs 31 and Rs 60 a day — the average being Rs 58.48. There's more bad news — 48 per cent of the beneficiaries did not know there is a stipulated minimum wage. Under the SGRY, wages were to be paid partly in cash and partly as foodgrains. The Centre allocated Rs 3,600 crore in 2005-06 for the scheme. In Andhra Pradesh alone, it was found that 5.65 per cent of the foodgrain released by the Food Corporation of India went missing in the supply chain. And, as per the books kept, only 20 states paid 5 kg food-grain per manday, in the rest it varied between 3 kg of rice and 4 kg of wheat In the new Bill to be introduced, the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana is merged with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. (Indian Express 16.8.05)

Daily wages to go up in Himachal (14)

SHIMLA: Himachal Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh on Monday announced an increase of Rs.5 in daily wages. The daily wagers would now get Rs.70 instead of Rs. 65 and it would be increased to Rs.75 shortly, he said, adding that the increase would cost the exchequer Rs.10 crores. He was speaking at the Independence Day function at Mandi. Promising to regularise the daily wagers, the Chief Minister announced an increase of Rs 25 in the honorarium of Home Guards. He declared that about 39,000 Class

IV employees of Public Works Department and Irrigation and Public Health Department would be brought in regular cadre. This will benefit over 22,000 employees of Public Works Department and 17,000 of Irrigation and Public Health Department. Mr. Singh also announced social security pension to 15,000 more people at the rate of Rs. 200 per month. This will cover 10,000 aged persons and 5000 widows. The Chief Minister said that Himachal Pradesh had made tremendous progress since its formation in 1948 in various fields, adding that it figured among the few best developed States in the country. He attributed the spectacular performance of the State to the Congress leadership at the Centre and the Congress Governments in the State. Mr. Singh said that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had announced Rs. 4000 crores during his recent visit to the state for various development projects including expansion of railway network, roads and for providing drinking water. (The Hindu 16/8/05)

Rural jobs Bill has practical difficulties, Left tells Centre (14)

New Delhi: ON THE eve of the tabling of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill in Parliament, the Left parties on Tuesday drew the Centre's attention towards "certain practical difficulties in the present bill" and asked it to remove them so as to ensure the smooth implementation of the legislation. "We have certain ground level experience in this regard. So we raised certain practical difficulties which could arise during implementation of the proposed legislation so as to ensure its successful implementation in all the states," West Bengal Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta said after a team of Left leaders had an hour long meeting with Leader of Lok Sabha Pranab Mukherjee. "We are confident that convergence of views (between them and the government) will be achieved," he said refusing to elaborate the areas of "difficulties". It was a matter of parliamentary privilege, he said. The Bill is likely to be brought in Lok Sabha on Wednesday for consideration and passing. "We strongly uphold the objective of employment generation and we wish that the scheme is successfully implemented," Mr Dasgupta, who also heads the Centre's Empowered Committee on VAT, said. Forward Bloc leader Debabrata Biswas, who was also present in the meeting, said the Left parties wanted that the state governments should be consulted in the process and the Centre must ensure that the funds for the employment guarantee scheme be released weD in advance so as to avoid any confusion during its implementation. Mr Biswas said the Left parties also told the Government that at least one-third of the beneficiaries should be women. (Pioneer 17/8/05)

Parliament passes Payment of Wages Bill (14)

NEW DELHI: Parliament on Wednesday passed the Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2004. The Bill seeks to enhance the wage ceiling of Rs 1,600 a month to Rs. 6,500 and to strengthen penal provisions. The bill was passed in Rajya Sabha in December 2004 and adopted by Lok Sabha on Wednesday. Assuring the House that the Government would make efforts at the earliest to further widen the scope of the Payment of Wages Act, Union Labour and Employment Minister K.Chandrasekhara Rao said the Government would soon come up with a new measure to benefit workers in the unorganised sector. The passage of the Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 2004 would protect the salary and wages of workers and timely payment besides ensuring that employers do not make illegal deductions. Mr. Rao accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies for shedding crocodile tears on the issue of workers as they had worked against the interest of the working class while in power. Earlier participating in the debate, T.C. Gehlot (BJP) said most companies did not adhere to the clauses of the Payment of Wages Act and did not pay wages to the workers on time. (The Hindu 18/8/05)

Support from all quarters for Employment Bill (14)

NEW DELHI: The decks have been cleared for the introduction of the much-awaited National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill on Thursday. The Lok Sabha will take it up for consideration and passage, amid clear indications of support across the political spectrum for the social security measure. The Bill, which envisages 100 days of guaranteed employment to those residing in rural areas in 150 districts, saw two rounds of consultation between the Government and supporting Left parties on Wednesday. The Left parties made a set of suggestions on Tuesday to "fine tune" the Bill. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader, Basudeb Acharia, said the Government agreed to move official amendments to the Bill, including providing a minimum wage of not less than Rs. 60 a day; giving priority to women by reserving 1/3 of public work to be taken up in the programme, transferring funds from the Centre to the States each quarter and spreading the programme across all rural districts over the next four years. The suggestions also included giving flexibility to the States in choosing public works and spreading the 100-day work period over a longer period instead of a restricted time frame. On two specific issues — minimum wages

and reserving 1/3 work for women — the Left parties had to invoke the intervention of United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi. The argument was that since the minimum wage varied in the country, between Rs. 24 in Manipur to Rs. 134 a day in Kerala, there had to be uniform minimum payment. (The Hindu 18/8/05)

'Historic' Bill for jobs in rural areas (14)

NEW DELHI: Fulfilling its promise of assured jobs, the United Progressive Alliance Government moved the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill in the Lok Sabha on Thursday. It aims to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to rural households in 200 districts. The amended Bill, introduced last year, was moved by Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh amid thumping of desks and support from across the political spectrum. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was present and his contribution came in for a special mention by UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi. Describing the social security measure as a "historic bill," Dr. Singh said it aimed at banishing poverty through assured employment. It was only through amelioration of poor economic conditions in rural areas could prosperity be achieved. The Bill, promised by the Congress in its manifesto and part of the National Common Minimum Programme, was fine-tuned over the last two days; the supporting Left Parties made five suggestions. It promises wage employment to every rural household, in which adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work, Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad said, moving a separate list of amendments. Initially 200 districts, including 150 now under the food for work programme, would be covered under the Bill. It would be extended to all 600 districts in five years. The Bill also provides for unemployment allowance if the job, under the scheme, is not provided. The minimum daily wage has been fixed at Rs. 60. (The Hindu 19/8/05)

Forum on dharna for job bill guarantee (14)

New Delhi, Aug. 18: The People's Action for Employment Guarantee on Thursday organised a dharna to "reaffirm the demand for a full-fledged" Employment Guarantee Act. Former members of the National Advisory Council, Mr Jean Dreze and Ms Aruna Roy, also participated in the meeting. The forum strongly opposed the government's move to stop fund to any ongoing employment guarantee scheme in the event of "any corruption". Opposing the move, Mr Jean Dreze felt that this was a "real killer". According to the members, instead of blocking the flow of fund to the project, the government should take action against the guilty officials. The PAEG also demanded that every adult should be eligible for job guarantee and that the government should not at any time withdraw guarantee or "switch off" the scheme. Some of the Left intellectuals, who participated in the agitation, also wanted that the minimum wage should be 70 per cent of the national floor level. Some of them pointed fingers at the amendment, which apparently fixed the minimum wage at Rs 60. A member of the PAEG pointed out that in certain state minimum wages go up to Rs 130 a day. The members demanded that in no way the existing wage should be brought down. They also wanted time bound extension of the act to the whole of rural India. (Asian Age 19/8/05)

Will it reduce poverty or fill corrupt pockets? A 7-item reality check (14)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 18: The National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill tabled by the UPA in Parliament is the most ambitious anti-poverty programme in the history of India. But so tearing has been the hurry to introduce it that the UPA has not even had time to examine the difficulties in the implementation of its precursor, the Food for Work programme which it introduced last year in 150 most backward districts. Whether it meets its laudable objectives or becomes the mother of all scandals, milking the taxpayer to line the pockets of corrupt bureaucrats, politicians, contractors and the village elite depends on how watchful the government is. 1. The EGA has no "allocated" funds. It is like a bottomless pit. Whichever project can be shown to be an EGA project will have to be funded by the Centre. Does the Centre have the will and the means to check corruption in the remotest of remote villages across the country? As The Indian Express first reported last week, a Rs 9-crore EGS fraud in Maharashtra involved a corrupt officer who "created" schemes where none existed, forged signatures and used the scheme to amass wealth for himself. 2. In theory, it's only the very poor who come to do unskilled physical work, and when they get better off, they stop coming. This is the basis of the logic on which the scheme is extended to all, and not merely to those who hold BPL cards and are below the poverty line. 3. The minimum wage at Rs 60 may sound very low. Yet, when people are so poor that they are willing to work for less, the contractor pays them less and pockets the difference, sharing it with his friends. As The Indian Express

reported early this year from Mayurbhanj, one of the 150 backward districts with an 80 per cent poverty rate, workers were officially being paid Rs 50, but actually received only Rs 30. 4. Ironically, if the higher wage norm is actually implemented correctly, it distorts labour markets. The farmer who was willing to pay Rs 30 to hire 10 workers can no longer afford to do so. Raising wage levels in a village can actually raise unemployment. (Indian Express 19/8/05)

Rural jobs bill to pay a person Rs 3 per day: NDA (14)

New Delhi: The Lok Sabha on Thursday began debating the national rural employment guarantee bill with the Opposition picking holes in the scheme and the United Progressive Alliance government saying that it was nothing short of "historic." At Rs 60 per day for 100 days, Janata Dal (United) MP Nitish Kumar has calculated that the bill would provide around Rs 3 a day for each member of an average family. "Can they eat with that," he asked. The government tabled a modified version of the bill first introduced in the Lok Sabha last year. The original draft was sent to a parliamentary standing committee, studied by a group of ministers and finally by the national advisory council headed by UPA chief Sonia Gandhi. She chose the occasion to make her first address in Parliament in the current Lok Sabha. For her the bill, which guarantees 100 days of employment every year for one person from every rural household in 200 backward districts, was part of a larger vision of the Congress-led government. "We see this Act as the human face of economic reforms," she said. She traced the genealogy of the scheme to the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and others begun by earlier Congress governments. But, she reminded, they were programmes run by the executive. The latest was a legal guarantee to the rural unemployed, she said. The "historic" tag was lent to the bill right at the beginning by Union rural development minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh when he moved the bill, saying that employment guarantee would be a "tool in the fight against poverty and unemployment." (Asian Age 19/8/05)

Opposition for more provisions in job bill (14)

New Delhi, Aug. 22: A landmark scheme or something which 'could have been better? The government and the Opposition continued to differ on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Bill, 2005, now being debated in the Lok Sabha. But when it comes to the vote, it is certain to be passed. The Opposition has said it would support the bill, but only wished there 'as more in it. Panchayati raj minister Mani Shankar Aiyar said the bill was truly historic as never before had the panchayati raj institutions been given such powers to implement a scheme. Quoting from the bill, he rebutted BJP leader Kalyan Singh who argued that the gram sabhas — larger bodies than the panchayats — were not being given enough authority to oversee the projects selected under the proposed scheme. Water resources minister P.R. Das Munshi also took on Mr Kalyan Singh, who had headed the parliamentary committee which scrutinised the earlier version of the bill, for saying that the proposed legislation was an admission by the Congress that it had done little to remove poverty during its long tenure. Mr Das Munshi cited the nationalisation of banks and development of the panchayati raj during the Congress tenures as examples of achievements of the Congress governments. (Asian Age 23/8/05)

Rural job guarantee Bill passed by Lok Sabha (14)

NEW DELHI: The National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2005 — seeking to provide 100 days' assured employment every year to every rural household in 200 districts — was unanimously passed by the Lok Sabha with 52 amendments on Tuesday after a marathon 13-hour debate spread over three days. While the Opposition gave in to the overwhelming support for the Bill and withdrew most of its amendments, the few that it insisted on — including the one moved by Vijay Kumar Malhotra (Bharatiya Janata Party) to extend the scheme to the entire country within two years — were negated by voice vote. The official amendment promises to extend the scheme throughout the country over the next five years. Ahead of his reply, Union Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh moved a last-minute amendment on minimum wages. While the Minister did not refer, during his reply, even once to the issue of minimum wages — a point raised by many a member right through the debate — he responded to a specific question later and said the minimum wages of States would apply to the programme and the amendment enabled the Centre to step in to ensure a minimum rate of not less than Rs. 60 a day in States where it was lower. Beginning his reply with an acknowledgment of the across-the-floor support to the Bill, Mr. Singh set aside apprehensions that the Parliamentary Standing Committee's

recommendations on the Bill had been ignored by the Government. Of the 22 suggestions, 16 had been accepted; nine in totality. (The Hindu 24/8/05)

Parliament nod for job Bill (14)

NEW DELHI: Parliament on Wednesday gave its nod to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2005 that seeks to provide 100 days of assured employment in a year to every rural household in 200 districts. The Rajya Sabha passed the legislation after a six-hour debate that witnessed intervention by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill on Tuesday after a marathon debate spread over three days. Replying to the debate, Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said that 16 of the recommendations of the Standing Committee had been fully incorporated in the Bill. He assured the members that enough safeguards had been introduced in the Bill at several levels from village panchayat to zila parishad. Village panchayats would play a pivotal role in the implementation of the National Employment Guarantee Scheme and money would not be a constraint in accomplishing the commitments made by the UPA Government in this regard. The Government was committed to providing 100 days of employment to every rural household instead of only to "poor" families as suggested earlier. (The Hindu 25/8/05)

A path-breaking legislation, says Manmohan Singh (14)

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday argued for rationalising subsidies, improving the investment climate and accelerating the pace of industrialisation to maintain the economic growth of seven to eight per cent to fund schemes such as Rural Employment Guarantee. Intervening in the debate on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2005 in the Rajya Sabha, the Prime Minister described it as the "most important piece of legislation" in independent India. It was path-breaking legislation "truly in the nature of a landmark." It marked a new beginning in the efforts for social equity and justice. He expressed the hope that in the next four or five years it would cover all rural districts. The Bill seeks to provide 100 days of assured employment in a year to every rural household in 200 districts. Dr. Singh said the Bill was a "comprehensive and satisfying" legislation. The National Advisory Council, headed by United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi, played an active role in framing it. "If this UPA Government is to be known for a single law, it will be this one." For the first time the right to work was being made a fundamental legal right and everyone should make efforts to ensure that it was honoured in letter and in spirit. While reiterating his Government's resolve to put on track faster and speedier industrialisation in a labour-friendly environment, Dr. Singh said rural people lagged behind and 25 per cent of the rural population was landless. (The Hindu 25/8/05)

'Employment Bill passage historic' (14)

NEW DELHI: Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee president Ram Babu Sharma on Thursday described the passage of the Rural Employment Guarantee Bill in Parliament as a historic step that would change the face of villages of the country. Stating that the scheme would fulfil the dream of the late Congress leader, Rajiv Gandhi, by empowering the rural youth, Mr Sharma said it would also bring about a change for the better in the villages. Leading a large number of Congress workers to the 10 Janpath residence of Congress president Sonia Gandhi for congratulating her on the passage of the Bill, Mr Sharma -- who felicitated Ms. Gandhi by presenting her with a garland -- said the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme would alleviate poverty and make the rural youth gainfully employed. A festive touch was lent to the felicitation function as buoyed by the presence of the Congress president in their midst, the workers began raising slogans which electrified the atmosphere. Holding aloft colourful banners and placards with slogans hailing Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi for making the scheme a reality, the Congress workers celebrated their party president's arrival on stage with cheers and claps. (The Hindu 26/8/05)

labourers rescued from Karnataka (14)

SALEM: Forty-one labourers, including women and children, who were held in bondage for nearly a decade in a stone quarry in Karnataka were rescued by a group of social activists and youths. They were brought to the Salem Collectorate here on Friday. Ten years ago, the labourers, who hailed from Nagareddipatti near Taramangalam here, were taken to stone quarries at Mathiapuram in Neelamangala taluk near Bangalore where they worked under inhuman conditions. The owners allegedly paid them Rs. 50 a week as wages and denied them even medical benefits. The State president of the Women's Movement Against Poverty and Atrocities and adviser for the Alternative for India Development (AID), M.

Shanthi, who initiated the rescue efforts, said the plight of the labourers came to light a month ago when three of them with their families escaped from the quarry and reached Salem. Narrating the exploitation in the quarries, they sought the help of AID, which submitted petitions to the Tamil Nadu Government and the Salem Collector. But no action was initiated, the activists claimed. It was then the activists and youths at Taramangalam went to the site and rescued 41 labourers, including 14 children. "The Karnataka Government has taken legal action against the quarry owners for employing child labour," Mr. Ayyanar and Ms. Sumathi of the AID said. As no medical attention was provided at the quarry, one labourer, Veerappan, almost lost his leg. He was now being treated in the Salem Government Medical College Hospital. (The Hindu 27/8/05)

Job scheme may benefit 6 districts (14)

CHENNAI: Six districts in Tamil Nadu are likely to benefit under the newly-announced National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme of the Centre. Already, Tiruvannamalai, Cuddalore, Villupuram and Nagapattinam are covered under the National Food for Work Programme. A few months ago, the Centre indicated to the State Government that the release of funds under the programme was linked to the preparation of perspective plans for the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. At that time, the number of districts to be taken up under the new scheme was not intimated. Now, the Centre has said that the scheme will cover 200 districts including 150 under the National Food for Work Programme. "We expect one or two more districts from our State to be included," a government official says. Noting that the perspective plans are under preparation, the official says the draft plan reports for the four districts are likely to be ready in a week. After fine-tuning, the reports will be finalised and submitted to the Centre in September. The formulation of the plan reports is being done at village, block and district levels. Though the Central authorities had suggested a group of agencies for the plan preparation, they left the option to the States. Except for Nagapattinam, the task of preparation of the reports for other districts has been given to a Thiruvanthapuram-based institution, as suggested by the Centre. The Nagapattinam district administration has decided to use local institutions. (The Hindu 27/8/05)

CPM wants funds for job bill (14)

New Delhi, Aug. 26: Continuing its tirade against the logic of some of the Prime Minister's economic policies, the CPI(M) has said that Dr Manmohan Singh's propensity of "giving from the left hand and taking from the right hand" was "not acceptable" and that he should desist from any move to link funding of a job guarantee scheme with economic growth. Referring to the Prime Minister's attempts to justify the reforms of liberalisation and privatisation as saying these were necessary to achieve the targeted growth levels, an editorial in the next issue of CPI(M) mouthpiece, People's Democracy, says: "We are being led to believe that the successful implementation of the Employment Guarantee Act is conditional upon the implementation of neo-liberal reforms." "The Employment Guarantee Act has come into being in response to the common people's craving for a better livelihood. If this is to be accompanied by further attacks on their livelihood through the measures suggested by the Prime Minister, then clearly the government is giving from the left hand and taking from the right hand. This," the editorial reads, "is simply not acceptable." "The measures suggested by the Prime Minister," the editorial elaborates, include larger flows of foreign investment and curtailment of subsidies. It also refers to the Prime Minister's hinting at the necessity to hike petroleum prices in order to protect the oil public sector giants. (Asian Age 27/8/05)

Planned state violence: reports (14)

NEW DELHI: Two fact-finding reports enquiring into the sequence of events leading to the lathi-charge on Honda Motorcycles and Scooter India (Pvt.) Ltd. (HMSS) workers on July 25 say that the brutal attack suggests a planned act of state violence. A Citizen's Committee Enquiry Report and a report by the Peoples Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) Report, say that the district and police authorities appear to have had clear instructions to inflict violence on the workers to break their efforts at organising themselves. Pointing out that incidents of violence against the police by retrenched workers who were being stopped from registering their protest was a spontaneous reaction, the reports say that workers were persuaded to march to the Mini Secretariat to submit a memorandum to District Commissioner (DC) Sudhir Rajpal, where they were lathi-charged by a large police force mobilised by the district administration from neighbouring police stations. The Citizen's Report, which has been submitted to the National Human Rights Commission, questions the mandate of Mr. Rajpal in appearing before the workers in riot gear and leading a lathi-charge against them. The report says that the actions of the police were in violation of the

Haryana Police Manual, which says that in order to disperse an agitating mob, it should use teargas before resorting to a lathi-charge. According to the manual, even in a lathi-charge, the police are not supposed to hit above the shoulder and is not supposed to follow a crowd that is dispersing. (The Hindu 27/8/05)

Rural employment bill: 'World is watching India' (14)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 31: Other countries will keenly watch how India implements the Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, an expert who is in Delhi to attend an International Labour Organisation meeting has said. Stephen Devereaux, fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, said: "This bill is historic not just for India but the rest of the world. The rest of the world doesn't have employment guarantee. This (bill) sees employment as a right... it's not just charity." The ILO has already begun receiving queries about the Employment Guarantee Bill — India is the first country to introduce a bill recognising employment as a legal right. "This type of scheme is pioneering and everyone will be watching the implementation of this scheme. Several requests have come in on employment guarantee schemes and poverty reduction," Rie Vejs-Kjeldgaard, officer-in-charge at ILO's sub-regional office in Delhi, said. "Other countries are taking interest and are thinking of introducing their own employment creation programmes," Dr Rizwanul Islam, director of the ILO's Employment Strategy Department, said. Latin American and African countries are the ones most interested. South Africa, Argentina, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia are among the nations which already run employment and food-for-work schemes. Devereaux said the South African model came closest to the Indian scheme, but warned: "You can't replicate one country's experience with another...." (Indian Exp. 1/9/05)

Women, SC/ST job seekers on the rise (14)

NEW DELHI: The number of job seekers among women and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has increased, according to an analysis of employment exchange statistics by the Directorate-General of Employment and Training of the Union Labour Ministry. The number of women increased from 95.3 lakhs in 1998 to 107.5 lakhs in 2003 and of the SC and ST from 58.0 lakhs and 16.9 lakhs to 66.3 lakhs and 23.1 lakhs. The number of physically handicapped persons seeking employment also rose from 4.2 lakhs to 6.6 lakhs. An age-wise analysis shows that approximately 71 per cent of the job-seekers are below 29. The percentage has gone up in the age group up to 29, while there has been a decline in higher age groups. This is in contrast to the trend witnessed up to 2002 when there was a gradual shift from lower age groups (20-29) to upper age groups (30 or above), indicating that people at younger age faced difficulty in seeking employment. People aged 60 and above were also in queue for jobs. Out of 59,000 elderly job seekers, 51,000 were from West Bengal. The State also had 85,000 people in the age group 50-59 registered with employment exchanges, followed by Tamil Nadu (48,000) and Kerala (37,000) at the end of 2003. (The Hindu 4/9/05)

U.P. merges 50 per cent DA with basic salary (14)

LUCKNOW: Fulfilling a long-pending demand of over 17 lakh State employees, the Uttar Pradesh Government on Tuesday announced merger of 50 per cent Dearness Allowance (DA) with the basic salary. Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, while making the announcement at a Press conference here, said the government would generate additional revenue to offset the burden of over Rs 970 crores arising from the new provision with retrospective effect from April 1, 2005. The employees will get hiked salary from October, while the arrears for six months would be deposited in their Provident Fund (PF) account. With this merger the employees would receive hiked gratuity allowances, leave encashment allowances and pension component. The State employees had threatened to go on an indefinite strike on the issue from Tuesday but later withdrew it following an assurance from the Chief Minister. On Monday, the Cabinet had authorised Mr Yadav to take a decision in this regard. The government had constituted two sub-committees to give its recommendation on the employees demand for merging half their DA with basic salary from April 2004. The Chief Minister assured that the common man would not be affected by the decision and no development project would be curtailed due to the extra financial burden on the government due to this hike. Of the total employees who would be benefited by the DA merger, 7.5 lakh are State employees, 5.5 lakh teachers and non-teaching employees, 4 lakh pensioners and family pensioners and 50,000 employees of the aided bodies. (The Hindu 7/9/05)

Social security system for unorganised labour (14)

New Delhi : The State Government has decided to launch social security system for the benefit of more than five lakh building and other construction worker from October 2. The Government has also reconstituted Building and other Construction Workers Welfare Board for providing them financial assistance. Industries and Labour Minister Mangat Ram Singhal said that the Government would be implementing the Building and other Construction Workers Cess Act 1996, which has been constituted in January 2002 whereby funds would be created for the welfare of such workers in unorganised sector by imposing one per cent cess on the construction activity of over Rs 10 lakhs. The Labour Welfare Board was constituted in 2002 but has failed to provide any relief to labourers. Huge amount was collected through cess and not a penny was spent on the welfare of labours. Mr Singhal said the labourers between 18 to 60 years would be registered online through the existing Citizen Service Bureau (CSB) across the city. Registration would entitle them to retirement benefits like family pension of Rs 150 per month, maternity benefit of Rs 1000, medical assistance upto Rs 1000 and payment of Rs 15000 in case of death of a member beside group insurance. The labourer would be required to contribute Rs 20 per month that have to be paid quarterly. (Pioneer 8/9/05)

Lawyers, engineers want to be constables (14)

New Delhi, Sept. 9: The Delhi police has received over two lakh applications for recruiting 2,000 constables and the aspirants include a large number of qualified professionals like lawyers and engineers. The recruitment drive which started last month, has the highest number of applications, 2,11,521 so far, and of these, about 35,000 candidates are graduates and post-graduates. Many of these applicants are from renowned institutions like the Faculty of Law, Ramjas College, Hindu College of Delhi University, different schools of Jawaharlal University, Jamia and other professional institutes. Some of these candidates undergoing the selection process are also pursuing research and other academic activities. Senior police officers supervising the drive say that several candidates amongst these are of much higher calibre than desired for the constable post. "We have adopted a transparent selection process but the kind of candidates we have received this time has added punch to the whole exercise. There are candidates who have even enrolled for M.Phil. and some are even proficient in computers," said a senior police officer. With unemployment figures running high in the country and government shrinking its service sectors, the large turnout does not come as a surprise. In the capital alone, there are more than 10,80,000 educated persons seeking employment. All of them are enrolled at the various employment exchanges of Delhi government. As per the economic survey of Delhi government, 2003-04, the average increase in the number of educated unemployed people is 27 per cent in the capital. (Asian Age 10/9/05)

Unemployment at a record high: ILO report (14)

NEW DELHI: Despite encouraging progress in reducing poverty and improving the working lives of people in Asia under the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), unemployment reached a record high while job growth remained "disappointing," says a report from the International Labour Office (ILO). According to the report, "Labour and Social Trends in Asia and the Pacific 2005," new data shows that three quarters of the world's poor — or close to 2 billion people subsisting on less than the equivalent of \$ 2 a day — live in Asia. The study was issued on the eve of the United Nations World Summit in New York to be held from September 14 to 16. The summit is the biggest gathering to be mounted by the U.N. and will discuss efforts to reduce poverty among other issues. Key Asian leaders will be among 160 heads of state who will be attending. The ILO study provides a stark analysis of a growing "employment gap" in the Asian region, and says the creation of new jobs has failed to keep pace with the impressive economic growth. Between 2003 and 2004, employment in Asia and the Pacific increased by a "disappointing" 1.6 per cent, or by 25 million jobs, to a total of 1.588 billion jobs, compared to the strong economic growth rate of over 7 per cent. During the same period, the total unemployed edged up by half a million reaching 78 million, the fifth consecutive year-on-year increase since 1999. Those aged 15 to 24 are bearing the brunt of this employment deficit, accounting for a disproportionate 49.1 per cent of the region's unemployed although they make up only 20.8 per cent of the labour force. The ILO estimates that halving youth unemployment would increase GDP, by up to 2.5 per cent in East Asia, by up to 6.7 per cent in South Asia and up to 7.4 per cent in South-East Asia. (The Hindu 13/9/05)

They drift in desperation with little guarantee of a job (14)

SOLAPUR (MAHARASHTRA): : In village after village in Solapur district, the story is identical. Villagers desperately in need of employment rarely get work through the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS).

When they do, they are paid less than the stipulated amount. Hangirge village in Solapur's Sangola taluka is one such typical village. It was the site for many EGS works earlier this year. But villagers say many of the works are fraudulent and hardly used labour. Khanderao Landge from the village points to a large farm pond, which was dug earlier this year. "The pond does not harvest any rainwater as it is on a gradient and its construction is faulty. Only six workers were there and the bulk of the work was done by a tractor." The cost of the pond could be around Rs. 54,000 but instead of employing at least 50 people, six were used, he said. The pond, which should be at least 10 ft deep, is not to specifications. At other places, bunds along the fields have been done shoddily and often earth has been dumped over existing mounds in the name of generating work. Like most people who have worked on EGS works, Khanderao is convinced that the muster rolls need to be inspected as he suspects they are faked. "They use small notes on which people sign. I have never seen a real muster roll in my life," he said. (The Hindu 18/9/05)

Labour unrest growing in Haryana, warns CID (14)

Chandigarh, September 18: ALARMED BY the increased activity of labour unions after the Honda episode, Haryana's intelligence arm, the CID, is learnt to have warned of labour unrest in more than half-a-dozen units in Gur-gaon, Faridabad and Bahadurgarh. The industrial units where trouble is said to be brewing include Maruti Udyog Limited, Remsons Private Limited (both in Gurgaon), Escorts Limited, Whirlpool (both in Faridabad), O.K. Industries, United Steel Company and Malik Industries (all three in Bahadurgarh). All three towns border Delhi. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Hind Mazdoor Sabha and other labour organizations have grown active and are supporting restive workers, the agency has warned in a classified communication to the Labour Department and the state government. It has advised the authorities and the Labour Department to act immediately "A proactive policy on a case-to-case basis needs to be evolved to defuse the situation before it reaches alarming proportions," the note says. At Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India Limited, there is "uneasy peace" in the plant and the workers and union leaders, who had participated in the strike, are now showing "indiscipline and an attitude of arrogance towards the management". In the Suzuki-owned Maruti Udyog Limited, sacked union leader Mathew Ibrahim has been trying to regroup workers, especially those who were either dismissed or made to opt for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme in 2003, with the objective of their reinstatement. AITUC general secretary and CPIMP Gurudas Das-gupta is giving tacit support to him, the note claims. (Hindustan Times 19/9/05)

Rural job bill gets presidential assent (14)

New Delhi, Sept. 20: The legislation seeking to provide jobs in rural areas has received the presidential assent, paving the way for provision of at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a year to every household. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 will be applicable to the whole of India except Jammu and Kashmir, an official release said. It said that every state government shall, within six months from the date of commencement of the act, by notification, make a scheme for providing the employment and the minimum wage fixed by the state shall be considered as the wage rate applicable to that area. It also said that an applicant would be entitled to a daily unemployment allowance if not provided such employment within 15 days of receipt of application and the state government will bear the full cost of unemployment allowance. (Asian Age 21/9/05)

On ground, rural job law to roll later rather than sooner (14)

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 26: TOMORROW as the Prime Minister inaugurates the meeting of all state rural ministers on the Employment Guarantee Act, it's clear that the Centre isn't launching it in a hurry. It is likely to take another three months before the Centre is ready to notify it to set the ball rolling for the states to draw specific schemes under the Act in the 150 chosen districts. "The monitoring mechanism has to be so solid that there should be no scope for loopholes," said Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh admitting that the groundwork is delayed. "It will take time as no law or rule has been discussed to this extent with the states as this one. After all, the success of this scheme depends on the states," he said.

And it's the wide disparities in states' responses that are key to the delay. Consider these:

North East states are not prepared to contribute their mandatory 20 per cent share arguing that they have no money. Tamil Nadu says it's ready, has started deliberations with Panchayati Raj Institutions—the backbone of the scheme— but Jharkhand does not even have its PRIs in place.

Several states have said they do not have the basic district-level manpower— schemes require a pro-

gramme officer as well as technical experts or engineers to supervise jobs. So that states can recruit more personnel, the Centre is considering increasing the contingency fund for the states from the present 2% to 4% of the total outlay. No final decision yet. • To guard against corruption, a four-stage "work-specific social audit" is still in the works. Before the launch, states need to identify families to prepare muster rolls. Centre is also waiting for states' suggestions on the list of approved jobs under the scheme. (Indian Express 27/9/05)

Maharashtra in a fix over NREG Act (14)

New Delhi: The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has put Maharashtra in a "quandary", conceded minister Harshvardhan Patil, wanting to dovetail the act with the state's Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS). Maharashtra is the only state in the country implementing the EGS for last 33 years and spending Rs 2,800 crores on it per year. The state government has also suspended 112 officials on the charges of corrupt practices. But the NREG Act had brought some anomaly in the execution of the EGS. Mr Patil, who is responsible for the working of EGS, was in the capital on Tuesday to take part in the conference of rural development ministers attended by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Later, talking to reporters, he compared the EGS to NREG Act with a view to pointing out the difficulties of its implementation. "While the Maharashtra act guarantees employment almost round-the-year to every rural adult, the Central act provides for only 100 day employment to a rural household. We can start new jobs even if there are 25 persons needing work, but the Central act requires minimum 50 persons for the purpose," he said. The Maharashtra government has decided to make a presentation of its scheme to the Centre in the coming days with a view that this would help it to know the practical difficulties of its the implementation. Mr Patil has also invited rural development ministers, secretaries and the Union RDD minister to visit the EGS works in Maharashtra. (Asian Age 28/9/05)

More than 1,300 miners lost lives in mishaps: Collieries (14)

Ranchi : mine accidents occur on a regular basis and over the years hundreds of miners have lost their lives as the safety measures suggested by DGMS remain only on paper. If one goes through the history of mine accidents, a majority of them took place due to the indifferent attitude of the coal companies. The highest number of deaths have taken place due to illegal mining and inundation of mines resulting in watery grave of the miners. According to an estimate of coal companies, more than 1,300 miners have died over the years. In illegal mining, about 827 people lost their lives over the years. The death of 10 illegal miners in Rajrappa colliery of Central Coalfield Limited (CCL) on Thursday is just tip of the ice berg. And more than 500 miners lost their lives when the mine got inundated. The first biggest mine accident had taken place in 1912 when 23 miners lost their lives in Phuladit and colliery when water entered into the mine. The biggest ever mine accident in India took place in Chasnala in which 375 miners lost their lives when water entered from nearby abandoned mines. In June this year, 14 miners lost their lives in the Basgaraha mines of central Saunda project of CCL. In February 2001, 29 miners lost their lives in Bagdigi mines of Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL). In Jharkhand, three coal companies are operational besides Tata. The three companies are CCL, BCCL and Eastern Coalfield Limited (ECL). (Pioneer 1/10/05)

Industrial workers denied rights: AIDWA (14)

PONDICHERRY: : The Pondicherry unit of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) and the Coordination Committee of Working Women have expressed concern over the "denial" of welfare measures for industrial workers under the Labour law. In a joint statement here on Tuesday, AIDWA secretary K. Mahalakshmi and R. Geetha of the Coordination Committee said a number of industrial estates had come up in and around Pondicherry employing thousands of workers. However, the benefits for workers envisaged under the Labour laws had not been made available to them. Whenever the workers came under a common banner of the trade unions to assert the statutory guaranteed rights and privileges they faced retrenchment. When the aggrieved workers approached the Labour authorities no effective steps were taken to protect them. They said that there was an instance of an industry showing the door to a group of 30 women employees though they had put in about 24 years service. They called upon the Administration to intervene and relieve the workers' agony. (The Hindu 5/10/05)

Nine months salary pending for Panchayat secretaries (14)

GUNTUR: Salaries of Panchayat Secretaries and Additional Panchayat Secretaries working in Guntur district, are pending since the last nine months as the district authorities are putting a deaf ear to their

problems, said Consumer Care Centre president T. Venkataiah. Speaking to The Hindu here on Thursday, he said that the contract appointments of the employees' dependents were made in 2003 in place of employees who were declared medically unfit. Even though the Supreme Court in its judgment said that the services of the employees appointed on contract basis should be regularised after 280 days of service. The State Government had also issued a GO (No. 212), which stated that after 180 days, the regularisation should take place. Leave alone regularisation but even after the clear instructions, the Government was not paying the pending salaries of 35 employees since the last nine months and another 88 employees since the last six months. (The Hindu 7/10/05)

Right to strike: Now IT is between CM and CITU (14)

Kolkata : Centre For Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the labour arm of the ruling CPI(M) has put its foot down on the question of unionising the IT industry. Apparently the arm is ignorant of the fact that through this it will be harming the nascent information technology industry. The CITU leadership has threatened to bring within its glare the hitherto trouble-free IT sector, which has been growing peacefully and fast in isolation at the up-market intelligent city in Salt Lake. This act is seen as a counter offensive on Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee for "allowing untold miseries on the State's working class for the last couple of years" that has seen closure of a multitude of industrial sheds besides police crackdowns apparently at the instance of the Chief Minister who also heads the Police Department. Senior CITU leaders said they would "not only protect the traditional industry from exploitation but would also see what we can do for the exploited workers at the IT sector." The "revolt" comes after the State CPI(M) leadership including the Chief Minister and party Secretary and politburo member Anil Biswas went on record saying henceforward IT and ITes sector would be kept out of the ambit of any strike. The Chief Minister subsequently promised the IT top guns in a meeting that the Government would take all precautions and would not allow the strikers to disturb functioning of the IT sector in times to come. The latest reaction is an answer to the Chief Ministerial guarantee to the IT bigwigs, CITU insiders said. According to CITU All-India president MK Pandhe, excluding IT from the purview of strikes will not be tolerated as "it is one sector where exploitation is supreme... in most of the cases the staff have to work for 12 hours or more without any extra benefit". The leader asked the Centre to make laws to protect the rights of the IT workers. (Pioneer 11/10/05)

Do not brush aside workers' protest, says Prakash Karat (14)

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Friday ridiculed those who accused it of "political immorality for seeking to blackmail the Manmohan Singh Government while supporting it" and asked the Centre not to brush aside the import of the workers' protest across the country against the Government's economic policies. In an editorial in the latest issue of the CPI (M) official weekly, its general secretary Prakash Karat made it clear that no amount of "vilification" would deter the Left from standing "firmly" with the working class and other sections of the working people in the struggle for a better life. "The working people will rebuff all attempts to put restrictions on the right to protest and the right to strike. The dominating media is bordering on advocating authoritarian measures to suppress strikes in the name of national interest. The media is doing it to defend the interests of the big capital. It was dangerous for the democratic system," Mr. Karat said, justifying the September 29 general strike. Mr. Karat said it would be better for the ruling circles to understand the message conveyed through this protest action. He noted that what was common in the editorials and commentaries regarding the general strike were a strong and often vituperative attack on the CPI (M) and the Left. "It was expected that the corporate-owned media would disapprove of the workers' action and write the usual editorials about the irresponsibility of the trade unions and how the economy suffers as a result. What is new is the offensive mounted against the Left parties and the strident tone of the demand that such strikes be stopped." (The Hindu 15/10/05)

Daily wagers are not at par with regulars (14)

New Delhi, Oct. 23: The Supreme Court has held that persons employed on daily wages cannot be treated at par with employees in regular service of the state government and thus the doctrine of "equal pay for equal work" cannot be applicable to such persons or those employed on contract. The verdict came on a bunch of appeals against the Punjab and Haryana high court order which had directed the Haryana government that daily wage employees in be paid salary equal to their counterparts working on regular basis in Class IV category. Saying that "the principle of equal pay for equal work" has no mechanical application in every case, a bench comprising Justice S.N. Vari-ava, Justice A.R. Laksh-manan and Justice S.H. Kapadia said "Article 14 permits reasonable classification based on qualities of persons

recruited and grouped together and those left out." "The fact that the person has not gone through the process of recruitment may make a difference," it said. (Economic Times 24/10/05)

During notice period employees can take back resignation letter (14)

New Delhi : The Supreme Court has held that an employee can withdraw his resignation during the notice period and is entitled to consequential benefits from the company if he is not allowed to work. While giving this ruling the Court referred to several of its earlier verdicts by which it has been settled that an employee remains in service if he withdraws his resignation within the notice period and thus the relationship of an employer and employee did not come to an end. The judgement came on a petition by an employee who had challenged the Karnataka High Court verdict dismissing his plea that he was entitled to be in the service of the company with all benefits after he withdrew his resignation during the notice period as per the rules of the company. Setting aside the High Court verdict, a Bench comprising Justice BN Srikrishna and Justice CK Thakker directed the company to treat the employee in continuous service up to the age of superannuation and give him all benefits, including arrears of salary. "Having given anxious consideration to the facts and circumstances of the case and in the light of Service Rules and various decisions of this court to which our attention has been invited, we are of the view that the High Court was wrong in holding that it was open to the appellant to withdraw the resignation," Justice Thakker, writing the judgement for the Bench said. (Pioneer 24/10/05)

CPM opposes coal bill (14)

New Delhi, Oct. 23: The CPI(M) has decided to oppose the UPA-led Congress government's move to amend the coal law to allow commercial mining of coal in India. Its trade unions are opposed to the change. CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat said, "We are not in favour of passing the Coal Bill 2000 that is pending in Parliament." At present, the bill is pending with the Rajya Sabha. A group of ministers, headed by defence minister Pranab Mukherjee, is now looking into the various issues concerning the coal industry. The GoM has not taken any decision on whether to pursue the passage of the Coal Bill, in view of repeated threats of strike by the trade unions. Union minister of state for coal Dasari Narayan Rao recently convened a meeting of federations working in the coal industry, along with chiefs of all coal companies to discuss improvements in the production and productivity of coal mines so that national requirement of coal can be met indigenously. The trade unions in the coal industry feel the need to retain coal, given its core nature, in the public sector. The trade unions have indicated that they would bitterly oppose any move to privatise the coal industry. If the UPA-led Congress government decided to grant it infrastructure status, the coal workers will do everything to ensure adequate supply of coal to the country in the forthcoming period. The trade unions feel that that public sector coal industry has the potential to meet all national requirements for the next Plan period and demanded the withdrawal of pending bill in Parliament to repeal the Coal Mines Nationalisation Act to help privatise the coal mining industry. Trade unions' representatives pointed out that the coal industry has not been faring well due to mismanagement and bad planning. (Asian Age 14/10/05)

Uphold labour laws in IT sector: CPI(M) (14)

NEW DELHI: The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Tuesday continued to debate whether the Information Technology sector be included in the essential services while emphasising that there could be no dilution of labour laws in it. "Labour laws must be upheld in the IT sector. We are against any dilution of labour laws, party Polit Bureau member Sitaram Yechury and West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said after the conclusion of first session of the two-day Polit Bureau meeting that began here. The Polit Bureau started a discussion on the issue and it came in the wake of Mr. Bhattacharjee's statements favouring the inclusion of IT and IT-enabled services in the essential services category. He, however, also made it clear that labour laws should be implemented in these crucial sectors that need to have uninterrupted service. Another Polit Bureau member and CITU chief M.K. Pandhe said the central trade unions had written to the Labour Ministry about the need to implement labour laws in the IT sector, where the working conditions were like "a 19th century prison" and the employees working like "slaves". The issue was whether the sector should be treated at par with essential services such as water, power, milk and hospitals or treat as a moneymaking service. Later in the evening, party general secretary Prakash Karat told correspondents that a formal statement would be issued on Wednesday after conclusion of discussions. (The Hindu 26/10/05)

Social security: India, China to broaden cooperation (14)

NEW DELHI: India and China are to extend cooperation and broaden exchange in employment, vocational training and social security for another three years. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) will be signed between the two countries here on Tuesday to this effect. Chinese Vice-Minister on Labour and Social Security Wang Dongjin will sign on behalf of his country while Union Labour and Employment Secretary K.M. Sahani will do so on behalf of India. Recognising the importance of employment, vocational training and social security in national economic development, the two countries had earlier signed a MoU in this regard on September 26, 2000. Under it, the two countries decided to conduct cooperation in labour and social security legislations, measures and policies of employment and promotion, labour relations, policies on vocational training and social security. Mr. Dongjin, heading a seven-member delegation, arrived in New Delhi on Monday morning on a three-day visit to India. The team members visited the V.V. Giri National Institute and the National Vocational Training Institute located at Noida (Uttar Pradesh) immediately after their arrival. (The Hindu)

Workers go slow, scuttle Gurgaon violence probe (14)

Gurgaon : With the workers union failing to file an affidavit before the commission probing the July 25 clash between the Gurgaon Police and the Honda Motorcycle and Scooters Company workers, the probe is all set to be given a quiet burial. The Justice GC Garg Commission was appointed on August 4 by the Haryana Government after the outrage expressed by the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)-affiliated Honda Workers Union to look into the circumstances leading to the violent clashes between the workers and the police. The commission was also meant to inquire into the role of any extraneous factor in the incident and whether the force used by the police was justified or excessive. It would also probe whether any other means were available to the police for controlling the mob. The commission wound up its sittings on Thursday with the Honda Workers' Union failing to file an affidavit before the commission. Sources in the commission said that the proceedings of the enquiry hinged on the workers' affidavit to which the police and administrative officers would be asked to file a rejoinder. Washing his hands off the failure to file the affidavit, workers union president Suresh Gaur instead alleged that the Government did not exhibit any desire to facilitate the enquiry by the commission. On his part, AITUC district secretary Subhash Diwan said that the workers could not participate in the functioning of the commission as sittings were being held in Chandigarh. The commission had sent a reminder to the union on October 12 to file an affidavit under section 163 of the CrPC. The one-member commission formed to look into the case is headed by retired Punjab and Haryana High Court Judge, Justice GC Garg. The commission of enquiry was instituted following the demand made by Left-wing trade unions for action against police officials who liberally used the baton to contain a violent crowd of striking workers of Honda factory. (Pioneer 28/10/05)

Haryana to appoint separate labour commissioner for Gurgaon (14)

Gurgaon : Haryana Government seems to have learnt a lesson from the Honda factory incident. Soon, the industrial city of Gurgaon will have its own Additional Labour Commissioner (ALC) appointed to look after the nuisances of the workers section in the city. According to an official in the district labour department, "the city is speedily emerging as an Industrial hub on the forefronts of the country, the need of an ALC was demanded by both industrialists and workers since a very long time." The official said that, "The person nominated for the post would be an IAS rank officer. He will look after the best possible solution of the disputes and grievances between both employees and employers." The official said, "along with an ALC, the state government will appoint an Additional Deputy Labour Commissioner (DLC) for Industrial Township of IMT Manesar." It is believed that the multi-crore business of the BPO sector, situated in Gurgaon, will also carry out the activities under the guidelines laid by the Additional Labour Commissioner. Headquarter in Gurgaon, domain of the ALC will extend upto Faridabad, Rewari, Jhajjar and Sonapat. The labour unions of the city have welcomed the scheme positively. According to them, the appointment of a separate labour commissioner will help the workers to seek a timely and proper justice. Sources reveals that, several times in the past, the labour department has alarmed the state government to create such a post for the NCR region, but the state government has responded lately. According to Suresh Gaur, President, Honda Workers Union, "the appointment of ALC and an Additional DLC in the district will prove to be beneficial for the workers." "Earlier, the workers had to rush to Chandigarh to register their grievances with the department, but now they can avail the privilege of having an ALC office in the district," added further Mr Suresh. (Pioneer 3/11/05)

Biharis starved in Kerala (14)

Thiruvananthapuram: The deaths of two half-starved and malaria-afflicted workers from Bihar have brought to light the pitiable condition of migrant labourers in the state. They were among the contingent of labourers brought to the state capital by Punj Lloyd Company to work on road construction projects. They were reportedly drafted for the work by another agency. It has now been revealed that the labourers were literally living the life of indentured slaves. Forced to work for more than 12 hours a day, the mostly illiterate labourers were given little food and were being paid a pittance by the supervisors. After a gruelling day in the streets, they used to sleep under ramshackle tents put up in a sprawling ground in Aakulam in the city. They subsisted on weak gruel and drank impure water from the nearby canal. Unable to survive this punishing schedule, many of them fell sick last week and were admitted to the general hospital here. Two starving labourers, who had contracted malaria, died in the last two days. Ironically, all violations were happening in Thiruvananthapuram, where trade unions, especially of the left variety, react swiftly to problems of workers. State labour minister Babu Divakaran visited the labourers admitted in the Medical College Hospital on Wednesday and assured them help. They sought his help to go back to Bihar. Mr Divakaran told the media that he had asked officials to get details of all migrant labourers working in the state within 10 days. "We will take action on those who treated them in an inhuman manner", he said. Opposition leader and CPI(M) politburo member V.S. Achutanandan also visited the hospital and demanded stringent action on the company officials. Ironically, the influx of migrant labour into Kerala increased in the last one decade because of the perception that workers in the state were "militant" and uncooperative. Nowadays, Kerala is known as the "mini gulf" of migrant labourers, especially from Tamil Nadu and Bihar. (Asian Age 3/11/05)

Employers hail proposed labour laws (14)

NEW DELHI: The All-India Organisation of Employers (AIOE) has welcomed the proposed reforms in the labour policy and said the laws would help industry sustain the growth rate of 8-9 per cent for another five years. In a statement here on Wednesday, AIOE president O.P. Lohia appealed to Parliamentarians to achieve wider consensus on the proposals presented to the Parliamentary Standing Committee by the Union Labour Ministry to stimulate growth and employment generation in the country. The contract labour legislation, Mr. Lohia said, needed flexibility to allow industry to create job opportunities. The biggest beneficiary would be the textile sector, which after phasing out the multifibre agreement (MFA) may increase India's share of textile export from four to eight per cent by 2010, creating 12 million new jobs. However, the proposed changes allowing only peripheral jobs to be contracted out may have a marginal impact. For a fuller benefit, section 10 of the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970 should be deleted, he said. Mr. Lohia said chapter V-B of the Industrial Disputes Act 1947 had not served any purpose since its enactment. It had only added to a long list of sick industries. Moreover, the provisions should also provide full safeguards against any arbitrary and mala fide action of the industry. (The Hindu 3/11/05)

Workers' welfare act on Centre table (14)

New Delhi, Nov. 3: The National Advisory Council, headed by Sonia Gandhi, is working to fulfil a commitment to ensure social security for the unorganised sector. The UPA had said in its common minimum programme that it "is firmly committed to ensure the welfare and well-being of workers, particularly those in the unorganised sector who constitute 93 per cent of our workforce".

The NAC has submitted a note and its version of the Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Act, 2005, to the Centre, which are available on its website. It has recognised that only about 8 per cent workers get benefits under the Provident Fund Act and the Factories Act. About 92 per cent (over 30 crore) workers have insecure jobs and low incomes though they contribute over 60 per cent of the GDP. Such workers include the self-employed small and marginal farmers, artisans, street vendors, contract workers, etc., who have no bargaining power, no fixed income and no social security net. The NAC has also stressed that the bureaucracy has neither the manpower nor the know-how to reach the scattered crores of workers. In its draft bill, which it termed "enabling" legislation, the NAC has said its objectives are to: ■ Redefine the worker to include even those who have no fixed employer like self-employed workers, casual, contract, home-based workers etc.; ■ Identify each worker and give him/her a unique social security number and card; ■ Offer a variety of social security benefits like health insurance, maternity benefits and pension; ■ Ask the central government to underwrite a minimum amount of benefits and funds while simultaneously creating a structure that will engage civil society and semi-government outfits; ■ Encourage unorganised workers to organise themselves around the social security structure, "creating a voice and space for them". (Telegraph 4/11/05)

Kerala govt acts to end migrants' woes (14)

Thiruvananthapuram, November 3: FOLLOWING THE death of two migrant labourers from Bihar, the Kerala government on Thursday suspended all construction activities employing migrant workforce. It has announced a

series of steps to check the exploitation of workers by contractors hiring them. The plight of these migrant labourers came to light when ten of them were hospitalised after a malaria outbreak in Thiruvananthapuram last week. Two died later in the hospital. A labour contract firm, Sachin Enterprises, had hired them to work for a construction company, Punj Lloyd. Taking a serious note of this, the government has suspended Thiruvananthapuram city development works carried out by the leading construction firm and asked the police to arrest the agents who supplied the workforce to the firm. However, an official of the company claimed that these workers were ill when they arrived and enough medical care was provided to them. The government has convened a high-level meeting with construction company representatives to monitor the working conditions of these labourers. Next week onwards, there would be surprise checks in labour camps to get a first hand information about their wages, basic amenities and living conditions. "It has come to our notice that most of them are living in pitiable conditions. We will take strong action against the erring contractors," State Labour Minister Babu Divakaran said. There are an estimated two lakh migrant labours, mostly from Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa, in the state. (Hindustan Times 4/11/05)

Manmohan favours cess to fund unorganized labour (14)

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh has favoured the imposition of a cess, the proceeds of which would go towards building a social security fund for close to 37 crore unorganised sector workers in the country. The proposal initiated by the National Advisory Council (NAC) has been perceived as being favoured by Congress president Ms Sonia Gandhi. The Prime Minister is understood to have rooted for the cess route for unorganised workers social security, a key unfulfilled promise of the NCMP of the UPA government alongside the Rural Employment Guarantee Bill. Monitored by the PMO, the bill would, crucially, pave the way for further labour reforms in legislation like the IDA and the legislation related to contract labour, sources said. The proposal of imposing cess came up at a meeting last week at the PMO to discuss social security for unorganised workers who form close to 92% of the country's workforce of 400 million-odd. (Over Rs 28,000 crore is garnered for social security schemes annually but only for coverage to a minuscule percentage for the total workforce). Dr Singh's backing to the NAC suggestion could mean that the cess route will be used to beef up the fund in addition to contributory schemes proposed. Significantly, the NAC was silent on whether the proposed cess would be imposed as an addition to the income tax, as often done to handle natural disasters such as in the 2002 Gujarat earthquake, or as sector-specific cess like the one imposed on petrol and diesel for road construction. The Prime Minister, sources said, is in favour of kicking off the social security scheme in phases, first with full coverage for all eligible agricultural labourers including small and marginal farmers and landless farm labour. (Nearly 84% of the operational holdings of over 105.29 million officially recorded belong to small and marginal farmers and landless labourers form a substantial part of the entire unorganised sector). (Economic Times 5/11/05)

Unemployed Punjab teachers polish shoes (14)

Chandigarh : Unemployed elementary teachers in Punjab drew attention of people here on Monday to their plight when they took to shoe-polishing in the streets. Many young elementary teachers are without jobs in the State and the Government cannot recruit them because of financial crunch. The protesting teachers are members of the Punjab Unemployed Elementary Teachers Union (PUETEU) and have been on dharna in front of the Director of Public Instruction (DPI)'s office since Friday to press their demand. The boot-polishing members also clashed with the Chandigarh policemen near the Sector-17 Parade Ground when they were walking to the bus stand in a procession. Unemployed teachers had earlier on Saturday surrounded the Punjab Congress chief Shamsher Singh Dullu and State Finance Minister Surinder Singla in Bhatinda. PUETEU has decided not to allow any Punjab minister to shop at the Sector-17 market and plans to gherao Punjab ministers wherever they go in the State. "We will gherao the CM at Nangal tomorrow. We also plan to meet the Prime Minister when he is in Chandigarh," said PUETEU president Jaswinder Singh Sidhu. Next, PUETEU members plan to hit the city streets with begging bowls. "We are trying to sensitise people about our plight and the state of education in Punjab, where about 13,947 elementary teachers posts are lying vacant but 4,000 trained teachers are jobless. Only 2,000 are employed in the unsuitable contract system at a meagre salary of Rs 5,000 a month," Mr Sidhu added. PUETEU has demanded jobs for the 4,000 unemployed teachers, abolition of the contract system and implementation of regular jobs for the trained teachers. (Pioneer 8/11/05)

'Rajasthan Government repressing labourers' (14)

JAIPUR: The general secretary of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Gurudas Dasgupta, on Sunday charged the Rajasthan Government with taking repressive measures against labourers and violating the labour laws in collusion with capitalist forces. The State Government, he said, was encouraging retrenchment and lay-off of

workers. Mr. Dasgupta, who was here to address a workers' meeting in Sitapura industrial area, told reporters that the AITUC would formulate a strategy for launching an agitation against the "capitalist onslaught" and would register strong protest against the use of police to brutally suppress the formation of trade unions in industries. Mr. Dasgupta -- also a Communist Party of India (CPI) MP -- said the support extended by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in the State to industrialists was natural as the party's anti-working class credentials were well-known. The similar inclination was witnessed during the previous NDA regime led by the BJP in the Centre, he added. While calling upon the Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, to intervene and help sort out disputes between workers and management in several industrial units, Mr. Dasgupta said the workers' agitation would be planned on the lines of the movement in Gurgaon following the ruthless police action against labourers. The AITUC will be holding its 38th national convention in New Delhi from November 26 to 30 to discuss, among other issues, the impact of globalisation on the trade union movement. Mr. Dasgupta pointed out that about 10,000 labourers from Rajasthan attending the convention would expose the nexus between the BJP-led Government and industrialists. (The Hindu 14/11/05)

Pension Bill amendments unacceptable, says CITU (14)

NEW DELHI: The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has described as 'unacceptable' the proposals mooted by the Government in the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) Bill. In a statement CITU general secretary Chittabrata Majumdar said the United Progressive Alliance Government, in a bid to legislate the Bill in the winter session, has put up a few proposals for amendments in it. The amendments are only cosmetic. They, in no way, address the basic concerns of employees and the trade union. "The proposals only seek to incorporate a few proposals in the main report of the Standing Committee, which vetted the Bill; and the issues raised in the dissenting notes appended by the Members of Parliament from the Left have totally been ignored," the statement said. The proposal to limit foreign direct investment (FDI) and overseas investment are nothing but to push through opening up of the pension sector to FDI, a dissent note sent by the CITU said. The note specifically points to Section 20 (f) of the Bill that clearly rules out 'any implicit or explicit assurance of benefits except marked based guarantee mechanism' and stated: "This means the fate of the employees in their old age will be determined by the vagaries of the market." (The Hindu 23/11/05)

Social security for workers (14)

New Delhi, November 29: FOR THE first time, the Delhi government has planned to extend social security to construction workers in the city. However, ultimately this security would come at the cost of house buyers. Builders now will have to pay an additional one per cent cess on new properties. The Building and other Construction Act, which was formulated in 1996, came into force on Tuesday. It aims to provide social security to building workers and electronic registration of all such workers. All builders and contractors will have to pay a cess of one per cent of the building cost to the government. They would finally realise this money from the buyers of flats in buildings. The new cess will not be applicable to the sale and purchase of old houses. Government agencies, involved in construction, will also pay the amount to the Labour Welfare Board, which has been tasked with implementation of the scheme. Official sources said this fund would be used to provide up to Rs 1,000 to women workers for maternity benefits, Rs 150 per month as pension to workers beyond 60 years of age, a loan of up to Rs 50,000 for construction of houses and special allowance in case of a major disability. The scheme also provides for financial assistance for education of children of workers, loan of up to Rs 5,000 for purchase of tools, financial assistance of Rs 2,000 for marriage of two wards of the workers and a grant of Rs 15,000 to dependents of deceased workers. Complementing the workers for the hard work done in construction of big buildings in the Capital, chief minister Sheila Dikshit said they were forced to live without the basic amenities and security. (Hindustan Times 30/11/05)

Rich, poor, all states are in job guarantee net (14)

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 7: After several studies, reports and even lobbying by MPs and states, the Planning Commission is finally ready with the list of 200 districts where the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the UPA's showpiece legislation, will be implemented. The initial idea was to choose 200 "most backward" districts in the country but in its final form, inclusiveness was considered important and so every state has at least one district under the scheme. A master list of sorts was prepared by a task force of the Planning Commission headed by economist Rohini Nayyar. In this, districts were identified and ranked 1 to 447 (1 was the most backward) on three criteria: agricultural wages, output per agricultural worker, and SC/ST population. This list formed the core of the "underdeveloped areas of the country," and had districts largely concentrated in Central and Eastern parts of the country. Very few districts of southern and northern India fell in this. In fact, Punjab, Haryana and Kerala did not have any

district in the first 150 in this list. Neither did Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu or Karnataka. However, in the final list, there are 12 districts from Andhra, 12 from Maharashtra, six from Gujarat and six from Tamil Nadu. There is Chittur district in Andhra which is included but is 331 on the task force list or Karimnagar which is 374 on the list. There were many representations from MPs. We had to take care to include districts from all parts of the country," said Rural Development minister, Raghuvansh Prasad who sent a bundle of requests to the Planning Commission. The Prime Minister's Office took two months to finalise the list. The programme is expected to be launched coming January if there is no further delay in preparing rules and muster rolls. (Indian Express 8/12/05)

EPF rate fixed at 8.5%, trade unions frown and bear it (14)

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 7: The Central Board of Trustees of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation today decided to set the EPF rate for 2005-06 at 8.5%. This is 100 basis points lower than the 9.5% demanded by trade unions, 50 basis points higher than the 8% recommended by the CBT's Finance and Investment Committee. The Left parties' trade unions rejected Rao's decision, saying, "We take it as interim rate... Efforts will continue with the PM to retain it at 9.5 per cent." The 8.5% rate means that the EPFO will have to fill a gap of Rs 365.89 crore. Since there was no consensus among board members, they left the decision to chairman, Labour minister K Chandrashekharao. Said Rao: "There will be an extra requirement of Rs 370 crore but there will be no burden on the exchequer. The burden will be on the Labour Ministry." (Indian Express 8/12/05)

Unions demand legislation for unorganised sector (14)

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of trade union activists and workers from the unorganised sector assembled here on Thursday to demand enactment of a comprehensive legislation on labour rights. A memorandum was submitted at the Prime Minister's Office to highlight their demands. In a resolution adopted at the rally, the workers expressed resentment over the "inaction" of the United Progressive Alliance Government in taking steps to enact comprehensive legislation for the unorganised sector workers — a commitment under the national common minimum programme (NCMP). It was 18 months since the UPA Government had come to power but the Unorganised Sector Workers Bill could not be finalised, though the Government had lost no time in bringing several pieces of legislation for the benefit of employers such as the Pension Regulatory Bill and the bills proposed to amend labour laws, the resolution said. Such an 'anti-worker' approach would not be tolerated, they added. Those who addressed the rally included Chittabrata Majumdar, W.R. Varadarajan and M.K. Pandhe of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions who stressed upon the need for intensifying the countrywide struggle by unorganised sector workers. Basudev Acharia and Brinda Karat of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said they would raise the just demands of the workers in Parliament. (The Hindu 9/12/05)

Legislation sought to protect rights of unorganised workers (14)

NEW DELHI: The 40th session of the Indian Labour Conference (ILC) has called for expeditious enactment of a comprehensive legislation covering the social security aspect and the service conditions of unorganised sector workers. It said a tripartite working committee should be set up to prepare a final draft Bill for the purpose. The committee should examine all the four draft Bills, viz., one each prepared by the Union Labour and Employment Ministry and the National Advisory Council and two draft Bills forwarded by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector. It should also take into account the recommendations from all stakeholders. The conference that concluded here on Saturday said that all unorganised workers, including home-based, wage workers, migrant workers and self-employed workers, whose average monthly earnings did not exceed Rs. 6,500 a month, should be covered. It said that floor-level social security schemes such as life and accident cover, health insurance and maternity benefit should be funded by the Centre. The ILC said that administrative and infrastructure expenditure under the proposed legislation should also be borne by the Centre for the initial five years. It called for designing of social security schemes prior to introduction of the legislation. The other recommendations included setting up of tripartite social security boards at the Centre and in the States and the Union Territories to review the schemes under the legislation. To promote better industrial relations, the ILC approved the proposal to set up a Grievance Redressal Authority with certain changes. It suggested that every industry or establishment employing 50 or more workmen must have one or more grievance redressal committees comprising an equal number of representatives from the management and the workers. The size of the committee should not be less than two and a maximum of six members. These committees would in no

way affect the right of the workers to raise disputes under the Industrial Disputes Act. (The Hindu 11/12/05)

PIL to urge ban on Assam bandhs (14)

Guwahati, Dec. 22: The Guwahati high court on Thursday admitted a public interest litigation seeking a complete ban on any kind of bandhs in Assam. High court Chief Justice B. Sudhakar Reddy and Justice A. H.Saikia heard the petition and issued notices to the Assam government, Centre, All-Assam Students' Union, Asom Gana Parishad, BJP and 14 other respondents from the All-Bodo Students Union to Asom Sena. Mrinal Talukdar, Suchibrata Raychoudhury and Ataur Rahman have moved the PIL in which they pleaded that constant bandhs in Assam have crippled the economy of the state and its normal life and all sorts of bandh be declared illegal and unconstitutional according to the Supreme Court order. The petitioners have argued that altogether 63 bandhs were called by various organisations in 2004 alone. In the last seven days, there have been four bandhs in Assam while there is another state bandh on Saturday by some organisation. According to the petition, every day the state loses around Rs 41.14 crores for every state bandh. On the education front, the petition said that 70,00,000 students of Assam lose around 21,00,00,000 study hours every year because of these bandhs. The menace of bandhs was also felt in the Assam Assembly and most political parties, cutting across party lines, had denounced the bandh culture, which is crippling the economy of the state as a whole. The petitioners have also pleaded before the court to issue guidelines for the media in Assam to restrain reporting on bandhs to discourage this culture. It further said that bandhs violated the constitutional right of Article 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. The PIL pleaded that bandhs be declared illegal and unconstitutional and an order be issued to the private respondents not to give bandh calls. (Asian Age 23/12/05)

States told to prepare for national rural job scheme (14)

NEW DELHI: Union Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh has asked all the State Governments to make advance preparations on a massive scale for the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) Act. The Act is going to be implemented in 200 selected districts, Mr. Singh told State officials through video conference from here. As many as 150 districts are already covered under National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP), for which sufficient funds have been released. Recently, 50 districts have been added.

The Rural Development Ministry has conveyed the list of selected districts to the States for making necessary preparations. They have been asked to get the long-term perspective plan ready. A sum of Rs. 10 lakh for each district has been released for meeting the costs of the perspective plan. Under the scheme, printing of job orders, registers, and related work is to be taken up on a massive scale for which Rs. 25 lakh for each district has been provided. Besides, Rs. 5 crore a district has been released for guaranteed employment in about 50 districts. (The Hindu 28/12/05)