

## COALGATE SCAM IN INDIA

## Govt appeals for end to parliament chaos

Says loss incomprehensible as no mining done

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's government appealed yesterday to opposition parties to allow parliament to function as it denied accusations that it had lost billions of dollars by giving away coal fields to private companies.

Main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stuck to its stand that it will not allow parliament to function until Prime Minister Manmohan Singh accepts responsibility over the national auditor's report of presumptive revenue loss to the tune of 33.4 billion dollars in allocation of the mines and quits.

"We make a fervent appeal to the opposition to allow parliament to function," said Finance Minister P Chidambaram after the lawmakers ended a fourth day without discussing any legislative business yesterday.

India's parliament has been paralysed since the auditor criticised last week the government's decision to give away coal blocks since

2004 in a murky allocation process rather than selling them via a transparent auction.

It said companies given valuable resources had made windfall profits of 1.85 trillion rupees or \$33 billion, a part of which could have gone to the national exchequer.

Chidambaram strongly contested the auditor's "flawed" figure.

The "presumptive loss (estimated by the auditor) I deeply regret to say is so flawed", Chidambaram said, adding only one out of 57 coal blocks investigated by the auditor had actually been mined for coal.

"If coal is not mined, if coal remains buried in mother earth, where is the loss?" he asked.

Analysts too have questioned the figures, saying the companies would have had to spend billions of dollars to develop the coal mines meaning their profits would have been much lower than suggested by the auditor's calculations.



PHOTO: REUTERS  
The body of a driver is seen next to overturned trucks and a collapsed bridge in Harbin, Heilongjiang province yesterday. The ramp of a multimillion-dollar bridge in northeast China collapsed in the early morning, sending four trucks falling 30 meters to the ground, killing three people and injuring five, Xinhua News Agency reported.

SINGUR LAND ROW  
SC issues notice to Tata Motors

PTI, New Delhi

The Indian Supreme Court yesterday sought response of Tata Motors on a special leave petition filed by the West Bengal government challenging the quashing of the Singur Land Acquisition Act by the state high court.

A bench of justices H L Dattu and C K Prasad, however, said that the Calcutta high court's interim order which had stated that the state need not part with the land for two months to allow it file its appeal, would continue.

The West Bengal government had moved the apex court against the high court order, which had struck down the Singur Land Acquisition Act that allowed the state government to reclaim 400 acres of land given to Tata Motors.

In its appeal, the state government had said the high court has erred in quashing the Act.

The high court had on June 22 ruled that the legislation enacted by the West Bengal government to recover the land leased to Tata Motors in Singur for its Nano small car project was constitutionally invalid.

The Singur Land Rehabilitation and Development Act 2011 had sought to empower the state government to take back 400 acres of land given to Tata Motors for its car project.

The court, on an appeal by Tata Motors Ltd, had observed that the president's assent had not been taken for the Act and as such it was void and unconstitutional.

## SC relief for Indian FM in 2G case

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Supreme Court yesterday dismissed a petition seeking the investigation of Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram over his alleged role in the 2G telecom case.

Janata Party chief Subramanian Swamy, who had filed the petition seeking to make Chidambaram a co-accused in the case, said the judgment was not based on "fair arguments" and that he will ask for a review.

"I did not argue conspiracy. The judges have ruled on conspiracy, from what they read out," he told television channel CNN-IBN.

Chidambaram was finance minister when companies were awarded 2G telecom licences at rock-bottom prices. Former telecoms minister Andimuthu Raja and several company executives were arrested in connection with the case.

Swamy argued that Chidambaram should also be made a co-accused because "he caused national loss".

The government is estimated to have lost up to \$32 billion in revenue after the underpriced sale of telecom licences.

The court judgment comes as a relief to the Congress-led coalition government, which is facing the heat over the 'Coalgate' case, with opposition parties stalling parliament demanding the resignation of the prime minister over alleged corruption in the sale of coal concessions to private companies.

## US drone attacks kill 15 in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

US drone strikes targeting three militant compounds yesterday killed at least 15 people in Pakistan's restive tribal region near the Afghan border, security officials said.

The strikes in Tundar village in North Waziristan, known as a bastion of Taliban and al-Qaeda, came a day after Pakistan summoned a US diplomat to protest over drone attacks, calling them "unlawful".

Missile attacks from unmanned US aircraft in North Waziristan have now killed at least 30 people since the start of the Muslim festival of Eid on Saturday.

Pakistan has repeatedly criticised American drone attacks in its territory, calling them counter-productive, and a foreign ministry spokesman condemned the latest incident.

## ETHNIC UNREST IN MYANMAR

## President accuses politicians, monks for kindling hate

AFP, Yangon

Buddhist monks, politicians and other ethnic Rakhine figures are kindling hatred towards Muslim Rohingyas in an area plagued by sectarian violence, Myanmar's president has warned in a report seen by AFP yesterday.

In an unvarnished assessment of the role of Buddhists in unrest in Rakhine state, which has left scores dead on both sides and displaced tens of thousands of people, President Thein Sein also said ethnic Rakhine could not accept the Rohingyas as fellow citizens.

Decades of discrimination have left the Rohingyas stateless and Myanmar's government considers their 800,000-strong population as foreigners, while many citizens see them as illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh and view them with hostility.

"Political parties, some monks and some individuals are increasing the

ethnic hatred. They even approach and lobby both the domestic and overseas Rakhine community," Thein Sein said in a report sent to Myanmar's union parliament -- which combines the upper and lower houses -- on August 17.

"Rakhine people are continuously thinking to terrorise the Bengali Muslims living across the country," he said, using a term frequently used in Myanmar for Rohingyas.

Thein Sein also said ethnic Rakhine could not envisage sharing their land with people they consider foreigners, echoing comments he made in July calling for camps or deportation of Rohingyas.

Myanmar's authorities have faced heavy criticism from rights groups after clashes between Rohingyas and ethnic Rakhine, which according to government figures left 87 people dead.

In response the government on August 18 announced a new 27-

member investigating commission, including religious leaders, artists and former dissidents, to probe the causes of the violence and suggest ways forward.

New York-based Human Rights Watch has accused Myanmar forces of opening fire on Rohingyas during the June outbreak of unrest, as well as committing rape and standing by as rival mobs attacked each other.

China has pushed thousands of refugees from Myanmar's Kachin minority back across the border into a province wracked by fighting between government troops and ethnic guerrillas, the rebels said yesterday.

Around 2,000 Kachin refugees have returned from China's Yunnan province this week and languish in camps near the border between the two nations, La Nan of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) told AFP, adding more were expected to cross.



PHOTO: AFP  
Cars make their way through a road affected by a mud slide caused by heavy rain dumped by Typhoon Tembin in Pingtung County, Southern Taiwan yesterday. Typhoon Tembin swept across southern Taiwan, toppling trees and ripping off rooftops after thousands of people were evacuated to avoid a repeat of a deadly storm three years ago.

## Rains kill 27 in western India

AFP, Jaipur

Heavy rains over the past two days have killed at least 27 people and left thousands homeless in western Rajasthan state, officials said on Thursday.

"Twenty-seven persons have been killed in rain-related incidents. Maximum deaths have occurred in state capital Jaipur," an official of the state disaster management authority told AFP.

Torrential rains that began on Tuesday night have led to flooding in the normally arid state, throwing normal life out of gear.

Earth-moving machines and pumps have been deployed in rescue work.

The state's meteorological department said the capital city of Jaipur was experiencing its heaviest rains since 1981, causing flooding in low-lying neighbourhoods and slum areas.

## Moderate voices still risk isolation in Myanmar over Rohingya Issue

AFP, Yangon

A Myanmar blogger who was a poster boy for online resistance to the former junta has become the target of a backlash by social media users for speaking out against hatred aimed at Rohingyas Muslims.

The case of former political prisoner Nay Phone Latt, a rare moderate voice on recent fighting between Muslims and Buddhist Rakhine, underscores the level of anger sparked by the unrest which erupted in western Myanmar in June.

The 32-year-old has faced the ire of social networkers for publishing an article warning of "genocide" if anti-Muslim sentiment spreads around the Buddhist-majority nation.

"I try to be neutral in this case but most of the Facebook (users) criticise me for being neutral. They want me to be on the side of the Rakhine," he told AFP.

The blogger, who received interna-

tional awards for writing in the face of repression, was sentenced to two decades in prison in 2008 for his links to the "Saffron Revolution" monk-led protests against the junta the previous year.

Fellow blogger Nyi Lynn Seck, who has challenged one government official for posting controversial Facebook

comments on Rakhine violence, said anger was being stoked by misinformation.

"Some people are intentionally spreading fake news," he said.

Matthew Smith, a researcher at New York-based Human Rights Watch, said it was difficult for ordinary citizens to be objective because there was a widespread belief that all Rohingyas are "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh", including at the highest levels of government.

Tensions in Rakhine are related not

only to religion, but also to a flood of immigration from the Indian subcontinent during British colonial rule, which ended in 1948, said independent Myanmar analyst Richard Horsey.

Even Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has disappointed some campaigners by not offering stronger support to the country's estimated 800,000 Rohingyas, viewed by the United Nations as one of the world's most persecuted minorities.

But Aye Lwin, a Muslim community leader at the Islamic Centre of Myanmar in Yangon, said he was satisfied with Suu Kyi's call for even-handed distribution of aid, adding that any strong pronouncement that seemed to favour the Rohingyas would be a "fatal blow for her politically".

He hopes to send an inter-faith group to Rakhine state to reach out to some monks who he described as "hot-headed" and said had been supporting the unrest.

## Indian govt defends Internet blocking

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday defended itself against accusations of heavy-handed online censorship, saying it had been successful in blocking content blamed for fuelling ethnic tensions.

The government over the past week has ordered Internet service providers to block 309 webpages, images and links on sites including Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, news channel ABC of Australia and Qatar-based Al-Jazeera.

The orders were an effort to halt the spread of "hateful" material and rumours that Muslims planned to attack students and workers who have migrated from the northeast region to live in Bangalore and other southern cities.

"We have met with success. These pages were a threat to India's national security and we demanded their immediate deletion," Kuldeep Singh Dhatwalia, a spokesman for India's home ministry, told AFP. "Spreading rumours to encourage violence or cause tension will not be tolerated. The idea is not to restrict communication."

Photographs of clashes in Myanmar are thought to have been circulated on the Internet with fake captions claiming the scenes were from the northeastern Indian state of Assam, where 80 people have died in recent ethnic violence.

The government has blamed Internet activity for fanning fears that resulted in tens of thousands of migrants fleeing back to the northeast last week from Bangalore and elsewhere.

## Maldives snubs C'wealth vote deadline

AFP, Colombo

Maldivian President Mohamed Waheed, who faces accusations of seizing power in a military coup, yesterday rejected as "premature" the Commonwealth deadline to hold elections before the end of this year.

Waheed, who is on an official visit to Sri Lanka, said he was not against elections, but that the poll deadline set by the Commonwealth could not be met because of constitutional impediments.

Waheed was vice president to Mohamed Nasheed who stepped down in February after weeks of street protests capped by a police mutiny. Nasheed later said he was forced out in a military coup.

The new president said the earliest a fresh vote could be held was July next year.

## NEWS IN brief

## Greenpeace raids Arctic oil platform

AFP, Moscow

Six environmentalists yesterday boarded an Arctic oil platform of Russian energy group Gazprom to draw attention to the dangers of drilling in one of the world's last remaining pristine environments.

Greenpeace International said its team reached Gazprom's floating production base by launching inflatable speedboats from its Arctic Sunrise ship before sunrise and then climbing aboard using

## Berlusconi in the news again!

AFP, Rome

A German starlet known as "Queen Bee" for her organising role at Silvio Berlusconi's raunchy parties said in an interview yesterday that she is pregnant by the former Italian prime minister.

Berlusconi, 75, has not commented on the claim and Began declined to say what his reaction has been. She added however that Berlusconi was currently "very depressed" and was keen to get back to the political scene.

Berlusconi, who resigned in November 2011 but is still a member of parliament, is on trial for allegedly having sex with an underage prostitute while he was prime minister and abusing the powers of his

## Three killed in Baghdad blasts

AFP, Baghdad

Two explosions in the Sadr City neighbourhood of north Baghdad ahead of Friday prayers killed three people and wounded at least eight, security and medical officials said.

The twin blasts struck at around 12:30pm as worshippers were gathering for prayers on the Muslim day of rest, and came after the conclusion of

## Kyrgyz president disbands cabinet

AFP, Bishkek

Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev yesterday signed a decree formally disbanding the volatile Central Asian republic's government after the ruling coalition collapsed.

The president signed a decree, which came into immediate force, "to consider the Kyrgyz government to have resigned" due to the ruling coalition's loss of a parliamentary majority, his press