

Centre makes fresh bid to woo states on retail FDI

To Meet Trade, Farmer Bodies To Allay Fears

Sidhartha | TNN

New Delhi: The commerce & industry ministry has decided to make fresh efforts to get state governments on board on the issue of allowing foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail trading. In addition, commerce & industry minister Anand Sharma is also expected to meet trade and farmer bodies over the next few days in a bid to garner their support for the controversial move.

Officials said industry secretary P K Chaudhary is writing to state chief secretaries on last week's Cabinet decision and explaining the rationale behind the move that has turned into a political headache for the government with even Congress members and allies questioning the decision.

In fact, several of them have even accused the government of pushing ahead with the proposal without stakeholder consultation. The government has, however, refuted the charge and said the issue was discussed for more than 12 months.

Several states, including Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Gujarat and Bihar have made it clear that they will not permit global retail chains, who can now own up to 51% stake in Indian



A protester attacks a goods carrier during a bandh in Jamshedpur

joint ventures, to set up shop. As a result, more than half the 28 cities with over one million population would remain out of bounds to global giants. Chaudhary's letter to chief secretaries will be the second such attempt to reach out to state governments within a span of a week. On Sunday, Sharma had written to CMs and prominent political leaders explaining the rationale, safeguards and consultation process followed by the government before the Cabinet approved the proposal last week.

The letter to chief secretaries is expected to be an attempt to convince states to drop their opposition to the

move, something that Chaudhary sought to push during a meeting with journalists on Thursday. During the interaction, he made it clear that the government did not intend to go back on the move but also did not provide a timeframe on when the rules would be notified.

Asked if government will seek public comments before formulating the rules, he said there was no such plan.

"If my answer to you was yes, that means I am conceding that we will revisit the policy. No," he said. Sources also said there were attempts to meet farmer groups on Friday to get some support from them.

Clarify on safeguards for traders: Cong MP

Subodh Ghildiyal | TNN

New Delhi: Congress MP Jyoti Mirdha said the country needed to tread cautiously on FDI in retail sector, asking how the Centre would ensure that foreign retailers respected the conditions put in the policy to safeguard interests of domestic manufacturers.

Mirdha said the Centre should clarify how it would make foreign companies buy 30% goods from Indian small scale industries when it is reported that the move to restrict the purchase to domestic manufacturers could run afoul of WTO norms.

She said the clarification was crucial since it was one of the only two riders inserted to safeguard the interests of the domestic constituency.

As commerce minister Anand Sharma prepares to brief Congress members in Parliament on the contentious policy decision, the scepticism among MPs is spilling out with lots of questions. While Mirdha has not red flagged the policy like Sanjay Singh or demands of Pravin Aron, her loud thinking does suggest reservations. She said if reports of WTO violation are correct, it would have serious repercussions — enforce-



Congress MP Jyoti Mirdha

ing the norm would invite sanctions and relaxing it would facilitate dumping of Chinese or cheaper foreign goods in retail stores opened by multinationals.

Talking to TOI, the MP from Nagore (Rajasthan) said the safeguard for domestic jobs — mandating retailers to spend 50% investment in developing backend infrastructure — would entail a humungous job of monitoring.

"How will you regulate and monitor that a company spends the required money as desired on infrastructure. It will have to be monitored in perpetuity. And given the inter-state buying and selling by retailers, it will require monitoring at central level. It is a challenging task which requires a clear road-map," she said, seeking deterrent for violations.

"The upside of FDI is that consumers will get cheaper goods but we need to tread with caution with good monitoring and accountability because at stake is farm sector and retail which provides maximum employment," she argued.

With FDI coming, Mirdha said it was time to assess the gains of allowing FDI in agriculture when, in 2006, the government opened up everything from vegetables to horticulture to animal husbandry. "The idea then must have been that it would develop cold chains and infrastructure. Has it happened?" she asked.

Cong, govt not on same page on issue: BJP

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The BJP on Thursday tried to drive a wedge between the Congress party and the government in the background of lingering discontent over the decision to allow FDI in the retail sector and asked UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and party general secretary Rahul Gandhi to make their views public on the matter.

"Congress has not made its views clear on FDI in retail issue. That means there is a rift in Congress and between the ruling coalition and the government on the issue. Congress president Sonia Gandhi should make her views public on this issue," leader of opposition in Lok Sabha Sushma Swaraj told reporters.

She pointed out that at a recent Youth Congress func-

Sushma Swaraj pointed out that at a recent event, the PM and finance minister had defended the decision but Sonia and Rahul did not air their views on FDI in retail

tion, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and finance minister Pranab Mukherjee

had defended the decision to allow 51% FDI in multi-brand retail but Sonia and Rahul did not air their views on the issue.

"No senior leader of Congress, its party president or any of the general secretaries, has defended the FDI decision," Swaraj said.

When told that Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari had stated at a press conference that the party was fully

with the government, Swaraj said he was a "lightweight" and since this was a burning issue, a senior leader of the ruling party should clarify their stand.

Swaraj said the government appeared to have taken the decision without consulting sections of Congress and this had resulted in party MPs like Sanjay Singh and Praveen Aron speaking against FDI in retail.

Mamata mustn't stall rollout in other states: PM

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday is learnt to have told Trinamool representative Sudip Bandopadhyaya that Mamata Banerjee should not come in the way of those states which may wish to benefit from the entry of foreign giants like Walmart and Tesco. "Ours is a federal polity," the PM is said to have argued.

Congress sources were doubtful that the pitch would work with Banerjee. A vocal opponent of the decision, she has upped her ante too high. Besides, she also has to contend with her principal rival, the Left, which along with BJP leads the resistance to allowing foreign retailers. Disturbingly for government, Trinamool's sole representative in the Union Cabinet, railway minister Dinesh Trivedi who opposed the decision last week, did not attend the Cabinet meeting on Thursday.

Likewise, DMK, which reiterated its opposition through T R Baalu at the meeting with the PM, has to factor in the opposition from its principal foe, Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalitha. The AIADMK boss has emerged as a strident opponent of the decision to allow FDI in retail.

The "no immediate rollout" option is getting a close look as it is expected to help pacify the restive allies while

allowing the government to save face by saying that it has not rolled back the decision. To that extent, it is also the least unacceptable of the options before the PM. Although Singh seems to appreciate the problem in implementing the reforms-friendly measure, he is averse to the idea of course reversal as it will strengthen the perception of policy inaction.

Although government managers are planning to use the four-day break from Parliament to get DMK and TMC on board, they are increasingly convinced that the Centre may not be able to issue the notification required to operationalise the FDI decision.

The government plans to use the break till Wednesday to win over allies. The option of persuading them to walk out in a test of strength may not suffice for Congress.

The signs of getting their support remain dim since, sources said, DMK made it plain to the PM that key stakeholders in the retail debate — farmers, consumers and retailers — had to be sensitized to the decision and its implementation could not be abrupt.

SP and BSP have stayed strident in their opposition and RJD leader Raghuvansh Prasad Singh too said the party would not relent on the issue. The opposition from outside supporters of UPA has further squeezed the Centre's margin to manoeuvre.

No united response to traders' bandh

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: A nationwide bandh called by traders on Thursday against foreign direct investment in the retail sector, which has hobbled the winter session of parliament thanks to the Opposition's onslaught, did not elicit the same response from traders across the country, with some states reacting with ambivalence to the Confederation of All India Traders' call for strike and others responding with gusto.

The bandh was partial in Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, and Assam. In Opposition-ruled Gujarat and Bihar, too, the bandh was partial. However, in Punjab, Bengal, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, the strike was total. There were reports of sporadic violence in some cities.

Shopkeepers in many cities took out marches demanding a rollback of the government move. Traders' bodies said the decision will create lopsided conditions, tilted towards multinational companies that will hurt traders and consumers.

Traders across Maharashtra, including Mumbai, downed shutters. Federation of Associations of Maharashtra (FAM), apex body of 750 trade, transport and small-scale associations, claimed about 35 lakh traders in the state had joined the strike.

Although most political parties, including the Left, and trade unions in West Bengal supported the one-



A labourer in Navi Mumbai rests during the nationwide bandh against FDI in retail on Thursday

Attack on Walmart stores

Protesters participating in an anti-FDI stir clashed with the police and attacked a Bharti Walmart outlet in Kota, officials said. Over 15 people, including five policemen, were injured in the incident. Protesting against foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail sector, the mob tried to put locks on the entrance gate of the retail outlet and pelted stones at the policemen posted there. In Raipur, traders and BJP activists vandalized Walmart's wholesale store Best Price during the bandh. Police rushed to the spot and arrested city unit BJP chief Ashok Pandey and 80 others. AGENCIES

day strike, the ruling party, Trinamool Congress, was against the bandh. Almost 90% of the 20-lakh medium and small traders in the state joined the strike. Barring some neighbourhood shops, most stores in Kolkata remained shut.

Confederation of West Bengal Trade Associations (CWBTAA) spokesman Feroze H Ali said, "It will endanger the existence of unskilled and semi-skilled labour in small and medium enterprises. If FDI is allowed in retail sector, it will

displace the workforce leading to unemployment."

Wholesale markets in Bangalore were shut, but several retail stores, especially in the city's central business district, were open. The bandh was total in Chennai while in Tamil Nadu districts, including Coimbatore and Madurai, there was a mixed response. Shops were open in most of Hyderabad. Traders in Begum Bazar, a famous traditional market for retail shops, downed shutters and sat on a dharna.

In Kota, Rajasthan, bandh supporters trying to lock the Wal-Mart outlet clashed with the police. A protest march led by BJP

MLA Bhawani Singh Rajawat tried to barge into the high-security Wal-Mart store. Police beat up protesters injuring around 25 people. Rajawat threatened to set the outlet on fire if it continued to function.

Jaipur Vyapar Mahasangh president T C Agarwal said, "Those who doubted us must have got their answer. Not even a tea or paan shop was open." Rajasthan traders demanded the roll back of the decision to allow foreign retailers in the state.

The bandh was near total in Amritsar, Ludhiana, Sangrur, Barnala, Patiala and Phagwara. At Amritsar's Hall Gate BJP MP Navjot Singh Sidhubrnt effigies of FDI and the Congress party and demonstrated with his hands in chains.

Trade was hit in Uttar Pradesh as shopkeepers downed shutters. In Lucknow, there was a face-off between the police and Samajwadi Party (SP) workers who forced their way through barricades near Vidhan Bhawan, shouted anti-government slogans and burnt effigies of the Centre and a multinational retail chain.

In Jammu, the bandh was near-complete. Spokesperson of Jammu's Bharti Walmart Best Price outlet said, "Best Price stores are not front-end retail stores. They are wholesale cash-and-carry stores and not related to FDI in retail." The store was recently inaugurated by CM Omar Abdullah.

Gadkari's own chain remains open for biz

Nagpur: His party vehemently opposes FDI in retail but for many stores of the Purti Group, headed by BJP president Nitin Gadkari, it was business as usual for part of Thursday during a day-long shutdown to protest the government's move on FDI.

"Our outlets reopened after remaining closed for some time in the morning hours," said a Purti employee in Nagpur, Gadkari's hometown, speaking on condition that he not be identified.

Traders guilds in the city also appeared divided over the bandh call and internal rivalry among trade associations led to a mixed response, leaving many stores open day-long and others rolling up shutters in the second half of the day.

While wholesalers in Itwari and Kalamna areas, which also has farm produce market yard, remained closed for the day, retail bazaars like those in Sitabuldi and Sadar areas, dominated by small shops, remained open through the day.

Former president of Nag Vidarbha Chamber of Commerce Nilesh Suchak said the FDI law will not hamper retailers at grassroots level. Instead, middlemen like wholesalers and distributors will be wiped out. "This is why the strike was limited to the wholesale markets," said Suchak. The NVCC, an umbrella organization of 95 trade associations, preferred to keep the protest a low-key affair. President of Vidarbha Industries Association Praful Doshi said, "FDI has led to disruption of the local retail sector in countries like Thailand and it is likely to have similar affect in India." TNN

Bangalore real estate cashes in on villaments

Anshul Dhamija | TNN

Bangalore: Villaments is the new buzzword in Bangalore's real estate lexicon. A villament is where an apartment ends and a villa begins. It's a concept that's gaining popularity with those who want the luxury of a villa and yet crave the comfort and convenience an apartment affords.

"It's a marketing strategy where we offer the privacy of a villa and the facilities of an apartment," says Syed Beary, CMD, Bearys Group, a Bangalore-based real estate developer. While prices of villas may be out of reach for many, and the density of apartment units too claustrophobic for some, villaments will bridge the divide.

"There is a large section of people who aspire to own a villa but can't afford it. Here comes the concept of a villament, which offers them a villa lifestyle at affordable prices," says Syed Beary, CMD, Bearys Group, a Bangalore-based real estate developer. While prices of villas may be out of reach for many, and the density of apartment units too claustrophobic for some, villaments will bridge the divide.

Whitefield. "Each villament has an exclusive green space of upto 1,250 sqft, enabling you to create your own kitchen garden, zen garden or barbecue pit. There are just five homes in each tower with space for 3 cars in the basement," explains executive di-

rector Bhaskar TN. The company is building 150 villaments that would have four to eight units in each block, with the ground-floor units getting garden space, the middle floors enjoying a lot of balcony space, and the units on the top floor getting their own terrace space.

Habitat Ventures has just launched Habitat Crest Villaments in Bangalore's

VILLAS	APARTMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence and exclusivity; lifestyle statement; privacy; landed property; garden area; parking in front of the house; flexibility to accommodate specific needs of each family Higher cost; fewer neighbours; most have surface drive-around, posing a safety concern to residents; distant locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value and affordability; denser and more vibrant community; lower maintenance cost and effort; security; amenities like club house, pool, sports facilities Lack of privacy; limited or no outdoor/garden area; less flexibility for lifestyle; no proximal parking

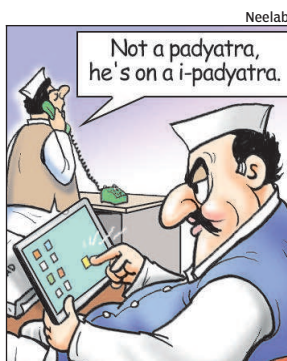
brancy of apartments, security and the price of a high-end apartment. Typically, a villament block would have four to eight units in each block, with the ground-floor units getting garden space, the middle floors enjoying a lot of balcony space, and the units on the top floor getting their own terrace space.

Syed Beary, CMD, Bearys Group, a Bangalore-based real estate developer, says the concept of villaments was pioneered by the group in its project, His Grace, in Mangalore, in 1993.

Paperless drive: MPs to get iPads

New Delhi: Parliament may be in a state of paralysis these days but it has not deterred the authorities from taking a digital leap of faith. Aiming to make its office paperless and the members tech-savvy, the Lok Sabha secretariat has sanctioned Rs 50,000 for each member to buy an iPad.

"We are encouraging MPs to use iPads. This would save a lot of paper," Lok Sabha secretary general TK Vishwanathan said. Officials said the MPs can buy either Apple iPads or Android-based Samsung Galaxy Tabs.



Following a decision to this effect by the Lok Sabha committee on paperless office, the lower house secretariat

has also held a familiarization drive for the MPs.

According to officials, they send daily notices, emails, questions and answers and details of House proceedings to the MPs in printed format. The paper used for such communication can be saved if the MPs start checking out this information in a digital format using iPads, they said.

"It is easier to retrieve and rearrange information in a digital format," said Vishwanathan. As part of the digital drive, the Lok Sabha secretariat has already re-

duced printing of many reports tabled in the House and has instead started uploading them on the official website.

"People can download this information and print it if they want," he said. The MPs too seem to be excited about the move. "I intend to buy an iPad," S S Ramasubbu, Congress MP from Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, said. To let the members make good use of iPads, the secretariat is also planning to make selective areas of the Lok Sabha wi-fi-enabled. IANS

'PM's visit must sow seeds of peace'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: In an emotional 'open' letter to fellow Indians, sporting icons from Manipur said the blockade-hit state was among India's most vibrant states and had produced some of the country's best sportspersons and nurtured topartists.

They said it was time the rest of India acted to support the people of Manipur through this crisis. "They need support from everyone to put an end to the sufferings and help them live a normal life," the letter said. The sports stars also hoped the Prime Minister's December 3 visit would "sow the seeds of peace and lay the foundation of a prosperous Manipur". The unusual appeal was organized



Schoolchildren walk past empty trucks parked waiting to be escorted by police to neighboring Assam to ferry supplies to Manipur

by the North East India Image Managers (NEIIM), described as a group of PR, media and brand management professionals hailing from the Northeast and working in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and elsewhere.

"We are sportspersons who love to play our sport and bring smiles to our people. We play as 'India' and we play for the pride of our countrymen... As much as we have enjoyed the privilege of representing you in various international platforms, today we are very saddened at what is repeatedly going on in our beloved state of Manipur," the letter said. Others who signed the letter were footballers Govind Singh, Sushil Singh, Lalrindika Ralte and Rocus Lamare.

Montek backs FDI in medical education

New Delhi: Plan panel deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia on Thursday pitched for opening up of the medical education sector to foreign investment to increase the supply of professionals, including doctors and nursing staff.

"My view is that opening up (medical education) to private (investment) sector is crucial... and wherever private investment is allowed, I have no problem with foreign investment," Ahluwalia said.

Ahluwalia's comment comes at a time when the government is facing flak over its decision to open up the multi-brand retail sector to foreign investment. The decision has resulted in a logjam in Parliament, which could not function for the eighth day in a row.

He further said, "If the private sector is going to set up 10,000 beds over the next few years, then 30 medical schools could be created."

According to Ahluwalia, the law prescribing that only trust or societies can run a medical school in the country is an obsolete idea in the present context. PTI