

**NATIONAL
COMMON
MINIMUM PROGRAMME
OF THE
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

May 2004

Introduction

The people of India have voted decisively in the 14th Lok Sabha elections for secular, progressive forces, for parties wedded to the welfare of farmers, agricultural labour, weavers, workers and weaker sections of society, for parties irrevocably committed to the daily well-being of the common man across the country.

In keeping with this mandate, the Congress, its pre-poll allies that include the RJD, DMK, NCP, PMK, TRS, JMM, LJP, MDMK, AIMIM, PDP, IUML, RPI (A), RPI (G) and KC(J) have come together to form a United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The UPA government supported by the Left Parties will have six basic principles for governance.

- to preserve, protect and promote social harmony and to enforce the law without fear or favour to deal with all obscurantist and fundamentalist elements who seek to disturb social amity and peace.
- to ensure that the economy grows at least 7-8% per year in a sustained manner over a decade and more and in a manner that generates employment so that each family is assured of a safe and viable livelihood.
- to enhance the welfare and well-being of farmers, farm labour and workers, particularly those in the unorganized sector and assure a secure future for their families in every respect.
- to fully empower women politically, educationally, economically and legally.

- to provide for full equality of opportunity, particularly in education and employment for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, OBCs and religious minorities.
- to unleash the creative energies of our entrepreneurs, businessmen, scientists, engineers and all other professionals and productive forces of society.

The UPA makes a solemn pledge to the people of our country: to provide a government that is corruption-free, transparent and accountable at all times, to provide an administration that is responsible and responsive at all times.

Employment

The UPA government will immediately enact a National Employment Guarantee Act. This will provide a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment to begin with on asset-creating public works programmes every year at minimum wages for at least one able-bodied person in every rural, urban poor and lower middle-class household. In the interim, a massive food-for-work programme will be started.

The UPA government will establish a National Commission to examine the problems facing enterprises in the unorganized, informal sector. The Commission will be asked to make appropriate recommendations to provide technical, marketing and credit support to these enterprises. A National Fund will be created for this purpose.

The UPA administration will revamp the functioning of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) and launch new programmes for the modernization of coir, handlooms, powerlooms, garments, rubber, cashew, handicrafts, food processing, sericulture, wool development, leather, pottery and other cottage industries.

The UPA government will give the highest investment, credit and technological priority to the continued growth of agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, floriculture, afforestation, dairying and agro-processing that will significantly add to the creation of new jobs.

Along with vastly expanding credit facilities for small-scale industry and self-employment, the UPA government will ensure that the services industry will be given all support to fulfill its true growth and employment potential. This includes software and all IT-enabled services, trade, distribution, transport, telecommunications, finance and tourism.

The textile industry will be enabled to meet new challenges imposed by the abolition of quotas under the international multi-fibre agreement in January 2005. Given its special ecological importance world-wide and within the country, the jute industry will receive a fresh impetus in all respects.

Agriculture

The UPA government will ensure that public investment in agricultural research and extension, rural infrastructure and irrigation is stepped up in a significant manner at the very earliest. Irrigation will receive the highest investment priority and all on-going projects will be completed according to a strict time schedule.

The rural cooperative credit system will be nursed back to health. The UPA government will ensure that the flow of rural credit is doubled in the next three years and that the coverage of small and marginal farmers by institutional lending is expanded substantially. The delivery system for rural credit will be reviewed. Immediate steps will be taken to ease the burden of debt and high interest rates on farm loans. Crop and livestock insurance schemes will be made more effective.

The UPA government will introduce a special programme for dryland farming in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country. Watershed and wasteland development programmes will be taken up on a massive scale. Water management in all its aspects, both for irrigation and drinking purposes, will receive urgent attention.

The UPA administration will ensure the fullest implementation of minimum wage laws for farm labour. Comprehensive protective legislation will be enacted for all agricultural workers. Revenue administration will be thoroughly modernized and clear land titles will be established.

The UPA government will bring forward a Constitutional Amendment to ensure the democratic, autonomous and professional functioning of cooperatives.

Controls that depress the incomes of farmers will be systematically removed. Farmers will be given greater say in the organizations that supply inputs to them.

The UPA government will ensure that adequate protection is provided to all farmers from imports, particularly when international prices fall sharply.

The UPA government will ensure that government agencies entrusted with the responsibility for procurement and marketing will pay special attention to farmers in poor and backward states and districts. Farmers all over the country will receive fair and remunerative prices. The terms of trade will be maintained in favour of agriculture.

The UPA government will take steps to ensure that dues to all farmers including sugarcane farmers will be cleared at the earliest.

Education, Health

The UPA government pledges to raise public spending in education to least 6% of GDP with at least half this amount being spent of primary and secondary sectors. This will be done in a phased manner,

The UPA government will introduce a cess on all central taxes to finance the commitment to universalize access to quality basic education. A National Commission on Education will be set up to allocate resources and monitor programmes.

The UPA government will take immediate steps to reverse the trend of communalization of education that had set in the past five years. It will also ensure that all institutions of higher learning and professional education retain their autonomy. The UPA will ensure that nobody is denied professional education because he or she is poor.

Academic excellence and professional competence will be the sole criteria for all appointments to bodies like the Indian Council for Historical Research, Indian Council for Social Science Research, University Grants Commission, National Council for Educational Research and Training, etc. Steps will be taken to remove the communalization of the school syllabus that has taken place in the past five years. A review committee of experts will be set up for this purpose.

A national cooked nutritious mid-day meal scheme funded mainly by the central government, will be introduced in primary and secondary schools. An appropriate mechanism for quality checks will also set up. The UPA will also universalize the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme to provide a functional anganwadi in every settlement and ensure full coverage for all children. The UPA government will fully back and support all NGO efforts in the area of primary education.

Proper infrastructure will be created in schools for NCC, NSS, physical development, sports and cultural development of all students.

The UPA government will raise public spending on health to at least 2-3% of GDP over the next five years with focus on primary health care. A national scheme for health insurance for poor families will be introduced. The UPA will step up public investment in programmes to control all communicable diseases and also provide leadership to the national AIDS control effort.

The UPA government will take all steps to ensure availability of life-savings drugs at reasonable prices. Special attention will be paid to the poorer sections in the matter of health care. The feasibility of reviving public sector units set up for the manufacture of critical bulk drugs will be re-examined so as to bring down and keep a check on prices of drugs.

Women and Children

The UPA government will take the lead to introduce legislation for one-third reservations for women in vidhan sabhas and in the Lok Sabha. Legislation on domestic violence and against gender discrimination will be enacted.

The UPA government will ensure that at least one-third of all funds flowing into panchayats will be earmarked for programmes for the development of women and children. Village women and their associations will be encouraged to assume responsibility for all development schemes relating to drinking water, sanitation, primary education, health and nutrition.

Complete legal equality for women in all spheres will be made a practical reality, especially by removing discriminatory legislation and by enacting new legislation that gives women, for instance, equal rights of ownership of assets like houses and land.

The UPA government will bring about a major expansion in schemes for micro-finance based on self-help groups, particularly in the backward and ecologically fragile areas of the country.

The UPA government is committed to replicating all over the country the success that some southern and other states have had in family planning. A sharply targeted population control programme will be launched in the 150-odd high-fertility districts. The UPA government recognizes that states that achieve success in family planning cannot be penalized.

The UPA government will protect the rights of children, strive for the elimination of child labour, ensure facilities for schooling and extend special care to the girl child.

Food and Nutrition Security

The UPA will work out, in the next three months, a comprehensive medium-term strategy for food and nutrition security. The objective will be to move towards universal food security over time, if found feasible.

The UPA government will strengthen the public distribution system (PDS) particularly in the poorest and backward blocks of the country and also involve women's and ex-servicemen's cooperatives in its management. Special schemes to reach foodgrains to the most destitute and infirm will be launched. Grain banks in chronically food-scarce areas will be established. Antyodaya cards for all households at risk of hunger will be introduced.

The UPA government will bring about major improvements in the functioning of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to control inefficiencies that increase the food subsidy burden.

Nutrition programmes, particularly for the girl child will be expanded on a significant scale.

Panchayati Raj

The UPA government will ensure that all funds given to states for implementation of poverty alleviation and rural development schemes by Panchayats are neither delayed nor diverted. Monitoring will be strict. In addition, after consultations with states, the UPA government will consider crediting elected Panchayats with such funds directly.

Devolution of funds will be accompanied by similar devolution of functions and functionaries as well. Regular elections to panchayat bodies will be ensured and the amended Act in respect of the Fifth and Sixth Schedule Areas will be implemented.

The UPA government will ensure that the Gram Sabha is empowered to emerge as the foundation of panchayati raj.

Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes

The UPA will urge the states to make legislation for conferring ownership rights in respect of minor forest produce, including tendu patta, on all those people from the weaker sections who work in the forests.

All reservation quotas, including those relating to promotions, will be fulfilled in a time-bound manner. To codify all reservations, a Reservation Act will be enacted.

The UPA government will launch a comprehensive national programme for minor irrigation of all lands owned by dalits and adivasis. Landless families will be endowed with land through implementation of land ceiling and land redistribution legislation. No reversal of ceilings legislation will be permitted.

The UPA administration will take all measures to reconcile the objectives of economic growth and environmental conservation, particularly as far as tribal communities dependent on forests are concerned.

The UPA is concerned with the growth of extremist violence and other forms of terrorist activity in different states. This is not merely a law-and-order problem, but a far deeper socio-economic issue which will be addressed more meaningfully than has been the case so far. False encounters will not be permitted.

The UPA government will immediately review the overall strategy and programmes for the development of tribal areas to plug loopholes and to work out more viable livelihood strategies. In addition, more effective systems of relief and rehabilitation will be put in place for tribal and other groups displaced by development projects. Tribal people alienated from land will be rehabilitated.

The UPA government is very sensitive to the issue of affirmative action, including reservations, in the private sector. It will immediately initiate a national dialogue with all political parties, industry and other organizations to see how best the private sector can fulfill the aspirations of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe youth.

Eviction of tribal communities and other forest-dwelling communities from forest areas will be discontinued. Cooperation of these communities will be sought for protecting forests and for undertaking social afforestation. The rights of tribal communities over mineral resources, water sources, etc as laid down by law will be fully safeguarded.

Social Harmony, Welfare of Minorities

The UPA is committed to the implementation of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1992. On Ayodhya, it will await the verdict of the courts, while encouraging negotiations between parties to the dispute for an amicable settlement which must, in turn, receive legal sanction.

The UPA government will enact a model comprehensive law to deal with communal violence and encourage each state to adopt that law to generate faith and confidence in minority communities.

The UPA government will amend the Constitution to establish a Commission for Minority Educational Institutions that will provide direct affiliation for minority professional institutions to central universities.

The UPA will promote modern and technical education among all minority communities. Social and economic empowerment of minorities through more systematic attention to education and employment will be a priority concern for the UPA.

The UPA will establish a National Commission to see how best the welfare of socially and economically backward sections among religious and linguistic minorities, including reservations in education and employment, is enhanced. The Commission will be given six months to submit its report.

Adequate funds will be provided to the National Minorities Development Corporation to ensure its effective functioning. The UPA government will examine the question of providing Constitutional status to the Minorities Commission and will also strive for recognition and promotion of Urdu language under Article 345 and 347 of the Constitution.

The National Integration Council will be restructured and revived so as to fulfill its original objectives. It will meet at least twice a year.

Infrastructure

The UPA attaches the highest priority to the development and expansion of physical infrastructure like roads, highways, ports, power, railways, water supply, sewage treatment and sanitation. Public investment in infrastructure will be enhanced, even as the role of the private sector is expanded. Subsidies will be made explicit and provided through the budget.

The review of the Electricity Act, 2003 will be undertaken in view of the concern expressed by a number of states. The mandatory date of June 10, 2004 for unbundling and replacing the state electricity boards will be extended. The UPA government also reiterates its commitment to an increased role for private generation of power and more importantly power distribution.

Railways constitute the core of our infrastructure. Public investment for its modernization, track renewal and safety will be substantially increased. Railways reforms will be pursued.

The UPA government commits itself to a comprehensive programme of urban renewal and to a massive expansion of social housing in towns and cities, paying particular attention to the needs of slum dwellers. Housing for the weaker sections in rural areas will be expanded on a large scale. Forced eviction and demolition of slums will be stopped and while undertaking urban renewal, care will be taken to see that the urban and semi-urban poor are provided housing near their place of occupation.

The UPA will pay special attention to augmenting and modernizing rural infrastructure consisting of roads, irrigation, electrification, cold-chain and marketing outlets. All existing irrigation projects will be completed with three to four years. Household electrification will be completed in five years.

Water Resources

The UPA government will make a comprehensive assessment of the feasibility of linking the rivers of the country starting with the south-bound rivers. This assessment will be done in a fully consultative manner. It will also explore the feasibility of linking sub-basins of rivers in states like Bihar. The UPA will take all steps to ensure that long-pending inter-state disputes on rivers and water-sharing like the Cauvery Waters dispute are settled amicably at the earliest keeping in mind the interests of all parties to the dispute.

To put an end to the acute drinking water shortage in cities, especially in southern states, desalination plants will be installed all along the Coromandel Coast starting with Chennai. Special problems of habitations in hilly terrains will be addressed immediately.

Providing drinking water to all sections in urban and rural areas and augmenting availability of drinking water sources is an issue of the topmost priority. Harvesting rain water, desilting existing ponds and other innovative mechanisms will be adopted.

Regional Development, Centre-State Relations

The UPA government is committed to redressing growing regional imbalances both among states as well as within states, through fiscal, administrative, investment and other means. It is a matter of concern that regional imbalances have been accentuated by not just historical neglect but also by distortions in Plan allocations and central government assistance. Even in the Tenth Five Year Plan, states like Bihar, Assam and UP have received per capita allocations that are much below the national average. The UPA government will consider the creation of a Backward States Grant Fund that will be used to create productive assets in these states. The central government will also take proactive measures to speed up the industrialization of the eastern and northeastern region.

A structured and transparent approach to alleviate the burden of debt on states will be adopted at the earliest, so as to enable them to increase social sector investments. Interest rates on loans to states will be reduced and the share of states in the single, divisible pool of taxes enhanced.

All non-statutory resource transfers from the central government will be weighted in favour of poor and backward states but with performance parameters as well. A special programme for social and physical infrastructure development in the poorest and most backward districts of the country will be taken up on a priority basis.

The UPA government will take special measures to ensure that regions of India like in the east where the credit:deposit ratio is lagging, is improved substantially.

The UPA government will review the issue of payment of royalties to states in the area of minerals.

From time to time, previous governments have announced special economic packages as, for example, for the northeast, for Bihar and for J&K. For Bihar, Shri Rajiv Gandhi had announced a special development package in 1989 and subsequently another package was announced at the time of its division in 1999 to make up for the loss of revenue. These packages will be implemented expeditiously.

The UPA government will make the National Development Council (NDC) a more effective instrument of cooperative federalism. The NDC will meet at least twice a year and in different states. Immediately, the NDC will take up the issue of the financial health of states and arrive at a national consensus on specific steps to be taken in this regard. The Inter-State Council will also be activated. All centrally-sponsored schemes except in national priority areas like family planning will be transferred to states.

The UPA government will consider the demand for the formation of a Telangana state at an appropriate time after due consultations and consensus.

The Sarkaria Commission had last looked at the issue of Centre-State relations over two decades ago. The UPA government will set up a new Commission for this purpose keeping in view the sea-changes that have taken place in the polity and economy of India since then.

Long-pending schemes in specific states that have national significance, like the Sethu Samuthiram project, flood control and drainage in North Bihar (that requires cooperation with Nepal as well) and Prevention of Erosion in Padma-Ganga and Bhagirathi flood control in West Bengal will be completed expeditiously. A Flood-prone Area Development Programme will be started and the central government will fully support flood control works in inter-state and international rivers. All existing schemes for drought-prone area development will be reviewed and a single major national programme launched.

Jammu and Kashmir, Northeast

The UPA government is pledged to respecting the letter and spirit of Article 370 of the Constitution that accords a special status to J&K. Dialogue with all groups and with different shades of opinion in J&K will be pursued on a sustained basis, in consultation with the democratically-elected state government. The healing touch policy pursued by the state government will be fully supported and an economic and humanitarian thrust provided to it. The state will be given every assistance to rebuild its infrastructure quickly. New efforts will be launched to bring investments in areas like power, tourism, handicrafts and sericulture.

The UPA government is determined to tackle terrorism, militancy and insurgency in the northeast as a matter of urgent national priority. All northeastern states will be given special assistance to upgrade and expand infrastructure. The Northeastern Council will be strengthened and given adequate professional support. The territorial integrity of existing states will be maintained.

Administrative Reforms

The UPA will set up an Administrative Reforms Commission to prepare a detailed blueprint for revamping the public administration system. E-governance will be promoted on a massive scale. The Right to Information Act will be made more progressive, participatory and meaningful. The Lok Pal Bill will be enacted into law.

The UPA government will take the leadership role to drastically cut delays in High Courts and lower levels of the judiciary. Legal aid services will be expanded. Judicial reforms will be given a fresh momentum.

As part of its commitment to electoral reforms, the UPA will initiate steps to introduce state funding of elections at the earliest.

Industry

The UPA will take all necessary steps to revive industrial growth and put it on a robust footing, through a range of policies including deregulation, where necessary. Incentives to boost private investment will be introduced. FDI will continue to be encouraged and actively sought particularly in areas of infrastructure, high-technology and exports and where local assets and employment are created on a significant scale. The country needs and can easily absorb at least two to three times the present level of FDI inflows. Indian industry will be given every support to become productive and competitive. All regulatory institutions will be strengthened to ensure that competition is free and fair. These institutions will be run professionally.

The UPA government will set up a National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council to provide a continuing forum for policy dialogue to energise and sustain the growth of manufacturing industry like food processing, textiles and garments, engineering, consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, capital goods, leather, and IT hardware.

Household and artisanal manufacturing will be given greater technological, investment and marketing support. In the past few years, the most employment-intensive segment of small-scale industry (SSI) has suffered extensively. A major promotional package for the SSI sector will be announced soon. It will be freed from the Inspector Raj and given full credit, technological and marketing support. Infrastructure upgradation in major industrial clusters will receive urgent attention.

Competition in the financial sector will be expanded. Public sector banks will be given full managerial autonomy. Interest rates will provide incentives both to investors and savers, particularly pensioners and senior citizens. The UPA government will never take decisions on the Employers Provident Fund (EPF) without consultations with and approval of the EPF Board. Regulation of urban cooperative banks in particular and of banks in general will be made more effective. LIC and GIC will continue to be in the public sector and will continue to play their social role. In addition, the social obligations imposed by regulatory bodies on private banks and private insurance companies will be monitored and enforced strictly.

Labour

The UPA government is firmly committed to ensure the welfare and well-being of all workers, particularly those in the unorganized sector who constitute 93% of our workforce. Social security, health insurance and other schemes for such workers like weavers, handloom workers, fishermen and fisherwomen, toddy tappers, leather workers, plantation labour, beedi workers, etc will be expanded.

The UPA rejects the idea of automatic hire and fire. It recognizes that some changes in labour laws may be required but such changes must fully protect the interests of workers and families and must take place after full consultation with trade unions. The UPA will pursue a dialogue with industry and trade unions on this issue before coming up with specific proposals. However, labour laws other than the Industrial Disputes Act that create an Inspector Raj will be re-examined and procedures harmonized and streamlined.

The UPA government firmly believes that labour-management relations in our country must be marked by consultations, cooperation and consensus, not confrontation. Tripartite consultations with trade unions and industry on all proposals concerning them will be actively pursued. Rights and benefits earned by workers, including the right to strike according to law, will not be taken away or curtailed.

Public sector

The UPA government is committed to a strong and effective public sector whose social objectives are met by its commercial functioning. But for this, there is need for selectivity and a strategic focus. The UPA is pledged to devolve full managerial and commercial autonomy to successful, profit-making companies operating in a competitive environment. Generally profit-making companies will not be privatized.

All privatizations will be considered on a transparent and consultative case-by-case basis. The UPA will retain existing “navaratna” companies in the public sector while these companies raise resources from the capital market. While every effort will be made to modernize and restructure sick public sector companies and revive sick industry, chronically loss-making companies will either be sold-off, or closed, after all workers have got their legitimate dues and compensation. The UPA will induct private industry to turn-around companies that have potential for revival.

The UPA government believes that privatization should increase competition, not decrease it. It will not support the emergence of any monopoly that only restrict competition. It also believes that there must be a direct link between privatization and social needs---like, for example, the use of privatization revenues for designated social sector schemes. Public sector companies and nationalized banks will be encouraged to enter the capital market to raise resources and offer new investment avenues to retail investors.

Fiscal Policy

The UPA government commits itself to eliminating the revenue deficit of the centre by 2009, so as to release more resources for investments in social and physical infrastructure. All subsidies will be targeted sharply at the poor and the truly needy like small and marginal farmers, farm labour and the urban poor. A detailed roadmap for accomplishing this will be unveiled in Parliament within 90 days. The UPA government will not cut deficits by reducing or curtailing growth of investment and development outlays.

The UPA government is pledged to the early introduction of VAT after all the necessary technical and administrative homework has been completed, particularly on issues like the integration of service sector taxation and compensation to states. It will initiate measures to increase the tax: GDP ratio by undertaking major tax reforms that expand the base of taxpayers, increase tax compliance and make the tax administration more efficient. Tax rates will be stable and conducive to growth, compliance and investment. Special schemes to unearth black money and assets will be introduced.

The UPA government will take effective and strong measures to control the price hike of essential commodities. Provisions to deal with speculators, hoarders and black- marketeers under the Essential Commodities Act will not be diluted in any way.

Capital Markets

The UPA government is deeply committed, through tax and other policies, to the orderly development and functioning of capital markets that reflect the true fundamentals of the economy. Financial markets will be deepened. FIIs will continue to be encouraged while the vulnerability of the financial system to the flow of speculative capital will be reduced. Misuse of double taxation agreements will be stopped. Interests of small investors will be protected and they will be given new avenues for safe investment of their savings. SEBI will be further strengthened. Strictest action will be taken against market manipulators and those who try to deliberately engineer market panic.

Economic Reforms

The UPA reiterates its abiding commitment to economic reforms with a human face, that stimulates growth, investment and employment. Further reforms are needed and will be carried out in agriculture, industry and services. The UPA's economic reforms will be oriented primarily to spreading and deepening rural prosperity, to significantly improving the quality of public systems and delivery of public services, to bringing about a visible and tangible difference in the quality of life of ordinary citizens of our country.

Defence, Internal Security

The UPA government will ensure that all delays in the modernization of the armed forces are eliminated and that all funds earmarked for modernization are spent fully at the earliest.

The UPA will set up a new Department of Ex-Servicemens' Welfare in the Ministry of Defence. The long pending issue of one-rank, one-pension will be re-examined.

The UPA government will make the National Security Council a professional and effective institution.

The UPA government is committed to maintaining a credible nuclear weapons programme while at the same time it will evolve demonstrable and verifiable confidence-building measures with its nuclear neighbours. It will take a leadership role in promoting universal, nuclear disarmament and working for a nuclear weapons-free world.

The UPA has been concerned with the manner in which POTA has been grossly misused in the past two years. There will be no compromise in the fight against terrorism. But given the abuse of POTA that has taken place, the UPA government will repeal it, while existing laws are enforced strictly.

The UPA government will take the strictest possible action, without fear or favour, against all those individuals and organizations who spread social discord, disturb social amity, propagate religious bigotry and communal hatred. The law of the land will be enforced effectively.

Science and Technology

The UPA government will follow policies and introduce programmes that strengthen India's vast science and technology infrastructure. Science and technology development and application missions will be launched in key areas, covering both global leadership and local transformation. The UPA government will mobilize the skills and expertise of Indian scientists, technologists and other professionals working abroad for institution-building and other projects in the country.

Energy Security

The UPA government will immediately put in place policies to enhance the country's energy security particularly in the area of oil. Overseas investments in the hydrocarbon industry will be actively encouraged. An integrated energy policy linked with sustainable development will be put in place.

Foreign Policy, International Organisations

The UPA government will pursue an independent foreign policy keeping in mind its past traditions. This policy will seek to promote multi-polarity in world relations and oppose all attempts at unilateralism.

The UPA government will give the highest priority to building closer political, economic and other ties with its neighbours in South Asia and to strengthening SAARC. Particular attention will be paid to regional projects in the area of water resources, power and ecological conservation. Dialogue with Pakistan on all issues will be pursued systematically and on a sustained basis. The UPA will support peace talks in Sri Lanka that fulfill the legitimate aspirations of Tamils and religious minorities within the territorial integrity and solidarity of Sri Lanka. Outstanding issues with Bangladesh will be resolved. Intensive dialogue will be initiated with Nepal for developing water resources to mutual advantage.

Trade and investment with China will be expanded further and talks on the border issue pursued seriously. Relationships with East Asian countries will be intensified. Traditional ties with West Asia will be given a fresh thrust. The UPA government reiterates India's decades-old commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people for a homeland of their own. Steps will be taken to withdraw Indian mercenaries from Iraq while further recruitment for this purpose will be banned.

Even as it pursues closer engagement and relations with the USA, the UPA government will maintain the independence of India's foreign policy position on all regional and global issues. The UPA is committed to deepening ties with Russia and Europe as well.

In keeping with the stance adopted by the late Shri Murasoli Maran at Doha, the UPA government will fully protect the national interest, particularly of farmers, in all WTO negotiations. Commitments made earlier will be adhered to, even as efforts are mounted to ensure that all agreements reflect our concerns fully particularly in the area of intellectual property and agriculture. The UPA government will use the flexibility afforded in existing WTO agreements to fully protect Indian agriculture and industry. The UPA government will play a proactive role in strengthening the emerging solidarity of developing countries in the shape of G-20 in the WTO.

Official Language

The UPA government will set up a committee to examine the question of declaring all languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution as official languages. In addition, Tamil will be declared as a classical language.

A Final Word

This is a common minimum programme (CMP) for the UPA government. It is, by no means, a comprehensive agenda. It is a starting point that highlights the main priorities, policies and programmes. The UPA is committed to the implementation of the CMP. This CMP is the foundation for another CMP—collective maximum performance.