

Publication: The Times Of India Mumbai; Date: Feb 14, 2007; Section: Times Nation; Page: 17



## 'Steps to curb price rise have failed'

### Central Minister Says This Is 'Worrisome' And Has Emerged As A 'Minus Point' For UPA

#### TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Rising prices of commodities and vegetables and the pointed manner in which opposition parties have made use of popular discontent over price rise to target the Congress during electioneering in Punjab and Uttarakhand has pushed up levels of unease within the ruling UPA.

Union minister for rural development Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said that measures to contain inflation had failed and the situation had become "worrisome". He said that this had become a "minus point" for UPA and "this is unfortunate".

The minister, who belongs to RJD, has spoken publicly on what many in government have been grumbling about in private. The rise in prices of food items like dals, wheat, pulses, sugar, vegetables and fruit have come in handy for BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal to target the Congress in Punjab.

The Akalis have laid considerable emphasis on the Congress government's "inability" to keep prices down and this, along with corruption, has been their talking point. SAD has felt that these issues are potent enough and has steered cleared of any form of religious appeals. In Uttarakhand, too, BJP has attacked the N D Tiwari government for its failure of keep a check on prices. BJP managers feel that the Congress can be hit hard on counts of both administrative ineptitude and corruption fuelling price rise. The opposition believes that this will yield it substantial benefits at the hustings.

Even in Delhi, BJP has zeroed in on price rise as the central campaign issue for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi elections due next month. Anger of a section of the population over demolitions and sealings could provide a handle to BJP, but the party feels that besides these issues, price rise affects the largest section of Delhi's citizens.

In Congress, too, there are worries over inflation denting the party's prospects. But while the party is mounting pressure on government to take some demonstrable measures to curb inflation, opinion is divided on what can exactly be done. Some steps like easing controls and duties on imports have been taken, but the government is not very clear whether exports should be frozen. With onion being sold at Rs 26/kg in the markets, the government does not enjoy much leeway as public anger has begun to reflect itself as it did in the Mumbai corporation polls where price rise was an important factor besides other like the July 2006 suburban train blasts.



WILL ONIONS MAKE THEM CRY?