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## Road sector slumps as Nath globetrots

Only 6 km of highways upgraded in a day  
 But Minister made 4 foreign trips in three months

Nidhi Sharma ■ New Delhi

The first quarter of the current financial year has nothing to show in the road infrastructure sector. The latest Government report reveals that a mere 6 km of highways were upgraded or constructed in a day, which is 43.2 per cent lower than the set target. So what is the man entrusted with the job of resurrecting India's road sector doing? Minister of Road Transport and Highways Kamal Nath is busy on foreign junkets.

It is three months since Nath took over as Minister of Road Transport and Highways on May 29, and during this period, Nath undertook four foreign trips. Within a week of taking over as the Minister, Nath went on a personal trip to London. He did a road show in Singapore in July. In the name of attracting foreign investment in the highway sector, Nath went to unveil another road show at Zurich on August 12. As per Ministry officials, he will spend most of the next two months in Europe and the US.

Even a diktat on austerity and cutting down foreign trips by Congress president Sonia Gandhi on August 19 at Congress Working Committee (CWC) doesn't seem to have deterred the Minister. For him, September and October are packed with foreign trips. At present, he is in London to meet foreign investors and unveil a road show. The entire top brass of the Ministry and NHAI, including Secretary (Road Transport) Brahm Dutt, Director-General (Roads) Nirmaljeet Singh, NHAI chairman Brijeshwar Singh and member (Finance) A Didar Singh, are accompanying him.

This is not all. He is off again to the United States from September 11 to 17. There are no mega road shows as such, but a series of luncheon and dinner meetings are planned with foreign investors. Nath will also meet World Bank president Robert B Zoelick, US Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and Secretary of Transportation La Hood.

He would again be travelling with a huge entourage of officials. According to sources, the "five-diamond luxury hotel" Ritz Carlton, which has a room tariff running up to US \$5,800 for a presidential suite, has been booked for Nath.

Just ten days after his return from the US would be his trip to Istanbul from September 27 to 31 where he would be attending Global Transportation Forum.

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### ROAD NOT TAKEN



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- He did a road show in Singapore in July
- He unveiled another road show at Zurich on August 12
- In Sept & Oct, he will spend most of his time in Europe and US
- In US, a series of luncheon and dinner meetings are planned with foreign investors
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## Most core sectors fail to achieve targets

J Gopikrishnan ■ New Delhi

The Government may be claiming that economic recovery is on the way, but a recent report by the Programme Implementation Department shows that most of the core sectors are lagging behind in achieving their targets.

The report covers the three-month period between April and June and major infrastructure areas like power, coal, steel, roads and crude oil and natural gas.

According to the report, the steel and coal sectors are 11.7 per cent and 2.5 per cent (respectively) behind the targeted production. Though power production increased compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year, the sector failed to achieve the specified target. The power sector is short by 0.8 per cent of the target.

In the petroleum sector, while the crude oil production is 1.4 per cent short and natural gas production 9.8 per cent short of the target, the refinery production registered an increase of 5.2 per cent over the target. Fertiliser production in the country also increased 0.6 per cent of the specified target. Cement production also witnessed an increase.

The import cargo handling at sea ports registered a decrease of 4.5 per cent of the targeted figures between April and June. Major ports like Mumbai, Chennai, Haldia, Visakhapatnam and Kochi suffered a decrease in handling imported cargo during the period.

Though cargo export in the civil aviation sector has increased, the import of cargo decreased. The passenger traffic in domestic airports witnessed a steep decline in this period, while the international sector gained marginally. The international terminals at the five major airports in the country handled 53.96 lakh passengers and registered a 0.1 per cent growth over the corresponding quarter last year.

The domestic terminals handled 118.04 lakh passengers during this period, which was 6.8 per cent lower than the 126.62 lakh handled during the corresponding period previous year.

The freight traffic carried by the Railways between April and June, at 215.09 MT, was 2 per cent higher than the target set and recorded a 5 per cent growth. The total Railways earning was Rs 19,849.57 crore, which was 5.4 per cent higher than the corresponding period last year.

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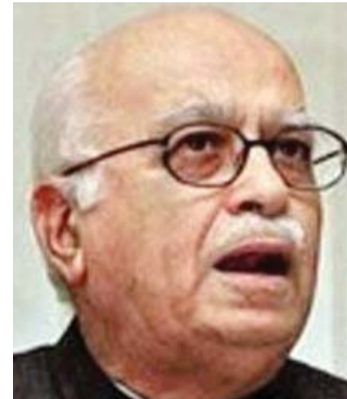
## Farooq comes to Advani aid over Kandahar

Pioneer News Service ■ New Delhi

Buffed by the storm raging within the BJP and under snide and not-so-snide attacks by colleagues who were once close to him and wouldn't dare look him in the eye, LK Advani has received praise and support from the most unexpected of quarters. Union Minister for Non-Conventional Energy and former Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir Farooq Abdullah has spoken up for Advani at a time when he is under relentless media fire over the Kandahar episode.

On an NDTV show, The Advani Legacy: Has the Iron Man Melted?, hosted by Barkha Dutt, BBC veteran Mark Tully sought to place Advani's legacy in perspective, disagreeing with the media's effort to shrink it to fit the week spanning Christmas eve and New Year's eve, 1999. "Advani is a man with a huge political past... He was in the engine room while Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the captain... He is the man who built the BJP."

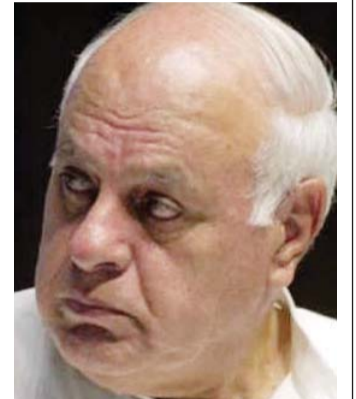
Farooq Abdullah was asked: You were Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir when Kandahar happened. What do you make of Advani's silence (in response to allegations levelled by Jaswant Singh)? Don't you think it makes the tallest leader of the BJP look shrivelled up? He responded: "I don't think you are right in describing him as a 'shrivelled up figure'. It is clear that Advani is allowing others to have their say. He will say



what he has to say. He isn't going to remain silent..."

Asked what he remembers of the Kandahar episode, Farooq Abdullah was scathing in his reply: "I want to forget the episode. Time has gone by... Why are we digging old wounds? It's over and done with. Why do you want to hang him (Advani)? Why the hell are you people playing it up so much? An icon will fall... You want it to fall... Advani is an icon India can never forget. He has done everything possible for India. He has thought for India. He has lived for India. He will live for India till his last breath."

When it was pointed out that Farooq Abdullah had opposed the release of three terrorists to secure the freedom of the hostages aboard IC-814, he promptly recalled, "I did oppose it. I spoke to him (Advani) on the phone from Jammu. I have no doubt about it, I could sense he



had gone along with the Ministers but I don't think his heart was in it. In my heart of hearts I could sense that this man did the man didn't want to do it (release the terrorists)."

After a pause, he added, "But so much hype had been created in the media... People were (camping) outside Atal Bihari Vajpayee's house, demanding their relatives (on the hijacked flight) be brought back. Media was there all the time... All the hype that was given to them... The Government had to give in. That went against our real aim that we are going to fight terrorists. The minute we gave in, India became a soft state."

Asked what he thought of Advani the private man who is prone to breaking into tears and turning mushy, and Advani the non-sense politician, an emotional Farooq Abdullah said, "I see him

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## Appointment of new Army vice-chief sparks off row

Pioneer News Service ■ New Delhi

The appointment of Lt General PC Bhardwaj on Tuesday as the next vice-chief has sparked off a controversy since he has superseded Lt General VK Singh, tipped to be the next Army chief. Bhardwaj is currently the Northern Army commander and Singh is heading the Eastern Command.

Singh is widely believed to be in the reckoning to succeed Army chief General Deepak Kapoor after he retires in March next year. Bhardwaj's promotion as the vice-chief means that Singh would be reporting to an officer six months junior to him. Bhardwaj will assume the new responsibility when vice-chief Lt General Noble Thamburaj retires in September-end.

However, the Army and the Government said there was no controversy in appointing Bhardwaj as the vice-chief and pointed out that both the officers were in the Higher Administrative Grade (HAG) and their pays and perks would be the "more or less the same".

Incidentally, to pave the way for Bhardwaj's promotion, General Deepak Kapoor had recommended to the Defence Ministry that an officer with around

two years of service left should take over the office so that he can get a grip of things and continue for a longer period.

Till now, the seniormost Lt General used to take over as the vice-chief, who would either serve in the office for six to eight months or go on to become the Army chief later. In the normal scheme of things, Singh would have — in all probability — become the vice-chief after Thamburaj's retirement. However, the Defence Ministry accepted Kapoor's recommendation that the vice-chief serve a two-year term.

However, Gen S Padmanabhan assumed charge as the Army chief in 2000 after serving as the Southern Command chief and was never made the vice-chief. The chiefs of the Armed Forces are selected on the basis of their track record, commission number, seniority and date of birth and the hierarchy was clear in the case of Padmanabhan.

It was also the case with Singh as he was likely to be the next chief, officials said here on Tuesday. There was no question of superseding him, they added. In fact, Defence Minister AK Antony had said some time back that "the mere fact that somebody is a vice-chief does not mean he is going to be the next chief."

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## 'Tiger density highest in Corbett park'

Prithviraj Singh ■ Dehradun

A Wildlife Institute of India survey report has claimed Uttarakhand's Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve has the highest density of tigers in the world.

One tiger is found on every eight square kilometres of the park. As per forest department sources, a large portion of Corbett even houses two tigers on 10 square kilometres.

An MoU (memorandum of understanding) will be signed between park authorities, the Union and State Governments for managing the affairs of the park.

"The tiger density in the Corbett park was around one in every eight sq km and this figure is the highest in the world," State Chief Wildlife Warden Srikant Chandola said.

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## Designer Anand Jon gets 59 years in US jail for rape

S Rajagopalan ■ Washington

India-born fashion designer Anand Jon Alexander has been sentenced to 59 years in prison for sexually assaulting aspiring models after enticing them to his Beverly Hills apartment in Los Angeles with the promise of jobs.

US Special Court Judge David Wesley pronounced the sentence after rejecting the 35-year-old's renewed plea for a new trial on the ground that he did not receive a fair trial because a juror had inappropriately contacted his sister, Sanjana, during the trial.

The celebrity designer, who has designed clothes for the likes of Paris Hilton and Mary J Blige, was convicted last November of 16 counts including rape, sexual battery and performing

lewd acts on a child. Prosecutors said his victims ranged in age from 14 to 21.

In his last-ditch bid for a retrial, Alexander made a lengthy presentation, asserting his innocence. "I am not perfect, but I'm not guilty," he told the judge.

But some of his victims, who spoke before the sentencing, had something different to say. "I was 14. You took my adolescence, my trust, my dreams and completely manipulated them for your sexual desires," one of the victims, now aged 17, said in the court.

Judge Wesley said Alexander should be incarcerated as long as possible for preying upon young girls and women, stressing that he showed no remorse for his actions and posed a danger to other young women. Alexander stared ahead blankly as the judge handed down the hefty sentence, while some of his victims — seated in the jury box — wept.

Citing statements by the victims, the Los Angeles Times reported that they spoke of continued suffering from depression and paranoia. Their families were also tormented by

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## Bihar babu plants his way to Guinness Book

Amarnath Tewary ■ Patna

An IAS officer of Bihar cadre on Monday created history of sorts by planting nearly 1 crore saplings in a single day.

The Guinness Book of World Records has registered plantation of 5,41,176 saplings on July 15 this year in Bihar. Bihar did it 20 times more and edged out Pakistan from the record book.

The man behind the mission is Tirhut Commissioner SM Raju, who hails from Karnataka and is an agriculture graduate.

"I've been nursing a dream to plant 1 crore saplings in a single day for two years. I achieved this goal through active cooperation of village panchayats and mukhias of my division," Raju told *The Pioneer*. The IAS officer had to engage 3 lakh people from 8,465 panchayats and 7,500 villages of six districts of Tirhut division. "We planted the 96,19,870 saplings under the rural job scheme NREG," said an ebullient Raju.

He said though he had been planning for this day for two years, when he got the news of



SM Raju: Tirhut Commissioner

Pakistan's Environment Ministry getting the Guinness certification, he decided to beat their record as soon as possible.

"I discussed my idea with the Bihar Chief Secretary and with the blessings of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, I plunged into this mission and ultimately succeeded," said the IAS officer.

"With groups of four families each planting 200 trees; now they must protect the saplings for three

years, till the plants grow sturdy. During this period, they will be paid 100 days a year," Raju said.

He has charted out a blueprint to protect the planted trees and to provide job to villagers simultaneously through his mission.

"Since Tirhut region in north Bihar is a flood-prone area, mukhias here find themselves unable to provide jobs to poor villagers throughout the year. So I've engaged them into this programme," Raju said.

The workers will get the full pay of about Rs 102 under the rural job scheme if they can ensure the survival of 90 per cent of the plants under their care. For a 75-80 per cent survival rate, they will be paid only half the wage. If the survival rate is less than 75 per cent, the families in the group will be replaced.

This Greenathon mission of the IAS officer has given fresh lease of life to the villagers of north Bihar. "We had never thought we would get employment at this age under this scheme. We're very happy and thanking Raju Saheb," said the villagers of Tirhut.

If the locals are to be believed

the villagers of Tirhut have vowed to protect the trees at any cost and they're taking constant vigil to the planted saplings.

"They seem to feel as if the trees they are protecting belong to them," Raju said.

The non-fruit trees like neem, jamun, gulmohar and peepal have been planted along the state and national highways while the fruit-bearing saplings such as the guava, mango, litchi, lemon and amla were planted in the villages.

Raju explained that this tree plantation mission was going to serve the society in many ways. It will promote social forestry in flood-affected areas of north Bihar. A total sum of Rs 700 crore would be spent on this scheme in three years, said Raju, who was also actively associated with the Chief Minister's much-praised Vikas Yatra.

Now a beaming and confident Raju hopes to get his mission and the name of the State reflected in *The Guinness Book*.

"Yes, I do hope that they would consider my effort and even the whole society would appreciate my move," said Raju.