

Many top officials had Bank-IMF links

By Sonal Kellogg

New Delhi, Sept. 20: Dozens of bureaucrats, some in top posts in India, like deputy chairman of the Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former finance secretary Shakar Acharya, former RBI governor Bimal Jalan and former director-general of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research R.A.

Mashelkar have, over the years, worked with the World Bank, World Trade Organisation, USAID and other international bodies for years.

Some of them have been on deputation while working for the Indian government, travelled abroad for study tours and been consultants on various committee and have been paid huge amounts many times over their salaries in India. This is a huge incentive to toe the World Bank and other foreign agencies' line, say social activists who have used the Right to Information Act to obtain this information from the government.

Civil rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan calls it the revolving-door policy between the government and the World Bank/International Monetary Fund, where many top bureaucrats have been on deputation to these international organisations and he says it seems that the Centre is totally oblivious to the possibility that these officials can be influenced by the policies which are promoted by these organisations.

This is part of the report which will reveal dozens of names of top officials in the government who have been working or been on deputation to these organisation which will be presented at the tribunal on World Bank on Friday.

One organiser of the tribunal said it is difficult to put a ballpark figure of how many top government officials are working or have worked with the World Bank but at the Centre itself there could be over a 100. "Then there are bureaucrats from the states who are also in hundreds, we are still trying to obtain the figures from the government under the RTI Act," he said.

The report said, "How can one explain the fact that for much of the last 20 years, and particularly since 1991, many, if not most, of the top economic policymakers, including members of the Planning Commission, secretaries of the finance ministry and governors of the Reserve Bank have been staffers of the World Bank/IMF. They have moved smoothly between the World Bank/IMF and the Government of India, as if the Government of India were just a division of the World Bank/IMF. Since the mid-80s it has become common to find World Bank staffers occupying key policymaking positions in the Government of India.

Starting with Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Mr Bimal Jalan, the vast majority of the key officials of the finance ministry and the Reserve Bank have moved seamlessly back and forth between the World Bank/IMF and the Centre. They include such influential policymakers and finance secretaries, such as Shankar Acharya, who, like Dr Ahluwalia, started with the World Bank in the 1970s and then again like him joined the government as economic adviser in 1985."

The report goes on to say, "In 1990, Dr Ahluwalia was back at the World Bank as chief of the public economic division till 1993, when he was appointed chief economic adviser to the Government of India. He was thereafter appointed to the Board of Sebi, the Exim Bank and various other policymaking bodies."

Then there is Mr Rakesh Mohan, who also initially worked with the World Bank (1976-80, 1983-86) and later became economic adviser to the ministry of industry, Government of India.

There is Mr Parthasarthy Shome, who worked at the IMF for most of the time between 1983 and 2004. In between he was called in as chairman, advisory group on taxation for the 9th Five-Year Plan, then as chairman of the advisory group on tax policy, and most recently as special adviser to the finance minister (2004-2007).

Another top official, Mr Ashok Lahiri, worked for many years in the IMF before being brought in to the government as chief economic adviser and then sent to the ADB as executive director in 2007.

Apart from deputations, there are hosts of other jobs, consultancies, assignments, even travel grants and huge honoraria paid for attending meetings of the World Bank and associated agencies. Thus, Mr R.A. Mashelkar as DG, CSIR, went on at least 50 trips abroad during his tenure which were paid for by the Bank or the World Intellectual Property Organisation.

For most of these trips, he was paid an honorarium of around ₹500 a day, which was many times his salary in India. As DG CSIR, he presided over several policymaking committees and advised the government to (for example) amend the Patents Act in line with what civil rights advocate Colin Gonsalves says were the needs of multinational corporations of the West.

The presentation mentions that "the United Progressive Alliance came to power three years ago. The positioning of top bureaucrats dedicated to neo-liberalism in key ministries was integral to the process. They included Mr N.K. Singh, Mr Vijay Kelkar, Mr Rakesh Mohan, Mr R. Vasudevan, Mr R.V. Shahi, Mr Anwarul Huda, Mr Arvind Virmani, Mr Ashok V. Desai, Mr S. Narayan, Mr Tejinder Khanna, Mr Y. Venugopal Reddy, to mention only some. At one time, 21 out of 27 economic bureaucrats passed through such "Revolving Doors"