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at 0111hrs IST NEW DELHI:

With upcoming assembly polls crucial to its leadership of the ruling coalition, Congress is on track to unfurl an “India Shining” campaign for ‘aam aadmi’. The Manmohan Singh regime may soon announce three decisions aimed at wooing the poor and the old, sections that turn out in big numbers and can tip the scales

The consideration may see proposals for social security for unorganised sector, new rehabilitation policy and a law for maintenance of old persons getting through fast. Sources said the proposals, in addition to the ‘tribal Bill’ giving settlement rights to tribals in forest areas, will push the Congress campaign in Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Mizoram and Punjab. Upcoming polls are a high-stake game for Congress as it looks to beat incumbency in three states and make a mark in UP.

While Cabinet notes for the former two are in circulation, old persons Bill — which would cater to an estimated 7.6 crore voters — will soon be cleared by a GoM for high-profile launch being planned by social justice ministry. Government is taking a look at “social security net” to the 30 crore-strong unorganised sector comprising agricultural labourers and workers in informal places.

With the unorganised sector comprising mostly the poor and SCs/STs, sources see it as a step with high political potential on the lines of job guarantee law and tribal Bill. Sources said labour minister Oscar Fernandes, also an organisation man, is keen on getting it through, even if it means imposing a cess. Anticipating finance ministry’s opposition, the Cabinet note has apparently offered three alternatives — a package of health care, life and disability cover and pension to be covered in five years (BPL in three and APL in two) and ten years (BPL in three years and APL in 10 years) or a life insurance for 30 crore persons.

The new-found concern for the poor and the weak does not stop at that. Rural Development (RD) ministry is to discuss with Planning Commission two proposals — to extend old-age pension from destitutes to the entire BPL swathe at a burden of Rs 3,700 crore from present Rs 2,000 crore and to introduce a widow pension of Rs 600 in addition to Rs 10,000 given as family benefit on death in a BPL family.

An estimate puts the number of widows at 96 lakh. Laws on rehabilitation and unorganised sector may not be in shape before the polls, but they are being spoken about to convey the message.

PM announcing a rehabilitation law in three months at a Ficci meeting is seen as much to sothe frayed nerves over SEZ land acquisition in West Bengal as much to tell voters what is in the pipeline. The rehabilitation law will seek to woo farmers and tribals. The law, which will turn the compensation package for displacement lucrative while ensuring resettlement before land is acquired, is being put in place by rural development ministry. Parents and senior citizens (maintenance, care and protection) Bill, aimed at ensuring care for 60-plus from their wards, is set to be announced too. 2001 census has pegged their numbers at 7.6 crore, with 80% in rural areas

2007 – SOCIAL SECURITY BILL,

Social Security Bill

THE UNORGANISED SECTOR WORKERS' SOCIAL SECURITY BILL, 2007

A BILL to provide for the social security and welfare of unorganised sector workers and for other matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

BE it enacted by Parliament in the Fifty-eighth Year of the Republic of India as follows:-

CHAPTER I PRELIMINARY Short title, extent and commencement. 1.

(1) This Act may be called the Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Act, 2007.

(2) It extends to the whole of India. (3) It shall come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint

3.(1) The Central Government may formulate, from time to time, suitable welfare schemes for different sections of unorganised sector workers on matters relating to –

(a) life and disability cover;

(b) health and *maternity benefits*;

(c) old age protection; and

(d) any other benefit as may be determined by the Central Government