

Business and Politics in Muslim World

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National Summary

Congress led UPA receives severe criticism from opposition parties over extensive price rise of food items. BJP and CPI (M) accused central government policies for inflation in states and demanded action for price control initiative. BJP wants L. K Advani to work as a working chairman of the UPA and for this purpose party will take Atal Bihari Vajpayee in confidence.

Congress leader C P Joshi has proposed “automatic inclusion” of Muslims in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list of families along with Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). According to him inclusion of all Muslims in BPL list would solve the problem and it would exclude well off Muslims from BPL list automatically as criteria for the inclusion in BPL will be recommended income and standard of life.

West Bengal and other Naxal effected states demanded more troops to combat insurgency in an effective manner. States criticise center’s move to recall troops from the effected areas. It is revealed in an investigation that private security agencies offices are providing weapons to insurgents. These offices buildings are used as stores of weapons. Government decided to fight Naxalism through social reforms. States are providing education, health and employment facilities to the peoples of Naxal effected areas. Removal of deprivation among citizens would transfer their loyalties towards government from Naxals.

After experiencing a tough time in the context of global slowdown now Indian industry is witnessing gradual recovery. The third quarter of the year 2009 brings hopes back for Indian economy. Industrial production in November reached 11.7 per cent, touching a two-year high. It is also expected that GDP will be accelerated in 2010 further but rising inflation is still a concern for the government.

Indian chief of the army staff Deepak Kapoor’s statement that Indian army has the ability to launch two front wars against Pakistan and China created problems for India and now Indian defence ministry and foreign office retreating from army chief’s stance by saying India wants peace with its neighbours and has no extra territorial ambitions. Deepak Kapoor also said India wants to promote peace with its neighbours. An official report revealed that area along the Line of Actual Control with China has “shrunk” over a period of time, and India has lost a “substantial” amount of land in the last two decades, but China denies any such happening. India wants to renew 1950 treaty with Nepal but Nepal’s Maoists refused any such move by accusing India for violating Nepal’s sovereignty.

Law and order situation was remain better in 2009 in Kashmir comparatively as less violent incidents were recoded in the year but the 2010 witnesses clashes between security forces and freedom fighters in the beginning of the year. Defence minister Antony asked forces to be alert to encounter any situation.

Swine flu death toll reaches so far to 1,113 in the country according to health

authorities. Ajmal Kasab once gain denies his presence in 26/11. He said the perpetrators were of Indian origin not Pakistani and Indian security agencies vanished all proves intentionally. There were at least 16,196 farmers' suicides in India in 2008, bringing the total since 1997 to 199,132, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The share of the Big 5 States or 'suicide belt' in 2008 Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh remained very high at 10,797, or 66.6 per cent of the total farm suicides in the country.

India signed two pacts with Botswana during Ansari's visit to the state. India wants to increase cooperation with African countries and vice president Ansari's tour to Africa is an initiative in this regard. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is on Indian tour where she receives the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2009.

Regional Summary

Samajwadi party is in turmoil as Amar Singh has given resignation to party leadership. Uttar Pradesh is the first state in India initiating to install power transmission sub stations and transmission lines project on the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. Bihar is doing well in industrial sector as it shows 14.80 per cent growth in factory output in 2007-08, marginally less than the country's rate of 15.24 per cent.

Andhra Pradesh is still in turmoil as Telangana protests are in progress. Clashes between Osmania university students and police led to state wide shutter down that paralysed the routine life.

Union Minister for State for Corporate and Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid said Pune is fast becoming the educational hub of the country and the Union government is reaching out to young people to create higher level of employability for them.

National Report

Politics:

Move to make Advani NDA working chairman

There is a move by the BJP to make L.K. Advani working chairman of the National Democratic Alliance. A top BJP leader said that the former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, would continue to remain NDA chairman. "We will talk to Mr. Vajpayee and then move ahead on this proposal after his consent. There is no doubt that Mr. Vajpayee will continue as NDA chairman, even though he is ill. We did not remove George Fernandes as NDA convener after his illness. Instead, Janata Dal (United) president Sharad Yadav was appointed NDA convener," said the BJP leader who did not want to be identified. It seems the subject was broached with Mr. Yadav by some BJP leaders during the election campaign in Jharkhand. But the matter was not taken forward. There is a view in the BJP that making Mr. Advani NDA working chairman will facilitate the allotment to him of Mr. Vajpayee's room in Parliament House. As Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha which post he has since quit Mr. Advani had his own room. But, as of now under the rules, he cannot be allotted a room as chairman of the BJP Parliamentary Party, his new position. (The Hindu)

From hotels to tents, BJP back to basics

The BJP delegates will stay in tents during the party national council/executive meet in Indore on February 17, 18 and 19. After taking over as the party president, Nitin Gadkari had said that "Deendayal Upadhyay and his philosophy of reaching out to the last man in the queue" would be the roadmap for every party leader. After discussions among top party leaders, it was decided that the BJP delegates, including senior leaders, would stay in tents during the national executive meet. "The number of delegates expected for the party's national council in Indore would be over 5, 000," said BJP headquarters in-charge Shyam Jaju. "This has happened since the days of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. After discussions, Advani ji and other senior leaders decided that delegates should stay in tents," said party spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad. Another spokesperson, Prakash Javadekar, added that there have been many BJP meets in the past where the delegates have stayed in tents, "including the inaugural BJP national executive meet in Mumbai in 1980; another national executive in Mumbai in 1995 (when Advani announced Atal Bihari Vajpayee's name as the party's prime ministerial candidate), and yet another meet in Mumbai in 2005". After the party's loss in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, where it had centered its campaign around the India Shining campaign, the party has come under attack, both internally and from outside, "about the poor vanishing from its radar". The "India Shining" campaign was perceived to have a distinct pro-rich bias, and Advani once stated that it should have, instead, been called "India Rising". Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi has often said in his election speeches that the Opposition's "India Shining" slogan reflected a pro-rich bias in contrast to the Congress's Agenda for "Aam Aadmi". "Staying in tents, as opposed to star hotels, is meant to send out a subtle message too," admitted a senior leader. The new arrangement has, however, also left a section of the party worried, while some have also questioned, in private, the rationale

behind erecting a large number of tents for the party meet and removing them later, “which would itself cost a huge amount of sum”. Some leaders are also said to be concerned over the presence of mosquitoes, while most are worried about toilets and hygiene in these tents. Sources said though these tents will not be the luxurious kind, they will have good toilets and proper beds. (The Indian Express)

Centre’s policies helping speculators: CPI(M)

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Friday charged the Congress-led government with failure to check food prices and inflation. “The Central government follows policies which help hoarders and speculators and then blames State governments for not taking action. Indeed it is the contradictory statements of different Central Ministers which are fuelling inflationary expectations,” the party Polit Bureau said in a statement. Inflation remained high at 17.28 per cent in the week ending January 2. Prices of sugar, cereals, pulses and vegetables continued to rise. The party said the recent note by the Cabinet Committee on Prices showed that the Centre wanted to shirk its responsibility by blaming the States. Without proper assessment of the causes behind the relentless increase in food prices, effective measures could not be undertaken. One of the reasons for high sugar prices was the failure of the Centre to build a sugar buffer stock. Instead it incentivised exports helping big traders and sugar mill owners. Sugar imports with a slew of concessions to importers since early last year had not resulted in lowering the retail price of sugar with only the traders and big companies profiting. “The Cabinet does not address these issues but instead blames the States. In fact, all the three Left-led State governments have removed VAT on sugar as have many others,” it said. It said the Centre’s move to release buffer stocks of food grains in the open market instead of providing it to State governments at subsidised rates was a “faulty approach.” Even the so-called additional food grains allocations offered to State governments is double the price of the earlier Above Poverty Line allocations. The threat to State governments that Central agencies like the NAFED and the NCCF will directly provide subsidised food grains, oil and pulses to consumers in States, it said, went against the federal character of the Constitution. As for “the homily” to the State governments to undertake steps to check hoarding sounds hollow when it was the Centre that liberalised inter-State movement of food grains and relaxed stockholding norms for private traders and corporates. The party demanded that the government take steps, including release of cereal stocks through the public distribution system by increasing rice and wheat quotas to the States, and bring Food Security legislation; supply sugar, pulses and edible oils through PDS at cheap rates, immediately ban all future trading in food articles; launch countrywide crackdown against hoarders; and reduce diesel and petrol rates prices by slashing indirect taxes. (The Hindu)

BJP takes on Pawar on price rise

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Friday found fault with the Centre and with Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar in particular for failing to take timely steps to stop the galloping increase in prices of food items. BJP spokesperson Prakash Javadekar pointed out that it was a time-tested practice for the Centre to release into the market large quantities of

cereals stored with it as buffer stock during times of acute scarcity, as during drought, and when prices are unreasonably high. But nothing of the sort was done this time. Mr. Pawar has instead blamed State governments for “not lifting” cereals offered by the Centre, Mr. Javadekar continued, “but without bothering to explain why this had happened.” The reason was, the Centre wanted the States to pay not only the procurement price but also the transport costs from the ‘mandi’ to the particular State, say Tamil Nadu or Kerala. “If the States do not get the cereals at a reasonable price they cannot release it at reasonable prices and the goal of bringing down the high market price will not be met. In short, the effort would be self-defeating.” For the bungling in sugar, Mr. Javadekar blamed the Centre for not assessing in time the total acreage under cane cultivation. “Mr. Pawar blamed the States once again for not informing the Centre about sugarcane cultivation when in fact through satellite imagery the Centre itself was in a position to assess this,” he said. About a year ago, the Centre allowed export of sugar at about Rs.12 a kilogram and later India had to import sugar at Rs.30 a kilogram. (The Hindu)

Karat: religious faith no bar for joining CPI(M)

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Friday said it does not bar persons with religious faith from joining the party and that while they may practise their faith, the members are expected to uphold secularism and oppose the intrusion of religion into the affairs of the State. “The rectification guidelines are designed to help Communist Party members live by Communist norms and values. As for the leading cadres are concerned, the party expects them to behave like Marxists, both in their public and private life,” general secretary Prakash Karat said in an article ‘CPI (M), Rectification and Religion’ in the latest issue of the party organ *People’s Democracy*. Mr. Karat referred to the announcement by the former party MP, K.S. Manoj, that he was quitting the party since its rectification document directed CPI(M) members not to take part in religious ceremonies and as a firm believer, it went against his faith. He said this step by Dr. Manoj was projected by a section of the media as if being a member of the CPI(M) would be incompatible with religious faith, with some well-meaning religious leaders asking if its decision excludes believers from the party. The CPI(M) was a party based on the Marxist outlook. Marxism was a materialist philosophy and its views on religion shared the same roots as the Enlightenment philosophers of the 18th century. Based on this, Marxists wanted the State to treat religion as a private affair and there should be separation of State and religion. The party upheld the materialist outlook and did not bar people having religious faith from joining it. The only condition for membership was acceptance of the party programme, the Constitution and the willingness to work under party discipline. (The Hindu)

Jyoti Basu, 95, passes away

Jyoti Basu, veteran Marxist leader and one of the tallest figures in the country’s political life, died of septicaemia due to pneumonia that led to multi-organ failure, on Sunday. He was 95 and is survived by his son and three grandchildren. After battling for life in a private hospital over the past 17 days, he passed away at 11.47 a.m. Chairman of the Left Front Committee in the State and Secretary of the West Bengal State Committee of the

CPI(M), Biman Bose, announced the passing away of Mr. Basu shortly after noon. “I have come to give you sad news. Jyoti Basu is no more with us. He has left us. I cannot speak any more,” he told journalists outside the hospital. Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram described Mr. Basu as “a colossus who strode India’s political scene for many decades,” adding: “He was a great democrat, a great parliamentarian and a great source of inspiration...It is a sad day for all of us.” Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat, Polit Bureau member and MP Brinda Karat and Somnath Chatterjee, former Lok Sabha Speaker, were present at the hospital. His body was taken to Peace Haven, a funeral parlour, via the residence of his son, Chandan Bose, and Indira Bhavan in Salt Lake where Mr. Basu lived in the later phase of his life. Mr. Basu was India’s pre-eminent Communist leader, and one of post-independence India’s greatest and most respected mass political leaders. He was the last of the nine founding Polit Bureau members and India’s longest-serving Chief Minister. Mr. Basu was a man of immense charisma, and one whose faith in the people was unflinching. He lived a full life, characterised by struggle and by successes in government that few other political leaders in India have been able to match. He was immaculate in dress and bearing, a person of extraordinary personal discipline, and, well into his 80s, known for the briskness of his stride, and for consistently outpacing the security guards who accompanied him. A byword for intellectual, political and personal integrity and for a straightforward, self-assured and imperturbable style in politics, Mr. Basu made a profound, long-term difference to the large, populous and strategically important State that was his first priority and commanded his best efforts. As has been widely noted, his enduring legacy as Chief Minister of West Bengal between 1977 and 2000 includes land reforms, accountable governance, functioning panchayat institutions, and the creation of a stable atmosphere of communal harmony and secularism. However, those who remember him chiefly as India’s longest-serving Chief Minister are likely to underestimate his long experience in the crucible of struggle: as a trade union organiser, as a popular agitator, and as a revolutionary fighter – starting, as was typical for his generation, as a freedom fighter and courageously facing and overcoming state-sponsored repression and intolerance in independent India as well. They are likely also to underestimate the inner resources of one of the most attractive and gifted mass political leaders that India, or indeed any country, has seen over the past half century. Mr. Basu was the chief architect of the Left Front in West Bengal, and he repeatedly said that it was to “the conscious, struggling people” of the State that credit went for making it possible for the Left Front to win seven successive Assembly elections. Being elected for a five-year term seven times in succession was “not only an achievement without precedent in India,” he noted matter-of-factly, “but also in the history of parliamentary democracy in the world.” Never one to despair over fluctuating political fortunes, he observed that the recent electoral setbacks suffered by the Left in West Bengal were because “we could not take our message properly to the people.” He added: “Besides, in certain areas we made mistakes.” In an interview to Bengali daily *Ganashakti* a month after the results of the 2009 Lok Sabha polls were announced, Mr. Basu reiterated his faith in the people. “It is the people who determine the course of history,” he said, adding that there “can be some who misunderstand [us] temporarily, but if we keep going to the people repeatedly and make ourselves worthy of their love, they will most certainly understand us. We will have to again draw to our side those who opposed us in the last

panchayat and Lok Sabha elections.” (The Hindu)

Minorities’ issues:

‘Urdu, Sufism and madrasas enriched Indian culture’

Governor H.R. Bhardwaj said on Sunday that Muslims had made a distinctive contribution to the country’s composite culture and heritage with “Urdu, Sufism and madrasas”, making it a fantastic society to live in, and every one should strive to maintain this unique character of unity in diversity. He was speaking after presenting the Lifetime Award of the Bearys’ Welfare Association, Bangalore, to the former Minister B.A. Mohideen, a doyen of Bearys, an ethnic group among Muslims of the west coast. He also gave away merit awards to more than 200 children studying in schools and colleges. Hailing Islam’s message of equality and working together for the common good of the people, Mr. Bhardwaj said that the Constitution framers derived this important element of the religion when they formulated Article 14 guaranteeing equality and brotherhood to the citizens. Mr. Bhardwaj said that Urdu was one of the most romantic languages. Sufism and its saints, who spread the message of Islam; Ruksana, a devout Muslim, who produced wonderful poetry on Lord Krishna in the Brij language; and Abdul Rahim Khan, a Sanskrit scholar, who translated Vedas, Upanishads and Indian scriptures for Akbar; had all made India a fantastic country to live in. Recalling his recent visit to Udupi, the Governor said that he came to know of some tension in the region created by some mischievous elements. Senior officers were told that communal harmony should be maintained at all costs. (The Hindu)

‘Include all Muslims in BPL, then exclude the well-off’

In a move that could stir the political pot, the Rural Development Ministry, under Congress leader C P Joshi, has proposed “automatic inclusion” of Muslims in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list of families along with Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Aware of the political sensitivities involved, the Ministry plans to replace the word “Muslim” with “Minority” to pre-empt opposition, especially from BJP-ruled states. Inaugurating a conference of Social Editors, Rural Development Minister Joshi said that to simplify the process and ensure that vulnerable sections are not left out from the BPL list, his department favoured automatic “inclusion” and “exclusion”. It has been proposed, he said, that SCs, STs and minorities be automatically included in the BPL list and then well-off families excluded on basis of Income Tax returns, land records etc. And certain categories will be “automatically” excluded from the BPL list: families with double of a district’s average irrigated land, those with a four or three-wheel motor vehicle or mechanized farm equipment, a government or private sector employee earning a salary above Rs 10,000 per month. Joshi justified automatic inclusion citing that “SCs, STs and Minorities together form less than 37% of the population” less than the BPL population pegged by the SC Saxena and Suresh Tendulkar committee reports released recently. “There is a feeling that vulnerable sections are being excluded from the BPL list due to competitive politics. We are trying to address the problem”, Joshi said. He, however, said that his Ministry was waiting for the NSSO survey to decide the mode to be adopted for the new BPL survey. Joshi’s proposal goes beyond what the Saxena

committee report it was appointed by the Rural Development Ministry recommended. While it said that weightage should be given to certain social groups, including Muslims, it did not favour automatic inclusion. According to the Saxena report, SCs/STs would get three points and Most Backward Castes (MBC) two points. The Saxena report said that Muslims and OBCs be given one point each. Automatic inclusion of Muslims in the BPL list could be the first major attempt by the Congress-led UPA government to woo the vote bank that roughly constitutes 18% of the country's population. The decision could be significant given that Uttar Pradesh and Bihar go to state polls in 2012 and 2010 respectively, states where the Congress is desperately trying to get a foothold. Inclusion and exclusion from the BPL list is a big issue in villages, particularly in the Hindi heartland, since benefits of most Central and state-sponsored welfare schemes like Indira Awas Yojna, old age pension are decided on the basis of the list. (The Indian Express)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

Insurgency Movements:

State to ask for fresh forces for Maoist control

A month after the Centre withdrew six companies of BSF from the Lalgarh-Jhargram tribal belt, the state government has decided to ask the Centre for ten companies of Central Paramilitary Forces. The troops will be deployed in the Maoist-dominated districts of Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapore. On Tuesday, Union Home Minister P Chidambaram will chair a meeting in Delhi on the Maoist problem with police chiefs from all states. The state plans to put forward the request at the meeting. "We need more companies of paramilitary forces to control the situation in these districts," said Director General of Police Bhupinder Singh. "We will ask for 10 companies of CPF during tomorrow's meeting. The situation in the state will also be discussed." The six companies of BSF had been withdrawn from the state to be deployed in Jharkhand for the assembly elections. There, however, was no replacement for the 420 jawans who had been stationed in the Lalgarh-Jhargram areas of West Midnapore. The Central announcement for the troop withdrawal had come as a shock to senior police officers of the state. A senior officer of West Midnapore district said: "We are running short of forces to flush out the Maoists. We receive intelligence inputs, but our forces cannot be deployed everywhere. By the time our forces reach a particular spot, Maoists strike elsewhere." A couple of months ago, the state police had sent a proposal to the Centre for having a Special Intelligence Branch (SIB) similar to Andhra Pradesh. The unit in Andhra operates in close coordination with the state's Greyhounds. It is a dedicated intelligence wing which collects information about top Naxals and their strategies. "We have proposed to have a SIB-like intelligence wing in the state dedicated to collect information on Naxals," said Singh. "In the proposal, we wanted a sanction from the Centre to form a full-fledged force like Greyhounds here as well. We will raise the issue in tomorrow's meeting." A three-member committee has already been set up to look after the formation of the Greyhounds and SIB in the state. The committee includes Vageesh Mishra, ADG, administration, Vivek Sahay, IG, state armed police, and Sanjai Singh, DIG, training. The committee is reviewing the proposal and making necessary arrangements for getting the sanction from the Centre, said a senior police officer. (The Indian Express)

Illegal arms reach Naxals via private security agencies

The state CID has unearthed a major arms racket involved in acquiring illegal firearms through private security agencies using forged licences and then selling them off to several militant groups in North Bengal and Maoists in the Left Wing Extremism-affected districts of the state. Interestingly, the state intelligence unit has found that miscreants used government establishments as safe haven for stacking their illegal arms. The CID came to know this after its officials seized illegal firearms from a BSNL telephone exchange in Tiljala on January 5 followed by a similar recovery of arms cache from the water treatment plant of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) at Palta four days later. At present, the CID is conducting several raids in different parts of the state, and till date 53 illegal guns and forged licenses have been unearthed from various government establishments. Five people have been arrested. The latest being Thursday's raid in Asansol when a team of CID officers seized 36 guns with fake licenses from a government office of coalmines. "A big racket is operating in the state. Apart from arms, we have seized several fake licenses of ex-army men and ex-BSF personnel," said Raj Kanojia Additional Director General, CID. At several government premises, the gunmen of security agencies were found carrying illegal arms. "The private security agency officials are moving freely with illegal arms. This is an alarming condition," Kanojia added. The CID has recovered more than 50 licences, which were forged from different parts of the country, including Kashmir, Bhagalpur and Munger in Bihar, and Kohima in Nagaland. "This business has been going on for a long time and the government offices have become the store houses for these illegal arms. We have reports that the arms have been passed on to several militant groups, including Maoists, operating in Bengal," said a senior CID officer. "We are investigating it. But at present, we are concentrating on seizure of illegal arms," the officer added. According to Soumen Mitro, IG (II), CID, the racket is involved in procuring arms from several dealers in Kolkata and getting their licences forged from various places. "We are trying to find where the arms are going," Mitro added. On Wednesday, the CID raided the office of Durgapur Projects Limited (DPL) and seized five arms with forged licences. A guard employed with Brite, a private security agency, Parameswar Chowdhury was arrested. "The arms were sold to the guards by some former army men. The ex-army men are from Bangalore, Behrampore, Nadia and Birbhum," said a senior CID officer. In connection with the BSNL raids, four persons have been arrested. Golam Ambia Sheikh, Sheikh Jahangir, Bapi Sheikh and Abdul Hossain Sheikh were hired as security guards by Inter State Security Agency and deployed at the BSNL exchange, a few months ago. The CID, however, has not made any arrest in connection with the arms seized from the Palta water treatment plant. "We have started keeping a close eye on a few private security agencies that are operating in the state," said a senior CID officer. "As of now, we have zeroed in on around 40 agencies who are involved in the racket. The licences are forged in such a manner that the security-in-charge of the government offices cannot judge whether the arms are legal or illegal. This is the most difficult part. Since the security agencies have the licences to have arms it is not always check whether the arms are legal or not," added the officer. According to the records available with the Kolkata police, around 62 private security agencies are currently registered in the city. "As per the Private Security Agency Regulation Act, 2005, we will send our sub-inspector to all the offices of the agencies to check the licences of the arms. Our officers will start visiting the offices regularly to

check whether the Act is complied with. Shortly, we will hold a meeting of all the private security agencies,” said Banibrata Basu, Special CP (II). (The Indian Express)

6 policemen killed in landmine blast

Six police personnel and a civilian were killed and one policeman went missing when Maoists triggered a blast and blew up their patrol truck in Jharkhand’s Gumla district on Friday. Assistant Sub-inspector Shaym Kumar Sinha and the truck driver were among those killed. (The Hindu)

Now, academic institutes to fight Naxalism at Machi

In a bid to garner support of people in Naxal-affected areas, the Sonbhadra police and the district administration have decided to open an intermediate college and an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in the Machi area. The area, located on the borders of Bihar, has been identified as the most vulnerable place for the recruitment of youngsters in the Naxal groups. Preetinder Singh, Superintendent of Police of Sonbhadra, said: “The area has already been finalised and the proposals have been sent to the state government and the Ministry of Home Affairs, seeking for funds under the Special Infrastructure Plan.” “We have been assured of the funds to raise the college building and other infrastructure. Funds for ITI would be released later. The decision to open the institutions was taken following the request from locals,” Singh said. The SP made the announcement during a camp organised at Dareb Township in Machi area on Saturday. A team of doctors conducted a health check-up and distributed medicines to over 4,000 locals at the camp. The policemen also distributed 2,200 blankets and volleyball kits to the youths of seven villages. Similar camps would be organised in different Naxal-affected areas on January 20, 22 and 24. Singh said: “We interacted with the tribal people and asked them about the problems they face from Naxalites or if the local police ever harass them. We have received complaints against the chowkidars of some villages and we will probe the matter.” “We have also selected a group of youths in the area who are graduates or have passed Class XII for a professional training including driving and computers at the Police Lines. The police would help in providing them jobs in various private industries in Sonbhadra district,” the SP said. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

Govt to pass Right to Food Act: FM

Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee said the government will pass the Right to Food Act to promote inclusive growth, a concept that has been pursued by the Congress since Independence. “We are going to pass the Right to Food Act,” the Minister said while speaking at a function. Pointing out that inclusive growth had always been on the agenda of the Congress, Mukherjee recalled that earlier slogans like ‘grow more food’ and ‘garibi hatao’ were aimed at achieving the same objective. The Congress in its manifesto for 2009 general elections promised to enact Right to Food law to provide 25 kg of rice or wheat at Rs 3 per kg every month to families living below poverty line. The UPA government, he added, had passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

(NREGA) and Right to Education Act to provide jobs and education to people through legislations. The Minister, however, emphasised that to make growth all encompassing the country would have to produce more food and industry more manufactured goods. Mukherjee said the rapid economic growth since liberalisation has led to rise in tax-GDP ratio. It was only because of the high ratio that former Finance Minister P Chidambaram managed to provide Rs 71,000 crore debt relief to farmers. (The Indian Express)

Industrial production at two-year high

Showing strong signs of economic recovery, industrial production in November reached 11.7 per cent, touching a two-year high. It also once again put the focus on whether the stimulus provided to spur the economy should continue or not. Part of the industrial growth, measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), is no doubt due to a low base of last year as factory production expanded by just 2.5 per cent a year ago, but it is mostly attributable to stimulus-driven demand. This is evident from the fact that manufacturing, the main gainer from stimulus, grew by 12.7 per cent, driven by 37.3 per cent expansion in consumer durable goods such as auto, refrigerators and televisions. As part of the stimulus, the government had cut the excise duty by six percentage points and the service tax by two percentage points, besides stepping up Plan expenditure taking the total value of stimulus to Rs. 1.86 lakh crore. Cabinet Secretary K.M. Chandrashekhara said, "The stimulus is now part of the overall scheme of things. It is not going to be one day there is stimulus and the next day it goes." Industrial growth stood at 3.8 per cent in the first quarter of this fiscal, 9.2 per cent in the second quarter and more than 10 per cent in the first two months of the third quarter. As such, if the trend is maintained in December, industry would expand at a faster pace in the third quarter. "Industrial growth this year is going to be much better than last year. Whether it will be 11.3 per cent for the next six months that is difficult to say," Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia told. In November, mining output grew by 10 per cent. However, electricity generation rose by just 3.3 per cent, which could, in fact, apply brakes to industrial growth in future. In quite contrast to consumer durables, consumer non-durables production rose by just 3.1 per cent in November against 12.4 per cent a year ago. Intermediate goods expanded by 19.4 per cent (negative 3.9 per cent), capital goods by 12.2 per cent (0.5 per cent) and basic goods by 6 per cent (2.2 per cent). In the first eight months of this fiscal, industrial growth stood at 7.6 per cent against 4.1 per cent a year ago. "I would certainly hope the trend of IIP growth to continue. I don't see any reason why it should not continue. I am sure overall there is increase in demand, there is increase in production," the Cabinet Secretary said. (The Hindu)

LoC trade resumes after two weeks

After remaining suspended for two weeks, trade across the Line of Control (LoC) resumed on Tuesday with 24 trucks crossing to the other side from Chakan Da Bagh in Poonch and 40 from the Uri side. The trade was suspended by the LoC Traders Association on December 22, demanding that restrictions on certain items be removed. (The Hindu)

GDP growth to accelerate in 2010: Sharma

India's gross domestic product growth is expected to accelerate in 2010 from 2009, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Anand Sharma, said on Tuesday. Speaking at a forum in Beijing, Sharma asserted that the country's exports recovery is sustainable, but he called for greater access for Indian goods in China in the face of a widening bilateral trade gap. Bilateral trade between the two giants has grown rapidly, making China India's second-largest trading partner. "We have an imbalance, a gap in trade, which we need to meaningfully address," Sharma told the forum. He called for more Chinese direct investment in India, especially in infrastructure, while noting that Indian firms are already present in China. (The Indian Express)

Inflation may hit double digits by March

India's monthly inflation may touch double digits by March, federal Chief Statistician Pronab Sen told a private television channel on Tuesday. "It is really possible," he said, when asked whether inflation could touch double digits by March. India's wholesale price index rose to 7.31 per cent in December from a year earlier, driven by higher food prices. (The Indian Express)

Geo-strategic developments:

No territorial ambitions, Defence Minister clarifies

Forced on the back foot due to recent comments by Army Chief General Deepak Kapoor who talked about getting ready for a two-front war with China and Pakistan, Defence Minister A K Antony on Saturday clarified that India was not a war-mongering nation, nor did it have any territorial ambitions in the neighbourhood. Responding to queries on the uproar over the comments by Kapoor, Antony made it clear that the remarks were not aimed at antagonising neighbouring countries. "We might have a difference of opinion with our neighbours but we have no extra-territorial ambitions. We are not a war-mongering country," Antony told reporters in Kochi in response to a question on the issue. As reported by this newspaper, the External Affairs Ministry is livid over the Army Chief's comments on China and Pakistan that have led to a major diplomatic row. The Army Chief had said that India was revising its military doctrine to get ready for a two-pronged war. Earlier, he also caused a furor in Nepal over reported comments on the integration of Maoist cadres in the Nepal Army. The minister, who was in Kochi to attend a Coast Guard function, said that the situation in Kashmir had improved this year but there was no room for complacency. "Even now there are a large number of terrorists waiting along the border to infiltrate into Kashmir. This is a matter of serious concern because Pakistan is not doing anything in this regard," Antony said. (The Indian Express)

'Substantial land lost to China'

The area along the Line of Actual Control with China has "shrunk" over a period of time, and India has lost a "substantial" amount of land in the last two decades, says an official

report. At a recent meeting at Leh, attended by officials of the Jammu and Kashmir government, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Army, it was agreed that there were differences in the maps of various agencies and lack of proper mapping of the area. The meeting was chaired by Commissioner (Leh) A.K. Sahu and attended, among others, by Brigadier General Staff of 14 Corps Brig. Sarat Chand and Col. Inderjit Singh. According to the minutes, it was agreed that "there is a lack of institutional memory in various agencies as well as a clear policy, which in the long run has resulted in the loss of territory by India in favour of China." (The Hindu)

Suitable action against China's incursions: IAF chief

IAF chief Air Chief Marshal P V Naik on Tuesday said India will take "suitable action" if the reports of China occupying Indian territory along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was established. "I am not aware of the authenticity of the reports. When it is established on the ground, then we will take suitable action. It (incursions) has got nothing to do with the Air Force though," Naik told reporters here. However, the IAF chief said there was "no" increase in the air space violations by Chinese military aircraft. "On the air space violations front...it has not increased. On the land, you got to ask the Army chief about it," he said. Regarding the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, Naik said the militant attacks in the border state were "nothing new" and were going on for the last 10 to 12 years now. "But last year, the number of attacks have come down and it will continue to come down," he added. Noting that stable situation in Kashmir was desired by all, the IAF chief said it was for the political leadership of the country to decide if troop reduction in the state helped stability or not. "It depends whether it will be stable by reducing the number of troops or by increasing the number of troops in Jammu and Kashmir. Let our political masters decide. They are the best judges of this. I am sure they will be consulting the army chief when they want to do all this. So no problem. Do not worry, there is no danger to the country," he added. (The Indian Express)

Assam Rifles to induct 30,000 troops

Assam Rifles, the paramilitary force entrusted with fighting insurgency in Northeast and guarding the Indo-Myanmar border, will induct more than 30,000 troops in coming years. The force, which currently has 65,000 troops, will raise 26 new battalions over the next decade and build roads, helipads and posts along the 1,600 km long Indo-Myanmar border. "Approvals for increasing the strength by 26 battalions are in a very advanced stage. By the year end, the process of raising the new battalions will start. We will raise three to four battalions every year," Assam Rifles Director General Karan Singh Yadava said. The first three of the new battalions will be raised by the end of this year and stationed in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, he said. The main purpose of raising the new units, Yadava said, would be to check the movement of goods like drugs and arms across the porous Indo-Myanmar border, which is one of the main routes for smuggling of weapons and drugs into India. Asked about reports that weapons were being smuggled into the country through China, Yadava said his men have found weapons with Chinese markings but there was "no indication that arms were being pushed into the Northeast from China". Assam Rifles is under the administrative control of the Home Ministry but under the operational control of the Army. The most active anti-insurgency force in

Northeast, it has participated in all wars and conflicts since independence. (The Indian Express)

Beijing unaware of border claim

The Chinese government on Tuesday said it was unaware of a report in India that suggested China has extended its control over a significant amount of disputed territory in the Ladakh region. But a Foreign Ministry official said China “abided by the strict commitments” it had made to New Delhi on the border issue. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu said she was unaware of the claims, indicating New Delhi did not approach Chinese officials over the report. Ms. Jiang said China had “always abided by the strict commitments” it made to New Delhi and the two countries had “reached a consensus” to maintain peace and tranquility along the border, pending a final settlement. The two countries have had 13 rounds of talks to resolve the border dispute. The talks have made little progress, and several areas along the western as well as eastern sections have not been formally demarcated by the two sides. (The Hindu)

No change in LAC: Antony

Defence Minister A.K. Antony on Wednesday denied reports that China had encroached on Indian territory in the eastern sector. “There is no change in the Line of Actual Control. There is only a difference in perception,” he told. (The Hindu)

Germany keen on civil nuclear cooperation

Germany is keen on civilian nuclear cooperation with India but the first step in this direction could be about reactor safety, according to German ambassador to India Thomas Matussek. “We have been reluctant because one of the big risks of the globe is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction... India has gone its own special way with the nuclear deal with the United States and has decided not to go the way of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). But you have an impeccable record of non-proliferation.” Germany was keen on a strategic relationship with India as “equal partners” over the long term, Mr. Matussek said. “We find [stability] in the European Union and to a certain degree in North America and we keep looking and looking and here we have an anchor of stability of over one billion people in a rough neighbourhood and we think your stability and security also defines ours,” he said. While strategic cooperation was being driven by the governments, there was also a vibrant industrial partnership especially in the automotive sector. Small and medium industries, largely family-run, contributed to 60 per cent of Germany’s GDP and this was similar to the Indian industrial structure. India’s greatest strength was its huge population and, if things went according to plan, it could have a productive workforce of 600 million by 2050. Germany could help in the form of shopfloor training and vocational courses for them. A “train the trainer” academy would be set up in Pune when the Federal President visited India in the first week of February. He would sign a bilateral agreement on economic and technological cooperation worth 350 million euros and agreements on scientific cooperation and social security. (The Hindu)

India ready to review the 1950 Treaty, says Krishna

India has reiterated its willingness to review the controversial 1950 Nepal-India Friendship Treaty. Indian Minister for External Affairs S.M. Krishna who is on a three-day visit has told this to Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Sujata Koirala who also holds the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. "India is positive to review the Treaty," Ms. Koirala told reporters after meeting her Indian counterpart in Kathmandu. She said times have changed since the treaty was signed. Although there were agreements in the past between the two countries to review the treaty, the latest remark from India has come a day after the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) burnt copies of "unequal agreements" Nepal signed with India, including the 1950 Treaty. The Maoists have launched a movement to protect Nepal's sovereignty since January. They say Nepal's sovereignty is in danger because of foreign interference, pointing at India. But Mr. Krishna told journalists that Nepal was top priority in India's foreign policy. He will be meeting Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Saturday. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala said she told the Indian side that Nepal would give India's security concerns a big priority. She also discussed ways to deal with cross-border problems, detection of fake currency, human and drug trafficking, and other problems at the border. Mr. Krishna, who is on a three-day visit of Nepal also met with Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal on Friday. He would be meeting President Ram Baran Yadav and Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala on Saturday. He will also be laying foundation of the Integrated Check Post in Birgunj. Ms. Koirala and Mr. Krishna signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen road infrastructure in the Terai region of Nepal. The assistance is worth NPR 1300 crore. Three other MoUs in presence of the Ministers were also signed between Nepal and India which include electrification of five village development committees, establishment of Nepal-Bharat Maitri Science Learning Center in Nepal, and an agreement between Nepal Stock Exchange Limited and Central Depository Services (India). (The Hindu)

India wants peace with neighbours: Army Chief

Chief of Army Staff General Deepak Kapoor on Friday said India believed in having peaceful and cordial relations with its neighbours, including China and Pakistan. "India has always believed in maintaining peaceful and cordial relations with its neighbouring countries. With China, we want to continue peace. We want cordial relations and peace with Pakistan too," General Kapoor said after reviewing an impressive parade on the occasion of the 62nd Army Day. Gen. Kapoor said this after his doctrine of a two-front war with China and Pakistan attracted criticism. (The Hindu)

India disappointed at Nepal Maoists' stance: Krishna

External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna has said that India is disappointed at the Nepali Maoists' anti-India movement. "I did convey to him [Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'] on the basis of the reports that I got about Maoist leaders' statements in the last 10-12 days," Mr. Krishna told reporters at the Tribhuvan International Airport on Sunday when asked if India was disappointed with the

Maoists' movement. Mr. Dahal has been saying that India made "naked interference" in Nepal's internal matters and that Nepal's sovereignty was at stake because of this interference. His party dubs the present government led by CPN-UML a puppet, remote-controlled by India. Two weeks ago, Mr. Dahal called India "masters" of Nepal's political parties. His party has demanded scrapping of all the "unequal agreements" Nepal had with India. Mr. Dahal and Mr. Krishna met on Saturday in Kathmandu, and during their meeting, Maoists' ongoing movement was discussed. Mr. Krishna told Mr. Dahal that activities such as burning of copies of past agreements could affect the diplomatic relations of Maoists with India. As per the Ministry's official website, Mr. Krishna had "conveyed his deep disappointment at the baseless attacks on India by the Maoist leadership which vitiate the age-old and time-tested friendly relations between India and Nepal and the people of the two countries." As per the official spokesperson of the Ministry, Mr. Krishna "emphasised that such baseless propaganda has a negative impact on the Indian public opinion." Although scheduled to hold a press meet, Mr. Krishna left for India without interacting much with Nepali media. (The Hindu)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Antony asks forces to be alert

Defence Minister A.K. Antony on Tuesday cautioned that 2010 may prove crucial as forces inimical to peace and stability in Jammu and Kashmir would make all efforts to neutralise the gains of the previous years. He asked the security agencies in the State not to be complacent and work towards consolidating these gains. While expressing concern at the renewed attempts by Pakistan to facilitate infiltration, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said that this year should be one of consolidation. Mr. Antony, who arrived in Jammu on a day-long visit, told a high-level meeting of various security forces and agencies at the Unified Headquarters that the synergy and hard work put in by them and the local people had brought down the "level of violence" in J&K considerably, though the attempts at infiltration had increased. Mr. Antony's visit came at a time when there have been several attempts by militants to infiltrate to this side. "The incidents in the first week of January in the Valley are indicative of the shape of things to come," the Minister said with reference to the Lal Chowk attack. The meeting was attended by the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Deputy Chief Minister Tara Chand, Chief of the Army Staff General Deepak Kapoor, Defence Secretary Pradeep Kumar, officers and commanders from the MoD and Service Headquarters, senior officers of the Jammu and Kashmir government and various security and Intelligence Agencies, according to an official release. The release quoted Mr. Antony as saying that "with the improvement in the security situation, the time had come for the State police to be given far greater responsibility, particularly in major towns, in tackling the threat of terrorism. However, "the handing over of the responsibility must be meticulously planned and undertaken in a gradual, phased manner." He disclosed that on the request of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Home Affairs had issued instructions to the CRPF to take over the entire responsibility of opening the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway from January 15, 2010. "This has been done to make the Army less visible, without in any way diluting our counter-terrorist grid," he said. Mr. Antony said a request had been sent to MHA to issue

instructions to discontinue the use of combat uniform by all Central Police Organisations and the State police. The Defence Minister reiterated the government's policy of 'zero tolerance' towards human rights violations by the armed forces personnel. "Our armed forces personnel must be conscious of human rights all the time. They must follow the twin ethics of minimum use of force and good faith during operations. Though their constraints are understandable, the security forces must bear in mind that the process of winning the hearts and minds of the people is never an easy one." Mr. Abdullah said 2009 was a better year in terms of the overall security environment. "2010, I believe, has also begun on a positive note. "Let us all consolidate the gains made in the direction of normalisation of the situation in J&K to make 2010 the year of consolidation." He sought a recruitment drive for the defence forces among the local youth. Frequent recruitment rallies must be organised, especially in far-flung areas, he said. There was a need to carry on developmental works, as the "State had succeeded in receiving the maximum financial support from the Centre and a massive development process had been launched. Sporadic militancy related incidents and law and order incidents should not hamper the development process." He said that standing operating procedures should be followed while dealing with law and order and militancy related incidents. The synergy existing between various forces needed to be further strengthened. Mr. Abdullah also stressed the need to enhance the rotary tonnage and provide helicopter service to the cut off and far-flung areas in the State. (The Hindu)

Militants attack Sopore police station; two killed, six injured

Militants on Friday attacked a police station in Sopore town of north Kashmir, killing one policeman and a civilian. Six others were injured in the attack, reports said. Witnesses told that militants first lobbed a grenade towards the police station in the Arampora area in the morning. They returned half-an-hour later and opened fire. The grenade hit the rooftop of the building. A Congress activist, Mohammad Latif Mirchal, was injured. The militants later directed fire towards the police station, injuring seven persons. Two of the injured, police constable Mohammad Amin and civilian Parvez Ahmad, died in a hospital. The attack led to panic and fear in the area. Shops downed shutters and traffic was hit. The police, joined by the Central Reserve Police Force and the Army, returned the fire. The area was cordoned off to flush out the militants. IGP Kashmir Zone Farooq Ahmad told that militants opened fired at the station after the area was cordoned off following the grenade attack. However, they managed to escape. On Thursday, two militants of the Hizbul Mujahideen and an Army man were killed in Khazanbal area of Kulgam district. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Swine flu death toll touches 1,113

Five swine flu deaths were recorded in the country on Friday, taking the death toll so far to 1,113, health authorities said here. Also 64 new cases were reported in the country. (The Hindu)

Kasab latest: All 4 Taj attackers Indians

Arrested terrorist Ajmal Kasab declared in court on Monday that the four attackers who had laid siege to Hotel Taj on 26/11 had been Indians, not Pakistanis, and that one of them, Abu Ismail, was a Mumbai local. Kasab was answering to charges under section 313 of the CrPC. He had claimed earlier that one of the terrorists, whom he calls Abu Ali, looked like him and committed the crimes that he is now charged with. “Abu Ali was a Kashmiri. Even a SIM card from Kashmir was found on his person,” Kasab told the court. According to the prosecution, Kasab and Abu Ismail had killed over 50 people at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, but Kasab said Ismail had been at the Taj, one of the “four Indians”. Ismail looks like an Indian citizen, he claimed. From the photographs shown to him and as per his information, Kasab said, Ismail was from Mumbai. He said two of the attackers, whose bodies had been charred beyond recognition, were from Kashmir and Gujarat respectively. The court asked him how he was able to say this when he had not even seen them. “I have seen their pictures and as per my information, the police burnt them alive after they found evidence on them, SIM cards and other identity cards, that they were locals,” he said. Confronted with details about the loss to property at Hotel Taj, Oberoi, Leopold, Nariman house, Cama Hospital and CST, Kasab denied having knowledge of it. The court will continue recording his statement on Tuesday. (The Indian Express)

Nearly 2 lakh farm suicides since 1997

There were at least 16,196 farmers’ suicides in India in 2008, bringing the total since 1997 to 199,132, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The share of the Big 5 States or ‘suicide belt’ in 2008 — Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh — remained very high at 10,797, or 66.6 per cent of the total farm suicides in the country. This was marginally higher than it was in 2007 (66.2 per cent). Maharashtra remains the worst State in the nation for farm suicides with a total of 3802. (This is just 40 short of the combined total of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.) The all-India total of 16,196 represents a fall of 436 from 2007. But the broad trends of the past decade reflect no significant change. The national average for farm suicides since 2003 stays at roughly one every 30 minutes. Within the Big 5, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh recorded higher numbers. The increase of 604 in these three States somewhat offset the dip in Maharashtra (436) and Karnataka (398). But a fall in suicide numbers in other States (for example, a decline of 412 in Kerala and 343 in West Bengal) means that the Big 5 marginally increased their two-thirds share of total farm suicides in 2008. The NCRB data now cover all States for 12 years from 1997. In the first six years (1997-2002), the Big 5 witnessed 55,769 farmers’ suicides. From 2003 to 2008, they totalled 67,054, a rise of nearly 1900 a year on average. Maharashtra has logged 41,404 farm suicides from 1997 (over a fifth of the national total) and 44,468 from 1995, the year when this State began recording farm data. No other State comes close. During 1997-2002, Maharashtra saw, on average, eight farmers kill themselves daily. The corresponding figure rose to 11 during 2003-2008. The rise was from an average of 2,833 farm suicides a year in the first period to an average of 4,067 in the next period. Professor K. Nagaraj, an economist who has worked at the Madras Institute of Development Studies, says of the NCRB data: “There is hardly any

decline in the suicide belt, though individual States may show variations across 12 years. If this is the state for 2008, the year of the Rs. 70,000 crore loan waiver and multiple farm packages, then 2009, a drought year, could show very disturbing figures. The underlying agrarian problems seem as acute as ever.” (The Hindu)

Foreign Relations:

India, Botswana sign two pacts during Ansari’s visit

India and Botswana on Saturday signed two agreements after Vice-President Hamid Ansari arrived on a three-day visit here and held “warm” and friendly” talks with his counterpart Lt General Mompoti Merafhe. Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (west) Vivek Katju said the bilateral discussions were held on a range of issues, including India’s ongoing “training of the defence forces of Botswana” and assistance in vocational training by experts from India. The two leaders also discussed United Nations reform and the need for “differentiated responsibilities for developing countries” in tackling climate change. While the first agreement was on “cooperation in agricultural research, machinery, livestock, crops, and horticulture”, the second was on cooperation in education. Katju said the talks did not cover trade in diamonds. Ansari had earlier stated that he wished to discuss sourcing of uncut diamonds directly from Botswana, instead of having to buy these at prices set by the diamond “monopoly”. The South African conglomerate De Beers dominates mining and trade in diamonds, and is often accused of monopolistic practices. The Vice-President is scheduled to visit the Diamond Trading Corporation, owned by De Beers. The economy of Botswana, widely considered one of Africa’s success stories, is heavily dependent on the production of diamonds. The Indian diamond industry is the world’s largest net importer of uncut diamonds, and the fall in global demand has badly affected the Surat-based business. Botswana is the final leg of the Vice-President’s tri-nation tour of southern Africa. He had previously visited Zambia and Malawi where the Indian government agreed to loan \$50 and 55 million respectively. Ansari’s trip is part of India’s renewed focus on Africa. (The Indian Express)

India committed to promote peace with Pakistan: Tharoor

Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor has said India remains committed to long-term peace with Pakistan provided the country dismantles militant infrastructure on its soil. Tharoor said: "India remains committed to long term peace with Pakistan...there is no Indian threat to Pakistan on any ground whatsoever. The need is for consolidated action against terrorists wherever their operations are." "Our position articulated (by) our Prime Minister is that we can have a meaningful dialogue with Pakistan only if they can fulfill their commitment with a ...spirit not to allow their territory to be used in any manner for terrorist activities against India," he added. He further said that the Mumbai terror attacks and the overwhelming evidence of the involvement of elements in Pakistan in executing it and in the conspiracy that planned, funded and launched it were a serious setback to the process of dialogue with Pakistan. "Pakistan's evasive responses and denials in response to our requests for cooperation in exposing the conspiracy behind the Mumbai terror attack and bringing all its perpetrators to justice have not helped our bilateral relations. That is why there has been a pause in the Composite Dialogue

Process," he added. (The Indian Express)

Indira was truly like our mother: Hasina

President Pratibha Patil on Tuesday conferred the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2009 on Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the presence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and United Progressive Alliance chairwoman Sonia Gandhi. Ms. Hasina and Ms. Sonia Gandhi went down memory lane and recalled the association between the two families since the 1970s. Departing from her prepared speech, Ms. Hasina said: "We had nowhere to go at that time [after the massacre of her family in 1975]. Our government did not allow us to return to our homeland. It was Indira Gandhi who gave us shelter. We took political asylum and stayed in Delhi for six years. She was truly like our mother." Ms. Sonia Gandhi said she was fortunate to be present when Indira Gandhi greeted Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as he stopped in Delhi on January 10, 1972, while returning to his homeland. "Even today, I can sense the euphoria and excitement of that historic moment Indira Gandhi's name is, of course, inextricably linked with the birth of Bangladesh," she added. "Indira Gandhi derived so much inspiration from her father. You too, followed your father's footsteps. You have been a fighter from your student days and have experienced blood and tears, suffered and lost almost your entire family," Ms. Sonia Gandhi told Ms. Hasina. Before the event began, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, who was on the dais with Dr. Singh, awaiting the arrival of Ms. Patil and Ms. Hasina spotted the Bangladesh Prime Minister's family seated in the middle rows. She signalled to Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ambika Soni. Soon, protocol personnel located and escorted Ms. Hasina's family members to the front row after several Union Ministers were asked to shift to the back rows. Ms. Patil assured Ms. Hasina that India was committed to strengthening its relationship with Bangladesh. Throughout her life, Ms. Hasina personified the heroic struggle against autocracy and dictatorship, the struggle for establishing democracy and pluralism. Dr. Singh said the award was not just to honour a great daughter of Bangladesh, but a distinguished world leader. "I reiterate our commitment to work together with the government and people of Bangladesh to shape a brighter future for our people and to enhance their common prosperity and development." He said Bangladesh's return to democracy owed a great deal to Ms. Hasina's courage, sacrifice and unshakeable belief in the will of the people. "As a democracy ourselves, we know that it is a form of governance which is not easy. It requires constant nurturing. It requires the capacity to manage differences and the willingness to respect them. By championing the cause of democracy and pluralism, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given the people of Bangladesh the means to realise their true potential and strengthen peace and harmony in the country." (The Hindu)

IPL rejection should not mar bilateral ties: MEA

Distancing itself from the issue of Pakistan cricketers not getting any buyers in the IPL, the government on Thursday said this episode should not have any adverse ramifications over the bilateral relations between the two countries. The Ministry of External Affairs has made it clear that the government has absolutely no problems with Pakistani cricketers coming to India and the treatment meted out to them by the IPL was a private

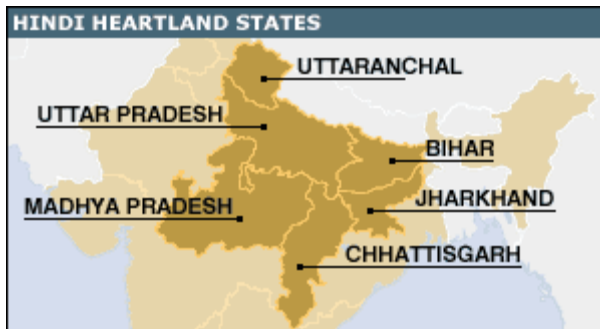
matter of the organizers. The MEA said all 16 Pakistani players had already been issued visas before January 13 to pave their way to play in the country. Some of the Pakistani players had applied for visas from third countries like New Zealand and the government had in fact expedited their requests. Pakistan has already reacted strongly to the 'insult' of its players by the IPL organizers. (The Indian Express)

Pakistan not to send parliamentarians

The National Assembly has decided not to send parliamentarians for the golden jubilee celebrations of India's Election Commission and cable operators have declared they will pull the plug on any telecasts of Indian Premier League matches. Weeks ago, the participation of the Indian boxing team in a tournament in Karachi was hailed as a positive development for ties between the two countries. It was the first visit by an Indian sporting team after the cancellation of an Indian cricket tour in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. But the snub to Pakistani cricketers at the Indian Premier League auction has caused another setback with widening repercussions. Even though the Pakistan government has acted with restraint by not jumping into the controversy, individual ministers have commented strongly against Pakistani players failing to find a place in any of the IPL teams. Interior Minister Rehman Malik said cricket was a way of doing diplomacy and India should send a delegation to apologise to the Pakistani players and invite them to play in the matches. He said it showed India was "not serious" about pursuing peace with Pakistan. Sports Minister Ejaz Jakhani also condemned the exclusion of the Pakistani players and said Pakistan would give a "fitting" reply. Cricketing hero-turned-politician Imran Khan and another Pakistani cricketing great, Zaheer Abbas, said Pakistan should reserve the right to boycott the 2011 World Cup cricket matches at Indian venues in retaliation. The Cable Operators Association of Pakistan said at a press conference that they would block any local or international channel that telecasts IPL matches, a decision that will hit Geo TV's sports channel, which has paid for exclusive rights to show the matches in Pakistan. At a press conference in Lahore, Captain Jabbar Ahmed Khan, the president of the association said the decision had been taken to express solidarity with the players. The National Assembly has pulled parliamentarians from a delegation which is to travel to India for the Election Commission's 50th anniversary celebrations. Two parliamentarians were in the delegation. The rest of the delegates, including Pakistan's Chief Election Commissioner, will go ahead with the visit, Farahnaz Ispahani, media adviser to President Asif Ali Zardari said. Speaker Fehmida Mirza's announcement that the parliamentarians will not go followed a long speech in the National Assembly by the leader of the Opposition, Chaudhary Nisar Ahmed of the Pakistan Muslim League (N), who said the party was withdrawing its delegate, Ayaz Amir, in protest against the manner in which the Pakistani players had been treated at the IPL auction. Mr. Ahmed also said his party would not join any other delegation visiting India until "India changes its attitude." He demanded a ban on all sporting ties with India and also a complete ban on Indian films. He accused the government of trying to appease India. Jamshed Dasti, head of a parliamentary committee on sports said he would move a resolution in the National Assembly against the IPL. (The Hindu)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

Situation still fluid in SP

After Amar Singh resigned from organisational posts, the Samajwadi Party (SP) is waiting for him and SP president Mulayam Singh to make their next moves. Even Mr. Amar Singh's detractors prefer to remain silent, because the situation, they feel, is still fluid. Mr. Mulayam Singh, who returned remained billeted within his Vikramaditya Marg official residence. His son and Uttar Pradesh SP unit president Akhilesh Singh Yadav spent some time in the party headquarters but said nothing about the resignation controversy. Mr. Mulayam Singh's brother, Ram Gopal Yadav, attended a pre-nuptial function at hotel Taj Residency and he also refused to make any comment. "Unless the party president takes a clear-cut line whether Amar Singh is indispensable or not, it would not be advisable to say anything on the controversy," said an MLA from Eastern Uttar Pradesh. "Moreover, it is still not known whether his resignation will be accepted." Reacting to the latest crisis in the SP, a former Minister from a neighbouring district said the wheel has come full circle. He did not elaborate. Party sources said the denial of nomination to Ravi Shankar Singh "Pappu" from Ballia in Thursday's Legislative Council polls, whose case was reportedly been pleaded by Mr. Amar Singh, proved the flashpoint in the already tense relationship between Mr. Mulayam Singh and the national general secretary. The SP nomination went to Randhir Singh, brother of Suraj Deo Singh, an alleged don of Bihar's coal mafia. Taking advantage of the intra-party dispute in the SP, the ruling Bahujan Samaj Party fielded Mr. Ravi Shankar Singh from Ballia. The sources said Mr. Ravi Shankar Singh and Mr. Randhir Singh were close to the former Prime Minister S. Chandra Shekhar, who hailed from Ibrahim Patti in Ballia district. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Economic Front:

UP plans to 'power' ahead on PPP model

Uttar Pradesh is set to become first state in the country to implement power transmission sub stations and transmission lines project on the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. The project to be executed on BOOT (Build-own-operate and transfer) basis is due to be completed by the end of 11th Five-Year Plan ending on March 31, 2012. The private developer will transfer the power infrastructure project to the UP Power Transmission (UP Transco) after running the project for 25 years. "The RFQ (request for qualification) was floated in August last, four bids were received, the RFP (request for proposal) are being evaluated and the contract is most likely to be awarded by the end of February next," said Ashok Kumar, the executive director of the UP Transco. "Later, the transmission service agreement (TSA) will be signed with the private developer who will manage the project for next 25 years". "The developer will realise the power wheeling charges from distribution companies which will buy power from the UP Transco. The developer will recover his cost of setting up the sub station and the transmission lines in next 25 years from the power wheeling charges," Kumar added. The state needs as much as Rs 23,000 crore for new transmission sub-stations and lines during the 11th five plan period. The cash-strapped state-run power utility was forced to explore the option of mobilising the investment via the PPP route and aims to raise Rs 7,800 crore. "Sub stations of 765 kv and 400 kv will be taken up under PPP, while the smaller ones are being constructed either by the UP Power Transmission Corporation or on turn-key basis," Kumar said. As per the estimates of the UP Power Corporation Limited, the state distribution utility, the availability of power in UP by the end of the 11th Five Year Plan in March, 2012 is expected to be 12,433 MW against the present availability between 6,500-7,000 MW. To cope with demand for additional power by 2012, UP needs to upgrade and strengthen its power transmission network. Besides adding fresh capacity and buying from Central sector power plants, the UPPCL has also drawn plans for the direct purchase of 2,000 MW of power from the Independent Power Producers (IPP). The fresh generation capacity to be added during the 11th Five Year Plan include the new units of 2X250 MW at existing Pariccha thermal power plant in Jhansi, new units of 2X250 MW at existing Harduaganj thermal power plant in Aligarh, 600 MW at the new thermal power plant coming up at Rosa in Shahajahanpur, being set up by the Reliance Energy, and 500X2 MW Anpara C, thermal plant being executed by the Hyderabad-based Lanco Kundapalli. (The Indian Express)

'Bihar's factory output races to match India's pace'

Laggard state of Bihar seems to have caught up with the rest of India as it clocked 14.80 per cent growth in factory output in 2007-08, marginally less than the country's rate of 15.24 per cent. "Bihar is doing well," Ashish Kumar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) said releasing summary of Annual Survey of Industries 2007-08, the volume of which would be out within a month. The survey conducted by Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) and National Sample Survey Organisation under MOSPI provides information on factories, and bidi and cigar units across India. State-wise details are expected in the volume. "Bihar's total

factory output was 14.80 per cent and total employees grew by 10.02 per cent in 2007-08 over 2006-07," Kumar said, adding that India's factory output during the year grew by 15.24 per cent. Recently, Bihar had hit the headlines as a CSO data showed the state clocking an astonishing 11.03 per cent growth per year during 2004-05 and 2008-09 second only to Gujarat at 11.05 per cent, when the country grew at 8.49 per cent. According to the ASI 2007-08, the highest number of working factories was in Tamil Nadu (14.37 per cent) followed by Maharashtra (12.50 per cent). Maharashtra had the highest invested capital at 16.78 per cent followed by Gujarat at 16.37 per cent and Tamil Nadu at 10.12 per cent, it said. (The Indian Express)

The North



Politics:

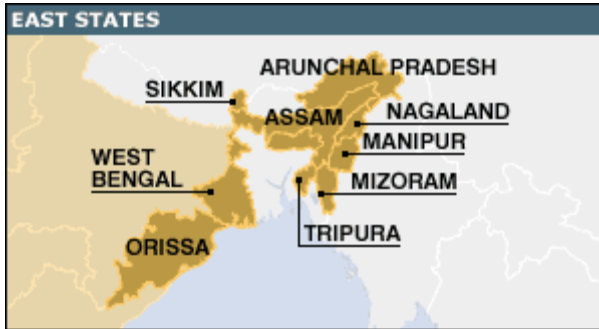
Social front:

Google's Internet bus begins its one-month tour of Rajasthan

Google's Internet bus, meant to take the benefits of the Internet to the common man, began its journey in Rajasthan on Tuesday. "The bus will travel across nine districts of the State in one month and provide Internet experience to the people of the State," Sanjay Jain, project director, Google India, told a press conference here. "This endeavour will provide an opportunity to the emerging Internet users to experience and understand the power of Internet." "The bus, equipped with computers and Internet facilities, focusses on the themes of information, communication, entertainment and education. It will travel through Jaipur, Kota, Ajmer, Bhilwara, Udaipur, Pali, Jodhpur, Bikaner and Sikar districts," he said. The bus would have informative contents in both English and Hindi to help the users understand how the Internet could be used for all of their needs, Mr. Jain said. Beginning its journey from Chennai in February last year, the bus has reached out to more than 4,60,000 people, visiting 70 cities across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. "This year, it will travel across Hindi-speaking States in north India in the next couple of months," Mr. Jain said. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

Mamata used people's movement in Singur, Nandigram: Kishenji

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, who has vowed to throw the ultras out of Bengal, has been accused by a top Maoist leader of having taken their help in Singur and Nandigram and now turning her back on them. "Mamata used the people's movement at Singur and Nandigram to reach the corridors of power at the Centre and now she is dreaming of the chief minister's chair at the cost of people's interest," Maoist leader Kishenji said in a fax message. "It sounds like the threats of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and P Chidambaram. Let Mamata try to tarnish Maoists and dispatch forces to suppress a people's movement. The red flag will continue to fly in 'Jungle mahal' which she cannot resist and which will bring change in Bengal." 'Jungle mahal' is Maoist-hit areas in the districts of West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia where joint operations by securitymen have been underway since the middle of last year. On Banerjee's resolve to drive Maoists out of Bengal 'if voted to power', Kishenji said "it is a matter of surprise that Mamata herself speaks against the people's movement to strengthen the hands of CPI(M) raiders when the people's rights are being established." Alleging that Banerjee was in the habit of 'political somersaults', he said "she should be answerable to the people." (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Telangana shutdown: Normal life crippled for second day

Normal life was paralysed in Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh for the second consecutive day on Thursday due to bandh called by Telangana Joint Action Committee (JAC) to protest the police cane-charge on students in Osmania University in Hyderabad. The Andhra Pradesh Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) has suspended its services in Telangana districts like Nalgonda, Medak and Karimnagar. The APSRTC, however, partially resumed its services here, providing some relief to commuters. It suspended its services yesterday. Schools, colleges, shops and business establishments in Telangana region remained closed. The JAC called for the bandh to protest cane-charge and firing of teargas shells on students in Osmania University, the nerve-centre of the statehood agitation, yesterday. About 50 students and several policemen, including an Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), were injured in the clashes between police and students in the campus. The JAC, however, exempted a religious congregation taking place at Madaram in Telangana from the shutdown. Accordingly, the APSRTC was operating bus services to Medaram for the convenience of devotees. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Aiyar compares Modi to Saddam

Former Union minister Mani Shankar Aiyar compared Gujarat government's move to make voting for civic polls compulsory to laws made by the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. "My personal view is that the compulsory voting Bill by Chief Minister Narendra Modi is not only undemocratic in spirit but also doesn't clearly specify punishments to be meted out to those who do not cast their votes. When Saddam Hussein was in power, he pursued similar policies wherein punishments or actions by the state against any lawbreaking individual were not specified," said Aiyar. He said that even the BJP was divided over the move. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

'City turning nation's education hub'

Union Minister for State for Corporate and Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid said Pune is fast becoming the educational hub of the country and the Union government is reaching out to young people to create higher level of employability for them. The minister said as part of this initiative he would visit more educational institutes in the city soon. Khurshid, who was in the city to attend a function, asked the industries to give weightage to minorities while recruiting and said his ministry is working on how fiscal incentives can be given to such companies. "The government is willing for an open debate on the subject to bring in innovative and affirmative action no less than that of reservation. The traditional skills and strength of rural minorities should be identified and training can be imparted to them," he said. Talking on the sidelines of convocation ceremony of International School of Business and Media Studies on Saturday, Khurshid said to monitor whether various schemes for minorities are effectively reaching the target groups, special monitoring programme would be set up this month." As part of the 15-point, Rs 37,000 crore was released by the Centre under the five-year plan for the welfare of minorities. To effectively monitor the programme, 150 retired civil servants, who are currently undergoing training in New Delhi, will be appointed this month across the country and will report directly to the ministry. Out of 150, an official will be deputed in each of the 90 districts," he said. Khurshid said the National Minorities Development and

Finance Corporation under the Ministry of Minority Affairs will be restructured in next four months. The minister said the Companies Act 2009 would be enacted this year giving shareholders more transparency. “It will make statutory auditors and independent directors of the companies more accountable.” He said the ministry in collaboration with the UGC would provide scholarships to 3 lakh students from the minority group apart from funding 756 PhD students. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front: