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National Summary:

Rahul Gandhi asked his supporters to oppose Shiv Sena's violent politics through peaceful means of mobilizing masses against Sena policies and activities. The Bharatiya Janata Party has welcomed the judgment of the Andhra Pradesh High Court invalidating State legislation on reservation for minorities. BJP considers it contradictory to Indian constitution to reserved quota for religious minorities.

The Left Front government in West Bengal has announced the implementation of the Ranganath Mishra Commission's recommendations by deciding to reserve 10 per cent of government jobs for the economically, educationally and socially backward sections among Muslims. The Andhra Pradesh High Court nullifies the four per cent reservation provided by the State government to selected sections of Muslims in education and public employment. High Court Declared the A.P. Reservation in favour of Socially Educationally Backward Classes of Muslims Act, 2007 "unsustainable," the five judges said the Act "is religion-specific and potentially encourages religious conversions. Muslims want 10 per cent reservation in public recruitment and education, as recommended by the Ranganath Misra-headed National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Jharkhand government does not consider the use of force to counter Maoist insurgents the only and effective option instead it believes that government can restore peace and security only by empowering the deprived sections of the society and providing them the basic needs of life. Maoists blasted railway tracks and train in Orissa and Bihar.

Despite of government claims that India stayed least effected in global economic crisis findings show poverty has increased in India. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (UNDESA) data estimates that the number of India's poor was 33.6 million higher in 2009 than would have been the case if the growth rates of the years from 2004 to 2007 had been maintained. If inequality grew in India in 2009, the number of poor would be even higher than these projections. The UNDESA report attributes this increase in poverty to a combination of reduced household incomes, rising unemployment and pressure on public services. Job losses in India were primarily in export-oriented industries like textiles while employment levels in Indian firms catering to the domestic market were largely unaffected, the report says.

Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee is hopeful that country would be able to achieve growth rate of 7.2 percent in 2010.

India has successfully test-fired its nuclear-capable Agni-III ballistic missile, with a range of more than 3,000 km from the Orissa coast on Sunday. Pakistan has accepted India's proposal for negotiations without any preconditions. Pakistan clarifies that talks should be productive and all major issues e.g. Kashmir and water issue will be on agenda.

BSF has accepted that its personnel had killed the Kashmiri youth that erupted

protest in the valley.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) report India figures among the four countries that have seen a marked increase in systematic attacks on schools, students and teachers between 2006 and 2009. In India, nearly 300 schools were reportedly blown up by Maoists between 2006 and 2009. Naxalites/Maoists recruit children of 6 to 12 years age. Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Jharkhand are the most effected states.

Regional Summary:

Orissa government had refused to accept any financial assistance from the European Union for rehabilitation of victims of Kandhamal riot.

TRS chief K Chandrasekhar Rao condemned the terms of references (ToR) of the committee set up by the Centre on Telangana as a “betrayal” and asked all party MPs, MLAs and MLCs to resign in protest.

National Report

Politics:

Oppose Sena by mobilising people, not violence: Rahul

After taking on the Shiv Sena on its home turf for "Mumbai for Marathis" campaign, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said the Sainiks should be opposed by mobilising people and not by violence. Taking potshots at the Sena protest, he said there were 15 to 20 Shiv Sena workers with black flags when he boarded the suburban trains in Mumbai but there were thousands of people to support him. "This is how we should oppose them. We should oppose them not by violence but by mobilising people," he told student leaders during an unannounced brief visit. Ignoring the protest by Shiv Sainiks, Gandhi had hopped onto Mumbai local trains abandoning his motorcade to make a last minute detour through the bastions of the Saffron outfit which had asked its cadres to greet him with black flags for opposing its "Mumbai for Marathis" campaign. "India belongs to all Indians. If you are an Indian, you can live in any part of the country as you live in your state ... whether you are a Keralite or Tamilian or Punjabi. It doesn't matter," Gandhi said. The Congress leader, who is trying to woo youth through interactions country-wide, stressed the need to strengthen student organisations by mobilising more workers. (The Indian Express)

BJP hails court order quashing quota for minorities

The Bharatiya Janata Party has welcomed the judgment of the Andhra Pradesh High Court quashing State legislation on reservation for minorities. Spokesperson Prakash Javadekar blamed the Congress for making false promises to Muslims knowing fully well that any attempt to give reservation to minorities would be unconstitutional. Mr. Javadekar said he hoped the ruling party would stop attempts to bring reservation for minorities when the Constitution forbade reservation for religious groups. (The Hindu)

Congress runs into trouble with allies

The Congress has run into trouble with its allies. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK is unhappy about a meeting between Congress president Sonia Gandhi and AIADMK chief Jayalalitha even as cracks have appeared in Jammu and Kashmir between the Congress and National Conference over the newly proposed surrender policy for militants over in PoK. Down south the DMK has expressed disappointment over rival AIADMK chief Jayalalitha's meeting with Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi at an Election Commission function last week. Tamil Nadu chief minister M Karunanidhi indirectly expressed his displeasure at the interaction by clamming the Chief Election Commissioner for facilitating the meeting, and written about the issue in the party mouth piece 'Murasoli' saying that CEC Navin Chawla had shown 'undue interest' in inviting Jayalalitha to the silver jubilee celebrations of the Election Commission held at Delhi last week and also arranging the cordial chat between the two powerful women politicians. The chat seemed no more than a brief exchange of pleasantries last week, but once which has made the DMK chief an unhappy man. In fact citing comments earlier made by PMK leader

Ramadoss, Karunanidhi has said, "If those vested with the responsibility to be truthful and protect democracy acted in a partisan manner, one is compelled to raise the question whether the fence itself is feeding on the crop He has also hit out at the CEC for postponing a assembly by-election at the behest of a request made by Jayalalitha. Karunanidhi, being a shrewd politician, stopped short of raising a direct finger at the Congress president, but the accusation is implicit and one that will no doubt be taken note of. Though both the DMK and Congress leaders had insisted soon after the meeting that there was nothing much to it, it is now clear that the DMK is indeed jittery. The reasons for the insecurity are many; with the assembly elections fast approaching, any overtures made by Jayalalitha are bound to upset Karunanidhi's apple cart. Moreover, the DMK believes that Rahul Gandhi is not too favorable about the alliance and there is much friction with the state Congress leaders. Political analysts believe that with this statement targeting the CEC, the DMK chief has given subtle hints to the Congress- that even a casual 'Hello' to Amma is unwelcome. Meanwhile, a war of words has broken out between allies the National Conference and the Congress in the Kashmir valley, with former chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad taking on Chief Minister Omar Abdullah over his proposed surrender policy, which if passed would facilitate the return of almost 11,000 Kashmiri men trained in militant camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The Union health minister Azad has lashed out saying that there is no guarantee that the youth after surrendering will not re-engage in terrorist activities. In stark contrast, Abdullah has said that the new policy will help bring back home young people in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir who are willing to return to the mainstream, adding that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that they are rehabilitated. (The Indian Express)

Gadkari formally elected BJP president

Nitin Gadkari, who was acting president of BJP since December, was on Tuesday formally elected to the top party post in the presence of senior party leaders. Gadkari, 52, is the youngest party chief since BJP's inception in 1980. Nominations in his favour were received from 13 state party units while one proposal came from the BJP parliamentary party. Party general secretary Thawar Chand Gehlot, who is in-charge of the organisational elections, handed over the election certificate to Gadkari in the presence of L K Advani, Sushma Swaraj, M Venkaiah Naidu and Gadkari's predecessor, Rajnath Singh. "A big responsibility has been entrusted to me by the party. This chair has earlier been graced by leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L K Advani and it is my good fortune to occupy it," Gadkari said. He asserted that he would strive to make the party stronger with price rise and internal security being the prime issues on which BJP will take on the government. Reeling under two successive Lok Sabha poll defeats, the party headquarters on Tuesday wore a festive look after a long time with performances by folk bands from different states and workers bursting crackers. Describing parliamentary party chairman L K Advani as his "margdarshak" (guide), Gadkari said he had the good fortune of having the guidance of Vajpayee and Advani, who were his role models. Later, Advani expressed confidence that Gadkari would fulfill the expectations BJP has of him. (The Times of India)

Minorities' issues:

10% quota for weaker sections among Muslims in West Bengal

The Left Front government in West Bengal has stolen a march over the United Progressive Alliance government at the Centre on the implementation of the Ranganath Mishra Commission's recommendations by deciding to reserve 10 per cent of government jobs for the economically, educationally and socially backward sections among Muslims. Announcing this on Monday, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said those benefiting from the decision would be brought under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category for which seven per cent of jobs were already reserved. "This will bring the total percentage of job reservation in West Bengal for the OBCs to 17." "It is not clear to us what the Centre will do [about the Ranganath Mishra Commission recommendations] but we have decided to accept it to ensure reservation of jobs for minorities not on the basis of religion but taking into account the economically, educationally and socially backward sections among the Muslims ... A committee will be set up to identify them," the Chief Minister said. "To start with, we are looking at reservation in jobs; after that we will think of reservation in educational institutions." The committee would suggest putting in place a mechanism for the implementation of the decision and would conduct a survey in all districts to identify the backward sections among Muslims. Mr. Bhattacharjee said "the creamy layer" among the community, those whose annual income was Rs. 4.5 lakh or more would be excluded from the benefit. Asked whether his government was considering five per cent reservation for other minorities, Mr. Bhattacharjee said: "At this point of time we are only announcing what applies to the Muslims as their numbers are substantial in our State. They constitute nearly 25 per cent of the population; therefore we are taking care of them first." (The Hindu)

A.P. quota for sections of Muslims quashed

In a significant judgment having national ramifications, the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday struck down the four per cent reservation provided by the State government to selected sections of Muslims in education and public employment. These sections were categorised as additional "E" group and included among the existing Backward Classes enjoying reservation, first through an ordinance and then legislation. Five judges on the Bench allowed the writ petitions challenging this Act 26 of 2007, while two differed with this view. The report of the A.P. Commission for Backward Classes, which was relied upon by the government for extending the reservation, came in for severe criticism by the judges. Declaring the A.P. Reservation in favour of Socially Educationally Backward Classes of Muslims Act, 2007 "unsustainable," the five judges said the Act "is religion-specific and potentially encourages religious conversions." The majority judgment pronounced by Chief Justice A.R. Dave said the government's action was based solely upon the findings and recommendations of the report of the Commission, and the procedural error committed by the Commission was fatal to its report and consequent recommendations. Chief Minister K. Rosaiah directed Advocate-General D.V. Seetharama Murthy to immediately take action for filing a Special Leave Petition in the

Supreme Court. He reiterated the government's commitment to provide 4 per cent reservation to Backward Class Muslims. Barring the BJP, all political parties expressed concern at the judgment and wanted the government to take steps to restore the quota. This is the third time the government is facing an embarrassment over a quota for Muslims. To keep its election promise, the government issued an administrative order in 2004 providing 5 per cent reservation for all Muslims, relying on a report by the A.P. Minorities Finance Corporation. This was struck down by the High Court. The government then constituted a BC commission and, based on its report, brought about the enactment in 2005, which was again rejected by the court. (The Hindu)

Muslims want 10 per cent quota on backward criterion

The speeches were sober, the analyses clinical and dispassionate, yet the message rang out clear from the podium: Muslims want 10 per cent reservation in public recruitment and education, as recommended by the Ranganath Misra-headed National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities. At the daylong meet, held in the Capital under the banner of the National Movement for Muslim Reservation (NMMR), Muslim intellectuals and activists hailed the Commission's recommendations as "unique and unprecedented" in the history of post-Independence India. They also urged the government to accept the Commission's other key recommendation: Amending the Constitution to bring Muslims and Christians within the ambit of Scheduled Caste reservation, now limited to Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. The coordinator of NMMR, Syed Shahabuddin, said matters had reached a stage where it was no longer possible to avoid the subject of reservation for minorities, Muslims among them: "Muslim reservation has today become the litmus test of secularism." However, having said this, Mr. Shahabuddin and the other participants clarified that Muslims were seeking reservation not as Muslims which move could run afoul of the Constitution, not to mention Hindu right-wing groups but as a backward, deprived class. Mr. Shahabuddin said Article 15 (1) prohibited discrimination by the state on grounds of "religion, race, caste etc." but if "religion, race, caste etc" were qualified by another criterion such as backwardness, the prohibition would not apply. He said Articles 15(4) and 16(4) gave expression to this caveat. The former enabled special provisions for the advancement of "any "socially and educationally backward classes of citizen" and the latter provided for reservation in jobs and appointments to any "backward class of citizens" In a concept note presented at the seminar, Mr. Shahabuddin said: "It is notable that the Muslim community today is demanding reservation as a Backward Class, as a deprived group, who is almost as backward as the SC/ST and more backward than non-Muslim OBCs. It is not staking any historical claim or desiring any preferential or special dispensation." The participants said the Sachhar Committee had statistically established the pitiable situation of the community, while the Misra Commission was of the firm opinion that Muslims formed a weaker section eligible for special care and promotion under Article 46. Mr. Shahabuddin said Muslims as a whole had been proved by every yardstick to be backward and were therefore entitled to reservation. Member-Secretary of the Sachhar Committee Abusaleh Shariff struck a note of caution. He urged elite Muslims to focus their attention on the uplift of their backward brethren. He said while reservation was undoubtedly one aspect of uplift, it was vital not to ignore other avenues of Muslim

advancement. The Sachhar Committee, with its emphasis on diversity and equal opportunity in the public sphere, suggested an entire package for Muslim advancement. "If we don't have a clear strategy we will not get reservation, and the Sachar package will also go," he said. (The Hindu)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

At Kumbh, sages discuss cow, Ganga and communal harmony

Here's what they didn't tell you about the Kumbh: that India's sages and sants are here not only for shahi snans (royal bath), the first of them on Shivratri on Friday. The Kumbh's not just a get-together. It's a conference, no less, of the top layer of the thousands of keepers of Hinduism. They meet every three years to confer on the state of Hinduism, review how Hinduism's shaping up in the country, and narrow down focus points for the next three years. This year, they're talking heavy about communal harmony, projects on the Ganga. And they want to go serious on taking care of India's cows. "We have to understand why hate is growing. Why there's so much killing, from animals to humans. Sanatan dharm has always been about peace and harmony. That is a serious concern for us here," says Mahant Ravindra Puri, chief spokesperson of the Akhara Parishad, umbrella body of all akharas. Puri also heads the Nirwani akhara. By April, their discussions will conclude in a sort of charter for action, with each akhara's representatives taking back the message to their multiple groups and give pointers on the way ahead. "Of course, ruchi (desire) must be there for follow-up," says a senior sadhu from Jammu of the Niranjani akhara, preferring not to give his name. "We hold our ground. We came together on the Amarnath Yatra turmoil. We won't give an inch on such issues. We take strong decisions," he says. Pressure government to take action, conduct awareness drives for citizens and keep societal Hinduism running more-or-less on their lines of thought is their focus. "Unnecessary projects on the Ganga, such as the Lohari Nagpala dam project, were stopped because the Ganga Raksha Manch, where Baba Ramdev and VHP's Ashok Singhal are also members, concluded it had to," says Mahant Puri. Of great pain is also the issue of the care of cows in India. "Only sadhus are taking care of our cows. Gau-hatya is rampant and sad. We want government to think on this, we want NGOs to adopt cows," he says. Some of the big-timers have already packaged the message. While global warming seems to be mainly a poster point, peace is clearly big. In popular Juna akhara, sadhu Pilot Baba's camp - verily like a sprawling city of high-end religiosity - posters on communal harmony, a quiet hall for meditation with stained glass work, a throne and crimson sequined curtains, a dance hall and community service are all part of the package. The sense of harmony has been painstakingly and expensively created in beautifully crafted thatched roofs and domed areas by a group of 100 artisans from Kanpur's Pal Shilpi Ghar. Camping here for more than three months, the campus has a special area for foreign devotees mainly from Russia, Ukraine, Japan and the US. Pilot Baba's woman counterpart, Japanese mata Keiko Aikawa will further the peace message when she arrives in March as a 'maha mandaleshwar'. The saints are still marching in. (The Ties of India)

Insurgency Movements:

Force alone cannot tackle Naxal menace: Jharkhand

Ahead of a meeting of four Chief Ministers on February 9, which is meant to devise ways to tackle the Naxal menace, the Shibui Soren government on Friday called for “a holistic approach”, saying the problem could not be solved by “mere induction of force”. “You cannot hold a gun to somebody’s head and solve the (Naxalite) problem. It is not that easy. What I mean to say is that the problem cannot be solved by mere induction of force. There has to be a holistic approach (to the problem) at the root of which lie development of areas and the people who have been downtrodden for ages,” said Jharkhand principal secretary (home) J B Tubid. He was here to attend a meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council, also attended by West Bengal chief secretary Ashok Mohan Chakrabarti, West Bengal home secretary Ardhendu Sen, Orissa chief secretary Tarun Kanti Mishra and Bihar chief secretary Anup Kumar Mukherjee. Just a couple of weeks ago, Jharkhand Chief Minister Shibui Soren had said there were no Naxalites in his state and all those who took to arms were his brothers and sisters. In tune with Soren, the Jharkhand official said those who were called Naxalites were all from grassroots level. “By mere induction of forces, by killing them, can you solve the problem? We don’t think so. A lot of other things have to be done. One has to be lenient about this,” Tubid said. He also raised questions about the joint operations that are going to be launched against the Naxals. “How can there be a joint force? Law and order is a state subject. If the Naxalites strike in West Bengal, the Bengal police cannot come to Jharkhand. Similarly, we also cannot go to Orissa. If there is a joint force, someone from the central government should head it,” he added. However, the official denied allegations that the Jharkhand government was not serious about tackling the Maoist problem. “We had a lot of meetings with the West Bengal government and they never said that we were lenient. All these allegations are baseless,” he said. However, senior officials of the West Bengal government sounded skeptical about the Jharkhand government’s attitude. “We don’t know what they are up to. We are waiting for the February 9 meeting where we will get to know their attitude,” said an official. Apart from Soren, the other Chief Ministers who will attend the meeting are Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee of West Bengal, Nitish Kumar of Bihar and Naveen Patnaik of Orissa. Union Home Minister P Chidambaram will preside over the meeting. (The Indian Express)

Naxal threat is more dangerous than terror groups: CRPF chief

Newly appointed Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Director General Vikram Srivastav on Monday described Naxal violence in some parts of the country as more challenging than dealing with terrorist groups. Interacting with media, Srivastav said: “Naxalism which challenged the development activities, is more challenging than terror groups.” “We are capable to win this challenge under the able leadership of Home Minister P Chidambaram”, he added. Srivastav also expressed confidence that things will improve very soon, but refused to share operational details. The CRPF, country’s largest counter insurgency force and involved actively in assisting the state police in all the Naxal affected areas. The CRPF has deployed over 20,000 personnel for anti Maoist operations at different parts of the country. (The Indian Express)

Maoists blow up rail tracks in 2 States

Maoists blew up rail tracks in Orissa and Bihar on the second day of their 72-hour bandh in five States on Monday. Suspected Maoists blew up a portion of railway tracks in Orissa in the wee hours on Wednesday causing derailment of a goods train and disrupting train services on the Howrah-Mumbai route. Eight wagons of goods trains derailed when the suspected Maoists blew up a portion of the railway track between Bisra and Bhalulata stations at around 2am on Wednesday, railway sources said. There was, however, no casualty. All up and down trains on the Howrah-Mumbai main line have been controlled at different stations as a result of this, the sources said. The spot where the goods train derailed was 20 km from Rourkela, the sources said. CRPF and GRP personnel have left for the spot from here on Wednesday morning. Just two days ago, railway track was blown up between Bhalulata and Jareikela stations by suspected Maoists leading to derailment of two wagons of a goods train. (The Hindu & Times of India)

Naxal leader sets terms for peace talks with govt

Even as home minister P Chidambaram met chief ministers of naxal-affected states in Kolkata to strategise on anti-Maoist operations, the ultras made a renewed pitch for peace talks on the condition that some of their top jailed leaders be released to facilitate the process. In what may be an indication that the Left extremists are feeling the heat of concerted Centre-state operations in areas like Lalgah and Jangalmahal in West Bengal and in Chhattisgarh, Maoists have sent out fresh feelers for "talks" to the government. CPI (Maoist) general secretary Ganapathy said on Tuesday his party is ready for talks with one of the pre-conditions being Maoist leaders like Narayan Sanyal, Amitabha Bagchi, Sushil Roy and Kobad Gandhi be released from custody. Though the "offer" can be read as a bid to earn a respite from the ongoing crackdown, the bid for talks also marks a climbdown of sorts. While Trinamool Congress chief and railway minister Mamata Banerjee has also suggested talks and even the possibility of mediation, Ganapathy told TOI, "This (anti-Maoist operation) is a brutal campaign of repression aimed at suppression of the political movement of people and exploitation of minerals." The Maoist leader said talks would mean a halt to the crackdown and that would be in the interest of the people. "The longer the gap (in operations) better for the people. But while holding the gun in one hand, one cannot talk ...The main point the party has placed before the government is -- all-out war has to be withdrawn, ban on the party and its mass organisations has to be lifted and `illegal' detention and torture of comrades have to be stopped and they be immediately released," said Ganapathy. Ganapathy argued that if the demand for release of leaders is met they would lead and represent the party in the talks. The party has been gravely hit by the arrest of its top leaders. Politburo members like Sanyal, Bagchi, Roy and Gandhi are frontline leaders and there are some other central committee members who are also in custody. Ganapathy did admit that the Maoists may be losing intellectual support its claim to fight for the truly disposed once enjoyed. Asked if the support in the early days of the Lalgah movement had worn off, Ganapathy said, "Initially there was a lot of support among urban intelligentsia. Now depending on the enemy's onslaught and nature of struggle, there could be changes in the support base. Some people may also go over to the opposition in the Lalgah movement." Elaborating on the limitations to Maoist appeal, he said, "In Bengal, our influence with civil liberty

groups and in urban areas is not strong. We need to do more... A lot would depend on our work there and the development of Lalgarh movement. There is a lot of difference between working among masses and intellectuals." Those who cannot directly support the violent phases of the movement can come together on other issues such as opposing tough anti-terror laws, he pointed out, indicating that Maoists would continue to look to co-opt and engage any movement or campaign which might benefit them. (The Times of India)

Economic Front:

India, U.K. to increase trade, investment flows

India and Britain on Friday agreed to increase the flow of trade and investments, particularly Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), in regard to market access for both goods and services and also look for collaboration and opportunities in the defence sector. Union Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma said India and the United Kingdom had a strong relationship in cooperation in science and technology, defence, education and security related issues. "There has been progress on defence collaboration and the talks could focus on tie-ups in air defence too. I know both Indian defence manufacturers and those from Britain would like to do more work together. We hope to progress on this," he said after the 6th session of the Indo-U.K. Joint Economic & Trade Commission meeting in London. The Indian side was led by Mr. Sharma and the British team by Business Minister Peter Mandelson. The U.K. is among India's major trading partners. Mr. Sharma told Mr. Mandelson that the massive infrastructure development programme being undertaken in India presented a huge opportunity for foreign investment. "India recognised the experience of the U.K. in infrastructure development through public-private partnerships, which could be gainfully exploited for establishing capacity building programmes in India," he said. (The Hindu)

No financial crisis impact? India's poor grew by 34 mn

It's a myth that the global financial crisis left India virtually unscathed. In fact, India is the biggest victim of financial crisis-induced poverty, according to data obtained by TOI from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (UNDESA). Check out these figures. The UNDESA data estimates that the number of India's poor was 33.6 million higher in 2009 than would have been the case if the growth rates of the years from 2004 to 2007 had been maintained. In 2009 alone, an estimated 13.6 million more people in India became poor or remained in poverty than would have been the case at 2008 growth rates. In other words, while a dip from the 8.8% growth in GDP averaged from 2004-05 to 2006-07 to the 6.7% estimated for 2008-09 may be nothing like the recession faced by the West, its human consequences for India were probably worse. The 2.1% decline in India's GDP growth rate has effectively translated into a 2.8% increase in the incidence of poverty. According to the UNDESA's World Economic Situation and Prospects 2010, 47 million more people globally became poor or remained in poverty in 2009 than would have been the case at 2008 growth rates, and 84 million more than would have poor at 2004-7 growth rates. Of these, 19 and 40 million respectively are in

south Asia. While the report did not give India-specific figures, these were given to TOI by the UNDESA in response to a request for more information on the numbers pertaining to the country. The numbers come from revised per capita income estimates for 2009. The report uses the World Bank's definition of poverty, which is people living on less than \$1.25 per day in 2005 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) dollars. The estimates assume that there has been no change in income distribution. If inequality grew in India in 2009, the number of poor would be even higher than these projections. The UNDESA report attributes this increase in poverty to a combination of reduced household incomes, rising unemployment and pressure on public services. Job losses in India were primarily in export-oriented industries like textiles while employment levels in Indian firms catering to the domestic market were largely unaffected, the report says. Monetary and fiscal policy intervention gave Indian growth some resilience, while safety nets like India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) helped to mitigate the effects of the slowdown, the report adds. "Surveys conducted by the labour bureau did show big job losses through most of 2008, but a pick up by mid-2009," said economist and Planning Commission member Abhijit Sen, adding the caveat that the construction industry, which was hit badly by the recession and is now recovering, was not covered by those surveys. "It's true that there has not been anything special for labour in government policy except the general fiscal stimulus," added Sen. In addition to job losses, food price inflation is a major factor in a decline in poverty reduction in India, said Sen. "It is not yet clear to what extent the spike in food prices is linked to the global financial situation, the poor monsoon or other factors", he added. The report is clear that the situation is picking up, but celebrations would be premature "global economic recovery is expected to remain sluggish, employment prospects will remain bleak". Job creation will lag output growth and as social protection coverage is limited, working poverty levels will rise and be difficult to reverse, the report warns. It is too early for fiscal stimuli to be withdrawn, the report adds. There is no agreement yet on the number of poor people in India. The last official (National Sample Survey) household expenditure figures are for 2004-5 and the next round (2009-10) is yet to be completed. Further, the definition of poverty remains disputed, the Suresh Tendulkar committee's recommendation that India move away from calorific norms being the latest iteration. This committee pegged the number of poor in India at 408 million in 2005. (The Times of India)

GDP growth could be higher than 7.2 %: Pranab Mukherjee

Upbeat on the pace of economic recovery during the second half of 2009-10, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Wednesday maintained that the final GDP (gross domestic product) growth numbers for the fiscal year could show an improvement over the 7.2 per cent expansion projected by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) in its advance estimates released earlier this week. Interacting with the media on the sidelines of the 42nd consultative committee meeting (CCM) of the 'Colombo Plan' group of nations for economic and social improvement in South and Southeast Asia, Mr. Mukherjee pointed out that even a 7.2 per cent growth would not be bad in the wake of the current uncertainty in the global economic scenario. "When the final figures come [in], particularly for the third quarter, I think there may be [an] improvement [over the CSO's estimate]," he said. He felt that even otherwise, the GDP growth figure for the current

fiscal could be revised upwards as had happened in 2008-09 when the actual expansion turned out to be 6.7 per cent as against the advance estimate of 6.5 per cent. In his inaugural address also, at the CCM earlier, the Finance Minister pointed to the Economic Survey's projection and exuded confidence that the economy could grow in the upper band of up to 7.75 per cent during the current fiscal. "The Economic Survey 2008-09 had indicated that the upper band of growth in real GDP for the year 2009-10 could be around 7.75 per cent," he said. Mr. Mukherjee noted that while the growing integration of the Indian economy with the rest of the world created new opportunities and rising expectations, it also brought new challenges and made the task of sustaining high growth more challenging in view of the new risks and responsibilities. Referring to the recent global financial crisis as a good case in point, he said that along with all other economies, India too, was forced to downgrade its growth projections owing to the impact of the meltdown. "Despite the stresses, India has been able to withstand the recessionary trend better than most other economies and is a front runner in leading the global recovery process," he said. Pointing to the fiscal and monetary stimulus packages put in place to combat the slowdown in the wake of the global financial crisis which eventually led to a better-than-expected 7.9 per cent GDP growth during the second quarter this fiscal, Mr. Mukherjee said: "It [economic growth] vindicates the timely policy measures taken by the government to mitigate the adverse impact of the financial crisis on India and the positive response of all stakeholders and partners in development." Alongside, Mr. Mukherjee noted that while the rising domestic savings and investments coupled with a nationwide stress on skill upgradation could push up growth rates higher, the weak link was the country's infrastructure. "It is estimated that investment requirement in the infrastructure sector would be \$514 billion between 2007 and 2012," he said. For such a huge investment, he said stress was being laid on the PPP (public-private partnership) model. (The Hindu)

Geo-strategic developments:

Nuclear-capable Agni-III missile test-fired

India on Sunday "successfully" test-fired its nuclear-capable Agni-III ballistic missile with a range of more than 3,000 km from the Wheeler Island off Orissa coast. The indigenously developed surface-to-surface missile was tested from a rail mobile launcher near Dhamara, about 100 km from Orissa, at about 1046 hours, defence sources said. "All mission parameters were met," they said, adding the test was a success. This was the fourth flight test in the Agni-III series carried out to establish the "repeatability" of the missile's performance, they said. The entire trajectory of trial was monitored through various telemetry stations, electro-optic systems and sophisticated radars located along the coast, in Port Blair and by Naval ships anchored near the impact point in the down range area for data analysis, the sources said. Agni-III missile is powered by a two-stage solid propellant system. With a length of 17 metres, the missile's diameter is 2 metres and launch weight is 50 tonnes. It can carry a payload of 1.5 tonnes which is protected by carbon-carbon all composite heat shield. The sleek missile is equipped with sophisticated navigation, guidance and control systems along with advanced on-board computer systems. The electronic systems are hardened for higher vibration, thermal and acoustic effects, an official of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said. A

high performance indigenous ring laser gyro-based navigation system, which was flight-tested for the first time during the last Agni-III trial, was a success, he said. The first trial of Agni-III conducted on July 9, 2006 had ended in failure. But the subsequent two tests on April 12, 2007 and May 7, 2008 were successful. (The Indian Express)

China's anti-ship missile not a threat: Navy Chief Admiral Nirmal Verma

Dismissing China's anti-ship missile programme as a threat to Indian warships, Navy Chief Admiral Nirmal Verma said it would be a difficult task to even spot the vessels in the vast expanse of high seas. "Targeting ships at high seas is not an easy task or as simple as land warfare," Admiral Verma told reporters on the sidelines of a seminar on aircraft carriers organised by the National Maritime Foundation. "There are hundreds and thousands of ships in the sea at any given time. It is extremely important to spot the ship before targeting it. There are limitations in terms of maritime reconnaissance and long-range searches," Verma said when asked about the threat posed by Chinese Anti-ship Ballistic Missile Programme. He said it was "a complex problem" to use a conventional missile against a moving target at high seas. Earlier, addressing the seminar, the Navy Chief said aircraft carriers were expensive and there were questions on their affordability and survivability due to their large size while at sea. "Some even talk about carrying out land-based missile attacks against an aircraft carrier. We must weigh this against the difficulties of targeting a mobile target out at sea," he said, noting that carriers can move 600 nautical miles a day, which translates into one million square nautical miles of ocean area which an adversary has to search. (The Hindu)

Pakistan decides to accept India's offer of talks

Pakistan appears to have decided to accept New Delhi's offer of Foreign Secretary talks after thrashing it out at a meeting of domestic "stakeholders" on Wednesday and may suggest February 25 as the date, but has not said so yet officially. A cryptic statement from the Foreign Ministry after the meeting said all the participants had "reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of Pakistan to enter into a meaningful and result-oriented composite dialogue with India" for the resolution of all issues between the two countries for the sake of peace in the region. In an interview to the Jang media group after the meeting, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said he would first brief Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani of the consensus that had been reached at the meeting and it would be announced thereafter. But he also said in the same interview that of the two dates offered by India for talks, February 18 and 25 Pakistan favoured the later date. Mr. Qureshi did stress that there was no point having "talks for the sake of talks," that Pakistan wanted a composite dialogue, and that the issues of Kashmir and water had to be included in the talks, but was also clear that placing pre-conditions for the resumption of dialogue would be "counterproductive." "We do not have too many concerns regarding dates. February 25 is not a bad date, that is if it also suits our Foreign Secretary, and as to where we meet, it is really not that important. What is important is that we start talking. Of course we feel that these talks should be the restart of the composite dialogue and take it up from where we left off," he said. Mr. Qureshi very firmly pointed out that the way forward was what was good for the region. "Let us not get caught in 'conditions.' So far there have been no conditions from India. Let us instead look at what is good for peace.

Common sense dictates to start talks as quickly as possible. Pakistan has shown political will where all political forces in and out of government agree on engagements with India,” he said. Separately, Information Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira told journalists that there was no harm in accepting the Indian offer, as it could lead to the resumption of the composite dialogue process. Kashmir, he said, was the number one issue for Pakistan and would be discussed in the talks. Wednesday’s meeting, held at the Foreign Ministry, was attended by representatives from the military and the Inter-Services Intelligence, aside from officials of all ministries dealing with the set of eight issues that the composite dialogue process covered. Pakistan’s envoy to New Delhi Shahid Malik was also present. In the National Assembly, meanwhile, parliamentarians kept up the pressure on the government by castigating India for “stopping” river waters to Pakistan. The Indian Indus Waters Commissioner, D. Aranganathan, who was on an inspection of water head works in Pakistan, told journalists in Lahore that the issue was overblown. The two officials signed a memorandum for inspection of barrages on rivers on both sides. (The Hindu)

India wants no preconditions

India is ready to discuss any issue Pakistan wishes to raise but is unwilling to assure Islamabad that the proposed Foreign Secretaries’ meeting will quickly lead to resumption of the composite dialogue, senior officials told The Hindu. If Wednesday’s Pakistani statement reaffirming the need for the “composite dialogue process” is aimed at its domestic audience, India would have no problem, officials say. Nor are they opposed to the Foreign Secretaries discussing Pakistan’s desire to resume the composite dialogue. If an assurance about resumption is sought beforehand, however, the talks are likely to run into trouble even before they begin. “Opinions in government may be divided on composite dialogue as a format,” one official acknowledged. “But if they are going to hold a gun to our head and say ‘only now will we talk’, that’s not going to work.” Although Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has the backing of Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee for his latest peace initiative, the government is aware it is walking on eggshells. Last month’s decision on talks was never formally discussed in the Cabinet Committee on Security, The Hindu has learned. But in informal consultations, CCS members like Defence Minister A.K. Antony are known to have expressed reservations about engaging Pakistan. “There is huge political aversion to resumption of the composite dialogue,” said an official, adding this was not out of fear of the BJP’s opposition but because many in the Congress believe the ‘no to talks’ stand helped the party win the April 2009 elections. Pakistan’s formal response to the Indian offer of talks is likely to be conveyed on Thursday. (The Hindu)

Agni-V to be test-fired within a year: Saraswat

India on Wednesday announced it would test Agni-V with a range of 5,000-km within a year, asserting that the country’s capability to develop ballistic missiles remained ahead of China. After the recent success of the 3,500-km Agni-III missile, declared ready for deployment, Scientific Adviser to Defence Minister V.K. Saraswat said the Agni-V programme moved out of the drawing board and material cutting stage to checking of sub-systems. “The tempo will pick up and within a year testing [for Agni-V] will be

done” Dr. Saraswat, who is also the Director-General of Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) said at a press conference along with a team of scientists. Emphasising the maturity of the missile development programme in the country, he said that as for Agni-V, the DRDO would like to get the test right at the first time and there would be no change in the design. “The design and drawing is frozen, there is no further development effort required,” Programme Director Avinash Chander said, adding the missile did not envisage manoeuvring capability. Ruling out a test to demonstrate anti-satellite capability, the DRDO chief said the country has the platform to handle the task with building blocks in place. Agni-V will be adequate to mitigate threat both in terms of range and lethality with the DRDO preparing to launch it from canisters providing the missile flexibility to be launched from multiple platforms on land and sea. “There is no requirement to build and store [the missiles] since it also has an impact on resources. We have the capability to convert to weapon systems at the shortest time,” Dr. Saraswat said. Swift conversion is made possible since the industry has been involved in the programme right from its beginning without the need to transfer technology. As for China, the DRDO scientists said the 2,500-km DF-21 missile is the closest it has to Agni-III. Beijing is also working on other versions, including carrying it over 6,000-8,000-km range, yet “our accuracy is better than China.” (The Hindu)

India, Pakistan foreign secretaries to hold talks on Feb 25: Pakistan PMO

The top diplomats of Pakistan and India will meet for talks in New Delhi on February 25, the Pakistani prime minister's office said on Friday. (The) Pakistan side should raise all the core issues and impress upon India the need for the expeditious resolution through resumption of composite dialogue," it said. "The prime minister directed the foreign secretary ... that his talks with his Indian counterpart should be result oriented and meaningful," the statement from Pakistan said. Foreign secretary Nirupama Rao will meet Pakistan counterpart Salman Bashir in New Delhi. India suspended a four-year-old peace process with Pakistan after the Mumbai attacks in November 2008. India had been demanding action against the terrorists it says were behind the assault before the peace process could resume but this month it offered to hold high-level talks despite little progress in Pakistan's prosecution of the suspects. The United States has been urging the two countries to resume engagement to help stabilise the region especially Afghanistan where the neighbours have been competing for influence. Indian officials say they offered Pakistan open-ended talks on all issues affecting peace and security, emphasizing counter-terrorism. But Pakistan has been pushing for the resumption of the full peace process, which centred on a so-called composite dialogue, covering all problems, including their decades old dispute over the Kashmir region. (The Times of India)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Over 100 Kashmiri ‘farmers’ in Surat, beg for livelihood

Several Kashmiri families in Surat can be seen begging for their survival. They request people to help them as heavy snowfall has destroyed their crops in the Valley. Over 100 Kashmiri people, including women and children, are staying in a tent set up in an open land at Udhna. Male members along with children beg for essential items in the

residential areas and return home by the afternoon to have food. In the late afternoon, they are again out on the streets for begging. Talking to The Indian Express, one Kashmiri youth Abul Rashid Jogi said, "We have nothing to earn as there are no major industries in our district. We come here after every two to three years depending on the climate conditions back home." He said five families have come here from his district. "After saving some money, we go back to our native place and use it in farming. We all are farmers and our crops are damaged because of snowfall," said Jogi who has come along with his wife and four minor children. He further said, "We beg as nobody will give jobs to strangers. A few from our community sell walnuts and other dry fruits but most beg. We usually stay here for two months." He said locals see them with suspicion because of spread of terrorism in Kashmir. Limbayat police Inspector B S Mori said: "They met me and told me that they have come here because of severe cold in their native place...I have checked their election i-cards. I have found there is no threat to society by their presence." (The Indian Express)

BSF says its personnel involved in J&K teenager's killing

The BSF on Wednesday said one of its personnel was "prima facie" involved in the killing of a 16-year-old youth last week, which had sparked major protests in the Kashmir valley, and he has now been handed over to local police. "There were allegations regarding the killing of a boy on February 5. Our inquiry has revealed that prima facie constable Lakhvinder was involved in the incident," BSF special director general P P S Sidhu told reporters. He said as a consequence, the constable has been placed under suspension and handed over him to Jammu and Kashmir police, which will carry out further investigations. Asked when the BSF man killed the youth, Sidhu said, "I can't say. It is a matter of investigation. The Jammu and Kashmir Police will do the investigation which will reveal everything". Officers in the para-military force have termed the killing as an "accident". The constable has been questioned by senior officials of the force, they said. The boy was shot dead by security personnel on February 5 at Nishat, triggering large scale protests across the valley. Police had examined all the call records around the area after Zahid Farooq Shah was shot dead. Eyewitnesses had told the police that the vehicle of the security forces had an insignia of "hangul" (red deer). The mark is used on the vehicles of BSF and the paramilitary force has a unit based nearby. Police had asked the BSF to provide the log details of the vehicle movements in and out of the company headquarter located near Nishat, the place where the incident took place. The breakthrough comes after chief minister Omar Abdullah raised the issue of Zahid's killing with the Centre at the recent conference on internal security chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He had sought the help of the Union home ministry in identifying the culprits. Home minister P Chidambaram had assured Omar that the Centre will help in identifying the accused. The state government has already ordered a probe into the incident and said that stern action would be taken against the guilty. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Systematic attacks on schools on rise in India: UN

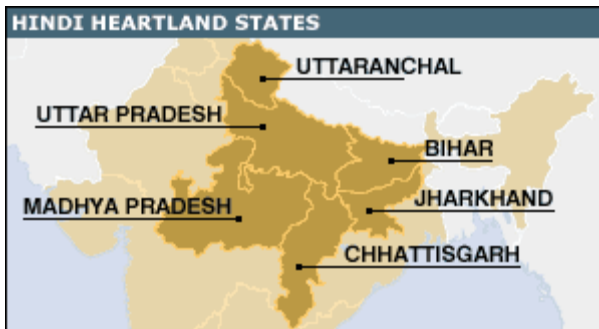
India figures among the four countries that have seen a marked increase in systematic

attacks on schools, students and teachers between 2006 and 2009, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) report has said. The other three countries where such attacks have increased are Afghanistan, Pakistan and Thailand. The report also finds that children are abducted to fights with arrows and guns in India. The UN cites the story of Tarrem Kosa who spoke to Human Rights Watch (HRW) about how the Naxalites came to recruit him when he was in class eight. "I was studying in an ashram school (government-run residential school) when Naxalites came to my hostel. They took four students from my school, but after 10-12 km the other three were sent away, and only I was kept," he told HRW. According to the report, Kosa who was 13 or 14 at the time was trained to use bows and arrows, and then he was given a rifle and trained to plant bombs. In India, nearly 300 schools were reportedly blown up by Maoists between 2006 and 2009, according to the report. These include, 18 in the first half of 2009 in Jharkhand and Bihar and 50 in those two states in the whole of 2009. The UN found that dozens of schools have been occupied for security operations including at least 37 in Jharkhand in the first half of 2009. In February 2007, Chhattisgarh government sources claimed that more than 250 schools had been blown up in recent months. Other reports said that around 250 schools were blown up in 2006 and 2007, the UN study stated. A Human Rights Watch 2008 report called 'Dangerous Duty: Children and the Chhattisgarh Conflict' found that Naxalites were recruiting children aged between 6-12. "The conflict in India's Chhattisgarh state has irreparably damaged children's lives. All parties to the conflict-Maoist rebels, state-supported anti-Maoist vigilante groups (known as Salwa Judum), and government security forces-have recruited children in different capacities that expose them to the risk of injury and death," it read. The UN study also found India among the 18 countries where children were voluntary or forcibly recruited from school, or en route to or from school, by armed groups or security forces for combat or forced. It is estimated that in 2008 there were more than 250,000 children, around the world, in armed forces or groups. The study recommends that in countries such as India where there is targeting of schools by the Communist Party of India-Maoist, evidence of such occurrences should be gathered along with investigations by international and national courts. (The Times of India)

Foreign Relations:

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)

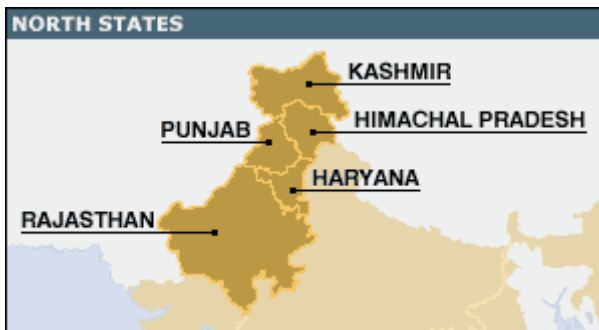


Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The North

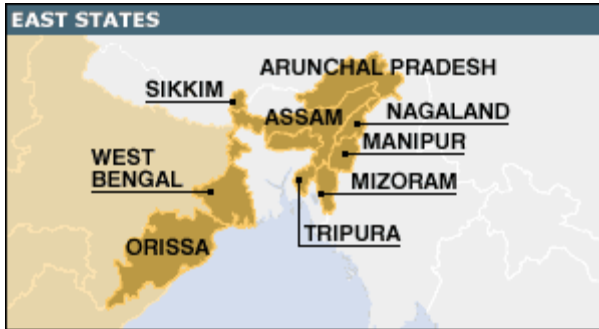


Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

Kishenji urges Mamata to stay away from UPA

Naxal leader Kishenji on Friday urged Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee to “stay away from UPA government”. “The UPA government is befooling the people and (Mamata) Banerjee should stay away from UPA if she wants to serve the interests of the people,” Kishenji told PTI over phone. Kishenji said the Maoists are ready for talks if the Centre stops operations against them. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

"Orissa needs no financial help from EU for Kandhamal victims"

Orissa government had made it clear that it did not need any financial assistance from the European Union for rehabilitation of victims of Kandhamal riot, a senior official said. The issue relating to EU's financial assistance for the Kandhamal victims came to fore during the recent visit of diplomats from nine European countries. The EU delegation before leaving for the riot-hit district, said at a press meet that they wanted to give 15 million Euro for the victims of Kandhamal. However, the EU delegation during their meeting with state government officials did not disclose about their plan to make financial assistance for the Kandhamal victims, said Special Administrator of Kandhamal M S Padhy. Padhy who attended a meeting last night where Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik took stock of Kandhamal situation, said, "India did not require funds from any country for rehabilitation of its own people. We are quite capable of handling our problems". The state government had never sought any kind of help from EU delegation, he said. (The Times of India)

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

TRS MPs to resign over ToR of Telangana panel

Slamming the terms of references (ToR) of the committee set up by the Centre on Telangana as a "betrayal", TRS chief K Chandrasekhar Rao on Friday asked all party MPs, MLAs and MLCs to resign in protest. "The Centre has betrayed us once again," he said, angrily reacting to the ToR announced on Friday morning. He directed all his party MPs, MLAs and MLCs to resign from their posts immediately in protest against the "betrayal". "KCR has convened an emergency meeting of the TRS politburo to discuss the TOR of the Sri Krishna Committee and chalk out future course of action," party sources said. The Congress legislators hailing from Telangana region too are meeting in the evening on Friday to discuss the TOR. Praja Rajyam Party MLA from Nirmal in Adilabad also decided to resign from his post protesting the ToR. He is expected to submit his resignation to Assembly Speaker N Kiran Kumar Reddy later in the evening. (The Times of India)

Social front:

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Time for Sena to close shop, says Rane

Slamming the Shiv Sena on the second consecutive day, State Revenue Minister Narayan Rane on Friday said it was time the shop (Shiv Sena) closed down. Rane was speaking to reporters during the two-day conference of district collectors and divisional commissioners at Yashada. About Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi's Mumbai visit and Shiv Sena's threats, Rane said, "They (Sena) are not strong enough to stop Rahul from roaming freely in Mumbai. Despite the Sena's appeal to its own workers, not more than 100 people were seen protesting on Mumbai streets." The minister said, "Shiv Sena madhye kahich dum nahi. (Shiv Sena does not have the guts). Somebody should tell Uddhav Thackeray to close down the shop once and for all, as it has become completely powerless." He asked if the party was left with any sainiks (workers). Earlier, on Thursday, Rane had said that the Shiv Sena's almost finished and was facing an existential crisis. "The Sena and MNS are raking up the issue of Marathi manooos just for vote bank politics. Uddhav should stop behaving as if he owns Mumbai," he had said. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front: