

## **Business and Politics in Muslim World**

**India**

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## **National Summary:**

External affairs Shashi Tharoor's remarks on Saudi Arabia's potential as an interlocutor in India's ties with Pakistan provoked criticism from BJP and other political parties including Congress. Congress president Sonia Gandhi said, "India's position on no to third party mediation in India-Pakistan issues is unchanged. There is no change in the Congress position." BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi termed Tharoor's remarks "unusual" and reiterated India's known stand that no third party can intervene in issues between India and Pakistan. BJP's senior leader L.K Advani criticised government on holding talks with Pakistan and stated it a response on US pressure.

Lok Jan Shakti Party president Ram Vilas Paswan on Thursday demanded a 10 per cent quota for Muslims in government jobs and a mechanism to ensure that funds allocated for the welfare of the minorities were fully utilised.

Responding on Maoist leader Kishenji's truce offer the government asked them to ensure ceasefire for 72 hours to facilitate talks. Top government officials have said Kishenji's offer for talks may be considered if he could ensure complete ceasefire for 72 hours.

Indian foreign exchange reserves fell by USD 528 million for the week ended February 19 to USD 278.672 billion compared to USD 279.2 billion in the previous week. After a year long financial crisis finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee is confident that economy would soon break the double-digit growth barrier and said the stimulus measures will not be fully withdrawn until a robust recovery is achieved. High food inflation and the ambiguous nature of recovery in exports due to the uncertainty prevailing in the developed economies still cause concerns.

India and Saudi Arabia finalised 10 pacts, including an Extradition Treaty and agreements in the economic sphere for signing during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the country. Manmohan Singh is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Saudi Arabia in 28 years. Singh received a vary warm welcome from Saudi King and declared his visit very successful. India is keen to build relations of geo strategic importance with Saudi Arabia. Country's increasing demand for energy resources and Saudi Arabia's influence in the region forced India make an attempt to strengthen ties with the oil rich and most respected country of the Muslim world. According to analysts it is an attempt to pressurise Pakistan to overview its policy in the region.

Killing of 9 Indians in last week's Kabul blast again provoked a debate whether it is the part of conspiracy to an oust India from Afghanistan? Pakistan is against the target of accusation even though Richard Holbrooke said in a statement that Indians were not the target of blast but then he had to change his statement on Indian pressure.

US report on International Narcotics Trade released by the state department said

that most of the drug transiting through the country is bound for Europe. The report, however, noted that the bulk of heroin seized in the past two years has been of domestic origin, was seized in South India, and was apparently destined for Sri Lanka.

According to the latest data by the Ministry of Home Affairs for three years, cases of child rape continue to rise as a total of 4,721 cases were registered during 2006, 5,045 in 2007 and 5,446 in 2008 across the country. Madhya Pradesh registered 892 such cases, Maharashtra (690), Rajasthan (420) and Andhra Pradesh (412) in 2008, the data said. A total of 411 such cases were registered in Chhattisgarh, 301 in Delhi, 215 in Kerala, 187 in Tamil Nadu, 129 in West Bengal, 106 in Punjab and 104 in Tripura, it said. Whereas, Gujarat has registered 99 cases, Karnataka 97, Bihar 91, Haryana 70, Himachal Pradesh 68, Orissa 65 and Goa 18. Uttar Pradesh tops the list of States and Union Territories with the highest number of 900 child rape cases in 2008 followed by Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra

### **Regional Summary:**

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is determined to make Bihar a developed state by 2015. Sixty-three people, all women and children, were killed and another 64 injured in a massive stampede at an ashram at Mangarh in Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh on Thursday. The tragic incident took place when a portion of the entrance gate collapsed under pressure of the surging crowd that thronged the ashram belonging to Kripalu Maharaj to collect food and utensils. The dead included 37 children and 26 women.

A new swine flu case has been reported in Himachal Pradesh after a gap of over a month, with this, the number of Influenza (H1N1) cases in the state has risen to 45.

Andhra Pradesh assembly opposition parties staged a protest on price rise issue. Members of assembly belonging to TDP, CPI, CPM, BJP and Praja Rajyam Party demanded that the issue be discussed through an adjournment motion. As their demand was rejected, the opposition members stalled the proceedings and Speaker N Kiran Kumar adjourned the House for 15 minutes. The opposition parties also demanded an immediate roll back of the hike to save the common man and wanted the state government to move a resolution in this regard.

Two persons died and eight others were injured in Shimoga district of Karnataka on Monday following violent protests over the publication of an article by Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen on the burqa in a vernacular daily.

## **National Report**

### **Politics:**

#### **No third party role in India-Pakistan ties: Congress, BJP**

The Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made it clear that there was no scope for a third party in India-Pakistan relations. Commenting on minister of state for external affairs Shashi Tharoor's remarks on Saudi Arabia's potential as an interlocutor in India's ties with Pakistan, a source close to Congress president Sonia Gandhi said, "India's position on no to third party mediation in India-Pakistan issues is unchanged. There is no change in the Congress position." BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi termed Tharoor's remarks "unusual" and reiterated India's known stand that no third party can intervene in issues between India and Pakistan. Tharoor, who is with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Riyadh, said, "We feel Saudi Arabia has a long and close relationship with Pakistan and that makes Saudi Arabia a more valuable interlocutor to us." He was asked if India would seek Saudi support to influence Pakistan to address Indian concerns over terrorism emanating from Pakistani territory. (The Times of India)

#### **Mamata softens stand on rollback**

With Prime Minister Manmohan Singh ruling out any rollback in petrol and diesel prices, Railway minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said her party made the demand in the interest of common people. "We are always for the people. If there is rise in prices of petrol and diesel, it hits the common people. That is why, we have appealed. It is the democratic way," Banerjee, the Trinamool Congress chief told reporters when asked about the Prime Minister's comment. "We are in the UPA government and we will continue to be in it," she said. "We don't want to get into any quarrel. In a democracy different political parties have their own position and our party has also articulated its view," she said before leaving for New Delhi. Banerjee said the appeal (for the rollback) would be made while remaining in the UPA. "This is the democratic way." Banerjee said, "in a democratic set up, nobody quarrels, but expresses their view. This is a democratic tradition," she said. (The Times of India)

#### **Govt's U-turn on Indo-Pak talks was at US nudge: Advani**

Accusing the government of making a U-turn on holding talks with Pakistan following US 'nudge', senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader L K Advani has said that no concrete outcome is possible in any dialogue till that country abandons terrorism. Terming the UPA's stand on Indo-Pak talks as a "self-inflicted insult", he said the only outcome that seemed to have emerged from the recent foreign secretary-level talks was that they will stay in touch. "Our Foreign Secretary called the recently concluded meeting 'constructive' but her Pakistani counterpart ridiculed the meeting and said his country did not believe in 'cosmetic engagement' and did not want India to 'lecture' them by

demanding that Pakistan should 'do this or that,' Advani said in his latest blog posting titled 'UPA's shabby approach to Indo-Pak talks: A self-inflicted insult'. (The Times of India)

### **Uproar over fuel price hike in Parliament, both Houses adjourned**

The hike in petrol and diesel rates united the entire Opposition in Parliament on Wednesday forcing adjournment of both Houses till noon minutes after they assembled for the day. It was trouble from the word go in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha which saw Opposition members on their feet demanding rollback of the petrol and diesel price hike that resulted from finance minister Pranab Mukherjee's Budget proposals. In the Lok Sabha, opposition parties, including BJP, JD(U), Left parties, SP, BSP and others, were on their feet as soon as the House met for the day. They were protesting against rise in prices of essential commodities. SP members trooped into the well and raised slogans. They were joined by BJP members who shouted, "Yeh sarkar nikammi hai (This government is incompetent)" and "jo sarkar nikammi hai woh sarkar badalni hai (An incompetent government needs to be changed)". Amid the din, Speaker Meira Kumar adjourned the House till 12 noon. In the Rajya Sabha, BJP, SP, AIADMK, BSP and Left members were on their feet immediately after obituary references were made and a member took oath. The Opposition benches shouted slogans demanding rollback of the Rs 2.71 a litre hike in petrol price and Rs 2.55 per litre increase in diesel rates. Chairman Hamid Ansari pleaded for Question Hour to be taken up. "Please allow Question Hour to proceed," he said and called the first listed question of the day. As the din continued, Ansari adjourned the House till noon. The Opposition parties had warned that they would not allow Parliament to function till fuel price hike was rolled back. Meanwhile, the Congress parliamentary party is meeting on Wednesday and finance minister Pranab Mukherjee may use the occasion to brief MPs about the compulsions behind the fuel hike and the negligible impact it will have on overall inflation. In what is seen to be an attempt to take the heat off the government, Mukherjee said he was ready to discuss the issue with allies even though he remained noncommittal on whether there would a rollback. On his way back from Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh ruled out any rollback, saying the economy has the capacity to absorb the increase without triggering inflationary pressure. (The Times of India)

### **Attack on Indians in Kabul will not bend our will: PM**

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Friday declared that the recent 'cowardly' act of terrorists to target Indians on goodwill mission in Kabul would not 'bend the will' of India to help people of Afghanistan. Replying to a debate in Parliament on Motion of Thanks to the President's Address, he referred to the February 26 attack and said the entire nation was outraged by the incident in which seven innocent Indian lives were lost. "These Indian nationals were in Afghanistan on a mission of goodwill and friendship helping to construct the peaceful and democratic Afghanistan that our Afghan friends desire. We condemn this cowardly act," he said. Noting that India's assistance has received widespread support among the people of Afghanistan, he said, "I wish to assure this House that such attacks will not bend the will of the people of India." He said India

will assist the people of Afghanistan in "securing their legitimate right to determine their destiny in the manner they chose without outside interference." Referring to President Hamid Karzai's telephone call to him after the attack, Singh said he had requested him to ensure the safety of all Indians. "I assured him of any support and assistance that may be required," the Prime Minister said about his talk with Karzai. He said India was closely monitoring the developments with regard to Afghanistan. (The Indian Express)

### **Budget 2010-11:**

#### **3.98% rise in Defence outlay**

The Union budget increased the outlay for the defence sector by 3.98 per cent with a total allocation of Rs. 1,47,344 crore as against the previous allocation of Rs. 1,41,703 crore. However, the outlay represents a 8.13 per cent growth over the revised estimates of Rs.1,36,264 crore for the current fiscal. Of the total outlay for 2010-11, an allocation of Rs.87,344 crore has been made for revenue expenditure, a growth of 0.54 per cent over the revenue allocation in the budget estimates of the current financial year. "Secure borders and security of life and property fosters development...needless to say, any additional requirement for the security of the nation will be provided for," Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee said in his budget speech. The budget estimates for 2009-10 included the allocation for defraying expenditure on payment of 60 per cent arrears of pay and allowances, which had been increased on the basis of the recommendations of the 6th Pay Commission. Of the three services, the manpower-intensive Army gets the major share of the allocation at Rs.58,995.19 crore, the Navy Rs.9,455.03 crore and the Indian Air Force Rs.15,803.65 crore. Significantly, the government earmarked Rs.60,000 crore for capital expenditure against the previous allocation of Rs.54,824 crore, of which Rs.7,000 crore was returned unspent. The capital expenditure which includes funds spent for modernisation represents a growth of 9.44 per cent over 2009-10 budget allocation. An increased allocation of nearly 25 per cent from revised estimates includes the big ticket deals in the pipeline. These include the IAF's 126 Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft, medium-lift helicopters, basic jet trainers, armed choppers, the Navy's aircraft carrier and other naval fleet acquisition programme and the Army's quest to procure the ultra light howitzers. (The Hindu)

#### **Union budget 2010-11 a road map for agricultural progress**

The section on Agriculture and Food Management of the 2009-10 Economic survey concludes with the following statement: "We need to address the challenges of the agriculture sector through comprehensive and coordinated efforts. Renewed attention needs to be paid to improving farm production and productivity, better utilisation of agricultural inputs, proper marketing infrastructure and support, stepping up of investment with the emphasis on environmental concerns and efficient food management." The anxiety on the food front arises from the steep fall in agricultural GDP (-0.2 per cent) during 2009-10, reduced water availability in 81 major reservoirs, fall in agriculture's contribution to GDP (15.7 per cent), inadequate growth in on-farm employment resulting in 52 per cent of the workforce still dependant on agriculture for



their daily bread and the prevailing food inflation. The production of pulses and oilseeds, which are the important crops of rainfed areas is stagnating. Allocation for agriculture in state budgets has been only 5.84 per cent during 2008-09, in spite of the fact that this sector is the backbone of the rural livelihood security system. Growth in irrigated area is slow and groundwater is being over-exploited. Large numbers of farmers (over 40 per cent) want to quit farming, if there is another option. The redeeming feature of the agricultural scenario is the availability of nearly 47.5 metric tonnes of rice and wheat with government in January, 2010.

### Road map for agricultural renaissance

It is in the above context that the approach adopted and allocations made in the Union budget for 2010-11 assume importance. Pranab Mukherjee, for the first time in recent years, has laid out a road map for agricultural recovery and progress based on integrated attention to the *conservation* of the ecological foundations essential for sustainable agriculture, *cultivation* based on the principles of conservation and climate-resilient farming, *consumption* with attention to food safety and quality, and farmer-centric *commerce*. For the first time also, he has addressed the issue of increasing feminisation of agriculture by proposing a *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana* with an initial outlay of Rs. 100 crore. The four-pronged strategy outlined by him relates to agricultural production, reduction in wastage, credit support and a thrust in post-harvest technology and food processing. For defending the gains in the heartland of green revolution namely Punjab, Haryana and Western U.P., Rs. 200 crore has been provided. For extending the gains to Eastern India namely, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Eastern U.P., West Bengal and Orissa, Rs. 400 crore has been provided. In order to increase the production of pulses and oilseeds, Pranab Mukherjee has provided Rs. 300 crore for organising 60,000 *Pulses and Oilseed Villages* in rainfed areas during this year. If this programme is implemented properly by the ICAR, agricultural universities in State governments, we can see the beginning of a pulses and oilseeds revolution of the kind originally envisaged by Rajiv Gandhi in the Eighties. A substantial step up of the credit availability in rural areas has been proposed, the target being Rs.3,75,000 crore. Also the effective rate of interest for farmers who repay their short-term crop loans as per the schedule will be 5 per cent per annum. I am glad slowly we are progressing towards the target of 4 per cent interest rate proposed by the National Commission on Farmers. The food processing sector has been given support for developing efficient infrastructure. The Finance Minister has also mentioned that a draft food security bill be placed in the public domain soon. There are also proposals for establishing a strong supply chain for perishable farm produce. Also there will be a concerted attempt to convert primary produce into value added products. Incentives have also been provided for relevant farm mechanisation and for establishing cold storages and other facilities for the preservation of perishable commodities. These steps should help to improve the productivity and profitability of horticulture, animal husbandry and aquaculture. While a road map has been indicated in the budget, the achievement of the goals of above steps will be possible within the very small amounts provided in the budget only if State governments can introduce a “*deliver as one*” approach with reference to the implementation of different projects. For example, substantial outlays are available under several ongoing programmes like the Rashtriya

Krishi Vikas Yojana, National Horticulture Mission, National Food Security Mission, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and National Rural Livelihood Mission. If such an approach involving appropriate changes both in attitude and action is not adopted, the small amount of money allotted for the above mentioned purposes will not yield the anticipated results. Another issue which needs careful consideration is the policy regarding the opening up of the retail trade. Mini-retail and small holder farming are the largest self employment enterprises in our country. Creating jobs is the greater challenge facing us now. Therefore the opening up of retail trade to large companies, whether national or multinational, needs to be taken up only on the basis of an *employment impact analysis*. Another issue which needs to be considered in its totality is the impact of the rise in the price of diesel and petrol. This will have serious implications for all sectors of the economy and particularly for the farm sector. During 2009, which was a severe drought year, Punjab-Haryana farmers increased rice production to a level higher than the previous year by resorting to ground water irrigation. This involved a large investment by farmers in the purchase of diesel for pumping water. It is because of this effort that we have now a comfortable reserve in rice. Unfortunately, irrigation which is the most important input for agriculture does not find special mention in the budget speech, although provision would have been made under Bharat Nirman. Finally, it is high time that the sentiments expressed by the Finance Minister in relation to post-harvest technology and particularly grain storage are converted into action without delay. In April-May 2010, the Food Corporation of India and other agencies may have to buy over 20 million tonnes of wheat in Northwest India. Even the existing stocks of wheat and rice are not stored properly. It will be sad if during a period of hardship as a result of food inflation, we should allow wastage of precious grains. The Finance Minister's recipe for agricultural renewal thus involves convergence and synergy among numerous ongoing programmes. It will be useful if the Prime Minister and the National Development Council initiate as soon as possible the steps needed for such a reform in governance. (Professor M.S. Swaminathan is a Rajya Sabha member) (The Hindu)

### **Minorities' Issues:**

#### **I love India but the country rejected me, says M F Husain**

Political leaders, intellectuals and artists in India kept silent when right-wing outfits targeted him, legendary painter M F Husain says "with deep pain" in his heart. "I still love India. But India doesn't need me. I am saying this with deep pain in heart," Husain told Gulf Madhyamam, Kerala-based Malayalam daily Madhyamam's Doha edition, in an interview. "India is my motherland. I can't hate my motherland. But India rejected me. Then why should I stay in India?" the 95-year-old painter said in his first interview after accepting Qatar citizenship. "When Sangh Parivar outfits targeted me, all kept silent. No one, including political leadership, artists or intellectuals came forward to speak for me. But I know the fact that 90 percent of the people of India love me. They are with me," he said. "Only 10 percent of people, including some politicians, are against me," Husain said. Husain has dozens of lawsuits against him across the country for his paintings of goddesses that some Hindus find sacrilegious. The artist has been living abroad as a

fugitive since 2006. He said he was not worried as people across the world love him. "India's continuing governments could not protect me. So, it is very difficult for me to stay in such a country. Politicians are eyeing only votes." "Now, they are asking me to come back. I was in exile...There was no one to speak for me. No governments recalled me. Now they are asking me to return after one country offered me citizenship. How can I trust a political leadership that refused to protect me?" he said. "Is there any surety that I would be given protection in India?" Husain asked. He stressed that the cases against him went against an artist's self-expression, and maintained that he did not want to hurt anyone's sentiments. "It is a move against art and the artist's self-expression. I never intended to hurt anyone's sentiments through the art," he said. "I only expressed my soul's creativity through art. Art's language is universal language. People who love it beyond all narrow viewpoints are my strength," he said. "I enjoy complete freedom in Qatar. Now Qatar is my place. Here no one controls my freedom of expression. I am very happy here," he said. Husain added that he would visit India, if he gets the opportunity. (The Times of India)

### **Paswan demands 10% quota for Muslims**

Lok Jan Shakti Party president Ram Vilas Paswan on Thursday demanded a 10 per cent quota for Muslims in government jobs and a mechanism to ensure that funds allocated for the welfare of the minorities were fully utilised. If the country is to become a super power, the socio-economic and political condition of the minorities needs to be improved," he told a rally organised by the party here. The minorities would have to be brought into the mainstream to strengthen the country, Mr. Paswan said. His party was playing the role of a catalyst to make the policymakers incorporate changes needed to help the Muslims, who share the "fate of the Dalits in the development matrix." e said the rally was meant to give a message to the Muslims that the LJP was "solidly" behind them and would fight to improve their lot. Referring to the ban on the SIMI, Mr. Paswan said: "Fanatic organisations" such as the RSS and the Bajrang Dal should also be banned. The migrants from the erstwhile East Pakistan who settled in Bihar before Bangladesh was created should be granted citizenship, he said. (The Hindu)

### **Hindu Fundamentalism:**

### **Insurgency Movements:**

### **Govt may consider Naxal truce offer, if ceasefire for 72 hrs**

A day after home minister P Chidambaram termed Maoist leader Kishenji's truce offer as "bizarre", the government extended an olive branch to the Left Wing extremists asking them to ensure ceasefire for 72 hours to facilitate talks. Top government officials have said Kishenji's offer for talks may be considered if he could ensure complete ceasefire for 72 hours. Home minister P Chidambaram had termed the truce offer by the Maoist leader as "bizarre" while underlining double standards adopted by the Left Wing extremists. In six days after Kishenji came with the offer for talks, Maoists have carried out 18 serious attacks on security forces and civilians killing 11 including an incident of neck-slitting of

a police official in West Bengal. Chidambaram said he had offered to facilitate talks with the CPI-Maoist provided they abjured violence. "There was no meaningful response to that offer. Nevertheless, on February 23 I responded that if the CPI-Maoist made a short, simple and unconditional statement that they would abjure violence, government would be prepared to hold talks with them. I have received no response to my statement," he had said. (The Times of India)

### **Maoists want to overthrow Indian state by 2050: Home Sec**

Maoists have plans to overthrow the Indian democracy through their armed struggle and want to control the government by 2050, Home Secretary Gopal K Pillai on Friday said. Addressing a seminar on "Left Wing Extremism Situation in India", Pillai said the Maoists might be getting the help of some former soldiers in carrying out subversive activities. "The overthrow of the Indian state is not something they are willing to do tomorrow or the day after. Their strategy, according to a booklet they circulated, is that they are looking for at 2050, some documents say in 2060," he said. According to Pillai, Naxals were not looking at to overthrow the Indian state in 2012 or 2013, it was a long steady plan and in the past 10 years they slowly build up the movement. "Now they can bring many sectors of Indian economy into their knees. (The Indian Express)

### **Economic Front:**

#### **Forex reserves decline to \$278.672 bn**

Country's foreign exchange reserves fell by USD 528 million for the week ended February 19 to USD 278.672 billion compared to USD 279.2 billion in the previous week. Foreign Currency Assets (FCA), during the week, declined to USD 254.203 billion from USD 254.7 billion a week ago, the RBI said in its weekly report. Foreign currency assets expressed in US dollar terms include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US currencies such as Euro, Sterling and Yen held in the reserves, the RBI said. Country's gold reserves, during the week, stood almost unchanged at USD 18.05 billion while the special drawing rights (SDR) slightly declined to USD 5.027 billion, the apex bank said. During the week, India's reserve position in the international monetary fund dropped to USD 1.386 billion from USD 1.393 billion a week ago, the central bank said. (The Indian Express)

#### **India to break double-digit growth barrier: FM**

Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee exuded confidence the economy would soon break the double-digit growth barrier and said the stimulus measures will not be fully withdrawn until a robust recovery is achieved. Mukherjee, however, remained concerned over high food inflation and the ambiguous nature of recovery in exports due to the uncertainty prevailing in the developed economies. "...I feel the fundamentals of the economy are strong. The positives from our recent performance outweigh the negatives, so that one can hope to see the economy breaking the double-digit growth barrier in the very near future, which is essential for reducing poverty in the country," Mukherjee said in his address to the 82nd AGM of FICCI. The Finance Minister has partially rolled back stimulus sops in the Budget by hiking excise duties by two percentage points across the

board, and enhancing tax rates on petroleum products. On a roll-back of the emergency measures to prop up the economy, the Minister said, "I am committed to fiscal consolidation in the interest of the economy's capacity to sustain growth in the medium to long term. "But it can be fully effected when the recovery in private demand -- both consumption and investment -- is sufficiently robust," Mukherjee said. (The Indian Express)

### **6.38 lakh jobs created in Oct-Dec Q**

In a clear indication of the revival of the economy, the Government has revealed that 6.38 lakh jobs were created in the October-December quarter last year. During this period, employment increased in almost all sectors except the transport sector which saw a marginal decline, according to the Labour Bureau under the Labour and Employment Ministry. It said 91 per cent of the jobs created were in export units, which bore the brunt of the economic crisis, thus signalling an imminent turnaround. "Out of the total increase of 6.38 lakh jobs during the period, 5.80 lakh jobs were added in the export units. The IT/BPO units alone added 4.87 lakh jobs within the export units", a senior official in the Ministry said. The bureau arrived at the figures after conducting an employment survey covering 2,953 units of eight selected sectors across 11 states and union territories. The survey was the fifth in the series, the first one being conducted in the October-December quarter in 2008 immediately after the onset of the global meltdown to assess the impact of recession on the job market. The previous survey conducted between July and September, 2009 showed a 4.97 lakh increase in job creation. (The Indian Express)

### **Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:**

#### **Saudi Arabia can be an interlocutor with Pak: Tharoor**

Saudi Arabia, with its close ties with Islamabad, could be a "valuable interlocutor" in improving India's ties with Pakistan, minister of state for external affairs Shashi Tharoor said on Sunday. However, MEA sources made a quick clarification later that there is no possibility of any third party mediation. "India is even against a suggestion of any third party mediation in Indo-Pak relations," MEA office sources told Times Now. "We feel Saudi Arabia has a long and close relationship with Pakistan and that makes Saudi a more valuable interlocutor to us," Tharoor told Indian journalists. According to IANS, he was responding to a question on whether India will seek Saudi Arabia's support to influence Pakistan to address India's concerns over terrorism emanating from Pakistani territory. Tharoor added that Saudi Arabia has its own issues with al-Qaida. "We expect to have a constructive conversation on the issue. The tentacles of terror have already spread from Afghanistan to Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and latest is Yemen," he added. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf's most influential country, was the first to recognise the then Taliban regime in Kabul in the mid-nineties and enjoys enormous leverage with Pakistan. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is currently on a three-day trip to Riyadh, a path-breaking visit that is likely to see the signing of an extradition treaty paving the way for greater counter-terror cooperation between the two countries. (The Times of India)

## **India, Saudi Arabia set to sign 10 pacts**

India and Saudi Arabia finalised 10 pacts, including an Extradition Treaty and agreements in the economic sphere for signing during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's ongoing visit to this oil-rich country. Singh, the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Saudi Arabia in 28 years. Singh has expressed keenness to impart "strategic character" to India-Saudi Arabia ties and the agreements are expected to give a major fillip to the relations. The Prime Minister's long overdue visit to the Kingdom comes four years after King Abdullah visited India. During the three-day visit, the two sides will sign 10 pacts including Extradition Treaty, Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners and Agreement on setting up Joint Investment Fund. Singh and King Abdullah will also hold talks on opening "new frontiers" of cooperation in various areas including security and defence. India's concerns over 'safe havens' of al-Qaeda and Taliban along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border will be also discussed during the talks between Singh and King Abdullah. India and Saudi Arabia on Sunday vowed to jointly combat terrorism and money laundering as they signed an extradition treaty and several agreements to raise their cooperation to a strategic partnership covering security, economic, energy and defence areas. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Saudi King Abdullah who held wide-ranging discussions here, signed the Riyadh Declaration outlining the contours of a new era of strategic partnership between the two countries. After the unprecedented welcome on Friday when the entire Saudi Cabinet was present to receive him at the airport on his arrival, Singh was accorded a grand reception at the imposing Al Rawadah Palace. King Abdullah received the Prime Minister and participated in the whole welcome ceremony, a rare honour bestowed on visiting dignitaries. Both sides emphasised the importance of strengthening the strategic energy partnership in line with the Delhi Declaration of 2006, including meeting India's increasing requirement of crude oil supplies and identifying areas of new and renewable energy. India invited Saudi Arabia to participate in crude storage facilities in the country. The two leaders condemned terrorism, extremism and violence affirming that it is global and threatens all societies and is not linked to any race, colour and belief. Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation in exchange of information relating to terrorist activities, money laundering, narcotics, arms and human trafficking, and develop joint strategies to combat these threats. The extradition treaty, signed by health and family welfare minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and Prince Naif bin Abdulaziz, second deputy prime minister and interior minister, further enhances existing security cooperation and will help in apprehending wanted persons in each other's country, Vijaya Latha Reddy, secretary (east) in the external affairs ministry, told reporters. Besides this four other agreements were inked in the presence of the two leaders. These are relating to transfer of sentenced persons, cultural cooperation, memorandum of understanding between Indian Space Research Organisation and King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology for cooperation in peaceful use of outer space and joint research and information technology. Four other agreements were signed during the day, including one by Tata Motors to supply school buses worth USD 80 million. The six-page declaration said keeping in view the development of relations between the two countries, and the potential for their further growth, the two leaders decided to raise their cooperation to a strategic partnership covering, security, economic, defence and political areas. The two leaders agreed to

continue strengthening defence cooperation in a way that realises the common interests of Saudi Arabia and India. Both Singh and King Abdullah discussed the peace process in the Middle East and reviewed the ongoing efforts. They hoped there would be early resumption of the peace process in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Plan with a view to address all key issues of the dispute comprehensively and within a definite time-frame leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent, united and viable Palestinian state. The two leaders emphasised that continued building of settlements by Israel constitutes a fundamental stumbling block for the peace process. The declaration said Singh and King Abdullah reiterated their support for the ongoing international efforts to resolve the issues relating to Iran's nuclear programme peacefully through dialogue. They asked Iran to respond to these efforts in order to remove regional and international doubts about its nuclear programme. This was especially so as these efforts ensure the right of Iran and other countries to peaceful uses of nuclear energy according to the yardsticks and procedures of the IAEA and under its supervision. The situation in Afghanistan figured in the talks and the two leaders called for preservation of the country's sovereignty and independence. They supported the efforts of the Afghan people to achieve stability and security, protected from exploitation by the terrorist organisations. (The Times of India)

### **PM's Saudi visit attempt to make up for lost time**

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh left for Saudi Arabia on Saturday morning on a visit tailored to close a gap in India's efforts to promote its economic and strategic interests through a string of international partnerships. Singh's is the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Saudi Arabia since 1982 when Indira Gandhi traveled to the desert kingdom, which accounts for 20% of country's energy imports and, by virtue of its King being the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, holds a pivotal position in the Islamic world. It is recognized here that the country should have followed up on Indira Gandhi's visit, but the failure to do so is blamed on India's preoccupation with developments in the neighbourhood and the toil to come to grips with the post-Cold War world. Saudis had their own concerns and imperatives -- a volatile Middle East and churn in the Islamic world which threatened to challenge the hold of the House of Sauds. But the two countries have decided to make up for the lost time and deepen the engagement. The visit of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in January 2006 when he was also the Chief Guest for the Republic Day celebrations was the turning point. The one-day visit of Saudi foreign minister Prince Saud Al Faisal in December 2008 to convey Saudi Arabia's condemnation of the terror attack on Mumbai was gesture of solidarity that went down well here. In a way, the Prime Minister's visit, as petroleum minister Murli Deora puts it, is a thanksgiving gesture to a country which stood by India during the energy crisis. But while crude imports remain the most crucial component of the ties, India is now looking at a partnership which is diverse. An extradition treaty is on the table. *More important, the government is keen on gauging the Saudi response to Pakistan's moves to take advantage of the growing American weariness of its war efforts in Afghanistan to install a puppet regime in pursuance of its quest for strategic depth.* Being the only country which, apart from Pakistan and UAE, recognized the Mullah Omar-led Taliban regime as the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan, Saudis seem to subscribe to the good Taliban/bad

Taliban formulation peddled by Pakistan to secure the return of its favourite jihadi groups to power in Kabul. India, however, is laying store by the developments that have exposed the growing collaboration between Taliban and al-Qaida -- a group that the ruling Saudi dynasty sees as posing a threat to their rule. Saddled with the perception that their country base of the radical Wahabi Islam -- from where Osama bin Laden and the overwhelming majority of 9/11 attackers came, Saudi authorities are having to battle al-Qaida both within and outside as in neighbouring Yemen. At a time when countries like China and Iran have rejected the good Taliban/ bad Taliban distinction as spurious, and when the Western forces have launched a huge offensive in Afghanistan, the Prime Minister may like to apprise his hosts of India's take on the issue. In a statement released before he took off for Riyadh, Singh stressed: "I believe India and Saudi Arabia have much to gain by cooperating with each other in combating extremism and terrorism. I expect to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and other regional issues of mutual interest." In an interview to Saudi journalists, the PM underlined that extremism and terrorism represent a major threat not just to India, but also Pakistan and the entire neighbourhood. "As a neighbour, we cannot remain immune to the rise of extremism and terrorism in Pakistan, or on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Extremism and terrorism are major threats not only to India, but also to Pakistan, and all its neighbours," he said. Though there are, as the failure of their efforts for unity between rival Palestinian groups show, limits to the Saudi leverage with Sunni groups, they remain a factor. Government is also seeking to use PM's visit to make a pitch for investments from Saudi Arabia. Saudis have so far preferred the US and West in investing the gigantic pile of petro dollars they are sitting on. Government is keen to get a piece of the cake by projecting India as the new hot destination. (The Times of India)

### **Blast part of effort to drive India out?**

Damayanti Behn and Sunita Kumari were out when the Taliban assault team burst into their room in Kabul on Friday morning, shooting on the bed, under the bed, and in the wardrobe. They would have shot Basharat Pathan but let him go when they heard his name, thinking he was an Afghan, not aware Pathan is a famous name among Gujarati Muslims. These three Indians are members of SEWA, a non-profit organisation, and they are in Afghanistan running a project by which they train war widows, orphans and destitutes to become earning members of society. They were lucky. Major Deepak Yadav of the Army Education Corps was not. He was in Afghanistan to teach English to its security personnel, but the Taliban got him. Major Jyotin Singh, unarmed, of the Army Medical Corps, working in the Indira Gandhi children's hospital, grappled with the suicide bomber forcing him to detonate himself outside the Arya guesthouse. This gave others nearby to run for cover and save themselves. But the Major from Manipur fell. Bholu Ram, deputy general manager of Power Grid Corporation who was on his last month in Kabul, having completed the high-profile Pul-e-Khumri transmission link, was also killed. *As India brought back the bodies of nine of its citizens from Kabul on Saturday, there is a growing sense that it is part of a concerted effort by Pakistan and its Taliban proxies to get India out of Afghanistan.* The Taliban attack on Arya guesthouse, Park Residence and Safi Landmark Hotel in central Kabul also comes a day after the first foreign secretaries' talks between India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, PM Manmohan Singh



asked President Hamid Karzai on Saturday to ensure safety and security of all Indians in Afghanistan. Karzai had called Singh to condole the attack. A special Indian Air Force plane carrying the bodies of six of the Indians killed in the Kabul terror attack arrived on Saturday evening at the Palam air base, where President Pratibha Patil attended the wreath-laying ceremony. Who did it and why? Indian and Afghan intelligence are already at work, said sources. India has now suffered three major attacks against it in 20 months. The first attack, in July 2008, was by the Haqqani network, said sources. The second, in October 2009, was by a combination of Haqqani and Lashkar-e-Taiba. After Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for Friday's attack, the needle of suspicion has pointed to the Haqqani network, and their sponsors, Pakistan's ISI. This was confirmed by the US director of national intelligence, Dennis Blair, on February 2, when he told the US Senate that Pakistan "has continued to provide support to its militant proxies, such as Haqqani Taliban, Gul Bahadur group, and Commander Nazir group." According to security sources here, the assault was very much India-centric, which has raised many questions among security officials. In recent weeks, particularly at the NATO conference in Brussels, the London and Istanbul meetings, Pakistan has been relatively clear that it wants to see the back of India in Afghanistan. This message was made clear by the Pakistan army chief on February 2 to foreign journalists. Former diplomat G Parthasarathy said, "There should be no doubt about ISI involvement, and even incitement of this attack. Sadly, we learn no lessons from our past experience." It may be too far-fetched to draw a link between the recent India-Pakistan talks and the blast. But it may be part of Pakistan's new mindset that with the US needing it more and more in Afghanistan, they feel they can advance their agenda regarding India without any significant costs. Parthasarathy said, "Pakistani officials are gloating at what they claim is US pressure which compels us to the dialogue table." But terrorism analyst B Raman points to the possibility of a Pune-Kabul link, whether it could have been a follow-up to the Pune attack of February 13. "The investigation into the Pune blast has not yet made much headway. It has not yet been clearly established who carried it out. The LeT is among the suspects. The possibility of a linkage between the Pune and Kabul incidents has to be kept in view during the investigation. If such a linkage ultimately emerges, that would indicate a new jihadi offensive by LeT against Indian nationals and interests not only in India, but also in Afghanistan and possibly in Bangladesh and the Maldives too in the months to come." (The Times of India)

### **India ready to walk extra mile if Pak acts against terror: PM**

India is willing to walk the "extra mile" to open a new chapter in relations with Pakistan but it must act decisively against terrorism, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asserted on Monday. Addressing the Majlis-al-Shura or the Saudi Consultative Council, he said India seeks a cooperative relationship with Pakistan for permanent peace as both countries are bound together by a shared future.. If there is cooperation between India and Pakistan, vast opportunities will open up for trade, travel and development that will create prosperity in both countries and in South Asia as a whole, Singh said. But to realise this vision, the Prime Minister asserted, Pakistan must "act decisively against terrorism". "If Pakistan cooperates with India, there is no problem that we cannot solve and we can walk the extra mile to open a new chapter in relations between our two countries," Singh, who

is on a three-day visit to the oil-rich kingdom, said. Noting that both India and Saudi Arabia are threatened by extremism and violence, the Prime Minister said, "History teaches us that the scourge of terrorism must be confronted with determination and united effort. "Nowhere is this challenge greater than in Afghanistan," Singh said. "The people of Afghanistan have suffered for too long. They deserve an atmosphere of peace and the opportunity to pursue a life of dignity and hope," the Prime Minister said. He said the pursuit of terror in the name of religion or any other cause or grievance cannot be acceptable to civilized societies. "It has no sanction in any religion." Singh asked the international community to support all sections of Afghan society who wish to work towards the emergence of Afghanistan as a modern, stable and sovereign nation. "No sanctuary should be given to those who promote terror, violence or instability in the country." He said India wishes to live in peace and friendship with its neighbours and that he believed that all countries of South Asia should work to realise a common vision of peace and inclusive development for the region. Addressing the members of the legislative body that advises the Saudi King, Singh said Islam is an integral part of India's nationhood and ethos and of the rich tapestry of its culture. "India has made significant contributions to all aspects of Islamic civilisation. Centres of Islamic learning in India have made a seminal contribution to Islamic and Arab studies," he said. "Our 160 million Muslims are contributing to our nation building efforts and have excelled in all walks of life. We are proud of our composite culture....," he said. Returning to the issue of bilateral ties, he said India considers Saudi Arabia as a "pillar of stability" in the Gulf region and expressed confidence that the two countries could forge a "new partnership". Describing west Asia as a vital part of India's extended neighbourhood, Singh said, "we have a high stake in the peace and stability of the region" and "neither the countries of the region nor the world could afford fresh turmoil." He reaffirmed India's support for the struggle of Palestinian people and its backing for the Arab Peace Initiative to ensure peace and stability in the region. Referring to his meeting with King Abdullah and other Saudi leaders on Sunday, Singh said these talks have led to reaffirmation of the close ties and common interests of the two countries. "We have agreed to impart a strategic character to our relations, and have put in place a roadmap for bilateral economic, political and security-related cooperation that will constitute the core of our relationship in the coming years." Singh said the kingdom is home to the largest Indian community abroad numbering 1.8 million and that Indian workers and professionals have participated in the "extraordinary development of this region". He also expressed gratitude to Saudi Arabia for the warm welcome it has extended to the community as well as pilgrims from India who come every year to perform Haj and Umrah. "As many as 165,000 Indian pilgrims perform Haj annually...the second largest group from any single country," the Prime Minister noted. He sought increased exchanges between parliamentarians, scholars, scientists and students of the two countries and observed that there is scope for considerable expansion of interactions in political, defence and security spheres. (The Times of India)

### **PM prods S Arabia to tame Pak**

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Sunday disclosed that he had asked Saudi Arabia to persuade Pakistan to stop supporting terrorism against India, in a significant development that shows India's growing confidence in the ties with the Arab kingdom which has

historically been close to Pakistan. Talking to journalists on board his special aircraft taking him home after a very successful visit to Saudi Arabia, the PM said that he had taken up the Indo-Pak ties in the one-on-one discussion he had with Saudi king Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in Riyadh on Sunday. Singh while replying to a question, said, "Well, I know Saudi Arabia has close relations with Pakistan. I did discuss the Indo-Pak relations with His Majesty on a one-to-one basis. I explained to him the role that terrorism, aided, abetted and inspired by Pakistan is playing in our country. And I did not ask for him to do anything other than to use his good offices to persuade Pakistan to desist from this path." The PM's initiative came against the backdrop of the government's calculation that the growing evidence of collaboration between al-Qaida and Taliban, Pakistan's proxies, may have sensitized the Saudi kingdom to the repercussions of Islamabad's policy of using terrorist groups to promote its strategic goals. Singh said: "My feeling is that the Saudi Arabian leadership has a better understanding of the predicament that we face both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. There is great deal of sympathy and support for India's point of view, that what we are asking is very reasonable." The PM's statement about his effort to seek Saudi help to try to get Pakistan to mend its ways is significant also because of its candour. While India has sought to mobilise support in international capitals against Pakistan's use of terrorism to make India acquiesce to Islamabad's objectives in J&K and, lately, Afghanistan, this is perhaps the first time it has been stated publicly. During his visit, PM told his hosts that while India was keen to normalise its ties with Pakistan, the efforts in direction have failed because of Pakistan's continued support to terrorists. Talking to journalists on his address to Majlis-al-Shoura, he said: "It is important that the community gets the right message that India is a victim of terrorism, that we have a situation where our neighbour has promised unambiguously not to allow its territory for perpetrating terrorist attacks directed against India and yet, on the ground, progress has been rather nil." But he also said that India would not hesitate to walk the extra mile if Pakistan stopped promoting terrorism. "In improving of our relations with neighbours, living in a neighbourhood of peace and stability is a very important issue which we will be working hard upon. I do recognize there are difficulties but we have to bite the bullet." (The Times of India)

### **Indian officials in Afghanistan to have better security cover**

Indian officials present in Afghanistan will be given a personal security officer in the wake of terrorists targeting the country's installations and mission across the war-torn nation, Home Ministry sources said on Tuesday. In a move to strengthen security of Indian interests in Afghanistan, another contingent of Indo-Tibetan Border Police personnel will be soon sent there, they said. The decision comes after Afghanistan agreed to the demand by India of sending more security forces to guard vital installations and ongoing development projects which have become the target of terror groups operating in the region. The Home Ministry has also decided to move Indian officials, including doctors, to safer locations after terrorists struck at two hotels on Friday in which Indians engaged in developmental and reconstruction works in that country were living, official sources said. Realising that the Taliban and their associates have started targeting Indian officials who are in the field and are vulnerable, India has begun review of their security. There are about 4,000 Indians engaged in such projects being implemented as part of

India's developmental assistance to the tune of 1.3 billion dollars to Afghanistan. A team of investigators is already in Kabul, joining a probe being conducted by Afghan authorities into last Friday's terror attack in which six Indians were killed. (The Times of India)

### **Attacks racist, damaged Australia's reputation among Indians: Oz minister**

Australia on Wednesday acknowledged that some of the attacks on Indians were racists in nature, causing considerable damage to its reputation among Indian people and said its premier criminal research agency has been roped in to study the issue and suggest remedial measures. "I acknowledge absolutely that this issue has caused considerable damage to Australia's reputation among Indian people. We have to work very hard to address that. We have to be open, transparent and upfront about that," visiting Australian foreign minister Stephen Smith told reporters here. However, both the countries have agreed that the issue should not be allowed to affect the bilateral ties which has grown immensely in the last two years, he said. The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) has been entrusted with the task of studying the issue in depth and ensure whether the government's response to the attacks has been apt, Smith said. Giving details about the study entrusted to the AIC, Smith said the institute, which is a premier agency in criminal justice research, will study the issue from all aspects and examine the response of the Australian government. "Our police authority in Australia does not keep statistics on the basis of nationality. It has been difficult to do an exhaustive statistical analysis of the assaults. The institute will do the study to get a better understanding of the issue," he said. "We want to see whether the Institute of Criminology can give us a deeper and further understanding to make sure that we are responding in a every possible way and that we are doing everything that we can," Smith said. The minister had a series of meeting in recent months with his Indian counterpart S M Krishna over the issue. "I want to give the message that we have zero tolerance to any such attack. We want to bring the culprits to justice," he said. Smith said there have been convictions in many cases while investigation is going on in 70 cases. "We want to ensure that any visitor to Australia experiences what the people of the country experience," he said. Smith said several initiatives have been taken by his government to check such incidents. "We abhor violence. We abhor these attacks". (The Times of India)

### **Washington may see an India-Pakistan meeting**

Leaders of India and Pakistan are expected to meet on the sidelines of a global security summit in Washington next month in yet another bid to revive their stalemated dialogue, well-placed sources said. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is set to go to Washington to attend the two-day Nuclear Security Summit starting April 12 that will focus on expanded global cooperation to prevent atomic material from falling into the hands of terrorists and non-state actors. The conference, an initiative of US President Barack Obama, will be attended by leaders of 44 countries, including India and Pakistan. It is not yet clear whether Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari or Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani will represent Pakistan at the summit. In Islamabad, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit has confirmed Islamabad's participation in the conference, but

added that the composition of the delegation has not yet been decided. If Gilani or Zardari goes to Washington, there is a strong possibility of a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the security summit in Washington, well-placed sources said. "Nothing has been decided yet. We don't know who is representing Pakistan," the sources added. If the meeting does take place, it will be the first interaction between the leaders of the two countries since they met in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh in July last year. A positive meeting could create the right atmospherics for a more constructive interaction on the sidelines of the SAARC summit in the Bhutanese capital Thimphu towards April-end. In Sharm el-Sheikh, Manmohan Singh had taken a calculated gamble to delink terrorism from the composite dialogue process and included a reference to Balochistan in the joint statement, leading to a strong domestic backlash against alleged capitulation by India. This time around, the atmospherics are different. The Feb 25 talks between foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan did not lead to any breakthrough, but a tacit understanding has been struck to keep the ball rolling as it were. Manmohan Singh, who is widely seen to be behind India's initiative to invite the Pakistani foreign secretary for talks, has kept the possibilities of dialogue alive by saying that he is ready to go the extra mile if Pakistan cooperates in addressing India's concerns over terror. Days after the attack on Indians in Kabul, in which the Afghan intelligence suspect the hand of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, Manmohan Singh made it clear that although there was no alternative to engagement with Pakistan, any meaningful dialogue will depend on Pakistan's response to India's concerns over cross-border terror. "All problems between India and Pakistan can be resolved through meaningful bilateral dialogue if only Pakistan would take a more reasonable attitude in dealing with those terrorist elements who target our country," Manmohan Singh told reporters while returning from Riyadh Monday. "If Pakistan cooperates with us, there is no problem that we can't solve." Any likely bilateral meeting between Manmohan Singh and the Pakistani leader will depend on Islamabad's action on the 10 dossiers provided by New Delhi linking terrorists in that country with various terror activities, including the Mumbai carnage, in India. (The Times of India)

### **Pak FO says no to Indo-Pak meet in Washington**

Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani is unlikely to meet his Indian counterpart Dr. Manmohan Singh in Washington, where they are scheduled to attend the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington on April 12 and 13. Pakistan Foreign Office (FO) spokesman Abdul Basit said he is unaware of any such meeting between the two leaders on the sidelines of the upcoming summit. "I don't know yet," The Daily Times quoted Basit, as saying. (The Indian Express)

### **Presence of water in Moon path-breaking discovery: Nair**

Describing the recent discovery of thick ice deposits on the Moon as path-breaking, former ISRO chairman G Madhavan Nair said it opens up a vast avenue for human exploration. "This is the first time NASA and ISRO have confirmed the availability of water on moon. Huge ice sheets were found in the polar regions of the moon. This is a path-breaking finding as it was earlier believed there was a vacuum in the moon," Nair, during whose tenure unmanned lunar mission Chandrayaan I was launched, said. "The presence of water gives many ideas. Water can be split with sunlight to get oxygen and hydrogen. While oxygen can be used by human explorers, hydrogen can be used as fuel

either to generate electricity or use as rocket fuel for the return journey or even attempt a Mars mission from the Moon," he said. (The Indian Express)

### **Holbrooke regrets comments on Kabul attack**

Two days after his statement on Kabul attack, which did not go well with authorities in India, US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke on Friday made a turnaround and said he regretted any 'misunderstanding' caused by his comments that Indians were not the target of the terror strike. Holbrooke said: "I did not say Indians were not targeted, but that initially it looked like the target was not an official Indian facility. Early reports on events like this are often unreliable, and I try not to jump to conclusions." "We all know that Indian citizens have and continue to be targeted by terrorists, including inside Afghanistan," he added. He also lauded India's willingness to take risks and make sacrifices to help Afghanistan and said this was testament to India's commitment global peace and prosperity.

The full statement by Richard Holbrooke:

I regret any misunderstanding caused by my comments on the recent terrorist attack in Kabul, which claimed the lives of 6 Indians and at least ten citizens of other nations. I did not say Indians were not targeted, but that initially it looked like the target was not an official Indian facility. Early reports on events like this are often unreliable, and I try not to jump to conclusions. We all know that Indian citizens have and continue to be targeted by terrorists, including inside Afghanistan. My heart goes out to the families of all of the victims. The Afghan people and international community deeply appreciate the very substantial humanitarian and reconstruction assistance that India provides Afghanistan. The willingness of India to take risks and make sacrifices to help Afghanistan is testament to India's commitment global peace and prosperity and a vital part of the international commitment to Afghanistan's future. (The Indian Express)

### **Indian Occupied Kashmir:**

#### **Indo-Pak relations have direct bearing on J&K: Omar Abdullah**

Welcoming the resumption of talks between India and Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday said the relation between the neighbours has a direct bearing on the state. "The smooth relations between India and Pakistan have good effect on our state and bad relations create an adverse result. So we must welcome the dialogue process between the countries," Abdullah told legislative council. The chief minister was referring to the recent Foreign Secretary-level talks between Indian and Pakistan held in New Delhi, which saw the countries resume deliberations after a hiatus of 14 months after the 26/11 attacks. Replying to the discussion on motion of thanks to Governor's address to joint Legislative session, he said when the bilateral talks were on, many confidence building measures (CBMs) like opening of Uri-Muzaffarabad and Poonch-Rawalakote roads and Cross-LoC trade came into being. Besides, militancy-related incidents reduced and the percentage of infiltration came down considerably having a positive outcome on the progress of the state, he said. Referring to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement that India was willing to walk the "extra mile" to

open a new chapter in relations with Pakistan if it acted decisively against terrorism, Omar said, "We appreciate and salute Singh for his peace loving gesture which indicates India's intention to improve bilateral ties with Pakistan." (The Times of India)

### **Social front:**

#### **Secular lessons on Godhra anniversary**

When Arun Solanki, a college professor came to bless Salma Sheikh tying the knot at a mass nikaah ceremony on Eid-e-Milad in Godhra, all he knew was that she was a dear friend's daughter. The festive day just happened to fall on the eighth anniversary of the Godhra carnage where 59 people, mainly kar Sevaks, were burnt to death in the Sabarmati Express at the railway station here, sparking off riots killing nearly 2,000 people. The Samagara Muslim Samaj (SMS) decided to hold a mass marriage ceremony for 34 couples with Hindus performing something akin to a 'kanyadaan' for the brides. But the wedding was minus the biryani! As a mark of respect to the 200 Hindu guests at the wedding, the Muslims decided that the menu would be totally vegetarian. Collectively the guests gave Rs 1 lakh cash. "Salma is my friend's daughter. I came to perform kanyadaan and bless the couple," said Arun Solanki, a professor in Godhra. (The Times of India)

#### **Most heroin transiting through India bound for Europe: Report**

Seizures of heroin made in various parts of India in the recent past indicate that most of the drug transiting through the country is bound for Europe, a US report has said. "Most heroin transiting India appeared bound for Europe. Seizures of Southwest Asian heroin made in New Delhi and Mumbai tend to reinforce this assessment," the latest US report on International Narcotics Trade released by the state department said. The report, however, noted that the bulk of heroin seized in the past two years has been of domestic origin, was seized in South India, and was apparently destined for Sri Lanka. According to the report trafficking groups operating in India fall into four categories. Most seizures in Mumbai and New Delhi involve West African traffickers. Traffickers who maintain familial and tribal ties to Pakistan and Afghanistan are responsible for most of the smuggling of heroin from the two countries into India. Ethnic Tamil traffickers, centred primarily in southern India, are alleged to be involved in trafficking between India and Sri Lanka. Indigenous tribal groups in the northeastern states adjacent to Burma maintain ties to Burmese trafficking organisations and facilitate the entry into Burma of precursor chemicals and into India of refined "white sugar" heroin through the porous Indo-Burma border. (The Times of India)

#### **Aurangabad tense after mosque minaret falls**

Parts of Aurangabad were tense on Monday afternoon after the minaret of a mosque fell down. The police clamped prohibitory orders in the city. Soon after the minaret of the mosque in Keli bazaar near Pandariba fell down, there was speculation that some miscreants had attacked it. This led to tension in Roshan gate, Lota Karanja, Nawabpura,

Shahgunj, Sabzi mandi, and Jinsi areas of the city. Commissioner of Police Shrikant Savarkar visited the spot and ruled out sabotage. He said the huge covers put on the mosque's facade to shield it from colour being splashed on it during Holo celebrations might have triggered the fall of the minaret. Some organisations held protests against the incident in the city. Savarkar said the situation is under control and peaceful in the city. Additional forces of SRP have been deployed, the police said. (The Times of India)

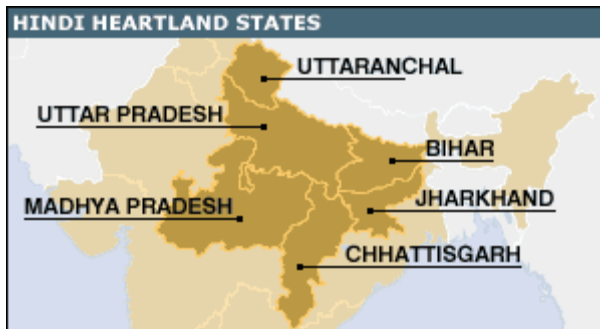
### **UP tops child rape graph**

Uttar Pradesh tops the list of States and Union Territories with the highest number of 900 child rape cases in 2008 followed by Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. According to the latest data by the Ministry of Home Affairs for three years, cases of child rape continue to rise as a total of 4,721 cases were registered during 2006, 5,045 in 2007 and 5,446 in 2008 across the country. Police have arrested 5,489 people in 2006 for their involvement in such crimes, 5,756 in 2007 and 6,363 in 2008. Madhya Pradesh registered 892 such cases, Maharashtra (690), Rajasthan (420) and Andhra Pradesh (412) in 2008, the data said. A total of 411 such cases were registered in Chhattisgarh, 301 in Delhi, 215 in Kerala, 187 in Tamil Nadu, 129 in West Bengal, 106 in Punjab and 104 in Tripura, it said. Whereas, Gujarat has registered 99 cases, Karnataka 97, Bihar 91, Haryana 70, Himachal Pradesh 68, Orissa 65 and Goa 18. "According to the Constitution, police and public order is the State subject that is why the primary responsibility of prevention, detection, registration, investigation and prosecution of crimes, including crimes against children, lies with the State governments or Union territory administrations," a Home Ministry official said. However, the condition in northeastern states was slight better as compared to their counterparts. Eleven cases came to light in Arunachal Pradesh, 12 in Sikkim, 18 in Mizoram, 22 in Manipur, 27 in Assam and 34 in Meghalaya. According to the data, no such cases were registered in Nagaland, Daman and Diu and Lakshadweep. Besides, ten cases were filed in Chandigarh, nine in Uttarakhand, eight each in Jharkhand and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, five in Jammu and Kashmir, four in Puducherry and three in Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Out of the total registered cases, 1,177 people were convicted for their offence during 2008. In 2007, 1,210 were convicted for their crime as against 963 in 2006, the data said. (The Indian Express)



## Regional Report

### Central India (Hindi Heartland)



#### Politics:

##### **Bihar will become a developed state by 2015 : Nitish**

Bihar will become a developed state by 2015 "despite the Centre's move to stall its development", chief minister Nitish Kumar told the assembly amid noisy walkout by the entire opposition over alleged unsatisfactory reply by the government on the governor's address. Replying to the debate on thanks giving motion to Governor Devanand Konwar's address to the joint sitting of the state legislature, Kumar said "We have initiated a number of steps to develop the state and bring it on par with other developed states. "I am sure that people of Bihar will not like to return to dark ages due to bad law and order situation," he said in an apparent reference to the erstwhile government of the opposition RJD. With the change of guard and improvement in the law and order situation one could find family members moving round the city in the dead of night, Kumar said and dealt in length about improving law and order situation in the state. Quoting the official records he said while 3861 people were murdered in 2004 when the RJD was in power, the figure came down to 3152 in 2009. In 2004 1257 cases of dacoities were registered, which came down to 654 during the NDA rule. "The people of Bihar will give a fitting reply to the opposition parties for spreading canards against the present government that it has failed to control the spiralling crime graph," he said.

#### Social front:

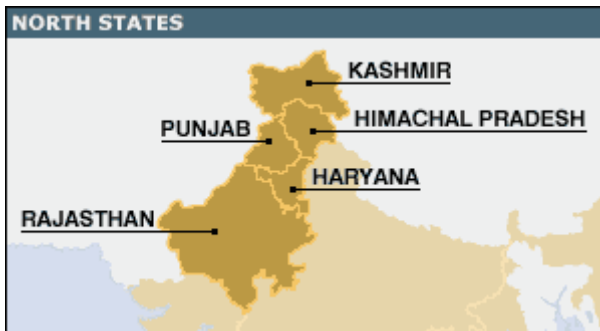
##### **Women, children among 63 killed in Uttar Pradesh stampede**

Sixty-three people, all women and children, were killed and another 64 injured in a massive stampede at an ashram at Mangarh in Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh on Thursday. The tragic incident took place when a portion of the entrance gate collapsed under pressure of the surging crowd that thronged the ashram belonging to Kripalu Maharaj to collect food and utensils. The dead included 37 children and 26 women. An official spokesman put the death toll at 61. The function at the ashram, located 80 km from the district headquarters of Pratapgarh and about 200 km from here, was held to

commemorate the death anniversary of Kripalu Maharaj's wife. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati has ordered a high-level inquiry into the incident. The probe would be conducted by the Divisional Commissioner of Allahabad. He has been asked to submit his preliminary report within 24 hours after which the amount of compensation for the victims would be fixed. Ms. Mayawati also sent PWD and Excise Minister Naseemuddin Siddiqui and Panchayati Raj Minister Swami Prasad Maurya to Mangarh to supervise relief operations and treatment of people. State Cabinet Secretary Shashank Shekhar Singh told reporters here that the mishap occurred around noon. The programme was to have begun at 2.30 p.m. but started earlier as the crowd entered the premises. A portion of the entrance gate was opened, but the structure collapsed under the pressure mounted by the crowd. The dead were either crushed under the debris of the gate or killed in the ensuing stampede. The injured were shifted to hospitals in Pratapgarh and Allahabad, and 39 of them were discharged after first aid. Two were referred to the Swaroop Rani Nehru Medical College Hospital in Allahabad with serious injuries. A team of doctors rushed to the site and ambulances from Rae Bareilly, Pratapgarh and Allahabad were kept ready to take the injured to the hospital. (The Hindu)

### **Economic Front:**

#### **The North**



### **Politics:**

#### **Social front:**

#### **Over 50 people detained for Punjab, Haryana violence**

Over 50 miscreants have been rounded up on charges of arson and rioting as tension prevailed in different parts of Punjab and Haryana, a day after supporters of the controversial Dera Sacha Sauda sect went on a rampage to protest registration of another murder case against their spiritual leader Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh. "We have rounded up 35 persons, who are accused of arson and rioting, from various parts of Punjab. Most of them are youngsters between the age-group of 18 to 25 years. Our investigation is on to ascertain the actual reason behind the provocation," a senior Punjab police official said on Sunday. He said the overall situation is under control. "No fresh incidents of violence have been reported since 9 pm Saturday... also, there have been no casualties so far," he

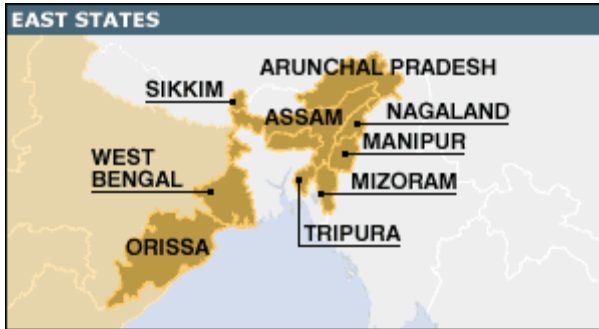
added. The Haryana police, which rounded up over 15 youths, have called additional companies of para-military forces to maintain the law and order situation in the state. "Right now it is not appropriate to come to any conclusion as we are still questioning the youths. It could be the work of some anti-social group," a Haryana police official said. Meanwhile, tension continued in violence-hit parts of the states and public transport remained off road during early hours Sunday. Dera followers, known as 'Premis', went on rampage on Saturday and burnt over a dozen rail coaches in various parts of Punjab and Haryana, thereby forcing the authorities to cancel some train services. At least 40 buses were torched and public property was destroyed in Moga, Bathinda, Mansa, Barnala and Ferozepur towns of Punjab and Sirsa, Hisar, Kaithal and Fatehabad in Haryana. The states have been put on high alert. The sect chief was booked by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) earlier this week for the murder of former Dera manager Faqir Chand in 1991. Chand's body was never found and the central agency conducted an inquiry into this matter on court orders. Besides the sect chief, the CBI has booked four other members of the Dera for murder, destroying evidence and for hatching criminal conspiracy. The sect chief is already facing three cases, two of murder conspiracy and one of rape of a female follower in a CBI special court in Ambala town of Haryana. The Dera Sacha Sauda sect, which has a big following all over the country, is headquartered at Sirsa town in Haryana, around 275 km from here. Dera officials have, however, condemned these incidents and said that they had no idea who was behind the violence across Punjab and Haryana. "We strongly condemn this violence and appeal to everyone to maintain peace and harmony in the region. No Dera follower is behind this arson and rioting. Once the police conduct their investigation, things will become clear as to who is responsible behind this chaos," sect spokesman Aditya Insaan said. (The Times of India)

### **Swine flu surfaces again in Himachal**

A new swine flu case has been reported in Himachal Pradesh after a gap of over a month, a health department official said on Wednesday. With this, the number of Influenza A (H1N1) cases in the state has risen to 45. "A 54-year-old man was admitted to Shimla's Indira Gandhi Medical College and Hospital yesterday (Tuesday). His samples tested positive for swine flu," Swine Flu Nodal Officer Vinod Mehta said. He said the patient was from Rohru in Shimla district. So far, 16 people have died and 45 tested positive for the H1N1 virus in the state, he said. (The Times of India)

### **Economic Front:**

## The East

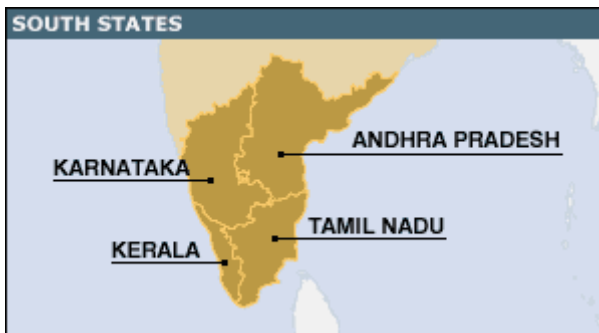


### Politics:

### Social front:

### Economic Front:

## The South



### Politics:

### **Andhra Pradesh assembly rocked over petroleum price hike**

The Andhra Pradesh assembly on Tuesday was adjourned briefly as the opposition created a ruckus over the issue of rise in petrol and diesel prices. As soon as the house met for the day, members belonging to TDP, CPI, CPM, BJP and Praja Rajyam Party demanded that the issue be discussed through an adjournment motion. As their demand was rejected, the opposition members stalled the proceedings and Speaker N Kiran Kumar adjourned the House for 15 minutes. The opposition parties also demanded an immediate roll back of the hike to save the common man and wanted the state government to move a resolution in this regard. The chair, however, allowed floor leaders to make a mention of the issue and put forth their plea for a resolution by the house. Leader of opposition N Chandrababu Naidu strongly denounced Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's assertion that the hike would not be rolled back. "The UPA government has enhanced prices of petroleum products 11 times in the last five years. It has totally broken the back of the common man," he said, pointing out that even UPA

allies like DMK and Trinamool Congress have opposed the hike. Praja Rajyam Party member Vanga Geeta said the Prime Minister's statement had only aggravated the concerns of the common people. G Kishan Reddy (BJP) said the price of petrol in Hyderabad was the highest in the country. Majlis Ittehadul-e-Muslimeen leader Akbaruddin Owaisi said taxes in the state were too high and the government should immediately cut them. G Mallesh (CPI) and J Ranga Reddy (CPM) also denounced the hike. Leader of the house J Geeta Reddy, however, rejected the opposition demand for a resolution. "We understand their (opposition) concern but they can raise this issue during the course of discussion on the state budget," she said. This did not satisfy the opposition members and they raised slogans against the government. Amidst the din, the Speaker took up the Question Hour, but as the opposition members did not relent, the house was adjourned. (The Times of India)

### **Social front:**

#### **Taslima's article sparks violence in Karnataka, 2 killed**

Two persons died and eight others were injured in Shimoga district of Karnataka on Monday following violent protests over the publication of an article by Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen on the burqa in a vernacular daily. While one of the victims died in police firing, the other died during the clashes. The police opened fire after protesters, who were taking out a procession, burnt 12 two-wheelers, two tractors, two autos and pelted stones at buses and buildings. The deceased were identified as Mustafa and Ataulla. According to home minister P V Acharya, there was trouble in Hassan too, with protesters burning two-wheelers, shops and raining stones on buses and buildings. But the situation there was more under control. About two dozen persons were arrested in connection with the incidents. Curfew has been clamped until Tuesday morning in both districts. The police force was meager in Shimoga with most of the personnel being deployed in other parts of the state on account of Holi. The intelligence wing is also said to have erred in assessing the situation when the protesters began attacking shops and went on a burning spree. One of the victims of the violence in Shimoga, Karnataka, died after the police opened fire in the air to prevent loss of property during the protests over an article by Taslima Nasreen. In fact, the district administration had appeal to community leaders not to go ahead with their procession plans, in vain. In Hassan, minority committee members gathered in large numbers and forced the closure of shops belonging to members of their community. Hassan additional SP Yellappa told TOI that a section of protesters turned violent after submitting a memorandum to the deputy commissioner. But IGP (southern range) Jeevenkumar V Gaonkar said the situation was limping back to normal, but they would continue intensive patrolling across the town for the next couple of days. KSRP men and additional forces from other districts have been pressed into action. Meanwhile, the Mysore police tightened security by erecting pickets at many spots. Police commissioner Sunil Agarwal said, "So far, no incident has been reported in the city, but we don't want to take chances." Karnataka home minister P V Acharya said the government has taken all possible steps to check violence from spreading in the state. "We have ensured an elaborate bandobust in all 30 districts of the state and prohibitory orders have been clamped in several sensitive districts," he said.

(The Times of India)

### **Economic Front:**

#### **West India**



### **Politics:**

#### **Social front:**

##### **Terror alert sounded in key cities of Gujarat**

A terror alert has been sounded in five key cities of Gujarat following an intelligence tip-off, an official said on Tuesday. Cities marked out for enhanced vigil are Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot and Jamnagar. According to Joint Commissioner of Police (Ahmedabad) Satish Sharma, this was done following specific intelligence inputs. "Terror strikes follow a pattern taking place on weekends or places of mass congregation especially in times of revelry, and therefore the precautionary exercise," he added. The maximum alert was sounded during Holi but with the festival passing off peacefully there has been a stand-down, however, the alert nevertheless continues, the police said. Parks and gardens which are frequented by morning walkers were particularly marked out for special attention. In the backdrop of the Pune blast and following reports that the American terror accused Tahawwur Rana had visited Ahmedabad and carried out a detailed survey in November 2008, the fear of a terror strike hangs heavy in cities of the state. (The Times of India)

### **Economic Front:**