

Business and Politics in Muslim World

India
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10th to 16th April 2010

Presentation Date: 21st April 2010

Report # 115

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National Summary:

Bharatiya Janata Party national president Nitin Gadkari blamed the Congress-led Centre for the price rise and unemployment and the DMK-led State government for the power and water crises in Tamil Nadu. According to him Congress government at the Centre is appeasing the minorities and terrorist organisations for political gain and for vote-bank politics which he said, would endanger the country's unity and integrity. Criticising the Congress and other secular political parties for describing the BJP as a communal party, Mr. Gadkari said the party was for justice for all irrespective of caste and creed.

Chief Election Commissioner Naveen Chawla expressed concern that roughly 700 out of 1,000 registered political parties do not contest polls but said the Election Commission has no power to de-register them.

The involvement of Tharoor in the IPL franchise for, the Kochi team has raised concerns among political circles and even in his own party. Left parties demanded his resignation as, for them, it is highly inappropriate for a minister in the Union government to be part of such activities.

Muslim groups in Rajasthan have alleged that over a dozen persons accused of carrying out and conspiring in the May 2008 serial blasts in Jaipur were being kept at the Central Jail without basic facilities and forced to make fresh confession despite the completion of investigation.

Senior BJP leader L K Advani emphasized that the party needs to work to explain to the people that Hindutva and Indian secularism are synonymous. The BJP leader quoted Supreme Court judgment on Hindutva in which the court had observed, "Hindutva is a way of life or state of mind and cannot be understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism."

After the government came under opposition attack on the handling of Naxal violence, Home Minister P Chidambaram said that the state governments have the primary responsibility to fight the Maoist menace and the Centre was ready to assist them.

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee has said there are no Maoists in West Bengal. Banerjee claimed there are about 200 camps of the Communist Party India (Marxist), which have unleashed violence across the state. Criticising the so-called Operation Green Hunt of the government, Banerjee said the operation is being carried out to suppress or kill rural folk in the area.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles successfully flew over the forests of Bastar in the first trial run for anti-naxal operations. The trials, which assumed urgency after the Dantewada massacre in which 76 security personnel were killed by Maoists, were aimed at generating real-time intelligence information to help ground forces in any offensive. The first trial involved an American UAV.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said India was poised to achieve 9-10 per cent economic growth but for this it required protection-free international climate. During the meeting with President Barack Obama, Singh said, there was a need to "rewrite" the architecture of global

economic system in which the G-20 could play an important role. Referring to the global economic crisis, Singh referred to role of US in strengthening growth impulses in world economy particularly in developing countries in period after World War II and stressed that that experience should be repeated.

According to the 'ING Investor Dashboard Survey' Investor sentiment in India has been the highest among the Asian economies in the January-March period of 2010 because of robust domestic consumption and expectations of increased stock market activity. The India index, which provides market insights into investor attitude and outlook, has jumped to 174 for the first quarter of 2010, from 169 in the immediate previous quarter. The survey found that a majority of Indian investors (91 per cent) believe the economic situation will improve in the next quarter, signaling continued confidence in the local economy. Also investors are willing to take more risk as the economic outlook turns bullish.

US President Barack Obama has hoped that the controversial nuclear liability bill will be concluded "expeditiously" by the Indian Parliament. The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill, introduction of which was deferred by the government on March 15, figured in the talks Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had with Obama on Sunday. The bill that seeks to limit the liability of a nuclear power plant operator at Rs 500 crore in case of an accident has generated criticism from opposition parties.

India seeks access to David Coleman Headley under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), 2005, which binds India and the US to share information and material while pursuing criminal cases.

The Obama Administration has asked the Congress to double its anti-terrorism budget to India to USD 4.5 million for the fiscal 2011.

A Freak storm preceded by hurricane-force winds killed nearly a hundred people in four blocks of North Dinajpur district in West Bengal and Araria, Purnea and Kishanganj districts of Bihar around midnight on Tuesday. While 31 people were killed and more than 50 injured in West Bengal, the toll was around 65 in Bihar. The figure is likely to rise as rescuers are still clearing debris of flattened houses in both states

Regional Summary:

Congress and BSP are struggling hard to gain Dalit's vote bank in UP. Both parties have announced different programmes to celebrate the birth anniversary of Bhimrao Ambedkar. Rahul Gandhi and UP chief minister Mayawati are the main contesters in vote bank politics.

Rajasthan government extended a fresh invitation for talks to Gujjar leader Kirori Singh Bainsla, who is spearheading a protest demanding five per cent quota for the community in state jobs. Hundreds of Gujjars led by Bainsla have been marching to Jaipur since April 11 to press for their demand.

Muslim religious leaders publicly voiced their support for Trinamool chief Mamata

Banerjee and criticised the CPM for not helping the Muslims in Bengal.

Tamil Nadu government has allocated Rs 1,000 crore for a project of constructing roads of international standard in 11 cities, including Madurai. Discussions were taking place at various levels to build the roads, which would have good lighting facility, footpath, and sign boards, an official release said.

The number of suicides in Gujarat has risen by 10.5 per cent in 2008, as compared to 2007, with housewives constituting the highest percentage, according to a National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report. The recently published report titled 'Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India-2008' said the number of suicides in Gujarat has increased to 6,165 in 2008 from 5580 registered in 2007, an increase of 10.5 per cent. The all-India average was recorded at 2.2 per cent. Out of the 6,165 suicides in 2008 in Gujarat, 1,744 (28.3 percent) were housewives. Gujarat, where 4.9 per cent of the total suicides in the country took place in 2008, stands eighth in the list of state after West Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, where high suicide rates were recorded.

National Report

Politics:

Resignation is a closed chapter: Chidambaram

Calling his resignation episode a closed chapter, Home Minister P Chidambaram on Saturday said he decided to quit because the CRPF came under his charge but that does not mean state governments have no role in tackling the Maoists. "The resignation was indeed tendered. The Prime Minister has rejected it. The matter is a closed chapter," he told reporters declining to talk further on the issue. Chidambaram said in the horrific tragedy in Dantewada in Chhattisgarh hit the CRPF whose 74 personnel were killed. "It (CRPF) is under my charge. This tragedy has happened under my watch. "Therefore, I said the buck stops at my desk. It does not mean that the state governments have no role. They have a role, they acknowledge it, recognise and according to me, all the state governments are fully aware of this responsibility." When a journalist told him that his score card has been neat in the Ministry and whether Dantewada attack was a blot on it, he said "any attack is indeed a blot". The Home Minister said it was an intra-Chhattisgarh operation and not an inter-state operation. The exercise was planned by the State Inspector General of Police and DIG and DIG of CRPF. It was conveyed to the Police Headquarters and they were aware of the exercise, he said adding "but something went wrong. Something went very badly wrong". He said precious lives were lost and the government has appointed an inquiry committee to go into it. "Let the report of the inquiry committee come and we will take corrective action." Asked about the role of the Centre in anti-naxal operations, the Home Minister said the Central government's role, according to the mandate given to the Ministry of Home Affairs, is to provide paramilitary forces to state governments to help them carry out anti-naxal operations to regain control over the area where the Naxals are dominating and to restore civil administration for development. "I have said this many times and I have said this three days ago in Jagdalpur (in Chhattisgarh) that this is our role and state governments have an important role to play "I think all the Chief Ministers recognise that they have an important role to play," he said. (The Indian Express)

Cong chief steps in, communal violence Bill back on drafting board

The Union Law Ministry is learnt to be re-drafting "crucial" clauses of the proposed Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of victims) Bill. The move comes after UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi wrote to Law Minister M Veerappa Moily, asking him to include more stringent clauses in the proposed Bill to ensure that incidents of communal violence as witnessed in the past are not repeated. She is also learnt to have suggested that the Bill have a comprehensive definition of communal violence and what constitutes it. While Law Ministry officials were tight-lipped on the exact contents of Sonia's letter, it is learnt that she perceived some clauses of the proposed Bill as weak. Along with her letter, Sonia has also forwarded to the ministry representations submitted to her by NGOs that are opposed to the proposed Bill in its present form. Opponents of the proposed Bill, which was cleared by the Cabinet in December last year, have argued that it would be unable to effectively check outbreak of communal violence and punish those responsible for it. Some organisations have also opposed the Bill on the ground that it does not make police, administration or state authorities accountable for

outbreak of communal violence and the failure to control it. They have demanded that the Centre and its agencies be given powers to intervene in such a situation without waiting for the state government to make a request for the same. Pointing out that the Indian Penal Code doesn't have adequate clauses to deal with perpetrators of communal violence, the NGOs have demanded that the proposed Bill cover crimes and offences that come under the definition of communal violence. The NGOs also want a national authority to prevent communal violence and punish its perpetrators. This authority, preferably the NHRC, will have the power to declare an area where communal clashes have broken out as internally disturbed and bring it under its control. It will also have the power to order probe, prosecution and monitor trial of those responsible by a special court. The proposed Bill is substantially different from the version that was introduced in Parliament in November 2005 but was later withdrawn. On March 31, Home Minister P Chidambaram, while saying he was hopeful the proposed Bill would be passed before year-end, had indicated that the government was open to amending it. Opponents of the proposed Bill have recently held meetings with Moily and senior Home Ministry officials to explain their position. (The Indian Express)

Gadkari blames Centre for price rise, unemployment

Bharatiya Janata Party national president Nitin Gadkari blamed the Congress-led Centre for the price rise and unemployment and the DMK-led State government for the power and water crises in Tamil Nadu. Addressing his first public meeting after becoming party president, in Chennai Mr. Gadkari said the Centre's "wrong policies" were responsible for the various ills plaguing the country. For political gain and for vote-bank politics, the Congress government at the Centre was appeasing the minorities and terrorist organisations, which, he said, would endanger the country's unity and integrity. Criticising the Congress and other secular political parties for describing the BJP as a communal party, Mr. Gadkari said the party was for justice for all irrespective of caste and creed. It was not against the minorities but was against terrorists and Pakistan's ISI and Maoists. Pointing out that the BJP had made A.P.J. Abdul Kalam the President of the country, he said the party was for a secular judiciary, a secular military, a secular media and a secular administration, which alone, he said, could make the country economically strong. Mr. Gadkari said the only achievement of the Congress, which had ruled the country since Independence except for short periods, was making the poor poorer and the rich richer. About 41 crore people in the country were living below the poverty line, and the Congress was responsible for such a situation. The BJP president also criticised the State government for the poor power and water supply situation in Tamil Nadu. If only the BJP had continued in power at the Centre, it would have created a situation without power cuts or water problems. He assured the people that if the party returned to power at the Centre in 2014, its first priority would be interlinking of rivers, and the Centre would be able to provide 4,000 TMC of Ganga water to the Cauvery and uninterrupted power supply to Tamil Nadu. Unfortunately, the present Central government had put the linking of river scheme in cold storage. Visualising a good future for the party in Tamil Nadu, Mr. Gadkari wanted party workers to improve the support base of the party. He wanted party workers to make door-to-door visits to explain to the people the correct picture and make the party strong at the grassroots. If they undertook such a task, the party would become a formidable force in the State by the 2011 Assembly elections, he said. (The Hindu)

Over 700 registered parties do not contest polls: Chawla

Chief Election Commissioner Naveen Chawla expressed concern that roughly 700 out of 1,000 registered political parties do not contest polls but said the Election Commission has no power to de-register them. "We don't have power to de-register them," he said. The commission sent reform proposals to the Centre from time to time. "We are going to hold talks with the Centre in May-June on our reform proposals, including on dealing with such political parties." Asked about Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's frequent demand that the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls be held simultaneously, Mr. Chawla said he would not comment. The idea was first proposed by the former Vice-President, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, and asked what would happen if a government lost majority soon after winning polls. (The Hindu)

Left parties demand Tharoor's resignation

Left parties on Wednesday demanded the resignation of Shashi Tharoor, saying it was "highly inappropriate" for a minister in the Union government to be involved in "murky dealings" with regard to IPL. Noting that the IPL is not just a sporting event but a "big business enterprise in which big money is involved, the CPI(M) said it was "highly inappropriate for a minister in the Union government to be involved in such murky dealings". Tharoor is battling allegations that a beautician romantically linked to him had received Rs 70-crore free equity in Kochi IPL team. "It is incumbent upon Tharoor to step down from office till his name is cleared of any unethical or irregular behaviour," the party said in a statement. "The involvement of Tharoor in the IPL franchise for, the Kochi team has raised a number of questions. It now transpires that a person associated with him has got 19 per cent free equity worth Rs 70 crores in the company that led the consortium which got the franchise," it said. The CPI(M) also said the UPA government should also explain whether its ministers can be involved in business dealings in the name of IPL. "The government should probe the source of certain funds flowing into the tournament and reconsider whether any tax exemptions or concessions are justified for this commercial enterprise," it added. CPI National Secretary D Raja also demanded Tharoor's designation saying his continuance in the government has become "untenable". "There should be an enquiry into it. Tharoor should step down as his continuance has become untenable," Raja said. (The Indian Express)

Tharoor issue: Sonia holds consultations with party leaders

With the opposition set to raise the Shashi Tharoor-IPL controversy in Parliament, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Friday chaired a strategy session with senior party leaders. Gandhi held consultations with finance minister Pranab Mukherjee, defence minister A K Antony and political secretary to the Congress President Ahmed Patel. The three leaders are also part of the Congress core group. On Thursday, Tharoor said he is open to making a statement in Lok Sabha on the issue of the Kochi IPL ownership controversy if asked to do so. Tharoor had a meeting with Gandhi on Thursday evening. The Shashi Tharoor-IPL controversy issue is expected to generate heat in Parliament on Friday with the opposition planning to raise the matter involving the beleaguered Union minister whose resignation has been demanded by BJP and the Left parties. Notices have been given in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha by several parties including BJP, Left and SP in the backdrop of allegations that Tharoor had misused his authority to help his friend Sunanda Pushkar get 'free' equity of the value of Rs 70 crore in IPL Kochi

franchise. The BJP had sharply reacted to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement that he will take action against Tharoor only after knowing "all the facts" of the case, saying all details were now in the public domain and there should be no delay in the matter. Earlier, the party had asked for the sacking of Tharoor. SP on Friday joined the chorus of demand for Tharoor's sacking from government, saying he has been "exposed" in the IPL-Kochi bid controversy. CPM leader Brinda Karat said Tharoor should step down immediately and government should investigate the whole issue. (Times of India)

Minorities' Issues:

Muslim groups allege torture of blasts accused

Muslim groups in Rajasthan have alleged that over a dozen persons accused of carrying out and conspiring in the May 2008 serial blasts in Jaipur were being kept at the Central Jail here without basic amenities in violation of the Jail Manual and forced to make fresh confession despite the completion of investigation. A five-member delegation of Muslim groups met Jail Superintendent Otta Ram Rohin earlier this week to register their protest against the treatment being meted out to the inmates even though their alleged role in the blasts is yet to be established and the trial in the main case is yet to start. One of the accused has complained that the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) officials, being given access to the inmates in the jail, are compelling them to put signatures on plain papers. The ATS has already filed charge-sheets against all the accused in the court. The delegation members, representing the Jamat-e-Islami Hind and the Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR), pointed out that confining the accused in small and inadequately ventilated cells without electric fan in the present hot climate amounted to their "indirect torture." They were allowed to come out of cells within the jail premises only for three hours daily. The accused have been incarcerated for more than a year-and-a-half. (The Hindu)

Let Women's Reservation Bill pass as it is: Muslim activists

A group of Muslim women leaders and activists on Thursday asked the UPA government to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed in the present form, saying the demand for sub-quotas will only delay it further. In a statement issued by leaders and activists of 15 organisations, "some of those opposed to the Bill in the name of sub-quotas also say that if reservation for women is reduced from 33 per cent, they will support the bill." "This exposes the hollowness of their demand for sub-quotas for minorities and Dalits," the statement said. Subhashini Ali, President of AIDWA, said Muslim women support the 33 per cent reservation and the the bill must not be opposed since reservation on the basis of religion is yet to be settled in the Constitution and stopping the Bill from getting passed in the Lok Sabha will only delay the process further. Alleging that opposition to the Bill was of patriarchal nature, Ali said statutory position on reservation remains the same. "If the Women's Bill is passed the number of men in Parliament will decline to approximately 300 from the 432 seats that men enjoy. This is something unacceptable to those opposing it," Ali added. (The Indian Express)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

Secularism has its roots in Hindutva: Advani

Senior BJP leader L K Advani indicated that the party needs to work more to explain to the people that Hindutva and Indian secularism are synonymous. Referring to an article by his former Cabinet colleague and senior lawyer Ram Jethmalani in a magazine, Advani said in his latest blog posting: "the title of this article 'Hindutva is not property of BJP' sounds provocative. Some of my party colleagues may take umbrage and presume the article is critical. It is not. It is complimentary." The Chairman of the BJP Parliamentary Party quoted Jethmalani as saying "It is a pity that the BJP has not been able to explain to people that Hindutva and Indian secularism are practically synonyms." Pointing out that "indeed, the stress is on Indian secularism having its roots in Hindutva", the BJP leader recalled that Jethmalani had argued Shiv Sena leader Manohar Joshi's case in the Supreme Court and secured a landmark judgment on Hindutva in which the court had observed "Hindutva is a way of life or state of mind and cannot be understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism". Advani also mentions about a book authored by Newsweek International's editor Fareed Zakaria. "He has repeatedly emphasised that Hinduism is not a religion in the 'Abrahamic' sense of the word," he said referring to 'The Post American World'. "Zakaria argues that it is this non-doctrinaire character that gives Hinduism its absorptive and assimilative power. I hold that it is this Hindu ethos that accounts for the success of both democracy as well as secularism in India," he said in his blog titled 'The roots of democracy and secularism'. (The Indian Express)

Insurgency Movements:

Only 300 cadres involved: Maoists

The 'Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee' of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PGLA), has in a statement, claimed that only 300 of its fighters took part in the ambush in Dantewada and not a thousand as believed. The release signed by Ramanna, a member of the Committee, admitted that eight Naxals were killed in the gunfight. The release claimed the ambush was planned and executed to protest 'Operation Green Hunt'. The Maoist release accused the Centre of "lying" about not involving defence forces in the fight against them, saying Army was already training police and para-military forces in the state in jungle warfare. Strangely, the organisation expressed its sympathy for the families of the slain security personnel. "We convey our sympathies to the families of the fallen security men. We appeal to the jawans and lower-rung officers of paramilitary forces and the police not to fight the war against people...don't be brutal," it said. (The Indian Express)

No Maoists in West Bengal, claims Mamata

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee has said there are no Maoists in West Bengal. Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Banerjee claimed there are about 200 camps of the Communist Party India (Marxist), which have unleashed violence across the state. Criticising the so-called Operation Green Hunt of the government, Banerjee said the operation is being carried out to suppress or kill rural folk in the area. "The operation is being carried out in the name of a joint operation. There are no Maoists in this region. There are 200 camps of the CPI-M operating in the area. Why would the CPI-M be involved in a government operation? Government operation is administrative operation. I have doubts about the operation itself," she

said. She demanded the arrest of West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee alleging that he had misused his powers under the Constitution. "Why should not any action be taken against him because of his politics of individual killings and mass murder? I feel it is my social responsibility to say so," she added. "Operation Green Hunt" is a joint exercise conducted by the central paramilitary and State police force to track down and flush out Maoists from their camps in forest regions. It was initially conducted in West Bengal and later extended in Jharkhand. The districts covered in Jharkhand are West Singhbhum, East Singhbhum, Ranchi, Latehar, Chatra, Hazaribagh and Bokaro. (The Indian Express)

Fighting Naxals primary job of states: Chidambaram

After the government came under opposition attack on the handling of Naxal violence, Home Minister P Chidambaram said on Thursday that the state governments have the primary responsibility to fight the Maoist menace and the Centre was ready to assist them. Making a statement in the Rajya Sabha on the Dantewada massacre in which 76 security personnel were killed, Chidambaram said, "the state governments have the primary responsibility" to regain control of areas dominated by the Naxals. The Central government, he said, was ready and willing to assist the state governments and to coordinate inter-state operations. "To counter the menace of Naxalism, we need a strong head, a stronger heart and enormous staying power. I believe that the government has all three qualities," he said. As the security forces were deployed in areas populated by scheduled tribes, they were facing hindrances, the minister said. "Because the security forces are deployed in areas populated by scheduled tribes, a number of restrictions have been placed on the operations of the central paramilitary forces," Chidambaram said giving details of the Dantewada incident of April six. Earlier, both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha witnessed frequent adjournments over the issue as the opposition wanted an immediate discussion and alleged that the government had taken the incident in a casual manner. Apparently rejecting suggestions that the security forces were not adequately trained, Chidambaram said, "the three companies (deployed in Dantewada) concerned had undergone pre-induction training before they were inducted in that area." Noting that the goal of Naxalites was to overthrow the established authority of the government, he said the State has a legitimate right to deploy its security forces to "resist, apprehend and, if necessary, neutralise militants who are determined to strike at the very roots of our nation". The Home Minister said that the call to the CPI(Maoist) for talks was made in the hope of getting their sincere response. "The only condition is that the CPI (Maoist) must abjure violence", he said. Recalling his visit to Chhatisgarh soon after the incident, Chidambaram said the Centre has appointed a one-man inquiry committee headed by E N Ram Mohan, a retired IPS officer, which has been asked to submit a report within two weeks. "I would submit to the House that we should await the report of the inquiry committee before reaching any final conclusions....We should remain calm, hold our nerve and stay on the courses that we had carefully chosen since October 2009," he said. The concerted action against the Naxals by the Centre and the affected states was launched in October last year. (The Indian Express)

India tests UAV for anti-Naxal operations

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, used by US forces to track down Taliban militants, successfully flew over the dense forests of Bastar in the first trial run for anti-naxal operations. The trials, which assumed urgency after the Dantewada massacre in which 76 security personnel were killed by

Maoists, were aimed at generating real-time intelligence information to help ground forces in any offensive. The first trial involved an American UAV. The decision to have UAV flights was taken by the Union Home Ministry after the April six attack and their field trials were ordered immediately. An UAV of US' Honeywell, whose pilotless planes are reportedly used successfully by allied forces in the hunt for targets in war-hit Afghanistan and Iraq, flew during the night trial. The compact UAV, weighing nearly 10 kgs, was put through the rugged terrains of the hills overlooking Kanker after its take off from Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare College. The trials was witnessed by officials not only from Chattisgarh and the Union Home Ministry, but also by police officials of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh. Cruising over the hills, the UAV was checked for providing thermal images of any movement on the ground, detection of Improvised Explosive Devices(IED) and ammunition dumps. The UAV known as T-MAV (Micro Air Vehicle) is a compact machine manufactured by 'Honeywell'. The company, during its briefing for officials, claimed that its deployment and stowing operations can be accomplished in less than five minutes. This UAV was selected first for field trials as it has been claimed that it has been useful to the US forces in tracking down Taliban militants in high mountain passes and dense Waziristan area of Pakistan. The UAVs are urgently required as the forces engaged in anti-naxal operations need real-time information to achieve greater success. It can go up to a height of 10,000 feet, fly at a speed of 70 kms per hour and can provide 240 minutes of sensor imagery to the ground station. The night-long trials also saw its use in detecting people in pitch dark and dense forests. In certain cases of mine detection, the UAV could not pick up signals properly and only showed some disturbance on the surface. A UAV of Defence Research and Development Organisation, which has claimed to have a similar product, may be tried soon. However, its UAV trials two years back had not got the desired results. With intelligence gathering still a problem in Naxal areas, the UAVs are expected to help in gathering advanced reconnaissance and situational awareness functions would be critical in protection of security personnel. (The Indian Express)

Andhra arms haul indicates changed Maoists strategy

The recent recovery of a cache of Maoists arms near West Godavari district points to change in strategy of rebels, who are now choosing thickly populated areas as their hideouts, a top police official said. "The huge catch of explosive material at Paidiparru village near Tanuku town recently is an indication that they (Maoists) have changed their strategy of taking shelter," the official said. This could be an attempt by the Naxals to regain control over Andhra Pradesh, he said. "Tanuku was never known for naxal activity in the past. Maoists are now making use of peaceful areas to store their arms and carry out extremist activities instead of setting up a series of hideouts in jungles," he said. The huge dump explosive material was recovered after the killing of two top Maoists in an encounter last month. One of the slain Maoist leaders Kondal Reddy was operating his activities from Paidiparru village where he took a room on rent posing as a scrap dealer. Based on his dairy seized from the encounter site, police searched houses in the area. The surfacing of two top Maoist leaders - Shakamuri Appa Rao and Kondal Reddy, killed in encounter last month, gave credence to the inputs that they visited the state with an intention to revive the activities in Nallamalla forests which was once known to be fortress of naxal activities, he said. Maoists in order to prove their existence want to commit some sensational offences and create terror in the minds of common people. Intelligence inputs suggest Maoist action teams roaming in the state in trying to re-build the organisation," DGP R R Girish Kumar

had said. The residents of Paidiparru village were not aware of a Maoist workshop was functioning there for more than 3 years. A huge quantity of material brought from Tanuku included over 1,600 grenade shells, plastic chambers, springs, rings, safety pins, hammers, live ammunition and six rocket launchers and this material was enough to make 3000 grenades. Andhra Pradesh police has asked the general public to be report activities of suspected persons or presence of arms and ammunitions in their area. Alert has been sounded in districts bordering Orissa and Chhattisgarh, in wake of the deadliest Maoist attack in Dantewada. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

Rupee rises to over 19-mth high

The rupee appreciated by 5 paise to trade at over 19-month high of 44.23 a dollar in early trade on Monday in line with other firming currencies. At the Interbank Foreign Exchange (Forex) market, the rupee strengthened by 5 paise to 44.23 a dollar. The domestic currency had gained 17 paise to close at 44.28/29 in the previous session. Dealers said the rupee strengthened against the US currency largely in line with other firming currencies and dollar selling by banks and exporters. Besides, more capital inflows by foreign funds into equity markets also supported the uptrend, they added. The Bombay Stock Exchange benchmark Sensex rose by 62.11 points, or 0.34 per cent, to 17,995.25 in the opening trade. (The Indian Express)

March inflation seen 'pretty high'

India's March inflation will be "pretty high," a top government adviser said on Monday. Core inflation, excluding food and fuel prices, is around 5.5 per cent currently, Kaushik Basu, chief economic adviser in the finance ministry, told reporters. Wholesale price index-based inflation data for March is scheduled for release on Thursday. Basu was speaking at an event organised by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (The Indian Express)

India to achieve 9-10 pct growth: PM

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday said India was poised to achieve 9-10 per cent economic growth but for this it required protection-free international climate. During the meeting with President Barack Obama, Singh said, there was a need to "rewrite" the architecture of global economic system in which the G-20 could play an important role. Singh and Obama discussed a broad range of issues, including global economic crisis, follow up of G-20 meetings and food security and energy security. The Prime Minister said he was convinced that the two countries could begin a new chapter in their relations, Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said while briefing on the meeting. Referring to the global economic crisis, Singh referred to role of US in strengthening growth impulses in world economy particularly in developing countries in period after World War II and stressed that that experience should be repeated. Talking about India's context, he said the country was poised to achieve high economic growth of 9-10 per cent, given the savings rate of 35 per cent and investment rate of 37 per cent. For this to happen, there was need for peace in the region, he said. He also said that countries like India needed international environment that does not allow protectionist forces to gain ascendancy, Rao said. Singh told Obama that "we should rewrite the architecture of the global economic system. In this context, G-20 could play an important role in ensuring that global economic recovery is sustainable." He said the US was uniquely placed to work out a plan for sustainable recovery in a globally

integrated financial system. There is synergy of interests between India and the US, Singh told Obama. In response, Obama said the US would welcome suggestions of India as preparations for the next G-20 were underway. He mentioned common interest of both countries in seeing early conclusion of Doha Round of WTO talks. Singh said, food security, energy security were other areas for cooperation especially since experience of India in these fields was very valuable and of relevance. (The Indian Express)

India identifies 9 special tax havens

India will now be able to officially initiate information exchange with at least nine tax havens and modify regulations to combat tax evasion. This will be possible because the government has approved the notification of these areas as 'specified territory'. Cayman Islands, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands that are often called tax havens would now be classified as special territory by the Indian government in the tax laws helping it to officially initiate talks with these jurisdictions with regard to tax avoidance and exchange of information. Till now the country could not officially initiate talks on the issue as agreements were signed between the two countries, India and the other country and there was no way how these specific areas could be dealt with. However, Section 90 of the Income Tax Act was amended by the Finance Act 2009 to enable the government to enter into an agreement with any specified territory outside India, in addition to the already existing provision of agreement with the government of any country. The nine countries which have now been identified as specified territory are Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, (all British Overseas Territories); Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, (all British Crown Dependencies); Netherlands Antilles (an Autonomous Part of the Kingdom of Netherlands) and Macau (a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China), the government said in a statement on Tuesday. The notification of Hong Kong, a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China, as a specified territory for the purpose is also under process. "The Centre can now initiate and negotiate agreements for exchange of information for the prevention of evasion or avoidance of income tax and assistance in collection of income tax with these nine specified territories," the statement has said. India has been facing tax evasion and avoidance through the tax havens where Indians as well as overseas firms use these areas to route investments in India and taking benefit of liberal tax laws in haven nations. To take action on the tax evaders it is required the two countries exchange information on the matter. Also, money launderers engaged in illegal activities such as terrorism funding can be dealt with if the information is exchanged. (The Indian Express)

'India investor sentiment highest in Asia'

Investor sentiment in India has been the highest among the Asian economies in the January-March period of 2010 on the back of robust domestic consumption and expectations of increased stock market activity, a survey has said. According to the 'ING Investor Dashboard Survey', the India index, which provides market insights into investor attitude and outlook, has jumped to 174 for the first quarter of 2010, from 169 in the immediate previous quarter. The index also allows each market to be benchmarked and tracked against the overall investor sentiment across Asia. Improved sentiment came on the back of increase in growth optimism, improvement in pessimism about inflation, strong domestic demand and confidence in the local stock market, the survey by global financial services group ING said. "Given that the global economy has stabilised and is entering a period of weak growth and risk of a double dip recession in the US

has abated, investors are recommended to look into consumer, capital goods, construction and infrastructure sectors to capitalise on the domestic growth prospect," ING Investment Management India MD and CEO Navin Suri said. The overall pan-Asia (excluding-Japan) investor sentiment index remained at the higher level of 145 for Q1 of 2010, lower marginally from 147 in the previous quarter (October-December), showing that investors were optimistic about the future economic environment after the financial crisis. The survey found that a majority of Indian investors (91 per cent) believe the economic situation will improve in the next quarter, signaling continued confidence in the local economy. Also investors are willing to take more risk as the economic outlook turns bullish. Besides, a good 60 per cent of Indian investors plan to increase their exposure in the local stocks, mutual funds and other equity linked products in the next quarter. They are also bullish on the country's property market. "We expect volatility in the markets driven by gradual stimulus roll back, rising inflation, interest rates, and some disappointments in sectoral earnings. Given the significant component of FIIs inflow, any global event that decreases the risk appetite could also result in significant volatility in the markets," Suri said. The survey showed marked improvement in pessimism related to inflation and food inflation among India investors. "Inflation is dependent on supply-side factors, namely agricultural conditions, capacity utilisation, international commodity prices and food. Food prices, which are the major contributor to high levels of overall inflation, will continue to remain high," he added. (The Indian Express)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

Iran sanctions push casts shadow on Manmohan-Obama meet

Apart from lingering concerns over aspects of the U.S. administration's AfPak policy, it is the latest American sanctions drive against Iran that most immediately concerns Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's advisers as he goes into a bilateral meeting with President Barack Obama on Monday. Asked about the agenda of the meeting — which is being held on the eve of the Nuclear Security Summit — a senior Indian official said the two leaders would cover the full range of bilateral, regional and international issues. Apart from discussions on how to move the bilateral relationship forward in the run-up to the Foreign Minister-level strategic dialogue set for June, Afghanistan and Iran are the issues expected to dominate. "It is obvious the U.S. will raise what bothers them most, which is Iran," said the official. For the past few weeks, Washington has been trying to garner international support for tightening economic sanctions on Tehran over the nuclear issue, a move that key countries like China and Brazil are resisting. Though India is not a member of the United Nations Security Council, the U.S. is keen to enlist its support. But New Delhi is not convinced. "We don't think sanctions are needed or that they will solve the problem," said the official, speaking on background. "We have complied with whatever sanctions the UN imposed but only as part of a broader process of engagement with Iran." The Iranians, he said, had repeatedly told India that they do not want nuclear weapons. "Unfortunately others don't believe that. So the only way to resolve this is through the [work of the] International Atomic Energy Agency" rather than through coercive means. The official also confirmed that India, like China, had accepted Iran's invitation to participate in an international conference in Tehran on April 17-18 on the theme of 'Nuclear Energy for All, Nuclear Weapons for None.' That conference, scheduled right after the Nuclear Security Summit to which the Islamic Republic has not been invited, is another red rag to Washington, which has quietly been

discouraging other countries from attending. The senior official said the Prime Minister would also discuss the AfPak issue with Mr. Obama. Asked about recent reports suggesting the Pentagon favoured a smaller Indian footprint in Afghanistan, the official said “our role [there] is not a function of India-U.S. relations. We just happen to have the same goals. But we will play our role with or without the U.S. because we have core interests in our periphery which we will protect. The issue really is about coordination.” Since the Manmohan-Obama meeting of November 2009, the situation in the region had evolved. “There are two things here – first, the increasing predominance of the Army and second, legal statutes are being modified to transfer power back to the prime minister.” The official said the U.S. couldn't be blamed for trying to use the Pakistani military as part of its strategy of pacifying Afghanistan. But in India's assessment, Pakistan's role in Afghanistan had not really changed and was unlikely to in the future. India shared the same goal as the U.S., the official said – the establishment of a peaceful, neutral Afghanistan free from foreign interference. “Last year, there was talk of giving regional powers a greater role. But not much has happened, perhaps because of the Iran-U.S. tension, and now the situation in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. There are so many moving parts in this equation it needs reviewing constantly.” (The Hindu)

Indian camp in Afghanistan attacked

Taliban militants launched a pre-dawn attack on an Indian road construction camp in eastern Afghanistan on Saturday, burning vehicles and equipment and sending the crew fleeing, said authorities. No deaths or injuries had been reported in the attack in Khost province's Domanda district, said the Interior Ministry in a statement. Suspected Taliban militants, who are active in the mountainous eastern region bordering Pakistan, descended on the camp around 2 a.m. local time. Such raids seek to discourage foreign involvement in Afghanistan and destabilise the central government, which is struggling to bring development to the impoverished countryside and extend its mandate outside Kabul. It was not clear whether the camp was targeted due to Indian involvement, though militants have launched a number of bloody attacks on Indian interests in Afghanistan over recent years. A total of 75 people were killed in suicide car bombings outside the Indian embassy in Kabul in July 2008 and October 2009, while at least six Indians were killed in an attack on a Kabul guest house in February. Taliban insurgents have claimed responsibility for the attacks, although New Delhi has claimed arch-rival Pakistan may have provided support in the embassy attack. (The Hindu)

India to test sub-sonic 1,000-km missile soon

India is developing a sub-sonic 1,000-km range cruise missile Nirbhay which can be used for a “variety of applications”, a top military scientist said on Sunday. The 1000-kg “missile is getting into some shape,” Dr V K Saraswat, Scientific Advisor to Defence Minister and Chief of DRDO said. He also said the flight-trial of air-to-air missile Astra, having a range of 45 to 100 km, is on the cards. Saraswat was delivering the keynote address at a national convention on ‘The Frontiers of Aeronautical Technologies’, organised by the Aeronautical Society of India. He said India's armed forces are looking for long duration loitering missiles which can enter “enemy territory”, search targets such as radars, concentration of assets and “a variety of movements of enemy”, “home-on” the targets and “bang” them. Saraswat made a strong push for deploying space-based sensors to keep tab on “adversaries” and gather intelligence. He said space-based sensors are a must for tracking and detecting movements of enemies. Unless it has space-based

sensors, India would not be able to make its ballistic missile defence system a “potent weapon”, he said. India is launching a major programme for surveillance, particularly space-based, in terms of electro-optical payload and synthetic aperture radar, he said. (The Indian Express)

US pressurises India on N-liability bill

US President Barack Obama has hoped that the controversial nuclear liability bill will be concluded "expeditiously" by the Indian Parliament. The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill, introduction of which was deferred by the government on March 15, figured in the talks Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had with Obama on Sunday. "The President did refer to the pending Civil Nuclear Liability Bill and expressed the hope that this could be concluded as expeditiously as possible," Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao told journalists in her briefing on the talks. Singh told Obama that the bill was going through the democratic processes. The bill that seeks to limit the liability of a nuclear power plant operator at Rs 500 crore in case of an accident has turned out to be a political hot potato. The passage of the bill, which is a crucial step in the implementation of the Indo-US nuclear deal, has got caught in a political quagmire with opposition parties objecting to certain provisions in it, including the use of word 'cap' for Rs 500 crore compensation to be paid by the operator in the case of a nuclear accident. The government has indicated its readiness to make some changes in it and the bill is expected to be introduced in Parliament in the second part of the Budget Session starting Thursday. (The Indian Express)

India to seek Headley access under 2005 treaty

India is all set to seek access to Lashkar-e-Toiba operative David Coleman Headley under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), 2005, which binds India and the US to share information and material while pursuing criminal cases. First signed in 2001, the Protocol of Exchange of the Instrument of Ratification was again signed on October 3, 2005 after the treaty was ratified by the President on July 1, 2005. According to legal experts, a formal request seeking access to Headley, who is in FBI custody, will be sent to the office of Attorney General of the US Government through diplomatic channels soon. Sources said Solicitor General Gopal Subramaniam suggested to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to take recourse to the clauses of the MLAT to seek access to Headley. Along with the request, India will also append details of proof that the NIA and the Maharashtra Police unearthed while probing the 26/11 Mumbai attacks as well as the more recent Pune's German Bakery attack. India has proof that Headley had a role in planning and giving final touches to the deadly attacks. In fact, he has already pleaded guilty to his role in the Mumbai attacks and links with the LeT. Apart from the US, India has similar treaties with at least 15 other countries such as the UK, Canada, France, Switzerland and Russia. Under the treaty, it is mandatory for the two countries to put in place a legal mechanism to enable them to provide to each other assistance in “connection with the investigation, prosecution, prevention and suppression of crime including those relating to terrorism, narcotics, trafficking, economic and organized crime”. But, most importantly, it also includes taking the testimony or statements of persons and transferring persons in custody for testimony or other purposes. A senior functionary of the MHA told, “This treaty is our best chance to lay our hands on Headley. We have examined all possibilities and we feel making a request under the MLAT is the best option.” The officer disclosed that the draft letter prepared by Subramaniam and senior functionaries of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) is awaiting the final decision of Home Minister P Chidambaram. However, asked if the government was certain that the US authorities would allow its officers to question Headley, the

officer replied in the negative, saying a lot depended upon the attitude of the US court, where Headley's plea bargain is still pending. "But, we have received encouraging signals from the US government," he added. (The Indian Express)

US eyes \$4.5 mn anti-terror India budget, \$1.2 bn for Pak

With India requesting for higher-level training from the United States in the wake of 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the Obama Administration has asked the Congress to double its anti-terrorism budget to India to USD 4.5 million for the fiscal 2011. Testifying before a Congressional committee, Coordinator for Counter-terrorism in the Department of States Daniel Benjamin yesterday said such a decision by the Obama Administration follows a request from India in the aftermath of the Mumbai terrorist attacks that killed more than 166 people, six of whom were Americans. "Under our FY 2011 request, India's ATA bilateral budget would almost double, to USD 4.5 million, to meet the increasing political will on the part of the Indian government, which has requested more and higher-level training in the aftermath of the Mumbai attack," Benjamin said. Anti-terrorism assistance or ATA continues to be US's flagship counter-terrorism law enforcement capacity-building programme, and its partner nations have registered several concrete successes over the last year, he said. Benjamin said the Obama Administration's request for Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund (PCCF) is USD 1.2 billion for the fiscal 2011; which will be the first year the Department of State assumes full management of this fund. Funds will continue to be targeted at building the capability of Pakistan's security forces directly engaged in counter-insurgency efforts in contested areas throughout the northwest frontier province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, he said. "A more capable Pakistani military will diminish extremist access to safe havens from which attacks on Pakistan and on US international forces operating in Afghanistan are planned and executed," he said, adding a better trained and equipped Pakistani security force will facilitate efforts to execute its USD 7.5 billion five-year US civilian assistance strategy, which includes efforts to improve basic government services in areas vulnerable to extremists. The official said a major difference in the management of PCCF in the FY 2011 will be the increased State Department oversight and involvement throughout the execution process, which will ensure that this major assistance programme aligns with US's broader policy objectives and complements its other foreign assistance programs in Pakistan and the broader region. "We are actively working to ensure that the transition of PCCF management from the Defence Department to the State Department is a smooth one," he said. (The Indian Express)

ISRO to launch Cartosat-2B on May 9

Undeterred by the GSLV-D3 mission failure, India is going ahead with the launch of an advanced remote-sensing satellite Cartosat-2B, now tentatively fixed for May 9 from Sriharikota spaceport. The high-resolution spacecraft, designed for an operational life of five years, is slated to be launched from the first launchpad on May 9 around 10 am, ISRO spokesperson S Satish told said on Friday. Thursday's GSLV-D3 mission to flight-test the indigenous cryogenic engine and stage for the first time ended in failure after the rocket veered off course and plunged into the sea. GSLV and PSLV missions are independent of each other. ISRO officials said there is no change in its earlier announced plans to launch PSLV in the first half of May -- now fixed for May nine. "It (Cartosat-2B) will give pictures of 0.8 metre resolution," ISRO chairman K Radhakrishnan has said. In simple terms, the single panchromatic camera on board this

cartographic satellite would be able to identify and take pictures of a moving car. Thus, this highly-agile satellite, weighing around 690 kg, is expected to give a boost to the tasks of infrastructure and urban planning. The camera provides scene specific spot imageries for cartographic and a host of other civilian applications. (Times of India)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Social front:

Neglected tropical diseases afflict millions in India

Neglected tropical diseases such as hookworm infection and lymphatic filariasis that affect over 100 million people in India have simple, low-cost drug and vaccine treatments that governments need to promote, according to Peter Hotez, Distinguished Research Professor and Chair of the Department of Microbiology, Immunology, and Tropical Medicine, George Washington University. Speaking to The Hindu after a seminar on “Control of the Neglected Tropical Diseases: Innovative Approaches and Role in U.S. Foreign Policy,” Mr. Hotez said there were approximately 70 million cases of hookworm infection and 30 million cases of lymphatic filariasis, also known as elephantiasis, in India with the latter costing the country close to \$1 billion per year. To highlight the extent of the disease in India, Mr. Hotez said that towards the end of his life, Mohandas Gandhi suffered from a hookworm infection, a disease caused by blood-feeding worms in the intestine and associated with severe anaemia, lethargy, and fatigue. “The fact that Gandhi's vigorous efforts to wage peace in India may have been slowed because of hookworms is only one of the more dramatic examples of the deep connection between medical health and the promotion of international peace and security,” said Mr. Hotez. He also linked the need to combat these diseases with U.S. foreign policy imperatives, pointing out that there was an “extraordinary opportunity” for the U.S. to improve treatment of these infections in Islamic countries such as Pakistan and Syria and also in other states with nuclear interests, such as India, China and North Korea — where neglected tropical diseases had “devastating consequences” for many. In particular, Mr. Hotez said there was much potential for the U.S. to cooperate with India in further developing new drugs and vaccines for hookworm infection and Leishmaniasis, a disease with extremely high infection rates in Bihar. He said that even in some developing countries the ratio of public expenditure on nuclear projects to neglected tropical diseases was of the order of magnitude of 10,000 to one. He added that even putting aside a small part of this military expenditure towards the treatment of diseases like hookworm would constitute an enormous anti-poverty step. (The Hindu)

Freak storm kills 96 in Bihar, Bengal

A Freak storm preceded by hurricane-force winds killed nearly a hundred people in four blocks of North Dinajpur district in West Bengal and Araria, Purnea and Kishanganj districts of Bihar around midnight on Tuesday. While 31 people were killed and more than 50 injured in West Bengal, the toll was around 65 in Bihar. The figure is likely to rise as rescuers are still clearing debris of flattened houses in both states. The three districts of Bihar were battered by winds of speed up to 125 km per hour followed by hail and a thunderstorm that wreaked havoc within 45

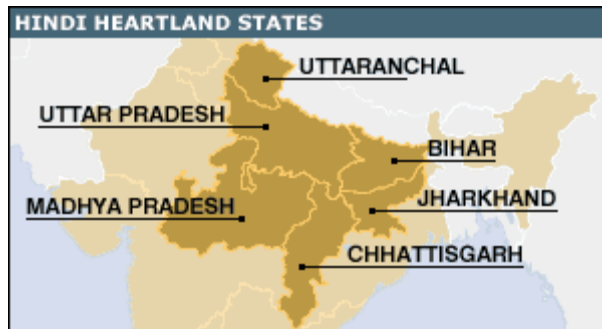
minutes. Araria and Purnea were worst-hit with 36 and 29 deaths each, followed by seven deaths in Kishanganj and two in Supaul. Most victims belonged to Forbesganj in Araria, Baisi and Amaur in Purnea. Disaster Management Secretary Vyasji said the storm had hit the entire Seemanchal region bordering West Bengal. Araria SP S S Thakur said the police had to shift 650 inmates to Purnea jail after an old wall of Araria jail collapsed in the cyclone. On Wednesday morning, as news of the destruction trickled in, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar rushed to the area and announced an ex gratia of Rs 1.5 lakh to the family of each victim. He directed the local administration to distribute the money within 48 hours. The CM conducted an aerial survey of the affected areas and asked the administration to start rehabilitating the affected families and repairing cyclone-hit homes. In neighbouring West Bengal, the winds and the subsequent rains uprooted trees and destroyed hundreds of houses. Chief Secretary Ashok Mohan Chakrabarti said most of the victims were caught under buildings that caved in. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee expressed concern at the disaster and deputed Minister for Tourism and Small Scale Industries Manab Mukherjee and Principal Secretary, Disaster Management, Madan Lal Meena to the area. The government has rushed relief material 30,000 tarpaulins, 1 lakh tonne of rice, dry food and clothes to Karandighi, Hematabad, Kaliaganj and Raiganj blocks. According to the district administration, while 19 people died at Karandighi, six were killed at Raiganj, three in Kaliaganj and two in Hematabad. A death has been reported from Itahar too. According to a primary estimate, more than one lakh families were affected by the storm. Most of the people have taken shelter in schools and government offices. The district administration said there was no warning of any storm and they were totally caught off guard. But Regional Met Centre Director G C Debnath called the storm a "severe nor'wester" which was almost impossible to predict. "Our experts will visit the affected areas to ascertain the nature of the storm," he added. (The Indian Express)

Radiation leak: 800 shops in scrap market scanned

Experts have scanned all the 800 shops in a west Delhi scrap market from where ten sources of radioactive Cobalt-60 was recovered leaving seven persons exposed to radiation. B B Bhattacharya, senior member of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and former BARC Director, said the expert team from Department of Atomic Energy had scanned all the shops in Mayapuri market where the radiation leak had injured seven persons. "They have checked all the shops. They have found nothing new. NDMA cannot say that the market is now radiation-free. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) is the competent authority to say so," he said. During examinations, he said, the experts also found some radiation in soil and it was collected. "This will be disposed off properly by the experts," Bhattacharya said. Two more sources of radiation were detected in the Mayapuri scrap market in the city on Tuesday night where Cobalt-60 was recovered, taking the total sources of radioactive substance found in the industrial area to 10. Eight sources of Cobalt-60 were recovered last week after six persons were admitted to city hospitals with burn injuries caused due to radiation. (The Indian Express)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

BSP, Congress battle for Dalit vote bank

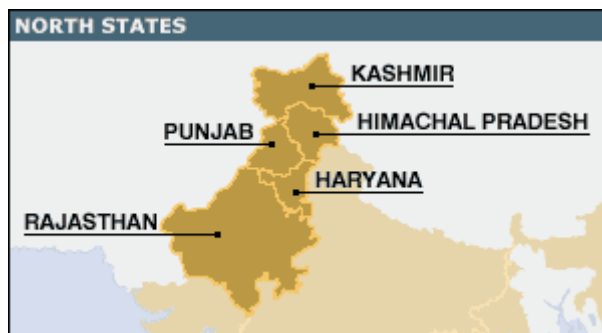
Pushed on to the back foot by the Congress bid to regain its Dalit support base in Uttar Pradesh with the launch of the “Congress Yatra 2010” from Ambedkar Nagar on April 14, the birth anniversary of Bhimrao Ambedkar, a tense Bahujan Samaj Party is now trying to “expose” its political adversary's concern for Dalits. As the yatra is set to be flagged off by the party general secretary, Rahul Gandhi, battle lines are drawn between the two parties with Dr. Ambedkar and Ambedkar Nagar (Akbarpur) emerging as symbols of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati's efforts to consolidate her Dalit vote bank and the Congress bid to regain it. Apart from celebrating Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary, the BSP would stage a state-wide dharna and demonstration on April 14 against the Women's Reservation Bill. On Saturday, the ruling BSP released three posters related to the dharna. The Congress too has come out with a poster for the day. While the BSP poster carries Ms. Mayawati's picture and that of the Dalit icons, including Dr. Ambedkar, Mr. Gandhi's portrait dominates the space in the Congress poster with lesser space given to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi. This Congress poster, however, does not carry the pictures of Dr. Ambedkar or any other Dalit leader. Describing the Congress as ‘anti-Dalit,’ BSP State unit president Swami Prasad Maurya alleged that the party was responsible for the extreme poverty and deprivation among the Dalits. Referring to the Congress poster, Mr. Maurya slammed the party for ignoring Dr. Ambedkar. Mr. Maurya said it was an insult to him. He said Dr. Ambedkar had advised his supporters to stay away from the Congress. In fact, the absence of Dr. Ambedkar's picture in the poster, which was put up in Ambedkar Nagar, was made an issue by the BSP local unit last week in a bid to expose the Congress' ‘Dalit-prem’ (love for Dalits). The posters were hastily withdrawn by the Congress. New posters and hoardings now installed in Ambedkar Nagar and at the Uttar Pradesh Congress headquarters in Lucknow show Dr. Ambedkar and the former Defence Minister and once the Dalit face of the Congress, Jagjivan Ram, along with those of Mr. Gandhi and other party leaders. When contacted, the Congress yatra in-charge and Faizabad MP, Nirmal Khatri, said the posters sans Dr. Ambedkar were put up by some enthusiastic party supporters. “The Congress has great respect for Dr. Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders,” Mr. Khatri told from Ambedkar Nagar. Ten Congress yatras would be flagged off by the Amethi MP from Ambedkar

Nagar on April 14 where Mr. Gandhi will address a public meeting at the ground next to the airstrip. “The yatras will touch all 430 Assembly segments in the 18 divisions of Uttar Pradesh,” said party spokesman Dwijendra Tripathi. The first phase of the yatra will end on May 31. The second phase of the Congress campaign is tentatively scheduled to commence on September 15 and end on November 10 in Allahabad. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The North



Politics:

Gehlot again invites Gujjars for talks on quota

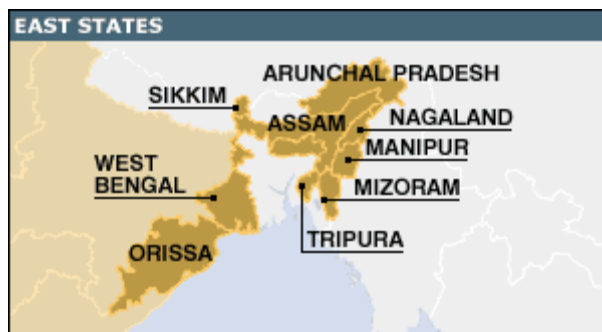
Rajasthan government on Thursday extended a fresh invitation for talks to Gujjar leader Kirori Singh Bainsla, who is spearheading a protest demanding five per cent quota for the community in state jobs. Hundreds of Gujjars led by Bainsla have been marching to Jaipur since April 11 to press for their demand. District Collector of Karauli Neeraj K Pawan extended the invitation to Bainsla and his colleagues at a private hotel in Peepalkhera village of Dausa district on Thursday. The district collector held a closed door meeting with the Gujjar leader for about 90 minutes and apprised him of the state government’s view point on the issue, an official said. “It is now up to Bainsla to decide whether to go ahead for talks with the government or continue march,” the official said, adding no written invite was handed over to Bainsla, it was just verbal talks between the two. Earlier, two rounds of talks between Gujjars and government emissaries collapsed on April 12 as the Gehlot government denied to concede to their demand. Following this, the Gujjars launched “Jaipur kooch” (march) from a college ground in Hindon, about 300 km from the state capital, and reached Peepalkhera last night. When contacted, Energy Minister and key intermediary Dr Jitendra Singh told PTI that the state government was exploring the possibility to satisfy the Gujjar community’s demand of five per cent quota within the limit of 50 per cent quota. “Legal experts are evaluating the rules, acts and other legislations adopted by south Indian states. It could take appropriate time to work out on a constructive formula,” Singh said. Hundreds of Gujjars led by Bainsla resumed the road show on the NH-11 from Peepalkhera in Dausa district, Dr Roopsingh, spokesman of Rajasthan Gujjar Arakshan Sangarsh Samiti, said. At Patoli’s Shaeed Smarak where seven Gujjars had fallen victim to police bullets two years ago,

the protestors paid floral tribute at the memorial, he said. Jaipur is about 100-km from Peepalkhera, and the marchers would pass through Manpur, Sikandra, Dausa, Bassi, Kanota to reach the state capital in next two days. The District Collector (Jaipur) has already imposed the prohibitory order under section 144 of CrPC in entire district to contain any outside movement of crowd or group into the state capital, till April 18. Extra force is also keeping a strict vigil on the national highways, and the GRP maintaining rail track surveillance in Kota division, officials said. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

It's time for change in Bengal, say Muslim leaders

Muslim religious leaders publicly voiced their support for Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee and lambasted the CPM for “not helping the Muslims in Bengal.” After sharing dais with Banerjee at the foundation-laying ceremony of new railway lines from Furfura Sharif to Dankuni in Hooghly, Toha Ali Siddiqui of Furfura Sharif and Noorur Rahman Barkati, the Imam of Tipu Sultan mosque said the time has come for change in Bengal. “For 32 years, Muslims in Bengal have been used by the CPM for their profit but no benefit has come to them. It’s time for change. It’s time for kicking out the CPM from Bengal. I am not a political person but I am sure that Muslims in Bengal are for Banerjee,” Siddiqui told the people gathered at the function. The Imam of Tipu Sultan mosque also showered praises on Banerjee and said: “Banerjee is a mass leader and we should all work towards making her the next chief minister of Bengal.” Banerjee also reiterated that the Railways will not forcibly acquire land for its projects. “We will provide proper compensation and a job to one of your family members. Support us in our projects. Don’t stand against us by being misled by some people,” she said. “I don’t give false promises,” she added. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Social front:

Tamil Nadu govt allocates Rs 1,000cr for laying world class roads in 11 cities

Tamil Nadu government has allocated Rs 1,000 crore for a project envisaging laying of roads of international standard in 11 cities, including Madurai. Discussions were taking place at various levels to build the roads which would have good lighting facility, footpath, and sign boards, an official release said. A meeting chaired by Tamil Nadu urban finance and infrastructure development corporation advisor M S Srinivasan was held here yesterday to discuss about the proposed project. Srinivasan said it had been proposed to build 750 km of roads in Madurai. Laying of water pipes and underground cables would be taken up in advance to ensure that there was no digging of the roads for at least five years after the completion of the project. The roads, the construction of which would begin in another one year, would be maintained by the private agencies for five years. (Times of India)

Economic Front:

Proposed nuke power plant faces opposition

Local farmers have voiced their protest against a proposal to set up a nuclear power plant at Mithivirdi in the coastal area of Bhavnagar district. Some 800 farmers have said that the site chosen includes areas with kesar mango and sapodilla (chickoo) orchards. As such, the proposed plant could lead to health hazards. Recently, farmers from Jasapar (the exact site of the proposed plant), Madvam and Kedpar submitted a memorandum to Bhavnagar District Collector C M Trivedi stating that they will not give away their land for a nuclear power plant project. "On Friday, the villagers sent back officials of the land record department who had reportedly come to take some measurements," said Damyanti Modi of Anu Abyas Urja Jooth. Other groups like the Gram Bachav Samiti, Kisan Sangh Sesav Sansthan, Loksevak Mandal and Gujarat Sarvoday Mandal have also joined the protest. Modi said the power plant will affect the 1.75 lakh population in about 30 villages and will call for the relocation of 15,000 families, who will lose their land. Arun Dave, director of the Lok Bharti Gyan Vidyapeeth in Bhavnagar, said a nuclear plant in the vicinity could lead to health hazards. "The site is populated and it should not come up here," said Dave. The 6,000-MW nuclear power plant is proposed to come up in six phases of 1,000 MW each at a whopping investment of Rs 60,000 crore. The 1,000 acre site, along with

another in Andhra Pradesh, has been identified for setting up two nuclear power plants. Mithivirdi was selected by the Site Location Committee appointed by the Central government's Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL). Six sites, including one in Ahmedabad, Junagadh and some others in Bhavnagar, were identified and short-listed by the committee. Mithivirdi's proximity to the sea, coupled with its distance from a wildlife sanctuary and dense human habitat, led to its selection. (The Indian Express)

West India



Politics:

Chhagan Bhujbal, Gopinath Munde pitch for OBC census

In a rare meeting of minds, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Chhagan Bhujbal, also a prominent leader of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Maharashtra and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Gopinath Munde made a strong pitch for the OBC census on Saturday. The leaders were speaking at a felicitation function of OBC MPs, MLAs and leaders, organised by the All Indian Muslim OBC Organisation. "The date available on the OBC census is from the British Raj. Today there are 340 castes or jatis among the OBCs, who constitute 54 per cent of the country's population. There is a need for the OBC Census, but they [government] don't want it," Mr. Bhujbal said. Making a case for reservation in politics, he said leaders from the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes have been articulate about the issues of their communities as they get elected from reserved seats. "That is not so for the OBC leaders. Having to contest in open seats, they lose their political teeth and are scared to be vocal with their demands. In the context of the Women's Reservation Bill, he said one more amendment granting reservation for the OBCs in Parliament could be ushered in, in the same manner. Before a predominantly Muslim audience, Mr. Bhujbal vouched his support for reservation for the Muslim OBCs as well. He urged the OBCs to back any leader who spearheaded their cause. Referring to the Phule-Ambedkar tradition, Mr. Bhujbal said that the OBC class lacked that kind of awakening. He said each caste in the OBC category had leaders working for their caste, leading to a lot of infighting. He said the OBCs have to look at themselves as one caste, lest they lose focus of their struggle. Overriding the rivalries between their parties, Mr. Munde declared his backing for Mr. Bhujbal's leadership of the OBC movement. "Let us organise and strengthen ourselves. We have to be one. I will fight with you shoulder to shoulder. [Mr.] Bhujbal should lead this struggle," he said. When members on the dais sought his support in making Mr. Bhujbal the first OBC Chief Minister, Mr. Munde said if it were in his hands, he would have done it long

ago. Reiterating the demand for the OBC census, he also hinted at boycotting Census 2011. "Cattle, fowl and other animals will be counted, but the OBC won't be. If the 52 per cent of the OBCs boycott the Census, whom will they count?" They demanded the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations for reservation in Parliament and Vidhan Sabha. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Housewives top suicide list in Gujarat

The number of suicides in Gujarat has risen by 10.5 per cent in 2008, as compared to 2007, with housewives constituting the highest percentage, according to a National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report. The recently published report titled 'Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India-2008' said the number of suicides in Gujarat has increased to 6,165 in 2008 from 5580 registered in 2007, an increase of 10.5 per cent. The all-India average was recorded at 2.2 per cent. Out of the 6,165 suicides in 2008 in Gujarat, 1,744 (28.3 percent) were housewives. Gujarat, where 4.9 per cent of the total suicides in the country took place in 2008, stands eighth in the list of state after West Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, where high suicide rates were recorded. Dr G K Vankar, Head, Psychiatry Department at B J Medical College, said, "Suicide is a complex phenomenon with depression and stress being major factors responsible for it. We believe that those who commit suicide 80 per cent of them are suffering from depression and related disorders." "Women are taking up dual responsibilities now a days like working and also taking care of home and children which adds up to the stress. Also, among housewives, there are number of factors - social, economical and psychological which could lead to depression, stress and result in suicide," Vankar said. City-based sociologist Prof Edwin Masihi said that societal pressures are a major factor contributing to the stress among the young men and women. "Housewives face traditional problems like not being able to conceive a male child, dowry and other forms of harassment, while the working women find it difficult to adjust into a joint family where she has to perform many roles," Masihi said. Also, decrease in interaction between husband, wife and children, difference in standards of living add to the stress factor, he added. "Some of our studies has also showed that people from lower middle class with economic instability or limited income are more prone to ending their lives," he said adding there is an urgent need for trained counsellors who could counsel people in stress. On suicides by unemployed youth, Vankar said, "It is rather those youth who lose employment who are more prone to stress and depression." The NCRB report said that 47 women committed suicide because of dowry disputes, while 83 killed themselves after failing in a love affair. Others committing suicide include those working in private sector companies (9.9 per cent), unemployed persons (9.1 per cent), self-employed persons in farming or agriculture (8.5 per cent) and students (4.9 per cent). According to the NCRB report, one of the major causes for suicides was illness (24.1). Family problems were the second highest cause resulting in 1,220 suicides, which comes to 19.8 per cent of the total suicide cases. The other causes included insanity (10.5 per cent), unemployment (4 per cent) and poverty (2 per cent). The NCRB report showed that 22.6 per cent of the total persons committing suicide in Gujarat were uneducated, while 35.2 per cent had only completed primary school, 19.4 per cent had finished middle school. While 15.7 per cent had completed matriculation, only 5.2 per cent had attended high school, 1.4 per cent became graduates and just 0.1 per cent had done post-graduation. (The

Indian Express)

Housing quota for Muslims?

Union agriculture minister Sharad Pawar said the Maharashtra government should explore possibility of giving reservations to Muslims in housing schemes. "Many poor Muslims come to meet me with grievances that they cannot avail of a home," Pawar said. He asked minister of state for housing Sachin Ahir to look into the issue as cohabitation is good for society. Addressing party workers at a meeting organised by NCP Mumbai unit, Pawar said Navi Mumbai municipal corporation election results have proved that people don't support parochial politics for long. The uniqueness of Mumbai lies in the fact that every Indian can come and live here with dignity through hard work. "If this secular and cosmopolitan fabric is damaged, Mumbai's future is at stake," he said. NCP's base can be expanded only if we give opportunity to new generation of leaders who come up from grassroots. He asked city unit to plan strategy for BMC polls scheduled in two years by taking up issues like water and electricity and expose Shiv Sena-BJP which has been in power in the Mumbai civic body for over 15 years. Pawar said Marathi speaking people should encourage non-Maharashtrians when they show inclination to learn Marathi and speak the language for communication purpose. Citing his own experience, Pawar said when he got the opportunity to travel in north India, he had problems speaking in fluent Hindi. "But people in Lucknow, Bareilly and Allahabad appreciated my efforts when I spoke in broken Hindi and my confidence level also grew," he said.

Economic Front: