

Business and Politics in Muslim World

India
Sadia Khanum
17 to 30 April 2010

Presentation Date: 5 May 2010

Report # 116/117

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National Summary:

Union Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor resigned after meeting PM Manmohan Singh. He was under severe criticism for his alleged involvement in the Kochi IPL cricket franchise bid. He said his decision to quit the Cabinet was “in the high moral traditions of our democratic system and in keeping with the standards”. Opposition parties criticise the IPL for misusing Indian cricket passion. Opposition demands a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe covering the full range of irregularities in the control and management of the money-spinning T-20 cricket tournament.

The BJP is criticizing the UPA for rising prices, attributing it to the “wrong economic policies” of the government and “bad management and corruption”. Charging the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government with failure to check the unprecedented price rise and protect the interests of the common man and the poor, the BJP came down with massive show of power on Wednesday, 21 April.

Despite their cut motions being defeated in the Lok Sabha, the Opposition parties on Tuesday claimed moral victory, saying that they were successful in pressuring the UPA over price rise. The SP and the RJD did not support the cut motion.

Government is under criticism for phone tapping issue. Opposition parties declare it intolerable and against the spirit of democratic norms.

The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, has sought an independent, high-level inquiry into bomb blasts of all kinds, fake encounters and confinement of Muslim youth, to nail the lie that Muslims are involved in acts of terrorism. He asserted that “99 per cent of Muslims arrested on accusations of terrorism are innocent.”

BJP President Nitin Gadkari said his party is not against the Muslim community but was unfortunately caught in an image warp. At the same time, he said there was nothing to be apologetic about Hindutva or the core issues of the BJP, including uniform civil code and Ram temple at Ayodhya.

The West Bengal government said it may introduce unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) for reconnaissance in Maoist strongholds, if the experience elsewhere proves successful.

There will be no census exercise in several hundred villages in Chhattisgarh which have been rendered out of bounds for government officials by Naxalite groups. District administrations of Jagdalpur, Dantewada, Bijapur, Narayanpur and Kanker, all part of undivided Bastar which was once one of the largest districts in the country, have informed senior officials in Raipur that it will be difficult for them to carry out the census exercise; counting of people, collection of biometric data for preparation of the National Population Register in many areas in view of the Naxal threat.

Analysts expect food inflation to soften on arrival of the Rabi crop harvest in markets by the middle of next month and in case the Meteorological Department happens to forecast a normal monsoon in its initial projections to be unveiled. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said the tightening of monetary policy by India is an 'appropriate' step, as the country is faced with high inflation and needs to consolidate the fiscal measures initiated during the slowdown. With the prices of certain essential items such as rice, milk, fruits and vegetables continuing to rule high, food inflation crept up further to 17.65 per cent for the week ended April 10 from 17.22 per cent in the previous week.

The leaders of Brazil, Russia, India and China on Thursday demanded the commitment to reform the Bretton Woods financial institutions that the advanced economies made at Pittsburgh during the G-20 summit be completed by this year itself. The BRIC document calls for an open and merit-based selection method, irrespective of nationality, for the heading positions of the IMF and the World Bank.

China has said the dam being built by it on river Brahmaputra will have no impact on the downstream flow of the river into India, Chinese foreign minister assured that it is a small project which will not have any impact on the river's downstream flow into North-east India.

A junior diplomat (Madhuri Gupta) in the Indian High Commission in Islamabad has been arrested by the special cell of the Delhi police on the charge of leaking sensitive national secrets to Pakistani intelligence agencies.

India and Pakistan ended a diplomatic stalemate on Thursday by resuming dialogue at the foreign-minister level, as part of an agreement worked out by PM Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yousaf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of the SAARC summit in Thimphu.

For purposes of food security, the Planning Commission finally accepted that the number of people living below the poverty line in India is 37.2 per cent of the total population. The 37.2 per cent poverty line (that works out to 40.71 crore for 2004-05) is based on the methodology recommended by the Suresh Tendulkar committee that submitted its report to Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia in December 2009. The number of poor in 2004-05, as per the Plan panel's own estimate released in March 2007, was estimated at 30.17 crore or 27.5 per cent of the total population. Were this number to be accepted as the BPL population, only 6.5 crore families would have got access to food security. But with the Plan panel accepting the Tendulkar report, about 10 crore families will benefit.

The government stepped up efforts to get to the bottom of alleged financial irregularities in the Indian Premier League (IPL), with officials from the income tax department visiting the Mumbai offices of World Sports Group (WSG) and Multi Screen Media (MSM) in Mumbai. WSG holds all audio and video rights for IPL, while MSM is the broadcast-rights holder. Media reports had said that MSM had paid a 'facilitation fee' of

\$80 million to WSG to secure the rights. IPL commissioner Lalit Modi is also under pressure for alleged corruption.

The India Meteorological Department on Friday issued its first-stage, long-range forecast for the Southwest Monsoon. It is likely to be “normal,” with a precipitation of 98 per cent of the long-period average (LPA), with a model error of plus or minus five per cent. In other words, the rainfall during the four-month season, from June to September, is likely to be between 93 per cent and 103 per cent of the LPA. (The LPA is the average of the rainfall over 50 years from 1941 to 1990 and it comes to 89 cm).

The Supreme Court has held that pre-marital sex is not a statutory offence and criminal law cannot punish individuals merely for expressing "unpopular views" justifying such acts as it would violate freedom of speech and expression. A three judge bench of Chief Justice K G Balakrishna and justices Deepak Verma and B S Chauhan passed the judgment while quashing the criminal cases filed against popular south Indian actress Khushboo for her views on "pre-marital sex".

Regional Summary:

Congress wants Shibu Soren to resign as chief minister first before making a move in Jharkhand where BJP-JMM partnership collapsed under the weight of the voting on cut motion on Tuesday, while ruling out any support to the veteran tribal leader. Congress is categorical that it will not back a CM from outside, ruling out support to Soren a la BJP.

In the backdrop of concerns regarding the dwindling number of tigers in the country, the ongoing tiger census has brought some more alarming news from Bihar. At the Valmiki Tiger Reserve Bihar's only national park — only three adult tigers have been caught by the trap cameras so far. The census is set to wrap up in June. While the reserve, spread over 880 sq km, including 340 sq km core area in West Champaran along the Nepal border, boasted of 63 tigers in 1990, the number had fallen to 13 in the last tiger census in 2006

To seek the rural votes, the Left Front government has decided to amend the existing Land Reforms Act. Earlier, the Act enabled an encroacher to have the ownership of the land provided one had the possession from 1974 or before. Now, the government has decided to bring down the cut-off year to 2009. In other words, any squatter on a piece of land not more than five cottahs in a rural area, who has been there since last year will now be given the right over the land.

The 12-hour Bharat Bandh called by the ruling Left Front in West Bengal will cost the state close to Rs 500 crore what with an estimated production loss of 61-62 per cent.

Nearly 65% of class V students in rural areas of Tamil Nadu can't read even a class II textbook in their mother tongue, 45% don't know subtraction and nearly 81% can't read simple English sentences, the Annual Status of Education Report for 2009,

compiled by Delhi-based NGO Pratham Foundation, has revealed. The findings of the survey, which had a sample size of 33,000 students in both private and government schools, showed that while 19.4% of class V students could read words and 7.2% could only identify letters, 3.7% could read nothing

National Report

Politics:

Govt unlikely to bring women's bill in LS this session

With political consensus missing and the government facing hard times on some fronts, the Women's Reservation Bill is unlikely to be brought in the Lok Sabha this session, which concludes on May 7. "Are we short of problems that we add one more to it," said a senior Congress leader and Union Minister when asked whether the government was going ahead with the bill in the Lok Sabha in this session. He said there were no plans to bring the bill in the remaining part of this session, underlining the fact that the government's priority was to get the financial business passed and desist from any fresh controversy. The government had so far been saying that the bill would be introduced in the Lok Sabha this session. (The Indian Express)

Tharoor quits after Manmohan asks him to step down

Union Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor, who was under a cloud for his alleged involvement in the Kochi IPL cricket franchise bid, resigned late on Sunday night. Amid mounting political pressure, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh summoned the first-time Minister to his residence after a meeting of the Congress Core Group, and asked him to step down. An official statement from the Prime Minister's Office said: "Dr. Shashi Tharoor, the Minister of State for External Affairs, has submitted his resignation from the Union Council of Ministers. The Prime Minister has sent his resignation to the President with the recommendation that it be accepted. [President Pratibha Patil has accepted the resignation]." Mr. Tharoor's fate was sealed at a one-on-one meeting between Dr. Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi just before the meeting of the Core Group of senior Ministers. The Core Group that met for over two hours discussed the floor strategy in Parliament. The government faces Opposition-moved cut motions on the Finance Bill against increase in prices of petroleum products announced in the budget and against the price rise of essential commodities. He drove in his private car into the 7 Race Course residence of the Prime Minister at 9.45 p.m., minutes after the Core Group meeting ended. He left 25 minutes later without speaking to the media. With the issue threatening to snowball into a major embarrassment for the Congress and the United Progressive Alliance government, the Prime Minister, who returned from a foreign tour on Saturday, decided to take a call but not before giving a hearing to Mr. Tharoor. The beleaguered Minister met Dr. Singh in the afternoon for over 45 minutes and explained his role in the row. On a day of fast moving developments, Mr. Tharoor's Dubai-based executive friend, Sunanda Pushkar, "voluntarily" offered to surrender her sweat equity worth Rs. 70 crore in the Kochi IPL consortium, prompting the BJP to slam the move as "admission of guilt." (The Hindu)

IPL misusing Indian passion for cricket, says Yechury

Communist Party of India (Marxist) Polit Bureau member Sitaram Yechury said the Indian Premier League (IPL) had nothing to do with cricket and that it was misusing the

Indian passion for cricket. Mr. Yechury said the IPL was actually being used as a backdrop for shady ventures that ran into thousands of crores of rupees. The source of IPL funds and where they were going had to be probed thoroughly, he said. With the media too playing a crucial role in the mounting of the IPL spectacle, it was essential to find the source of such money, particularly at a time when the common man was finding it tough to find food and to tackle rising prices. On Union Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor's alleged involvement in the controversy, Mr. Yechury said Mr. Tharoor, if he genuinely had Kerala's interests at heart, should have fought for the Kochi Metro Rail project or for rectifying the below poverty line (BPL)-above poverty line (APL) categorisation imbroglio in the State. (The Hindu)

Bill will benefit only rich, corrupt women: Mulayam

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Mulayam Singh, who had drawn flak for his 'sexist' remarks on the Women's Reservation Bill, on Sunday claimed that the legislation would only benefit rich women, who would corrupt the election process. "If the bill is passed, it would only benefit women of the rich and the influential class and they would corrupt the election process which would also become costlier," he said, while addressing a meeting at the Samajwadi Party headquarters. He said the bill was not acceptable in its present form. Mr. Singh's remark last month that women elected through quota would be whistled at had drawn flak from political parties and rights bodies. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had slammed the SP leader for resorting to a "low level" of debate. Friend-turned-foe Amar Singh had termed it "sexist, Talibani and a cheap remark." The SP chief, however, remained unapologetic and asserted that his statement was deliberate and made after evaluating all aspects, so as to initiate a debate on the issue. Accusing the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government of being hand-in-glove on the price rise issue, Mr. Singh said there was a possibility of mid-term-election in the State. "People, who are taking a beating due to the price rise caused by the collusion of the two governments, should remain prepared for a unified protest on the issue on April 27," Mr. Singh said. "There is a possibility of mid-term elections in the State, therefore party leaders and workers should go to the people," he said. He alleged that the Centre and the State had made education and health facilities expensive and had hit the poor and the middle classes badly. "Take the support of all sections including industrial and business establishments, teachers, students, youths, traders, farmers, lawyers and workers in this strike, but there should be no violence," the SP supremo told his party leaders and workers. Mr. Singh said that as women were the most affected, they should actively participate in the strike. He claimed that only his party was fighting for the cause of backwards, the minorities and Dalit women. (The Hindu)

UPA insensitive to sufferings of common man: BJP

Charging the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government with failure to check the unprecedented price rise and protect the interests of the common man and the poor, the BJP on Sunday announced a "March to Parliament" (Sansad Chalo) and a protest rally on April 21 in the capital. Addressing a press conference, BJP general secretary Ananth Kumar said the nation was witnessing unbridled food inflation, which threatens

to cross the double-digit mark. “The 2009 general election results have been misunderstood by the Congress, and have driven its leadership to electoral arrogance resulting in the UPA-II government being insensitive to the sufferings of the aam aadmi,” he said. Mr. Kumar said lakhs of workers and party representatives from all over the country would attend the rally on the Ramlila Grounds. After the rally, the leaders would lead a protest march to Parliament passing through the main streets of Delhi. The rally would be attended by all Chief Ministers of the BJP-ruled States and central leaders. “The BJP understands the aam aadmi's anguish and has therefore called upon its workers all over the country to march to Parliament. The UPA-II is indifferent to the plight of the people and has failed to curb the price rise, especially that of essential commodities. The household budgets have gone haywire and people are battling for survival,” Mr. Kumar said. Demanding a probe by the Joint Parliamentary Committee into the ‘scam’ behind the unprecedented price rise, Mr. Kumar said it was unfortunate that hoarders and wrongdoers were being patronised by Union Ministers and the blame for the price rise was being put on the high consumption of food by the middle class as well as the poor. (The Hindu)

I don't want to be an embarrassment: Tharoor

The former Minister of State for External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor, on Tuesday said his decision to quit the Cabinet was “in the high moral traditions of our democratic system and in keeping with the standards” all would wish to uphold in the nation's public life. “Today marks a new beginning for me,” he added. The Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram who resigned on Sunday night following the Indian Premier League Kochi franchise controversy told the Lok Sabha that he had “no desire to be an embarrassment” to the government, and believed that his departure at this stage would allow Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Cabinet colleagues to focus on the great challenges facing the nation. Mr. Tharoor said he was deeply wounded by the “fanciful and malicious charges” against him and had requested Dr. Singh to thoroughly probe them. “I have led an unblemished life of personal integrity and probity, and it is important to me that my name is cleared,” he said. Reiterating that his “conscience is clear,” Mr. Tharoor said he had “done nothing improper or unethical, let alone illegal.” The former Under Secretary-General of the United Nations, who kept getting caught in one controversy or the other since the UPA-II government assumed office last year, said he was new to Indian politics but had a long record of public service, “unblemished by the slightest taint of financial irregularity.” He said that after his long stint abroad, he returned to India because he believed in “an India of honesty and hard work, not of corruption and malfeasance...an India of openness and straightforwardness, not of hypocrisy and double-dealing.” Some Opposition members booed him and made sarcastic remarks when Speaker Meira Kumar called Mr. Tharoor to make a statement under rule 199 to explain his reasons for quitting, but began listening to him along with the Treasury benches when he started reading. Notably, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi were absent in the House. Clad in a white kurta-dhoti with a Congress brand angavasthrum around his neck, Mr. Tharoor quoted Malayalam poet Vallathol: “When you hear the name of India, your heart must swell with pride; when you hear the name of Kerala, the blood must throb in your veins.” Mr. Tharoor

said: “My heart swells with pride for India, and Keralite blood throbs in my veins.” He said Kerala was a trailblazer for India's progress. “Its ethos, with cultural unity amidst religious diversity, high educational standards and respect for democracy, commitment to the empowerment of women and the well-being of the poor, embody the best of India.” Mr. Tharoor paid rich encomiums to Dr. Singh and Ms. Gandhi, saying that they were “two of the finest public servants our country has ever had,” and that “the country is in good hands.” (The Hindu)

Fight Naxals politically, says CPI leader

Asserting that Left-wing extremism had to be fought politically and ideologically, Communist Party of India MP D. Raja called upon the Union government to rework its strategy in dealing with naxalism, stating that the only way to bring peace was to restore the civil administration and provide justice in tribal areas. Mr. Raja, who intervened during a Rajya Sabha debate on the April 6 attack on the CRPF in Chhattisgarh, also came down heavily on the government-sponsored vigilante group, Salwa Judum, which he termed a threat to democratic politics. He said the State government's failure to give justice had made the problem worse. “The victims of Salwa Judum have not got justice and they have not been given rehabilitation.” Quoting intelligence figures, he said Maoist numbers had swelled by at least 22 per cent since Salwa Judum came into being. Condemning the killings of CRPF jawans in the strongest terms, Mr. Raja said the tribal people in Chhattisgarh were today increasingly getting alienated. He said the Chhattisgarh government agreed on October 17, 2008 to rehabilitate and compensate villagers whose houses had been burnt down by Salwa Judum. However, nothing was done. “The Union government, despite acknowledging in court that Salwa Judum has burnt houses and committed illegal acts, continues to glorify and praise [it]. If you say Left-wing extremism is a threat to parliamentary democracy, Salwa Judum, a non-state player, is also a threat to the democratic politics,” he remarked. On February 2, 2010, he said, the Supreme Court asked Nandini Sundar, Kartam Joga, Manish Kunjam and other petitioners to file a comprehensive rehabilitation plan. “The State government in Chhattisgarh took two weeks to file a response but has not done anything till now.” The main aspects of this rehabilitation plan were to (a) identify affected persons through a survey, (b) hold sittings of district judges in block headquarters, etc., (c) deal with heinous crimes like rape, murder and restore essential services in villages. All this was to be supervised by a senior retired judge or retired secretary to the Union government, he said. Responding to Home Minister P. Chidambaram's statement that “human rights activists” should guarantee that Maoists would not again demolish schools the government rebuilt, Mr. Raja asked whether the government was ready to guarantee that “schools will be allowed to run as schools, not as camps of security forces.” School buildings in tribal areas had been taken over by the security forces, he said. “Can [Mr. Chidambaram] assure the nation that school buildings will be used for schooling the children of tribal people?” Quoting a report in The Hindu of April 14, 2010, Mr. Raja said the Maoists had indicated that they were ready for a simultaneous ceasefire. “Can the government remain adamant? [The Home Minister] says that only if [the Maoists] abjure violence, can [the government] speak. But ceasefire or giving up violence has to be a matter agreed upon by two sides.” (The Hindu)

Price rise rally has BJP on ‘record high’

Staging a massive show of strength, the BJP on Wednesday came down heavily on the UPA for rising prices, attributing it to the “wrong economic policies” of the government and “bad management and corruption”. Into his fourth month as president, Nitin Gadkari derived satisfaction in getting the party worker to hit the road and L K Advani said the rally had beaten previous records in the Capital. “The Congress had given the slogan of garibi hatao, but has actually pursued its philosophy of garib badhao. Government figures show an increase of 41 crore in the number of BPL population,” said Gadkari. He said all parties should come together on the issue. Many interpreted this as the party saying it is not averse to joining hands with the Left on price rise. Gadkari said the mobilisation on the issue will be intensified. “We have collected 3.5 crore signatures, we need 10 crore signatures,” he said. Advani said “mismanagement of food economy” and “corruption” were the chief reasons for the price rise, and showcased Gujarat as a model of good governance. Sushma Swaraj said a number of scams had resulted in spiralling of prices of essential commodities. Arun Jaitley said even in the face of the worst droughts during the NDA rule, the Vajpayee government had ensured prices remained under control. Rajnath Singh said the government appeared more interested in IPL and not in BPL. Murli Manohar Joshi took a dig at Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar for paying more attention to cricket. Gadkari’s was the concluding speech at the rally. BJP chief ministers Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Raman Singh, Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank and Prem Kumar Dhumal were also present at the rally. (The Indian Express)

Opposition demands JPC probe into IPL irregularities

Tremors from the rapidly imploding Indian Premier League behemoth echoed through Parliament on Friday, with a united Opposition stalling both Houses demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe covering the full range of irregularities in the control and management of the money-spinning T-20 cricket tournament. In a related development, embattled IPL Commissioner Lalit Modi facing the onslaught of income tax and Enforcement Directorate investigations and the threat of ouster, sought five days’ time from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to present his case before the cricketing body. A determined Opposition both in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha kept up the chant for a JPC into the T-20 mega scam. The uproar in the Lok Sabha brought Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee to his feet. Mr. Mukherjee promised that he would convey the sentiments of the House to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Outside, the various enforcement wings of the government agencies cast their nets wider even as allegations of betting and match fixing during the second edition of IPL in South Africa surfaced, threatening the carefully constructed brand image of the game as well potentially damaging the reputations of several players charged with benefiting from the “slush money.” The tax authorities also slapped notices on Kolkata Knight Riders Sports Private Limited and Gameplan Sports seeking details of their dealings in the IPL, and directing them to appear before the authorities on April 28 in connection with the searches conducted at the premises of the two companies. “We have issued notices to both Knight Rider Sports and Gameplan,” Director-General of I-T investigation (East) Vinod Khurana stated. The tax authorities in Mumbai are probing the funding and

shareholding pattern of KKR Sports as the company was based in Mumbai. On the other hand, IPL CEO Sundar Raman appeared before the Income Tax authorities in Mumbai and submitted a large number of documents pertaining to IPL deals, franchisee details, sponsors, event managers and their respective roles. Director-General (Investigations) B.P. Gaur submitted a "source report" to the Finance Ministry even as Mr. Mukherjee held intense consultations with the top officials of the investigating agencies to gauge the depth of the scam that could have cross-border implications. BCCI vice-president Rajiv Shukla also met Mr. Mukherjee and apprised him of the developments in the Board as well as those concerning the IPL. The income tax sleuths are also probing the alleged links of Kings XI Punjab with the name of one Delhi-based individual cropping up as a possible proxy. Sources said the anti-corruption unit of the International Cricket Council cautioned the BCCI last year that bookies had entered the game which was not in its best interest. However, both the BCCI and IPL chose to overlook the ICC unit's warnings. (The Hindu)

Phone-tapping intolerable, says Karat

Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Prakash Karat on Friday said the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's tapping of telephones of political leaders was "illegal and intolerable." "The UPA government...has to own up responsibility and take action against those responsible. Further safeguards should be there against such misuse of security agencies," Mr. Karat said. English news magazine Outlook in its report said phones of some prominent political leaders including Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, Congress leader Digvijay Singh, Mr. Karat and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar were tapped by National Technical Research Organisation, an intelligence agency created in the aftermath of the Kargil war to cover all aspects of technical intelligence gathering. It said Mr. Karat's phone was tapped in 2008, when the CPI(M) was opposing the India-U.S. nuclear deal while Mr. Pawar's phone was tapped recently in the wake of the IPL scandal. BJP Deputy Leader in Rajya Sabha S.S. Ahluwalia said his party would raise the issue in Parliament on Monday. He contended that the tapping was violation of Article 21 of the Constitution which assures protection of life and liberty to every citizen. (The Hindu)

A moral victory: Opposition

Despite their cut motions being defeated in the Lok Sabha, the Opposition parties on Tuesday claimed moral victory, saying that they were successful in pressuring the UPA over price rise. "Our only purpose behind introducing the cut motion was to pressure the government into rolling back prices of petrol and diesel. We did not want to destabilise the government," CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury told reporters. "Both outside and inside Parliament, we were successful in pressuring the government as 201 MPs voted in favour of the cut motion, which is an encouraging number considering the fact that SP and RJD members had walked out," he said. Asked why the Opposition could not rope in the SP and the RJD to support the cut motion, the CPI(M) leader said, "We wanted both the parties to come with us, but they decided not to go with the BJP." "However, the cut motion should not have been seen as a move by any individual party. In fact, one of our

MPs moved it. Ultimately, it should be seen in a larger perspective that the entire Opposition voted in favour of cut motion," he said. Mr. Yechury, however, said "only they [SP and RJD] can answer as to what kind of pressure they were under," when asked if the two parties had entered into a deal with the UPA. BJP leader Ananth Kumar said: "The government lost and the CBI won. Both Lalu and Mulayam fought on the streets against price rise but betrayed [the Opposition] in the House and befriended the government." Mr. Kumar also accused the Centre of "gross misuse" of the CBI to silence the parties which were protesting against price rise. "Those parties which used to scream against price rise in favour of the common man and had decided to support the cut motion, ultimately rebelled and lent passive support to the government." He said the BJP would launch a signature campaign against price rise and submit a memorandum on the same to the President after a meeting of senior leaders of the party. Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari, meanwhile, said: "It was inappropriate for the Opposition to move the cut motion at this time when the government has completed only 11 months in office." Asked about the BJP's allegations about the government having struck a deal to sail through the cut motion, Mr. Tewari said, "only those parties whose entire politics is based on deals use such language." Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee termed the defeat of cut motions moved by the Opposition as "impressive approval" by the Lok Sabha to the demand-for- grants for 2010-11. Home Minister P. Chidambaram described the cut motions as completely needless. (The Hindu)

Lalu, Mulayam accuse Govt of being anti-Muslim

The reports of Sachar and Ranganath Misra committees on minority welfare on Thursday generated heat in the Lok Sabha, with RJD chief Lalu Prasad and his SP counterpart Mulayam Singh Yadav charging the government with being anti-Muslim and leading walkout by their party members. BJP members too utilised the opportunity to express anguish over non-utilisation of funds for development of social infrastructure, including water and power, in Muslim-dominated areas, especially slums. The issue cropped up during Question Hour when Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid was replying to questions on the implementation of the Sachar Committee recommendations. "I am thankful for your advice but I don't know what question you asked," Khurshid remarked after Prasad wanted to know whether the government was prepared to amend the Constitution to provide reservation to Muslims in government jobs as it was doing for women. Prasad and Yadav insisted on a proper reply and later led their members in staging walkout from the House. Trying to ease the situation, Speaker Meira Kumar said, "If you give a notice, we can have a separate discussion on the matter." Earlier when a BJP member asked a supplementary alleging non-utilisation of funds for development of social infrastructure in Muslim-dominated localities, Khurshid suggested that the MPLAD scheme, under which Rs two crore was allocated to each MP for carrying out development activities in their respective constituencies, could be utilised for the purpose. This led to a furore in the House, with BJP leader Shahnawaz Hussain accusing the government of shirking its responsibility. He was supported by members from SP, RJD, BJD and several other opposition parties, who also asked the government to withdraw the MPLAD scheme. Even Prasad told the Minister "you can keep your suggestion to yourself and withdraw the MPLAD scheme". (The Indian Express)

Minorities' Issues:

Most of arrested Muslims are innocent: Shahi Imam

The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, has sought an independent, high-level inquiry into bomb blasts of all kinds, fake encounters and confinement of Muslim youth, to nail the lie that Muslims are involved in acts of terrorism. He asserted that "99 per cent of Muslims arrested on accusations of terrorism are innocent." In a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Shahi Imam recalled a recent meeting with him on issues of "fake encounters" and "indiscriminate arrests" of Muslim youth: "It is strange and paradoxical that the nation has two political sections, one playing politics on Muslim votes, and the other section adhering to anti-Muslim politics, but the object of both is to deprive Muslims of their constitutional and democratic rights and to reduce them to second-class citizens." The Shahi Imam accused the intelligence agencies and government departments of conniving to create "the hype that Indian Muslims have no agenda but that of terrorism." He said even though there was evidence to believe that Hindu extremist organisations were involved in many of the terror attacks, only Muslims were arrested. Syed Bukhari said the Maharashtra government had disclosed the involvement of Hindu terror groups in several attacks but the Central government failed to follow the lead. (The Hindu)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

SIT summons Togadia

The Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing nine relatively serious incidents of massacre during the post-Godhra communal riots in Gujarat and the Godhra train carnage, has reportedly summoned Vishwa Hindu Parishad international general secretary Pravin Togadia for questioning. Dr. Togadia is believed to have been asked to appear before the SIT at its office here on any day during the coming week. A message to this effect from the SIT office was faxed to the VHP Delhi office, it is reliably learnt. Dr. Togadia is currently in Jammu and is not expected to return in the next three days. Informed sources said if he chose to respond to the summons, he might appear before the probe team towards the week-end. Even during the carnage, Dr. Togadia, a medical practitioner, was holding the same office. The VHP had given a bandh call a day after the train carnage that led to widespread violence. After Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who appeared before the SIT last month, Dr. Togadia is considered to be the next key witnesses for the SIT. (The Hindu)

BJP not against Muslims, says Nitin Gadkari

Seeking to reach out to Muslims, BJP President Nitin Gadkari said his party is not against the community but was unfortunately caught in an image warp. At the same time, he said there was nothing to be apologetic about Hindutva or the core issues of the BJP, including uniform civil code and Ram temple at Ayodhya. "We are not against Muslims. We are not a communal or caste-based party. We are only against terrorists and not against any religion," Gadkari said. Lamenting that BJP's problem was "image versus

reality", he said it was "unfortunate". He targeted the Congress, accusing it of not executing Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru because he was a Muslim. (The Indian Express)

Insurgency Movements:

Depending on utility, West Bengal may use UAVs

The West Bengal government may introduce unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) for reconnaissance in Maoist strongholds, if the experience elsewhere proves successful, Director-General of Police Bhupinder Singh said. "The utility will need to be checked and we are waiting for a report from an official who had gone to Chhattisgarh, where a UAV was pressed into service recently in a demonstration exercise by the Union Home Ministry. The success will have to be established," the DGP told journalists. "Jangalmahal in the Left-wing extremism-affected districts Paschim Medinipur, Purulia and Bankura is thickly-forested. To what extent a UAV can carry out surveillance and reconnaissance in such areas, especially during the rainy seasons, will have to be seen." (The Hindu)

Census to skip Naxal-ruled villages

There will be no census exercise in several hundred villages in Chhattisgarh which have been rendered out of bounds for government officials by Naxalite groups. District administrations of Jagdalpur, Dantewada, Bijapur, Narayanpur and Kanker, all part of undivided Bastar which was once one of the largest districts in the country, have informed senior officials in Raipur that it will be difficult for them to carry out the census exercise — counting of people, collection of biometric data for preparation of the National Population Register in many areas in view of the Naxal threat. "We have requested that 108 villages in Dantewada be exempted from census because our officials are being prevented by Naxalites from reaching these areas. Our request has been accepted," Reena Kangale, District Magistrate of Dantewada told The Sunday Express. Kangale said local officials had identified 255 villages which posed a challenge to enumerators because of the inaccessible terrain and presence of Naxalites. In 147 of these, however, the enumerators were able to complete the numbering of houses, an exercise that precedes the actual counting of people. "We are assuming that since the officials were allowed to number the houses, they would be able to carry out the census as well. But in 108 villages, even house numbering has not been possible," she said. Significantly, these 108 villages do not include the area near the Chintalnar forest where Naxalites had killed 76 security men earlier this month. Those areas were not counted amongst the worst affected in the district before that incident and were within reach of government officials. Kangale's counterparts in the other districts have not asked for exemption for the troubled areas but only identified the number of villages where there were "practical difficulties" in completing the census exercise. The district administration of Kanker has listed 300 such villages while Jagdalpur has identified 194. Similarly, 117 villages in Bijapur and 22 villages in Narayanpur fall in the same category. "There will be full effort to reach to every village and every person. But there is no denying the fact

that there are some problem areas. The administration in Raipur has been informed while we continue efforts to complete the census in a comprehensive manner,” said R Prasanna, District Magistrate of Bijapur. Lying in heavily forested areas, these villages do not have very large populations. The 22 villages in Narayanpur, for example, had only 1,723 people according to the 2001 census. So, leaving out these villages is unlikely to distort the census figures in a significant manner. But what is important in this year’s census is the simultaneous compilation of the National Population Register, or NPR. Unlike the census data, which only contains a count of the people and some aggregate characteristics of broad groupings within the population, the NPR will identify every person individually and also store biometric information like photographs, fingerprints and iris scan. The NPR data will be later fed into the scheme for allotting a unique identification number to every individual in the country. The NPR and UID number are aimed at better targeting of government services like the public distribution system or the rural employment guarantee scheme to the people, especially those belonging to the socially and economically weaker sections. “Local officials have been told to spread awareness about the benefits of census and make people interested in participating in it,” said Renu Pillai, Director Census, Chhattisgarh. The local administrations are also looking at alternative ways of carrying out the census exercise. “If some villages are indeed inaccessible, we are examining whether it would be feasible for us to count and identify people from these villages when they come to nearby markets or government fair price shops,” said Lakhan Singh Ken, District Magistrate of Narayanpur. In Delhi, Registrar General and Census Commissioner C Chandramouli said such challenges were nothing new to this exercise. “In a country so vast and such diverse as India, carrying out a census is a job laced with difficulties. This time it is the Naxal-affected areas. There have been other areas earlier where census could not be done in a comprehensive manner,” he said, citing the case of Assam that was left out in 1981 and Jammu and Kashmir where census could not be held in 1991. Chandramouli said as of now he was not aware of any areas in Chhattisgarh that were being left out of the census exercise. “May be the district administrations have expressed their apprehensions about certain areas but the mandate is to include everyone in this. Only on completion of the exercise next year will we come to know which areas could not be counted.” (The Indian Express)

Rs 7,300 crore road projects approved in Naxal-affected areas

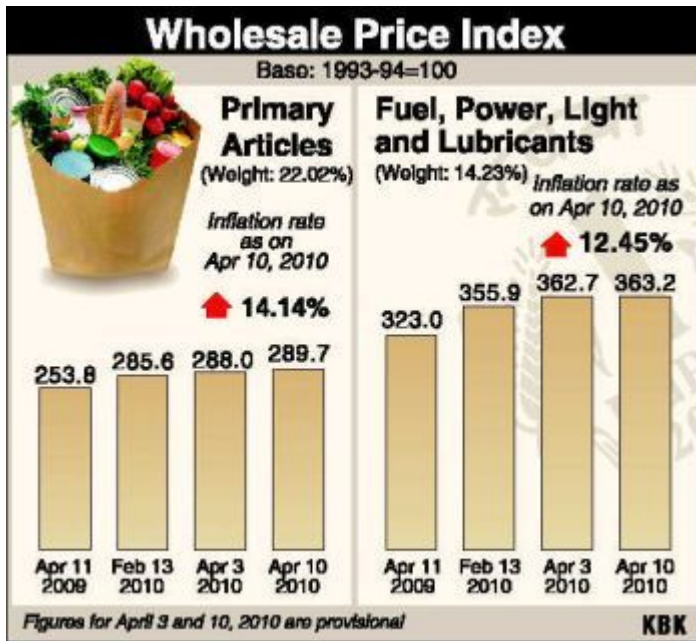
The government on Wednesday said road projects worth Rs 7,300 crore have been approved for implementation in Naxal-affected areas over the next three years. In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, minister of state for road transport and highways R P N Singh said the government has approved a scheme for development of 1,202 kilometers of national highways and 4,363 kilometres of state roads in "Left Wing extremism-affected areas of 34 districts in eight states". The projects will be completed during next three years at an estimated cost of Rs 7,300 crore, he said. No projects for construction of two-lane highways in states have been affected due to Naxal violence, he added. "State government agencies have prioritised construction of roads under Left Wing extremism areas, depending on their ability to provide enough security during the entire construction period," Singh said. (Times of India)

Economic Front:

RBI measures will cool inflation: FM

The rate hike by the Reserve Bank will gently tighten money supply and help moderate inflation which is hovering close to 10 per cent, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee said on Tuesday. He, however, also felt that inflation has peaked and would begin falling and be lower than the 5.5 per cent projected by RBI for this fiscal. "These policies should have a gentle impact in tightening money in the economy and should dampen further inflationary pressures," he said. The central bank hiked key short-term lending and borrowing rates (repo and reverse repo) and CRR, the portion of money banks park with it, by 25 basis points each. These moves are aimed at tempering demand for loans and would, in turn, check consumer spending. The hike is part of the steady exit from the easy money policy that the RBI unveiled in the wake of the global financial meltdown in 2008. RBI began rolling back monetary stimulus in January when it hiked CRR to 5.75 per cent and later in March, it hiked repo and reverse repo by 0.25 percentage points each. "If nothing untoward happens on the weather front, my belief is that overall inflation has peaked and should be on downward trajectory from now on," Mukherjee said. Wholesale prices-based inflation was 9.90 per cent in March and is largely fed by food inflation, which is around 17 per cent. Food prices are on a high due to supply side constraints. "My own belief based on analysis done in my ministry is that inflation is now on downward trajectory and in 2010-11 will be less than 5.5 per cent and in fact closer to four per cent with an upward bias," Mukherjee said. The measures complement well the policies of the Finance Ministry aimed at controlling inflation and promoting sustainable growth, he said. The RBI projected the economy to grow 8 per cent this fiscal. "The well balanced measures which involve raising the repo rate, reverse repo rate and CRR by 25 bps each reflect a mature and balanced view of the needs of our economy and I fully endorse the measures," Mukherjee said. India has now bounced back with growth seemingly back on track and inflation, though high, on a clear downward trend, he said. "Hence I believe that it is time to move back towards 'neutral' policy rates that is rates should prevail when an economy is stable and on track," he said. (The Indian Express)

Food inflation creeps up to 17.65 per cent



With the prices of certain essential items such as rice, milk, fruits and vegetables continuing to rule high, food inflation crept up further to 17.65 per cent for the week ended April 10 from 17.22 per cent in the previous week. Fearing that the WPI (Wholesale Price Index)-based overall inflation ruling at 9.9 per cent in March and well above its fiscal-end projection of 8.5 per cent may shoot up further on account of the spill-over from food inflation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday this week hiked the key policy rates to squeeze money supply and get a hold on the price spiral. Analysts expect food inflation to soften on arrival of the rabi crop harvest in markets by the middle of next month and in case the Meteorological Department happens to forecast a normal monsoon in its initial projections to be unveiled on Friday. Clearly, while a good rabi harvest would moderate food inflation to a large extent, the deciding factor would be the monsoon as prospects of good rainfall would tend to douse overall inflationary expectations. On the contrary, if the pressure on food prices continues to persist, the overall inflation is certain to move up further, especially when manufactured products and fuel items are already witnessing price pressures. (The Hindu)

IMF supports India's monetary tightening

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said the tightening of monetary policy by India is an 'appropriate' step, as the country is faced with high inflation and needs to consolidate the fiscal measures initiated during the slowdown. "India is relatively more closed, and has relied on stimulus to support growth. The main challenge will be to ensure durable fiscal consolidation, including by implementing fiscal and other structural reforms," Abdul Abaid, senior economist in the World Economic Studies Division of the IMF, said. He said in relation to other countries in the Asian region, India has high inflation, and the tightening of monetary policy currently under way is appropriate. Referring to the latest World Economic Outlook, he said in India, growth is projected to be 8.8 per cent in 2010, and 8.4 per cent in 2011, which is supported by rising private

domestic demand. "Consumption will strengthen as the labour market improves, and investment is expected to be boosted by strong profitability, rising business confidence, and favourable financing conditions," he said. In India's neighbourhood, Nepal's real GDP growth is expected to slow to three per cent in 2009-10 from 4.7 per cent in 2008-09 due to poor monsoon and softer remittances, but growth is anticipated to strengthen again in 2010-11, said the IMF official. For Sri Lanka the IMF projects acceleration in growth from 3.5 per cent last year to 5.5 per cent this year. "There is currently an IMF programme, which we can't comment on, the key priority in Sri Lanka is basically to obtain a credible and sustainable reduction in the fiscal deficit going forward. That is the main vulnerability there right now," he said. (The Indian Express)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

BRIC declares 2010 deadline for World Bank, IMF reform

The declaration issued by the BRIC nations at a summit meeting, their second since 2009 shows a collective assertiveness in world economic matters that is bound to make leaders and bankers in the West sit up and take notice. With a confidence borne of their successful role as a caucus at G-20 meetings over the past year, the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India and China on Thursday demanded the commitment to reform the Bretton Woods financial institutions that the advanced economies made at Pittsburgh during the G-20 summit be completed by this year itself. "The IMF and the World Bank urgently need to address their legitimacy deficits," the BRIC summit declaration says. "We call for the voting power reform of the World Bank to be fulfilled in the upcoming Spring Meetings, and expect the quota reform of the IMF to be concluded by the G-20 Summit in November this year." And in an attack on the "jobs for the boys" approach of the West to the two international financial institutions, the BRIC document calls for an open and merit-based selection method, irrespective of nationality, for the heading positions of the IMF and the World Bank. "Moreover, staff of these institutions needs to better reflect the diversity of their membership. There is a special need to increase participation of developing countries." Addressing reporters at the end of the summit hurriedly held to allow the Chinese President to leave for home in the wake of Wednesday's devastating earthquake in Qinghai Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said BRIC the name was coined by Goldman Sachs in 2003, was not borne out of a crisis but was an act of long-term faith in our people and in our economies. "However, the global economic and financial crisis has created a new relevance for BRIC." The Brasilia summit was evidence that he and President Lula da Silva of Brazil, Dmitri Medvedev of Russia and Hu Jintao of China are clearly enjoying their newfound relevance. Their declaration ranged from advocating the need for restructuring the global economy, to evolving common positions on climate change, energy, trade, terrorism, agriculture and reform of the United Nations. On U.N. reform, Russia and China both permanent members of the Security Council balked at endorsing the specific demand India and Brazil have made for permanent seats. But the declaration reaffirmed the need to make the world body more effective and representative. "We reiterate the importance we attach to the status of India and Brazil in international affairs, and understand and support their aspirations to play a greater role in the United Nations," they said. The four rising powers also took on board a suggestion

Mr. Medvedev made in the run-up to the summit, declaring that in order to facilitate trade and investment, "we will study feasibilities of monetary cooperation, including local currency trade settlement arrangement between our countries." Recognising that such talk might weaken the position of the dollar and adversely affect their own holdings, the leaders also underlined the importance of maintaining relative stability of major reserve currencies. While expressing satisfaction at the emergence of the G-20 as the "premier forum" for international economic coordination and their own "significant contribution" to that group, the four leaders said much more remains to be done to create a reformed and more stable financial architecture for the world. Their declaration also made a pitch for "a more stable, predictable and diversified international monetary system." On climate change, the BRIC leaders said the upcoming negotiations in Mexico should be more inclusive and transparent. The Cancun talks should produce an outcome that is fair and effective, "while reflecting the principles of the U.N. Framework Convention," especially the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. (The Hindu)

We must take advantage of world situation: PM

The world could be having apprehensions about China's rise but it wants India to grow and it is time to take advantage of the situation, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said. "Unlike China's rise, which possibly gives rise to apprehensions, the world takes a benign view of India's growth. We should take advantage of that (situation) because we don't know how long it will last," he said. He noted that the world is not apprehensive about India and wants it to succeed. Singh was talking to accompanying journalists while returning home after his eight-day visit to the US and Brazil, where he attended the Summits of Nuclear Security, IBSA and BRIC. He said India's problems are at home and "we have to first tackle our own problems. (The Indian Express)

Chinese dam will not impact flow of Brahmaputra

China has said the dam being built by it on river Brahmaputra will have no impact on the downstream flow of the river into India, External Affairs Minister S M Krishna told Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. "It is a fact that when I met my Chinese counterpart recently, the question of the hydel project over Brahmaputra river being built by it in Zangmu did come up. However, the Chinese foreign minister assured me that it is a small project which will not have any impact on the river's downstream flow into North-east India," he said during Question Hour. Expressing dissatisfaction over the answer, opposition BJP demanded a short term discussion on the issue. They were joined by Birendra Prasad Baishya and Kumar Deepak Das (both BJP). Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was also present in the House. Das said the dam being built by China is not a small project but a 450 MW hydro-electric project and sought to know from Krishna the status of talks with China over trans-border rivers like Brahmaputra. To this the minister said, "with reference to trans-border rivers, we have an expert level mechanism to address the issue. A meeting of experts from both India and China is scheduled to take place between April 26-29 in Delhi and the issue will be discussed in it." He, however, said that as regards China, "there are concerns over the boundary question. It has been our policy that

a fair and mutually acceptable solution to this is needed. Our special representative has held 13 meetings with his Chinese counterpart on this and the 14th meeting is scheduled soon". Krishna said India-China relations are growing despite these concerns. To another question, he said "there is no disconnect between India-China relations....A beginning was made when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao in Copenhagen and a new beginning was made there when both the nations stood together on common issues". (The Indian Express)

Indian diplomat held for 'spying'

A junior diplomat in the Indian High Commission in Islamabad has been arrested by the special cell of the Delhi police on the charge of leaking sensitive national secrets to Pakistani intelligence agencies. The official, Madhuri Gupta, was produced in a court on Monday and remanded to five-day police custody. Ms. Gupta, who was posted as Second Secretary in the Press and Information Wing of the High Commission, was picked up for questioning four days ago. She was interrogated by intelligence officials for a couple of days and arrested under the Official Secrets Act after the agencies were "convinced" that she had leaked sensitive information. Said to be an expert in Urdu, the middle-aged official was working with the Information Wing for the past couple of years. She came under the scanner of intelligence agencies a year ago, as she had allegedly been showing interest in matters beyond her brief. An Indian Foreign Service Branch 'B' official, Ms. Gupta was called to the capital for consultations on the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in Bhutan and then arrested. Sources claimed the woman diplomat had allegedly been passing information on policy matters and the movement of people to a Pakistani intelligence man identified as "Rana." The role of another senior official in Islamabad also came under the scanner, the sources said. Ms. Gupta was alleged to have taken information from the senior diplomat and passed it on to Pakistani spy agencies. However, it was not immediately clear whether he knew about the woman officer's designs. The Ministry of External Affairs has acknowledged the arrest of the official. "We have reason to believe that an official at the Indian High Commission in Islamabad had been passing on information to Pakistan intelligence agencies. The matter is currently under investigation. The official is cooperating with our investigation..." Ministry spokesman Vishnu Prakash told journalists at Thimphu. Officials declined to answer any further question on grounds of national security. (The Hindu)

Singh, Gilani meeting is good for region: US

On the eve of a crucial meeting between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yusuf Raza Gilani, the US on Wednesday said that it encourages such development which is good for the region. "We have encouraged the leaders of Pakistan and India, to restore, direct dialogue that has been characteristic of the relation between those two countries within the last few years. We're encouraged that they are taking steps to do that," Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P J Crowley told reporters. "I think we always think that when leaders of countries, you know, particularly countries with the history of - the unique history of India and Pakistan - any time they can get together for high-level, constructive dialogue, that is good for the region, and we

support it," Crowley said in response to a question. Noting that the US is having its own strategic dialogue with both India and Pakistan and is planning for the next round of discussions with India in the next few weeks, Crowley said the United States has always encouraged the two South Asian countries that they need to restore a high-level dialogue that they have had in the not-too-distant past. "You know, there have been significant steps by both countries, restore dialogue, both at the leader level and lower levels, and we certainly encourage that," Crowley said. When asked about the SAARC Summit, where Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake is attending the meet as an observer, Crowley said this is one of a number of important structures that is there, across the broader Asia region. "We think they're important. We encourage them. And, as you see, both with, Secretary Blake's appearance at the SAARC, you know, the secretary is committed to strengthen the United States' ties to other structures, like ASEAN, this is an indication of our ongoing and deepening commitment to the region," Crowley said. (Times of India)

India, Pak agree ministers should meet

India and Pakistan ended a diplomatic stalemate on Thursday by resuming dialogue at the foreign-minister level, as part of an agreement worked out by PM Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yousaf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of the Saarc summit in Thimphu. The process, which gets underway when foreign secretary Nirupama Rao travels to Islamabad in the next few weeks (after the current session of Parliament), will be followed by a meeting between the two foreign ministers S M Krishna and Shah Mehmood Qureshi likely in Delhi. While this shows that Singh defied sceptics at home by pushing through a new peace agenda with Pakistan, the PM has also taken care to enter terror caveats to quieten opposition at home. He also made it clear that his faith in engagement could only work if Pakistan's civilian establishment stepped up to the plate on terrorism. The PM acknowledged a "trust deficit" between the two sides but also pushed hard for normalization of the relationship, saying it was "vital". Also, this will not mark the resumption of the composite dialogue as it existed before the Mumbai attacks. That is dead. In its place is a new process, which will concentrate on issues of prime concern to both sides terrorism and infiltration for India would be paramount. Rao was quick to scotch speculation on the composite dialogue. Urging a forward-looking mindset, she said, "Let's not get stuck on nomenclatures." India was uncomfortable with the idea of resuming the old composite dialogue. As senior government sources said, it was premised on Pakistan stopping all terrorism from its soil. Even though Gilani reiterated the same mantra, after Mumbai and Pune, sticking to the same format of dialogue made no sense. Besides, India really wants to send the signal that post-Mumbai, it could not be business as usual. A large part of the dialogue will be on confidence-building measures. Qureshi quoted Singh as saying the two leaders should be able to pick up the phone and talk to each other, which could help in tackling terrorism in the future. India, sources said, will watch whether there is progress on the trial of the seven accused in the 26/11 attacks. "Our concerns about terrorism remain very much on the agenda," Rao said. (Times of India)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Social front:

37.2 per cent of population BPL, 10 crore families to get food security

For purposes of food security, the Planning Commission finally accepted that the number of people living below the poverty line in India is 37.2 per cent of the total population. The 37.2 per cent poverty line (that works out to 40.71 crore for 2004-05) is based on the methodology recommended by the Suresh Tendulkar committee that submitted its report to Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia in December 2009. The report is yet to be officially accepted by the Plan panel. Besides technical issues of methodology, the report led to a sharp increase in the number of poor in India since 2004-05. But for the limited purposes of food security, the Planning Commission agreed to Tendulkar's recommendations in an internal meeting of all members. The number of poor in 2004-05, as per the Plan panel's own estimate released in March 2007, was estimated at 30.17 crore or 27.5 per cent of the total population. Were this number to be accepted as the BPL population, only 6.5 crore families would have got access to food security. But with the Plan panel accepting the Tendulkar report, about 10 crore families will benefit. "Two different poverty lines one for food security and the second for all other purposes for one country sounds odd. But this has been the most expedient solution for the time being," said an official who did not wish to be quoted. In fact, the eGoM was being urged by the Congress leadership to stick to the spirit of the party election promises made in the manifesto. A note that was pushed by the Congress leadership and finally adopted by the eGoM specifically referred to the BPL numbers. "Whatever we do, we should not reduce coverage to below 10.8 crore families," the note said. It said that while the Plan panel's estimates of poverty could be the basis for identifying BPL families, the entitlements under Antyodaya Anna Yojana for the most vulnerable sections including single women, aged, urban homeless, street children, primitive tribal groups and destitutes should not have any numerical ceiling whatsoever. In the run-up to the finalisation of the BPL numbers, so crucial to the proposed Food Security Act, there has been intense lobbying, with the Plan panel itself sharply divided. Despite attempts to stick to a lower BPL figure, the Plan panel has finally veered to accepting the Tendulkar committee recommendations that results in a much higher BPL population. (The Indian Express)

Ash may impact monsoon, fear experts

The volcanic ash cloud over Europe has now got India's weather scientists worried over its likely impact over monsoon. Scientists believe that if the ash cloud, caused by a volcanic eruption in Iceland, persists, beyond a month or so, it may impact the monsoon system. "As of now, it seems that the volcanic ash would diffuse into the atmosphere by the time it reaches central Asia from eastern Europe where it is now. But if it persists beyond that, it may just interfere with the monsoon system as well. We are unsure what kind of an impact this may be," said Ajit Tyagi, Director General, Indian Meteorological Department (IMD). Tyagi said volcanic eruptions like the current one were known to cut off solar radiations over large parts of the earth, resulting in a cooling effect. This might lead to complications for the process of precipitation over the sub-continent. The IMD is slated to come out with its first long-range monsoon forecast for this season by the end of this month. (The Indian Express)

Nationwide raids on IPL entities

The government on Wednesday stepped up efforts to get to the bottom of alleged financial irregularities in the Indian Premier League (IPL), with officials from the income tax department visiting the Mumbai offices of World Sports Group (WSG) and Multi Screen Media (MSM) in Mumbai. WSG holds all audio and video rights for IPL, while MSM is the broadcast-rights holder. Media reports had said that MSM had paid a ‘facilitation fee’ of \$80 million to WSG to secure the rights. A similar exercise was undertaken later in the day, when tax officials visited the offices of Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in Kolkata and India Cements in Chennai, the two IPL franchise teams. Tax officials have already visited IPL headquarters in Mumbai and made enquiries with the IPL teams of Rajasthan Royals and Kings XI Punjab. Officials said that as part of the probe, offices of all IPL teams would be visited in a day or two. The day also saw IPL commissioner Lalit Modi—who is under pressure to step down—questioning the legality of the governing council meeting slated for April 26. A defiant Modi said that he alone had the powers to convene the council meeting, which he wanted to be held on May 1. However, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is going ahead with the scheduled meeting. Cricketers who played in IPL in the last three years may not be spared scrutiny either. Sources said that the IPL franchise teams had been asked to hand over details of payments made to cricketers of all the teams who have played in the three IPL editions. The payments include money paid to the players for the match as well as for the post-match parties. The IT department has also asked the franchise teams to provide the details of money paid to the cheerleaders as well as commentators. All IPL franchise teams are facing probes by the various departments of the finance ministry and the Registrar of Companies (RoC). As earlier reported, the RoC has already sought ownership pattern and other details from all the franchises. In Kolkata, the officials from the income-tax department and the enforcement directorate visited the offices of Shah Rukh Khan-Juhi Chawla-promoted Red Chillies Entertainment at the Eden Gardens, who are the promoters of KKR. I-T officials also landed up at the office of sports marketing agency Gameplan in Kolkata on Wednesday. Gameplan is a sports management group which looks after KKR’s affairs. In Chennai, I-T officials visited the office of India Cements, the owner of Chennai Superkings. The countrywide probe began after reports of financial irregularities surfaced in the bidding process of Kochi IPL team and the Shashi Tharoor-Lalit Modi spat over sweat equity granted to Sunanda Pushkar by Kochi franchise owners. Earlier this week, finance minister Pranab Mukherjee had assured the Lok Sabha that a thorough probe will be conducted into all aspects of IPL. The ongoing I-T actions are believed to be part of this enquiry. On Tuesday, I-T officials had visited the Kings XI Punjab office. Summons has already been issued to the BCCI by I-T authorities to furnish all details of all the eight original IPL franchises. I-T authorities are investigating the entire IPL structure, which has become a huge revenue-earning entity for the BCCI, since its inception in 2008. (The Indian Express)

Southwest Monsoon likely to be normal

The India Meteorological Department on Friday issued its first-stage, long-range forecast for the Southwest Monsoon. It is likely to be “normal,” with a precipitation of 98 per cent

of the long-period average (LPA), with a model error of plus or minus five per cent. In other words, the rainfall during the four-month season, from June to September, is likely to be between 93 per cent and 103 per cent of the LPA. (The LPA is the average of the rainfall over 50 years from 1941 to 1990 and it comes to 89 cm). Highly placed sources in the Department told The Hindu that as of now, there seemed a greater probability for the rainfall to be in the lower side of the range (between 93 per cent and 98 per cent) than in the higher side (between 98 per cent and 103 per cent). This was because of a weak El Nino condition, which was expected to prevail till the early part of the monsoon and which could have an adverse impact on it. But the sources said that even if the rainfall amounted to only 93 per cent, it would not be a matter of concern. "There can be a problem only if the rainfall dips below 90 per cent. That does not seem to be possible this year." Agreeing that a weak El Nino condition was expected to prevail for some more time before getting neutralised, IMD Director-General Ajit Tyagi said the present situation was far better than what was obtaining earlier. The El Nino condition, which started strengthening from late October last, peaked in the third week of December. Since then, it had weakened, he said. Further, a few models indicated that there was a possibility of a weak La Nina developing by July or August, he said. La Nina is the opposite of El Nino. "The IMD will keep a close watch on the El Nino front." The forecast of a rainfall ranging from 93 per cent to 103 per cent should come as a great relief, given the dismal monsoon last year, which resulted in a steep increase in the prices of food articles. Last year, there was a rainfall of just 78 per cent of the LPA for the whole of the country. The north-west India was the worst hit, with a precipitation of just 65 per cent of the LPA, followed by the north-east (77 per cent of the LPA) and central India (80 per cent). Only the southern peninsular region had a good rainfall, with a precipitation of 94 per cent. Of the 511 meteorological districts for which data was available, 294 districts received deficient or scanty rainfall during the season. June 2009 was the worst period: it registered a rainfall of just 53 per cent of the LPA for the month, The situation improved, with July recording a rainfall of 98 per cent, August 73 per cent and September 80 per cent, but they were not adequate to fill the huge gap. (The Hindu)

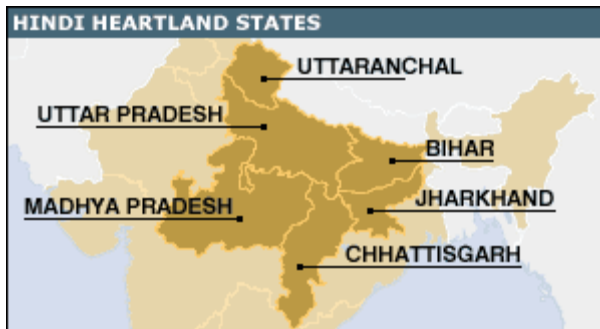
Pre-marital sex not a statutory offence: SC

The Supreme Court has held that pre-marital sex is not a statutory offence and criminal law cannot punish individuals merely for expressing "unpopular views" justifying such acts as it would violate freedom of speech and expression. "While it is true that the mainstream view in our society is that sexual contact should take place only between marital partners, there is no statutory offence that takes place when adults willingly engage in sexual relations outside the marital setting, with the exception of 'adultery' as defined under Section 497 IPC," the apex court said in a judgment. A three judge bench of Chief Justice K G Balakrishna and justices Deepak Verma and B S Chauhan passed the judgement while quashing the criminal cases filed against popular south Indian actress Khushboo for her views on "pre-marital sex". "It is not the task of the criminal law to punish individual merely for expressing unpopular views. The threshold for placing reasonable restrictions on the 'freedom of speech and expression' is indeed a very high one and there should be a presumption in favour of the accused in such cases. "It is only when the complainants produce materials that support a prima facie case for

statutory offence that magistrates can proceed to take cognizance of the same. We must be mindful that the initiation of a criminal trial is a process which carries an implicit degree of coercion and it should not be triggered by false and frivolous complaints amounting to harassment and humiliation to the accused," the court said. Writing the judgement, Justice Chauhan said the complaints against the actress were instituted with a malafide by office bearers of PMK party and "in order to prevent the abuse of the criminal law machinery", the same has to be quashed. Asserting that Khushboo's statement was not obscene or harmed the reputation, the bench said, "the appellant's statement published in 'India Today' is a rather general endorsement of pre-marital sex and her remarks are not directed at any individual or event at a 'company' or an association or collection of persons." It said the statements did not invite any case for defamation as defined under Section 499 of IPC. "The appellant's statement published in 'India Today' (in September 2005) is a rather general endorsement of pre-marital sex and her remarks are not directed at any individual or even at a company or an association or collection of person," the apex court observed. The apex court said that though Khushboo's remarks provoked a controversy, there must be a culture of open dialogue when it comes to societal attitudes on issues like pre-marital sex and live-in relationship. "While there can be no doubt that in India, marriage is an important social institution. We must also keep our minds open to the fact that there are certain individuals or groups who do not hold the same view. "To be sure, there are some indigenous groups within our society wherein sexual relations outside the marital setting are accepted as a normal occurrence. Even in the societal mainstream, there are a significant number of people who see nothing wrong in engaging in pre-marital sex," it said. The court observed that notions of social morality are inherently subjective and the criminal law cannot be used as means to unduly interfere with the domain of personal autonomy. "Morality and criminality are not co-extensive. In the present case, the substance of the controversy does not really touch on whether pre-marital sex socially acceptable, instead the real issue of concern is the disproportionate response to the appellant's remarks," it said. If the complainants had any grievances against the actress, they should have contested the same through the media and not by filing criminal complaints, the court said. Rejecting the argument that her views endorsing pre-marital sex misguided young people, Justice Chauhan said, "All that the appellant did was to urge the societal acceptance of the increasing instances of pre-marital sex when both partners are committed to each other. This cannot be construed as an open endorsement of sexual activities of all kinds. "If it were to be considered so, the criminal law machinery would have to take on the unenforceable task of punishing all writers, journalists or other such persons for merely referring to any matter connected with sex in published materials." The court further said that for the sake of argument, even if it were to be assumed that the appellant's statements could encourage some people to engage in pre-marital sex, no legal injury has been shown since the latter is not an offence. (The Indian Express)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

Cong ready for Prez rule in Jharkhand, wants Soren to quit

Congress wants Shibu Soren to resign as chief minister first before making a move in Jharkhand where BJP-JMM partnership collapsed under the weight of the voting on cut motion on Tuesday, while ruling out any support to the veteran tribal leader. Congress is categorical that it will not back a CM from outside, ruling out support to Soren a la BJP. The party, however, is not averse to doing business with JMM short of giving chief ministership. Congress insistence on CM's post stalled a deal with JMM after results threw up a stalemated assembly in Jharkhand in December 2009. BJP is likely to meet the governor to withdraw support on Thursday. But pending a political deal, Congress is ready for a spell of President's rule. It is felt central rule will cool down expectations in different quarters which otherwise are bound to be bullish in the aftermath of the fall of Soren regime. There is a view that central rule will also help clear things like on the naxal front before a new regime can take over. By all indications, Jharkhand developments have taken Congress by surprise. Sources said crossvoting by Soren was not negotiated as part of mobilisation for the floor test and the four-month-old government's fall has left the party without fresh ideas. Congress pointsperson Keshava Rao met Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and other leaders on hammering out a future course of action. AICC spokesman Manish Tiwari said, "It is an evolving situation. We are watching it." (Times of India)

Social front:

Fresh survey to find new urban poor

Not finding enough urban poor for the second phase of Kanshiram Shahri Garib Awas Yojna, the state government is all set to conduct a fresh survey in all the 71 districts to identify more beneficiaries for the prestigious scheme of Chief Minister Mayawati. The government is considering a proposal to relax the norms for selection of beneficiaries for the scheme and a fresh survey would be carried out according to changed norms, said a senior state official. In the initial survey conducted between January and March, the government found only 45,000 beneficiaries for the second phase (2009-10) the figure

being half the target set in the first phase (2008-09) when the scheme wanted to benefit 1.01 lakh urban poor families with free houses. “A fresh survey would begin in a week. Target for the second phase would be revised according to the findings of the survey,” said Balvinder Kumar, principal secretary, Ambedkar Gram Vikash Vibhag. The figures have come down for the second phase of the scheme because over 14 districts, including Mau and Siddarth Nagar, expressed their inability to find beneficiaries for the scheme and land for constructing houses. To increase the number of beneficiaries in the fresh survey, the government is considering a proposal to relax the norms of the scheme. It is now proposed that every constituent family of a joint family will be considered as a single unit and will be eligible for allotment of a house free-of-cost if it fulfils two conditions: the share of each family in the house was less than 33 square metres; and if the constituent families could produce their certificates of poverty. Also, an applicant may be considered as poor and eligible for allotment of a house even if he owns residential land in any rural area. But the applicant should not own residential land in any urban local body area. Similarly, an urban poor residing in a rented house will also be eligible to avail of the benefits of the scheme. In December 2009, the government had put a condition mandating that only those who lived in the jurisdiction of the local body or urban areas for at least five years could apply for houses. The government is now considering a proposal to also allow the urban poor with stay periods of less than five years to apply for the scheme, said the official, adding that they will have to submit a copy of the voters’ list or ration card to prove their eligibility. Some relaxations in the guidelines were also made in December last year, following which the Lucknow district administration had received over 8,000 applications for over 1,140 houses that were left unallotted in the first phase due to unavailability of eligible candidates. “Seeing the increase in number of applications, the target for Lucknow has been doubled to 3,000 houses for the second phase,” Kumar said. (The Indian Express)

From 63 in '90, tiger population down to 3 in Bihar reserve

In the backdrop of concerns regarding the dwindling number of tigers in the country, the ongoing tiger census has brought some more alarming news from Bihar. At the Valmiki Tiger Reserve Bihar’s only national park — only three adult tigers have been caught by the trap cameras so far. The census is set to wrap up in June. While the reserve, spread over 880 sq km, including 340 sq km core area in West Champaran along the Nepal border, boasted of 63 tigers in 1990, the number had fallen to 13 in the last tiger census in 2006. Ironically, the Valmiki reserve, which was declared a national park in 1991, was categorised as a ‘level I’ reserve on account of the large area, ample vegetation and abundant availability of species of tiger prey. The authorities claim that the tigers may have slipped into Nepal. “Phase-I data collection on indirect sign of carnivores, encounter rate and concentration of prey species is encouraging. Trap cameras might have shown just three tigers, but the figure should go up from last time. If that does not happen, we will have to assume that some tigers slipped into contiguous Chitwan forest of Nepal,” said J P Gupta, conservator of forest-cum-field director of the reserve. On March 18, a four-year-old tigress was allegedly poisoned to death and buried near Kanti Tola in Madanpur Range. Forest officials, who claim they have “no wherewithal for enforcement of forest laws”, have asked for a CID probe. With two months still to go for completion of the census, reserve authorities are optimistic that more tigers will be sighted in the trap

cameras. It is the nodal census agency the Wildlife Institute of India that will arrive at the “final estimate”, studying pictures taken over a period of time through capture-recapture method introduced in 2006. It is supposed to be a far more accurate method than the earlier pugmark one. The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), a voluntary group, is the partner of the Wildlife Institute of India in carrying out the census. Explaining the new method, WTI assistant manager at Valmiki Nagar field station Samir Kumar Sinha, who recently got 40 trap cameras fitted in Raghia range, said: “We place film cameras using 24-hour mode in thick forest areas and night-mode in human disturbance area. The camera using infra-red sensor method automatically clicks when an animal within its focus emits body heat. As every tiger has distinct body lining, we can avoid overlapping in case the same tiger gets clicked by cameras again and again.” He, however, said that 141 villages adjoining the forest create obstacles as the inmates sometimes steal or destroy the cameras. Thirteen cameras have been stolen since 2005, including two during the current census. Gupta pointed out the need for a dedicated and armed task force to take on poachers. The reserve has a sanctioned strength of 171 staff but the actual strength is down by nearly 40 per cent. There is not a single armed staff member. Of the 40 unarmed Special Auxiliary Police personnel, 22 left last year after not getting their salary for a year. Besides rampant poaching from the Nepal side, human disturbances are a serious obstacles in tiger protection. While residents of Kanti Tola village, where a tigress was killed in March, claimed to know nothing about the killing, police said that villagers had left poisoned meat in the jungle for the tigress after a buffalo was killed. SSB members deployed along the reserve’s border with Nepal said that though seizure of animal skins, particularly of leopards, happens at regular intervals, poachers are not caught. “We also have inputs of poachers putting electric wires to target animals. We have intensified patrolling in reserve area to protect our animals,” said officiating SSB commandant at Valmiki Nagar, Assistant Commandant Vaibhav Singh Parihar. But foresters of six ranges have their own woes. Koutraha range forester Shivshankar Singh said: “I have been given a Rajdoot motorcycle with just five litres of petrol for a month. We have no arms.” The reserve receives a cumulative central and state government annual budget of about Rs 225 lakh. In 2009-10, it got central assistance of Rs 134.6 lakh as against Rs 93.9 lakh in 2008-09 and Rs 106.663 lakh in 2007-08. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

The North



Politics:

Social front:

Dalit houses torched in Hisar, polio-stricken girl and father killed

A 17-year-old polio-stricken girl and her father were burnt to death and over a dozen persons injured today when ten houses of Dalits were set ablaze, allegedly by members of the Jat community, in Mirchpur village of Hisar district in Haryana. The girl who died in the attack has been identified as Suman, a student of Class XII. Her father Tarachand, who suffered 90 per cent burns while trying to save her, later died at the Hisar Civil Hospital. Police have arrested 25 people. As per preliminary reports, some 40 men, said to be members of the Jat community, came to the Dalit Basti around 11 am to protest the beating up of two Jat boys by Dalits on Tuesday. Arguments between the two sides led to a scuffle and stones were hurled, leaving 12 persons injured. Later, the houses of Dalits were set ablaze. Suman, the polio-stricken girl, was trapped in one of the burning houses. While the Dalits blamed the Jats, the latter claimed their boys had been assaulted in the Dalit Basti without provocation while they were returning home after a dip in the local canal. (The Indian Express)

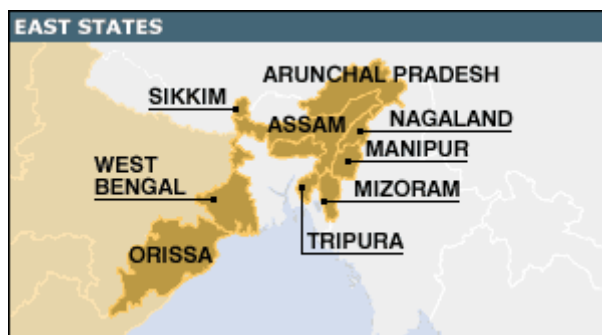
Economic Front:

Houses likely to become expensive

As private banks have already increased home loan rates and with the levy of the new service tax on construction proposed, developers are likely to pass on the losses to consumers which will see an increase in prices of houses. Private banks, including HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank, have raised lending rates by as much as 100 basis points. More banks are expected to follow suit to maintain profitability. ICICI Bank will now charge 8.75 per cent for loans up to Rs 30 lakh, 9 per cent between Rs 30 lakh and Rs 50 lakh and 9.5 per cent for loans over Rs 50 lakh. It was earlier offering 8.25 per cent for two years. HDFC bank officials said the bank had reverted its rate to 8.75 per cent for home loans up to Rs 30 lakh, 9 per cent for loans between Rs 30 lakh and Rs 50 lakh and 9.25 per cent for loans Rs 50 lakh and above. Till last month, it was

offering loans at a fixed rate of 8.25 per cent up to March 31, 2012, after which the loan would revert to the prevailing floating rate. Some banks have even rolled back the “teaser” home loan schemes with rates as low as 8 per cent in initial years. Axis Bank was the first to discontinue its teaser loan rates in February after the monetary policy. The bank was offering fixed rates of 8.25 per cent for two years. Others who pulled out cheap loans are government-owned Union Bank and Canara Bank. Teaser rate loans are those where interest rates are low in initial years, but progressively climb, making it tough for consumers to repay. There is another reason for the housing segment to be expensive. The cost of flats will go up 3.3 per cent of the total purchase consideration once service tax begins to be levied on construction. There is speculation that the government will exempt those flats booked before the notification of the levy of tax on construction. (The Indian Express)

The East



Politics:

Eye on rural votes, govt to amend Land Reform Act

In A bid to woo the rural voters, the Left Front government has decided to amend the existing Land Reforms Act. Earlier, the Act enabled an encroacher to have the ownership of the land provided one had the possession from 1974 or before. Now, the government has decided to bring down the cut-off year to 2009. In other words, any squatter on a piece of land not more than five cottahs in a rural area, who has been there since last year will now be given the right over the land. The proposal for the amendment will tabled for approval in the Cabinet meeting on April 20. “Those who will get this right will include poor fishermen, farmers and craftsmen. We have taken this step to ensure that more people get the right to build houses in the villages,” Abdur Rezaq Mollah, state Minister for Land and Land Reforms. Interestingly, not only illegal settlers on government land will get this patta, people having possession of land belonging to another individual will also get the patta for that land from the government. “In such cases, the government will vest the land with it and later hand it over to the squatter,” Mollah said. Asked about the apprehension that it will open a floodgate of litigations as people, whose land is vested in this way will definitely go to court, the minister said the government was determined to go ahead with it. “Let them go to court. We will fight it there. Nobody can do anything as we are committed to the poor,” Mollah added. (The Indian Express)

Centre asks Manipur to protect migrant workers

The Union Home Ministry has instructed the Manipur government to provide necessary protection to the migrant workers who have been served quit notice. On Saturday, Director-General of Police Yumnam Joykumar summoned the Superintendents of Police of the four valley districts to take stock of the situation. He asked them to identify and locate the migrant workers for providing them protection. Nareshwor Kumar, president of the Hindustani Samaj of Manipur, submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Manmohon Singh seeking protection to migrant workers in the light of the quit notice served by the proscribed Revolutionary People's Front. In a notice, the outfit said that the non-Manipuris who came and settled in Manipur after 1949 should leave the State by May 31. However, those who had come for study and service could stay back. Some other rebel groups and the All-Manipur Students' Union extended support to the quit notice. Mr. Kumar said that since January this year 32 non-Manipuris were gunned down by rebels. There were about 50,000 non-Manipuris eking out a living by running grocery kiosks and doing casual works. (The Hindu)

Bharat Bandh to cost West Bengal Rs 500 crore

The 12-hour Bharat Bandh called by the ruling Left Front in West Bengal will cost the state close to Rs 500 crore what with an estimated production loss of 61-62 per cent. "According to a rough estimate by the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the total loss due to a 12-hour bandh in West Bengal would be approximately Rs 496 crore of the Gross State Domestic Product," ICC Senior Vice-President P Jayanta Roy said. "Annually the percentage loss per bandh to gross and net SDP stands at 0.21 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively. Quantification of non-economic loss is, however, not feasible," Roy said. "This mainly includes loss of investors' interests, damage to state's impression to prospective investors, damage to industrial climate, socio-political unrest etc," he added. The Bharat Bandh has been called by 13 non-UPA and non-NDA parties, including the Communist Party of India (CPI), Biju Janata Dal, Communist Party of India (M), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), Samajwadi Party (SP), Rashtriya Samajwadi Party (RSP), over price rise. (The Indian Express)

Cong-Trinamool talks still stuck: Mamata

Speaking for the first time on the seat-sharing impasse with ally Congress, Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee today said there has been no progress in the talks even as the state Election Commission today issued notification for the municipal elections in the state. "There has been no progress in the talks. Talks are going on. We will let you know when that happens," Banerjee said at her Kalighat residence before leaving for Delhi. Both the parties are preparing for another round of talks to resolve the issue but the state Congress leaders are under pressure from the high command as well as from the Trinamool to accept the seat-sharing proposals. "We are trying very hard to resolve the matter through talks. If it works out, it will work out within a few days," said CLP leader Manas Bhuniya. "We are caught between the high command and the leaders and workers in the state. The top leadership wants us to go for the seat-sharing even if it means some sacrifice on our part. But the workers and state leaders are not willing to accept the

demand of Trinamool at any cost,” said a senior Congress leader. Recently, seat-sharing talks for the Kolkata Municipal Corporation was stuck as Trinamool only offered 21 out of 141 seats to the Congress and asked it to drop the wards of four sitting councillors. Meanwhile, the two allies reached a deal for the first time in Bally Municipality in Howrah, where Congress agreed to field candidates in 15 seats while Trinamool got 20. “This is for the first time that a consensus has been reached in a municipality. Positive talks are being held between the two parties in South 24-Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Coochbihar districts. In others, talks are still stuck. I do not know what will happen in the seat-sharing talks for Kolkata Municipal Corporation,” said state Congress working president Subrata Mukherjee. However, in other districts, including Nadia, Malda and Murshidabad, it is almost certain that seat-sharing will not be worked out. Meanwhile, CPM candidates have already started campaigning, including in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Social front:

2 blasts outside IPL venue in Bangalore, another bomb defused

Two minor blasts involving crude devices triggered panic outside the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore ahead of an IPL-3 league game between the Royal Challengers Bangalore and the Mumbai Indians on Saturday afternoon. A third unexploded device was found outside another access point to the stadium. A private security guard, attached to the Karnataka State Cricket Association, was seriously injured while three policemen and a bystander sustained minor injuries. Preliminary analysis of the unexploded device discovered after authorities had allowed the match to go on revealed a cheap clock timer, two detonators and about two kilograms of a wax-like creamish white explosive substance which, as per initial analysis, contains ammonium nitrate and is suspected to be a material known as powergel that is used extensively in quarrying. “There are some

doubts about the exact nature of the material. From preliminary analysis, it seems to be of the kind used locally in quarries. Doubts have been expressed on the presence of a higher explosive by some spot spray tests conducted by bomb experts. We hope to have that clarified by Sunday,” said sources involved in the investigation of the blasts. Like the devices that exploded, the unexploded device is believed to have been set for the afternoon. None of the devices contained shrapnel or materials that could act as missiles post-explosion, suggesting that the prime objective was to create panic ahead of the match, sources said. This blast occurred just outside the massive generator room that sustains the lighting of the cricket stadium. Initially, police suggested that the blast occurred in the generator room. The unexploded device was found placed on the boundary wall of the stadium, behind a hoarding indicating the gate number. It was kept at Gate 8 which is located on the Queens Road and is the third road encompassing the stadium. Police sources said the devices that exploded also seemed to have been triggered by timers. At the Anil Kumble circle, pieces of clock batteries were found. Also found at both blast sites were shredded pieces of the local newspaper, Prajavani, in which the bombs are suspected to have been wrapped. The IPL match was delayed by an hour on account of the blasts. The crowd was not turned away after police and bomb squads did a search of the stadium and its surroundings, assessed the situation and ruled that it was safe for the game to proceed. The discovery of the third unexploded bomb at around 7 pm created fresh panic and forced the police to press bomb squads into action again to check all vehicles in the stadium, including the buses of the players. (The Indian Express)

81% of class V kids in TN can't read English

Nearly 65% of class V students in rural areas of Tamil Nadu can't read even a class II textbook in their mother tongue, 45% don't know subtraction and nearly 81% can't read simple English sentences, the Annual Status of Education Report for 2009, compiled by Delhi-based NGO Pratham Foundation, has revealed. The findings of the survey, which had a sample size of 33,000 students in both private and government schools, showed that while 19.4% of class V students could read words and 7.2% could only identify letters, 3.7% could read nothing. Only During the survey, the children were first asked to read a short story, failing which they were asked to read out a couple of lines. If a child was unable to read the words, he or she was then asked to identify the letters. Vasanthi Devi, convenor of the KALVI Alliance for Education and coordinator for the survey, said, “While the state has been able to do a good job in getting children into schools and in making efforts to introduce child-centric pedagogies like the activity-based learning methodology, it still has to look at the learning outcomes. What is the benchmark for a child to go to class V or even VIII?” The report, however, found that the state had a healthy enrolment ratio with just 1.4% out-of-school children in the 11-14 age group, lower than the national average of 6%. The percentage of out-of-school girls between 11 and 14 years at 1.1% was also lower than the national average of 6.8%. The report said that not even half the number of students in class VIII could read easy sentences in English. Also, a dismal 42.5% of class VIII students were able to do subtraction. On a positive note, the report praised the state for scoring over others in getting out-of-school children back to schools, in ensuring that 92.6% of kids below five years were enrolled in anganwadis and 97% of children in the 11-14 age group go to school. The survey was carried out in private and government schools in 870 villages in 29 TN districts. The data

was collected by volunteers from 23 NGOs and a college. Senior officials of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan said they didn't believe the report and that they had "their reservations about its credibility". Former SSA special project director MP Vijaykumar said, "The NCERT studies, which are more reliable and have a bigger sample size, gave us a thumbs up last year. The Pratham report is not foolproof. I don't dispute the fact that TN may not be topping the list in reading and math, but I can't accept that we are the worst." (Times of India)

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Social front:

To attract youth, Army seeks collector's help

The recruiting office of the Army in Pune this week wrote a letter to the district collector, seeking help to draw youth to the armed forces, especially for its technical wings. The Army is sending publicity material to the collector's office which will distribute them in schools and colleges. Collector Chandrakant Dalvi said he has instructed his officers to help the Army to try and draw more youth from Pune. He said the officers, in collaboration with the Army, will visit schools and colleges to motivate the youth to join the armed forces. Director, Recruiting, Col Bharat Dabral, said, "We will carry out the awareness drive in the form of presentation in schools and colleges to encourage the youth to join the armed forces. We want youth with high qualification to join us to strengthen our technical service." The Army plans to make presentations to impress the youth and inform them that a career in defence service is as lucrative as any other job. Entry as personnel below officer rank (PBOR) is hassle free as the recruitment is done through open rallies which the youth can participate by walking in with their documents. "There are good promotion prospects for those who join the PBOR category. The sepoy can even be selected as a commissioned officer later through departmental examination, after putting in five years of service," said, Dabral. These measures hold significance as increasing reluctance has been noted among city youth in coming forward to join the Army. "A recent recruitment rally held in Beed in February saw about 24,000 youths

from five districts of Maharashtra take part. While four districts Beed, Ahmednagar, Osmanabad and Latur accounted for over 21,000, Pune had only 10 per cent share," said an officer. The awareness drive will also highlight the benefits of working in the Army -- like free ration, clothing, accommodation and entitlement of field allowances as per rank and place. "Not only does a youth get a chance to serve the Army, but his future will also be secure. It is a pensionable job," said another officer. The Army would also ask the civic administration to draw youth to the category of soldier technical and soldier nursing assistant. While the qualification is 10+2, after joining the Army, they will be trained in different branches like electrical and mechanical engineering. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

Power utility to continue with loadshedding

Despite soaring temperatures, the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) said it will continue with planned power cuts every Thursday in the city to undertake maintenance work. "We need to undertake pre-monsoon maintenance repairs and hence have planned power cuts in different areas every Thursday," said S P Nagtilak, chief engineer, Pune division of the MSEDCL. The maintenance work involves locating faults in damaged overhead lines. Often there are suspected faulty insulators as water may have seeped in the cables. We need to switch off the supply to check the faults, said Nagtilak. The main work is, however, to ensure the supply from the substation tower lines to the busbars. Busbars carry large currents or distribute current to multiple devices within switchgear or equipment. The work is under way along Chinchwad and Ganeshkhind lines, he said. New transformers are being added and the Theur-Phursungi 132 KV line is being made into a double circuit line which will take a month, he said. Areas that depend on these lines include Hadapsar, Mundhwa, Kondhwa. "With the double-circuit line, we hope to resolve the problem," said Nagtilak. The power utility has proposed to increase the number of section officers and sub divisions. There are nine divisions in Pune with two main circles at Ganeshkhind and Rasta Peth. Under these, there are four and five divisions and 30 other sub divisions. "Each sub division has at least 50,000 consumers and to balance workload we are planning to introduce more sub divisions, added Nagtilak. Meanwhile, construction work of a 355 MW natural gas-based electricity generation plant started at Navlakh Umbre village in Talegaon Dabhade on Thursday. (The Indian Express)