

Business and Politics in Muslim World

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Sadia Khanum
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National Summary:

BJP national president Nitin Gadkari criticises the Congress-led UPA government for being soft on terrorists and their sympathizers because of vote bank politics. He blames UPA for price rise and increasing naxal insurgency in the country. He accused Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav and Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Lalu Prasad of betraying the opposition on the recent cut motions in parliament, and said they were "dogs who lick the feet of the Congress".

Environment minister Jairam Ramesh is under severe criticism of opposition for his remarks in Beijing on Saturday that India should be much more relaxed in its approach to Chinese investments into the country and get rid of "needless" restrictions. Congress party is also not very encouraging for his remarks. Manmohan Singh refused to accept his resignation but warned him to be careful in his statement.

Darul Uloom Deoband, India's foremost Islamic seminary denied asking Muslim women not to work along with men and said it only suggested that working women should dress "properly". Media and civil society's strong reaction caused Darul Uloom to withdraw its statement.

With an aim to strengthen anti-Maoist operations in West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura before the 2011 Assembly elections, the West Bengal government has decided to set up a dozen more camps in the three districts.

Seven Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans were killed on Saturday when Naxals blew up their bullet-proof vehicle in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, the first major attack after the Dantewada incident on April 6, in which 76 personnel were killed.

India is facing shortage of grain storage warehouses Agriculture Minister of the country Sharad Pawar invited individuals to help government in this regard.

The Bombay Stock Exchange benchmark Sensex registered its biggest single day gain of 561 points in ten months after EU and IMF agreed on a 1 trillion dollar emergency fund for the Union to help contain the region's credit crisis. The Sensex, which lost over 788 points over the past five sessions, bounced back by 561.44 points to 17,330.55 on positive Asian cues.

In a big-ticket investment aimed at giving a boost to its holding of oil and gas assets abroad, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Limited (OVL), along with its partners, entered into an agreement with the Venezuelan government on Thursday to develop a \$20-billion oil project in that country. The project is expected to give India 3.6 million tonnes of crude a year. OVL and its partners signed the agreement with Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PdV) for development and production of hydrocarbons from the Carabobo project in the Orinoco region.

India has conveyed to Tehran that it had a major role in stabilizing the situation in

Afghanistan and that India would cherish its support in handling the developing situation in that country. This was conveyed by India's deputy NSA Alok Prasad to Iran's main security body, Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), in a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday. Both sides remained tight-lipped about the dialogue over security-related issues. Sources, however, said Prasad told SNSC chief Saeed Jalili that India was looking forward to full-scale security cooperation between the two countries over Afghanistan and other regional security issues. The crucial IPI pipeline issue also came up during the discussion and Prasad conveyed to the Iranians that India's participation was being prevented solely by its concerns over security and pricing issues.

The US administration has named India's oil and gas flagship ONGC and Indian Oil Corp (IOC) among the 41 firms worldwide having energy ties with Iran, an act for which it may impose sanctions on them. "The Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) provides for sanctions against persons, including foreign firms, who invest more than \$20 million in Iran's energy sector in any 12-month period," the report said. Of the 41 firms named in the report, five are Indian. Besides ONGC and IOC, it names ONGC Videsh Ltd - the overseas investment arm of the state-run explorer, Oil India Ltd and Petronet LNG Ltd.

Indian government extended the ban on LTTE by another two years following intelligence reports that remnants of the Sri Lankan Tamil terror outfit were trying to re-group in Tamil Nadu.

Despite Pakistan's protest India will organise a civilian mountaineering and trekking expedition to the forbidding Siachen Glacier for the fourth year in a row in October-November this year. The expedition, which has now become an annual affair, is meant to showcase to the global community that Indian troops hold the Siachen glacial heights and Pakistan is nowhere near the glacier. During this year's expedition, the Army plans to take along 35 civilians including women, journalists, scientists from the DRDO and other glacial studies institutes, and mountaineers from among civilian enthusiasts as well as military training establishments. The civilian Siachen expedition had run into a controversy when it began in 2007 after Pakistan lodged a strong protest, calling it "incongruous" to the ongoing peace efforts between the two countries.

Investigation of Malegaon, Ajmer and Hyderabad blasts cases clearly indicates the involvement of extremist Hindu groups and individuals in all incidents.

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre said an incident of minor radioactive contamination was detected in one of its laboratories. The incident which happened on Monday involved minor contamination of the hands of a person, who was involved in the transfer of samples containing radioactive material in a sealed container from one laboratory to another for analysis.

Regional Summary:

The Election Commission of India (EC) has announced the poll schedule for the biennial election to 11 Rajya Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh. Eleven members of the

Rajya Sabha from the state will retire on July 4.

Nearly 14 years after 21 dalits, mostly women, girls and two infants, were massacred by a private militia of landlords in Bhojpur district; a local court of Bihar awarded capital punishment to three convicts and life imprisonment to 20 others.

A faction of the Gujjars on Monday said it would launch a fresh agitation against the one per cent additional quota offered to the community by the government, saying it was not ready to settle for anything less than the 5 per cent separate reservation.

In a case of 'honour killing', a woman was murdered on Wednesday in Punjab's Tarn Taran district by her family for marrying against their wishes, police said. Her mother-in-law was also shot dead. Cases of honour killing are increasing in Punjab.

National Report

Politics:

BJP put govt on back foot: Sushma

At the end of the Budget session, Leader of Opposition Sushma Swaraj said the main Opposition space well and truly belonged to the BJP, and cited issues like “price rise”, “misuse of CBI by government”, “IPL scam” and “telephone tapping” among other issues to show how the Opposition had put the government “on the back foot”. She said the proceedings, including the cut motion vote, showed the UPA government had only a wafer-thin majority in the House. “Our focus, during the session, was price rise. We used all parliamentary provisions like suspension of Question Hour, cut motions, walkouts and a big demonstration outside Parliament to keep this issue alive,” said Swaraj. “We demanded division of votes as we wanted to show the government the mirror. If we take out the 22 BSP members, this government will be in a minority,” she said. Through the cut motions, BJP also wanted to expose parties which form the “psuedo-opposition”, she said. (The Indian Express)

Politics is slippery in India: Advani

BJP Parliamentary party leader L.K. Advani said on Saturday that politics was slippery, particularly in India, and political posts gave people a clout in society. The political posts, however small, gave people a prestige in society far in excess of their intrinsic merit. A political activist with a small post can wield much more influence than professionals like doctors and engineers, Mr. Advani said, after releasing a book chronicling the speeches of the former BJP president, M. Venkaiah Naidu. (The Hindu)

Gadkari says Cong soft on terror for vote bank politics

BJP national president Nitin Gadkari on Sunday launched a blistering attack on the Congress-led UPA government for being soft on terrorists and their sympathizers because of vote bank politics. “Terrorist attacks are on the rise. Explosives and weapons are reaching the country in a large quantity. Young soldiers and police jawans are dying everyday while fighting against terrorists. It’s the Congress which is playing politics of appeasement of terrorists and their sympathizers,” Gadkari alleged at a BJP rally here, adding that internal and external security of the country was in a serious danger. Raking up the issue of Afzal Guru, who has been given death sentence for the attack on Parliament, he said: “The government is not acting even after the highest court’s orders. It’s simply because the Congress fears its adverse effect on the vote bank. Now, there are also apprehensions about Ajmal Kasab Ajmal Kasab, sentenced to death for Mumbai attack.” The BJP president said “bartering votes with national security is very serious and dangerous. How can the government be soft on the terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Toiba and al-Qaeda responsible for terrorist attacks across the country?” Asserting that the country had become “unsafe and insecure”, he referred to the growing problem of Naxalism. “The Naxalites are active from Pashupatinath to Tirupati to make a corridor because the government lacked political will to act,” he added. Drawing a parallel

between the BJP and Congress, Gadkari wondered why the Congress had been trying to differentiate between criminals and terrorists on the basis of caste and religion, which the BJP had never done. Rubbishing the Congress's charges that the BJP was a communal party, he said: "This is a campaign against the BJP so that the Congress manages to retain its votebank." He supported Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal's demand for construction of Manali-Leh railway line for strategic reasons in view of China having already constructed roads and railway line in the region. (The Indian Express)

Cong distances itself from Jairam's remark on MHA

Congress on Monday distanced itself from the remarks of Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, who was critical of the Home Ministry for allegedly stalling import of Chinese telecom equipment and raising security concerns. "Let the minister come back and throw light on what he has said. He can tell whether there was any confusion about what he said," Congress spokesperson Shakeel Ahmed said. Sources in Congress admitted that there is disquiet in the party circles over the remarks by a Congress minister against the approach of another ministry of its own government. "It is something that is not encouraging," a senior leader said. "An adverse comment against the policy and functioning of a ministry as sensitive as Home Affairs, that, too in a foreign land, cannot be justified. If there are differences of opinion over an issue, these have to be resolved at party and government fora," he said. Ramesh had said in Beijing on Saturday that the "overly defensive and alarmist" approach in the security establishments in India which are raising telephone tapping concerns will not help in sustaining the Copenhagen spirit. He had said that India should be much more relaxed in its approach to Chinese investments into the country and get rid of "needless" restrictions adding "we are imagining demons where there are none." Suggesting that India should be more open and receptive to investments and technology from the neighbouring country, Ramesh said the spirit of cooperation evolved at Copenhagen between the prime ministers of the two Asian giants should be taken forward. Ramesh had made the remarks in the context of recent reports that India had barred import of telecom equipment from major Chinese firm Huawei, especially in the border areas following security concerns. Home Secretary G K Pillai has, however, rubbished reports of a bias against China saying there was no discrimination from the government's side and it was wrong to say that the security establishment was biased against the Chinese. (The Indian Express)

Mulayam, Lalu are Sonia's dogs, says Gadkari

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday accused Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav and Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Lalu Prasad of betraying the opposition on the recent cut motions in parliament, and said they were "dogs who lick the feet of the Congress". "Bade dakarte the sher jaise, aur kutte ke jaise ban kar Soniaji aur Congress ke ghar par talve chatne lage' (these leaders were roaring like lions but later bowed like dogs to lick the feet of Sonia and the Congress)," Gadkari said about Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad. Gadkari, addressing his maiden rally in this city, said the two leaders and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) deserted the opposition on the cut motions in parliament. "In front of the TV, Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad stood

with Sushma Swaraj (leader of opposition). All these parties stood with us but turned away later," Gadkari said. "What happened during the cut motion? The BSP went and sat in the lap of the Congress," he said. "Someone asked me later which party is with the Congress? I said that only one party was with the congress - the Congress Bureau of Investigation," Gadkari said taking a swipe at the Congress for allegedly using the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against political leaders. "Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad bowed before the CBI. In their inquiry, somewhere the lawyer was changed while somewhere the affidavit was changed," the BJP president claimed. Chiding the Congress Party for promoting dynasty politics, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Nitin Gadkari Wednesday said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee cannot even think of ever becoming their party's chief. Referring his elevation from a poster-pasting ordinary worker to the BJP president, Gadkari said the Congress culture was only to depend on the Nehru-Gandhi clan for leadership. "Can Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee and other senior Congress leaders even ever think of becoming the Congress president?" Gadkari asked as he addressed his first public rally in Chandigarh. "From (Jawaharlal) Nehru to Indira Gandhi to Rajiv Gandhi to Sonia Gandhi now and in future Rahul Gandhi, the leadership issue is quite decided in the Congress," Gadkari said. He said as an ordinary party worker, he had pasted BJP posters and painted walls. "I have been going around places with electricity linesmen to put up BJP posters. The BJP is a party of the workers. You can become an ex-MP from MP, ex-minister from minister and ex-MLA from MLA, but you can never be an ex-worker. The BJP knows the worth of its workers," he said. Condemning the policies of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the centre, Gadkari said the government has failed miserably to fulfil its promise of controlling prices within 100 days of coming to power June last year. "Instead of the slogan 'garibi hatao' (eliminate poverty), the Congress government is out to eliminate the poor," the BJP president said. (Times of India)

Rs 1,762 crore Kargil purchase scam buried by UPA?

More than 10 years after Kargil war, the stink of corruption in purchases of arms and ammunition worth Rs 1,762 crore appears to have been a false alarm. After years of investigation, the ministry of defence has said that it has now agreed to close most of the cases except two — Thermally Guided Munition (TGM) purchases worth Rs 151 crore and aluminum caskets for Rs 6.55 crore — in which CBI had registered FIRs more than four years ago. The Supreme Court is monitoring investigations into the purchases since 2004 when a PIL pointed out a damning report from Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) that the ministry had agreed with CBI and Central Vigilance Commission to close 29 of the 35 purchase cases as they did not involve any corruption. Of the remaining six cases, CBI has reiterated to MoD its earlier findings that in three purchases -- Hand Held Thermal Imagers worth Rs 41.95 crore, ammunition for T-72 tanks for Rs 402.7 crore and other ammunition worth Rs 9.2 crore -- "no criminality or malafides are discernable". The high-profile cases were linked to Janata Dal(U) leader George Fernandes's tenure as defence minister during the Kargil war. And while the cases were pursued once the UPA came to power, not much headway seems to have been made into the allegations that saw Congress target Fernandes as "kafan chor". It has been argued that some of the purchases that were contracted in haste during the war were actually delivered later and some

procedures had to be shortened. The entire set of purchases relating to the Kargil war were later referred for investigation. In TGM and casket purchase cases, CBI had registered FIRs nearly three years back and no progress has been reported to the SC by the MoD's affidavit, which was handed over to the court by solicitor general Gopal Subramaniam. The MoD said CBI was still investigating "into payment of agency commission with regard to purchase of Anti Material Rifles contracted through Denel, a South African arms supplier". Of the 29 cases which the MoD has decided to close, it has imposed monetary penalty on arms and other material suppliers, including those from foreign countries. Lastly, the MoD said it has decided to close the case relating to purchase of Automatic Grenade Launcher for over Rs 52 crore, which was referred for an opinion to CVC. The CVC has advised closure of the case, it said. (Times of India)

35-member staff for NAC

The institutional framework for the National Advisory Council is beginning to fall in place with the government sanctioning a 35-strong staff, including a secretary-level officer, for the body to be headed by Congress chief Sonia Gandhi. Union minister Ambika Soni said the Union Cabinet approved the posts at its meeting on Thursday. The decision to revive NAC has led to a war of words between BJP and Congress over its role. BJP has criticised the body as a way of making Sonia Gandhi the "super PM". However, after the Cabinet approved the posts, Congress rebuffed the criticism saying it was an advisory body to help the government on issues of concern to common man. AICC spokesman Shakeel Ahmed said, "If Sonia Gandhi wanted she could have become Prime Minister twice. The people have reposed faith in her leadership in two elections but she declined." (Times of India)

Stay, but mind your words: PM to Jairam

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has turned down beleaguered environment minister Jairam Ramesh's offer to resign, but asked the gaffe-prone minister to be discreet. The PM, sources said, told Ramesh to carry on with the "good work you are doing in the environment ministry" in response to the minister's offer on Tuesday morning. The PM's praise for his ministerial stint can salve Ramesh's bruised pride, but cannot quell the uncertainty enveloping his status. Congress president Sonia Gandhi, whose support propelled him to the front row, remains upset with the environment minister and has refused to meet him -- something that may encourage the opposition to upset the plan to renew his Rajya Sabha term from Andhra Pradesh. Even Singh qualified his praise of Ramesh's performance with the advice that the latter needed to curb his propensity to commit gaffes and his strong unilateral streak. "We have to learn the business of being discreet and appreciate the fact that we all function on the basis of collective responsibility," sources quoted Singh as telling the environment minister. Ramesh shot off a letter offering to quit on Monday after he was publicly censured by both the PMO and the Congress leadership for accusing the home ministry of blocking Chinese telecom companies because of its "defensive and alarmist" approach. The minister, whose proximity to the Congress leadership and the PMO is a source of envy for many in the party, was stung by the public rebuke. Smarting under the embarrassment, Ramesh, who had in the past survived situations that have devoured politicians senior to him, soon offered to quit. Ramesh is learnt to have written to the PM to treat it as his resignation

letter if he (PM) felt that he had committed any impropriety. The minister did not betray signs of anxiety when he attended the meeting of the Union Cabinet on Thursday. In fact, he was at his persuasive best when the Dam Security Bill came up for discussion. His suggestion that a representative of the environment ministry be put on the committee on dams was accepted by the prime minister. Congress spokesman Shakeel Ahmad said on Thursday that the issue should not drag on, now that the minister had offered an explanation to the party leadership, the PM as well as the home minister. But the Beijing stumble has already exacted a huge cost of the minister who bested formidable reputations in policy feuds. He was made to wait for two days before home minister P Chidambaram agreed to meet him. Ramesh had sought time from Chidambaram, who protested to the PM against the environment minister's criticism of the home ministry on foreign soil, to explain his Beijing outburst. Uncertainty over his status persisted on Thursday, with speculation rife in political circles that he was being spared drastic action because of President Pratibha Patil's visit to China scheduled for the month-end. India would not like to give the impression of a minister being punished only for asking for a level playing field for Chinese business. There was no let-up in the resistance among Congressmen to re-nominate him to Rajya Sabha from the state. Congress leaders who seemed resigned to support the environment minister in the biennial polls scheduled next month have suddenly upped the ante against outsiders like Ramesh who is from Karnataka. (Times of India)

Minorities' Issues:

No 'fatwa' against Muslim working women, says Deoband

Darul Uloom Deoband, India's foremost Islamic seminary, on Wednesday denied asking Muslim women not to work along with men and said it only suggested that working women should dress "properly". "We had only given an opinion based on Sharia that women need to be properly covered in government and private offices," said Maulana Adnan Munshi, spokesman for the seminary in Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. He denied a media report that the seminary was opposed to men and women working together. "No new fatwa was issued," Maulana Munshi told IANS on telephone, adding that even the opinion on dress code was given when a Muslim woman desired to know if women could go to work without a 'purdah' or veil. "That too is one-and-a-half months old," he said. But the media report claiming that the Deoband seminary had issued a "fatwa" against working women has led to sharp reactions from leaders and scholars from the Muslim community. Maulana N.A. Farooqui, secretary of the Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind, said the Deoband fiat "should be understood in the correct perspective". He said Islam does not prohibit women from taking up jobs or moving outside the house but it was obligatory for them to keep themselves "properly covered". Congress MP Rashid Alvi said every religion had its own rules but the law of the land must prevail ultimately. "Whatever a preacher says, it is according to religion. But if there is a conflict between religion and constitution, then the law of the land will prevail," Alvi told IANS. Former MP Syed Shahabuddin said Muslim women in contemporary life were educated, had taken up jobs and, in some cases, were helping their husbands in running businesses. "It is not possible to follow such a fatwa." (Times of India)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

Guj riot case: Togadia appears before SIT

VHP International General Secretary Praveen Togadia on Monday appeared for questioning before the Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the 2002 riots. Togadia reached the SIT office in block number 11 of Old Secretariat campus around 1100 hours along with several VHP activists who shouted 'Jai Shree Ram' slogans. After the VHP leader went inside, nearly 100 activists including some sadhus gathered in the lawn outside the office and sang bhajans. Before reaching the SIT office, Togadia visited two temples - Mahalakshmi temple in Ahmedabad and Panchdev temple in Gandhinagar. Togadia was called for questioning by SIT on April 19 in connection with the complaint of Zakia Jaffery, wife of slain ex-MP Ehsan Jaffery, who was among the 69 killed in the Gulburg society riots on February 28, 2002. He had however, failed to appear before it then. "I don't know what the complaint is about because despite making several requests, I was not given copy of the complaint," Togadia told reporters at the VHP headquarters before leaving for the questioning. "Since the Supreme Court has set up the SIT and asked it to probe the complaint, I am going there as I respect the apex court," 53-year-old Togadia said. "In this country it has become a crime to be a Hindu," he said. The VHP leader also referred to Afzal Guru, Parliament attack case convict, who is in the death row. (The Indian Express)

Insurgency Movements:

12 more security camps in Maoist-hit districts of West Bengal

With an aim to strengthen anti-Maoist operations in West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura before the 2011 Assembly elections, the state government has decided to set up a dozen more camps in the three districts. "We have decided to set up 12 more camps in the three districts. We will have two CRPF battalions deployed in the districts. A major part of the forces will be posted in West Midnapore," said DGP Bhupinder Singh. Senior officers point out that several areas on the state borders are still unguarded and pose a serious threat to security. "The areas in Gopiballavpur and Nayagram are still unguarded. These two places are emerging as Maoist strongholds," said a senior officer. Pointing out that Maoists have started shifting base from Lalgarh to these areas, the officer added: "Lalgarh, the core area of the Maoists till now, has almost become incident-free these days as Maoists have started moving towards new areas." IG (CRPF), eastern sector, Nageswar Rao confirmed that two battalions from Nagaland will join the security forces in the three districts. (The Indian Express)

Naxals kill 7 CRPF jawans in blast

Seven Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans were killed on Saturday when Naxals blew up their bullet-proof vehicle in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, the first major attack after the Dantewada incident on April 6, in which 76 personnel were killed. The Naxalites triggered an improvised explosive device blast near Pedakodepal village on National Highway 16, 284 km from Raipur, and fired at the security personnel, Director-General of Police Vishwaranjan said. Seven personnel of 168 Battalion, including the

driver, travelling from their company headquarters in Murkinal to the nearby battalion headquarters, were killed. One jawan was injured and another missing. "It appears that the personnel ignored instructions not to drive through Naxal-infested areas," Home Minister Nankiram Kanwar said. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

Lack of storage facility for food grains a problem: Pawar

India is facing a scarcity of warehouses. "As Agriculture Minister of the country, the biggest question before me is, 'Where to keep the food grains?'" Sharad Pawar said on Saturday. "Today we have fewer numbers of warehouses. We have stocks of wheat and rice to last us for a year, and the next crop [rabi] is already arriving. The misfortune of storing grain in temporary sheds is upon us," he said. With the proposed Food Security Act, guaranteeing a particular amount of food grains to every person, there was a greater need to maintain stocks of grain and fertilizers in each State. This also called for increasing storage capacities. Individuals could come forward to construct warehouses, Mr. Pawar said. Highlighting the problem in Maharashtra, Chief Minister Ashok Chavan said the State needed to increase its warehousing capacity by 8 lakh-13 lakh tonnes, from five lakh tonnes now. Admitting to inadequacies in the public distribution system, Mr. Chavan said: "It is not as effective as it should be. Complaints of black marketing are on the rise." He also pointed to the need for increasing the State's crop output and irrigation capacity. On the cooperation movement, Mr. Pawar called for policy decisions for strengthening it and devolving more powers to State representatives of cooperative institutions. With the advent of liberalisation, cooperative institutions had gone through a period of struggle, he said. (The Hindu)

Gold falls 3 pct, triggers buying in India

India gold prices fell over 3 percent on Monday afternoon, tracking weak overseas markets, triggering physical demand ahead of a key festival next week, dealers said. India, the world's largest consumer of the precious metal, celebrates Akshaya Tritiya on May 16, when it is considered auspicious to buy the yellow metal for lasting prosperity. Jewellers are buying for Akshaya Tritiya now after a gap of many days, we could see further 200 kgs getting booked if prices fall below \$1,180, said a dealer with a state-run bank in Mumbai. The most-traded gold June contract on the Multi Commodity Exchange was trading 2.79 percent 17,433 rupees per 10 grams, after hitting a low of 17,358 rupees earlier. International gold, which guides the domestic markets, was trading at \$1,189.75/1,190.55 an ounce as against the previous close of \$1,207.75/1,208.75. Gold slipped as the market digested news of an emergency package to stabilise markets and allay the Greek debt crisis that has threatened the euro and euro-zone unity. Some Jewellers are still waiting for a fall of more than over 4 pct..., said Daman Prakash, director with Chennai-based wholesaler MNC Bullion. A strong rupee, which made the dollar-quoted yellow metal cheaper, helped sentiment. The Indian rupee was trading stronger with the dollar's losses against major currencies and over 2 percent gains in domestic shares helping sentiment. (The Indian Express)

Sensex ends 561 pts up, at 10-month high

The Bombay Stock Exchange benchmark Sensex registered its biggest single day gain of 561 points in ten months after EU and IMF agreed on a 1 trillion dollar emergency fund for the Union to help contain the region's credit crisis. The Sensex, which lost over 788 points over the past five sessions, bounced back by 561.44 points to 17,330.55 on positive Asian cues. Marketmen said European Central Bank's announcement that it will intervene in the public and private bond markets in an effort to help stave off a sovereign-debt crisis bolstered trading sentiment. Of the 30-BSE index components, 25 stocks gained while six ended in the negative. The uptrend was further fueled by a higher closing in Asian stock markets and better opening in Europe. The wide-based National Stock Exchange index Nifty shot up by 175.55 to 5,193.60, as stocks in realty, metal and banking segment surged between four to 6 per cent. Reliance Industries, the country's most valuable company, climbed to a two-week high by adding Rs 46.35 to Rs 1,080.20 while Infosys Technologies shot up Rs 41.35 to Rs 2,661. The two carry nearly 23 per cent weightage on the Sensex. The realty sector index gained the most by rising 6.17 per cent to 3,353.57 followed by metal index by 6.06 per cent to 16,929.39. Sterlite Industries, the largest copper and zinc producer rose 5.84 per cent to Rs 756.05 on the back of firming base metal prices in London. The banking sector index rose by 3.95 per cent to 10,921.21 and auto sector index by 3.32 per cent to 7,764.43. The midcap index rose 2.75 per cent to 8,948.70 and the small-cap by 2.40 per cent to 6,998.15. (The Indian Express)

Greek impact on India seen minimal

India sees minimal impact from the Greek debt contagion despite some likely capital outflows in the near term, top policy makers said on Monday. Finance Secretary Ashok Chawla said he expected the Greek sovereign debt crisis to have a minimal impact on India, while one of the deputy governors at India's central bank, Subir Gokarn, said there may not be any impact in the long term. There might be some nervousness among investors worldwide which might provoke capital outflows from emerging markets in the short run, so there is a risk of short-term vulnerability of capital outflows, Gokarn said. European Union finance ministers agreed an emergency loan package on Monday that with IMF support could reach 750 billion euros (\$1 trillion) to prevent a sovereign debt crisis spreading through the euro zone. Separately, Chawla said India's inflation was spreading to non-food items. High manufacturing inflation would be taken into account for policy making going forward as it was more worrisome than food prices, said Gokarn. The government is looking at raising the foreign institutional investors (FII) investment limit in debt, said Chawla. We are looking at that, Chawla told reporters, when asked whether the government was planning to raise the FII investment cap in both government and corporate debt, currently at \$5 billion and at \$15 billion respectively. Chawla also said he did not expect any change in the government's market borrowing plan in the first half of the current fiscal year that started on April 1. The government is on track to borrow 2.87 trillion rupees in the period through September. However, higher-than-expected proceeds from the third generation mobile spectrum auction has raised speculation that the government's borrowing in the first half of 2010/11 could be lower.

(The Indian Express)

India, Venezuela ink pact to develop \$20-billion oil project

In a big-ticket investment aimed at giving a boost to its holding of oil and gas assets abroad, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Limited (OVL), along with its partners, entered into an agreement with the Venezuelan government on Thursday to develop a \$20-billion oil project in that country. The project is expected to give India 3.6 million tonnes of crude a year. OVL and its partners signed the agreement with Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PdV) for development and production of hydrocarbons from the Carabobo project in the Orinoco region. The agreement was signed in Caracas in the presence of Venezuela President Hugo Chavez, Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Murli Deora, Petroleum Secretary S. Sundereshan, ONGC chairman R.S. Sharma, OVL Managing Director R.S. Butoal and IOC chairman B.M. Bansal. Spain's Repsol-YPF SA, Petrolia Nasional Bhd (Petronas) of Malaysia and OVL each hold a 11 per cent stake in the consortium that will produce 400,000 barrels of oil a day. IOC and Oil India Limited will each have 3.5 per cent interest in the joint venture to develop the Carabobo 1 Norte and Carabobo 1 Centro blocks, located in the Orino Heavy Oil Belt. Corporacion Venezolana del Petroleo, a unit of PdV, will hold the remaining equity. About half of the production from the joint venture, called PetroCarabobo SA, will be upgraded light crude oil for export. (The Hindu)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

India not paranoid over China: Antony

Making it clear that India is not paranoid over China, defence minister A K Antony on Wednesday said that Sino-Indian bilateral relations were improving and getting better, despite the border dispute. "Nothing like that," was Antony's response to reporters' queries if the government was paranoid over China and if there was any problem or bad feeling about Beijing. The government has taken a conscious policy decision to maintain "very cordial and friendly" relations with all the neighbours, he said while interacting with the media after inaugurating a conference of defence accounts controllers in New Delhi. "In this context, we are trying to improve our relations with all our neighbouring countries and this includes China also. All are reciprocating well," he said. Noting that Sino-Indian border disputes still existed, the defence minister said the two governments had evolved mechanisms to talk about these disputes. "Despite these disputes, our relations are improving (with China) in all aspects. China is today our largest trading partner. Our cultural relations are improving. "Regarding my ministry, disputes are there, but military relations are improving," he said citing the example of two Sino-Indian army exercises held in the last three years and the visit of defence secretary Pradeep Kumar to China earlier this year. "Our relations with China are improving and it is comparatively better and the border is peaceful," he said. (The Times of India)

Now, no record of Navy sinking Pakistani submarine in 1971

The sinking of Pakistani submarine Ghazi in the 1971 Indo-Pak war may have been one of the high points of India's first-ever emphatic military victory but there are no records

available with naval authorities on how the much-celebrated feat was pulled off. As a debate rages over a TOI report on the destruction of all records of the 1971 Bangladesh war at the Eastern Army Command headquarters in Kolkata, it transpires that naval authorities also destroyed records of the sinking of Ghazi. The troubling finding has been thrown up by a trail of communications among the naval brass. Pakistani submarine PNS Ghazi, regarded as a major threat to India's plans to use its naval superiority, sank around midnight of December 3, 1971 off Visakhapatnam, killing all 92 on board in the initial days of the war between India and Pakistan. Indian Navy claims the submarine was destroyed by depth charges fired by its ship INS Rajput. Pakistani authorities say the submarine sank because of either an internal explosion or accidental blast of mines that the submarine itself was laying around Vizag harbour. According to a set of naval communications made available to TOI by sources familiar with the Ghazi sinking, senior officers and those writing the official history of Navy exchanged a host of letters admitting to the fact that crucial documents of Ghazi were missing. Immediately after Ghazi sank, Indian naval sailors had recovered several crucial documents and other items from the submarine, wreckage of which is still lying underwater off Vizag. On June 22, 1998, Rear Admiral K Mohanrao, then chief of staff of Visakhapatnam-based Eastern Naval Command, told Vice Admiral G M Hiranandani, who was writing the official history of Navy, "All-out efforts were made to locate historical artifacts of Ghazi from various offices and organizations of this headquarters. However, regretfully, I was unable to lay my hands on many of the documents that I personally saw during my previous tenure." Mohanrao went on to tell Hiranandani, "We are still continuing to search for old files and as and when they are located, I will send appropriate documents for your project." Mohanrao also refers to their inquiries with Commodore P S Bawa (retd), who worked with the Maritime Historical Society, to find out about the artifacts. Here also they drew a blank. What Mohanrao's letter does not disclose is the letter written by Bawa himself in 1980. On December 20, 1980, Bawa, then a commander with the Maritime Historical Society, said, "In Virbahu, to my horror I found that all Gazi papers and signals were destroyed this year. Nothing is now available there." He was writing after a visit to Virbahu, the submarine centre at Vizag, where the documents, signals and other artifacts recovered from Ghazi were stored. His letter (MHS/23) was addressed to Vice Admiral M P Awati, the then chief of personnel at the naval headquarters. Over the years, in the 1990s, as Vice Admiral Hiranandani sat down to write the official history of Navy, he made several efforts to get the Ghazi documents, records show. In one of his letters to the then chief of eastern naval command, Vice Admiral P S Das, he sought the track chart of the Ghazi, the official report of the diving operations on the Ghazi from December 1971 onwards and any other papers related to Ghazi. But none of it was available for the official historian of the Navy. A retired Navy officer who saw action in 1971 said the destruction of the Ghazi papers and those of Army in Kolkata are all fitting into a larger trend, many of them suspected about Indian war history, of deliberate falsification in many instances. It is high time the real history of those past actions were revealed. "We have enough heroes," he said. "In the fog of war, many myths and false heroes may have been created and many honest ones left unsung," he admitted. (Times of India)

India seeks Iran help for stabilizing Afghanistan

Days before foreign minister S M Krishna's visit to Iran for the G-15 meet, India has

conveyed to Tehran that it had a major role in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and that India would cherish its support in handling the developing situation in that country. Highly placed sources said this was conveyed by India's deputy NSA Alok Prasad to Iran's main security body, Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), in a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday. Both sides remained tight-lipped about the dialogue over security-related issues. Sources, however, said Prasad told SNSC chief Saeed Jalili that India was looking forward to full-scale security cooperation between the two countries over Afghanistan and other regional security issues. Sources said Prasad's dialogue with Jalili has helped chalk out the agenda for Krishna's visit to Tehran later this week as he is also expected to have a bilateral meeting with his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mottaki. How to keep the Taliban out from the government in Kabul was discussed at length by the officials. The crucial IPI pipeline issue also came up during the discussion and Prasad conveyed to the Iranians that India's participation was being prevented solely by its concerns over security and pricing issues. Sources said the security dialogue should be seen in the context of India's efforts to form a potent alliance — comprising "like-minded" countries like Russia and Iran — in dealing with the situation in Afghanistan once the reintegration, as well as reconciliation, process starts to set in. While Russian ambassador to India Alexander M Kadakin said this week that Moscow was "hundred per cent with India" over Afghanistan, New Delhi is expecting similar support from Iran. Like India, Iran maintains that there can't be a good Taliban even though, in a marked departure from India's stand, it favours immediate withdrawal of NATO troops. Despite the traditionally close ties, the two countries have over the past few years drifted apart, a process initiated by India's vote in favour of IAEA's resolution censuring Iran for its nuclear programme. Krishna was slated to visit Iran in February but was forced to back out after Tehran continued to juggle with the dates for the visit. Talking to TOI later, Krishna admitted that India's IAEA vote was an issue between the two countries and that he was trying to "assuage" Tehran's concerns. (Times of India)

US names 5 Indian firms doing business with Iran

The US administration has named India's oil and gas flagship ONGC and Indian Oil Corp (IOC) among the 41 firms worldwide having energy ties with Iran, an act for which it may impose sanctions on them. The United States Government Accountability Office this week released a report 'Firms Reported to Have Commercial Activity in the Iranian Energy Sector and US Government Contracts' listing companies who have energy ties with Tehran. "The Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) provides for sanctions against persons, including foreign firms, who invest more than \$20 million in Iran's energy sector in any 12-month period," the report said. Of the 41 firms named in the report, five are Indian. Besides ONGC and IOC, it names ONGC Videsh Ltd - the overseas investment arm of the state-run explorer, Oil India Ltd and Petronet LNG Ltd. OVL, IOC and OIL explored for oil and gas in Farsi block and proposed investing \$5.5 billion in producing gas from the 21.68 trillion cubic feet discovery they made in the offshore block located near the Saudi Arabian border. Besides, ONGC, OVL, Petronet and Hinduja Group last year signed agreements with Iran to develop one of the 28 phases of the giant South Pars gas field and convert the fuel into LNG for exports at an investment of over \$10 billion. The report, which said the US has not imposed sanctions on any firm for their Iran energy ties

since 1998, also names Hinduja for ties with Iran but lists it as a UK firm. When contacted, ONGC Chairman and Managing Director and OVL Chairman RS Sharma declined comments but a senior official said the Indian firms' business in Iran were in full compliance with the Government of India policy. "Whatever we are doing is fully compliant with the Government of India policy. We have not violated any rule by investing in Iran. In fact, our investment in Iran has not even violated the US law as OVL-IOC-OIL have not invested more than \$20 million in any one year in exploring for oil and gas in Farsi block," the official said. The \$20 million barrier will be broken only when Iran awards them the contract to develop the field or if the Indians made investment in the South Pars fields. "As of now, we only have agreements for Farsi and South Pars Phase-12 development and no investment has gone into the ground," he said. The US and its allies are aggressively pushing for new sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme. The Obama administration is trying to convince foreign firms that it was becoming too politically risky for them to do business with an increasingly isolated Iran. (Times of India)

Ban on LTTE extended by another two years: Govt

Government on Friday extended the ban on LTTE by another two years following intelligence reports that remnants of the Sri Lankan Tamil terror outfit were trying to re-group in Tamil Nadu. According to a notification issued by the Union Home Ministry, even though LTTE has been "decimated in Sri Lanka, recent reports reveal that remnant LTTE cadres and leaders are regrouping in Tamil Nadu". The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has been banned since 1992 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. The outfit which was espousing the cause of a separate Tamil Eelam was vanquished by the Sri Lankan military in May last year. The notification said the possibility of its remnant cadres using India and especially Tamil Nadu as a rear base for their re-grouping activities cannot be ruled out. It also said the possibility of their entering in the guise of Tamil refugees also cannot be ruled out. Sources said LTTE sympathisers were posing a security threat by continuing to spread anti-India propaganda on the Internet accusing the Indian leadership and its officialdom of being responsible for their defeat. They said activities of certain remnant cadres have been noticed in Tamil Nadu and an extension of ban on LTTE was required. As per the procedure, the notification will now reach a Tribunal, which has to ratify it. The group-led by V Prabhakaran had been proscribed as a terrorist organisation by several countries including the United States. The LTTE was involved in the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991 following which it was banned in India in 1992. (Times of India)

Despite Pak protest, India plans civilian trek to Siachen

Notwithstanding Pakistan's vociferous protests earlier, India will organise a civilian mountaineering and trekking expedition to the forbidding Siachen Glacier for the fourth year in a row in October-November this year. "The Siachen trekking expedition this year is in its planning stage and is likely to take place some time in October-November," an Army officer involved in the planning of the trek said. The expedition, which has now become an annual affair, is meant to showcase to the global community that Indian troops hold the Siachen glacial heights and Pakistan is nowhere near the glacier, regarded as the world's highest battlefield. Guns had boomed in the 78-km-long glacier at an altitude of

18,875 feet till November 25, 2003, when a formal ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan came into effect along the 740-km Line of Control (LOC) and 110-km Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL). During this year's expedition, the Army plans to take along 35 civilians including women, journalists, scientists from the DRDO and other glacial studies institutes, and mountaineers from among civilian enthusiasts as well as military training establishments. The participants would be trained in mountaineering, skating and other such skills required to go through the arduous month-long trek to the Glacier, the officer said. They would also be visiting some of the Indian Army positions on their way up the glacier and back. The civilian Siachen expedition had run into a controversy when it began in 2007 after Pakistan lodged a strong protest, calling it "incongruous" to the ongoing peace efforts between the two countries. Though the Army halted the trip immediately after the protest that year, it went ahead with the trekking expedition after a go-ahead was given by the UPA government later. Every year since then, India continued with its Siachen expedition of civilians and mountaineering enthusiasts, even as Pakistan had voiced its concern. Despite protests from Pakistan, India maintains it does not need Islamabad's approval to send trekkers to Siachen, which is essentially in Indian territory. (Times of India)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Social front:

Curb websites circulating pornography, says CJI

Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan on Saturday said the government could place restrictions on websites that exclusively circulated pornography and hate speech, though it would not be right to clamp blanket bans on all types of websites. Addressing a national seminar on the enforcement of cyber law, Justice Balakrishnan said it was also important to distinguish between intermediaries such as network service providers, website operators and individual users for fixing liability for wrongful acts. "Liability cannot be mechanically placed on Internet intermediaries, when it is specific individuals who engage in reprehensible conduct. That would be comparable to punishing the persons who build roads for rash and negligent driving by other persons who operate vehicles on the roads." The distinction between intermediaries and end-users was important because in many cases the websites that ordinarily posted acceptable material also allowed users to circulate content of their own. The investigators should keep themselves abreast with the latest developments in web-based applications so that they could quickly identify the actual perpetrators instead of going after an intermediary, he said. He wanted the Cyber Appellate Tribunal to reflect on the technological and judicial expertise needed to resolve cyber-related disputes. Those who served on the Tribunal must be familiar with the latest developments in Information Technology. Democratic values such as freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association and the freedom to pursue an occupation, business, profession or trade must be promoted in the online domain as well. (The Hindu)

Malegaon, Ajmer, Hyderabad blasts... Joining the dots

During the initial days of the probe into the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast, investigators had found that while the perpetrators had used a stolen number plate on the motorcycle on which the bomb was planted, they had also used a ‘hand grinder’ to try and erase its alphanumeric chassis number. Long hours and days were spent combing through the layers of the metal body to finally figure out the actual number. When the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) team reached the office of LML, which had manufactured the two-wheeler, they were told that the company had stopped manufacturing the model in 2006 and that there were about 3.5 lakh units at the time across the country. The search for the owner of the bike eventually took them to Surat, to the house of Chandrapal Singh Thakur. Thakur said that the motorcycle actually belonged to his daughter. Even as they sat in his house, they were curious about the identity of the woman. As the team struggled with the idea that they might be on the verge of discovering a rare woman terror conspirator, they found that this woman was also a Sadhvi, something the team found a “little too much to handle”. Phone calls were made — the officers to their seniors and Thakur to his daughter who was told to reach home immediately. But Sadhvi Pragya Thakur, now one of the main conspirators of the 2008 Malegaon blast, went straight to Indore, Madhya Pradesh — the same city where all the new investigation trails are now leading in connection with the 2007 Ajmer dargah blast. This April, when the Rajasthan ATS made its first arrests in the Ajmer blast case — a similar nexus emerged. Another investigation down south in Hyderabad, in the May 2007 Mecca Masjid blast case, is also indicating links to Indore and the Hindu extremists it seems to have spawned. For one, at least two accused in the newly emerging network behind the two 2007 blasts, Devendra Gupta and Chandrashekar, have affiliations with Abhinav Bharat, which was founded in 2006 by Lt Col Prasad Purohit — another accused in the Malegaon blast — as an educational trust but was in reality a step to “set up a parallel Hindu state and an armed government”. Investigators said the three cases also seem to have other technical links, such as the common identity proof used to obtain SIM cards for the two 2007 blasts by Indore-based Jharkhand native Gupta. In the Malegaon blast too, the SIM card operations were allegedly taken care of by Indore-based Ramnarayan Kalsangra alias Ramji, who is also accused of having made the bomb in Nashik. The Maharashtra ATS has always maintained that while the conspirators come from diverse backgrounds, the foot-soldiers were essentially from two base camps, operating under Hindutva-preaching NGOs based out of Pune and Indore. While the connections between the Mecca Masjid blast and the Ajmer blast still remains to be completely established, investigators say that a further possible link with Malegaon needs more work and corroboration. In the Malegaon probe, it did not go unnoticed that every time a suspect’s name emerged, the suspect would flee to the safety of the Dangs, Gujarat’s tribal region, where the Maharashtra ATS had camped to track another suspect, Swami Asimanand in October 2008. Last week, the teams probing the Ajmer blast landed in the Dangs. And Asimanand is once again believed to have given them the slip. When the CBI team investigating the Mecca Masjid blast visited Nashik jail to question Purohit and Pragya last week, it was not the first time that an agency investigating another blast in the country had come to talk to them. A Rajasthan Police team had come to question them much earlier, in 2009, to find out if the Ajmer blast, the Mecca Masjid blast and even possibly the Samjhauta Express blast had

anything in common. While the motive for the radical Hindus to allegedly launch attacks is suspected to involve the country's communal history, the targets in all three cases were Muslim places of worship or an Islamic religious event such as the fasting month of Ramadan when Malegaon was targeted. Seeking their custody, investigating agencies had informed the Nashik Chief Judicial Magistrate court that "a series of meetings" had taken place between Sadhvi Pragya Thakur and retired Major Ramesh Upadhyay, also an accused in the Malegaon blast, which needs to be further probed. The remand also speaks of meetings between the Sadhvi, Sameer Kulkarni and Upadhyay, in Indore, along with an important meeting that took place on April 16, 2008, at Bhonsale Military School in Nashik. The Maharashtra Police are now hopeful that a lot of "blanks" will be filled — the key question of "who let the RDX out" to the whereabouts of Ramji, and the suspected conspiracy network of the blasts in 2007 and 2008. (The Indian Express)

Minor radioactive contamination detected at BARC

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre said on Wednesday an incident of minor radioactive contamination was detected in one of its laboratories. The incident which happened on Monday involved minor contamination of the hands of a person, who was involved in the transfer of samples containing radioactive material in a sealed container from one laboratory to another for analysis, Head Media relations R K Sharma said in a release. "The matter was promptly detected by experts and the person who carried the sample to the laboratory was adequately decontaminated and cleared for normal work," he said. Two more personnel who were in the vicinity were also tested and they were found to be free of any contamination. "There was no spillage of the sample and the contamination has been traced to the sample container," Sharma said. "The incident is of very minor nature with no safety consequences," he added. (Times of India)

Justice S H Kapadia sworn in as new Chief Justice of India

Justice S H Kapadia, the most senior judge of the Supreme Court, was on Wednesday sworn in as the 38th Chief Justice of India by President Pratibha Patil. The swearing in of 62-year-old Justice Kapadia at Rashtrapati Bhawan was attended among others by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, his cabinet colleagues, outgoing Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan and other dignitaries. Justice Kapadia, who wants all judges to keep themselves abreast with commercial laws, would remain at the helm of Indian Judiciary till September 29, 2012. He was associated with a historical judgement in which a five-judge Constitutional Bench had held that the law put in the Ninth Schedule was open for judicial review. Justice Kapadia's deep knowledge on wide ranging issues, particularly tax laws, has earned him accolades from the bench and the bar in equal measure. The judge, who is known for maintaining strict judicial discipline, assumes the office at a crucial time when Indian judiciary is hit by a corruption controversy and perceived failure of in-house mechanism on appointment and elevation of judges. For the judge, who during his tenure in the apex court since December 18, 2003 has been associated with 771 judgements, his 28-month term as the CJI would be a challenging one against the backdrop of the need to reducing the mounting pendency of the cases not only in the top court but in high courts and trial courts. However, the real test for Justice Kapadia would be to take a stand on whether or not the office of CJI comes under the ambit of the Right to Information Act as Justice Balakrishnan had consistently maintained that it has

to be kept out of the purview of RTI. The issue assumes importance as the Delhi High Court had dismissed the stand of Justice Balakrishnan after which the Supreme Court Registry appealed to the apex court. In a letter to former Supreme Court Judge V R Krishna Iyer on May 3, Justice Kapadia had said the only asset he possesses is integrity and hoped to fulfill the Constitutional obligations to achieve the goal of "inclusive growth." "I come from a poor family. I started my career as a class IV employee and the only asset I possess is integrity", he had said. Justice Kapadia had said, "Even as a judge of the Supreme Court, I have used my knowledge of accounts and economics for the welfare of the downtrodden including tribals and workmen... "... I hope to fulfill my obligation to the Constitution in the matter of achieving the goal of inclusive growth", he had said in his letter, replying to a congratulatory message from Justice Iyer following his new appointment as CJI. (Times of India)

Kasab may be hanged by year-end

Amid concerns that Ajmal Kasab's hanging may be delayed like many others who were awarded death sentence, the government on Tuesday said the matter would be fast-tracked and he may be hanged by the year-end. Referring to Kasab's death penalty, law minister Veerappa Moily said cases of this kind could always be fast-tracked whether it was in the High Court or in the Supreme Court. Moily was quoted as saying by a TV channel that even the President would speed up the process and Kasab would be hanged soon. A similar statement came from home secretary G K Pillai. "If there is no petition from him (Kasab) challenging the sessions court verdict in the higher court... he can be hanged by the year-end," Pillai was quoted by a news agency. Kasab was awarded capital punishment on May 6 by a Mumbai special court which held him guilty of mass murder and waging war against India, by carrying out the terror strikes in November 2008. The death sentence to Kasab has to be confirmed by the Bombay HC where the matter would come up automatically. Kasab will, however, have right to appeal the HC's view in the SC and subsequently file a mercy petition before the President of India. Many convicts including Parliament attack case convict Afzal Guru have taken this route and thereby have been spared of being hanged for years. (Times of India)

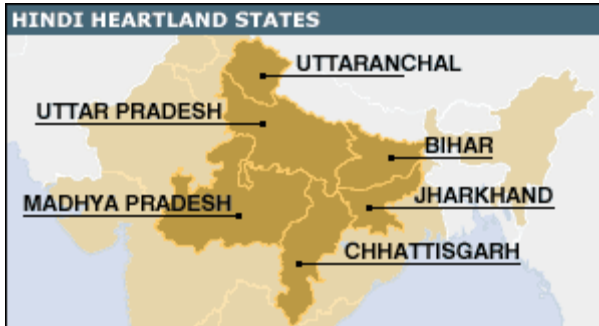
SIT submits report in SC on Modi, Togadia

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged role of Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi in post-Godhra killing of ex-Congress MP Ehasan Jafri on Friday submitted its report to the Supreme Court. The SIT chief and former CBI Director R K Raghavan submitted the report in a sealed cover to the SC registry as directed by the apex court in its May 6 order. The SIT had earlier sought time for submitting the report as it wanted to question VHP International president Praveen Togadia who was last week questioned by the SIT which had earlier questioned Modi and several other persons named in the complaint lodged by the slain MP's wife Zakia. The apex court had on April 27, 2009, asked the SIT to look into the complaint of Zakia about the alleged role of Modi and others in Gulbarg Housing Society killing in which the former MP was burnt alive along with several others during the post Godhra 2002 communal riots in Gujarat. Modi was earlier grilled by the apex court-appointed Special Investigation Team on his alleged role in the 2002 killing of Jafri as the deceased, according to the complaint, had made frantic calls for help to police and the Chief Minister. The Gujarat government had

in a subsequent affidavit in the apex court questioned the SIT's power to summon Modi for interrogation. Earlier on May 6, the Supreme Court had restrained the trial court from pronouncing its judgement in 2002 post-Godhra communal riots cases but refused to stay the ongoing trial, as sought by certain NGOs and rights activists. "The trial court shall proceed with the trial but no judgement shall be pronounced," a bench of Justices D K Jain, P Sathasivam and Aftab Alam had said. The apex court also appointed A K Malhotra, a former DIG of CBI, to verify allegations of lapses in investigations being conducted by the SIT into 2002 Gujarat communal riots. The Bench had passed the direction while dealing with the plea of the NGO Citizen for Justice and Peace of Teesta Setalvad and some rights activists who sought a stay of the trial and sought reconstitution of SIT for its alleged bias. (Times of India)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

Rajya Sabha elections on June 17 for 11 seats in state

The Election Commission of India (EC) has announced the poll schedule for the biennial election to 11 Rajya Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh. Eleven members of the Rajya Sabha from the state will retire on July 4. The notification for the biennial election will be issued on May 31. While the last date for filing nomination papers is June 7, the scrutiny of the papers will be held the next day. Last date for the withdrawal of papers is June 10, and if required, polling will be held on June 17. The 11 Rajya Sabha members retiring on July 4 are Kamal Akhtar, Nand Kishore Yadav, Jaya Bachchan, Bhagwati Singh, Ram Naryan Sahu, Amir Alam Khan and Brij Bhushan Tewari (SP), Ambeth Rajan, Satish Chandra Mishra and Sri Ram Pal (BSP) and Arun Shourie (BJP). Each candidate will need 34 first preference votes to win the seat. The BSP can easily get its six members elected while for winning the seventh seat, it is short of 12 first preference votes. While the SP can win two seats, the BJP can win one seat. The EC also announced the poll schedule for the by-election to the lone Assembly seat, Domariyaganj, in Siddarth Nagar district. The by-election has been necessitated by the death of sitting BSP legislator Taufiq Ahmed. The notification for the election will be issued on May 10. While the last date for filing nominations is May 17, scrutiny of papers will be held the next day. Last date for the withdrawal of papers is May 20. Polling will be held on June 3 and the counting of votes will be taken up on June 7. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

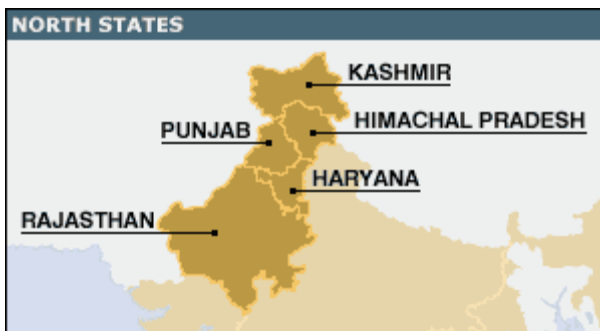
14 yrs after dalit massacre, 3 get death, 20 life sentence

Nearly 14 years after 21 dalits, mostly women, girls and two infants, were massacred by a private militia of landlords in Bhojpur district, a local court on Wednesday awarded capital punishment to three convicts and life imprisonment to 20 others. Additional district and sessions judge A K Shrivastava had on May 5 convicted 23 activists of Ranvir Sena while acquitting 30 others for want of evidence. On Friday, he handed down

capital punishment to Ajay Singh, Manoj Singh and Nagendra Singh. Around 70 Sena activists had raided Bathani Tola village in Bhojpur district in the afternoon on July 11, 1996 when most of the male members were in the fields. The marauding militia men hacked many victims to death while gunning down others. Ranvir Sena, now a defunct outfit, was a private army of goons raised by upper caste landlords to take on CPI-ML (Liberation) Naxalites who were grabbing farmlands and killing big landlords in central parts of then undivided Bihar in late 1980s and 1990s. Ranvir Sena usually targeted dalits because they were regarded as sympathizers of CPI-ML, which has now become a political party. Special public prosecutor Ram Babu said police had chargesheeted 63 people of whom four died during the trial while five others were acquitted by Patna High Court. Two accused, including prime suspect Ranvir Sena chief Brahmeshwar Singh alias Mukhiyaji, are yet to face trial as they had been absconding for long. Mukhiyaji was later arrested. Though granted bail by Patna High Court in Bathani Tola massacre case, he would be soon put on trial, Ram Babu said. The trial began on January 24, 1998 and charges were framed against 63 accused on March 24, 2000. The prosecution produced 13 witnesses, including three doctors and an investigating officer, while the defence brought three witnesses. Arguments in the case started on April 1, 2010, and concluded on April 20, 2010. This is second massacre case in Bihar in which capital punishment has been awarded to Ranvir Sena activists during the last one month. On April 7, a Patna court sent 16 convicts to the gallows and sentenced 10 others to life imprisonment for killing 58 dalits at Laxmanpur-Bathe in Arwal district on December 1, 1997. Nineteen accused were acquitted. (Times of India)

Economic Front:

The North



Politics:

Unhappy Gujjars want nothing less than 5% quota

A faction of the Gujjars on Monday said it would launch a fresh agitation against the one per cent additional quota offered to the community by the government, saying it was not ready to settle for anything less than the 5 per cent separate reservation. All India Gujjar Aarakshan Sangarsh Samiti would hold a 'Mahapanchayat' at Sikandra town of Dausa district on May 13 to decide on the agitation, its chief patron Ramvir Singh Bidhuri told a

press conference here. Strongly condemning the agreement arrived between the state government and Gujjar leader Kirorisingh Bainsla on granting one per cent additional quota, he alleged that Bainsla settled for the accord only for his “personal gains”. “Gehlot-Bainsla accord on one per cent quota within 50 per cent limit is unconstitutional,” Bidhuri said. “Bainsla, who got political mileage by getting Lok Sabha ticket from BJP and important postings for his relatives now ended the Gujjar agitation for ensuring a Rajya Sabha seat for his daughter in the June 17 elections,” Bidhuri alleged. Besides Gujjars, people of Rebari, Gardia Lohar and Banjara communities would also participate in Mahapanchayat to draw the attention of the government, he said. “Gujjars’ sole demand would be 5 per cent separate quota for the community, release of Gujjar prisoners booked for previous agitations, pensions to bereaved families of 72 ‘martyrs’ of the community who fell to police bullets and withdrawal of cases,” Bidhuri insisted. The community had called off its month-long stir on May 5 after the government agreed to accord one per cent more quota to it in addition to the existing four per cent given to them under the OBC category. As per the agreement, since the community is already getting four per cent reservation under the OBC category, they would get one per cent more quota till the High Court completes formalities on their demand for five per cent reservation under the Special Backward Class category. The decision to call off agitation had met with stiff resistance on the same day. (The Indian Express)

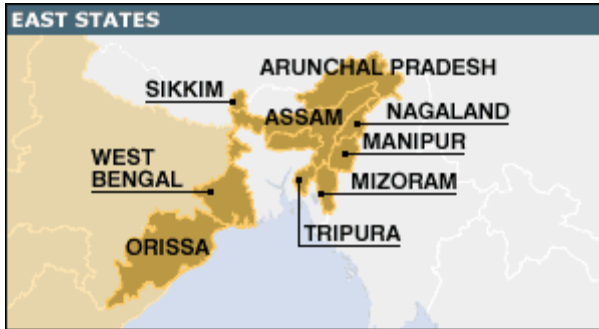
Social front:

'Honour killing' claims two lives in Punjab

In another case of 'honour killing', a woman was murdered on Wednesday in Punjab's Tarn Taran district by her family for marrying against their wishes, police said. Her mother-in-law was also shot dead. The newly-married woman, Gurleen Kaur, bled to death after being attacked with swords at her home in Bahmaniwala village, about 25 km from Amritsar. The family also chased her terrorised husband through the streets and fired at him, seriously injuring him. Gurleen and Aman had married last month against the wishes of the woman's family, police said. Aman is warded in a hospital in Amritsar. The Punjab police have registered a case of murder against 8 relatives of Gurleen. The killers escaped. The couple had the protection of the Punjab and Haryana High Court in Chandigarh when they tied the knot. Honour killings have become commonplace in Punjab. In a suspected case of honour killing, Prabhjot Kaur and Pardeep Singh were shot dead in front of the Government Senior Secondary School in Patti town March 30 after they got married in a court. A newly-married couple was shot dead in Tarn Taran town in January last year by relatives of the girl for marrying against their wishes. The victims, Balkar Singh and Rajinder Kaur, were shot dead separately. (Times of India)

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

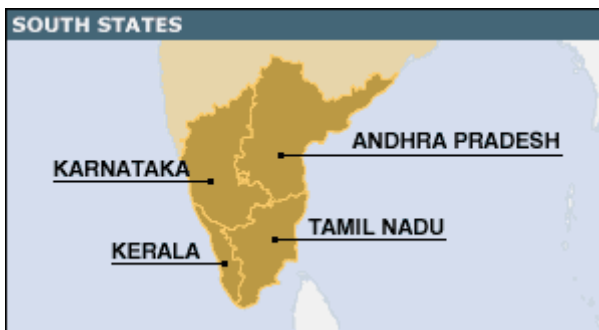
Social front:

4 more government offices torched in Manipur

Four more government offices were torched in Manipur on Sunday night, bringing the total number of offices torched by protesters to 20. Official reports said documents, furniture, computers and other equipment were burnt to ashes. The Naga Students' Federation and the All Naga Students' Association Manipur have been on the agitation path, protesting against the holding of autonomous district council elections and the bar by the Manipur government on the proposed visit to his home village in the State by Nationalist Social Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) leader Thuingaleng Muivah. Government and private hospitals have stopped all operations as there is no medical gas supply owing to the protest. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Social front:

Heat wave claims 26 lives in Andhra Pradesh

The severe heat wave in Andhra Pradesh on Friday claimed 26 lives, taking the toll to 44 in two days, officials said. Almost the entire state is in the grip of a heat wave with the temperatures hovering five to six degrees Celsius above the normal for this time of the year. Hyderabad and most parts of Telangana region were almost like a furnace. As many as 26 deaths due to the heat wave were reported on Friday from 14 of the 23 districts in the state. The scorching heat on Thursday claimed 18 lives. Ramagundam in Khammam district Friday recorded 49 degrees Celsius the highest this season. Adilabad district also recorded 47 degrees. In Hyderabad, the mercury soared to 44 degrees Celsius. The Met Office has warned that the temperature in most parts of the state would remain between 45 to 47 degrees Celsius till the monsoon sets in. The sweltering heat has severely affected normal life in some districts. The streets wore a deserted look as people preferred to remain indoors. In Hyderabad, Chief Minister K. Rosaiah reviewed the situation with top officials of health and disaster management departments. He expressed anguish at the reported sun stroke cases. He directed the departments to take all precautions and steps needed to save people from the scorching heat. Rosaiah asked officials to create awareness among the people to prevent heat strokes by adopting various preventive measures. He also directed district collectors to ensure supply of safe and pure drinking water in all the villages. (Times of India)

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front: