

Business and Politics in Muslim World

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National Summary:

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) criticized government for delaying parliament attack convict Afzal Guru's execution party also accuses government to being soft for home grown terrorists. Advani criticized government for not implementing Sachar Commission's recommendations. 63% Indians feel Congress supremo has more influential than the PM. There is, however, some strong support for the PM with a vast majority giving his work at the top thumbs up. As many as 70% Indians reported "satisfied" with his performance and only 38% said there will be a change at the top before elections scheduled for 2014. The survey, commissioned by a news channel.

The All-India Ulema Mashaikh Board announced that they would vote for a government whether at the Centre or in the state that works for its welfare and listens to its demand for giving them fair representation in the functioning of Muslim organizations. The board wanted Bhagalpur (Bihar) and Sultanpur, Gonda, Kanpur and Ferozabad in UP to be declared as "minority-concentrated districts". Board asked for immediate passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, the board also advocated for fair representation to Muslim women.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Friday submitted in the Supreme Court the final report on the results of its investigation into the role of 63 persons, including Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, in the Gulberg Society massacre case.

After fatwas by Darul Uloom Deoband that it was un-Islamic for women to work in close proximity to men in offices and for her family to accept her earnings, an Islamic seminary has said that education for Muslim girls was not only important, but also mandatory. "Education is mandatory for every Muslim, whether male or female," Maulana Khalid Rasheed Farangi Mahali of Darul Uloom Farangi Mahal said in a fatwa while quoting the Hadees and Sharia

The newly appointed Uttar Pradesh BJP President Surya Pratap Shahi visited the disputed site and vowed to construct a Ram temple there, saying it was a something related to the faith of crores of Hindus.

In a significant development, Punjab authorities have brought to the notice of the Central agencies and also officials of the ministry of home affairs that the communication between khalistanis and Naxalites is increasing in the state.

Naxal leaders refused home minister P Chidambaram fresh offer to hold talks if they "suspend" violence even for just 72 hours. The offer was dismissed by Naxal leader Ramanna who said in Bastar district in Chhattisgarh, "we cannot give up our weapons".

Naxals struck again in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, blowing up a bus and killing at least 36 people, including 12 Special Police Officers (SPOs). At least 14 people were injured.

A total of 880 persons have been killed during last three years in naxal insurgency, who included 356 police personnel, 118 Special Police Officers (SPOs) and home guards, 391 civilians and 15 government servants.

India sought comprehensive reform of international financial institutions to enable enhanced capital flows and infrastructure investment in developing markets, which it said will strengthen recovery from the worst global economic crisis since 1945.

China asked India not to discriminate against Chinese companies and ensure a fair and transparent investment environment to all.

India's rupee completed its worst week since 1995 as tumbling stocks worldwide fueled concern the debt crisis in Europe will undermine the global economic recovery. The rupee's 5.5 percent loss since April 30, the second- worst performance among Asian currencies, more than erased its gains during the first four months of 2010.

India's benchmark stock index fell, on course for its worst month since January, as Europe's sovereign debt crisis and rising U.S. jobless claims prompted investors to withdraw funds from riskier assets. Sterlite Industries (India) Ltd., the largest copper producer, dropped 1.6 percent as metal prices tumbled. Wipro Ltd., India's third-largest software-services provider, declined to the lowest in two weeks.

In a bid to step up strategic ties with the Gulf, India on Tuesday decided to expand its bilateral military cooperation with Oman in fields ranging from maritime security and anti-piracy measures to joint training and combat exercises.

The death toll from a powerful cyclone that slammed into southeastern India, toppling power lines and triggering landslides, has climbed to 23, a top official said. The storm plunged a large swath of coastal Andhra Pradesh state into darkness when it hit Thursday packing winds of 60 miles (100 kilometers) per hour. The storm made landfall near Bapatla, about 250 miles (400 kilometers) southeast of Hyderabad, and waves as high as 9 feet (3 meters) lashed the coast. Even before the cyclone hit, some parts of the state had received up to 1 foot (32 centimeters) of rain. Officials said at least 23 people have died since Wednesday. At least 55 fishermen were reported missing, although authorities had ordered fishing vessels to stay in port. State welfare agencies evacuated more than 50,000 people from low-lying villages ahead of the storm.

More than three years after the blasts on the India-Pakistan Samjhauta Express as it passed through Haryana, CBI Director Ashwani Kumar indicated that the agency was looking at similarities in the blasts on the train with the ones in Ajmer and Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad. "The link between Mecca Masjid, Samjhauta and Ajmer blasts is that the bombs had the same arming devices and these were procured from Indore," Ashwani Kumar told.

Regional Summary:

Ending three weeks of impasse in Jharkhand, the BJP on Tuesday announced a rotational plan for the state: BJP with its allies, JMM and All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU), will share power for 28 months each with the BJP having the first shot at power.

Ruling out any political understanding with Mayawati-led BSP, Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday hinted that Congress may go it alone in the 2012 assembly polls in the state.

West Bengal chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee rejected Trinamool Congress' demand for advancing 2011 Assembly elections in the state, saying it was only the state government which could make a recommendation in the matter.

Jewellers in Ahmedabad reported a good business on Sunday on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya considered auspicious to bring home wealth as gold sale crossed the Rs 20-crore mark.

National Report

Politics:

Government soft on home-grown terrorists: BJP

BJP alleged that the clean chit to two suspected Indian accomplices of 26/11 convict Ajmal Kasab and the delay in hanging Parliament attack culprit Afzal Guru was fast giving India the reputation of being soft on home-grown terrorists. BJP's reaction came amid media reports that the Delhi government led by Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit was sitting over a status report demanded by Ministry of Home Affairs on a mercy petition filed by Afzal's wife on his behalf. "Is the Delhi government pro-terror or does it think Afzal Guru was a tourist or a nationalist and feels he is not guilty? If yes, then it should openly say so ... We want a clarification from the Prime Minister on the manner in which Afzal is being given relief," BJP spokesperson Rajiv Pratap Rudy said. It also sought a clarification from the Delhi government on the issue. Reports in the media suggested that the Home Ministry had sent the report to the Delhi government four years ago but the latter had not taken any action despite two reminders. The main opposition maintained that the people were closely watching this "appeasement politics" of the Congress-led government. Rudy alleged the action of the government in the whole issue was becoming "questionable". BJP also alleged that the Indian government was giving a softer treatment to home-grown terrorists unlike Kasab who was given a death sentence. "After Ajmal Kasab's conviction and with the prosecution failing to provide evidence against his two Indian accomplices Fahim Ansari and Sabahuddin Ahmed, there is a world-wide belief that Indian laws are different for those who are Indian terrorists and those who come from outside," Rudy said. BJP sought to paint Afzal's case in a similar light. Rudy alleged that there was a growing perception that India did not want to punish home-grown terrorists and asked the Prime Minister to come clear on the issue. The party's newly appointed Delhi BJP president Vijendra Gupta accused Dikshit of "playing politics" in clearing the file pertaining to the mercy-petition of Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru. He told reporters that the party will launch an agitation in the city if her government does not complete the process within next two days. "The chief minister is playing politics over this serious issue. Her government has been sitting over the file for last four years," Gupta said. He said BJP workers would protest at the residence of Dikshit if the file pertaining to Guru's mercy petition was not cleared in next two days. Gupta sought to know the reasons for the time taken on clearing the file and said the people have a right to know it. BJP's reaction on the issue came after the Union Home Ministry in yet another reminder to Delhi government sought its opinion on the mercy petition of Guru, who has been sentenced to death. Afzal Guru was awarded death by a local court on December 18, 2002 after being convicted of conspiracy to attack the Parliament on December 13, 2001, waging war against India and murder. The death sentence was upheld by Delhi High Court on October 29, 2003 and his appeal was rejected by the Supreme Court two years later on August four, 2005. The sentence was stayed after Guru filed a mercy petition to the President. (The Indian Express)

Advani counters govt on plight of Muslims in Gujarat

In a move aimed at embarrassing the government on the report of the Sachar Committee set up by it to study the plight of the Muslims, BJP leader Mr LK Advani wrote in his blog that the facts regarding Muslims in Gujarat compared to those in other parts of the country “clearly shows that the Muslims of Gujarat are progressing well in the field of education. They are provided ample opportunities and they are well cared for. The facts on their economic conditions dispel similar myths about their being discriminated against or being denied equal opportunity.” Supporting his contention with figures, Mr Advani says that the report running into over 400 pages states that literacy level of Muslims in Gujarat stood at 73.5 percent as compared to the national average of 59.1. While the figure for the urban males was 76, it was 81 for those living in rural areas as compared to the national average of 70 and 62 respectively in similar category. The high powered committee set up in 2006 by Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, headed by Mr Justice Rajinder Sachar to make a detailed study of the economic, social and educational conditions of Muslims in the country states even Muslim women in the urban areas of Gujarat have average literacy rate 5 point higher than the national average whereas their counterparts in rural areas of Gujarat fare even better with a literacy rate of 57 percent as compared to the national average of 43 in similar category. On the economic well-being of Muslims in Gujarat, Advani writes in his blog that here also, the Sachar Committee dispels the myth. In terms of per month per capita income, Muslims in the urban areas of Gujarat earn an average Rs 875 which is more than the national average of Rs 804. In contrast, it is Rs 662 in UP, Rs 748 in West Bengal, Rs 811 in Punjab, Rs 803 in Andhra Pradesh and Rs 837 in Karnataka. In terms of people living below poverty line, Gujarat had 54% Muslims living below it in 1987-88 while the figure stood at 34% in 2004-2005 showing a healthy pace of improvement. (The Statesman)

Afzal hanging: BJP slams Delhi govt for delay

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Wednesday hit out at the Delhi government for delaying parliament attack convict Afzal Guru's execution and claimed that 26/11 may not have happened had he been hanged earlier. BJP spokesperson Prakash Javadekar said: "Had they done it (execution) five years back, the world would have realised what India does to those who carry out terrorist activities. And may be even 26/11 would not have happened." While backing the Supreme Court decision to hang Guru, the Delhi government has expressed concerns about the law and order situation in the wake of his execution. To this, Javadekar retorted: "This is an insult of Muslim patriotism. We condemn it. The Delhi government should give an unconditional recommendation." BJP vice president Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi also backed Javadekar's view. "The Delhi government has abused the patriotism of crores of Muslim," Naqvi said. "Guru is a terrorist responsible for violence in India. Both Hindus and Muslims want him hanged immediately," added Naqvi, a statement said. Guru was given death penalty by a Delhi court Dec 18, 2002 after holding him guilty of conspiring to attack parliament Dec 13, 2001, waging war against the country and murder. The Supreme Court rejected Aug 4, 2005 his appeal against the death sentence, which was upheld by the Delhi High Court Oct 29, 2003. A sessions court set the date of his hanging Oct 20, 2006 in Tihar Jail but his wife Tabassum filed a mercy petition before the president, delaying his execution.

According to the laid down procedure, the president sought the home ministry's views on the mercy petition and the home ministry, in turn, sought the Delhi government's comments. (Times of India)

PM scores well, but Sonia's boss, says survey

Sonia Gandhi is more powerful than Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. While it may not be news in the UPA scheme of things as they have unfolded since the Congress chief renounced the top post, a survey on the completion of the first year of UPA-2 has found that 63% Indians feel Congress supremo has more clout than the PM. There is, however, some strong support for the PM with a vast majority giving his work at the top thumbs up. As many as 70% Indians reported "satisfied" with his performance and only 38% said there will be a change at the top before elections scheduled for 2014. The survey, commissioned by a news channel, does not diverge much from the known arrangement where the Congress chief is seen as the strong hand behind the political arrangement run by the party. While there is no doubt about her being the force behind UPA, there is also an acceptance of the fact that PM Singh is an executive head. The survey sought to assess the national mood as the central government moves towards completing its first year in its second term. While BJP is in a shambles as opposition party, the survey has mostly focused on the power equations and the choice before the country presented by the Congress. Rahul Gandhi seems to be making a strong march towards the leadership stakes. Around half of the respondents said that the scion of the Gandhi family would make a better prime minister than the incumbent. At the same time, 55% said that Rahul should be the next prime minister. Around 25% replied in the negative. The survey found an interesting 77% respondents as backing the women's reservation bill as a positive step. In fact, 56% felt that women make better leaders than men. (Times of India)

Hindus face reservation threat: BJP

BJP will launch a major 'awakening Campaign' in July to highlight the 'threat' facing Hindu students due to reservation for minorities (read Muslims) and monthly Education (Financial) assistance (EFA), party's Tamil Nadu president Pon Radhakrishnan said. During the campaign from July 4-31, the party will press for similar EFA for Hindu BCs, SCs, STs and MBCs, he told reporters here after the party's State Executive Committee meeting. Government was giving Rs.350 as EFA for minority school students (doing 5th-10th std),and Rs.500 for vocational course students. Besides other concessions on tuition fee were being given to the minority students. On an average each student was being given Rs.35,000 a year, he claimed. He alleged that Government was encouraging conversions by such moves. The DMK, which started a big agitation on a "non-issue like "Anti-Hindi" agitation, which ultimately affected Tamil students, should now help the Backward,SC and ST people and get them the EFA, he said. "There are economically and socially backward people in majority Hindu community also, who were not able to pursue education like minorities, who should be helped", he said. (The Indian Express)

Minorities' Issues:

Sunnis for women's quota Bill

A gathering of Sunni Muslims announced that they would vote for a government whether at the Centre or in the state that works for its welfare and listens to its demand for giving them fair representation in the functioning of Muslim organisations. The All-India Ulema Mashaikh Board general secretary Maulana Syed Mohammad Ashraf said: "We must not let political parties take us for granted. Now, the governments at the Centre and in the states must listen to our demands." The board wanted Bhagalpur (Bihar) and Sultanpur, Gonda, Kanpur and Ferozabad in UP to be declared as "minority-concentrated districts". The 21-point demands of the Sunni board included the Centre's intervention in protecting Muslim places of worship in Saudi Arabia, passing of the Central Madarsa Bill with amendments, fair representation in Muslim bodies and announcement of six holidays during Urs in Ajmer Sharif. Besides asking for immediate passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, the board also advocated for fair representation to Muslim women. (The Indian Express)

Gujarat riots: SIT submits report to SC

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Friday submitted in the Supreme Court the final report on the results of its investigation into the role of 63 persons, including Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, in the Gulberg Society massacre case. SIT chief R K Raghavan submitted the report to the apex court registry. The team had in an earlier hearing sought time for submitting the report as it wanted more time to question VHP International president Praveen Togadia and incorporate the information so received. The probe team had started its investigation into the case after the Supreme Court in April 27, 2009 asked it to "look into" a complaint filed by ex-Congress MP Ehsan Jafri's widow, Zakia, on the alleged collusion of the state machinery with rioters during the post-Godhra killings for almost two days. The very order of the Supreme Court Bench led by Justice (ret'd) Arijit Pasayat to involve the SIT is now under challenge, and is being termed "illegal" by one of the accused, former BJP MLA Kalu Maliwad, who is represented by senior advocate Ram Jethmalani. Jethmalani has consistently argued that the April 2009 order was passed without prior notice sent to any of the accused or without giving them an opportunity to be heard. But this did not prevent the SIT from summoning Modi for a six-hour session of questioning on his alleged role in the killing of Jafri in 2002, who allegedly had made frantic calls for help to police and the Chief Minister. Even the Gujarat government had joined the bandwagon, by complaining that it had not been taken into confidence and was not in possession of the SIT's investigation reports. The state government was later supplied with the documents and had in turn filed an affidavit about how certain civil rights activists were tutoring witnesses, including Zakia, to lodge complaints against the state police. The report also comes in the background of accusations of lapses and bias levelled against the SIT members in the investigation of the riots cases, and also the quitting of one state public prosecutor and the firing of another. The SC is currently seized with demands for the reconstitution of the probe team. (The Indian Express)

Now, a fatwa against birthday celebration!

In a fresh fatwa, Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband has said that Islam does not permit celebrating birthdays. Responding to a query posed by a woman, the country's biggest Islamic seminary observed that the tradition to celebrate birthdays was started by the Jews and Christians, but Islam does not permit this practice. The Darul Uloom Deoband has in recent days issued edicts declaring that working in banks and opting for an insurance policy was against the tenets of Islam, sparking a debate. The seminary had also decreed that it was illegal according to the Sharia or Islamic law for a woman to work and for a family to accept a woman's earnings. Leading Islamic body Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind's spokesman Abdul Hameed Nomani had maintained that fatwas should not be generalised and should be seen in the context in which they have been issued. "People must read between the lines and not generalise the fatwas," Nomani had said. (The Indian Express)

Educate Muslim girls, urges latest fatwa

After fatwas by Darul Uloom Deoband that it was un-Islamic for women to work in close proximity to men in offices and for her family to accept her earnings, an Islamic seminary has said that education for Muslim girls was not only important, but also mandatory. "Education is mandatory for every Muslim, whether male or female," Maulana Khalid Rasheed Farangi Mahali of Darul Uloom Farangi Mahal said in a fatwa while quoting the Hadees and Sharia. The fatwa was issued in reply to a query posted by Huma Khawaja seeking clarification on girl's education, the Darul Uloom's secretary Naeemurrehman said. The fatwa also stated that 'man has come into this world for enlightenment and for spreading knowledge in society.' "A man who gets his daughters and sisters educated, teaches them etiquette, treats them well and marries them off would go to heaven," it added. The fatwa said Islam not only promoted education for one's own children, but even for servants. "As the mother is close to her children, being educated is very important for her," it said. It said from the quotes of the Hadees that it was evident much importance had been given to the issue of women's education. "It is mandatory for every Muslim to ensure proper education to his daughter at any cost," it said. (Times of India)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

Avoid unnecessary use of English: Ex-RSS chief

Former RSS chief K Sudershan on Saturday asked people to avoid "unnecessary" use of English, an essence of the British rule, which is relegating the national language Hindi. "While the British rule was pushed out of the country with the great sacrifices by martyrs like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, the essence of the British rule (English language) is yet to go away," Sudershan said paying tributes to martyr Sukhdev on his 103rd birth anniversary. "The greatest tribute to the martyrs would be to adopt the Indian culture and our own language which is being relegated to secondary position in preference to English," the former chief of the right wing group said. Sudershan also expressed concern over rising drug abuse in Punjab and called for involvement of youth in constructive purposes to prevent them from falling prey to this menace. (The Indian Express)

UP BJP chief vows to build Ram temple

The newly appointed Uttar Pradesh BJP President Surya Pratap Shahi on Friday visited the disputed site and vowed to construct a Ram temple there, saying it was a something related to the faith of crores of Hindus. "BJP is committed to the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya as it is a matter of faith and belief of crores of Hindus and not a political agenda of the party," Shahi told newsmen after offering prayers at the site. The day BJP forms its government both at the Centre and in the state, the path for construction of Ram temple would be cleared, he said. The BJP leader, who also visited the 'Hanuman Garhi' temple said the emotions of crores of people had led to the demolition of the structure on December 6, 1992 and no particular party should be blamed for it. Shahi, who was made UP BJP chief on May 12, said he had been assigned the responsibility of the biggest state in the country during politically trying times and he had come here to seek the blessings of Lord Ram before embarking upon the task given to him. Alleging that there was 'Ravan Raj' (Ravan's rule), both at the Centre and in the state with "insensitive" governments, Shahi said rampant corruption, inflation and terrorism have left the people frustrated. Lashing out at his political opponents, Shahi said that despite publicly criticising each other, Congress, Samajwadi Party and the BSP had a tacit understanding and cited the support given by the latter two to the former during the cut motion in the Lok Sabha to make his point. "All these parties are befooling the people of the state and country in the name of opposing each other," the state BJP chief said adding that the BJP was the only alternative to the Congress. He also charged the three parties with indirectly encouraging communal forces by advocating pseudo secularism. Holding the Congress responsible for rise in Naxal violence, Shahi said while running the government with the help of Left parties during its last tenure, UPA had desisted from taking action against them which helped the Maoists gain strength and accused the Union government of still not taking strict measures to combat the menace. To a question, Shahi said like the Congress, Samajwadi Party too has been promoting family members. Refuting reports of factionalism in the state unit of the party, Shahi said he would take every one along with him to strengthen the party. "Those who work dedicatedly to strengthen the party would be entitled for a ticket in the 2012 assembly elections," he said before leaving for Varanasi. (The Indian Express)

Insurgency Movements:

Hints of growing alliance between Naxals and Khalistanis in Punjab

In a significant development, Punjab authorities have brought to the notice of the Central agencies and also officials of the ministry of home affairs that the sudden spurt in the appearance of pro-Naxal posters in the border state is part of a growing alliance between the Naxals and people owing allegiance to the now-dormant "Khalistan movement" in the state. Sources in the ministry confirmed that reports about a sudden spurt in the activities of the Naxals had been originating from Punjab as well as Uttarakhand. Punjab police officers have quoted examples of how meetings have taken place between a group of elements referred to as the "pro-Khalistan" lobby and the Naxal ideologue. They have ruled out the hand of the workers of any of the deras small spiritual groups that dot the

rural landscape in Punjab and also the neighbouring Haryana. Though the basic grouping between the two sides does not match due to divergence in philosophy, the use of the loosely assembled cadres of either to foment trouble could be ruled out. The Punjab police in its assessment shared with the Central agencies have quoted the example of how a Punjab resident has been attending Naxal meetings in central India where gun-toting Naxalites hold entire villages under their thumb. A top source said that Naxal ideologue Kobad Gandhi, who is under arrest, had revealed during interrogation that Punjab was a fertile ground to “start a struggle”. Pro-Naxal movement posters have appeared during the past few days in various towns of Ferozepur, Mansa and Bathinda districts. The worrying point, said sources, is that unlike the 1980s or the 1990s, when the Punjab police unleashed a reign of terror on the Khalistanis, the same methods cannot be adopted at this age when the media is so powerful and the human rights groups raise issues. Claiming that Naxalites were trying to spread their network in Punjab, former chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh warned that Naxalism can raise its head in the state. “Naxals are trying to have their presence which can turn into a major law and order problem in the state,” he said. (The Statesman)

We cannot give up our weapons: Naxal leader to Chidambaram

A day after Naxals unleashed another attack in Chattisgarh, home minister P Chidambaram on Tuesday made a fresh offer to hold talks if they "suspend" violence even for just 72 hours but the Left-wing extremists rejected it. The offer was dismissed by Naxal leader Ramanna who said in Bastar district in Chhattisgarh, "we cannot give up our weapons". He said the Naxal's had responded to the Home Minister's earlier offer for talks. "But the government did not believe us. There is a heavy presence of security forces and their atrocities are continuing every day," he said. Ramanna said the attack on the civilian bus in Dantewada district was aimed at Special Police Officers who were travelling on it. Several passengers including SPOs were killed when their bus blown up by the Naxals. "The administration used civilians as human shields, so they got killed. But I regret this," he said. "Maoists should say 'We will abjure violence. We will suspend violence and actually suspend violence for 72 hours'. We will get the Chief Ministers on board. We will respond. We will fix a date, time and place for talks and let the Maoists come for the talks on anything they wish to talk," Chidambaram said. Chidambaram contended that the CPI(Maoist) never responded "seriously" to the earlier offer of talks. "They are indulging in gimmickery I am afraid media plays up that gimmick," he said. Asked whether government forces will also halt all operations against them during the period of ceasefire, the Home Minister responded, "That goes without saying". Chidambaram said "if they observe complete suspension of violence for just 72 hours, it goes without saying that police will not take any action against any CPI(Maoist) activist, hideouts or camps." He said complete suspension means there should not be any attack on infrastructure, any landmine blast or any targeting of telephone towers. (Times of India)

Reds strike again in Dantewada

Naxals struck again in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, blowing up a bus and killing at least 36 people, including 12 Special Police Officers (SPOs). At least 14 people were

injured. The passenger bus, which was on its way from Sukma to Dantewada, was blown up by the Maoists between Gadiras to Bhusaras near Chingavaram village, using an improvised explosive device (IED) made with gelatin sticks. The bus was thrown several feet due to the impact of the explosion and body parts of the victims were strewn all along the roadside. State police chief Mr Viswa Ranjan said about 100 SPOs had gone to Dantewada on 15 May for an anti-Naxal operation. Some of them returned by the bus. Under the standard operating procedures, the security personnel have been advised not to use civilian vehicles. The attack came a day before the Maoists' call for a 48-hour bandh in five states, including Chhattisgarh, in protest against the security operations launched against them by the Centre. Strongly condemning the attack, Union home secretary Mr GK Pillai said the killing of innocent civilians showed "wanton disregard" for life by Naxals. "This pattern of killing unarmed civilians has been the hallmark of Maoist violence over the years. In the last two days, we have seen that a village sarpanch and five others were killed," Mr Pillai said. He said seven persons were injured and have been rushed to hospital where their condition is serious. Chhattisgarh chief minister Mr Raman Singh said the attack showed the desperation of the Naxals who were losing their support base. "This incident shows the cruel face of Naxals. We have been saying this... when the Naxals support base finishes they resort to such methods. Their (Naxals) belief in people's representatives and local population has finished," he said. Mr Raman Singh later said he will press the Centre to re-examine the strategy to deal with the Naxals in the wake of the extremists targeting civilians in a big way. (The Statesman)

Maoists are biggest terrorists: Chhattisgarh CM

Terming Naxals as the biggest terrorists, Chhattisgarh chief minister Raman Singh on Wednesday said there cannot be a "soft line" to deal with Maoists but disfavoured use of air power to combat the menace. Attributing the recent spur in the Naxal violence to frontal operations by the security forces in the state, Singh favoured a long-term action joint action plan with the Centre to tackle the problem. Singh is in the capital to meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and deputy chairman of Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia two days after the Naxal attack in Dantewada left 35 people dead including 14 SPOs. Giving details of Naxal activities in the last 10 years in Chhattisgarh, he said the ultras have killed more than 1000 civilians and more than 650 policemen besides blowing up 132 electric towers, 106 school buildings and three hospitals in the state. "Who else can be termed as terrorists? They are the biggest terrorists....Naxalism is a biggest challenge to democracy. They want to capture power at gunpoint," the chief minister said. "There cannot be a softline (towards Naxals)...What have we achieved in the last 60 years by adopting a softline?" he asked. He also disfavoured use of air power, saying "it is not possible to go for bombing in those areas which are covered by dense forest. The army helicopter can be used only for rescue and relief operations." Replying to a question on use of air power, Singh said, "Bombing a village is not possible. You have the tribals staying there." The chief minister said the "real face" of Maoists has been exposed. "They are blowing up infrastructure facilities like railway stations and electric lines. What kind of revolution are they talking about," Singh said. He also sought to clear the air on the allegation that area domination operations by the security forces was aimed at giving a free run to multinational companies to mine in Bastar region. "The mining is done by MMTC and SAIL and no other private company is involved in iron ore mining,"

he said. He said the propaganda being spread by Maoists that Bastar is being vacated for a mining purposes "is wrong" and so are their claims on land reforms. Singh said there was a change in Naxal strategy from waging guerrilla warfare to mobile war. "There is no last word on the strategy to be adopted against Maoists. We also have to change our strategy," he said. Appealing to the people to join in the fight against Naxals, he said, "There should be no delay." The Naxals, he said, were carrying out the killings with impunity. (Times of India)

Enemy within: 60,000 lives lost to subversion in 20 years

Nearly 60,000 people have lost their lives in bloodshed unleashed by various armed groups trying to subvert and destroy the Indian republic, in the past two decades. This horrific trail of violence has consumed the lives of nearly 22,000 civilians, over 8500 personnel of security forces and about 27,000 terrorists or insurgents. The latest massacre of civilians travelling in a bus in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh is the latest in this continuing dance of death. While the epicenter of terrorist violence continues to be Jammu & Kashmir where terrorists from across the border are the propelling force to violence, the North-Eastern states, especially Manipur and Assam are also a seething arena for diverse ethnic separatists. J&K has seen nearly 37,000 deaths in the nearly two decade old insurgency. Nearly a third of the fatalities in J&K are of civilians. The proportion of deaths of security personnel is about 15% of all deaths in the state. These figures based on compilations from press reports by South Asia Terrorism Portal may be slightly on the lower side. In 2008, SS Kapur, Kashmir's chief secretary had estimated that the death toll in J&K was about 47,000, reports Reuters. The seven northeastern states (excluding Sikkim, which is not afflicted with such violence) have seen nearly 18,000 deaths since 1994. This includes nearly 9000 civilians and a very high toll of security personnel at 2221, that is, over 12% of all insurgency related deaths in the region. Left extremist violence, mostly led by the Maoists, has flared up in recent years extracting a heavy toll from the people. After the 2004 merger of the Maoists and the People's War Group two of the most dreaded and violent formations active in the eastern forested areas of country Naxalite initiated violence has taken over 4000 lives, including nearly 1600 hapless civilians and over 1100 security personnel. This violence though directed against the state and aiming for its overthrow, does not have separatist aspirations like in J&K and the northeast. Recent years have also seen a spike in terrorist violence directed against civilians in several states through overt acts of terror like the 26/11 massacre in Mumbai, and bomb blasts in several cities. Such violence has taken a toll of nearly 1300 lives in the past 16 years, spread over several states like Maharashtra, Delhi, UP, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana etc. Most security analysts believe that religious bigotry, ethnic chauvinism and sheer banditry are driving these violent activities, poverty, unemployment and deprivation are used by insurgent groups to harness support from people in the affected areas. In Kashmir, cross border support is also a prominent factor in the continued bloodshed. (Times of India)

Mixed response to 5-state bandh call

The 48-hour bandh called by the Maoists protesting security operations against them in five states Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand evoked mixed response on the first day on Tuesday. The Maoists massacred more than 40 people,

including civilians and children, in Chhattisgarh on Monday. There were no blasts on rail tracks as has been a usual feature during the past bandh calls. Bandh was peaceful in Jharkhand, barring a minor incident of a tractor being set on fire at Latehar. Though life in Ranchi and Jamshedpur weren't hit, public transport stayed off the road and shops had shutters down in the rural areas of the state. In Gumla, mining and transportation activity came to a halt, leading to a loss of around Rs 100 crore. Six trains passing through Palamu section were diverted and eight others cancelled. In Chakradharpur division, the speed of the trains was reduced. Jharkhand DGP Neyaz Ahmed said, "Police are ready to tackle any untoward incident. Patrolling has been intensified along the border and other sensitive areas of the state." No untoward incident was reported from Maoists-hit districts of Bihar like Gaya, Aurangabad, Jamui and Muzaffarpur. But roads wore deserted look and shops were shut. Life was paralyzed in Maoist-dominated three districts of West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia in West Bengal. At Madhupur village near Lalgarh in West Midnapore, an IED explosion was reported but no one was injured. (Times of India)

Cops shouldn't have used public bus: Arundhati

A day after 50 civilians were killed in the latest Maoist attack, author-activist Arundhati Roy came up on Tuesday with a qualified condemnation. Referring to the media reports that Maoists had targeted and killed civilians in Dantewada, Roy said, "If this is true, it is absolutely inexcusable and cannot be justified on any count." For somebody who had recently raised a controversy by describing Maoists as "Gandhians with a gun", Roy alleged that sections of the media had "often been biased and incorrect in their reportage." The reason she cited for her being unsure about the nature of the victims was some media accounts suggesting that apart from special police officers and police, "the other passengers in the bus were mainly those who had applied to be recruited as SPOs". Pointing out the need for more information, Roy said, "If there were indeed civilians in the bus it is irresponsible of the government to expose them to harm in a war zone by allowing police and SPOs to use public transport." In a bid to put the event in perspective, she added "right at this moment, in Kalinganagar and Jagatsingpur in Orissa, hundreds of cops are firing on unarmed people protesting the corporate takeover of their land." (Times of India)

Chidambaram makes fresh offer for talks with Naxals

A day after Maoists killed at least 26 civilians, including women and children, in an attack on a bus in Dantewada, home minister P Chidambaram threw down the peace gauntlet before the ultras calling on them to cease violence for at least 72 hours so that a dialogue could be initiated. The "challenge" came as the home minister looked keen to drive home the point that while the government has not shunned dialogue something a section of civil society activists have accused it of it was for the Maoists to demonstrate their sincerity to any sort of peaceful resolution. With BJP attacking him for appearing "martyred and injured", Chidambaram appealed to all political parties to maintain a bipartisan approach in dealing with the Red ultras. On dialogue, he told a TV channel, "Maoists should say they will suspend violence and actually suspend violence from any date they fix for 72 hours... We will get the chief ministers on board. We will respond. We will fix a date, time and place for talks and let the Maoists come and talk on anything they wish to talk." The home minister had placed a similar offer before the ultras three

months ago, but there was no response. Rather, the Naxalites had stepped up attacks since February and killed over 140 persons including civilians in Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal. Stating that CPI (Maoist) never responded "seriously" to the offer of talks, Chidambaram said: "They are indulging in gimmickery. I am afraid media plays up that gimmick. I make the offer now. Let anyone who is hearing this take note." Asked whether government forces will also halt all operations against them during the period of ceasefire, he said, "That goes without saying." He said: "If they observe complete suspension of violence for just 72 hours, it goes without saying that police will not take any action against any CPI (Maoist) activist, hideouts or camps." He elaborated that complete suspension means there should not be any attack on infrastructure, any landmine blast or any targeting of telephone towers. His remarks came on a day when the home ministry took stock of the ongoing anti-Naxal operation and alerted five states Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal -- to remain extra vigilant in view of the 'bandh' being observed by the ultras on Tuesday-Wednesday. Chidambaram, while seeking support of political parties in handling the Red menace, said the state governments have the primary responsibility to tackle the situation. "I would urge BJP and other political parties to continue to maintain as far as possible a bipartisan spirit and approach to dealing with this challenge to India's security," he told reporters here. Reacting to BJP leader Arun Jaitley's statement that he (Chidambaram) looked like an "injured martyr" and was given a "limited mandate" in taking tougher action against Naxals, the home minister said: "I think it was an unfortunate choice of words. If he had reflected for a moment, he would not have used those words. The injured and the martyrs are both in Chhattisgarh among the jawans and the SPOs who were injured and died." The home minister said as far as the mandate of central government was concerned, he had already explained it and its mandate was to help the state governments to meet the challenge of Naxalites by providing paramilitary forces, intelligence and tactical assistance. "It is the state governments which have the primary responsibility to tackle the menace of Naxalism. It is in that sense that I said that our mandate is a limited mandate. But if you play upon words like limited mandate, I could turn around and say that it is the state governments and the chief ministers who have an unlimited mandate," he said. (Times of India)

Naxals killed 474 security men, 391 civilians in last 3 years, SC told

The barbaric killing of civilians by Maoists in Chhattisgarh on Monday may have generated shockwaves, but it was certainly not a one-off instance of the extremists targeting unarmed non-combatants. In fact, the Maoists had already killed 391 civilians in a space of just three years when they blew up the bus. The chilling statistic is part of the report the Chhattisgarh government submitted to the Supreme Court just days after the April 6 massacre of 76 security personnel in Dantewada by Maoists. The report put the number of security personnel killed till then by the Left extremists in the state in the same period at a huge 474. "The state is going through the worst phase of Maoist violence," the Raman Singh government told the SC this month while responding to a PIL filed by sociology professor Nandini Sundar, historian Ramachandra Guha and retired bureaucrat E A S Sharma, who had sought a ban on the anti-Naxal militia 'Salwa Judum' and prosecution of its activists for alleged excesses. Reporting incidents of Naxal attacks in Dantewada, Bijapur, Kanker, Rajnandgaon, Dhamtari, Bastar, Narayanpur, Balrampur

and Durg districts, the state gave a break-up of casualties for the last three years upto April 30 this year. A total of 880 persons have been killed, who included 356 police personnel, 118 Special Police Officers (SPOs) and home guards, 391 civilians and 15 government servants. With Monday's landmine blast claiming 31 more lives, the toll has now crossed 900. What is equally troubling is the cache of arms amassed by Naxals after their successful attacks on security forces. Naxals not only picked up the best of the weapons -- INSAS rifles, Ak-47s, SLRs, LMGs and mortars -- but also removed bulletproof jackets from the bodies of security men and distributed them among the leading cadre. The PIL petitioners had alleged that the government's relief and rehabilitation measures were shoddy and half-hearted in the Naxal-affected areas where the civilians were caught in the cross-fire between the security forces and Maoists. The state, in its affidavit filed through standing counsel Atul Jha, had detailed the developmental measures taken in every affected district in addition to the compensation scheme implemented in those areas. It said: "The success of the relief and rehabilitation measures initiated by the state and the central government has been widely appreciated by the victims except the Maoists and their urban sympathizers." "From reliable sources it is learnt that the Maoists have instructed their cadres and sympathizers to attack the relief and rehabilitation policy of the government by indulging in false propaganda at various forums to discredit the government initiatives such as counselling, maitree organizations, Janta Durbar, police mela, surrender and rehabilitation policy, gram raksha dal, lok adalat etc to alleviate the grievances of the common people," it said. "Furthermore, it is also reliably learnt that Naxal front organisations want to somehow control even the development activities initiated by the state," the Raman Singh government had told the SC. The SC asked it to respond to the suggestion from the petitioners for appointment of an independent committee to monitor the relief and rehabilitation measures. (Times of India)

Economic Front:

India tops list of exporting countries to UAE

India, China, US and Japan have topped the list of exporting countries to the UAE in March 2010 with a total export value of 24.6 billion dirhams- 60 per cent of the total value of the country's imports. Germany, UK, Italy, Switzerland, France and Malaysia were the other countries in the list. According to preliminary statistics released by the Federal Customs Authority, the UAE's non-oil foreign trade was about 63 billion dirhams by the end of March 2010. This is made of 40.8 billion dirhams of imports, 6.8 billion dirhams of exports and 15.4 billion dirhams worth of re-exports. Meanwhile, the weight of the UAE's total foreign trade during the same period was 5.8 million tonnes, including 3.7 million tonnes for imports 1.4 million tonnes for exports and 0.7 million tonnes for re-exports. India, Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany represented 70 per cent of the total re-export value at 10.8 billion dirhams. The Authority said that the total value of non-oil trade with GCC states, according to preliminary figures of March 2010, amounted to 4.7 billion dirhams. The shares of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait were 1.8 billion dirhams, 813 million, 769 million, 800 million and 542 million, respectively. (The Indian Express)

India seeks greater reform of global lending bodies

India on Monday sought comprehensive reform of international financial institutions to enable enhanced capital flows and infrastructure investment in developing markets, which it said will strengthen recovery from the worst global economic crisis since 1945. "We need to continue our efforts for a comprehensive reform of the international financial institutions to make them more inclusive," External Affairs Minister S M Krishna said addressing the 14th G-15 Summit. The G-15, a group of 17 developing countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, was set up to foster cooperation and provide input for other international groups. India's call for comprehensive financial reforms comes within a month of the World Bank member-nations approving greater say to developing nations in how the multilateral lending agency is run. India's voting rights in the Bank increased to 2.91 per cent from 2.77 per cent, while that of China went up to 4.42 per cent from 2.91 per cent. Krishna said while it may appear that the immediate global economic and financial crisis is behind us, it was early to say if the world was on a long term recovery path. "Sustainable recovery of the global economy will depend on several factors, including how the developed economies fare, enhanced investment for infrastructure development, stable capital flows to the developing markets, appropriate macro-economic adjustments and avoiding complacency in the area of financial sector reforms," he said. India is now the seventh largest member of the World Bank in terms of voting power, after the US, Japan, China, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, and to that extent enjoys powers to decide how the bank's funds are disbursed. The extra voting rights will also enable India to seek additional assistance from the Bank. India, already the single largest borrower from the bank, has borrowed an average USD 2.3 billion from the World Bank over the last four financial years of the lending institution. The country has separately said it requires USD one trillion to prop up its crumbling infrastructure. Also, the developing nations must work together to ensure "a balanced outcome of the Doha Round which addresses the concerns of the developing countries," Krishna said, referring to the global trade talks that commenced in 2001 but have been stalled over differences between developed and emerging economies on opening up various sectors for trade. The Doha round seeks to lower trade barriers around the world, but developing countries are seeking safeguards to their agriculture sector from dumping of cheap farm goods from developed nations. Estimates suggest that a successful conclusion of the Doha round of World Trade Organisation talks could boost world trade by USD 300 billion a year. Most of the G-15 members are also rallying together in the WTO under a grouping named G-20 to push for safeguards. The 14th Summit of G-15 provides an opportunity to review the progress and revitalise the grouping, he said. "We should make it an effective platform, not only for North-South cooperation but, equally importantly, for policy articulation in the global discourse in the areas of trade, money and finance, equitable development, food and energy security, climate change and other issues of concerns to our people." India offered to share its developmental experiences with the other developing countries. "India stands ready to cooperate with other members of the group to undertake new projects for deepening and expanding our cooperation," he said. "We need to consolidate ourselves as partners in development, willing to work towards creating a global environment of enhanced understanding and cooperation that is conducive to inclusive and sustainable development," he said. "We need to work on

greater involvement of our business community and civil society in the G15 process." Krishna is representing India at the Summit where Presidents of Algeria, Brazil, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Sri Lanka and Iran are participating. (The Indian Express)

Play fair, China tells India

China asked India not to discriminate against Chinese companies and ensure a fair and transparent investment environment to all. "We hope that (Indian) policies should be fair to all enterprises and should not discriminate against Chinese enterprises," a commerce ministry spokesman told reporters when asked about the reported ban by India on import of Chinese telecom equipment. Telecom majors like Huawei and ZTE say they have been informed that they have not met the Indian government's security criteria. (The Statesman)

Vegetables, fruits push food inflation to 16.49%

Food Inflation rose to 16.49 per cent for the week ending 8 May, mainly due to high prices of vegetables and fruits. Inflation rose by 0.05 per cent from 16.44 per cent in the previous week. On a weekly basis, Onions turned expensive by 5.73 per cent, potatoes by 0.95 per cent, fruits by 0.41 per cent and vegetables by 2.41 per cent while prices of urad and moong rose by two per cent each. On an annual basis, pulses turned costlier by 33.65 per cent and fruits by 17 per cent. Food Inflation had breached the 20 per cent-mark in December. During the week, prices of non-food articles declined by 0.35 per cent, as raw rubber prices sank 7 per cent and linseed fell 2 per cent. Fuel prices remained steady over the week, but rose 12.33 per cent on an annual basis. (The Statesman)

India's Rupee Completes Worst Week Since 1995 on Fund Outflows

India's rupee completed its worst week since 1995 as tumbling stocks worldwide fueled concern the debt crisis in Europe will undermine the global economic recovery. The rupee's 5.5 percent loss since April 30, the second-worst performance among Asian currencies, more than erased its gains during the first four months of 2010. U.S. jobless claims unexpectedly rose to 471,000 and the Conference Board's index of key economic indicators posted a surprise drop of 0.1 percent, separate reports showed yesterday. "Economic growth rates are coming under threat globally due to the European debt crisis and this has triggered an erosion of investor confidence," said R.V.S. Sridhar, senior vice president at Axis Bank Ltd. in Mumbai. "It's difficult to predict where the rupee is headed given that a lot of the action is driven by overnight developments abroad." The Indian currency slumped 0.2 percent to 46.92 per dollar as of the 5 p.m. close in Mumbai, taking this week's losses to 3.6 percent, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. It fell as low as 47.335 earlier, the weakest level since November, falling past 47 for the first time this year. Offshore forwards indicated the Indian currency will trade at 47.33 to the dollar in three months, compared with expectations of 47.02 yesterday and 45.38 at the end of last week. Forwards are agreements in which assets are bought and sold at current prices for future delivery. Non-deliverable contracts are settled in dollars rather than the local currency.

Shares Slide

The Bloomberg-JPM organ Asia Dollar Index, which tracks the region's 10 most-traded currencies excluding the yen, dropped 1.7 percent this week, the most since February 2009, and the MSCI Asia-Pacific Index of regional shares slid 7 percent. The Bombay Stock Exchange's Sensitive Index has lost 3.2 percent since May 14. Overseas investors sold Indian stocks worth an average \$101 million a day this month, compared with net daily purchases of \$111 million in April, data released by the Securities and Exchange of India show. India's foreign-exchange reserves shrank by \$6.3 billion in two weeks to \$273.3 billion on May 14, central bank show. The rupee pared losses today on speculation the nation's central bank will buy the currency to limit volatility in the exchange rate. The monetary authority will intervene in the currency market if necessary, Reserve Bank of India Deputy Governor K.C. Chakrabarty said. "I wouldn't rule out the possibility of central bank intervention," Axis Bank's Sridhar said. (Bloomberg business week)

India's Stocks Fall on Risk Aversion; Sterlite, Wipro Decline

India's benchmark stock index fell, on course for its worst month since January, as Europe's sovereign debt crisis and rising U.S. jobless claims prompted investors to withdraw funds from riskier assets. Sterlite Industries (India) Ltd., the largest copper producer, dropped 1.6 percent as metal prices tumbled. Wipro Ltd., India's third-largest software-services provider, declined to the lowest in two weeks. The nation's largest software exporters get more than a fifth of their sales in Europe. "Global risk aversion has increased among investors," said Alex Mathews, head of research at Geojit BNP Paribas Financial Services Ltd. in Kochi, southern India. "The global markets are under a lot of pressure. We have advised our clients to book profits in mid and small-cap stocks." The Bombay Stock Exchange's Sensitive Index, or Sensex, fell 74.07, or 0.5 percent, to 16,445.61, taking its loss this week to 3.2 percent. The gauge is poised for its worst monthly performance since January's 6.3 percent slide. The S&P CNX Nifty Index on the National Stock Exchange lost 0.3 percent to 4,931.15. The BSE 200 Index retreated 0.6 percent to 2,089.54.

Prices Tumble

Sterlite declined 1.6 percent to 641.65 rupees. The stock has slid 22 percent since the end of April and is poised for its worst monthly performance since October 2008. Commodities, measured by the Reuters/Jefferies CRB Index of 19 raw materials, slumped to an eight-month low yesterday (20 May). Wipro dropped 1.9 percent to 641.7 rupees. Tata Consultancy Services Ltd., the largest software services exporter, slid 1.6 percent to 718.7 rupees, its lowest close in more the four months. India's rupee fell past 47 per dollar for the first time this year, set for the worst week since 1995. "Economic-growth rates are coming under threat globally due to the European debt crisis and this has triggered an erosion of investor confidence," said R.V.S. Sridhar, senior vice president at Axis Bank Ltd. in Mumbai. Overseas investors sold a net 14.7 billion rupees (\$320.4 million) of Indian equities yesterday, reducing their total purchases of the stocks this year

to 245.9 billion rupees, according to the nation's market regulator. Inflows from overseas reached a record 834.2 billion rupees in 2009, exceeding the high set two years earlier in domestic currency terms, as the biggest rally in 18 years lured foreign funds. They sold a record 529.9 billion rupees of shares in 2008, triggering a record annual decline.

The following were among the most active on the exchange:

Abbott India Ltd. (BOOT IN), the local unit of Abbott Laboratories, advanced 3.4 percent to 1,095.8 rupees. Its parent agreed to buy Piramal Healthcare Limited's Healthcare Solutions unit for \$3.72 billion. Piramal (PIHC IN) sank 12 percent to 502.75 rupees. ITC Ltd. (ITC IN) added 3.4 percent to 271.3 rupees. India's biggest cigarette company said fourth-quarter profit rose 27 percent from a year earlier to 10.3 billion rupees on higher tobacco sales. Jaypee Infratech Ltd. (JPIN IN) dropped 10 percent to 91.45 rupees as the unit of India's biggest builder of dams commenced trading. The company raised 22.6 billion rupees selling 60 million shares to the public at 102 rupees a piece. Wockhardt Ltd. (WPL IN) sank 7.2 percent to 119.9 rupees after the drugmaker reported a net loss of 5.6 billion rupees in the fourth quarter. (Bloomberg)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

Iran yet to respond to India's offer

Breaking a two-year chill in talks over its joining the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, India has invited Iran for resumption of dialogue on the long discussed project but Tehran is yet to respond. India has proposed a meeting of India-Iran Joint Working Group between 23-28 May in New Delhi but Tehran has not yet confirmed the dates, sources in the know of the development said. India has been boycotting project talks since 2008 after its concerns of safe delivery of gas were ignored. It wants Iran to be responsible for safe passage of gas through Pakistan and would pay for the fuel only when it is delivered at the Pakistan-India border. External affairs minister, Mr SM Krishna left for Iran to attend the G-15 summit this week, and is likely to discuss the project with his Iranian counterpart. Economic cooperation between members of G-15, a group of developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and a review of international developments will feature in the high profile summit. Sources said India had last month proposed dates for JWG and it was unlikely that the meeting can now happen between 23-28 May because of paucity of time. The pipeline has been on the drawing board since the mid-1990s, when Iran and India inked preliminary agreements to transport gas through Pakistan. It was dubbed the "Peace Pipeline" because of hopes it would lead to a detente between neighbours India and Pakistan. India says it fears for safety of the pipeline in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, home to a militant Islamist separatist movement, and wants Iran to take responsibility of safe passage of gas through Pakistan. While security concerns and frequent changes in gas prices kept New Delhi away from the project, Iran and Pakistan in March signed Inter-Governmental Framework Declaration to support the gas pipeline. Gas Sale and Purchase Agreement between National Iranian Gas Export Co (NIGEC) and Pakistan Inter-State Gas Co has also been concluded. Sources said Tehran is insisting on transferring ownership of gas to India at

Iran-Pakistan border while New Delhi wants it to be Pakistan-India border thereby making Iran explicitly responsible for safe delivery of gas. While the 1,100-km pipeline from South Pars gas fields in the Persian Gulf to Iran-Pakistan border would be laid by an Iranian firm, New Delhi wants to take stake in the 1,035-km pipeline section in Pakistan. India feels that its participation in execution of pipeline in Pakistan would make the project more bankable, reduce the financing cost, ensure timely execution and ensure transparent and efficient management of the operations, they said, adding that Islamabad has so far not agreed to the proposal. (The Statesman)

India, Oman to step up military ties

In a bid to step up strategic ties with the Gulf, India on Tuesday decided to expand its bilateral military cooperation with Oman in fields ranging from maritime security and anti-piracy measures to joint training and combat exercises. This emerged after defence minister A K Antony, on his first-ever visit to West Asia, held discussions with his Omani counterpart Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi in Muscat on Tuesday. Taking note of the 'Eastern Bridge' exercise held between the air forces of the two countries in October 2009, Antony said, "We have laid the foundation and should now work towards adding more content to our defence cooperation." With India sourcing the bulk of its energy needs from the Gulf and keen on ensuring the protection of its huge sea-borne trade, especially from the growing menace of piracy, New Delhi is now steadily trying to enhance its security cooperation with the countries in the region. "Maritime security has become a global concern due to pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden. Piracy off the coast of Somalia has been growing over the years and has now assumed alarming proportions," said Antony. Discussing the regional security situation, the minister said both India and Oman had a common aim in not allowing Afghanistan to become "a safe haven for terrorists again". Holding that India's efforts in the war-ravaged country focussed on economic and social development, Antony said, "We intend to continue such activities even though we have lost personnel and have suffered attacks on our embassy in Kabul. We want a stable, moderate, unified and democratic Afghanistan." (Times of India)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Mirwaiz to offer Saudi mediator role

With China visit already on cards, moderate Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq will soon be leading a delegation to Saudi Arabia. His mission: to consolidate on the recent visit of the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the country early this year by urging the Saudi government to mediate in the resolution of Kashmir dispute. The visit, Mirwaiz said, will also be about creating awareness in the country of the Kashmiri dimension of the Indo-Pak dispute over the state. And to do this, Hurriyat is enlisting the services of OIC office in Jeddah, The Muslim World League and World Assembly of Muslim Youth. "Saudi Arabia has to come forward as a friend, especially because King Abdullah has shown his keenness to play a role in the resolution of disputes between India and Pakistan," Mirwaiz who himself visited Saudi Arabia in March this year told. "The situation is very conducive because of the Indian Prime Minister's recent visit to

Saudi Arabia. We are hopeful that the Saudi government can play the role of an honest broker in Kashmir on the lines of what they have done in Palestine and Afghanistan.” Incidentally, the delegation to Saudi Arabia will not comprise the separatist leaders from Valley alone. It will have their counterparts from across the border and will also include the heads of the Kashmir centres in Washington, London and Brussels like Ghulam Nabi Fai, Nazir Ahmed Shawl and Abdul Majid Trumboo. “Our mission is to set up an interest group in Riyadh which will interact with the Saudi government,” said Mirwaiz. Prime Minister Singh during his visit to Saudi Arabia early this year had sought the help of Saudi monarch to use his good offices to persuade Pakistan to stop abetting terrorism in India. Foreign Minister S M Krishna had also indicated India’s open-mindedness about a Saudi role in the reconciliation between India and Pakistan. Mirwaiz, on the other hand, has also been a staunch supporter of Chinese involvement in Kashmir. He has called for a “joint contact group on Kashmir” that will include India, China and Pakistan. China, Mirwaiz has asserted, had a stake in Kashmir by virtue of its “rising global profile”. Incidentally, Mirwaiz is also visiting China on the invitation of a Chinese NGO Han Foundation sometime later this year. Hurriyat chairman is likely to meet the diplomats and administrators in Beijing “to give them his perspective on the situation in Kashmir”. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Cyclone Laila hits southeast India, 23 killed

The death toll from a powerful cyclone that slammed into southeastern India, toppling power lines and triggering landslides, has climbed to 23, a top official said Friday. The storm plunged a large swath of coastal Andhra Pradesh state into darkness when it hit Thursday packing winds of 60 miles (100 kilometers) per hour. The storm made landfall near Bapatla, about 250 miles (400 kilometers) southeast of Hyderabad, and waves as high as 9 feet (3 meters) lashed the coast. Even before the cyclone hit, some parts of the state had received up to 1 foot (32 centimeters) of rain. Officials said at least 23 people have died since Wednesday. At least 55 fishermen were reported missing, although authorities had ordered fishing vessels to stay in port. State welfare agencies evacuated more than 50,000 people from low-lying villages ahead of the storm. The latest deaths included four people killed in a landslide near the city of Vijaywada late Thursday night, state revenue minister Dharmana Prasad Rao said. Another four deaths were reported in nearby Nellore, Guntur, and Prakasham districts. Strong winds uprooted trees, power lines and billboards, blocking roads in many places. Nearly a dozen towns and more than 1,400 villages in six districts were hit by power outages, state officials said. More than 10,000 people died when Andhra Pradesh was struck by its worst cyclone in 1977. (The Associated Press)

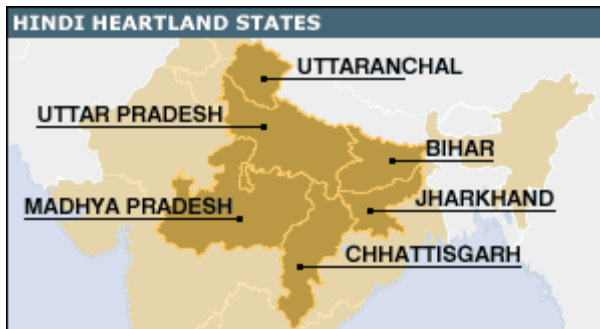
Samjhauta, Hyd, Ajmer bombs had same arming devices: CBI

More than three years after the blasts on the India-Pakistan Samjhauta Express as it passed through Haryana, CBI Director Ashwani Kumar indicated that the agency was looking at similarities in the blasts on the train with the ones in Ajmer and Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad. “The link between Mecca Masjid, Samjhauta and Ajmer blasts is that the

bombs had the same arming devices and these were procured from Indore,” Ashwani Kumar told. Probing that link, the Haryana ATS and CBI are jointly questioning Ajmer and Mecca Masjid blasts suspects Devendra Gupta and Chandrashekhar Barod. “Joint investigations are being carried out to know more about the Samjhauta blast,” Kumar said. He said the suitcase locks used for triggering bombs in two coaches of the Samjhauta Express on February 18, 2007 were like the tin-bombs used in Mecca Masjid in May 2007 and Ajmer in October 2007. The bombs were in metal pipes with grooves in single rows on one side and spiralled on the other. The device used to trigger the blast at these three places was a small suitcase lock fitted into suitcases (on Samjhauta) and tin boxes (Ajmer and Mecca Masjid). To arm the device, a key had to be used. The Haryana ATS has been unable to crack the Samjhauta case but the arrest of suspects in the Ajmer and Mecca Masjid blasts have raised hopes of getting to the perpetrators. “We informed the Haryana ATS about the similarities of suitcase bombs in Mecca Masjid, Ajmer and Samjhauta long back. Since then, they have been in touch with our teams. After the arrest of the two accused in the Mecca Masjid and Ajmer blasts, joint interrogation is happening,” Kumar said.(The Indian Express)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

BJP fails to clear Jharkhand haze

The BJP failed to make a final formal announcement on the Jharkhand issue, after three rounds of meetings, lasting over six hours, with the last leg of the meeting ending at BJP president Nitin Gadkari's residence around midnight. Gadkari had indicated on Thursday at Chandigarh that a final solution to the issue could be arrived at on Friday. "There's nothing to be communicated at this stage," said a top leader after the meeting. Former BJP president Rajnath Singh and general secretary Ananth Kumar were the last ones to leave Gadkari's residence around midnight. The BJP has, so far, maintained that its chief minister would lead the state for the next four-and-a-half years, while the JMM has been insisting on a rotational arrangement, with each chief minister (BJP's and then JMM's) getting 28 months each. (The Indian Express)

JMM wants Soren to continue as CM

Senior JMM leader Champai Soren on Monday said there was no change in their stand with regard to formation of government in Jharkhand though the party has authorised JMM supremo and Jharkhand Chief Minister, Shibu Soren to take decision on the issue. "No, there is no change in our stand. We still want Guruji (Sibu Soren) to continue as chief minister of Jharkhand as there is no need to oust him midway", Champai Soren, MLA and senior vice-president of the party said. All the JMM MLAs were together and wanted Guruji to remain as chief minister, Champai Soren said when asked whether JMM would accept BJP to take over the charge particularly after the recent development. BJP leadership had on Sunday authorised party general secretary and former Jharkhand chief minister, Arjun Munda, to talk to coalition partners in regard with formation of government in Jharkhand. (The Indian Express)

No political understanding with BSP in UP: Rahul Gandhi

Ruling out any political understanding with Mayawati-led BSP, Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday hinted that Congress may go it alone in the 2012 assembly polls in the state. "I am ready to fight your battle. Take me wherever you want. Together, we will change Uttar Pradesh for the better," Gandhi said addressing a rally. He dismissed suggestions of

a political understanding reached with the BSP to help the UPA government sail through trying times in Parliament. "Listen to me carefully. There will be no political understanding or pact with the BSP. Congress will defeat the BSP government. The youth of UP will help us achieve this," Gandhi said. "During voting in Parliament on the cut motions, newspapers wrote that Congress has struck a deal with the BSP. I would like to say there will be no agreement with the BSP and no compromise with the future of UP," he said. The Congress leader claimed that successive governments led by BJP, SP and BSP have failed to bring change to the state where people were forced to seek employment in other states. "You go to Maharashtra and are chased away. You go to Haryana and Punjab and help those states progress. If UP strides to progress, the entire country will make a beeline to this state," he said. Gandhi exhorted the youth of the state to be drivers of change and take UP to the heights of glory it enjoyed in the past. "BJP said it will work wonders. SP played the caste card and BSP said it has formed a government of Dalits. But have you ever asked the Dalits, whether the government works for them," he asked aloud. "The Dalits say there is no government in Uttar Pradesh and I know that you will send the BSP packing as you did with the BJP and the SP in the past," he said. Gandhi claimed that the funds the Centre allocates to Uttar Pradesh never reach the intended beneficiaries. "Government at Delhi is sending crores of rupees to UP, but it is not reaching the people. We are sending funds for MNREGS, but it is not reaching the people it is meant to benefit," he alleged. He said that the Centre launched MNREGS, where 100- day employment was being provided to the people in the rural areas. "While in other states the scheme is being implemented, in UP when I visit villages and talk to people, they said that it is nowhere on the ground," Gandhi said. Gandhi also spoke about the power problem in this district. "Power generated here is being used by the entire state, but you (people) are not getting electricity even for five to six hours," he said. (Times of India)

BJP, JMM agree to run Jharkhand in turns

Ending three weeks of impasse in Jharkhand, the BJP on Tuesday announced a rotational plan for the state: BJP with its allies, JMM and All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU), will share power for 28 months each with the BJP having the first shot at power. Although there has not been any formal announcement so far on who will be the next CM, it's now almost certain that BJP general secretary and MP from Jamshedpur, Arjun Munda, will head the new government. Munda had been authorized by the party to resolve the political crisis. Despite claims of an amicable agreement, Soren's own party men including MLA Simon Marandi openly expressed displeasure. "I'm not happy with the arrangement... I'm hurt that party has ignored our sentiments and entered into an agreement against the wishes of a large number of party workers," said Marandi, who preferred to stay in Kolkata rather than attend the four-hour meeting at Soren's residence. Discontent in BJP, too, was evident. Party's state chief Raghuvar Das, who was also in the race of CM, stayed in the meeting for less than half-an-hour. (Times of India)

Naxals don't target common people: Lalu

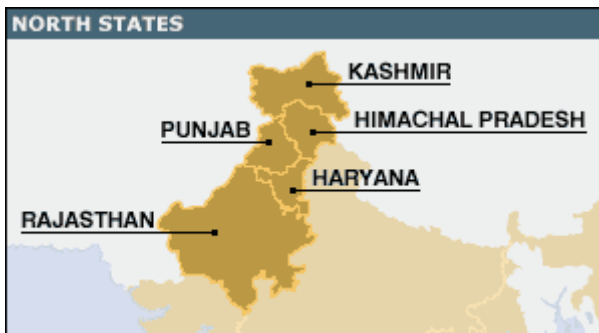
RJD supremo Lalu Prasad on Friday claimed that naxalites did not target the common people, except those who "spied" on the outfit. "The naxalites never target common people as we have observed during past several years, but if somebody spies for the

police they are targetted," he told reporters here. However, Prasad termed as "misrepresentation and distortion" of facts quoting him that he had justified civilian killing at the hands of naxalites. Targeting the Nitish Kumar government in Bihar, Prasad demanded to know from the chief minister what he lacked from the Centre to tackle the naxal menace. "Kumar is an abject failure which has led to spread of activities of naxals in every part of Bihar. We want Kumar to explain what exactly the state lacks from the Centre to tackle the menace," Prasad said. "Merely speaking against the Centre for non-cooperation on the issue will not suffice ... he should detail what the state really wants from the Centre," the RJD leader said. He also targeted the Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh on the same lines. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The North

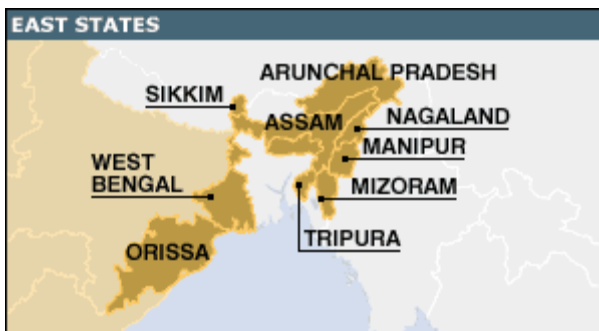


Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

Buddhadeb rejects Trinamool demand for advancing Assembly poll

West Bengal chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee rejected Trinamool Congress' demand for advancing 2011 Assembly elections in the state, saying it was only the state government which could make a recommendation in the matter. "We have thought over holding the elections on scheduled time. Only the state government can take a decision to hold elections early or not," Mr Bhattacharjee said. Addressing a Press conference at the CPI-M party office, the chief minister, without naming Ms Mamata Banerjee, said the person who made this demand was not conversant with the Constitution. "The careless utterances indicate reckless and whimsical thoughts," he pointed out. He alleged that forces like the RSS, Maoists, ultra-rightists and foreign forces have joined together to fight the Left. Mr Bhattacharjee said RSS mouthpiece Organiser recently said the Trinamool Congress should come to power in West Bengal, indicating that the two organisations had united against the Left Front. "Those leaders from the BJP who have joined the Trinamool Congress have links with the RSS," he claimed. Attacking the Trinamool Congress, Mr Bhattacharjee said whereas the Left parties want progress of West Bengal, Trinamool wants to take the state backward. (The Statesman)

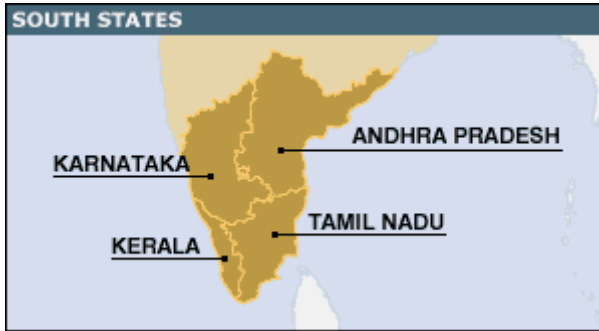
Mamata stoking panic among Muslims, CPM tells PC

Accusing Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee of "stoking panic" amongst Muslims in West Bengal, the CPM asked the government to take note of her statements and set at rest the apprehensions caused by them. Seeking Home Minister P Chidambaram's intervention in the matter, CPM leaders Sitaram Yechury and Basudeb Acharia accused Banerjee of "deliberately stoking panic and terror amongst the Muslim minority population claiming that she has secret information that a section of the police will help the Left Front in unleashing communal violence in the state". In a letter to Chidambaram, they said if Banerjee genuinely possessed such "secret information", then the Home Ministry should "obtain it and act on it in consultation with the state government". "If on the contrary, there is no such information, as surely is the case, then may we request you to set at rest the apprehensions and tensions that have resulted from the Union minister's utterances," the senior CPM leaders, who met Chidambaram, said. They drew Chidambaram's attention to "a serious situation that is developing in the course of the current election campaign to municipal corporations" in West Bengal and sought his intervention. Maintaining that 30 years of Left Front rule was marked by "unprecedented communal harmony and fraternity", they said any effort to blemish this record would not be in the interests of national unity and integrity. "Further, casting such wild and unsubstantiated allegations, especially by a Union cabinet minister, also violates the provisions of the Representation of People Act, 1951," Yechury and Acharia said. They submitted another letter in this regard, written by Left Front Chairman Biman Bose, to the Home Minister. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

City witnesses gold rush on Akshaya Tritiya

Jewellers in Ahmedabad reported a good business on Sunday on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya considered auspicious to bring home wealth as gold sale crossed the Rs 20-crore mark. Prominent jewellers said though the purchase was restricted to token buying, the turnover was much beyond expectation. Gold price touched Rs 18,500 per 10 gram on

Sunday, which was Rs 14,800 on the same occasion last year. Jatin Parekh of Tanishq said: “Gold is considered a safe investment option when other markets are down. But this time, marriage season purchases restricted quantities on Akshaya Tritiya, bringing them down to token purchase.” Ahmedabad Jewellers Association president Shantibhai Patel said, “People seem to have absorbed the shock of price rise over the past one week as can be seen from the way they are thronging gold shops in the city.” The good part about this purchase is that it is not a design-buy (giving old jewellery for new one and paying only the making charge) but fresh investment in gold, he said, adding that heat condition and marriages had affected the demand to some extent. Amid rumours following an ASSOCHAM prediction that gold prices could fall to Rs 15,000 per 10 gram by end of 2010, some buyers may have postponed their investment plans. But Manoj Soni, who runs AB Jewels, a gold retail shop, said there was no reason for believing that this prediction would suppress the current demands because gold is a dependable currency in the backdrop of global economic crisis. Soni said he was surprised at the amazing response in the evening because his firm had not issued any special advertisements or sent SMS to probable buyers, still they thronged his shop. The occasion is not restricted to gold purchase only. A phenomenal 20,000 marriages were solemnised in the city on Sunday alone, according to Dharmesh Mashruwala of Maverick Management in the Satellite area. Mohan Decorators from the Uttamnagar area put the figure at 25,000 marriages in a day. (The Indian Express)