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National Report

Politics:

Congress defends Krishna

In a bid to quell the controversy triggered by the just-concluded Foreign Minister-level talks in Islamabad, the Congress on Friday vigorously defended External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna, while hitting out at his Pakistani counterpart Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi. Responding to Mr. Qureshi's remark that Mr. Krishna did not have the mandate for the talks, Congress spokesperson Jayanthi Natarajan said, "We don't want a certificate from the Pakistani Foreign Minister whether Mr. Krishna had a mandate for the talks. He had the full mandate." The Congress also described as "uncalled for, unjustified and condemnable" Mr. Qureshi's comparison of "a terror-sponsoring criminal" like Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed with India's Home Secretary G.K. Pillai. On Thursday, responding to a question at a press conference about Mr. Saeed's anti-India speeches, Mr. Qureshi retorted that the "statement by Pillai that there was an ISI hand in the 26/11 attacks, too, did not help." Asked why Mr. Krishna had not defended Mr. Pillai, Ms. Natarajan said Mr. Krishna "conducted himself with utmost dignity and restraint while on foreign soil." On the other hand, she said, that Mr. Qureshi's aggressive stance stemmed from the fact that he had been criticised by the Pakistani press for being too soft: "He was, therefore, addressing the sensibilities of his domestic constituency," she said. India's success at the talks, the Congress spokesperson said, was reflected in the fact that Pakistan had taken the leads provided by Home Minister P.Chidambaram when he was there recently. While maintaining that India should continue the "engagement with Pakistan," she stressed that the trust deficit would remain till Pakistan ended cross-border terrorism and brought to justice the perpetrators of 26/11. It was amidst this controversy that the Congress Core Group, which includes Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi, met on Friday to discuss, among other issues, the outcome of the talks in Islamabad ahead of the monsoon session of Parliament. (The Hindu)

BJP wants India-Pakistan talks called off

The Bhartiya Janata Party demanded that the India-Pakistan talks be called off immediately, noting that Pakistan Foreign Minister Mehmood Qureshi had yet to learn the basic norms of diplomatic behaviour. Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj, who was away in Madhya Pradesh, said the government could not remain a mute witness to all the insults heaped on External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna. Representatives of the two countries might or might not agree with each other, but diplomatic norms should be observed. This was not done by the Foreign Minister of the host country. "The time has come for India to call off the dialogue," she said. There was no need for India to keep

putting up with insults heaped upon its representatives. At the party headquarters, spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad said Mr. Qureshi seemed to have lost his cool because Home Secretary G.K. Pillai mentioned about the Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan in a comment he had made. This showed the ISI was the "real boss" in Pakistan, he said. The BJP had serious reservations about the functioning of the External Affairs Ministry under Mr. Krishna, but he stood for India when he travelled abroad, and any insult to him was an insult to India which could not be tolerated, Mr. Prasad said. (The Hindu)

Centre, state and Trinamul failed to curb Naxals: BJP

Mr Arun Jaitley, Leader of the Opposition (Rajya Sabha), accused the Centre, the state government and the Trinamul Congress of not fighting the Maoist menace properly and not handling infiltration across the Indo-Bangladesh border with the seriousness the problem demands. He said this at a Press conference after a two-day "Chintan baithak." The BJP leader lambasted the Centre for sitting tight after sending forces for joint action with the state police against the Maoists. This, he said, is not enough, as the problem was far more serious and required concerted action. On the other hand, he said, the Trinamul Congress was guilty of not being as vocal against the Maoists as it should have been, especially when it is a part of the UPA government. He said the BJP would emerge as an alternative power in West Bengal and for that, the organisational capacity of the state unit should be enhanced. He said that the BJP will contest all 294 seats in the ensuing Assembly poll. He also blamed the state government for lawlessness in the state and said that security should be beefed up to tackle the law and order problem. He said the BJP will have to achieve 11.6 per cent votes, as in 1991. Later, Mr Chandan Mitra, senior BJP leader, said, "We are keeping a watch on the Left Front partners and may form an alliance just before the election." (The Statesman)

Krishna slams Pillai naming ISI in 26/11 attack

Disapproving the comments made by Union Home Secretary G K Pillai on the eve of Indo-Pak talks, External Affairs Minister S M Krishna on Wednesday said his whole visit to Islamabad was "under-pinned" by the remarks, the timing of which was "very unfortunate." Clearly unhappy with Pillai's statement about the involvement of ISI in Mumbai terror attacks, a day ahead of his visit to Pakistan to hold talks, Krishna said if he was the Home Secretary, he would not have spoken about the details of the Pakistani-American David Headley revelations. Factually, Pillai was "very much in order" in speaking about the disclosures made by Headley to FBI and Indian interrogators but "the timing was something which was very unfortunate," Krishna told in an interview. The Minister disclosed that he discussed Pillai's comments with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, whom he had briefed on his parleys with his Pakistani counterpart S M Qureshi and other leaders. He insisted that the government was speaking in one voice on Pakistan and said he was "glad" that Home Ministry has now announced the appointment of a spokesperson. In recent months, Pillai has been briefing the media. Disagreeing with the perception that his discussion with Qureshi had ended in a deadlock, Krishna said he was "quite satisfied" with his visit which has bridged the trust deficit "to some extent." Rejecting suggestions that the outcome of his talks was a setback to the overall dialogue

process, the Minister said the visit was a confidence building exercise and "to that extent, we have succeeded". Expressing his firm belief that India and Pakistan needed to remain engaged, Krishna said there was no other alternative. Responding to a question on BJP's stand that India should not talk to Pakistan now, the Minister said he had briefed the BJP leaders before his visit to Islamabad and conveyed the desirability of engaging Pakistan. "There is no alternative. If somebody can come out with an alternative, I can consider that." Answering questions about Qureshi's undiplomatic remarks after the talks and if he was willing to ignore such behaviour, Krishna said "I am willing to mind my business and concentrate on my work." However, he dismissed as "ridiculous" the comparison sought to be drawn by Qureshi between JuD chief Hafiz Saeed's anti-India statement and Pillai's remarks on ISI. The Minister said the minute details of how the "whole conspiracy of 26/11 was hatched and executed" showed the "diabolical nature of the conspiracy". The fact that these details had come out during interrogation of Headley by FBI put much more onus on Pakistan to act against the conspirators, he said. The External Affairs Minister welcomed Qureshi's assurance that Pakistan would act on the leads provided by Headley and would hasten the trial of those involved in the Mumbai attack. "I am glad about it. That is expected from that government (of Pakistan)." Responding to a question on the perception that the first session of his talks with Qureshi had gone off well, prompting Indian officials to promise some good news, Krishna said he was not "very sure" of the outcome of the meeting till the last minute. Asked about his meeting with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Krishna said he had briefed her on what transpired at his meeting with Qureshi. "She is happy that India and Pakistan are talking." On whether she had raised the issue of Kashmir, which she has described as an impediment in Indo-Pak relations, the Minister said "with me no specifics were mentioned. However, the External Affairs Minister disagreed that Kashmir was on the only issue between the two countries. "Kashmir is one of the questions which keeps India and Pakistan apart but there are a number of other concerns such as terrorism," he said. He also advocated a graduated approach in the bilateral relations with Pakistan, saying India wanted to start with issues which are "helpful and beneficial" to both countries such as release of fishermen, people-to-people contact before taking up complex issues like Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen and Sir Creek. Krishna said he had raised India's "immediate concern" of terrorism during his meetings in Pakistan. "I would have failed in my duty as External Affairs Minister if I would not have put enough pressure on Pakistan to address itself to our concerns about 26/11 and what happened after that." "I wanted to know how the trial is proceeding. I wanted to find out....I wanted them to hasten up the trial. All the other things can come up later," he said. (The Indian Express)

Centre to invite all groups for dialogue on Kashmir

The Centre will extend invitation to all shades of opinion in Jammu and Kashmir, including Hurriyat Conference, to find ways for resolution of Kashmir issue and restore peace in the state which has witnessed separatist-sponsored agitation for last three weeks. Sources in the government said invitation will be extended separately to each small and major group, mainstream as well as separatists groups including both factions of Hurriyat Conference. An initiative is already underway by the state government and the Centre was building on that to carry forward the process. Letters of invitation would be sent to

every party and group for separate meetings with the Central leaders which may include Home Minister P Chidambaram, the sources said. This comes in the wake of repeated demands by Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah asking the central leadership for initiating a political dialogue with all shades of opinion in the state. Omar had said recently in Srinagar that the Centre should talk to everybody who is willing to talk and also reach out to those who are unwilling to talk. Citing the example of the Centre's dialogue with the Hizbul Mujahideen 10 years ago, he had said "I think an example can be taken from the dialogue in 2000 where as a result of a ceasefire, talks were initiated with the militant outfit. "Now obviously, it will take (a) a lot of ground work for and (b) ceasefire for the dialogue to go ahead. But I think that needs to be done", he had said. The Centre, he had said, should try "some Track II diplomacy like the efforts made in 2000 that had led to a ceasefire and dialogue." Chidambaram had started quiet diplomacy with the Hurriyat Conference leaders led by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq last year which came to an abrupt end after one of the moderate leaders Fazal-ul-Haq Qureshi was shot by terrorists. The Centre also supported the move of the state Chief Minister for holding elections to local bodies later this year as this would help create another buffer zone in governance. Omar had, during his meetings with the Central leadership and at an all-party meeting held last week in Kashmir, favoured holding of panchayat and municipal polls in October-November this year. The Chief Minister had said his government was looking at panchayat and municipal bodies in October and November so that the benefits of governance trickle down to the grass-root levels. "This way, we will have a vested interest among the people at large to have normalcy," Omar had said. (The Indian Express)

BJP rejects Manmohan's lunch invite

The BJP on Friday came out in full-throated defence of Gujarat Minister of State for Home Amit Shah, who was charged in Ahmedabad by the CBI with being part of the criminal conspiracy to liquidate Kausarbi, wife of fake encounter victim Sohrabuddin Sheikh. Party's top leaders L.K. Advani, Nitin Gadkari, Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley on Thursday night decided to decline Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's invitation for lunch, which they had accepted earlier. "Mr. Advani telephoned Pranab Mukherjee [Finance Minister] to inform him of our decision not to attend the lunch, and we also sent word to the Prime Minister's Office," Ms. Swaraj said adding: "We could not be lunching with the Prime Minister while the government was misusing the CBI against Amit Shah. It would not have been appropriate." The Gujarat happenings made the party's top leadership meet twice in the past 24 hours at Mr. Advani's residence — on Thursday evening and Friday morning. It is learnt that the decision to defend Mr. Shah came after "clearance" from Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and his insistence that the party take up the matter politically. It was then decided to address the press to denounce the CBI and pronounce Mr. Shah's "innocent." Separately, a senior party functionary, speaking on condition of anonymity, admitted that Mr. Shah's continuance as Minister had become untenable. "He will have to resign. His continuation in office has become untenable," he said. Nevertheless, Mr. Jaitley said: "The facts are concocted and false." (The Hindu)

We don't want nuclear liability Bill in present form: CPI(M)

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) said the government, instead of proceeding with the Civil Nuclear Liability Bill, should bring in the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha for adoption. "We do not want the [Civil Nuclear Liability] Bill in the present form. It is not acceptable, as foreign suppliers will not be liable under it," CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat said at a press conference at the end of a three-day Central Committee meeting. The Bill neither protected the interests of people nor assured their lives and safety. With the monsoon session of Parliament starting on Monday, the Central Committee called upon the government to bring in the Women's Reservation Bill for its passage. "We do not want it to become part of a political manoeuvring for other consideration. Let the House decide," he said. The Rajya Sabha had passed the historic Bill in March. The Left parties would also raise the issue of steep increase in the prices of petrol, diesel, kerosene and cooking gas and demand rescinding of the hike and scrap the deregulation of petrol pricing. The committee wanted the government to place its response to the recommendations of the Ranganath Misra Commission report on reservation for minorities in education and jobs.

Kashmir issue

Stating that it was highly unfortunate that the Union government did not take any worthwhile step to initiate a political dialogue with all sections in the Kashmir Valley, which was rocked by violent protests, Mr. Karat said a parliamentary delegation should visit the State immediately to hear the views of all concerned "so that the political forces can also play a role." Referring to the CBI charge sheet in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case, he said Gujarat Minister of State for Home Amit Shah, who was charged with murder, should step down and face trial and investigation should continue "given the history of connivance of the Gujarat government in the communal pogroms." The committee expressed serious concern at the activities of the Popular Front of India in Kerala and other southern States. The chopping off of the hand of a lecturer in Kottayam district and the subsequent searches had unearthed the storage of bomb-making material and other weapons. "There is an interconnection between communalism and the spawning of such terrorist activities. The CPI(M) will conduct a campaign against both Hindu and Muslim extremism and all forms of terrorism," the party noted. The committee decided to mobilise public opinion against the entry of Foreign Direct Investment in retail trade and accused the government of going ahead with various measures oblivious of people's livelihood with its latest push to allow multi-brand retail. Stating that 44 members and supporters of the party were killed by Maoists and the Trinamool Congress-led combine, Mr. Karat took a dig at Home Minister P. Chidambaram, stating that while the latter talked of intelligence inputs, he was not willing to see the developments in West Bengal, as the Trinamool shared power at the Centre. The committee finalised a draft political resolution that would be discussed at its extended meeting to be held in Vijayawada next month. It identifies the key task as the one to fight against the whole gamut of neo-liberal policies affecting the lives of the people, struggle against communalism, oppose strategic tie-up with the United States of America, work towards building an alternative for the Congress-led UPA and the BJP-led

National Democratic Alliance. While stating that a third alternative would take time, it talks of certain intermediate measures. (The Hindu)

Advani 'outraged' at Krishna 'admonishing' Pillai

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader L.K. Advani on Sunday expressed his "outrage" at the manner in which External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna "publicly admonished" Home Secretary G.K. Pillai "for no fault of his but for the signal service he rendered to the country by exposing the ISI's role" in the Mumbai terror attacks. Writing on his blog, Mr. Advani said he was surprised at "our Foreign Minister quietly swallowing the insult" at the joint press conference, where his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi castigated Mr. Pillai and bracketed him with terrorist Hafeez Saeed." "My surprise verily became a sense of outrage when a couple of days later our own Minister added injury to the Pakistani insult by publicly admonishing Pillai," he said. Mr. Advani said New Delhi's Pakistan policy was a shambles and alienated from public opinion. "Even within the government, Ministers have serious reservations about the policy." He sought to underscore the "conspicuous contrast" of the NDA's conduct of Pakistan policy, with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee demonstrating to Islamabad "India's stand on cross-border terrorism would remain uncompromising." He claimed that it was this "firm stand" that made General Pervez Musharraf to discard his "Agra attitude" and later sign a joint statement with Mr. Vajpayee agreeing not to "permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner." Mr. Advani expressed the hope that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Mr. Krishna would realise that "firmness is one of the most necessary sinews of character, and one of the best instruments of success. As of today, the prime purpose of India's Pakistan policy must be to force this neighbour of ours to abandon terrorism." (The Hindu)

Opposition rocks Parliament over price issue

The issue of price rise paralysed Parliament with an agitated opposition forcing adjournment of Rajya Sabha for the day and repeated disruptions in Lok Sabha. The Upper House called it a day soon after it assembled after Question Hour as the opposition members raised slogans protesting the spiralling prices. P J Kurien, who was in the Chair, tried to pacify the members and asked the ministers to lay the papers listed for the day. As the din continued, he adjourned the House for the day. Earlier, the Rajya Sabha was adjourned for an hour soon after it met for the day. The Lok Sabha was adjourned twice before lunch. The House adjourned for an hour minutes after it met for the day and then till 2.00 PM after SP and RJD members led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and Lalu Prasad stormed the well shouting slogans denouncing the government for its "failure" to check price rise. They chanted slogans like 'Jo Sarkar Nikammi Hai, who Sarkar Badalani Hai (we have to change the government, which is incompetent)' as BJP and other opposition members were on their feet protesting against price rise. As the members refused to relent even after the House resumed during Zero Hour, Speaker Meira Kumar adjourned the Lok Sabha till 2.00 PM amid vociferous demands for a discussion on the issue of price

rise from opposition parties and even some of those supporting the government. In the melee, the Speaker ordered laying of the papers listed for the day and asked Petroleum Minister Murli Deora to make a statement on the revision in prices of petroleum products. Earlier, soon after Kumar read out obituary references, members of the SP and RJD, both parties supporting the government, joined the opposition in demanding a discussion on the issue of hike in prices of kerosene and cooking gas. Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj said increase in prices of kerosene and LPG has disturbed the budget of the common man and the entire opposition has come together to demand a discussion on the issue. She said a number of opposition members have submitted adjournment motions on the issue. "Accept our adjournment motions and allow a discussion on the issue," she said pointing out that even some parties supporting the government have made common cause with the opposition. TDP members were also seen in the Well raising the issue of the Babhli barrage. With members unrelenting, the Speaker adjourned the proceedings till 12:00 noon. In Rajya Sabha, soon after new members took oath or affirmation, the entire Opposition was up on their feet raising the issue of price rise. BJP-led NDA was joined by Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajwadi Party and AIADMK vociferously raised the issue of rise in prices of essential commodities particularly domestic cooking gas LPG and PDS kerosene. Amid the din, Shiv Sena members holding banners on the Babhli barrage issue moved towards the Well. Chairman Hamid Ansari asked members not to show banners and resume their places so that Question Hour could be taken up. His remarks had no effect on the members who continued to raise slogans. Ansari called Leader of the Opposition Arun Jaitley to speak but he could not make a statement as Opposition continued to protest, which forced the Chairman to adjourn the house till 12:00 hours. (The Indian Express)

Minorities' Issues:

SIT submits interim report in Ishrat case

The Special Investigation Team (SIT), appointed by the Gujarat High Court to probe the Ishrat Jahan encounter case, on Friday submitted its interim report and sought more time to complete the job. The SIT said it had tried to secure records of phone calls made between June 1 and 20, 2004 among all the police officials involved in the alleged fake encounter, as well as those of the victims. But being six-year-old information, no record was available with the telephone or mobile companies concerned. The SIT, under Additional Director-General of Police Pramod Kumar, was formed by the court by an August 13, 2009 order for a fresh investigation into the encounter death of Ishrat, Pranesh Pillai alias Javed Sheikh, and two Pakistani nationals on the outskirts of Ahmedabad on June 16, 2004. The order was issued on a petition filed by Ishrat's mother Shamima Kausar, who has now filed another petition demanding that the probe be handed over to the CBI. The SIT was asked to submit its final report by November 30 last, but it said it could not complete its task because of new and additional factors. In its interim report, the SIT said it had taken possession of all relevant papers and documents on the encounter and also of logbooks indicating the movements of all vehicles of the Ahmedabad Crime Branch police between June 11 and 16, 2004.

Checking of the logbooks was pending.

The SIT said efforts were on to collect all wireless messages and intelligence inputs received by the Ahmedabad police control room and the State CID department. But it was not able to make much headway in collecting information on the movements of the private car, in which Ishrat and the others had been travelling. After the court asked it to enquire about the movements of the car, the SIT checked at petrol pumps, toll plazas and other relevant places between Mumbra and Pune, Pune and Nashik, and Nashik and Nadiad via Shirdi, and recorded the statements of 63 people. But the issue being six-year-old, no one could provide details. “Efforts are, however, still on.” On October 25 last, the SIT inserted advertisements in local newspapers, asking people to share with it any information they might have on the encounter but not a single response was received. The weapons allegedly used in the encounter — but which were not deposited for inquiry then — were taken possession of and sent for testing at the Forensic Science Laboratory on November 23 last. (The Hindu) The FSL report was received but the SIT was yet to probe the contents.

New dimension

The SIT recorded the statements of Ms. Kausar and Javed's father Gopinath Pillai. But a subsequent order from the High Court, asking it to probe the report of Ahmedabad Metropolitan Magistrate S.P. Tamang — who held the encounter fake — added a new dimension to the investigation. As a result of this, the SIT could not complete its task, the interim report said.

Hindu Fundamentalism:

Shiv Sainiks attack Zee 24 office in Kolhapur

Shiv Sainiks attacked the Zee 24 hours television office in Kolhapur late night on Friday and destroyed furniture apart from injuring the correspondents during a live telecast of a debate on the Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute. Mansoor Syed of the Karnataka-based Seema Rakshak Vedika was on the show along with Diwakar Raote, Sena leader, in Mumbai. The first segment was over when about 40 Sainiks attacked the office and beat up an associate of Mr. Mansoor Syed and attacked Deepak Shinde, bureau chief. (The Hindu)

VHP to co-opt BJP in fresh Ayodhya movement

The Bharatiya Janata Party's services have been enlisted by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh for giving a fresh life to the Ram temple movement. At the kumbh mela in Haridwar this January-February, a plan to re-ignite the interest in the Ram temple issue was drawn up by 'sants' associated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. That has now been finalised and announced, with the RSS stepping in to ensure all its affiliates, including the BJP, participate in large numbers. The RSS-VHP decision has come when arguments are over in three of the four Ayodhya title suit cases before the three-judge Bench of the

Allahabad High Court in Lucknow. In the fourth suit — all the four have been consolidated — arguments are expected to be completed by this month end. “We expect all the arguments to be completed by July-end and the judgment reserved,” said Zafaryab Jilani, advocate for the Sunni Wakf Board and some other Muslim parties to the suit. “We want to keep up the pressure at a time when the court would be reserving its judgment,” said a member of the sangh parivar. The idea was to “familiarise” the generation born after the 1989 to 1992 Ayodhya agitation with the highpoints of that movement, said Prakash Sharma, VHP spokesperson. The plan was that sangh members would visit individual homes, especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and remind people of “the commitment to build a Ram temple,” Mr. Sharma said. Asked about the BJP’s participation in the programme, Mr. Sharma’s answer was: “Yes, the BJP is expected to participate” and “we will appeal to all political parties to do the same.” Part of the plan is to organise reading of Hanuman chalisas in temples throughout the country, with a focus on 8,000 temples selected for this activity. “Hanuman chalisas will be read at those temples 11 times during the day and we want hundreds and thousands of people to attend them,” Mr. Sharma said. This revival of the temple agitation would be done from August 16 to November 15. At a recent meeting between the sangh and BJP leaders in Bihar — Arun Jaitley and Ananth Kumar were present — the Hanuman Chalisa programme was discussed and orders given that the BJP ensure participation by its members. With Assembly elections due in October-November, the programme will coincide with the election campaign. There are some in the BJP who feel this could be counter productive as it would make nonsense of the BJP’s new development plank. One party leader said: “If the programme is taken up in a big way, it could lead to Muslim consolidation against the Janata Dal (United)-BJP combine; just what Chief Minister Nitish Kumar wanted to prevent by objecting to the publicity offensive by Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi during the recent Patna conclave of the party.” Uncertain of what campaign tricks the BJP may play, the Janata Dal (United) has made it clear it will not have a joint manifesto with the BJP. “We can later work out a common minimum programme of governance,” its president Sharad Yadav said. The VHP spokesperson said several decisions were taken at the kumbh mela. A Ram temple must come up at the disputed site in Ayodhya, irrespective of the court verdict. The government must legislate to let this happen. Any attempt to allow the building of a mosque within the limits of Ayodhya, even outside the disputed site, must be thwarted. (The Hindu)

RSS’s increasing size can be cause of its downfall

The RSS has come under a cloud due to the suspected links of some of its swayamsevaks to Hindu terror outfits. But there is little the Sangh can do to bring such “elements” under the scanner and stop them from accomplishing their “deadly mission.” In fact, the increasing size and spread of the organisation is the bane of the RSS, those knowledgeable of the Sangh’s working told The Statesman. A combination of factors ~ the RSS’ waning focus on its original mission of working as a social organisation and its increasing tendency to explore some kind of a political role for itself ~ has worked to the disadvantage of the organisation. The RSS, with its 40,000 shakhas across the country and 3000 full-time pracharaks has turned into a mammoth organisation. Sangh insiders said that even a few decades back, the RSS used to be a well-knit body of swayamsevaks

who were known to each other. Today, apart from those officially enrolled in the RSS, there is a huge chunk of invisible Sangh cadres who have joined the fold mainly inspired by its Hindutava ideology. They are not accountable to any higher authority in the RSS. This invisible section of swayamsevaks, inclined to violence, poses the biggest threat to the RSS credibility, insiders explained. Mismanagement of the RSS only adds to the problem, Sangh sources said. Earlier, the Sangh Pracharaks used to keep a close watch on all new entrants for five years. Under the day-to-day supervision of pracharaks and due to close bonding among cadres at the family and personal level, it was not easy to nurture any nefarious designs let alone accomplish them. Only those who were ideologically inclined were allowed to continue and the rest were sidelined. But, as the RSS spread its wings and its size increased, it became an unmanageable organisation, Sangh sources said, adding that now the “RSS has no mechanism to stop such elements.” (The Statesman)

Malegaon blasts: Sadhvi Pragya moves SC for bail

Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, who is facing charges under MCOCA for her alleged involvement in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case, has moved the Supreme Court for bail. The petition is listed for hearing on Monday before a bench comprising Justices J M Panchal and Gyan Sudha Mishra. Pragya's counsel Sushil Balwada, who has filed the petition challenging the denial of bail by the Bombay High Court, said he will seek adjournment of the matter for two weeks. The High Court had rejected her bail plea on March 12. He said Thakur will also file a petition against the July 19 decision of the High Court restoring the charges under the stringent anti-organised crime law MCOCA. The High Court had ordered that Pragya and ten other accused in the Malegaon bomb blast case will face trial under MCOCA (Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act) and had quashed the decision of the Special Court which had dropped the charges under the special law. Among the other high-profile accused in the case is Lt Col S P Purohit. The trial of the case will take place at a special MCOCA court. The accused are currently lodged in Nasik Central Prison. Seven people were killed in a bomb blast on September 29, 2008, at Malegaon, a communally-sensitive textile town in Nasik district of North Maharashtra. The probe into the blast has brought into focus some right-wing Hindu groups. A Special MCOCA court on July 31 last year had ruled that Anti Terrorist Squad had wrongly applied MCOCA in the case against Pragya, Purohit and nine others. The 4,000-page chargesheet had alleged that Malegaon was selected as the blast target because Muslims form sizeable part of its population. It named Pragya Thakur, Purohit and another accused Swami Dayanand Pandey as the key conspirators. The chargesheet had further alleged it was Pandey who had instructed Purohit to arrange for RDX while Pragya owned the motorcycle used in the blast. Ajay Rahirkar, another accused, allegedly organised funds for the terror act while conspiracy meetings were held at Bhonsala Military School in Nasik. Rakesh Dhawde, Ramesh Upadhyay, Shyamlal Sahu, Shivnarain Kalsangra, Sudhakar Chaturvedi, Jagdish Mhatre and Sameer Kulkarni were the other seven accused. (The Indian Express)

Insurgency Movements:

Maoists blow up two Orissa schools, kill man

Maoists blew up two school buildings and killed a villager in separate incidents in Orissa's Malkangiri district, police said. The rebels blew up a school building in Bejngiwada village and another in Tentuliguda village using landmines, superintendent of police Mr Anirudha Kumar Singh told. In a separate incident, Maoists killed a man at Gampakunda village, accusing him of being a police informer. The man's body was found on a village road with Maoist posters lying nearby. More than half of Orissa's 30 districts are affected by the Maoist menace. Malkangiri, nearly 620 km from here, is considered one of their strongholds. Meanwhile, Maoists set ablaze five vehicles of a construction company in Jharkhand's steel city of Jamshedpur after the firm refused to pay levy to them, police said. The vehicles, including three dumpers and other equipment, were being used for road construction work in Badhuwa village, about 145 km from here. They were set on fire late yesterday. "The construction company's refusal to pay levy to Maoists resulted in the incident," a police officer said. (The Statesman)

Govt considers 26% equity for tribals in mines

In a bid to deplete the reservoir of antagonism in the central Indian tribal belt that feeds the Naxalite cadre, the government is engaged in fast-paced discussions to provide 26% equity in mining entities to the affected people, mostly tribals, where excavation of minerals takes place. The Group of Ministers headed by Pranab Mukherjee met on Thursday to discuss the proposed Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act but the debate about whether the affected people should be provided shares in the company or directly provided a share in the annual revenues from the company without getting embroiled in distributing equity remained unresolved. Pointing to the alienation of local population, incidence of Naxalism, backwardness of regions and lack of infrastructure development in the mine-rich belt of India, the ministry of mines recommended that the people affected be provided shareholding rights apart from the compensation given under the resettlement and rehabilitation package. Though not going as far as asking for prior consent of the local communities, the bill provides for consultation with the local community before notifying an area for mining-related activities and consultations with the gram sabhas and district councils before grant of concessions for minor minerals. The bill has also suggested prior green clearances under the Forest Conservation Act before notifying an area for mining. In a bid to check the miners escaping under the scanner by keeping the mining area just a bit lower than that requiring scrutiny for environmental impact, the bill provides that the ministry of environment and forests' recommendations on minimum area for minor minerals would be followed. In a presentation made on Thursday to the GOM, the mines ministry estimated that the annual earnings in case of iron ore excavation could go as high as Rs 2 lakh per year per person. But the debate within the government on how to make the benefits of mining reach the predominantly impoverished tribal population saw the GOM run for two hours with Virbhadr Singh, the Union steel minister, and law minister Veerapa Moily, intervening at length to the debate. Union environment and forests minister Jairam Ramesh has already sent in a critique about some of the reservations the ministry holds over the bills. While some cabinet ministers in the GOM, including

Ramesh, had suggested that the people should be given a part of the annual profits, the bill at present provides that equity participation be mandated in case of companies and annuity payments from profits is provided in case of individual firms and cooperatives. The GOM will also debate when it meets again on July 30 that if it continues with the equity model, should the returns on it be used for community development or be given directly to individuals. The bill as of now provides for the former with another cess on royalty intended for a mineral fund that would be used to build community infrastructure and services. Issues have also been raised about loopholes in the bill, which could continue to provide super normal profits by using first-come-first-serve principle to give concessions and mines in non-notified areas. The mines ministry has taken the stand that it would be administratively difficult to auction small deposits and that super profits should be cut off by the 20% cess and 26% profit-sharing formula. It has also been pointed out that the bill right now provides for competitive bidding in only cases where applications for prospecting and mining are not already pending. But it's been noted that most mining areas are already applied for and therefore competitive bidding by default would not really take place. (Times of India)

Maoist problem will be overcome in three years: Chidambaram

Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram said on Thursday the government was confident that the problem of Left-wing extremism would be overcome in the next three years. Addressing a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Minister expressed confidence that the challenge would be met jointly by the Central and State governments. Mr. Chidambaram said that after consultations with the Naxal-affected States, it was agreed to have a two-pronged strategy to handle the Maoist issue — based on development and police action. While the Central government acknowledged that the primary role and responsibility was that of State governments to enforce law and order, it also recognised its own responsibility in assisting the States in every way, he said. The Minister said the Centre was assisting the States by providing paramilitary forces, sharing intelligence, and funding development schemes and security needs. Mr. Chidambaram said that at the July 14 meeting of Chief Ministers of seven Naxal-affected States, it was agreed that a Unified Command would be set up in West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand for anti-Naxal operations. Besides, the Centre would provide these States additional helicopters for logistics support, funds for establishment and strengthening of 400 police stations. It was also agreed to set up an Empowered Group chaired by Member Secretary, Planning Commission, to review existing norms and guidelines in implementation of various development schemes, having regard to local needs such as road connectivity, primary education, primary health care and drinking water. During the discussions, the members broadly agreed with the suggestions given in the agenda note, which included steps on both security and development fronts. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

China's slowing growth could hit India's exports

China's moves to bring back in control its rapidly over-heating economy appear to have paid dividends, with the economy showing signs of slowing in the second quarter of this year according to data released on Thursday. China's economy grew 10.3 per cent in the second quarter, down from 11.9 per cent in the first and 10.7 per cent in the last quarter of 2009, announced the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The economy's slowing-down follows a number of steps taken by the government in recent months, including phasing out the \$586-billion stimulus spending, tightening curbs on lending and bringing in check spiralling property prices. Thursday's numbers were welcomed by Chinese officials but are expected to cause concerns globally, said economists, particularly because slowing industrial output could impact China's appetite for imports of raw materials. "A slowdown in the growth rate will benefit the economy because it will prevent it from growing too fast and being overheated," said Sheng Laiyun, a spokesman for the NBS. Analysts said they expected growth to continue to slow through the rest of the year. Tom Orlik, an economist in Beijing with Stone & McCarthy Research Associates, said the government would now focus on preserving growth, having brought inflation under control. Growth would slow, but would not "collapse". The Consumer Price Index increased 2.6 per cent in the first half of the year. Inflation in June dipped to 2.9 per cent, down from 3.1 per cent in May. "China's inflation in the first half was mild and within the range of management," said Mr. Shen, referring to the government's three per cent target. Of concern globally will be China's slowing industrial output, which is likely to hit China's imports. Industrial output grew 13.7 per cent in June, down from 16.5 per cent in May.

Fixed asset investment also slowed.

Significantly for India, iron ore imports are expected to fall through the rest of the year, said economists, potentially hitting the country's biggest export to China and further widening a record trade imbalance. The first half of this year has seen Indian exports soar by 80 per cent, largely driven by iron ore and slag, which accounted for 63 per cent of total exports. But recent months have seen signs of falling demand for iron ore as a result of slowing industrial output, with some of China's biggest steelmakers announcing price-cuts in recent weeks. (The Hindu)

Industries log double-digit growth

In a development that augurs well for the government's target to achieve nine per cent economic growth this fiscal, most of the country's manufacturing industries logged double-digit growth in the first quarter of this fiscal. This was revealed in a survey conducted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and ASCON released. The government's chief economic adviser, Mr Kaushik Basu said the growth would be faster than 8.5 per cent this fiscal and the first quarter is likely to show up around nine per cent expansion. According to the report, out of the 110 industries covered, 30 recorded growth rates of more than 27.3 per cent as compared to 10 industries which registered a growth of nine per cent during the corresponding period last fiscal. Even the number of

industries registering high growth rate went up to 28.2 per cent (31 industries) from 16.4 per cent (18 industries) in April-June 2010. The share of industries registering negative and moderate growth also declined to 15.5 per cent (17 industries) and 29 per cent, respectively, as compared to the growth in the corresponding period of the previous year 41 per cent (45 industries) and 33.6 per cent, respectively. “The industry can do even better, provided an even more conducive environment is created,” Tata Steel vice-chairman, Mr B Muthuraman said. According to the survey, out of 38 industries reporting for sales, 16 recorded excellent growth, eight high growth, eight registered moderate growth and four reported negative growth. The industries which registered excellent growth include air-conditioners (50 per cent), vehicle industry (33.2 per cent) and refrigerators (32 per cent). The industries which recorded negative growth are polyester staple fibre (-0.65 per cent), tea (-4.5 per cent), groundnut oil (-28.4 per cent) and cigarette and tobacco (-2.0 per cent). “Actions such as faster implementation of ongoing and already announced projects, improving regulatory environment and ensuring timely availability of credit and directing banks to provide easier and cheaper credit, especially for small and medium enterprises, are vital to higher manufacturing growth,” CII director general, Mr Chandrajit Banerjee said. (The Statesman)

Govt asks industry to consider 5 per cent jobs for poor

Finding it difficult to enforce employment quota in private sector, the government has asked the industry to consider giving five per cent of the jobs to disadvantaged sections wherever fiscal incentives are given. In a letter to the leading business chambers CII, FICCI and Assocham, the industry department has sought their views on the issue. The letter dated 14 July was a follow-up of the meeting between the government and chambers on the affirmative actions in April this year. Industry secretary Mr RP Singh had suggested in the April meeting that “while it may not be possible to insist on a quota in the private sector, wherever the government was giving incentives to the industry, a certain minimum, say five per cent employment for disadvantaged sections may be insisted”. Industry gets a variety of fiscal sops which include export related duty credit, area specific income tax exemptions which are also extended on R&D budget of companies. Besides, the export income in the special economic zones and software technology parks are also exempted from income tax. While the government has not been insisting on job reservation in the private sector, it wants the industry to take affirmative action in favour of underprivileged sections of the society. A high-level group headed by a PMO official has been interacting with the industry on the issue. The industry on its part claims that it has several initiatives for training and employment of the SCs and STs from the weaker sections of the society. The CII has come out with several reports showing that quite a few of its member organisations have been working on affirmative action. (The Statesman)

Investment in new projects slows down

Indicating a subdued start to the current fiscal, investment in fresh projects dropped by over Rs 50,000 crore to Rs 1,47,457 crore in the April-June quarter of 2010-11 financial year over the previous quarter. As per a survey done by online database Projects,

slowdown was seen in new project investments in the first quarter of FY 2010-11, mainly due to higher costs of fuel and non-food manufactured products, delays in government approval and lack of any big-ticket projects. A total of 2,293 new projects entailing an investment of Rs 1,47,457 crore were announced in the April-June period compared to 2,431 new projects worth Rs 2,01,671 crore announced in the January-March quarter of 2009-10 financial year. "High inflation, mainly in fuel and non-food manufactured items, and clearer signs of RBI exiting expansionary monetary policy, that is likely to lead to rise in lending rates, along with delays in projects clearance by the government may have caused the slowdown in fresh private-sector investment plans in the first quarter of FY'11," the report stated. The aggregate figures revealed slowdown in announcement of fresh investment proposals by both the public sector as well as the private sector. "Lack of big-ticket projects in the private sector dragged down the fresh investment figures despite increase in the number of start-ups," the report stated. Private sector saw announcement of only 35 mega projects worth Rs 84,987 crore in the first quarter of FY'11 compared with 41 mega projects worth Rs 1,16,919 crore proposed in fourth quarter of FY'10. The public sector saw 1,300 new project announcements worth Rs 44,682 crore in the first quarter compared to 1,554 projects entailing Rs 67,899 crore in Q4 of last fiscal. The manufacturing sector, despite attracting 111 new projects, saw fresh investments decline sharply by 41.5 per cent on quarter-on-quarter basis. (The Statesman)

China warns India on trade hurdles

Accusing India and the US of following protectionist policies, China said any attempt to politicise outbound investments by Chinese firms or "abuse" investment protection tools to protect domestic industries would hurt bilateral ties. Naming India and the US among other countries, the Chinese Commerce Ministry spokesman Yao Jian said that such abuse will sour trade and investment relations with China, as well as dampen the confidence of the country's outbound direct investment (ODI). Apparently pointing to media reports that India had blacklisted 25 Chinese telecommunications providers over security concerns and banned Indian operators from Chinese purchases, Jian said there should be no misuse of trade protectionist measure in the name of national security. "On the one hand, Chinese enterprises are encouraged to actively adjust themselves to the changing environment overseas, but on the other hand, we strongly call for some individual nations and regions not to abuse trade and investment measures against China, citing national security excuses," Yao was quoted today by state run China Daily. "We don't think it is appropriate for them to politicise common commercial investment cases, which will hurt bilateral relations with China," he said. China's ODI surged 24 per cent from a year earlier, to USD 55.18 billion during the first six months this year, according to new figures. The investment mainly went to sectors such as mining, commercial services, manufacturing, wholesale and retail. Despite the rapid growth of China's ODI, Chinese investment abroad has been frequently blocked by other countries, especially the US and India, during the past few months, according to the Daily. It also said that the US Congressional Steel Caucus wrote to Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner last month asking the Obama administration to obstruct the USD 175 million investment proposal by Anshan Iron and Steel Group Corporation, China's leading steel producer, in a US rebar facility. "The financial crisis has provided Chinese enterprises with a nice opportunity to

expand and invest overseas, at a comparatively lower price," ministry spokesperson Yao said. On the criticism about restrictions on foreign investment in China, he said, "Loopholes do exist with China's FDI policies, but it is undeniable that the Chinese government is much willing to listen to suggestions from all sources and we are also trying to improve the environment," Yao said. "I don't think there is any other country that could create a better environment for foreign businesses than China. (The Indian Express)

Non tax-paying upper castes are equal to OBCs: Panel

A national commission has said that upper castes who do not pay income tax are akin to other backward castes (OBCs), a policy recommendation which can have far-reaching consequences. The Commission for Economically Backward Classes, formed in response to the clamour for reservation benefits for the poor among upper castes, has equated them to OBCs. It has recommended that they be given special treatment in key sectors like education, housing, health and social sector. Since preferential treatment in employment boils down to job reservations, it can be assumed that the Commission's recommendation implies that if the government is to accept reservation for EBCs, there will be need for a constitutional amendment to get past the 50% ceiling on total quota. The panel had been asked to suggest criteria for identifying EBCs, welfare measures and reservations for them, and to suggest constitutional and legal ways for their implementation. The report of the Commission, chaired by SR Sinho and including Narendra Kumar as member and Mahendra Singh as member-secretary, may test the government at a time when it is facing quota conflicts. The panel's recommendation that EBCs, which it has estimated at six crore, deserve state support on a par with the OBCs flies in the face of the post-independence policy that favoured only socially backward classes for affirmative action. The EBCs would comprise upper castes from all religions. The introduction of economic criteria to affirmative action may trigger a new debate if it is expanded to include reservation. The present quota regime is limited to SC/STs and OBCs which are communities facing social backwardness. The new move would lead to insertion of economic criteria in reservation policy. This is first move of its kind at the central level. Sources said the commission has said that non-IT paying upper castes would qualify as EBCs. It has argued that while they are not socially disadvantaged like the untouchables, they are on a par with OBCs. The panel has even given a rough estimate of the EBCs -- six crore. After visiting 28 states over four years, the Commission has stated that EBCs form 20% of the population which is roughly one crore families. At an average of six members per family, the figure stands at six crore. Acceptance of the recommendation will mean a clutch of preferential treatment policies for the non-IT payees among upper castes. While in education, the EBC children will be eligible for soft loans for higher education, scholarships, coaching for IAS/PCS exams, they will also be eligible for subsidized health facilities. Government help in housing sector can be in the form of loans, soft loans with lower rates of interest. (Times of India)

Double-digit inflation a worry: Survey

Industry projected India's economy to grow by 8.5-9 per cent this fiscal despite global uncertainties, but voiced concern over double-digit inflation, says a CII survey. "Businesses are upbeat on the domestic economy despite the global uncertainties and are

maintaining their investment momentum," Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) President Hari Bhartia said while releasing the chamber's snap poll of 90 CEOs. Over 50 per cent of the CEOs representing different sectors expect the country's gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2010-11 to be in the range of 8.5 to 9 per cent, he said. The Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council in its Economic Outlook for 2010-11, released last week, said the economy is expected to expand by 8.5 per cent. While the CEOs are upbeat on the GDP, high wholesale price based inflation is a cause of concern for them. (The Indian Express)

Indians most confident about job prospects: Survey

Indians are the most optimistic about job prospects and personal finances globally, according to a survey by consultancy firm Nielsen. According to the Nielsen Global Consumer Confidence report, 92 per cent of Indians were optimistic about their job prospects in the next 12 months. Indians were also the most optimistic about the state of their personal finances in the next 12 months. Nearly 14 per cent of Indians think it is an 'excellent' time to buy the things that they want and need and 71 per cent think it is a 'good' time to make purchases. "The positive attitude of Indians comes on the back of a robust GDP growth (9 per cent) in the April-June quarter of 2010. For the fiscal 2009-10, India's economy grew by 7.4 per cent due to higher-than-anticipated growth in the agriculture, mining and manufacturing sectors," The Nielsen Company (India) President Piyush Mathur said. Nielsen, which tracked confidence, major concerns and spending intentions among 27,000 Internet users in 48 countries, found that Indians were the most optimistic globally on all parameters, whether it was their job prospects, personal finances or attitude towards spending. In addition, the report revealed that India scored the top position in the consumer confidence index during the April-June quarter of 2010. With 127 index points, India was ranked number one in the latest survey, followed by Indonesia and Vietnam, with 115 points each, Nielsen said. Job scares and financial concerns are a thing of the past for Indians. They have been replaced by concerns over increasing food prices, with 13 per cent of Indians citing this as their biggest concern in the second quarter of the 2010 calendar year. In fact, India tops all other countries where increasing food prices are concerned, it said. Other concerns bothering Indians were terrorism and children's education, parent's welfare and happiness and global warming. (The India Express)

Information Technology:

A computer for Rs. 1,500 unveiled

India on Thursday launched a low cost access-cum-computing device for learners and teachers which would be made available through educational institutions by 2011. "The price of the device is expected to be around \$35 (Rs. 1,500), gradually dropping down to \$20 and ultimately \$10 per piece," Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal said, while unveiling the device. "This is real, tangible and we will take it forward," he said. India, he said, had demonstrated to the world that a cheaper device could be made, when prices were ruling high. These computers will be accessible to 20 crore children across the country and the total cost is expected to be approximately Rs. 10,000 crore,

including a 50 per cent subsidy component. Since this effort of continuous reduction in price and enhancement in capabilities would require a constant endeavour for research and development, Indian Institutes of Technology and other technical institutions are setting up research teams to cover a wide range of issues in achieving the ultimate goal in terms of price and quality, the Minister said. However, while the technology is available, the Ministry is yet to work out the modalities of distribution, as this would require connectivity and involve transportation costs. The new device is an improvement over the one launched at Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh last year that had come under criticism for various reasons, including the cost. The government will also try and patent some technology used in the devices though most of the parts were available over the shelf, N.K. Sinha, Joint Secretary in charge of the project said. The device has a touch-screen, video-conferencing facility, multimedia content, searchable Pdf reader, unzip tool, and storage. Work is now on to provide these with solar panels. Under the National Mission on Education through Information and Technology (NMEICT), connectivity is proposed to be provided to universities and colleges. In nearly 8,500 colleges already connected, high quality e-content in various subjects is being created. Under the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning, nearly 500 web-based and video courses are available and uploaded on 'sakshat' and other portals. Another 1,100 courses in various disciplines of engineering and sciences are also being generated. Initially there was lukewarm response from the IT corporate houses to the Ministry's proposal, following which discussions were held with a group of experts at the Indian Institutes of Science at Bangalore and various Indian Institutes of Technology. Now that technology is available, the Ministry expects many corporates to volunteer to produce the device which would ultimately be available commercially also. (The Hindu)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

“Not for selective approach”

A day after the marathon ministerial engagement with India failed to make any headway, Pakistan on Friday indicated its unwillingness to return to the negotiating table for another open-ended dialogue just to keep up appearances. Though Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi maintained that there was no deadlock and Islamabad was ready to “negotiate anytime, anywhere,” there were clear indications of a disconnect and refusal to talk for the sake of talking. “We do not want to just provide photo opportunities,” a Foreign Office official said. India's selective approach to dialogue — where some issues of New Delhi's concern are given priority and others relegated to second grade — has peeved Pakistan. It wanted all issues taken up in tandem. “Talking about Kashmir does not mean we have to reach a conclusion immediately. But our contention is that the two sides should also talk about our core concerns because that was the mandate given to us by the two Prime Ministers in Thimphu,” the official said. (The Hindu)

Qureshi: Indian side was ill-prepared

Reacting to India's selective approach to dialogue, Pakistan officials said that till

Wednesday night India was open to discussing all issues. This was more or less agreed to at the dinner hosted by Pakistan Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi for External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna. Even during the course of the talks, dates for a possible visit by Mr. Qureshi to India in late November was considered but then Pakistan apparently decided against it given India's reluctance to have any structured form of dialogue. Mr. Qureshi indicated as much in his interaction with the media on Friday. Elaborating on what transpired, he said last-minute hitches were usual whenever there was some understanding between the two countries but categorically said that this time Pakistan was not responsible for it. Pakistan from the start had been insisting on a sustained dialogue and picking up from where the composite dialogue was suspended by India, but New Delhi's contention was that since the process was called off because of the Mumbai terror attack, it cannot be restarted without some action in unravelling the conspiracy and bringing the culprits to book by Islamabad. Commenting on the way the Indians conducted the negotiations, the Minister said the Indian side appeared ill-prepared with Mr. Krishna having to time and again consult New Delhi. Pointing out that he had entered the dialogue well prepared and with the full mandate of the Pakistani leadership, Mr. Qureshi pondered aloud why his counterpart — who is supposed to preside over Indian diplomacy — needed to consult New Delhi ever so often. (The Hindu)

Never said Krishna received instructions from Delhi: Qureshi

Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has denied having said that his Indian counterpart Mr SM Krishna was getting directions from New Delhi during the talks the two leaders held earlier this week. "I had never said that Indian external (affairs) minister repeatedly went out during the meeting to receive instructions from Delhi," Mr Qureshi was quoted as saying by The News. The denial comes despite his televised comments on Friday, a day after the talks, in which he openly said Mr Krishna was getting phone calls from New Delhi to receive policy directions. "India was narrowing the dialogue. The Indian foreign minister received foreign policy directions from New Delhi repeatedly during our meeting," Qureshi said in the televised Press conference while Mr Krishna was still in Islamabad. Mr Qureshi also said he would visit India only if he is assured that the neighbouring country had the "intention to hold meaningful and result oriented dialogue". "I do not want to visit India for a leisure trip. I want to go for meaningful, constructive and result-oriented talks if the right atmosphere prevails and if they are fully prepared," he told reporters. Mr Krishna said on Thursday that he had invited Mr Qureshi to visit India for the next round of their parleys. The Pakistani foreign minister also accused "some extremist forces in India" of not being in favour of successful India-Pakistan talks. "Pakistan was willing to hold a frank and candid dialogue on all issues but India had a limited agenda," he said maintaining the same line he had toed on Friday. He said: "India repeatedly talks about terrorism but it may be kept in mind that Pakistan has been playing a frontline role in the war on terror which is acknowledged by the world at large." (The Satesman)

Pak in conciliatory mood

Pakistan appears to have piped down today after two days of acrimony with India with its leaders saying it wanted the bilateral dialogue to continue and that it was serious about bringing Indo-Pak ties to an even keel. Both Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani and foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi made conciliatory statements against the backdrop of the war of words between the two sides after talks between their foreign ministers on Thursday failed to make any headway. Mr Qureshi, however, chose to up the ante again when he later told reporters that he was unwilling to travel to India for talks unless it is prepared to hold a “meaningful, constructive and result-oriented” dialogue to resolve outstanding issues. Mr Gilani, who described Dr Manmohan Singh as an “honourable man”, said: “Pakistan wants the continuation of dialogue with India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has assured me that all issues will be discussed.” Speaking on the sidelines of a function in Lahore, he said: “We want talks, they (India) too want talks. When talks are held, we will discuss all issues.” In Islamabad, Mr Qureshi who had blamed India for lack of progress in the talks, said that Pakistan was “very serious about normalising bilateral ties”. Mr Qureshi told a meeting of the Friends of Democratic Pakistan forum: “We are very serious about normalising our relations with India. I met with my Indian counterpart in Islamabad just day before yesterday. We agreed to embark on a sustained dialogue process.” The decision to continue the talks is a “good augury”, he said. Later in the day, responding to questions after addressing a joint news conference with visiting British minister Ms Sayeeda Warsi, Mr Qureshi said: “I do not want to visit India for a leisure trip. I want to go for meaningful, constructive and result-oriented talks if the right atmosphere prevails and if they are fully prepared (for talks).” Mr Krishna had invited Mr Qureshi to visit India for the next round of parleys. Mr Qureshi also reiterated his assertion that Mr Krishna had come to Pakistan with a limited mandate, and contended that during the talks, India raised its concerns and “then became selective” in taking on Pakistan's concerns. Sharp differences had become apparent during the talks between Mr Qureshi and Mr Krishna on Thursday over a roadmap and timeframe for future engagements. The two ministers also jostled verbally yesterday, with Mr Krishna rejecting Mr Qureshi's contention that India was not ready to discuss all issues. In New Delhi today, foreign secretary Mrs Nirupama Rao rebuffed Mr Qureshi's claim that Mr Krishna had supported him in his criticism of home secretary Mr GK Pillai. “India did not express any agreement with Pakistan's comments on Mr Pillai”, Mrs Rao told a news channel. She also lent support to Mr Pillai's statement ahead of the Islamabad talks that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence had a significant role in the Mumbai terror attack, saying that India is definitely concerned about ISI's role in 26/11. Mr Rao reiterated that the talks between the two nations had not collapsed. “There are differences in perception, but the gap is not unbridgeable,” she said. (The Statesman)

Foreign vs Home: the gulf is widening — and it isn't new

Differences between the Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs may be surfacing now after Home Secretary G K Pillai's remarks to The Indian Express on the ISI-26/11 link but the fact is there's been a gulf between the two that's been widening for some time. At the heart of this conflict are the apparently competing interests of the two ministries. The gathering opinion in MEA is that the MHA, focused on looking at the India-Pak equation through the prism of internal security, is infringing on its order of

duty while North Block feels that it's just doing its job by being upfront about security concerns and terror investigations. The MEA also complains that the MHA doesn't share key findings with it, such as those from David Headley's interrogations. Or details of Home Minister P Chidambaram's visit to Islamabad. Result: exasperated MEA officials, in the run-up to Krishna's visit to Pakistan, found their hands tied while preparing notes on terror-related points. And so kept referring to these in general terms, like "issues discussed in HM's visit." All that was agreed to was that India could propose Home Secretary-level talks as one of the announcements after Krishna's meetings. But those announcements never happened. One key factor behind the MEA-MHA dissonance is the fact that the Home Ministry, for the first time in many years, is asserting itself. For instance, it wants to legitimately own the visa-issuing process. On paper, the Home Ministry is responsible for this but for long much of the discretion lay with embassies and that was because there was no system by which North Block could be involved in the day-to-day issuing of visas. Headley's case re-ignited this conflict as the MEA reminded Home Ministry of its role when questions were asked about visas issued to the man who scoped Mumbai for the 26/11 plotters. In return, the Home Ministry decided to take over the process. And to begin with, it wanted to control the entry of Pakistan nationals and people of Pakistani-origin. So now, every Pakistani or Pakistani-origin visa applicant needs to be scrutinized by the Home Ministry and related agencies. There is also a new online process by which the Indian High Commission in Islamabad has to upload every visa application, which can then be accessed by Home Ministry here with a decision time of 30 days. The High Commissioner can use personal discretion only if there is no response within that time period. A bulk of the visas issued in Islamabad were at the High Commissioner's discretion. An alarmed MEA has asked the MHA to create categories for people like artists, businessmen, journalists, among others, who need not be scrutinized. The matter is being hotly contested between both sides of Raisina Hill. Incidentally, this is not the first time that MEA has had issues with the Home Secretary. Last November, Pillai commented on North-East insurgent groups receiving arms supplies from China. This upset Beijing, which is said to have taken up the matter diplomatically. When New Delhi, after checking with the Home Ministry, took the line that Pillai may have been quoted out of context, it is believed that the Chinese side produced a videotape to substantiate its claim. This infuriated the MEA further while the Home Ministry maintained that Pillai's remarks were played out of context. Next, came the Pune blasts in February, barely weeks after India had again made a move for reopening talks with Pakistan. Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao was to meet her counterpart in the last week of February. When the state government dithered from speaking to the media on the day of the blast, the task was entrusted to Pillai. His mention of Headley having surveyed targets in Pune was seen as being speculative by some quarters in South Block as that indicated a Pakistan hand. Again, the wariness was that this would not augur well ahead of the FS-level talks. Those talks eventually achieved little headway. Then, of course, came the row over Canada not issuing visas to defence and intelligence officials who had served in Jammu and Kashmir. Here, North Block wanted the MEA to take stern action and ensure removal of the Canadian embassy official responsible for issuing such bizarre and accusatory notes about human rights violations by these agencies. The MEA, on the other hand, wanted to handle it deftly as the Prime Minister was to visit Canada a month later in June. In that visit, India and Canada were to sign a civil nuclear cooperation

agreement that would end the ugly chapter when Ottawa suspected India of wrongly using reactors it had supplied for purposes of carrying out the first nuclear test in 1974. The MEA felt that instead of targeting individuals, the matter should be taken up with the Canadian government and once an apology was tendered, matters should rest there as there was a relationship to build. North Block was not too happy with the result. Sources point out that senior PMO officials have had to do a lot of bridge-building between the two ministries but the gap has not narrowed. A public spat, sources said, was waiting to happen and Krishna's disappointing visit to Islamabad seems to have provided that occasion. (The Indian Express)

India, U.S. sign counter-terrorism initiative

India and the U.S. on Friday signed the Counter Terrorism Initiative (CCI) to forge close and effective cooperation in counter-terrorism, information-sharing and capacity-building. "Today, with the formal signing of the initiative, we take several significant steps forward against terrorism," said U.S. Ambassador to India Timothy J. Roemer, who signed the Memorandum of Understanding with Home Secretary G.K. Pillai. Describing the MoU as symbolic of the "indispensable partnership" against terrorism, Mr. Roemer said both countries would work closely in such matters as intelligence-sharing and bomb blast investigations. "In the coming days and months, there will be even closer information-sharing and collaborative efforts in issues ranging from bomb blast probe and major event security to mega-city policing, cyber and border security. The strength of our bilateral relationship continues to grow, and the CCI will further enhance this unprecedented partnership," Mr. Roemer said. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Washington in November 2009, he and President Barack Obama had agreed on the Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative. The CCI is aimed at giving both the U.S. and India additional opportunities to work together across a broad spectrum, including transport security, money-laundering, counterfeit currency and terrorist financing, maritime, port and border security, cyber security and mega-city policing.

Common threat

"President Obama and Prime Minister Dr. Singh have acknowledged the common threat that international terrorism poses to all people," Mr. Roemer said. Exchanging experience of and expertise in port and border security; enhancing liaison and training between counter-terrorism units, including the National Security Guard, are part of the agreement. "Terrorism has brutally attacked the U.S. on 9/11, terrorism has attacked the people of India, particularly on 26/11 in Mumbai, where six Americans were killed. So this effort, I think, symbolises Prime Minister Singh's and President Obama's efforts to create this indispensable partnership for the 21 century," he said. "The MoU provides the two countries with a legal authority and framework and an institutionalised mechanism for close cooperation in counter-terrorism and exchange of crucial information and databases," Mr. Pillai said. (The Hindu)

'Monitor military aid to Pakistan'

Concerned over misuse of U.S. military aid to Pakistan against it, India on Friday asked Washington to set up a “monitoring mechanism” to ensure that it was used for the intended purpose. With the U.S. giving Pakistan weapons for the war against terror, Defence Minister A.K. Antony told the visiting Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Mike Mullen that the military aid was disproportionate to the intended task, sources in the Ministry said. Mr. Antony told Admiral Mullen that the U.S. should ensure that aid was used only for the purpose it was meant. In a 45-minute meeting at South Block, the visiting U.S. official is said to have apprised the Defence Minister of the American assessment of the security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Admiral Mullen renewed Defence Secretary Robert Gates' invitation to Mr. Antony to visit Washington and it was accepted. It is expected that he will visit the U.S during the last week of September, the sources said. Speaking to the media separately, Admiral Mullen said that at his meetings with Indian political and military leadership, the U.S. asked that the issue of concern over the defence capability of Pakistan be kept on the table. “I do not believe that we sold any weapons to Pakistan that [would] greatly imbalance capability in the region.” As for the monitoring mechanism, Admiral Mullen felt that the U.S., considering the relationship and understanding it had with Pakistan, expressed a very strong desire that the weapons systems be used against terrorist threat within the country. Characterising U.S.-Pakistan military cooperation as being reflective of the growing relations and friendship between the two countries, Admiral Mullen said Washington was broadening its military relations with Islamabad after the ties were cut off for almost a dozen years.

Concern at China claims

Admiral Mullen said China's aggressive posturing over territorial claims in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions was a matter of concern that America shared with India. “China seems to be asserting itself more and more with respect to the kinds of territorial claims. They seem to be taking a much more aggressive approach to the near-sea areas recently ... There is growing concern over it,” he said. “In my perspective, we [the U.S.] must work with India in this regard as in my recent interactions with its leadership, India too has expressed similar concerns.” (The Hindu)

India, Vietnam explore buying BP stake

India is exploring, in association with Vietnam, the possibilities of buying the stake of the British energy player, BP Plc, in a gas project in the Southeast Asian country, according to sources. India has evinced interest in the BP's stake in Nam Con Son gas project following reports that the British firm might sell some of its assets in Vietnam and elsewhere to fund the oil-spill clean-up operations in the Gulf of Mexico. (The Hindu)

Britain, India unite to pressure Pakistan over terror

Britain and India pressed Pakistan on Thursday to tackle militant groups operating from its soil as Prime Minister David Cameron wrapped up a two-day, trade-driven visit to the country. Cameron's trip, seen as test of his much-hyped business-oriented foreign policy,

was engulfed from the start by the issue of extremism in South Asia after remarks he made about the "export of terror" from India's neighbour. His initial aim -- revitalising a bilateral relationship he thought had stagnated -- did win support from his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh, however, who said the visit had injected "new momentum" in their partnership. They agreed to try to double trade in five years and signed several relatively minor exchange agreements, but militancy in Pakistan, blamed for attacks in India and Afghanistan, dominated their final press appearance. "No one is in any doubt, least of all the Pakistani government themselves, that there has been and still are terrorist organisations ... that need to be cracked down on and eliminated," Cameron said. This was echoed by Singh, who again called on Pakistan to "honour its commitment given to us on a number of occasions that Pakistani territory will not be allowed to be used for terrorism." Pakistan has been under intense scrutiny this week after leaked secret US military documents detailed alleged links between Pakistan's ISI intelligence services and Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan. Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is also held responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which left 166 people dead and derailed a slow-moving peace process between India and Pakistan, which have fought three wars since 1947. Next week, newly-elected Cameron will host Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, with the relationship likely to have been strained by his sharp criticism of support for insurgents in Pakistan. Asked about unrest in South Asia on Wednesday, Cameron responded that Pakistan could not be permitted to "look both ways" in promoting the export of terror while publicly supporting stability in the region. Pakistan's ambassador to Britain accused Cameron of "damaging the prospects of regional peace," while the foreign ministry in Islamabad reminded him of the nation's commitment and sacrifices in the fight against terror. "I believe in speaking clearly and plainly about these matters," Cameron told the news conference. "What we will continue to do is to work with the Pakistani government to do everything we can to encourage them to crack down and take on these groups that have caused so much pain, so much suffering within Pakistan and outside." Cameron, despite the time spent discussing Pakistan, had been keen to focus on how to deepen bilateral economic ties with India, the former jewel in Britain's colonial crown and now one of the world's fastest growing economies. He praised the recent investment in Britain made by Indian-run companies such as the car maker Tata and steel group Arcelor Mittal, but also pushed India to open up its tightly regulated retail and banking markets. "With Prime Minister Cameron's visit, we have set in place a new momentum to drive our strategic partnership forward," said Singh, who endorsed the vision of a "renewed and enhanced partnership". Cameron headed the largest British delegation to travel to India in recent memory, including a host of senior cabinet ministers and corporate bigwigs. In the only major commercial deal signed of note, BAE Systems finalised the sale of 57 Hawk trainer jets to India -- to be built locally under licence -- in a deal worth 500 million pounds. Rolls-Royce will provide the engines for the aircraft for another 200 million pounds. In further comments designed to please his hosts, Cameron said he would continue to lobby for India to take a place on the UN Security Council and said Britain would push for the completion of a long-delayed EU-India trade deal this year. The prime minister has come under fire back home after writing that he came to India "with humility" and accepted Britain was just one nation out of the "the whole world beating a path to (India's) door." (AFP)

Cameron: we can't tolerate Pakistan exporting terror

British Prime Minister David Cameron has said he will discuss with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh the “leakage” of funds provided to Pakistan to terrorists based in that country. Speaking at his first public event in India, on the Infosys Technologies' campus here on Wednesday, Mr. Cameron said he discussed the matter with U.S. President Barack Obama last week. “Although we are for a stable and democratic Pakistan, we cannot tolerate the idea that Pakistan can look both ways and export terror to India, Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world.” Later, Mr. Cameron witnessed the signing of an agreement at Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd's facility here for the supply 57 Hawk Advanced Jet Trainer aircraft to the Indian Air Force and the Navy. While the IAF will acquire 40 aircraft, the Navy, for the first time, will obtain 17 Hawk AJT aircraft at a total cost of Rs. 5,100 crore. The tripartite agreement involving HAL, BAE Systems and Rolls Royce was signed on behalf of HAL by P. Soundara Rajan, Director, Corporate Planning and Marketing; Guy Griffith, Group Managing Director, BAE Systems; and Christopher John Awde, Commercial Director, Rolls Royce. Under the terms of the contract, BAE systems will supply products and services to enable HAL to build the Hawk under licence from it, for Rs. 3,640 crore. BAE Systems will provide specialist engineering services, raw material and equipment necessary for airframe production and also the support package for the IAF and the Navy. Commenting on the deal, BAE Systems India Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Andrew Gallagher said: “The Hawk AJT fast jet training solution enables an Air Force or Navy to provide front line pilots for even the most modern fighter aircraft such as the Eurofighter Typhoon or Sukhoi SU-30.” Rolls Royce is to supply 57 Adour engines, which will power the Hawk aircraft. The deal is valued at Rs. 1,460 crore. The BAE Systems Hawk is to be powered by the Mk871 variant of the Adour, which will be assembled here in partnership with HAL. In 2004, India signed a deal for the acquisition of 66 Hawks for the IAF. (The Hindu)

Military:

£500-million arms deal on Cameron's wish-list for India

A £500- million arms deal to sell 60 Hawk jets to New Delhi is reported to be among the business contracts that British Prime Minister David Cameron hopes to clinch during his visit to India, beginning on Tuesday. The trip has been heavily trailed in the media here with commentators contrasting Britain's waning global influence with the growing importance of India. “Cameron reaches out to the power and wealth of New India as days of Raj recede,” was the heading of a long despatch from The Observer's Delhi correspondent while a full-page article in The Sunday Times called the visit an attempt to “woo a new superpower”. Mr. Cameron is leading a large and high-profile business delegation reflecting his government's decision to use British foreign policy more aggressively to promote the country's business interests. Diplomats have been told to put commerce at the heart of their dealings with foreign governments, especially the emerging global economies such as India. There is also a move to fill key diplomatic posts, including at the ambassadorial level, with businessmen. In a letter to members of the delegation, Mr. Cameron said the visit was an opportunity to demonstrate to India that

Britain was “open for business” as it sought to seek an “enhanced relationship” with New Delhi. “For our part, government ministers on this trip will be stressing the importance of trade and demonstrating to our Indian counterparts how Britain is open for business again. But you have a crucial role, too. In the meetings you meet, places you visit, you can showcase the ingenuity and creativity our country has to offer,” he wrote. The Liberal Democrat Business Secretary Vince Cable, who is among the more than half-a-dozen Cabinet ministers accompanying the Prime Minister, said that in the past British politicians went to India with a “wrong attitude” by harping on the old “sentimental” links. “In the past, the British have talked about history and sentiment — and then gone there and whinged about the difficulties of exporting whisky. It's become a negative stereotype of the way the British relate to India,” he said. The BAE systems, which manufactures the Hawks, has a controversial record and was forced to review its business ethics following allegations that it paid secret commissions to win a £43 billion defence contract with Saudi Arabia though it has always insisted that all payments were “lawful.” The company already has a joint venture with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and is seeking to raise its profile in India on the back of Mr. Cameron's visit. Its Chairman Dick Olver called for British businesses to treat India on a par with America in its importance as a trading partner. (The Hindu)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Separatist shutdown, restrictions cripple Srinagar again

A shutdown called by separatists and restrictions imposed by authorities paralysed life in Srinagar, just a day after a semblance of normalcy was restored after days of strikes and curfew. North Kashmir's Baramulla town, meanwhile, was tense after a boy allegedly drowned there after being chased by security forces. The hardline separatist Hurriyat group headed by Mr Syed Ali Geelani has called for a Valley-wide shutdown to protest alleged human rights violations by the security forces in Kashmir. The shutdown is part of the group's continuing "Quit Kashmir" programme. "Restrictions have been imposed in Srinagar's Old City areas and uptown Maisuma, Batmaloo and Humhama localities to prevent violence," a police officer said. Police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) contingents were moved out early morning to enforce restrictions. Traffic intersections were blocked with coils of razor-fitted wire in the Old City and in Maisuma and Batmaloo areas. Both vehicular and pedestrian movement has been disallowed by security forces. Reports of restrictions also came in from north Kashmir Sopore town where police and CRPF personnel have been deployed. The Kashmir Valley had witnessed normalcy yesterday after 12 days of separatist shutdowns and official restrictions. Hundreds of vehicles were seen on Srinagar roads resulting in traffic jams. People came out in large numbers to buy essential items fearing another spell of shutdowns and restrictions. However, Baramulla town remained tense as residents alleged a Class VII student, identified as Faizan Ahmad Buhroo, drowned after being chased by security forces. The teenager's body has not yet been recovered. Security personnel had reportedly chased a stone-pelting mob at Azadgunj Bridge in Baramulla town last evening. The teenager, who was among the mob, jumped into the river to escape the security forces, reports said. District magistrate (Baramulla) Mr Bashir Ahmad

Bhat told reporters that the first priority of the administration was to recover the boy's body. "Circumstances leading to the boy drowning would be thoroughly probed once we recover his body," Mr Bhat said. Fourteen civilians have been killed across the Valley since 11 June in incidents of firing by security forces at stone-pelting mobs. The state government has decided to conduct an independent enquiry into the circumstances leading to the civilian deaths.(The Statesman)

Demoralized & helpless, J&K cops refuse field duty

Caught between mob fury and politics, J&K police seems to have disintegrated into a demoralized force with several of its officers refusing field postings, saying their hands were tied due to instructions against the use of force against stone-pelters. Sources said the demoralization came to fore on Monday when Baramulla SSP Sheikh Mehmood deserted his force at the first sign of trouble feigning a heart ailment. The officer left the town after the situation seemed to be going out of control after two youth — Faizan Bhuroo (13) and Fayaz Ahmad Khanday (30) — were killed and 25 others injured in police action. Mehmood was transferred along with another dozen officers the same day and posted as SSP traffic, Kashmir. Former CID SSP Ghulam Hassan Bhat declined to take over and instead preferred attachment to the police headquarters. A police officer, who said he would decline field posting as well, said the cops were helpless and had to follow orders on maximum restraint. "I don't want the posting in the present environment where authorities stop us from using force against the protesters who can even lynch us," he said. The officers particularly avoid hometown postings, which makes even their families vulnerable to attacks. "The instructions on exercising restraint makes it worse." The recent police reshuffle indicated most officers were transferred to their hometowns. The officers have by and large expressed their reservations in taking up the new responsibilities. "The then Baramulla SHO Khurshid Ahmad's family had a narrow escape when a mob set fire to his house at Khwaja Bagh in Baramulla while he was away managing street protests in August 2008," said a top cop. Another senior cop cautioned against April 1992-like police revolt when DGP B S Bedi and home commissioner Mehmood-ur-Rehman besides several senior officers were held hostage at Srinagar's police control room. The 48-hour drama ended after the Army was called in. Insiders compare the demoralization with the mood in the force following the 1990s militant onslaught. Worse, the Central forces accuse the J&K police of shirking its responsibilities. A CRPF officer noted that over 200 paramilitary personnel were injured in the recent spell of unrest, against minor injuries to over two dozen J&K cops to underline the latter's unwillingness to take charge in crowd control. The paramilitary force also resents J&K police's attempt to pass the buck and blame the CRPF for civilian killing. The mistrust, which underlines serious lack of coordination among various security agencies, could add to the woes of the state government that has been under fire for its failure to stem street protests that started after a 17-year-old boy was killed in police action on July 11. The Army had to be called in after the situation seemed to be spinning out of control last month. The Army brought an uneasy calm, which was shattered after two more youth were killed in police action in Baramulla. The state police, which shares the credit for breaking the back of insurgency, has a strength of 80,000 personnel. (Times of India)

Hizb chief for rethink on agitation strategy

As the prolonged strike in the Kashmir valley against the recent civilian killings during action by security forces completed 25 days, the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen chief and head of United Jihad Council Syed Salahuddin on Friday expressed concern over the continuance of the agitation in its present form. In a telephonic interview to local news agency KNS, Mr. Salahuddin said that it was time for a rethink on the strategy to ensure that the economy and students were not affected, while “the struggle for freedom” continues. He said that in the areas where people were involved in “genuine protests” his cadres would not engage security forces but move to the borders. Justifying the stone-pelting as a “tool of resistance,” he said “Kashmiris have no alternative but to carry on their struggle through this method.”

“No Pakistani hand”

The Hizb chief ruled out the hand of Pakistan in the struggle and said it was totally indigenous. People had sacrificed a lot for the “cause.” According to him, the separatist leaders should join hands and devise a “new programme” whose impact would be less disruptive. “The programme of frequent strikes is not practicable because the struggle for freedom is not just for days, it is a long-drawn battle,” he said. His suggestion was that the protests could be conducted at district levels. Mr. Salahuddin strongly condemned the recent killings and the arrest of separatist leaders.

Put to hardship

All shops and business establishments, most government offices, educational institutions and banks have remained closed for nearly a month now causing hardship to the people. Mr. Salahuddin's appeal comes at a time when people were expecting yet another protest calendar from the Hurriyat Conference led by Syed Ali Geelani. (The Hindu)

Clashes in Kashmir, curfew clamped in 3 towns

Stone-throwing mobs clashed with security personnel at nearly a dozen places in Kashmir after Friday prayers, leaving 15 persons, including seven security men, injured even as authorities clamped curfew in three towns in the Valley. Five policemen, including a CRPF jawan, were injured when protesters attacked a security vehicle outside Nishat police station on the banks of the Dal Lake here shortly after Friday prayers, police said. Police and CRPF personnel fired several warning shots and burst teargas shells, they said, adding three civilians were also injured in the clash. Another group of youths tried to take out a procession towards Hyderpora Chowk on the Srinagar-airport road but was dispersed by police who fired teargas shells and used batons. Four persons, including a policeman, were injured in the violence. The authorities imposed curfew in Kupwara and Bandipora district towns besides Sopore town in Baramulla district as a precautionary measure as the hardline faction of the Hurriyat Conference led by jailed leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani asked people to stage demonstrations after Friday prayers against the killing of several youth during clashes with security forces in the past one month.

Chairman of moderate faction of Hurriyat Conference Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, who usually delivers the Friday sermon at the Jamia Masjid and is under house arrest for the past nearly one month, criticised the administration for imposing restrictions on the movement of the people. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Bharti's Mittal putting more money aside for education

Having helped with the transformation of India through the power of communication, Sunil Mittal, the founder of the country's largest mobile phone operator, is channeling his wealth towards education for poor children that has the power to change their destiny. Right now, Mittal's philanthropy through the Bharti Foundation has touched the lives of 30,000 underprivileged children and the telecom czar has pledged to put more money aside to expand this number to at least 1,00,000. In 2000, when the telecom sector was in the midst of a revolution, Mittal realised that connecting communities in small towns and villages through mobiles was not enough. They needed the power of education. And the Bharti Foundation was set up to make this possible. In an interview with PTI, Mittal said: "The focus of the foundation is education for the poor in the villages. Nearly 30,000 students are already there in 236 schools. We are determined to take it to 1,00,000. This will be the single largest intervention by any corporate in the history of this country." Mittal has already donated Rs 200 crore towards various educational initiatives. The first generation entrepreneur, who has been ranked among the top philanthropists in the country, feels that money is not going to be a limiting factor for his initiative. "Whenever money is required, we will put in cash," he said. Mittal, who started his business as a bicycle manufacturer and is now leading the over US\$ 8 billion business conglomerate Bharti Enterprises, is also ready to part with his stake in the company for charity. "We will put in cash or (dilute) stake" whenever required, he said. The company he founded is the largest mobile phone operator in terms of subscribers in a country where mobile phones are seen as a tool for economic empowerment. Everyone from fishermen to street vendors use mobile phones across the country, thus gaining access to information such as the market price they need for growing their business. At Bharti Enterprises, there is absolute belief in education being the most important tool for social and economic development in India. This belief is what led to the launch of the Satya Bharti School Programme in 2006. Currently, 236 Satya Bharti Primary Schools are operational, reaching out to approximately 30,000 children across the states of Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. (The Statesman)

Frogmen of Pakistan Navy trained 26/11 terrorists, Headley tells NIA

Terrorists who carried out the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai were trained by the "frogmen" of the Pakistani Navy, Lashkar-e-Taiba operative David Coleman Headley had told the National Investigation Agency (NIA) team who questioned him in Chicago recently. The disclosure by Headley — an American citizen of Pakistan origin who had done the groundwork for the Mumbai attacks — comes as a corroboration of the statement of the lone captured terrorist Ajmal Amir Kasab that the terrorists were given training by the

Pakistani Navy, giving enough indication of the involvement of Pakistani establishment in the terror attacks. During interrogation, Kasab had confessed that the 10 terrorists, including himself, had received training in swimming, diving and underwater combat from the frogmen. "The role of frogmen was confirmed by Headley when the Indian investigators interrogated him in the U.S. last month," senior officials in the Home Ministry said. Home Secretary G.K. Pillai had recently stated that the Pakistan's spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), was "literally controlling and coordinating the [Mumbai] attack from beginning to end." Officials said the Indian investigators so far had no plan to interrogate Headley's accomplice Tahawwur Hussain Rana, a Canadian citizen of Pakistani-origin, as his involvement in the Mumbai attack conspiracy was limited to providing finance. "If necessary, we may interrogate Rana also, though we have no immediate plan to do so," an official said. Headley had also told NIA team that the Pakistani intelligence agency had paid Rs.25 lakh to Lashkar to purchase a boat which the terrorists used to travel from Karachi to the Pakistani maritime boundary, where they hijacked an Indian fishing boat 'Kuber' to reach Mumbai.

ISI officers identified

Headley also identified through voice sample test two ISI officers believed to be in constant contact with the terrorists, who carried out the 60-hour attack in Mumbai on November 26, 2008. Officials said Indian investigators have information that ISI chief Lieutenant-General Ahmed Shuja Pasha had met one of the handlers of the Mumbai attack, Sajjid Mir, who is currently in a Pakistani jail. "All this information has been shared by India with Pakistan through the multiple dossiers given to Islamabad," officials said. (The Hindu)

Arundhati Roy, Indra Nooyi among 30 most inspiring women

India-born head of PepsiCo Indra Nooyi and writer and activist Arundhati Roy have been named by Forbes among the world's 30 most inspiring women, a list that also features Mother Teresa, media mogul Oprah Winfrey and United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. "Role models mean different things to different people — some of us look for guidance in business, some in our personal lives, some of us strive to make the world a better place each day, some admire trailblazers," Forbes said. Ms. Roy comes in third on the list, while Ms. Nooyi ranks 10. The '30 Utterly Inspiring Role Models' list has been compiled by ForbesWoman. The publication reached out to communities on Facebook and Twitter to determine the most motivating women in the world. Others named in the list include First lady Michelle Obama and Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling. (The Hindu)

'Nearly 200 women killed every year after being branded witches'

Citing National Crime Bureau statistics, a Dehra Dun-based NGO has said that nearly 150-200 women are killed every year in the country after being tagged as 'witches.' Jharkhand tops the list with 50-60 witchcraft-related murders every year, followed by Andhra Pradesh, where the number is around 30, Haryana with 25-30 and Orissa with 24-

28 deaths, Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK) chairman Avdhash Kaushal said. According to a study conducted by RLEK, more than 2,500 women were killed in the past 15 years after being accused of practising witchcraft. Five women were stripped and paraded naked last year at Patharghatia village in Jharkhand's Deodhar district. In another incident, a 40-year-old woman was allegedly lynched by her women neighbours at Sikariatand village in Simdega district of the same State, Mr. Kaushal said. "It is very sad that women are still being killed rampantly after being declared witches. A majority of these incidents are not reported in the media," he said, adding that a national legislation was needed to overcome the menace. "We will soon file a writ petition in the court of law to seek a remedy in the form of legislation from Parliament on the issue," Mr. Kaushal said. (The Hindu)

Environment:

Monsoon to remain subdued over south peninsular region

The India Meteorological Department on Friday forecast that the South-West Monsoon would continue to remain subdued over most parts of the south peninsular region and central India over the next one week, while being fairly good over east, north-east and the north-western parts of the country. The forecast comes in the wake of signals that the monsoon trough could once again shift to north of its normal position from Sunday. In a press release, the department said there were also indications that a western disturbance could affect the north-west region from Monday and a cyclonic circulation could form in the lower tropospheric levels over Uttar Pradesh around Tuesday. The situation, it said, could, however, change for the better for the south peninsular region and central India by next Saturday, with the strengthening of monsoon flows over the Arabian Sea. The deficiency in rainfall for the country has gone up to 14 per cent from 10 per cent last week. The north-west region continues to fare the worst, with the deficiency going up to 18 per cent from six per cent a week ago. Uttar Pradesh had the maximum deficiency of 49 per cent: 59 of the 71 districts have a deficiency of over 20 per cent, and of them 28 had deficiencies of over 60 per cent. The eastern part of the State is the worst hit. Jharkhand followed it with a deficiency of 45 per cent. IMD experts said the situation could improve in these two States over the next one week. (The Hindu)

India's first scientific expedition in November

Come November, India will mount its first scientific expedition to the South Pole to mark the centenary of the first successful expedition to the southern end of the world by the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen. A team of eight scientists will undertake the icy journey from 'Maitri', India's research station in the Antarctic region, which is located at about 70 degrees north. The scientists would traverse a distance of about 3,000 km. Announcing this, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Shailesh Nayak, said that during the 45-50 day expedition, the scientists would collect ice cores and gather atmospheric data to understand changes in environment over the past 1,000 years. Experiments involving geomorphology – the study of landforms and geophysics, which includes movement of tectonic plates, are also planned. The scientists would be travelling in four

sport utility vehicles specially designed for the icy terrain. The Government is planning to acquire one vehicle at an estimated cost of Rs. 90 lakh and hire the three others. India is building a new research station named 'Bharti' in the Larsemann Hills region in the eastern part of Antarctica. The station will play a major role in oceanographic research, besides studying climate change. Most of the construction material was transported to the site last year, and the building activity would begin once the current winter season ends. "We get a maximum of 60 days to carry out construction work in any given year. Weather permitting, we hope to complete the first phase of the station this year," Dr. Nayak said. The target is to have it functional by 2012. (The Hindu)

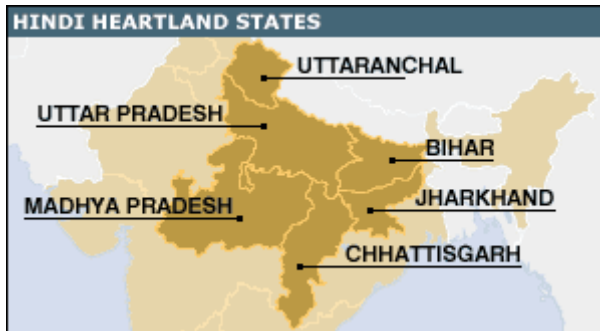
India's monsoon rains turn normal in July

India's monsoon rainfall in the key crop-planting month of July has been normal, recovering sharply after a 16 percent deficit in June, two sources in the weather office told said on Tuesday. Heavy showers, mainly in soybean-growing areas in the past week, have narrowed to 7 percent the shortfall in total monsoon rains since June 1, raising hopes of a strong harvest in the world's leading consumer of rice, cooking oils and sugar.

The improvement in monsoon showers has given hope for above normal rains in August-September, said a senior official of the India Meteorological Department who did not wish to be named. Rainfall has been well distributed over major crop-growing regions of the country, officials at the weather office said. Good rains in the crucial month of July will help bumper production for summer crops, L.S. Rathore, head of the agricultural meteorology division of the weather office, told Reuters. Vigorous monsoon rains will help rein in soaring inflation, which has stood in double digits for five consecutive months and has been rising after last year's monsoon delivered the weakest rainfall in nearly four decades. India's opposition has sought a special discussion and vote in parliament over high prices this week, attacking the government on an issue that has emerged as a major policy challenge. India produced 218 million tonnes of grains in 2009/10 with summer sown crops such as rice and soybean sharing nearly half of the output. Last week, a top weather forecaster said the vital monsoon rains would narrow a shortfall in rainfall in the June-September period despite a lean patch in mid-July. The weather office expects good rains in coming days as favourable weather conditions are expected to develop over the Bay of Bengal on the east coast in the next 48 hours. The weather office also expects good rains over rice-producing Orissa state in eastern India, and soybean-growing central India this week. Monsoon showers at regular intervals will help the soybean crop which is in good condition now, said Rajesh Agrawal, a spokesman of the Soybean Processors Association of India based in the central city of Indore. Monsoon rainfall has been three times the normal level in the main soybean region in the past two to three days, weather officials said. In southern India, where rice, cane and corn are grown, rainfall has been a quarter above average in recent days. (The Indian Express)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

Cong's poll prospects bleak in Bihar, say party observers

Even as the Congress has initiated the process of identifying candidates for the forthcoming Assembly elections in Bihar, it shows no signs of revival in a state where it has rebuffed all overtures of its erstwhile allies RJD and LJP. Congress observers sent to Bihar to identify candidates have come back disappointed about the party's prospects. In the past four weeks these observers had gone to every constituency to assess the party's situation and identify "winnable" candidates. While they came back with a list of at least five to 10 potential candidates in every constituency, they were far from enthusiastic about the poll prospects. "You hardly find any Congress workers in villages. While the very prospects of getting a party ticket, which also brings party funds to contest elections, draw a lot of aspiring candidates, the Congress does not seem to have much presence at the grassroots level," one observer told. Another observer said while the party continued to bank on the possibility of Muslims and upper castes coming back to it from the RJD and the BJP, respectively, "there was little on the ground to inspire confidence". At a meeting here with AICC general secretary in charge of the state Mukul Wasnik though, these observers presented a long list of potential candidates. For instance, in one of the districts with 10 Assembly constituencies, the list contained at least 270 potential candidates. "There are encouraging reports. We are moving in right direction," said Wasnik. Congress president Sonia Gandhi had sought to set the house in order in the state, axing AICC in charge of Bihar Jagdish Tytler and PCC chief Anil Sharma last month and replacing them with Wasnik and Mehboob Ali Kaisar, respectively. The move has, however, failed to check the party's downslide in the state, according to observers. (The Indian Express)

Kalyan hits out at BJP and SP, tries to woo Hindus, backwards

Calling the Bharatiya Janata Party a “party of cowards”, former state chief minister and chief of Jan Kranti Party, Kalyan Singh, said the BJP is not focusing on the issue of Ram Mandir, as it wants to please the Muslims. Speaking at the first national convention of his party in Lucknow on Tuesday, Singh said the BJP has betrayed the sentiments of the Hindus and his party will now fight for their rights. He also slammed the Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav — his ally in the last Lok Sabha elections — for apologising to the Muslims for the demolition of the Babri Masjid. He claimed that Yadav should instead apologise to the Hindus for opening fire on the karsewaks in 1992. “The BJP may be ashamed of the fall of the Babri Masjid, but I feel proud of this act. I am the only leader who does not feel ashamed of what happened in 1992 and neither have I ever apologised for it,” said Singh. He added: “But I promise my workers and also the Hindus of the country that I will never return to such a party. My workers will now work towards strengthening my party. No matter how hard the BJP may try, my workers will stay here.” Hitting out on “friend-turned-foe” Mulayam Singh Yadav, Singh said his apology to Muslims is a mere drama. “Mulayam should apologise to the Hindus. All these parties are just trying to woo the Muslim votebank, but who will think about the Hindus and the backwards?” he asked. Claiming that SP has lost its following in Uttar Pradesh, Singh said: “I supported them because Mulayam Singh and Amar Singh came to my house seeking support. If I had not supported them, they would have managed only 11 seats in UP. Now, I would not support them anymore.” Not sparing the BSP as well, Singh termed the BSP rule as jungle raj and Maya raj. “The party wastes money on stone structures and does not think about the poor and Dalits. It has changed Lucknow into a city of stone sculptures, which has even changed the climate of the city,” he said. The national president of the party and Singh’s son Rajveer presided over the convention. He asked the workers to begin a mass membership campaign and enrol people to strengthen its base before the 2012 Assembly elections. (The Indian Express)

Cong demands dismissal of Nitish government

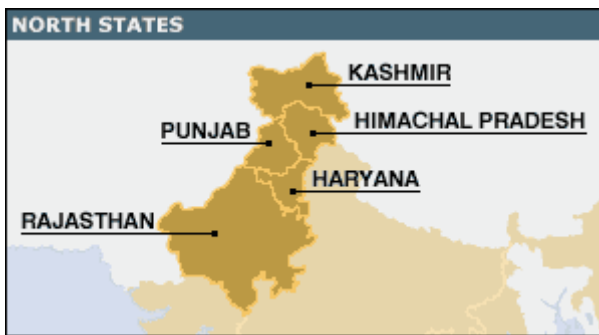
Congress legislators in Bihar on Friday met Governor Devanand Konwar and handed over a memorandum demanding the immediate dismissal of the Nitish Kumar government over alleged irregularities of Rs 11,412 crore in the state. A day after Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Left parties legislators submitted a memorandum to the governor in this regard, Congress legislators led by state party president Mahboob Ali Qaiser also did the same. The Congress legislators also demanded the removal of state assembly Speaker Uday Narain Choudhary for his "partisan" role and decision to suspend 67 opposition legislators for unruly behaviour and taking no action against ruling legislators. Qaiser said that the governor assured them that he would look into the matter. Qaiser said the Congress had distanced itself from other opposition parties to oppose the matter in its own way. The 67 opposition legislators were suspended for unruly behaviour in the assembly, which witnessed violent clashes between the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and opposition members on Tuesday and Wednesday. Unruly scenes were witnessed in the assembly Wednesday as a slipper was flung at the speaker in the house and flower pots

were broken in the premises by opposition legislators. The delegation of the other opposition parties led by the RJD marched to the Raj Bhavan Thursday evening and presented a memorandum to the governor, demanding the dismissal of the Nitish Kumar government. The Left parties, including the Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India-Marxist and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), have decided to stage a daylong sit-in July 23 over the scam. Nitish Kumar and deputy chief minister Sushil Kumar Modi are among the 47 people named in the court complaint alleging irregularities of Rs 11,412 crore during 2002-08 in Bihar. Petitioner Arvind Kumar pointed at financial irregularities in the use of development funds. The Patna High Court has asked the Central Bureau of Investigation to probe the complaint, a move the government has appealed against. (Times of India)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The North



Politics:

Social front:

Flood toll in Punjab, Haryana reaches 51

The flood situation continued to remain grim in some parts of Punjab and Haryana where at least 51 people have so far lost their lives, officials said. According to official figures, 26 people were killed due to flood-related reasons in Haryana while 25 people were killed in Punjab. "In Haryana, maximum flood-related deaths were reported from Ambala district where 11 people lost their lives. This is followed by 10 in Kurukshetra, four in Fatehabad and one in Sirsa," a Haryana government spokesperson said. The flood situation is still grim in some parts of Sirsa and Fatehabad districts, where the Ghaggar river was flowing above the danger mark. "Several acres of agricultural land has been inundated and many villages are still submerged. Rescue work is on and the overall situation is under control," the spokesperson said. "But it will take some more time for the situation to normalise in these two districts," the official said. Besides, the Panchkula administration had also issued a flood alert in the district yesterday following a rise in

Ghaggar river's water level. Officials in Panchkula district said the water level in Ghaggar river had risen yesterday following heavy rains in the catchment areas of neighbouring Himachal Pradesh. Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Sirsa and Fatehabad districts were badly affected by the floods during the last few days. The state government claimed a loss worth crores of rupees and a team of Central government will come here on 19-20 July to assess the actual damage. In the neighbouring state of Punjab, the flood situation is still worrisome in Sardulgarh sub-division of Mansa district. "Although there has been no fresh breach, the flood situation is grim in some parts of Sardulgarh area. Our relief operation is on and the water level has also marginally receded since yesterday," Mr Kumar Rahul, deputy commissioner of Mansa, told IANS. "Nearly 20,000 houses have been damaged in Mansa district and over 9,000 acres of agricultural land has been inundated," he said. As per official figures, over 3.25 lakh acres of land has been submerged in the floods, causing a loss of around Rs 480 crore. So far, 25 people have been killed in various flood-affected districts in Punjab. (The Statesman)

Haryana now seeks 1,346 crore for flood relief

Haryana on Monday urged the Centre to sanction a total financial assistance of Rs.1,346.81 crore so that necessary succour could be provided to the flood-affected people and damaged infrastructure could be repaired on a war footing. Earlier, the State Government in an interim memorandum had sought financial assistance of Rs.1,000 crore. The supplementary memorandum seeking assistance of Rs.346.81 crore was submitted by the State Government to a four-member Inter-Ministerial Central team which visited the flood-affected areas on Monday, Haryana Chief Secretary Urvashi Gulati said. She added that the supplementary memorandum was submitted as two more districts of Fatehabad and Sirsa had also been affected by floods and the earlier estimates had been accordingly revised. Ms. Gulati said that out of the total additional financial assistance of Rs.346.81 crore, Rs.124 crore was required for repair of roads and bridges, Rs.50 crore for repair of damaged bunds and breaches and dewatering, Rs.124.32 crore for damage to crops, pumps and input subsidy, Rs.10.04 crore for repair of electrical installations, replacement of transformers, Rs.2 crore for health care, Rs.21 crore for veterinary care, Rs.0.45 crore for repair of damaged waterworks, Rs.10 crore for repair of rural community centres and Rs.5 crore for repair of houses. She disclosed that these estimates were preliminary and the actual damage would be known only after the flood water recede. "Keeping in view the needs of the people, the State Government provides relief at a higher scale than permissible under the Calamity Relief Fund," she added.

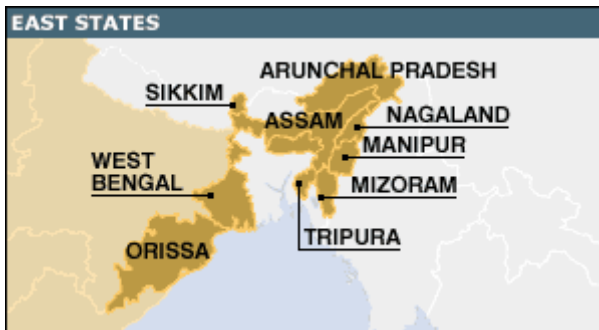
Heavy losses

Nearly 100 98 villages in Fatehabad district and 47 in Sirsa district had been affected by breaches in bunds along the Ghaggar due to excess water. Farmers had suffered heavy losses due to crop loss in these two districts. The flood water was still standing in the fields and farmers would have to put in extra labour for preparing the fields again for re-sowing the damaged areas or go in for alternative crops as they had "missed" the main kharif crop. Hence there was an urgent need to provide subsidised seeds in this hour of crisis. Paddy is the main kharif crop and it is estimated that 35,000 hectares transplanted

paddy area had been totally damaged in these two districts, she added. Meanwhile, the State Government also urged the Centre to grant liberal financial assistance and raise the norms and rates of compensation to compensate the flood-affected people. It also urged the Centre to speed up approval to the projects of construction of dams at Diwanwala and Dangrana on the Ghaggar to control the menace of flash floods in the State. The requests were made by senior administrative Secretaries during their meetings with the Central team in Ambala, Kurukshetra and Kaithal. The team was led by Joint Secretary (Home Affairs) R. P. Nath and consisted of Director, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Directorate of Wheat Development, Ghaziabad, G. K. Chaudhary, Director in Power Ministry R. K. Verma and Senior Regional Director in Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Amarjeet Kaur. Haryana Financial Commissioner and Principal Secretary (Irrigation) S .S. Dhillon and other senior officers said the rate of compensation was very low for the damage caused to houses and fields. Ambala City MLA Venod Sharma and Ambala Cantt. legislator Anil Vij were also present. Talking to media persons, Mr. Nath said there had been substantial loss due to the floods and the team would submit its detailed report on the losses caused due to the unprecedented floods to the Union Government. Meanwhile, an official spokesman said the level of the Ghaggar had receded significantly and the flow of water in Ottu Weir had come down to 9,000 cusecs on Monday as compared to 20,000 cusecs on Sunday. (he Hindu)

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

Social front:

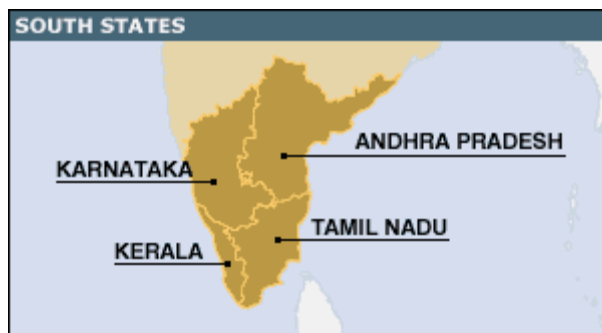
67 killed in train smash

At least 67 persons were killed and 121 injured when the Sealdah-bound New Cooch Behar-Sealdah Uttarbanga Express rammed the Bhagalpur-Ranchi Vananchal Express from behind at the Sainthia station in the early hours of Monday. The engine of the Uttarbanga Express and the parcel van and two general compartments of the Vananchal Express were completely destroyed. So great was the impact of the collision that one of the general compartments was flung over the footbridge of the station. The drivers of the

Uttarbanga Express, M.C. Dey and M.K. Mondal, and the guard of the Vananchal Express, A. Mukherjee, were among those killed. While most of those injured persons were admitted to the Suri hospital, some were shifted to hospitals in Bardhaman district and Kolkata. Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee visited the accident site and announced an ex gratia of Rs. 5 lakh to the relatives of those killed and a job to one from each bereaved family. Ms. Banerjee termed the incident “unfortunate” and ordered an inquiry. The disaster occurred within two months of the May 28 accident in Paschim Medinipur district involving the Jnaneswari Express, that claimed 150 lives. According to Eastern Railway General Manager V.N. Tripathy, the Vananchal Express was just leaving Platform 4 around 1.50 a.m. when the Uttarbanga Express rammed it at high speed. “What happened is something very unusual. The Uttarbanga Express had a scheduled stop here but was still running at a very high speed. We are not ruling out any possibility, including sabotage. Commissioner of Railway Safety R.P. Yadav has already initiated an inquiry,” Mr. Tripathy said. Most of the passengers of the general compartments of the Vananchal Express were asleep when the incident took place. State CID officials inspected the spot in the evening. Rescue work continued throughout the day, with the Army's disaster management team joining hands with railway and police officials to extricate the bodies. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Yeddyurappa rules out removal of Reddy brothers

The BJP today appeared to have decided to brazen it out in the fight with the Opposition with Karnataka chief minister Mr BS Yeddyurappa giving a clean chit to the Reddy brothers facing allegations of illegal mining and ruling out their dismissal from the Cabinet. “101 per cent. There is no charge against them. There is no evidence against them. Let them (Opposition) approach the High Court,” Mr Yeddyurappa told reporters when asked if he was giving a clean chit to the Reddy brothers Mr G Janardhan Reddy and Mr G Karunakar Reddy. The chief minister's remarks came after the Reddy brothers held a breakfast meeting with Mr Yeddyurappa who is under Opposition pressure to remove them on charges of illegal mining and excessive export of iron ore. “The question

of taking action against the Reddy brothers does not arise. There is no proof,” the chief minister said to a query whether there would not be action against the duo who also met the leader of the Opposition Mrs Sushma Swaraj today to give their version. Recalling his meeting with Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and home minister Mr P Chidambaram to discuss the issue of illegal mining in the state, Mr Yeddyurappa said “in no way, they (Reddy brothers) are responsible for illegal mining.” Mr Yeddyurappa, who also met senior party leaders Mr LK Advani, Mr Nitin Gadkari and Mrs Sushma Swaraj, refused to divulge to the media “whatever suggestions given by them”. Asked if BJP Central leaders had asked the Reddy brothers to clear their name in the wake of charges of illegal mining, the chief minister said the Reddy brothers were “capable of tackling things themselves”. “The Reddy brothers are going to clarify their stand and how Congress and JD-S are targeting them unnecessarily without documents or any charges,” Mr Yeddyurappa said. The Bellary mining barons said they would hold a Press conference in Bangalore tomorrow when they will respond to the charges against them. Mr Yeddyurappa said he would write to Karnataka Lokayukta Mr Santosh Hegde tomorrow to investigate all cases of illegal mining from 2002-03 till date. However, he said he could not fix a time frame for the Lokayukta to complete the investigations. (The Statesman)

Reddy names Congress leaders ‘involved’ in illegal mining

In the continuing war of words over illegal mining, Bellary district in-charge Minister G. Janardhan Reddy on Monday alleged that several Congress leaders of Bellary district were linked to illegal mining. The Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular) leadership reacted soon afterwards, holding the Bellary Ministers responsible for the scam and describing the statement of Mr. Janardhan Reddy as an attempt to divert attention. Addressing presspersons here, Mr. Reddy alleged that family members of the former Minister M.Y. Ghorpade, legislator Santosh Lad, Rajya Sabha member Anil Lad, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee general secretary Abdul Wahab, the former MP H.G. Ramulu and the former All India Congress Committee member S.M. Jain were involved in illegal mining. He has based his charge on a report submitted by the Lokayukta to the Government. The Lokayukta's interim report, submitted in December 2008, contains the names of the mining companies that have “encroached upon” areas adjoining their respective mines, and Mr. Reddy gave the names of political leaders who control these companies. Accusing the Congress leaders of hurting the pride of the people of Bellary, he said the BJP would organise a “Swabhimani samavesha” in Bellary on August 20, which would be addressed by party leader Sushma Swaraj. A padayatra to Mysore from Bellary would be taken out prior to the convention.

Congress preparations

Meanwhile, the State Congress leaders, under the leadership of KPCC president R.V. Deshpande, have commenced preparations for a Bangalore-Bellary padayatra set to commence on July 25 from here and culminate in a protest rally in Bellary on August 9. The Congress has remained firm in its demand that only an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation will help in unravelling the truth. Mr. Janardhan Reddy suggested that a

group of journalists could visit Bellary to investigate illegal mining and that he would take them to all the mines along with officials. He said that he, his brothers and Minister B. Sriramulu did not have even an inch of mining area in Karnataka. "How can illegal mining come up when we are not into mining in Karnataka," he asked. "We are 24-karat gold, and nobody can find any fault with us. The Congress and the JD(S) cannot paint us black," he added. The former Chief Minister, H.D. Kumaraswamy, later told presspersons that the Anantapur Mining Corporation, owned by Mr. Janardhan Reddy, had illegally mined iron ore at Honnahalli in Bellary district in the name of Black Gold (Iron Ore) Mines and Minerals. He accused the company of taking advantage of an order of a court that had only permitted transport of ores extracted before closure of the mine. (The Hindu)

Telangana by-election results send out a warning to Congress

For the Congress, its problems in what is its strongest State, Andhra Pradesh, are only growing. The Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) is set to sweep the by-elections held in the Telangana region, thereby strengthening the case for a separate Telangana and reminding the Congress-led UPA government of the assurance that it had given on the issue and then backtracked on. Congress general secretary in-charge of Andhra Pradesh and Union Law Minister M. Veerappa Moily was very guarded in his response to the results of the by-elections, in which the Congress has fared poorly: "These are the people who volunteered to resign [on the Telangana issue]. The people have chosen to vote for them," he told The Hindu, adding, "We put up a good fight." Asked whether the results did not put pressure on the Centre to push for the creation of a separate Telangana State, Mr. Moily said, "The matter is before the Srikrishna Commission, let the report come." But a senior party functionary admitted that these results "had strengthened the case for a separate Telangana" and that from now on, "there would be greater pressure on the Centre" to act on the assurance made by Home Minister P. Chidambaram on December 9, 2009, when he publicly declared the Centre's support for a new State. "We will now have to think of a new strategy," he said. What is worrying the Congress here, party sources said, is the fact that these results are a confirmation of the fact that it has lost the "goodwill" it won in Telangana after the December 9 announcement: at that time, TRS supporters had celebrated the occasion, holding aloft Congress president Sonia Gandhi's portrait. The first signs of this loss of goodwill came when the Congress did a rethink on the issue, after the rest of the State exploded with party MP and former Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's son, Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, leading those opposed to the division of Andhra Pradesh. In a bid to check the violence across the State, the Centre quickly set up the Srikrishna Commission to "examine the situation in Andhra Pradesh with reference to the demand for a Telangana State as well as the demand for maintaining the present status of united Andhra Pradesh," and asked it to submit its recommendations by December 31, 2010. Congress MP Madhu Goud Yashki, whose constituency falls in the Telangana region, pointed out that the Bharatiya Janata Party's Lakshminarayana had retained the twelfth seat, defeating Congress State unit president D. Srinivas in the Nizamabad urban segment, with the help of the TRS. "The TRS is our naturally ally," Mr. Yashki said, adding, "and we need to reach out to them – we can't afford a BJP-TRS tie-up in Telangana." Currently, the Congress holds 56 of the 119 Assembly segments

and 12 of the 17 Lok Sabha seats in the Telangana region. So, while the Congress was not holding any of the seats that went to the polls on July 27, the results are a reminder of how much the party stands to lose if it does not get its Telangana strategy right before the next elections. The by-elections for 12 seats were called after 10 TRS MLAs and one MLA each of the BJP and the Telugu Desam Party resigned to register their demand for a separate State of Telangana earlier this year. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Malegaon cow slaughter rocks Maha Assembly

The issue of cow slaughter in Malegaon rocked the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly on Thursday with the Opposition threatening to prevent smooth functioning of the House till the accused were arrested. The House witnessed five adjournments after the Question Hour. Shiv Sena legislator Dada Bhuse from Malegaon first raised the matter as soon as the House assembled for the day. He said bodies of the cows were scattered in different parts of Malegaon city and nearby villages last night. Bhuse also informed that a spontaneous bandh has been observed in Malegaon to protest against the cow slaughter. Home Minister R R Patil said that he would make a statement after the Question Hour. Later, he said bodies of eight cows were recovered from three different places. Patil said that the post-mortem report is awaited and the police have formed two teams to look for the accused. However, the Opposition members were not satisfied with the reply and demanded strict action be taken against the guilty. Bhuse said two cows were recovered near a police chowkie and the police officials did not do anything. "The incident was reported to the police by local milkmen," he said. Leader of Opposition Eknath Khadse described the slaughter of cows as "inhuman and deliberately done on the auspicious occasion of Ashadhi Ekdashi on Wednesday." "The bodies were swollen. It looks like they were killed two days ago and then their bodies thrown on the streets on Ashadhi Ekdashi. This is a conspiracy to hurt Hindu sentiments," he said. Subhash Desai (Shiv Sena) accused the police and the government of having a religious bias. "If such an

incident had happened which hurt the sentiments of other religious group, police would have swung into action by now," he alleged. Khadse claimed a local woman office bearer of the BJP was so shocked to see bodies of the cows, that she fell unconscious and breathed her last in the hospital this morning. "You can imagine how horrific the sight must have been," he said. The Opposition leader charged that some members of the treasury benches were laughing when he was speaking. An enraged Khadse said that unless the perpetrators of the crime were not arrested, they would not allow the House to function. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Malegaon blast accused to be tried under MCOCA

In a significant development, the Bombay High Court restored proceedings under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) on all 11 accused, including Sadhvi Pragya, in the 29 September, 2008 Malegaon bomb blast. A division Bench comprising Mr Justice BH Marlapalle and Mr Justice AV Mohta set aside an order of a lower court of 31 July, 2009, dropping charges under the MCOCA on the accused. The High Court upheld the contention of the state government, which went in appeal against the lower court's order, that MCOCA should be made applicable on the 11 accused in the terror case. Six people were killed and at least 20 injured in the blast. "All the accused are currently in custody in different jails in the state and shall be brought to Mumbai for trial under MCOCA on 23 July," Sadhvi's lawyer Mr Ganesh Sovani told. (The Statesman)

Tension grips Navsari over demolition of mosque stairs

Six people were arrested at Navsari town in Surat on Saturday, after they tried to stop Nagarpalika officials from demolishing the staircase of Khatkiwad mosque on Tata School main road. The Khatkiwad mosque was recently renovated by local residents. The stairs to the mosque were constructed on the main road, which is encroachment of public land, claimed municipal officers. Nagarpalika sources said that though people inside the mosque allowed them to carry out the demolition process, a mob interrupted the officials, which snowballed into a clash. Police had to resort to lathicharge to quell the rampaging mob. Later in presence of police, the municipal officials demolished the stairs. The mob alleged that only a few steps were constructed on the main road and the municipal body has let off other illegal buildings in the area. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front: