

Business and Politics in Muslim World

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Summary:

The civil Nuclear Liability Bill has been passed from Lok Sabha unanimously after months of hectic negotiations followed by a compromise between the government and the Opposition over the legislation, which is critical for India's atomic industry. The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha after the government agreed to consider amendments suggested by a parliamentary panel to the original proposed atomic law tripling the liability cap on an operator in case of an accident to Rs 1,500 crore from the earlier Rs 500.

The recent upsurge in Kashmir valley has caused concerns among Indian authorities. The opposition parties expressing concern at the happenings in the Valley and the government's handling of it, but there is clear divisions over granting of autonomy. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is strongly against the grant of autonomy and independence while the Left parties favour a political and economic package including "broadening of the framework of autonomy within the sovereignty of the Indian Constitution."

Voicing serious concern over the ongoing spate of violent protests in Jammu and Kashmir, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh highlighted the need to "revisit" standard operating procedures and crowd control measures by security forces to deal with public agitations.

As a part of the West Bengal government's initiatives to include maximum number of Muslims in the other backward classes (OBC) category, eight more Muslim communities would soon be included in the OBC category. After announcing 10 per cent reservation in jobs for Muslims in the OBC category, the state government was trying hard to include at least 80 per cent of the Muslim population in the category only to make them eligible for the facility. Senior officials said the Muslim communities which would be included in the list of OBCs are Darji/ostagar/idrissi, rajmistri, vatiara, dhali (Muslim), mollah, talpakha benia, Muslim piadals, Muslim Barujibi/barui.

Home minister Mr P Chidambaram said a new phenomenon of "saffron terrorism" involved in many bomb blasts has been uncovered. Extremist Hindu organizations are being involved in spreading radicalization in the society.

Bringing the much needed relief to slowdown-hit sectors of the economy, the government announced more sops worth Rs 1,052 crore. The business incentives are for labour-intensive sectors such as handicrafts, handlooms and leather goods, exports of which have suffered a severe setback due to the downturn in the USA and Europe. The government has already announced an incentive package of Rs 1,350 crore. In order to give immediate relief, a bonus incentive is being provided to sectors whose exports are still not doing well.

The Indian government has served notice on global Internet major Google Inc for wrongly depicting the Indian map on its website and asked to immediately rectify it. It

has also warned other websites to show India's international boundaries correctly or face legal action. In its notice to Google Inc (United States of America) USA, the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-in), under the Department of IT, said that the map on its website (www.google.com/insights) showed certain parts of Jammu and Kashmir as a part of another country. As per Indian law, wrongful depiction of map, including the boundaries, is an offence and gives rise to issues concerning the defence, sovereignty and integrity of the country.

Cyber crimes are on the rise in Tamil Nadu and there has been a three-fold increase this year in Coimbatore compared to the first seven months of 2009. City Police Commissioner C. Sylendra Babu said in 2009 from January to July there were 150 cyber crimes and during the same period this year the police received 450 complaints relating to rampant misuse and abuse of mobile phones and internet facilities.

India and Japan on Saturday discussed the parameters for a civil nuclear accord which, they hoped, would be negotiated quickly and takes into account Tokyo's sensitivities on the issue. Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna and his Japanese counterpart Katsuya Okada expressed the hope that the economic partnership agreement (EPA) would be finalised before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Tokyo towards the year-end. While hailing India's non-proliferation record, Mr. Okada hoped that Japan's approach to disarmament and non-proliferation would be reflected in the civil nuclear pact that is being negotiated between the two countries. He said the agreement would be terminated if India tested an atomic bomb.

National Report

Politics:

MPs may get Rs.10,000 more

The government appears to have achieved a compromise with the Opposition parties on the issue of increasing the salary and allowances of members of Parliament. Top sources told The Hindu that while the government had rejected the demand to increase the salary from the current Rs. 16,000 to the Rs. 80,001 recommended by a Parliamentary Committee, it was willing to add another Rs. 10,000 to the allowances that MPs get. The formula arrived at, the sources said, was that the current salary would be increased to Rs. 50,000 – as recommended by the Union Parliamentary Affairs Ministry, and which was earlier rejected by the Opposition parties as being a dilution of the parliamentary committee's recommendations but that the constituency allowance which was being upped from Rs. 20,000 a month to Rs. 40,000 a month could now be pegged at Rs. 50,000 an increase of Rs. 10,000 over what the government had proposed. Alternatively, the constituency allowance will be hiked by Rs. 5,000 and the secretarial allowance by Rs. 5,000, adding up to Rs. 10,000 a month. This emerged after Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee met Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Lalu Prasad and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh on Saturday morning. Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Arun Jaitley, Bharatiya Janata Party deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gopinath Munde and Bahujan Samaj Party leader Dara Singh Chauhan were also present at the meeting. The changes agreed upon will have to be taken to the Cabinet again, likely either on Monday or Tuesday. (The Hindu)

'Further changes in liability bill if need be'

The inclusion in clause 17(b) of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill of a phrase that will make it virtually impossible for the operator of a nuclear facility to seek compensation from a supplier was inserted as, otherwise, it would be almost impossible to get anyone to supply nuclear technology/ products to India, top government sources told TheHindu. The sources stressed that without some protection for the supplier, at best “Russia and France will come...People don't realise that you cannot force a supplier to supply technology.” The unsaid part was – that the U.S. may not be willing to sell nuclear technology unless India's domestic law protects the supplier. So, though the offending “and” connector between two sub clauses in the controversial bill have been snipped off, the addition in clause 17(b) now ensures that the operator will have to prove the supplier had “intent” to cause nuclear damage to get any compensation from the latter. However, the sources, admitting that the inclusion of the “intent” phrase could be negatively interpreted by the Opposition parties, said: “If there are serious objections to the inclusion of the ‘intent’ phrase from the Opposition, the government is willing to drop it.”

Need for clean energy

Simultaneously, the sources acknowledged that given the urgent need for clean energy –

which nuclear power would provide – the deliberations relating to this bill were shrouded in too much secrecy. They said a public debate might have better explained India's difficulties in seeking nuclear technology and products. Vigorously defending the draft law, the sources said that after the most recent set of amendments, the bill was the strongest of similar existing domestic laws anywhere in the world. “The government proposed changes in the bill after studying the Science and Technology Parliamentary Standing Committee's report, the evidence that was placed before it, deliberations within government, similar laws across the world and particularly, the “very useful suggestions that came in from the BJP and the Left Parties.” The Prime Minister, the sources said, was “determined to have the broadest possible political consensus. We are ready even now to improve on the bill.” Over the next few days, government managers will be working overtime to ensure that the BJP and parties such as the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party will back the bill, when it is placed in the House next Wednesday.

Left parties' stand

As far as the Left parties are concerned, the sources said, they understood their compulsions: “Clearly, after almost bringing down our government on the civil nuclear agreement with the U.S., they can't be seen supporting this bill. But if they don't press a vote, we will consider it a major success.” On Saturday, CPI leader Gurudas Dasgupta told TheHindu, “significant changes have been made in the bill – and there are now no major roadblocks. But we will take a final view after studying the fine print.” The government's prime concern, the sources said, was to “put in place a system that would restrict the sort of irresponsible behaviour seen in the Union Carbide case,” by placing affected persons at the heart of the bill. Indeed, while the government has been emphasising its concern for possible victims of nuclear accidents, the Opposition's focus has been on ensuring the liability of the supplier. (The Hindu)

BJP, Left to push for nuclear bill changes in House

With no fresh contact on the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill between the government and the Bharatiya Janata Party — or for that matter any other Opposition party — it seems the issue may be resolved, if at all, during the discussion on the bill when it is taken up for consideration and passing in the Lok Sabha. The bill is now the property of the House. While the BJP said “it appears there is a deviation from the text that was agreed,” the Left made it clear that it would oppose the bill. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) did not agree with the text as approved by the BJP and other parties represented on the Standing Committee that considered the bill over the past three months. It had given a dissent note; and there was no question of it supporting the bill with further dilution of supplier liability. The changes in respect of supplier liability were “irrational and ridiculous,” D. Raja of the CPI said. The Left party leaders also said the government seemed to have learnt no lessons from what happened after the deadly Bhopal gas leak. S.S. Ahluwalia, a BJP member of the Standing Committee, was categorical that now whatever needed to be done had to be done on the floor of the House, not behind closed doors. “The bill is now the property of the House. Whatever

changes are made now after the bill, with its proposed amendments, has been circulated to MPs, will have to be done during the course of the discussion on the bill. The government can move an amendment, the BJP may do so or any other party MP is free to move an amendment on the floor of the House..." Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Prithviraj Chavan confirmed to The Hindu that there was no contact with the Opposition leaders on Sunday. "We will be contacting them," he said. For, well before the bill is taken up, the government will again try to hammer out an agreement with the BJP on any fresh amendment that may be worked out. Since Monday and Tuesday are not working days in Parliament — there are no sittings on account of Onam and Rakshabandhan holidays — the earliest the fracas over the exact words to be used to pin supplier liability can only be Wednesday. At least two of the key players from the BJP — Yashwant Sinha and Sushma Swaraj — were both away in their constituencies, while Arun Jaitley told PTI: "We are examining all the papers. Prima facie, it appears there is a deviation from the text, which was agreed upon. The language as framed now substantially nullifies supplier liability." He confirmed that there was no contact between the government and the BJP. This was on Sunday, a day after the text of the bill, as approved by the Cabinet, began to be circulated among MPs. Immediately, there were protests, the strongest from the Left parties, that by introducing "intent to cause nuclear damage" as a condition for suppliers' liability, the government was again trying to let nuclear suppliers get away with almost no liability. (The Hindu)

Near unanimous Lok Sabha nod to N-Liability Bill

The civil Nuclear Liability Bill got a near unanimous go-ahead from the Lok Sabha after months of hectic negotiations followed by a compromise between the government and the Opposition over the legislation, which is critical for India's atomic industry. The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha after the government agreed to consider amendments suggested by a parliamentary panel to the original proposed atomic law tripling the liability cap on an operator in case of an accident to Rs 1,500 crore from the earlier Rs 500. The legislation was cleared by the lower House after the government removed the word "intent" along with 17 other amendments to the Bill that had been a major source of wrangling between the government and a united Left and right Opposition. Though, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Left MPs criticised the government and expressed their concerns over the risks at nuclear plants, but there was no severe Opposition to the legislation. Moving the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damages Bill, 2010, in the Lok Sabha, minister of state for science and technology Mr Prithviraj Chavan said the government had taken on board the amendments proposed by the Opposition parties to the Bill. The proposed law is critical for India's nuclear deals with various countries. Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh made a brief intervention during the four-and-a-half hour debate over the legislation, saying: "The Nuclear Liability Bill completes our journey to end the apartheid in the nuclear field." "To say that this Bill is aimed at advancing US interests is far from the truth...and history will be the judge," Dr Manmohan Singh said, in a bid to counter BJP leader Mr Jaswant Singh's charges. Initiating the debate, Mr Jaswant Singh asked the government to take the larger concerns of Indians on board and not those of a "smaller" US market. He said the government was resorting to a "sleight of hand" by introducing the controversial words "and" and "intent"

in the draft Bill suggested by the parliamentary panel."It is a sleight of hand and trickery. First there was "and" then "intent". It is simpler and easier to take parliament along," the former external affairs minister said, amid bouts of laughter. He said the government was trying to "hustle" through with the legislation ahead of the US President Barack Obama's visit to India. (The Statesman)

Crowd control measures in J&K need to be revisited: PM

Voicing serious concern over the ongoing spate of violent protests in Jammu and Kashmir, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh highlighted the need to "revisit" standard operating procedures and crowd control measures by security forces to deal with public agitations. "Despite the curtailment of militant activities in Jammu and Kashmir, the public order dimension in the state has become a cause of serious concern," he said addressing the three-day conference of directors general and inspectors general of police here. "We need to revisit standard operating procedures and crowd control measures to deal with public agitations with non-lethal, yet effective and focused measures. We also cannot have an approach of one size fits all" the Prime Minister stressed. His comments come against the backdrop security forces in J&K facing flak for the killing of over 60 civilians in police action to quell violent protesters since June this year. Dr Singh asked home minister Mr P Chidambaram to establish a high-powered task force to come out with a set of recommendations on non-lethal crowd control measures in the next two to three months. He said that instead of single standard sequence for the use of force, other countries have put in place procedures that vary according to the situation. The Prime Minister cited the experience of Rapid Action Force for non-lethal crowd control which has been successful saying it should be examined for being followed by other police forces also. (The Statesman)

House divided on autonomy for J&K

Raised tempers and emotional speeches marked a discussion on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir in the Lok Sabha on Thursday with the Opposition parties expressing concern at the happenings in the Valley and the government's handling of it, but there were clear divisions over granting of autonomy. While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was strongly against grant of autonomy and "azadi," the Left parties favoured a political and economic package including "broadening of the framework of autonomy within the sovereignty of the Indian Constitution." However, it was Union Minister and National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah who stole the show by reiterating that Kashmiris – including from the Pakistan occupied Kashmir and the areas with China now – wanted to be with India. "Those demanding independence do not realise the consequences of their demand," he said, while making a passionate appeal for winning over the hearts and minds of the Kashmiris. Autonomy, Dr. Abdullah said, was the need of the hour and would strengthen the Indian federal system. "Soon all States will demand autonomy and this will be a healthy way to strengthen the Centre." Rejecting the demand for more autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir, Murli Manohar Joshi (BJP) said the government should bluntly tell the people of Kashmir that demands for "independence or autonomy are not acceptable." This evoked a strong protest from the NC's Sharif-ud Shariq, who

asserted that his party would not relent until autonomy was granted. He accused the BJP of creating problems in Kashmir, leading to a clash with members of that party. Mr. Shariq was supported by NC colleague Mirza Mehboob Beg, who said his party was committed to autonomy. Intervening, Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj said Kashmir was a “sensitive and serious” matter and every member should be allowed to air his or her views. Dr. Joshi referred to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's announcement that the government was ready to hold dialogue on political issues and wondered whether this meant a discussion on demands for “independence” or “autonomy.” Initiating the debate, CPI leader Gurudas Dasgupta said the Centre's policies with regard to the State had “not succeeded.” There was a sense of alienation among the people of Kashmir who had “genuine grievances” which needed to be addressed through immediate “proactive” measures, he said. (The Hindu)

Minorities' Issues:

Centre promises to consider salary for imams

Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad's demand in the Lok Sabha on Saturday for payment of salaries to imams (clerics) not only irked the Bharatiya Janata Party, but also forced the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government to state that appropriate action would be taken at the earliest. Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who is also the Leader of the House, was forced to intervene when Mr. Prasad and other members took umbrage at Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid's statement that there was difference of opinion among the imams on drawing salaries from the government. Mr. Mukherjee, after going through the Supreme Court ruling, a copy of which was provided to him by Mr. Prasad, said the government and the Wakf Board would take appropriate action as directed by the court. Raising the issue during zero hour, the RJD chief regretted that the 1993 ruling that directed the government to pay remuneration to imams of masjids aided by the government, as also those not aided by it, within six months, had not been implemented even 17 years later. Members of various parties, including the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Trinamool Congress and Janata Dal (United), an ally of the BJP, associated themselves with the views on the issue, and charged that Mr. Khurshid was sweeping the matter under the carpet by saying that there was division of opinion. Even as Mr. Prasad reiterated that the government formulate a legislation and leave it to the imams to accept or decline the salary, BJP members Yogi Adityanath and Bijoya Chakravarty opposed the demand asking why the same facility should not be extended to eight lakh “sadhus and sants.” The RJD chief shot back saying he was only seeking the implementation of the court's order, and accused the BJP of communalising the issue. He said there was no reason why sadhus and sants should not get a salary, and underscored that the BJP was free to approach the Supreme Court for the purpose. Following this, Mr. Adityanath demanded that various Supreme Court rulings regarding Bangladeshi infiltrators and the common civil code, too, be implemented. Ignoring the BJP's stand, JD(U) member Monazir Hassan suggested that a parliamentary committee be set up to pave the way for payment of salary to imams. (The Hindu)

Eight more Muslim communities in OBC list soon

As a part of the state government's initiatives to include maximum number of Muslims in the other backward classes (OBC) category, eight more Muslim communities would soon be included in the OBC category. After announcing 10 per cent reservation in jobs for Muslims in the OBC category, the state government was trying hard to include at least 80 per cent of the Muslim population in the category only to make them eligible for the facility. Senior officials said the Muslim communities which would be included in the list of OBCs are Darji/ostagar/idrissi, rajmistri, vatiara, dhali (Muslim), mollah, talpakha benia, Muslim piadals, Muslim Barujibi/barui. The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes has completed the hearing of the communities and recommended the state to include these communities in the OBC category. The proposal to include these communities will be taken up at the next Cabinet meeting. Senior officials said that with the inclusion of these communities, the total number of Muslim communities would be 51. So far, there are 98 communities in the OBC category. Of which, 43 are Muslim communities and these together cover a population of 1.4 crore. With the inclusion of eight more communities, a total of 1.62 crore population would come under the OBC category which is about 80 per cent of the total Muslim population in the state. (The Statesman)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

New phenomenon of 'saffron terrorism' in India: Chidambaram

Warning that there has been no let up in attempts to radicalise the youth, home minister Mr P Chidambaram said a new phenomenon of "saffron terrorism" involved in many bomb blasts has been uncovered. Inaugurating a conference of chiefs of police forces of the country, Mr Chidambaram also expressed concern over the situation in Kashmir Valley and hoped that in the next few days, a "starting point" would be found to reach out to the protestors and restart the process of a dialogue. "There is no let up in the attempts to radicalise young men and women in India. Besides, there is recently uncovered phenomenon of saffron terrorism that has been implicated in many bomb blasts of the past," he said. Mr Chidambaram said beginning 2005 and with the exception of 2008, the law and order situation in J&K has been extremely benign with few incidents and fewer casualties. Unfortunately since June this year, there has been an unexpected turn of events, he said. "I am afraid J&K is now caught in a vicious cycle of stone pelting, lathicharge, teargassing and firing, leading to casualties and resulting in more stone pelting," he said. The home minister said the security forces have been instructed to act with great restraint and the situation has not yet returned to normal. He said the Central government has acknowledged that a political solution must be found to the problems of J&K and the Central government has offered a dialogue with all sections of the people and political parties and groups of the state. "We are concerned that we have not been able to stop the vicious cycle in which the state is caught. However, it is my hope that, in the next few days, we would be able to find that elusive "starting point" from where we could reach out to the protestors, reassure them of their rights and dignity, restore peace and order, redeem the promises made, and re-start the process of a dialogue that will lead

to a solution,” he said. Mr Chidambaram said the Indian state has been able to stand up to the challenges and face them with confidence and courage.” The home minister said except for one incident, the last 21 months have been remarkably free of any terrorist attack and the attack on the German bakery in Pune was indeed a blot and hoped that the suspects will be apprehended soon. Referring to the Naxal problem, Mr Chidambaram said despite setbacks, security forces have been able to reassert their control in several Maoist affected districts. He said this year alone so far 424 civilians have been killed and of these 192 were killed after being named “police informers”. “I regret to say that there has been no direct and credible response to our offer of talks,” he said. Maintaining that one of the principal concerns of the government is the maintenance of communal peace and harmony, the Minister said he was particularly dismayed by the fact that petty disputes and imagined slights trigger conflicts between communities and groups. (The Statesman)

Insurgency Movements:

Economic Front:

Rs 1,052 crore sops for slowdown-hit sectors

Bringing the much needed relief to slowdown-hit sectors of the economy, the government announced more sops worth Rs 1,052 crore. The business incentives are for labour-intensive sectors such as handicrafts, handlooms and leather goods, exports of which have suffered a severe setback due to the downturn in the USA and Europe. The government has already announced an incentive package of Rs 1,350 crore. In order to give immediate relief, a bonus incentive is being provided to sectors whose exports are still not doing well, commerce and industry minister, Mr Anand Sharma said. “We are not yet out of the woods,” Mr Sharma remarked, while extending the schemes such as DEPB, under which taxes are reimbursed to exporters, subsidised interest and sops for import of capital goods. Releasing the annual supplement to the Foreign Trade Policy 2009-14, he said the revenue implication of these measures would be Rs 1,052 crore. The government made it clear that the popular Duty Entitlement Pass Book (DEPB) scheme, which has been in vogue for more than a decade, is being extended for the last time. “Recognising the fragile recovery and the prevailing uncertainties (in the global markets), I have been able to obtain extension of DEPB one last time for a further period of six months till 30 June 2011,” he said. “Some sectors are still struggling to recover from the demand shocks of the global economic slowdown. For these sectors we are providing additional benefits,” he said. Pointing out that the export target for the current fiscal is \$200 billion, he said: “With the present growth trend, we are on course to achieve the export target for 2010-11.” India’s exports growth slowed down to 13.2 per cent in July this year against 30.4 per cent in the previous month. This has prompted the government to announce incentive measures otherwise it would not be feasible to achieve a target of \$200 billion exports in fiscal 2010-11, he said. The government also extended the zero-duty Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme by one year to 31 March 2012. The scheme, which was announced in August last year, was to expire on 31 March 2011. Steps to reduce the transaction cost of exports too were announced in the policy. At

present, transaction cost is estimated at 7-8 per cent of the exports value. "The Rs 1,052-crore bonus incentive will be in addition to the package announced earlier," explained the commerce secretary, Mr Rahul Khullar later to the media. The incentive schemes will be effective from 1 April 2010. The incentives would be in the form of revenue outgo. "It will be basically in the form of tax outgo and interest rates incentives," he said. Labour intensive sectors such as handicrafts, handlooms, silk carpets, leather and leather manufacturers, sports goods, toys and some bicycle parts businesses are covered under the scheme. Besides, certain new engineering and electronic items, finished leather, rubber products, packaged coconut water and coconut shell worked items have been covered under the incentive scheme. The facility of interest subvention of two per cent, currently available for handicrafts, handlooms, carpets and SMEs is being extended for a number of specified products pertaining to leather and leather manufacturers, jute manufacturing, including floor covering, engineering goods and textile sector for the current financial year. (The Statesman)

US visa fees hike could impact economic relationship: India

The hike in visa fees for foreign skilled workers to USA could affect its wide-ranging bilateral economic relationship with India, parliament was informed. "The government has expressed its strong concerns at the legislation, stating that such steps by the US government adversely affect the Indian software industry's interest in the USA and impact the broader bilateral economic relationship," external affairs minister Mr SM Krishna told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply. He admitted that while the provision is not country-specific, it would disproportionately "affect Indian software companies adversely as a large number of H1B and L visas are availed by them". US President Barack Obama on 13 August signed the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill, which will raise funds for border security by increasing the visa fees for foreign workers under H1B and L category. Mr Krishna said that even while the legislation was under process, the Indian Embassy in Washington had taken up the matter with the US administration and key lawmakers. It was also discussed by the commerce and industry minister Mr Anand Sharma with his US counterpart, as well as by the foreign secretary Mrs Nirupama Rao with the US Ambassador, Mr Timothy Roemer. "It has been conveyed that the legislation would primarily impact companies of Indian origin and is seen as a discriminatory and protectionist measure," said Mr Krishna. (The Statesman)

Food inflation falls to 10.05 per cent in second week of August

Annual food inflation fell for the second straight week, to 10.05 per cent for the week ended on 14 August, as prices of vegetables like potato and onion declined. Food inflation had softened to 10.35 per cent for the week ended on 7 August against 11.40 per cent in the previous week. On a yearly basis, potato became cheaper by over 50 per cent, while vegetables overall saw a decline of 14.23 per cent. Onion prices also fell by 7.29 per cent, official data showed. Cereal prices, however, rose by 7.10 per cent, driven mainly by higher prices of pulses, rice and wheat compared to the same period last year. While pulses became dearer by nearly 16 per cent, prices of rice and wheat rose by 7.72 per cent and 7.61 per cent, respectively, during the week under review on yearly basis.

Among other food items, milk prices soared by 18.22 per cent during the week over the same period last year, and fruits became dearer by 15.24 per cent. The overall inflation, which also factors in the rate of change in prices of manufactured goods, fell to single digit after a gap of five months to 9.97 per cent.

Cyber News:

Cyber crimes increase three-fold

Cyber crimes are on the rise and there has been a three-fold increase this year in Coimbatore compared to the first seven months of 2009. City Police Commissioner C. Sylendra Babu said in 2009 from January to July there were 150 cyber crimes and during the same period this year the police received 450 complaints relating to rampant misuse and abuse of mobile phones and internet facilities. The police are equipping the cyber crime cell with skilled manpower to combat the spurt in such crimes. Mr. Babu said mobile phone-related cyber crimes largely pertain to making unsolicited obscene phone calls or sending Short Messaging Service (SMS) to women. The police now have the wherewithal and logistics to trace the mobile number and apprehend the accused in 24 hours. Following prompt police action against such offenders, women have mustered courage to lodge complaints instead of remaining silent sufferers. Some of the cyber crimes using computers are sending threat e-mails to extort money and hacking e-mail accounts to send objectionable mails. There have also been cases of tracking confidential credit card/debit card data from online transactions for misappropriation of funds without the knowledge of the card holder/account holder. Earlier, these were “easy to commit and hard to detect” offences but now technology has come in handy for the police to zero in on offenders with ease and swiftness. Many cyber crime cases are solved in two or three days the police get complaints. Only complicated cases and those with voluminous material take time. Mr. Babu said many of the cases could be prevented if people were vigilant. He said people should refrain from using computers at cyber cafes for online transactions or online purchases since they required furnishing of confidential details such as card number/account number, Personal Identification Number (PIN) and secret value codes of cards. Sharing of password and PIN number should be completely avoided. People should not fall prey to luring e-mails or SMS about winning lotteries and asking for bank details or remittance of processing fee. These measures would bring down the cyber crime rate by more than 50 per cent, Mr. Babu said. (The Hindu)

Tapping Facebook to improve traffic

Here is an example of the real power of social networking harnessed. The novel experiment of the Delhi traffic police with Facebook to open a two-way channel for instant communication with road-users has tasted success , bringing in more than 21,000 dedicated members in barely three months. Bulldozing bureaucratic barriers that often prevent the flow of information on the ground realities to supervisory officers, the platform has fast evolved into a medium for both road-users and the traffic police for sharing information and exchanging views. Through Facebook, the police give out frequent updates and advisories on the traffic scenario in the capital. They also share data

on special drives carried out from time to time. A large number of commuters post updates on problems, ranging from non-functional traffic signals and snarls to the men-in-white allegedly indulging in corrupt practices. A member, who is a lawyer with sound knowledge of traffic rules, even clears doubts of other members. "We have received a tremendous public response. Thanks to information being provided by the members, we have been able to deliver more efficiently. Another interesting aspect is that people are frequently reporting traffic rule violations and other problems they come across. They feel empowered to contribute to the prosecution of violators," says Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Satyendra Garg. In fact, several enthusiastic contributors have started posting photographs of violating vehicles, mentioning the location, date and timing of the violations such as unauthorised parking, faulty number-plates, the use of prohibited tinted glasses, driving without helmets and the use of Delhi police sticker. Taking up the cases seriously, the traffic police are issuing challans to violators and also getting back to the contributors about the action taken. Till August 15, the traffic police received 4,425 complaints through their Facebook account; in all, prosecution has been initiated in 1,577 cases of violations. The message wall apart, the traffic police have provided a discussion board on which the members have so far posted nearly 130 topics. While senior officers, including Mr. Garg, have been regularly responding to issues highlighted by the members, other traffic police officers are encouraged to respond to area-specific problems. Mr. Garg says exchange of information through the Internet has helped in faster correction of deficiencies. The police recently started an SMS service through which registered users get advisories and regular updates on the traffic situation. About 40,000 people have registered for the service so far. (The Hindu)

Centre's notice to Google Inc

The Centre has served notice on global Internet major Google Inc for wrongly depicting the Indian map on its website and asked to immediately rectify it. It has also warned other websites to show India's international boundaries correctly or face legal action. In its notice to Google Inc (United States of America) USA, the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-in), under the Department of IT, said that the map on its website (www.google.com/insights) showed certain parts of Jammu and Kashmir as a part of another country. As per Indian law, wrongful depiction of map, including the boundaries, is an offence and gives rise to issues concerning the defence, sovereignty and integrity of the country. Directing Google Inc to correct the error, CERT-in has said that it was liable for action under of the IT Act 2000. Minister of State for Communications and IT Sachin Pilot told that he has asked CERT-in to carry out a detailed survey of Internet to find out if other websites were providing such inaccurate information about the country's international borders. "Sufficient legal provisions exist to tackle such issues and are being enforced effectively; we will not hesitate to take strict action against all such companies," he warned. Mr. Pilot said, "As use of Internet is increasing everyday and students are using Internet tools in their studies, it is of utmost importance that we take such issues seriously. Apart from the wrongful depiction of J&K, such errors also occur in maps of the north-eastern States," he said. (The Hindu)

USA, Brazil, India top 3 spam-sending countries: Report

The United States, Brazil and India retained their positions as the top three spam-sending countries in the past two months. While the USA and Brazil posted an increase in their spam numbers during these months, India posted a decline, according to a report. TrendLabs Researchers reported that the top 10 spam-sending countries comprised 85.67 per cent of the total number of spam messages circulated. India comprises 12.55 per cent of the messages circulated worldwide with attacks being carried out using three primary vectors ~ e-mail, Web and file. The researchers found that HSBC has become the top phishing target this month via e-mail. It rose from the bottom of the list to the top spot this July while PayPal remained part of the top three phishing targets. A new entrant in the top 10 list is ABN Amro Bank. “User account information and credit card credentials reap good profits for cyber criminals. Cyber criminals continued to leverage on the widespread use of social networking sites, search engines, and redirectors this July. “In the report on cyber crimes, we detailed certain attacks and notable data points related to compromised sites,” said Mr Amit Nath, country manager (India and Saarc) of Trend Micro. The report notes that the continued proliferation of online gaming threats has made the gaming sector a consistent cyber criminal target. This is particularly true in case of China where online gaming is becoming very popular day by day and where cyber criminals have created XWM, the popular Chinese Trojan kit. The study said malicious URLs have been found to be hosted in Ireland, China, the United States, Germany, and Japan. (The Statesman)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

Bhopal gas tragedy is a closed case now: U.S.

The United States said on Friday the Bhopal gas tragedy was a closed case now. State Department Spokesman P.J. Crowley was answering reporters' questions on the issue. Later, the State Department official clarified that legally the case was closed. “We have interacted with the Indian government on the Bhopal issue. On an ongoing basis going back many years, we've expressed our sympathy and concern about the impact that this had on the people of India.” (The Hindu)

Nuclear pact should reflect Japan's concerns: Okada

India and Japan on Saturday spelt out the parameters for a civil nuclear accord which, they hoped, would be negotiated quickly and takes into account Tokyo's sensitivities on the issue. Speaking to journalists at the end of the fourth round of India-Japan strategic dialogue here, Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna and his Japanese counterpart Katsuya Okada expressed the hope that the economic partnership agreement (EPA) would be finalised before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Tokyo towards the year-end. Both countries also discussed specific ways to approach the nations that disagreed with the formulation of the G-4 countries (India, Japan, Germany and Brazil), along with Africa, being represented on an expanded U.N. Security Council. The Ministers agreed to hold a brainstorming session with other partners on the sidelines of the U.N. General

Assembly next month in New York.

Challenging task

While hailing India's non-proliferation record, Mr. Okada hoped that Japan's approach to disarmament and non-proliferation would be reflected in the civil nuclear pact that is being negotiated between the two countries. He said the agreement would be terminated if India tested an atomic bomb. This indicated Tokyo's desire to have a civil nuclear agreement modelled on the India-U.S. pact, which contained a similar clause. Admitting that it was domestically challenging to initiate civil nuclear talks with India, which was not a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Mr. Okada said New Delhi's non-proliferation credentials tilted the scales. Pointing out that Japan was the only country to have experienced a nuclear attack, he said talks with a non-NPT signatory ran counter to Tokyo's policy of seeking a nuclear-free world. He was optimistic of the proposed civil nuclear accord reflecting Japan's position on disarmament and non-proliferation. Both leaders described economic and trade relations as the fulcrum of bilateral ties, with Mr. Okada observing that despite the "notable deepening" there was need to redouble efforts. He felt that finalisation of the EPA would help raise the economic ties by a couple of notches.

"Win-win" situation

Mr. Krishna conveyed India's appreciation of Japan's decision to begin talks on a civil nuclear pact, with both sides agreeing that the negotiations would continue quickly with no timelines resulting in a "win-win" situation. He also thanked Japan for removing 11 Indian entities from its End User List, which would provide a big boost to high technology trade between the two countries. On disarmament issues, Mr. Krishna said India shared Japan's goal of a nuclear weapon-free world and was ready to work with it in achieving the objective in a "comprehensive, non-discriminatory and verifiable framework." Mr. Okada also called on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Planning Commission Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia. (The Hindu)

No anti-China activity on Indian soil: Krishna

Against the backdrop of self-exiled Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama meeting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh earlier this month, External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna assured China once again that it would not encourage anyone to undertake political or any other kind of activity that was detrimental to the relationship between the two countries. Responding to questions at a joint press conference with Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada, Mr. Krishna said this assurance had been given to his Chinese counterpart Yang Jeichi. It was also made "absolutely clear" to the Chinese leadership that the Tibetan Autonomous Region was a part of China. "That should bring the curtain down on any controversy," Mr. Krishna said. He began his reply by pointing out that the Indian position in this regard had been stated "repeatedly, equivocally and categorically" and that India believed the Dalai Lama was an honoured guest and a spiritual leader "held as such by millions of Indians." Mr. Krishna was asked the question following reports

that Beijing had protested against the meeting between the Dalai Lama and Dr. Singh on August 11. (The Hindu)

Constructive ties needed between India, Pak, Afghanistan: USA

Asking South Asian nations to avoid a “zero-sum mentality”, the USA has asked Pakistan to engage in a constructive relationship with India and Afghanistan, saying effective and coordinated action was needed to meet the common challenge of terrorism. “Does Afghanistan need to have a constructive relationship with Pakistan? It does. Does Pakistan have to have a constructive relationship with India? It does,” state department spokesman Mr PJ Crowley said. “Should all these countries need to avoid a zero-sum mentality that a gain on one side is necessarily a detriment on the other? We think that to the extent that these countries can work more effectively together, that will ultimately help reduce the threat of terrorism to any one of them,” he said. Mr Crowley was responding to recent media reports that the Pakistan's ISI no longer considered India as its top threat, but considers internal terrorism as its main threat. These are individual judgements made country by country, he said. “We have certainly encouraged countries in the region to work collectively together because they confront a shared threat, and we think some of these challenges can only be resolved through effective and coordinated action across the region,” Mr Crowley said. (The Statesman)

Govt approves exploration and mining of uranium

Amid attempts by the government to get the Nuclear Liability Bill passed in Parliament to pave the way for the entry of foreign suppliers in the lucrative sector, the environment ministry has given its approval to seven proposals related to exploration and mining of uranium by various state controlled mining and exploration agencies. The ministry of environment has so far received 20 proposals for exploration and mining of uranium. Of this 14 proposals are for exploration and six are for mining. The ministry had given its forest clearance to the six proposals for mining uranium. “Of the 14 proposals of exploration, seven have been approved and four withdrawn for want of information”, the environment minister, Mr Jairam Ramesh, informed the Lok Sabha last week. Further, of the 14 proposals, the ministry rejected one proposal for exploration on merit and two proposals are pending with the state governments. Of the seven approved proposals for exploration, two each are in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chattisgarh and one in Orissa. Of the six approved uranium mining proposals, one each is in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan and four are in Jharkhand. The permission for survey and exploration of uranium and other atomic minerals in Gandi-Madyalabodu areas of Idupulapaya in Andhra Pradesh has been given to Department of Atomic Energy and Atomic Minerals Directorate. Clearance has also been granted for exploration in Rayavaram and Nidgul reserve forest block of Andhra. In Chattisgarah, parts of Sakti forest and areas falling in Karichhapar, Bhagora and Saraipali-Bhagora protected forest under Raigarh forest division have been thrown open for exploration of uranium. In Orissa, Toda of Bonai forest division and in Rajasthan Raghunthgarh and Diara-Saladipura area are to be explored for the radioactive mineral. (The Statesman)

Military

Lt. Gen. to be court-martialled

The Army has ordered the court-martial of Lt. Gen. G.K. Rath for wrongdoing in the transfer of a 71-acre tea estate adjacent to the Sukna military station near Siliguri in West Bengal to a real estate dealer. The proceedings will begin on Monday. (The Hindu)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

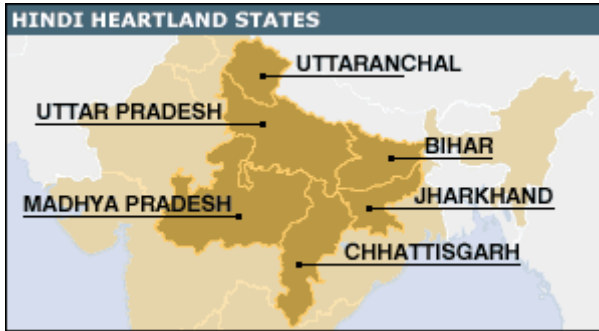
Another teenager dies, Kashmir toll rises to 64

An 18-year-old, who was allegedly beaten up by security forces here last week, succumbed to his injuries, taking the toll of civilians killed in the ongoing unrest in the Kashmir Valley to 64. Doctors at the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Soura (SKIMS) in Srinagar said Mr Omar Qayoom Bhat, who had been admitted to the hospital on Monday, could not be revived despite their best efforts. "He had reported at the hospital on 23 August with breathlessness and chest trauma. After his condition deteriorated, he was put on life support system, but could not be revived," an attending doctor said. "He died in the cardiac intensive care unit of the hospital this (Wednesday) morning," the doctor added. Locals and relatives alleged the teenager had been beaten up in Soura locality last Friday during clashes between stone-pelters and security forces. Tension gripped Soura locality as the news of Bhat's death spread. Security forces increased deployments to maintain law and order there. Bhat belonged to Anchar locality near Soura in Srinagar city. The teenager's body was handed over to his relatives, who took out a procession for the burial. The Valley has been reeling under a long spell of unrest since 11 June, leaving 64 people dead so far. (The Statesman)

Social front:

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

RJD confident of winning back Muslim support base in Bihar

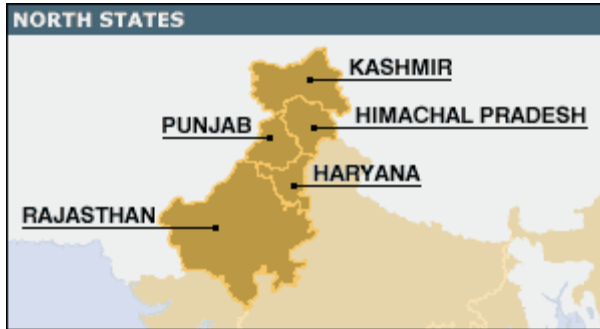
The RJD is confident of winning back its dwindling Muslim support base in Bihar even as the party leaders feel projection of party chief, Mr Lalu Prasad, as chief ministerial candidate would give it a definite edge against the incumbent chief minister, Mr Nitish Kumar. Senior party leader Mr Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said that unlike the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, the Muslims would not vote for Congress in the forthcoming assembly elections. "By voting for Congress in 2009, Muslims have only helped the BJP-JD(U) combine. Now they realise this. Moreover, Muslims vote according to a pattern and would prefer RJD-LJP combine as we are the formidable parties who can take on BJP and JD(U)," Mr Singh told The Statesman. He admitted that the dwindling of Muslim support base in 2005 had cost the RJD dearly but hastened to add that Muslims had again come back to Mr Lalu Prasad in the recent by-elections in Bihar. "You must note that Nitish Kumar had made by-polls very prestigious but lost them dearly. It was great encouragement for RJD-LJP that we won in key Assembly seats including in the Lok Sabha segments hitherto considered strongholds of JD(U)," he said citing RJD-LJP victory in assembly seats under Lok Sabha constituencies like Nalanda and Madhepura. Moreover, he said projection of Mr Lalu Prasad as chief ministerial candidate would for the first time give Nitish a 'real fight'. 'In 2005, come what may, Nitish had faced only a shadow of Lalu Prasad. RJD-Congress combine did not project a chief ministerial candidate. We were on defensive from the beginning. This is not the case now. Lalu Yadav will be our chief minister and is a declared candidate of RJD-LJP alliance," he said. He pointed out both Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar had socialistic background but they parted ways after Lalu became the chief minister. "Lalu's base was much bigger always and this has been proved umpteen times. Lalu has followed Karpoori Thakur's principles. Whereas Nitish Kumar has betrayed socialistic ideals and joined hands with BJP for the sake of power. It was purely opportunistic move," he said. Contrary to media-hype about Nitish Kumar dividing Muslim base by

moving close to OBC Muslims, the former union minister claimed, “Nitish Kumar has only shown self-seeking intentions and divided Muslims for his benefits.” (The Statesman)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The North



Politics:

Social front:

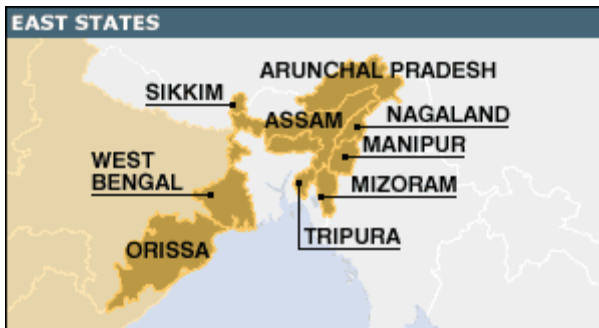
Rajasthan gets more rain than northeast States this year

In a reversal of roles, the desert State of Rajasthan received more rain than the green States in the northeast. As per the latest data available with the India Meteorological Department, Rajasthan received 20 per cent more rainfall than the normal, while Manipur is faced with a whopping deficit of 52 per cent and Meghalaya, 41 per cent. Most noteworthy is the fact that within Rajasthan rainfall has been most bountiful in the western part, where the Thar desert is located. Western Rajasthan has recorded a rainfall of 71 per cent more than usual. Rainfall in the Jaisalmer district tops the list, with a surplus of 178 per cent — 29.8 cm against the normal 10.7 cm. Barmer district comes next, with a surplus of 119 per cent (36.5 cm against 16.7cm). It is followed by Bikaner district (plus 87 per cent; 26.4 cm against 14.1 cm), Jalore (plus 85 per cent; 54.2 cm against 29.3 cm), Sri Ganganagar (63 per cent; 23.6 against 14.4 cm), Jodhpur (plus 48 per cent; 30.5 cm against 20.6 cm), Churu (35 per cent; 30.6 cm against 22.6 cm), Nagaur (34 per cent; 34.7 cm against 25.9 cm), Pali (23 per cent; 36.9 cm against 30.1 cm) and Hanumangarh (4 per cent; 19.2 cm against 18.5 cm). In the northeast, on the other hand, all States are facing deficiencies. While Manipur and Meghalaya top the list, Tripura suffered a deficit of 20 per cent rain, Arunachal Pradesh 17 per cent, Nagaland 16 per cent, Assam and Sikkim 11 per cent each, and Mizoram 10 per cent. While the phenomenon of western disturbance has been prevailing almost right through the season so far, monsoonal activity over the Bay of Bengal has been subdued. Normally, several

low pressure areas form around the head of the Bay and bring rainfall to Cherrapunjee and other parts of the northeast as also the Gangetic part of West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. But not a single such system formed over that region this year. Some low pressure areas have formed over the Bay, but they have all been far away from the head of the Bay. Consequently, apart from the northeast, the rainfall situation over Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh continues to remain grim. Outside the northeast, the situation is the worst in Jharkhand. The State is facing a deficiency of 47 per cent. Only one district has recorded above normal rains, six still have deficiencies of over 60 per cent, and 17 others, deficiencies ranging from 20 per cent to 59 per cent. Jharkhand is followed by Uttar Pradesh (36 per cent). Out of the State's 71 districts, only 12 have received normal or above normal rainfall. Of the remaining districts, 12 districts face a deficiency of over 60 per cent and 47 others, deficiencies ranging from 20 per cent to 59 per cent. The Gangetic West Bengal is next with a deficiency of 31 per cent. Out of the 13 districts there, 10 are faced with deficiencies ranging from 20 per cent to 48 per cent. Bihar is next, with a deficiency of 28 per cent. Meanwhile, for the country in its entirety, the situation has improved considerably. It is now just three per cent below normal rainfall. The southern peninsular region has benefitted the most. It has received 12 per cent more rains than the normal. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

West Bengal polls not before December: CEC

Even as Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee continues to speak of early Assembly elections in West Bengal, Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi reiterated on Friday that the Election Commission will not hold polls before December. "Elections in West Bengal under the Constitutional provision are due on June 11. The only power or flexibility we have is of six months. If you work backwards from June 11, we come into the picture only from December 11," he said. However, Mr. Quraishi did not comment on whether elections will be brought forward within that six-month period. "It is only after December 12 that we can decide upon the best date for holding elections," he said, adding that several factors including exam schedules, agricultural

cycles, weather and the law and order situation and elections in the four other States scheduled for next year will be considered. Ms. Banerjee has been insisting on the demand for early elections in the State since the results of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections were announced. During her election campaign for 81 civic bodies, held on May 30 this year, Ms. Banerjee assured her supporters that polls would be held in six months time, if her party secured a majority in most of them. In recent rallies held in Kolkata and Lalgah she had indicated that elections will be held “in three months time.” The ruling Front has maintained that holding early polls would be unconstitutional. (The Hindu)

Co-mediators to resolve Assam-Nagaland border row

Observing that border disputes between States must be resolved through mediation, the Supreme Court has appointed two co-mediators for resolving the row between Assam and Nagaland pending in the court for 22 years. Passing interim orders on an original suit filed by Assam in 1988 against Nagaland, a Bench of Justices Markandey Katju and T.S. Thakur said on Friday that an attempt should be made to resolve the dispute through mediation. Assam has also filed a suit against Arunachal Pradesh. After hearing Advocate-General of Nagaland K.N. Balgopal and senior counsel Krishnan Venugopal, appearing for Assam, the Bench appointed senior advocates Sriram Panchu of the Madras High Court and Niranjana Bhat of the Gujarat High Court, “who are two of the foremost experts in mediation in India to be the co-mediators.” The Bench said the present dispute was over the boundary between Assam and Nagaland, which was carved out of Assam through a 1962 Act of Parliament. In these two suits, the Supreme Court appointed, in September 2006, Justice S.N. Variava, a retired Supreme Court judge, to head a commission to identify the boundaries of Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. At that time, the court made it clear that it was not a boundary commission as postulated in the Constitution but only a local commission. After Justice Variava expressed difficulties in heading the commission, the court in January this year replaced him with Justice Tarun Chatterjee, another retired Supreme Court judge. On Friday, Mr. Balgopal submitted that since Justice Chatterjee was one of the three judges on the Bench in 2004 that considered the appointment of the commission, propriety demanded that he should not preside over it. So, Nagaland was seeking modification of the January 2010 order appointing Justice Chatterjee to head the commission. The Bench, however, dismissed the application and said the mediation process would in no way affect the proceedings before the local commission where Nagaland would file its evidence within two months. The Bench said the two co-mediators could decide who the expert should be in the mediation, and a representative of the Union Home Ministry and the Chief Secretaries of the two States should also be associated with the process of mediation. The Bench asked the co-mediators to submit a preliminary report after three sittings, the first to be held on September 18, on the progress of the process and whether it would be possible to resolve the dispute through mediation. If a positive report was received, the tenure of the co-mediators would be extended. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front: