

Business and Politics in Muslim World

India

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National Summary:

L.K Advani has left his seat as the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha and become chairman of BJP's parliamentary wing. Sushma Swaraj replaced him as opposition leader in Lok Sabha. Prakash Karat again criticizes the increasing US influence on country's policies and negative outcomes of civil nuclear agreement. BJP's former president Rajnath Singh warns that posing any kind of challenge to party's new leader Nitin Gadkari could cause crisis in party, while new president Nitin said in a statement that there will be no compromise on Hindutva and nationalism. He said his party does not believe in cast, creed and faith based politics. Opposition parties criticize government's stance over environmental policy in Copenhagen accord.

The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities recommended quota for all linguistic and religious minorities including Dalits converted to Islam or Christianity. It also recommend 10% quota in educational institutes and government jobs as they constitute 73% of all minorities. Muslim community wants the implementation of Sachar commission report and fifteen point's recommendation of PM Manmohan Singh to improve the condition of Muslim community in the country. Muslim representative also criticize the role of Congress party and Narsimha Rao in the demolition of Babri Mosque.

Maoists blasted hydal project and school buildings in Orissa.

Indian economy is doing surprising growth in the last quarter of the year 2009 as it achieved 7.75% growth rate in last two months. But along with encouraging growth rate increasing food inflation is worrisome for government sector as well as for common people. ADB will provide India \$850 million loan for developmental projects.

Defense minister Antony said that Indian government has moved 30,000 troops from J&K and wants to call back all military forces if law and order situation remain satisfactory.

Ajmal Kasab the only survivor of 26/11 has refused to accept any allegation of involvement in the terrorist act.

Pakistan's high commissioner Shahid Malik accused India for not fulfilling its promise to restart composite dialogue.

Regional Summary:

The Gorkha Janamukti Morcha leadership refused to accept the centre's offer of negotiations over separate state of Gorkhaland and continued their protest in West Bengal.

Situation in Andhra Pradesh is still serious as protest over the separate Telangana state disturbed routine life. The hunger strike by TDP caused concerns for centre and state government. In Karnataka 535 farmers committed suicide in last two years government is taking measures to facilitate farmers in the state.

Opposition parties in Maharashtra assembly staged walkout in protest over Rangnath commission's report. Member of opposition parties opposed the recommendation to allotting quota to Dalits converted to Islam or Christianity.

Mumbai is facing acute problem of water shortage as water storage has left only for 200 days. Less rains and decreasing amount of underground water causes serious problem in fulfilling the increasing water needs of the city.

National Report

Politics:

Advani steps down as Opposition Leader

L.K. Advani on Friday became chairman of the Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary wing leading to his simultaneous exit as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, a position now taken by Sushma Swaraj. The post was especially created for Mr. Advani when party president Rajnath Singh moved an amendment to the party's parliamentary constitution. It was adopted unanimously by 112 party members of both Houses of Parliament present at the Parliament Annexe where a special meeting of the parliamentary party was called. It was then proposed that Mr. Advani be made chairman and the proposal was approved with the thumping of desks and clapping of hands. With this, his position as the Leader of the Opposition stands vacated. And Mr. Advani, as chairman, nominated Sushma Swaraj as the Leader of the Opposition. He also re-nominated Arun Jaitley as the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha. Mr. Rajnath Singh offered "laddus" to the two and others presented them with garlands and bouquets. With Mr. Advani's exit as the Leader of the Opposition, the entire parliamentary team of office-bearers stood disbanded. This necessitated the re-nomination of Mr. Jaitley. The positions of deputy leaders of the party in the two Houses – till Friday held by Ms. Swaraj and S.S. Ahluwalia – and other positions will be filled in a few days. Mr. Advani said he was not about to retire and would continue to be a political "rath-yatri" till the end of his life, and Friday marked "a new beginning" in his political life. He felt a "relief" that he was no longer "responsible" as the "de facto and de jure" Leaders of the Opposition were now Ms. Swaraj and Mr. Jaitley, and the "satisfaction" that he could contribute to the political life of the country for almost 70 years, ever since he became a `swayamsevak at the age of 14. Mr. Advani mentioned the high mark in his political career the "rath-yatra" from Somnath to Ayodhya that was stopped mid-way with his arrest at Samastipur and his second "Swaran Jayanti yatra" and many others. Later, when the floor was given to Mr. Jaitley and Ms. Swaraj, they thanked Mr. Advani, Mr. Rajnath Singh and the party. Later, Mr. Advani, Ms. Swaraj and Mr. Hussain met Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Leader of the House Pranab Mukherjee over tea in the Speaker's chamber. (The Hindu)

Lobbying on in BJP for vacant positions

Leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party were on Friday lobbying hard with Ms. Sushma Swaraj, the newly appointed Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, for several positions that are lying vacant. After Mr. Jaswant Singh resigned as chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the most prestigious parliamentary committee, several senior MPs have made it known they would like to be considered for the position. With Ms. Swaraj's elevation, the position of chairman of the standing committee attached to the Ministry of External Affairs that was held by her is also vacant. In the parliamentary party, all positions are to be filled afresh, including the positions of Deputy Leaders of Opposition in the two Houses, till now occupied by Sushma Swaraj in the Lok Sabha and S.S. Ahluwalia in the Rajya Sabha. For the deputy's post in the Lok Sabha, the buzz is around the names of Ananth Kumar and Gopinath Munde. With the party becoming "Brahmin-heavy" Mr. Jaitley and Ms. Swaraj and the next party chief, Nitin Gadkari,

are Brahmins. On that score Mr. Kumar, also a Brahmin, is likely to lose out to Mr. Munde with his backward caste credentials. On Saturday, the BJP Parliamentary Board is expected to announce its “choice”— Nitin Gadkari — for the position of next party chief at the end of tenure of Rajnath Singh. He will take charge by mid-January or February and set up his own team of office-bearers, for which hectic lobbying has begun. (The Hindu)

White Paper not to target anyone, says Mamata

Even as Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee asserted that the White Paper did not target anyone in particular, Railway officials ruled out the possibility of reverting back to the older accounting system and said that the present system would be adhered to. Ms. Banerjee told journalists after tabling the white paper on the table of both the Houses of Parliament that there was no politics behind the white paper and that it was not to target her predecessor Lalu Prasad. She also refused to comment on Mr. Prasad’s reaction that it was a black paper. She said the objective was to understand and strengthen the system. Nitish Kumar and other former Railway Ministers had together brought out seven status or white papers. She had a task at hand, she said. The white paper was the basis for her “Vision 2020” under which she aimed at an investment of Rs. 14 lakh crore to make the Railways the number one rail operator in the world. In her vision document, Ms. Banerjee has proposed that the Centre support the transformation through an Accelerated Rail Development Fund (ARDF) of about Rs. 5 lakh crore, of which Rs. 1 lakh crore would be set aside for socially desirable projects. However, Railway authorities ruled out reverting to the older accounting system saying that they could continue to adhere to the present system. “We are not saying that figures have been juggled. We are also not saying that there was wrong representation of facts during the five year period of 2004-09,” said the Additional Member (Budget) Samar Jha under whose supervision the White paper was prepared. He said that an Accounts Reforms Project was currently studying the various options for initiating further reforms in the accounting system besides what the Centre intended to propose. Mr. Jha said that the recommendations of the consultative body would be examined from all angles to see if it could be incorporated in the accounting system. At the same time, he pointed out that one of changes in the accounting system had been recommended by the Union government and the CAG. As regards the consultative firm dubbing the 2004-09 period as below par for the railways, Mr. Jha said that it was not the opinion of the Railways. “People come and go and with that strategies and policies too change but the Railways’ growth continued,” she said Mr. Jha denied that the turnaround story had been shot down by the white paper and said that he had himself underlined the growth in traffic earning and that it was the general practice of the government to state its surplus before setting aside the depreciation fund. He denied that the white paper had been prepared with any political motive. Asked if the target to lay 25,000 km of tracks by 2020 was realistic, Mr. Jha said that it would depend on how it was planned and on the availability of funds underscoring that only 10,000 km of rail track had been added since independence. (The Hindu)

All parties must oppose Civil Nuclear Liability Bill: Karat

Admitting that the Communist Party of India (Marxist) being the biggest party bore the “major responsibility” in the recent electoral reversals suffered by the Left Front in West Bengal,

Prakash Karat, general secretary of the party, said here on Friday that the Left parties must make “an objective assessment of our strengths and weaknesses...individually as parties and collectively as the Left Front.” “Representing the Communist Party of India (Marxist), I can say that being the biggest party, we have the major responsibility,” he said, adding that he was sure that the other constituents would also keep their commitment. Mr. Karat’s remarks were in response to observations made by Communist Party of India general secretary A.B. Bardhan. Pointing out that “certain blunders have occurred that have blunted the ideals of the Left Movement,” A. B. Mr. Bardhan reiterated the call for stronger Left unity and action and the belief that the people of West Bengal would “rally behind the Left parties for a better edition of the Left Front.” “For this, there is a common but differentiated responsibility of the parties – the bigger party bearing a bigger share,” said Mr. Bardhan. Speaking at the 16th party congress of the All India Forward Bloc, Mr. Karat also appealed to all parties to oppose the Civil Nuclear Liability Bill in parliament. “Now this government wants a law that in the event of a nuclear accident in one of their reactors, no U.S. company will be liable,” Mr. Karat said adding that according to the law compensation to victims will not be provided by the suppliers, but by the operators instead. Indicating the strategic alliance that India has entered with the United States to be the reason for the decision, Mr. Karat said: “The Russians and the French, who are also supplying nuclear reactors to us, have no requirement for such a Nuclear Liability Law.” Pressing the demand for a united struggle against the neo-liberal policies, including the sale of profit-making PSUs, the direct tax code and the End Use Monitoring Agreement, Mr. Karat called for a struggle on two fronts – a struggle to prevent further subordination of national interest to the U.S. and the struggle to a campaign on every issue that adversely affected the people. (The Hindu)

Challenge to BJP chief's authority will create crisis: Rajnath

A day after stepping down as BJP President, Rajnath Singh on Sunday said there is bound to be a crisis if the authority of the party chief is challenged. "The line of command rests only in the hands of the party president which is Nitin Gadkari. It is true that if the authority of the party president is challenged, there is bound to be a crisis but this hasn't happened in the BJP and I am confident that this won't happen with Nitin Gadkari either," he said. Recalling that the results of the Lok Sabha elections were "not as per our expectations," Singh said, "Had we attained a good strength in the Lok Sabha, (L K) Advani would have definitely been the Prime Minister". Asked if he regretted this, he said, "Yes, absolutely." Hoping that Atal Bihari Vajpayee will play his role in the party once his health improves, Singh said, "As far as Advaniji is concerned, he is still active in politics and will be in the future." (The Indian Express)

Rangnath Commission report to be studied 'sincerely': Govt

"We will examine it (Mishra Commission report) with all sincerity. For us, it is an issue of importance," Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid said when asked if the government will implement the recommendations and if yes, when. Khurshid said the Centre will study the recommendations and then decide which of them should be implemented. He also justified non-tabling of the Action Taken Report along with the Commission's report in Parliament, saying it was not mandatory as the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, headed by former Chief Justice of India Rangnath Mishra was not constituted under the Commission of Enquiry Act. Among a host of recommendations, the Commission suggests delinking of

Scheduled Caste status from religion and abrogation of the 1950 Scheduled Caste Order which "still excludes Muslims, Christians, Jains and Parsis from the SC net." The Order originally restricted the SC status to Hindus only but was later opened it to Buddhists and Sikhs. If the Commission's recommendation is accepted, Dalits converted from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity will also come under SC category and can claim benefits being given as per the Constitution. Khurshid said the government's first priority was to ensure cent per cent implementation of the recommendations of the Sachchar Commission, on the welfare of Muslims. Rangnath Commission, constituted after the findings of the Sachchar Commission, had pointed out acute backwardness among Muslims and other minorities. While Congress appears to be adopting a cautious approach towards Rangnath Mishra Commission report, a senior leader of its ally NCP Tariq Anwar said his party should build pressure on the Centre to ensure the implementation of Rangnath Commission report. RJD and LJP have demanded implementation of the recommendations of the report. (The Indian Express)

Copenhagen Accord a 'compromise document', would hurt India: Opposition

The Opposition slammed the government in the Rajya Sabha on the Copenhagen Accord, saying it was a "global disappointment" and a "compromise document" which would hurt India's sovereignty by opening up its voluntary emission cuts to global scrutiny. Equating the accord with the Sharm-el-Sheikh joint statement between India and Pakistan, Leader of Opposition Arun Jaitley accused the government of "spin doctoring" and trying to interpret the agreement differently. Describing the Accord as a "global disappointment" amounting to "betrayal of poor nations", the BJP leader took particular objection to the mention of peaking of emissions in the Accord even though no year has been fixed for it. Contending that the government had digressed from its commitment to Parliament on peaking, Jaitley argued that by accepting the principle of peaking, India would be under pressure in the next round of talks to agree to a particular year. He also questioned the provision of reporting on India's domestic mitigation actions on emission cuts which he felt would bind the country and affect its sovereignty. The mention of "international consultations and analysis" on mitigation steps "obliterates distinction between supported and unsupported actions" and India could be subjected to some kind of inspections, he said. "Consequences will follow" if India does not meet the targets it outlines even though these may be unsupported actions, Jaitley said. CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury called the accord "a compromise document" and "an attempt to jettison" the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol and Bali Action Plan. "We have opened windows for the possible jettisoning of the Kyoto Protocol" just like the developed world wanted, he alleged. He accused the government of ensuring that the developed countries were let off from the legally binding provisions in the Protocol for penalties against defaulting states. CPI's Raja described the Accord as "no step forward and several steps backward" and sought to know how developed countries would finance the stopping of deforestation and encourage afforestation by developing nations. Pointing to assurances that India and others would have to inform the UNFCCC about its emissions, Jaitley asked if the accord was not legally binding, "what will happen if developed countries do not submit (their emission reports) by January 31." The BJP leader also questioned the pattern of funding of the actions to cut emissions by the developed countries, saying it was to be made from a gamut of measures including private, public, bilateral and multilateral sources. Jaitley said no reference had been made on the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in the accord. (The Indian Express)

All have equal rights, says Gadkari

The new Bharatiya Janata Party president, Nitin Gadkari, on Thursday maintained that there would not be any change in the ideology of nationalism and Hindutva and asserted that the party stood opposed to discrimination against any citizen on grounds of caste, creed, religion or language. “We are against vote-bank politics. We believe in justice to all and appeasement to none. What begins as appeasement of minorities later becomes appeasement of terrorists,” he told reporters during his first press conference at the party headquarters. Mr. Gadkari made a plea for judging the party by its actions than being caught in the web of “image versus reality.” He said the BJP remained committed to “genuine secularism,” which he described as “Sarva Dharma Sama Bhav,” and not to “vote-bank secularism.” “The party brooks no distinction or discrimination between citizens of India on the lines of caste, religion, language, region or ethnicity. India belongs to all, and all belong to India. All have equal rights and at the same time, all also have equal responsibility to make India stronger and united,” he said in his opening statement. He said his emphasis would be to turn the party organisation into a disciplined body where mutual trust and respect would be the cornerstones of its functioning. Discounting suggestions that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has overarching influence on the BJP, Mr. Gadkari said the RSS did not give any directions as to how to manage the affairs of the party. He admitted that the most important factor was to overcome the “crisis of credibility” that had seeped in not only in political parties but other spheres of society as well. How would he make the BJP an attractive party for the youth? “We have the potential of changing our socio-economic conditions. I firmly believe that politics is the instrument of socio-economic reforms and I have plans to create and enhance employment potential in the rural areas without taking the government funds. The BJP will remain a party with a difference,” he said. Mr. Gadkari said he would not oppose good work of the government for the sake of opposing it. Terming BJP the natural alternative choice for the Congress, he said his efforts would also be directed towards strengthening the National Democratic Alliance. Insisting that he would regularly carry out “performance audit” of the party and its functionaries, he promised to decentralise and distribute power in the party organisation. He stressed that indiscipline would not be tolerated. “Indiscipline is not a subject for discussion but for execution. No indiscipline will be tolerated.” (The Hindu)

Minorities’ issues:

‘Income must be lone criteria for quota’

The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities has recommended the extension of quota to all religious minorities including Hindus where they are in a minority while advocating an overhaul of the reservation policy to make income the lone criteria for affirmative action. In its report tabled in Parliament on Friday, the Commission said Scheduled Caste (SC) status should be delinked from religion to make the SC net fully religion-neutral like that of the Scheduled Tribes (STs). For this, Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 which originally restricted the SC net to Hindus and later opened it to Sikhs and Buddhists should be wholly deleted by appropriate action. Though it was not scheduled to be tabled on Friday, the report of the Commission headed by former Chief Justice of India Ranganath Misra

was hurriedly presented to the House by Union Minister of State for Minority Affairs Salman Khursheed after the decision to adjourn the Lok Sabha sine die was taken in the morning following the first adjournment. Calling for an overhaul of the entire reservation policy, the Commission, which submitted its report to the Government on May 10, 2007, has stressed the need to limit the benefits of reservation to the socially and economically backward. For this purpose, the Commission has suggested that the Below Poverty Line (BPL) lists prepared on the basis of social/educational and economic criteria should be used, as they are scientifically prepared and revised periodically. “BPL lists should, therefore, be made eligible for grant of reservation without distinction on caste, class, group or religion basis.” Working on the premise that socio-economic backwardness emanates from educational backwardness, the Commission has recommended that at least 15 per cent of the seats in all non-minority educational institutions should be earmarked by law for minorities. Of the 15 per cent, the largest chunk of 10 per cent should go to Muslims — commensurate with their 73 per cent share of the total minority population in the country — and the remaining five per cent to other minorities. While making this recommendation, the Commission has followed the judicial decisions mandating that only 50 per cent of the seats in a minority institution can be set aside for minorities in the interest of national integration. The 15 per cent reservation for minorities in non-minority institutions is justified by the Commission “by the same analogy and for the same purpose.” In defining religious minorities, the Commission has gone beyond the scope of the definition used by the National Commission for Minorities. (The Hindu)

Panel recommends quota for Muslims

The Ranganath Misra Commission has recommended 10 per cent reservation for Muslims and five per cent for other minorities in government jobs and favoured the Scheduled Castes status for Dalits of all religions. To address under-representation of minorities — particularly Muslims — in government employment, the Commission has recommended that 15 per cent of posts in all cadres and grades under the Central and State governments should be earmarked for minorities. Again, 10 per cent of this should go to Muslims and in case of non-availability of candidates from this community, the remaining vacancies may be given to other minority groups. (The Hindu)

“Congress, Rao will not be forgiven”

The Congress and the former Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, would not be forgiven for their role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the former Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, should have been given notice to appear before the Liberhan Commission, All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) assistant secretary-general and spokesman Maulana Abdul Rahim Qureishi said. Mr. Vajpayee was among the 68 persons held “culpable” for the demolition of the mosque by the Commission, he said. He told journalists that Mr. Vajpayee, on technical grounds, should have been summoned by the Commission. The process was not followed by it. In fact, it overlooked the judicial process before naming Mr. Vajpayee as one of the persons responsible for the demolition, Maulana Qureishi said. (The Hindu)

Speed up welfare measures: Muslim MPs

Muslim members of Parliament on Wednesday met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to press for speedy implementation of the measures announced by the government for the minorities. Led by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman K. Rahman Khan, the delegation urged Dr. Singh to implement the report of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities — tabled in Parliament last week — while drawing his attention to the delay in the implementation of the Sachar Committee Report on Muslims. It wanted the government to amend the Wakf Act in line with the recommendations made by a joint parliamentary committee. Other demands include Haj reforms, reservation for Muslims along the lines of the policy adopted in Karnataka, recognition for the Islamic banking system to encourage savings within the community, proper monitoring of the Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities, constitutional status to the National Minorities Commission, and minority status to Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia. (The Hindu)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

Insurgency Movements:

Maoists attack Orissa hydel project

Power generation at the Balimela hydroelectricity project in south Orissa's Malkangiri district was disrupted following an attack by Maoists on the infrastructure of the unit during the early hours of Sunday. Power had not resumed at the unit till evening. A high-level team of the Orissa Hydro Power Corporation, which manages the unit, is on the way to the spot. Speaking to The Hindu, Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Satyabrata Bhoi said about a dozen armed Maoists launched the attack at around 12.30 a.m. The project is located in a remote area around 60 km from Malkangiri. The Maoists were targeting the areas of the unit that had low security. When the naxals reached the tunnel camp of the project, it was deserted. Then the attack took place. (The Hindu)

Orissa: Naxals blow up 4 school buildings

Maoist mayhem in the northern Orissa district of Sundargarh continued unabated with the rebels blowing up four school buildings and a primary health centre in the past 24 hours. There was no report of any injury. Rourkela SP Diptesh Patnaik, who visited the spot, said on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning the Maoists set off landmines in the high school and primary school buildings of Jharbeda, Balijora and Mohupadar villages. The CRPF forces were camping in these schools to provide security to the villagers since last 10 days, he said. "On Tuesday, the security forces had left the buildings and came back to K Bolang area. Taking advantage of the absence of the CRPF personnel, the Maoists blew up the buildings," he said. A police officer said the schools were targeted as the places had been used by security personnel during combing operation. Last week, more than 50 Maoist rebels blew up a gram panchayat building in the district. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

7.75% economic growth envisaged

India's economic expansion could exceed 7.75 per cent during the current fiscal, helped by high GDP growth numbers recorded during the July-September quarter, said the Finance Ministry's Mid-Year Review tabled in Parliament. However, it called for urgent action to contain the rising prices of food articles. (The Hindu)

States should take price rise seriously, says Pawar

Unless the States take price rise seriously and protect the interests of consumers, the situation will become difficult, Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar cautioned on Sunday. Though soaring prices were a global phenomenon, the Centre would assist the States in all possible manner in controlling prices. It was making determined efforts to contain the prices of foodgrains and essential commodities, he said. Mr. Pawar admitted that the unprecedented rise in the prices of essential commodities created serious difficulties for the people. While the Centre was taking a substantial burden of subsidy, some States too were coming forward to provide cereals and pulses to the people at affordable rates. Mr. Pawar said the government made efforts to bring down the inflation rate to the single digit at a time the world economy was hit by recession. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar disagreed with Mr. Pawar's suggestion that States do more to rein in the prices. He blamed the UPA government's "faulty policies" for the crisis. "I don't subscribe to Mr. Pawar's charge about inability of States to control skyrocketing prices of essential commodities. Whenever the Congress came to power at the Centre, it gifted the nation with uncontrolled price rise," Mr. Kumar told journalists in Patna. (The Hindu)

Land India's least reformed sector: Tata

In the Indian reform story, policies on land have been the least reformed one, said Ratan Tata on Monday. The Chairman of the Tata Group, whose company Tata Motors had to shift the production base for its Nano car from Singur in West Bengal to Sanand in Gujarat following continuous protests over land acquisition for the project, said political leaders should be able to strike the right balance in deciding whether it is needed for agriculture or for industry. Speaking at the TiE Entrepreneurial Summit 2009, Tata said, "Land is a hot issue and it is going to impact projects." Tata Motors had already pumped in Rs 1,500 crore into the project at Singur and many of its vendors had set up base there before the project site was abandoned. "More often than not, conflicts related to land are promoted by individuals who do not belong to that area, but have other political motives. Leaders need to define and reconcile between cultivated land and industrial land, because agriculture also needs to be efficient. There should be no long term detriment to land owners," he added. Tata said land reforms would create more jobs and take India to the next level of growth. "Given that India wants to create job opportunities for not-so-educated people, it has to be in the sectors like manufacturing where we need a lot of land." Murthy too stressed the need for more land to do business in the country. In urban areas for instance, Murthy said, "India needs to improve its floor area ratio from the current 1:1 to 1:15." Defining the Singur experience as sad and inevitable, Tata said, "A lot of infrastructure projects

are impacted due to the conflict of personal interests. The industry faces several issues on land, and these come from individuals who are politically inclined and they exploit the situation.” Tata also said bureaucratic hurdles emerge in such circumstances. “A misinterpretation of the businessmen’s motives by people with ulterior motives can bring out a defensive attitude from the bureaucrats.” Quoting examples from developed countries, Tata said it’s easier to bring about an agreement between businessmen on a common platform in other locations. However, in India, it continues to be a challenge. “Infrastructure is a good example where we have seen countries that were way behind us (move ahead) as their infrastructure is in place.” (The Indian Express)

ADB to provide \$850 mn in loans to India

India has signed two loan agreements totaling \$850 million with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the finance ministry said in a statement on Tuesday. The ADB will provide a \$700-million loan, in three tranches in as many years, to state-run India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd. to fund the country's infrastructure programme. The Manila-based bank will lend \$150 million in four tranches over a period of three years, the statement added, for the restructuring and development of Khadi industry, which makes India's traditional handspun fabric. (The Indian Express)

Cost-push element behind rise in food prices: Pranab

Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Thursday said increasing food grains productivity, ensuring effective distribution of subsidised essentials to vulnerable groups and allowing duty-free import were some of the steps taken to control the spiralling prices of essential commodities. Speaking at the 109th Annual General Meeting of the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Mukherjee said that though he was concerned about the continuous rise in food prices, a ‘cost-push element’ was responsible for it. “It has to be understood that a cost-push element is responsible for the rise in food prices ... it emerges from the Centre’s decision to give fair and remunerative prices to farmers among others [procurement, transportation and stocking prices].” The situation rose from a “supply-side bottleneck,” he said. Mr. Mukherjee emphasised the need for making the public distribution system more effective for the benefit of the fixed income group and the vulnerable sections of society. He stressed on the role of the States in ensuring the same. “The State governments should ensure that subsidised food grains were given through effective public distribution system. Also the States’ de-hoarding mechanism should be strengthened to ensure that unscrupulous traders, who hoarded essential commodities, were brought to book.” he said. Outlining a fiscal deficit at 6.8 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as one of the challenges facing the nation, he said the solution lay in expanding the revenue base. “Fiscal consolidation is a must in this situation that should be 5.5 per cent of the GDP for 2010-11 and not more than 4 per cent of the GDP in 2011-12.” On the dip in export figures for 13 months since October 2008, Mr. Mukherjee said the situation was mainly due to a low demand following the economic downturn in the markets of Europe, Canada, Japan and the U.S., which constituted 62 per cent of India’s export market. “A lesson needs to be learnt from it is that unless Indian exporters diversify the exportable goods market, the situation will not improve.” (The Hindu)

Geo-strategic developments:

'US can't interfere in India's domestic climate actions'

Dismissing the US claims that India's domestic climate actions can be challenged, top environmentalist R K Pachauri made it clear on Tuesday that there was no power granted to America in the Copenhagen accord for such interference. The Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was reacting to White House senior advisor David Axelrod's remark that the climate accord allows US to not only unilaterally review India's progress but also challenge the country if it failed to meet its domestic climate targets. Pachauri rejected the observation as an attempt by the Obama administration to "win domestic favour" and categorically stated that "there is no provision in the accord for such interference." "What they (Obama aides) are trying is essentially to convince the Senators that they would be able to pressure China and India on climate actions. I think they want to project that only because they want to get passage of the bill (Cap and Trade Bill related to carbon emission) that has been introduced in the Senate. Apart from that, I don't think we should read much between the lines," he said. Pachauri also maintained that there was no pressure on India "otherwise we would have been accepting monitoring, reporting and verification which is what the US wanted to start with (at the Copenhagen Summit)." "We (India) clearly resisted with that and I think that language in limited, non binding agreement is very clear. It talks about consultation and analysis. And how can they (US) challenge us on that or for that matter China or any other country which has supported the accord," Pachauri said. In fact, the consultation and analysis applies to all the countries including the US, he said. Axelrod had said, "Now China and India have set goals combating climate change. We are going to be able to review what they are doing. We are going to be able to challenge them if they do not meet those goals." The US official's remark had invited sharp criticism from the Opposition which attacked the government for compromising with India's concerns on emission cuts at the Danish capital. (The Indian Express)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

30,000 troops withdrawn from J&K since last year: Antony

Two Army divisions (about 30,000 troops) were withdrawn from Jammu and Kashmir since last year and there were plans to pull back more troops if the law and order situation in the State continued to improve, Defence Minister A.K. Antony said on Friday. He, however, ruled out revocation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from areas where the armed forces were deployed for counterinsurgency operations. "Already the Army, by its own initiative, has withdrawn two divisions from Jammu and Kashmir. Last year, it withdrew one division. This year also it withdrew another division. So whenever we feel the situation is improving, we are willing to further reduce the visibility and presence of the armed forces," he said after delivering the keynote address at a seminar on internal security. On the AFSPA, he reiterated the stand taken by the Army chiefs in the past that the armed forces needed special powers whenever they were deployed on counter-insurgency duties. But, he expressed the government's willingness to discuss changes in these powers. "Without special powers, the Army cannot operate ... But at the same time we can have a detailed discussion about making some modification here and

there.” Asked about Army Chief General Deepak Kapoor’s observations that the media highlighted human rights violations, the Minister made it clear that the government would not ignore even a single case of such violation. “We will take prompt action. We feel that in a democracy, Parliament, judiciary, human rights organisations and also media have a positive role to play to protect the rights of citizens.” The Minister admitted that neither the government nor the Army was “happy” about counter-insurgency deployment. “This is the last resort. The Army is not at all interested, the government is not at all interested in large-scale, permanent stationing of the armed forces in Jammu and Kashmir,” he said. Mr. Antony complimented the armed forces for their “dedicated hard work” in Jammu and Kashmir because of which “for the first time the law and order situation is improving, infiltration and the number of violent incidents are declining.” Speaking at the seminar, Mr. Antony said the AFSPA allowed the armed forces to act in “difficult situations” in Jammu and Kashmir and the northeast but the onus was on them to stop “misuse” of these special provisions. On human rights, he said the government would not hesitate to take stern action against the guilty in case of any misuse. “We must adopt the policy of zero tolerance in letter and in spirit, towards any instance of human rights violation,” Mr. Antony said. (The Hindu)

Social front:

I was in jail before 26/11, says ‘Kasab’

Mohammad Ajmal Amir ‘Kasab,’ the lone surviving gunman in the Mumbai terror attack case, on Friday denied having ever fired at passengers at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. He also told the special sessions court that he was in police custody 20 days before the attacks. As per the trial procedure, the court was recording his statement under Section 313 of the Criminal Procedure Code. To questions posed to him, he said “Pata nahi [I don’t know],” “Poori baat galat hai [Everything is wrong],” or “I was not there [at CST].” Judge M.L. Tahaliyani read out the deposition of eyewitnesses on the attack at the CST. ‘Kasab’ said the incident might have happened, but he was not present at the terminus; people might have been injured, but he was not the one who fired at them. He claimed he had first laid his eyes on an AK 47 when he was in custody, and he had never handled the weapon. ‘Kasab’ said: “I was in police custody 20 days prior to 26/11. I was caught at Juhu Chowpatty. I was there, ‘picture ke chakkar me’ [to watch a movie]. I had a Pakistani passport and visa and a Sony Ericsson 500. The mobile did not have a local SIM. The police searched me, found my Pakistani passport and took me in. I was first in the custody of the local police and then transferred to the Crime Branch.” When the judge inquired how he had landed himself in Mumbai, came the reply. “By Samjhauta Express, via Delhi.” Sensing that ‘Kasab’ seemed to know that the local police and the Crime Branch were different entities, Mr. Tahaliyani asked him if he knew what the Crime Branch was. “Unit one, Crime Branch. ‘Udhar to maa yaad aati hai’ [They bash you up till you see stars]. I got to know later it was unit one.” He alleged on Friday that the police tutored witnesses to identify him as one of the attackers at the CST. Further, since his photograph was splashed around the world, it made identification easy. He said the “shorter person,” a term often used by eyewitnesses to describe ‘Kasab,’ was not him; the real attacker was another man of short stature, named “Abu Ali, who died.” “Since my height and face matched the CST attacker, the police fitted me in the case.” He alleged that the identification parade was manipulated by the police. Giving an

instance, he said: “There was one witness who could not identify me. The officer then hinted at me with his eyes. Only one officer would escort the witnesses to the parade. You can see for yourself that most witnesses have given similar evidence.” ‘Kasab’ also denied having taken a taxi from the Badhwar Park or having planted a bomb in a taxi. “Atireki the; utar gaye, Taj mein [They were terrorists; they got off at Taj].” When asked to give the meaning of the word, ‘atireki,’ he said: “Jo dehshat karte hai. [Those who spread terror].” The court reminded him of his voluntary confession on July 20 while he was in judicial custody. He had admitted to everything, including the exchange of fire with the police at the CST. But he said he had admitted out of fear for the police. Referring to the men in uniform who stood next to him in the court, he said their presence itself was not good for his wellbeing. The judge reminded him that he had specifically pointed to a photograph in a footage admitting that it was him. However, ‘Kasab’ said he had lied, and his confession was not true. He was not part of any of the CD footage. “The terrorists at CST and Taj are the same.” He felt that if punishment was delivered quickly, he would be shifted to another jail where he could be in peace. On Friday, he again appealed for punishment. Alleging police torture, ‘Kasab’ said his confession recorded before the magistrate was forcibly taken. “Maar peet ke manvaya mujhe. Sab zabardasti. [They beat me and forced me to agree].” ‘Kasab’ said he was interrogated by four foreigners. “Chaar gore aye the. Usme ek Headley tha. [Four white people had come. One was Headley].” David Coleman Headley is now in the custody of the FBI for his alleged involvement in 26/11. Avoiding straight answers and using digressions, ‘Kasab’ appeared to be playing to the gallery. So much so that the court had to repeatedly ask him to look straight and stick to the point. About a witness having identified him, he said: “Poor thing, she was mistaken.” As for the testimony of a 10-year-old child eyewitness, he said: “She is a child. She said what she was tutored to say.” Like all his answers, he was also vague about his address and age. He first appeared to be unsure about his age, but later said he could be 20. When the court asked him how he could take such a guess, ‘Kasab’ said: “Mother and father would say, son now you are 10 or 12 years old.” He gave his address as Faridkot, Punjab. “Punjab in India or Pakistan?” the judge queried. “That the government has to decide. I am saying I am from Pakistan,” he replied. He did not know his date of birth and stated his occupation as “labourer.” (The Hindu)

Kasab still in denial mode: Wasn’t there, didn’t kill

Picking up from where he had left off on Friday, Ajmal Kasab, the lone 26/11 gunman captured alive, continued with his bizarre claims before the special sessions court on Monday, alleging that the police had shot him in a hospital he had been taken to. “Mujhe sunn hone ki dawai di gayi. Tikaa lagaya tha aur teen jagah par goli maar di. Teeno goli ek hi afsar ne maari thi (They administered anesthesia and then fired three rounds at my arm. The same officer fired all three bullets),” said Kasab in his statement recorded under Section 313 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Kasab also denied having killed police constable Tukaram Omble at Girgaum Chowpatty in an encounter with a police team on November 26 last year. “I wasn’t there at all, so how could I kill him?” Kasab asked special Judge M L Tahaliyani. In a standard answer to every question, Kasab maintained, “Main nahi tha wahan (I was not there).” He also insisted that every witness, who had either deposed against him or identified him in the court, were tutored by the police. “You know the police officers,” he said. Kasab has confessed to his crime thrice after his arrest. The first was his admission of guilt before the police soon after his arrest, with another

confession made before a magistrate which is admissible as evidence, and the third given in the trial court when he accepted his guilt partially. In his guilty plea, Kasab had said it was Abu Ismail who had inflicted heavy casualties at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) railway station and at Cama Hospital by firing indiscriminately. He further said he had not fired at Anti Terrorism Squad chief Hemant Karkare, Additional Commissioner of Police Ashok Kamte and senior police inspector Vijay Salaskar, claiming it was Abu Ismail who had shot them. However, on Monday, Kasab maintained his standard answer of “I don’t know.” Photographs clicked by a journalist that are now part of the evidence in the case were shown to Kasab in court. “These people work for the government. In this photograph, the rifle is pointed downwards,” Kasab reacted on seeing a photograph clicked by photojournalist Shriram Vernekar. Dressed in his usual white kurta pyjama, Kasab said he did not want to carry on with the statement in the first half of the court session. “I cannot think right now. I will skip my meal in the evening today and speak tomorrow,” Kasab told the court. Ajmal Kasab, told a court on Tuesday that he was not a “jihadi” and did not undergo training by the Lashkar-e-Taiba. The court was recording his final statement. (The Indian Express)

India failed to protect people’s interests, says Greenpeace

By endorsing the Copenhagen Accord at the just-concluded U.N. climate meet, India has failed to protect the interests of the people most affected by climate change not only in India but worldwide, environmental group Greenpeace said on Tuesday. Reacting to the Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh’s statement on India’s position at Copenhagen on climate change, it said India shirked its responsibility to show leadership and let down the most impacted communities in the least developed countries and island states. Prior to going to Copenhagen, Mr. Ramesh had said that India was the “most vulnerable” nation due to impacts of climate change. Over 700 million Indians are dependent on climate-sensitive sectors and resources and by endorsing this Accord, India has failed to protect the interests of the people most affected by climate change, Greenpeace said in a statement. While appreciating India’s willingness to report nationally on unsupported actions to Parliament, Greenpeace said it was a good proactive step. “With this decision, India is showing transparency of its mitigation actions.” (The Hindu)

Foreign Relations:

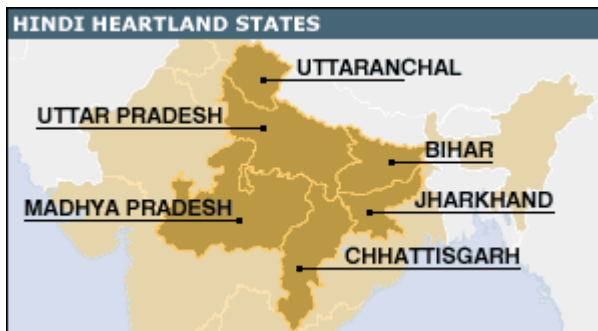
‘India not fulfilling its commitments’

Pakistan High Commissioner Shahid Malik has said that India was not fulfilling its commitments made in an agreement reached between the two nations to de-link composite talks from action on terrorism. “Something that we agreed on, has not been acted upon,” he told Karan Thapar in an interview to be broadcast on CNN-IBN, referring to the joint statement in Sharm-el-Sheikh issued by Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He said the diplomatic vacuum was only helping those elements who did not want both countries to talk to each other. Mr. Malik defended his country’s pace of taking steps against the conspirators of the Mumbai terror attacks, stating that Pakistani investigators were looking for credible evidence to ensure a foolproof case. The India-Pakistan joint statement at Sharm-el-

Sheikh July 16 said: Action on terrorism should not be linked to the composite dialogue process and these should not be bracketed. (The Hindu)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)

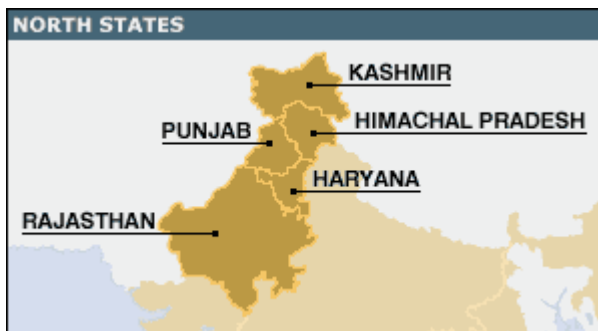


Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The North

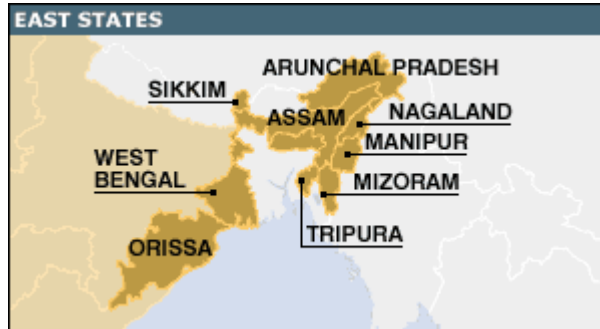


Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

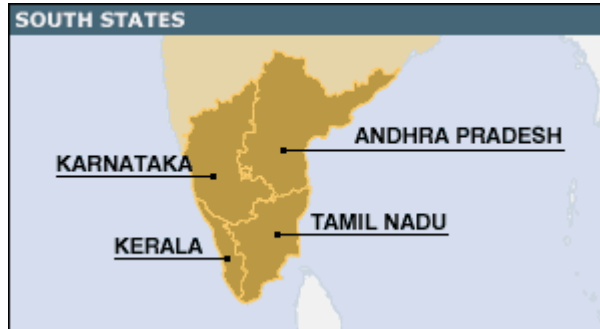
GJM rejects Chidambaram's appeal

The Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) leadership has turned down Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram's appeal to call off the "fast-unto-death" programme by some of its activists which entered its eighth day on Friday. "Our president Bimal Gurung has made clear to Mr. Chidambaram our refusal," senior GJM leader and member of its central committee Benoy Tamang told *The Hindu* over telephone from Darjeeling. The GJM has been demanding creation of a Gorkhaland State comprising Darjeeling and its adjoining areas in West Bengal. Mr. Chidambaram, in a statement issued in New Delhi, made the appeal to the GJM even as he stressed the need for creating a cordial atmosphere for the tripartite talks scheduled to be held in Darjeeling on December 21. The GJM leadership said that though it had abided by Mr. Chidambaram's request to call off its four-day bandh 12 hours after it had begun in the Darjeeling hills on December 14, the fast would continue. The condition of some of those participating in the protest has been worsening by the day. The West Bengal government too believes that by calling such an agitation in the run-up to the talks, the GJM is only vitiating the atmosphere. It has also appealed to the GJM to call off the agitation, according to State Home Secretary Ardhendu Sen. Earlier, Mr. Chidambaram, in a statement issued in New Delhi, said as the talks involving the Centre, the West Bengal government and the GJM were already scheduled, there was no need to adopt an agitational approach on the eve of such dialogue. He said the GJM's hunger strike was still continuing and he was saddened to learn that several on fast were suffering from dehydration and some hospitalised. "The deteriorating health of some who are observing fast is a matter of concern to all of us. Hence, I would appeal to the GJM to call off the stir immediately and utilise its time and energy to prepare for the tripartite talks," the Home Minister said. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Violence hits Anantapur again

The movement for unified Andhra Pradesh took a violent turn after police disrupted the indefinite hunger strike camps of various leaders in the city on Friday. Protesting the action of the police, the agitators set fire to furniture in the Railway Kalyanamandapam. The furniture and the electrical wiring were reduced to ashes. Fire-fighting personnel rushed to the spot and brought the flames under control. Police dispersed the agitators. BSNL cables kept outside a godown on Gooty road were also set ablaze. The flames were brought under control by the fire personnel. Earlier, police swooped down on the camp of the fasting Telugu Desam leaders. They arrested three MLAs -- Paritala Sunitha, B.K. Parthasaradhy and Palle Raghunath Reddy, whose indefinite hunger strike entered the fourth day and shifted them to hospital. Their arrest met with stiff resistance from supporters, but the police overpowered them. The three MLAs are reportedly continuing their fast. The police also disrupted the indefinite fast by Dharmavaram MLA Venkatarama Reddy. Elsewhere in the region, fasting TDP MLA Ch. Prabhakar in Eluru and ex-MLA N. Varadarajulu Reddy in Proddatur were also forcibly removed. In Vijayawada, there were stray incidents of violence. Inspector General of Police, A.R. Anuradha, told reporters in Hyderabad that sporadic violent incidents were reported from the two regions which witnessed protests at as many as 397 places. The police spokesperson said Government offices in Kakinada and Ravulapalem and Praja Rajyam office in Mahabubnagar were set on fire while an APSRTC canteen, a hotel, a petrol bunk in Ongole, electricity office in Chirala, MRO office in Nuzvid and Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad were attacked. (The Hindu)

Social front:

'535 farmers committed suicide in Karnataka in two years'

A total of 535 farmers have committed suicide in Karnataka from January 2008 to November this year, the state assembly was informed on Tuesday. This was stated in a written reply by Agriculture Minister S A Ravindranatha. On steps taken by the Government to prevent such cases, he said seeds, tractors, power tillers and other hitech agricultural equipments, drip and sprinkler irrigation units are being distributed at subsidised rates among others. Besides, crop loans at three per cent interest were being distributed in the current financial year, he said.

Meanwhile, Tourism Minister G Janardhana Reddy said Rs 614.4 lakh has been sanctioned for development of tourist facilities and signages near beach resorts of Gokarna, Kasarakodu, Thrasi, St Mary Island, Malpe, Tannirbhavi and Panambur in the coastal districts of Uttara Kannada, Dakshina Kannada and Udupi. He said the Nandi Hills near Bangalore was being developed as a hill station at a cost of Rs 1.03 crore. Reddy said 56 hotels are under the control of Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation -- 24 run by it, 21 being run by private agencies on a lease basis, while the remaining 11 are proposed to be given to private parties. During question hour, Chief Minister B S Yeddyurappa said the government is mulling over a scheme to make 114 taluks, identified as backward by the Committee headed by Dr D M Nanjundappa on eradication of regional imbalances, as huts-free taluks. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Ranganath Mishra report: Opp stages walkout

Refuses to discuss matter in Assembly as it is sub judice and pending before the Supreme Court Congress members staged a walkout when a resolution for discussion on the Ranganath Mishra Commission recommending reservation for Dalit-converts to Islam and Christianity was introduced in the Assembly by Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Fakirbhai Vaghela. Introducing the resolution, Vaghela said that social status of Dalits change after religious conversion and hence, they could not be considered for SC status and reservation. He asked the Central government not to implement the recommendations and warned that its implementation would lead to social division in the country. Before staging a walk out, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Shaktisinh Gohil told the House that it was not advisable to discuss the matter in the state Assembly because it was pending before the Supreme Court and sub judice. Gohil also argued that the report was tabled in the Lok Sabha just a day ago and it was yet to be discussed in the Parliament. He urged Speaker Ashok Bhatt to postpone the discussion on the issue. But Bhatt did not agree and allowed discussion on the issue, prompting the Opposition to stage a walkout. The resolution was passed by a majority vote. (The Indian Express)

Gujarat BJP to get new chief by first week of January

Kaushik Patel, Bhupendrasinh Chudasama and Dilip Sanghani are believed to be in the fray. With barely a fortnight left for the three-year tenure of state BJP president Parshottam Rupala to end, the party unit is agog with speculations over his successor. Kaushik Patel, Bhupendrasinh Chudasama and Dilip Sanghani are believed to be in the fray. The party is through with its membership drive and the final list of members will be submitted to the central leadership in New Delhi next week. Once the names for district presidential posts are declared, the process for election of state president will get a push. “At least 60 per cent of the district presidents should be elected and they should submit names for consideration to the central party leadership,” said a party insider. Bhupendrasinh Chudasama and Kaushik Patel are the favourites due to their closeness to CM Narendra Modi, while Dilip Sanghani may get the favour for being a senior Leuva Patel leader from the Saurashtra region. Sanghani is the state cooperation minister and has a good rapport with co-operative sector leaders. Former MLA from Dhandhuka Bharat Pandya, who is in-charge of the enrolment drive of the party in Gujarat, said the drive was over and a meeting would be held in Ahmedabad on Sunday to take stock of the situation. “The district presidents will be named in two to three days, while the state president will be declared by the first week of January,” Pandya said while declining to reveal any names. “I cannot give out the names, but whoever he is, will be in the saddle in the first week of January,” said Pandya. Chudasama, the Rajput leader among the probable candidates, said he was aware of his name making rounds. “But the final decision will be taken by the party leadership,” he said. Patel said the party leaders would have the last word on the issue. Sanghani said he being a minister in the state government did not discuss the issue with anybody in the party organisation. He said he would not be part of the decision-making body consisting of the organisation leaders. However, he cited the example of Vajubhai Vala, who was moved from the government to the party organisation. State BJP president Rupala said once the district presidents’ list is finalised, it will be sent to the central leadership. Rupala too refused to name the probables, but did say that the list will be out in the first week of January. (The Indian Express)

After must-vote, Modi govt plans voter’s right to recall

After its controversial Bill making voting in Gujarat local body polls compulsory, the Modi government is now mulling another giving voters, among other provisions, the right to recall non-performing local representatives. The state election commission has already vetted its final draft for Modi’s nod. Once operational, the law will enable the electorate to recall elected representatives across all local self-government bodies — municipal corporations, municipalities and panchayats — if he or she fails to deliver or is involved in any serious misconduct. Once the Bill goes through the Assembly, District Collectors would have the power to remove any elected local body representative and order a repoll, if one-third of the electorate lodges a complaint, and the Collector finds substance in it. Elected representatives, however, can serve an initial two years of their five-year term, before voters could exercise the right to recall. “The draft for this and some other recommendations are ready. We will soon hand it over to the government for its consideration,” Gujarat Election Commissioner K C Kapoor told The Indian Express, adding that he “strongly believes” the government would accept it since ‘right to recall’ is already being

implemented in local bodies in BJP-ruled Chhattisgarh. The SEC has also suggested to legislate for barring anyone above the age of 65 from contesting any local body poll. (The Indian Express)

BJP wins 25 of 37 seats in Gujarat municipal polls

The BJP put up an impressive show in the by-elections for 37 seats in various municipalities in Gujarat, while the party shared honours with the Congress in the by-elections for the panchayat bodies. The by-elections for 79 seats in various districts and taluka panchayats and municipalities were held on Sunday. The BJP claimed 25 of the 37 seats in the municipalities leaving only four for the Congress while independents bagged eight seats, capturing five of the nine seats in the district panchayats and 14 of the 33 seats in the taluka panchayats. The BJP won four seats in the district panchayats and 17 in the taluka panchayats with two seats going to the independents. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Emergency call: Mumbai is drying up, and fast

There have been bad seasons before but poor monsoon has left the city facing its worst water crisis. As tempers rise and protests grow, Mumbai has enough to last just another 200 days. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and these are desperate times for Mumbai. Delayed monsoon and poor rainfall have pushed India's commercial capital to the brink of its worst water crisis. According to officials, at present rates, there is enough water to last the city just another 200 days. With the supply down by about 3 lakh million litres of water per day, options from desalinating the Arabian sea water to recycling sewage water, digging wells/borewells, cutting supply for one day per week and the drastic move of not providing water connection to new high-rises are being considered. Civic officials are also grappling with the fear of an impending public backlash — the protests for increasing the supply of water have already seen one death, vandalism of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) offices, hunger strikes, in addition with morchas practically every day. While the city's demand for water is 4,200 million litres per day (mld), only 3,450 mld can be supplied. The present availability of water is around 7 lakh million litres as against 10 lakh million litres last year. Even with the water cut in place since June (imposed just before the monsoon as the rains were delayed), the situation hasn't improved due to poor rainfall, which failed to fill the lakes, leaving many areas without adequate water. The shortage has already left people ordering water tankers and buying water, even mineral water for drinking purposes, to save the remaining for cooking, washing and other non-potable purposes. "The lake levels are depleting daily and the water from the six lakes (of Mumbai) is enough for not more than 200 days," said an official of the Water Department. The issue has also gained political colour after Nitesh Rane, the son of Congress Revenue Minister Narayan Rane, led a protest in which a young man died following lathicharge by police. He is not the only one leading protests. Corporators and almost all political parties are taking out morchas on the issue. Mumbai's water network, set up during the British period, has 108 zones through its island city, eastern and western suburbs. The BMC believes the solution lies in re-aligning of the existing network in seven zones and cutting off the supply of each zone for a day in a week for equitable distribution. "The cuts cannot be increased from 15 per cent as those at

hilly and far-off places will suffer the most. Moreover, political parties will not allow hiking the cuts. Realigning of the zones and rationing of water are the only option,” an official said. Officials also say that the biggest hurdle in checking water shortage is the loss through leakages, pilferages and illegal connections — around 700 mld of water is unaccounted for. It will take another few years to replace the old pipelines. While the city has faced water shortages earlier, in 1996, 1992, 1972 and 1966, it never reached such desperate situation because of rainfall that eventually filled up the lakes: Bhatsa, Tansa, Modak Sagar, Upper Vaitarna, Tulsi and Vihar. To cope with the situation, the BMC imposed a further 15 per cent water cut in October, in addition to allotting Rs 100 crore for digging up of borewells and cleaning of existing wells. More than 8.7 lakh litres of water has been added after the cleaning and desilting of more than 100 underground wells. To bridge the demand-supply gap, the Mumbai administration has also undertaken steps like curbing per capita supply to 90 litres per person per day, instead of the national norm of 150. Also all the new constructions whose demand is more than 2 lakh litres per day will not be given water connection until the Middle Vaitarna project is completed. The project, costing Rs 1,600 crore, is expected to be complete by 2012, adding 450 mld to the 3,450 mld water being supplied now. The government has also announced plans to desalinate sea water, a feasibility study on which will be conducted soon. The BMC is making it mandatory for all new constructions to recycle sewage water and use it for non-potable purposes. Plans are also on to rope in celebrities to spread awareness about saving water. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front: