

Business and Politics in Muslim World

India
Sadia Khanum
23rd to 29th January 2010

Presentation Date: 3rd February 2010

Report # 104

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National Summary:

TRS enforced centre to take quick action to solve Telangana issue. BJP president Nitin Gadkari says he has the full support of and cooperation from senior leaders and is not a “puppet” of any of them. He said party consults RSS in every important issue but does not take dictation from it. Gujarat Chief minister Narendra Modi’s proposal to apply compulsory voting in India lacks support from political circles. Election Commission of Thailand President Apichart Sukhaggonond said compulsory voting “may not be feasible in a country as large as India.”

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said India should teach a lesson to Pakistan and take strong steps against China while highlighting the problem of infiltration from Bangladesh. He criticised the lending of agricultural lands for industrial use in West Bengal.

Maoist killed four citizens in an attack in Orissa while blow up railway track in Assam.

India is determined to achieve 7% growth rate in 2010 while IMF predicted 7.9% growth rate in 2010-11.

Security was on high alert during republic day celebrations in India. UN envoy for nuclear non proliferation criticised Indo-US nuclear deal as it weakened the effort for nuclear free world.

Omer Abdullah invites freedom fighters for dialogue to resolve the dispute.

The rate of gender base discrimination decrease in last decades and state capital is on top of the list in providing equal political and economic opportunities to women.

India announces 100 fellowships for training Afghan students in agricultural field every year.

The West Bengal government is planning to create one lakh jobs by March 2010 in different department.

Regional Summary:

The Forest Survey of India, through satellite pictures, claims an increase of two square kilometer area of the forest and tree cover in Chandigarh. Chief Conservator of Forest Iswar Singh gave credit for the increase in greenery to the joint efforts of residents, schoolchildren and employees of horticulture wings of the Municipal Corporation and Chandigarh Administration. Punjab Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal termed the population of the country as its biggest asset while inaugurating a conference titled ‘Making Punjab the skill capital of the world’ the Central government proposes to create a resource base of 500 million skilled workers by 2022 and 15 million people would be

trained annually. “Punjab has identified nine sectors including drivers for heavy machinery, hospitality industry, dairy entrepreneurs, training for poultry, horse breeding, security personnel, construction workers and health care workers in which training would be provided,”

Kateekal Sankaranarayanan was sworn in as Governor of Maharashtra on Friday. Shiv Sena defeated SP leader Abu Azmi’s son Farhan in a closely-contested by-election. The Sena tally in the 288-member Assembly went up to 45 with this victory, just one less than ally BJP. Sena candidate Rupesh Mhatre won the triangular fight with a margin of 1,676 votes. Mhatre secured 35,376 votes while Farhan got 33,700 votes.

Despite tall talk of progress and development, the practice of untouchability is still prevalent in rural areas of Gujarat. This was found in a survey by the Navsarjan Trust and the Robert F. Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights.

National Report

Politics:

Act fast on Telangana issue, says TRS

As the Centre is yet to finalise the name of the former Supreme Court judge to head the likely committee on the Telangana issue, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) has urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to act on the issue fast before the situation goes out of control. "It is more than 16 days since the Centre convened the all-party meeting and decided to announce the mechanism on the issue. Already more than 11 people have committed suicide in Telangana areas. So the Centre should act fast and should not let the people think that the issue has been put on cold storage," said TRS general secretary K.T. Rama Rao. He said it would be very difficult to restore people's confidence if they lost faith. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president D. Srinivas met Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and discussed the issue. (The Hindu)

Huge embarrassment for govt, ex-PAF chief's image in ad

In a huge embarrassment, a full-page newspaper advertisement given by the government today to mark the National Girl Child Day carried a photograph of a former Pakistan Air Force chief along with that of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi. The advertisement also showed sports icons Kapil Dev and Virender Sehwag and Sarod Maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan along with former PAF chief Tanvir Mahmood Ahmed in uniform with the heading, "Where would you be if your mother was not allowed to be born?" An unrepentant Minister for Women and Child Development Krishna Tirath defiantly refused to accept the blunder and accused the media of hair-splitting. She said the "message is more important than the image. The photograph is only symbolic. The message for the girl child is more important. She should be protected. The Prime Minister's Office on Sunday apologised to the nation and ordered an inquiry into the inclusion of the former Pakistan Air Force chief's photograph in a government advertisement carried by some newspapers to mark the National Girl Child Day. A committee, led by an Additional Secretary of the Ministry, will look into the episode. By noon, the PMO issued a statement. It said: "The Prime Minister's Office has noted with regret the inclusion of a foreign national's photograph in a Government of India advertisement. While an internal inquiry has been instituted, the PMO apologises to the public for this lapse." (The Indian Express & The Hindu)

I am not a puppet of any leader: Gadkari

BJP president Nitin Gadkari says he has the full support of and cooperation from senior leaders and is not a "puppet" of any of them. Mr. Gadkari, 53, the youngest ever BJP leader to hold the post, said he was taking decisions on his own though often after consulting party elders and RSS leaders. Speaking to Karan Thapar in CNN-IBN's "Devil's Advocate," he denied he was an RSS appointee imposed on the party. "Hundred per cent, I'm telling you that all leaders are with me. They are supporting me from the

core of their heart, and they have guided me very properly... , and they are supporting me,” he said, asked whether he had the full backing from such senior leaders as Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitley, Venkaiah Naidu and Ananth Kumar. Mr. Gadkari, who admitted that he was new to national politics soon after taking charge on December 20, denied these senior leaders were turning him into a puppet. “ ... And the people who know me know that I will never become a puppet. I can make bonafide mistakes, but I cannot make malafide mistakes.” “Last four years as president of the BJP in Maharashtra, the RSS is part of my life conviction. But RSS leaders never direct me, never give me any instruction. And even as BJP president, I am taking my own decisions,” he said. He said senior leader L.K. Advani and his predecessor Rajnath Singh were the first to suggest that he become the party president. He denied that RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat imposed him on the BJP. “Some people are creating the image that the RSS is controlling the BJP. This is not the correct thing... They [the RSS] never interfere in our day-to-day activities, never interfere in the selection of candidates and politics.” However, he said, the BJP and the RSS had an “ideological relationship,” and the party often discussed issues with the RSS. Asked whether the BJP had become the front for the RSS, Mr. Gadkari attributed this perception to the gap between image and reality. Could the BJP reject any advice given by the RSS? “Yes, [at] many times. There is democracy in the RSS. Even when I go to the highest leader in the RSS, I can discuss with him ... my opinion. When the RSS takes a decision on its matters, every Swayamsevak is ready to accept that,” Mr. Gadkari said. He described Mr. Bhagwat and the former RSS chief, K.S. Sudarshan, as democratic leaders with whom he had discussed issues quite often, and he had differences with them on many occasions. Asked about the BJP being associated with the Kandhamal riots in Orissa, the Ram Sene in Karnataka and Varun Gandhi’s alleged communal speech, Mr. Gadkari said: “We are a democratic party. We have many leaders in the party with different views. These did not represent the party’s views. As far as the Ram Sene is concerned, it is not directly or indirectly related to the BJP; it is a section of the people ... who attaches everything with the BJP.” (The Hindu)

Compulsory voting may not work in India: Thai poll chief

The debate over compulsory voting has attracted attention from other countries with Thailand on Wednesday suggesting that while compulsory voting “may not be feasible in a country as large as India”, variants of the idea could be introduced in regions traditionally witnessing a low voter turnout. Voting is compulsory in Thailand, but failure to cast one’s vote doesn’t invite punitive action, Election Commission of Thailand President Apichart Sukhaganond said. The debate over the Gujarat compulsory voting bill has revolved around the “likely punitive action that those unable to cast their votes would have to face”. EC India has dubbed the idea “impractical” saying it doesn’t have the wherewithal to enforce compulsory voting. Thai authorities also don’t recommend compulsory voting. “India is a far more evolved democracy, so the voters may perhaps like to retain the right not to vote,” said Thaveechaiyagarn. “We introduced compulsory voting, after facing voter apathy, especially in the countryside,” he said, adding that variants of the idea could, perhaps, be introduced in regions routinely witnessing a low voter turnout. The Thailand Election Commission officials were here to take part in EC’s diamond jubilee celebrations. (The Indian Express)

Minorities' issues:

Hindu Fundamentalism:

RSS chief sees waves of change in Bengal

Addressing a gathering of Swayam Sevaks here, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said India should teach a lesson to Pakistan and take strong steps against China while highlighting the problem of infiltration from Bangladesh. Bhagwat, who was speaking at an RSS gathering Shahid Minar, also criticised granting of agricultural land for industry and saw a wave of change ushering in Bengal. Interestingly, US Consul General Beth A Payne decided to drop in with her camera at the RSS meet and was seen taking pictures of the event. "Our internal and external security is above politics, but nobody thinks like that. All political parties are looking for vote banks," Bhagwat said. The RSS chief also spoke against acquisition of land for industry and farmers getting dependent on genetically-modified seeds. "Why is vast fertile agricultural land given out to big companies? Certain types of seeds are given to farmers which are making them dependent on companies producing them. Sometimes, we try to become Russia, sometime America and sometime China. When will we become Indians?" he said. (The Indian Express)

Insurgency Movements:

4 dead, 8 injured in Orissa Maoist attack

Ahead of the two-day Orissa bandh called by them, the Maoists wreaked havoc in northern and southern Orissa triggering landmines blasts that left four civilians dead and 8 jawans of the Special Operation Group seriously injured. The Maoists, who called the bandh to protest against the arrest of Subhasree Das, the wife of top rebel leader Sabyasachi Panda, blew up a Commander trekker carrying policemen and some civilians in Palur area of Narayanpatna block of Koraput district on Saturday morning. Deputy Inspector General (DIG - southwestern range) Sanjeev Panda said the blast took place at Jogipalur area when 10 SOG jawans were returning to their barracks after conducting combing operations at Narayanpatna in a passenger trekker. Among the dead were two women and the owner and driver of the trekker and the vehicle was ripped apart by the force of the blast. Police officials said the blast appeared to be the handiwork of the Koraput division of the Andhra Orissa Border Special Zonal Committee. The Maoists also struck at Machhkund block in Koraput on Friday night and burnt down the Tehsil office and blew up a mobile phone tower. They also blocked the roads leading to Machhkund by felling trees. In another incident the Maoists abducted 3 persons including a Zilla Parishad member of Sundargarh district. Rourkela SP Diptesh Patnaik said the Maoists abducted Zilla Parishad member Anand Masi Horo, his brother and another civilian from Jamdihi-Roxy area under K Bolang police station. The rebels also fired indiscriminately at several trucks of a construction company on NH-215. (The Indian Express)

Militants blow up railway track in Assam

Militants blew up a railway track in upper Assam's Dhemaji district disrupting train

services with the rest of the country on Sunday. Security forces recovered two improvised explosive devices, including one from a passenger bus, to avert more tragedies in stepped-up counter-insurgency operations in the wake of the R-Day boycott call. A powerful explosion occurred at Dekamishing village in Dhemaji district on Sunday morning. A portion of a railway bridge and railway track was damaged in the blast. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

China, Japan added to list of non-traditional markets

China and Japan have been added to the 39 non-traditional export markets identified by the Centre as part of a series of new incentives to encourage Indian exporters to explore non-traditional business avenues, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Anand Sharma said on Friday. Addressing media persons after participating in an Open House hosted by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), Mr. Sharma said the inclusion of the two new markets with which there had been a worrying trade imbalance was aimed at expanding the horizon for exporters hit by dwindling orders from recessionary markets. Mr. Sharma recalled that the Foreign Trade Policy announced last year identified 39 new markets under the market-linked focus product scheme that included 16 in Latin America and 10 in Asia. The new incentives announced in January included bringing 2,000 new products under the focus products scheme that provides export incentives, he said. Mr. Sharma said his ministry was favouring the continuation of fiscal stimulus packages to all sectors that had been affected by recession. On whether a time-frame had been set for a stimulus exit plan, he said he was for “cautious and calibrated withdrawal,” as an abrupt withdrawal could be hurtful to the industry. Stating that it would be irresponsible to speculate on a timeline for the withdrawal of aid, Mr. Sharma said the government would keep a close watch on the sectors and undertake a periodic sectoral review. Mr. Sharma said his ministry had also recommended to the Finance Ministry measures such as extending easy credit availability, provision of reduced rate of interest for dollar credit at the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) plus one per cent in place of LIBOR plus 3.5 per cent, and the continuation of two per cent interest subvention to labour incentive sectors such as textiles, handicrafts, carpets, leather, gems and jewellery. Earlier, addressing the Open House, Mr. Sharma urged exporters to have a global vision by looking more at non-traditional markets. He also wanted exporters to bear in mind the need to be globally competitive. “The industry has to take up this challenge,” he said. The government could only intervene in a crisis and facilitate supportive policy regimes, but the onus was on industry to perform and become world leaders, Mr. Sharma said. (The Hindu)

SBI for acquisitions in Indonesia, Thailand

The country's largest lender SBI is eyeing acquisitions in the south-east Asia, particularly in Indonesia where it acquired a bank way back in 2006, bolstered by Indian companies' keenness of step up operations there. "Because of India joining ASEAN, there could be greater synergies...So we are looking at Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines," SBI Deputy Managing Director and Group Executive (International Banking) Pratip

Chaudhuri said. Chaudhuri said the top priority will be to look at the possibility of acquisition in Indonesia "then Thailand and then possibly the Philippines." He said Indonesia has huge reserves of coal, oil and many Indian companies are eyeing acquisitions there, which makes it a good case to acquire another bank. Coal India Ltd, NTPC, NALCO and shipping company Mercator Lines are reported to be looking at acquiring coal assets in Indonesia. In Indonesia, SBI has already acquired PT Bank IndoMonex in 2006. "We took a bank in Indonesia and call it SBI Indonesia. It has seven branches now. We could think of taking over another bank, bring them together and scale up quickly." Chaudhuri said besides Indonesia, Thailand and Philippines are priority markets. "They are on radar," he added. Though he did not give exact timeframe for such acquisitions, the SBI official said "in the next two years something can happen in some of these geographies." (The Indian Express)

Indian economy to grow at over 7%: Montek

India's economy will grow at over 7 per cent this fiscal despite being hit by the global slowdown and would clock a decent 8 per cent in the next fiscal, Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia said on Tuesday. Noting that India is looking good, Ahluwalia said "the economic growth will be above 7 per cent this year against 6.7 per cent in 2008-09." Speaking on 'The Indian Economy: The Outlook 2010 Business Interaction' organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry and the Confederation of British Industries at Crown Plaza here, he said, "We hope to get 8 per cent in 2010-11 and 9 per cent in 2011-2012." He said but for the global decline, India would have grown at 9 per cent. Referring to the country's emphasis on developing its infrastructure, including airports, telecommunications, power, railways, road and ports, Ahluwalia said, "We are on the right track but we need to do it much faster. The pace of approval of projects has improved considerably and it should be possible to pursue foreign investors to invest in India as India is a good place to invest." On raising the FDI investment ceiling in the medical insurance sector from 26 per cent to 49 per cent, Ahluwalia said, "The government is very clear that it should go up to 49 per cent and the issue is before a select committee of Parliament." (The Indian Express)

IMF pegs India's economic expansion at 7.8 per cent in 2011

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday scaled up India's economic growth rate by 1.3 percentage points to 7.7 per cent for 2010, saying it is bullish on the country's growth story. In its latest World Economic Outlook, IMF pegged India's economic expansion at 7.8 per cent in 2011, up 0.5 per cent projected in the previous outlook. "India is one of the countries we are very bullish about," IMF economist Jorg Decresson told reporters. Mr. Decresson said India has shown a very strong domestic economic recovery. The IMF's projected growth rate of the economy in this calendar year is quite higher, as the multi-lateral agency has pegged the economic expansion at 5.6 per cent in 2009. In recent times, the economy has been showing remarkable upsurge, bolstered by the stimulus packages given by the government. Stunning most experts, the economy grew by 7.9 per cent in the third quarter of 2009 against a mere 6.1 per cent in the preceding quarter and 5.8 per cent in previous three months. "We have seen a very strong rebound [for India]... In the third quarter, the growth is already accelerated and we expect that to be maintained," Mr. Decresson said. India has pegged its economic growth rate at

7.75 per cent this fiscal (which includes first three months of 2010). (The Hindu)

Geo-strategic developments:

Airports put on red alert

The Union government on Friday ordered further strengthening of security at all airports and deployment of sky marshals on certain flights. The directive came after intelligence inputs from security agencies and the Ministry of Home Affairs warned of a possibility of terror groups hijacking a flight operating from a South Asian country. The level of security to counter the threat perception had been upgraded and the agencies in-charge of civil aviation security had taken all necessary steps, including the strengthening of anti-hijacking measures and the introduction of stepladder frisking, said the spokesperson of the Civil Aviation Ministry, which sounded the red alert. Para-military forces have been ordered to be deployed at strategic points at sensitive airports as well as around vital installations. Air India confirmed it had initiated action at the airports concerned to counter any possible threat. Its spokesman said the carrier would like to assure its passengers that they need not have any apprehension with regard to security as adequate measures were in place. Air India's security standards were, incidentally, regarded as among the finest in the industry, the spokesman pointed out. Airports have been in a state of maximum alert over the past one month when the festival season set in. Sources in the Home Ministry said the intelligence agencies received "credible indications" that terror groups might hijack a flight operating from any of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation nations to India. The red alert comes three days prior to the Republic Day across the country and close on the heels of U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates' caution to India that there is a threat of the terror syndicate in the region trying to trigger a war between India and Pakistan. A week ago, the Home Ministry had issued an advisory to Bihar, U.P., Assam, Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal and Karnataka, warning them of possible terror attacks around the Republic Day. (The Hindu)

Pakistan must act: India

India has objected to Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani's observation that his country cannot guarantee that there will not be a repeat of the Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008. Pointing out that no country can absolve itself of the responsibility of ensuring that its territory is not used for terrorist attacks against any other country, government sources said this basic principle applied to Pakistan as well. "It is stating the obvious but Pakistan cannot absolve [itself of] the responsibility that comes with nationhood," added the sources. Pakistan should earnestly take steps to dismantle the terror infrastructure on its soil and act against those plotting violence against other countries, they said. (The Hindu)

'U.S. arms to Pakistan must not target India'

The government on Friday said the U.S. was free to supply military hardware to Pakistan as long as it was not directed against India. Government sources were reacting to reports

about the U.S. planning to sell a dozen unmanned aerial vehicles (or drones) to Pakistan. Pointing out that the U.S. has been “sensitised” to Indian security concerns, the sources said New Delhi had no difficulty in economic aid being given to Islamabad to help it combat terrorism. However, past experience had shown that U.S. arms were used against India in military conflicts, they added. (The Hindu)

‘Plot’ to hijack Indian plane sparks U.K. alert

Indian authorities are reported to have warned British intelligence agencies about a suspected plot by al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in Pakistan to hijack an Air India or Indian Airlines plane, originating from Delhi or Mumbai, and “crash” it into a British city. The claim came a day after the British government raised the level of terror threat to “severe,” suggesting that an attack was “highly likely,” though Home Secretary Alan Johnson insisted that the decision was not linked to any specific threat. In a front-page report, *The Sunday Times* claimed that India told MI5 about the alleged plot early last week after the interrogation of Amjad Khwaja, a suspected militant, arrested in India recently. Khwaja was described as a “leader” of Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, which is alleged to have been behind terror attacks in India. The newspaper said the warning was contained in a “detailed threat assessment sent to MI5 by the Indian Intelligence Bureau.” “It did not state that Britain was a specific target. But police security sources said it had raised fears in London that a British city might be attacked,” the report said. The warning revived long-standing concerns about a terror attack on a British target. (The Hindu)

Military might, cultural heritage on display at R-Day parade

The country's vibrant cultural heritage, its impressive achievements and military might were on a majestic display on Tuesday as the country celebrated the 60th Republic Day. Marching down from the Raisina Hills, the Republic Day parade showcased the country's 'unity in diversity' as well as the armed forces in full battle regalia. Despite the heavy fog, well turned out and synchronised military contingents marched proudly through the Rajpath where President and Supreme Commander of armed forces Pratibha Patil took the salute. The march-past was watched by the Republic Day chief guest South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, Vice President Hamid Ansari, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Defence Minister A K Antony and the country's top political and military brass, including UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi. A heavy security blanket was thrown around the capital for the Republic Day celebrations in the backdrop of intelligence inputs about militant outfit LeT acquiring over 50 para-gliding equipment which could be used to launch an air-borne suicide attack. The Army showcased its armoury before the nation which included the indigenous MBT Arjun, SMERCH Multiple Launch Rocket System and Armoured Engineer Recce Vehicle and Sarvatra Bridge. The army also brought its state-of-the-art ICV Communication Vehicle besides Samyukta Electronic Warfare System, Infantry Fighting Vehicle 'Sarath' and Ambulance Tracked to the parade. (The Indian Express)

‘India-U.S. deal a major hurdle’

Australia’s non-proliferation envoy Gareth Evans has slammed the India-United States nuclear deal, saying it is a major hurdle to the goal of a nuclear-free world. “Everybody knows that from India’s point of view it was a brilliant success but from the point of view of non-proliferation objectives it wasn’t as helpful as it could have been,” Mr. Evans told journalists here. Mr. Evans, who is the co-chair of the International Commission for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament a joint initiative of the governments of Japan and Australia, was speaking after presenting a report, ‘Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers.’ One of the contributors for the report is the former National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra. Mr. Evans said the commitments made by the Indian government were insufficient and set a bad precedent. “It was a very bad deal from the point of view of non-proliferation and the kinds of principles that most of us are committed to simply because it did not demand enough of the Indian government in terms of issues such as non-production of fissile material or even non resumption of testing,” Mr. Evans said. A nuclear war between India, Pakistan could cause severe “climate cooling” and have a devastating impact on agriculture worldwide, said the commission report. “Just a limited regional nuclear exchange, for example between India and Pakistan, with each side attacking the other’s major cities with 50 low-yield Hiroshima-sized weapons, will throw up major concentrations of soot into the stratosphere, which would remain there for long enough to cause unprecedented climate cooling worldwide, with major disruptive effects on global agriculture,” the report said. (The Hindu)

Pakistan protests ‘unprovoked firing’

Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry called the Indian Deputy Commissioner, Rahul Kulshreshth, to register a protest against what it called unprovoked firing by Indian troops across the LoC. (The Hindu)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Ahead of R-day, huge arms haul in JK

Ahead of the Republic Day, security forces seized a huge cache of arms and explosives, including over 15-kg RDX and 150 grenades, in two separate operations on Sunday, scuttling militants' plan to disrupt the national event in the state. The seizures, which included two Pak-made Anti-Personal Mines and 13 mortar bombs, were effected in Baramulla district in Kashmir valley and Rajouri in Jammu region, police said. Acting on a tip-off, a team of police, army and CRPF personnel raided Check-e-Mamoosa area in Baramulla district in the wee hours and recovered a large quantity of arms and explosives from a stream. The haul included over 10-kg of lethal RDX, 150 grenades and two Anti-Personal Mines, SSP (Baramulla) Shakeel Ahmad Beigh said. The arms and explosives, smuggled from across the border, were concealed in two water tanks which were pulled out from the bed of the stream, he said. "The weapons were meant for distribution among militants to create disturbances in the run-up to the Republic Day," Beigh said. Other recoveries included a Universal Machine Gun with over 700 live cartridges, 57 hand

grenades, 42 Under Barrel grenades and four wireless sets with 26 additional batteries. Six explosive sticks, 330 electronic detonators and two boxes filled with 1500 live rounds of AK series rifles were also recovered from the water tanks, the SSP said. He said the operation lasted nearly four hours, but no one was arrested. (The Indian Express)

Omar asks militants to come to the negotiating table

Noting that the gun culture of the last 20 years had only resulted in bloodshed and destruction, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday asked militants to shun violence and come to the dialogue table to resolve issues amicably. Abdullah expressed hope that a better sense will prevail and militants will drop guns forever. "This will be in their larger interest and the interest of the people", he said in his Republic Day address to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. "Nothing has so far either been achieved or will be achieved in future by the bloodshed", he said, adding that dialogue is the only means to address the problems and solve issues in a conducive atmosphere. "We will act as a facilitator in the dialogue process between all groups of opinion in the state and the Centre, besides working for restoration of Indo-Pak composite talks", he said. The Chief Minister said the task to seek betterment and bright future for youth has been taken by him as a challenge. "I have recognised technology and young people as the two important aspects on which development and prosperity of a nation is dependent. It is for these facts that I have flagged both as important concerns having co-relation". He said the announcement of a comprehensive employment policy for youth by his government has been the path breaking step in the 60 years' history of Jammu and Kashmir. Abdullah said his government has provided employment to about 21,000 youth in various government departments during the past year and another 20,000 jobs are in the pipeline. "Despite financial constraints, my government has implemented the sixth pay commission, enhancing the salaries of government employees", he said, adding more than 6500 adhoc and contractual employees are being regularised, besides raising the daily rates of daily wagers from Rs 70 to Rs 110. "Under the power sector, about 2700 MW of power is being generated in the state during the next five years to relieve the people from the problem of load shedding", he said. The generation of another 1800 MWs through other projects is also in the offing, he said. The Chief Minister said that during the last year 1.50 crore gallons of drinking water has been added in the Public Health Engineering (PHE) system in Jammu and Srinagar. "I am also focussing on upgradation of road communication system in the state and construction of inter district and inter provincial roads. The completion of Mughal road and my travel on the road has realised the dream of Sher-i-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah about connecting Jammu with Kashmir through the historic Mughal road". The government has also approved construction of a 4.5 kms tunnel to connect Kishtwar with Anantnag. Under the skills development programme to enhance employability of youth, he said five new ITIs and 18 polytechnics are being established in the state whereas more 50 ITIs and 140 skills development centres are in the pipeline. Abdullah said the government is opening an ayurvedic college in Jammu and Unani college at Srinagar, besides providing required equipment and staff to health institutions. "We have also created 5500 posts in the health department to cater to the needs of hospitals in the rural areas". The Chief Minister said his government has succeeded in receiving highest-ever annual plan of Rs 550 crore for the current financial year besides getting Rs 1200 crores under prime minister's

reconstruction programme. Abdullah said that in order to transfer power to people at grass roots, his government is determined to conduct panchayat and local bodies elections in the state soon. "This would, on the one hand, provide opportunities to the public representatives at panchayat and municipality levels and on the other, help curb corruption to a large extent", he said, adding that the year 2010 will be the year of eradication of corruption in the state at all levels. The Chief Minister said he has underlined close rapport with general masses as the most important aspect of his governance. "The creation of Chief Minister's Grievance Cell to keep myself available to people 24 hours is yet another initiatives I have taken", he said, adding that he personally monitors the cell. He asked the people to take advantage of this medium to communicate their grievances to him so that action is taken for their redressal. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

Gender-based discrimination cases come down

Gender-based disparities have shown a decline in the country in the last decade with the national capital scoring the highest, according to a report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. There is an overall improvement in the performance on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) over the decade, both in the all-India score and in the scores achieved by the States and Union Territories, the report titled "Gendering Human Development Indices: Recasting the Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure for Index" says. The GEM is calculated on political participation and decision-making power, economic participation and decision-making power and power over economic resources of women. The GEM score for India, which was 0.416 in 1996, increased to 0.497 in 2006. As many as 14 States and Union Territories achieved GEM scores of above 0.485 in 2006, while only two had achieved scores higher than this in 1996. The only two States to have achieved a score above 0.485 in 1996 and 2006 are Goa and Kerala. The National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi had the highest score of 0.564 in 2006, jumping from rank three to occupy the top slot. Nagaland, on the other hand, got the lowest rank, both in 2006 and 1996 with GEM scores of 0.289 and 0.165 respectively. While 13 States improved their ranks over the decade, 19 lost their respective position during the same period. The newly formed Jharkhand and Uttarakhand achieved large gains of 0.157 and 0.132 respectively and improved their ranks by six positions each. While Uttar Pradesh and Bihar performed slightly better, the improvement in their GEM was lower in comparison (0.118 and 0.101 respectively). Chhattisgarh improved its score by only 0.058, compared with an improvement of 0.056 by Madhya Pradesh. These States lost four and five ranks respectively. However, the biggest GEM rank losers are Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Chandigarh and Lakshadweep. The Human Development Index (HDI), the Gender Development Index (GDI) and GEM scores attained by the States and Union Territories and changes in the scores and ranks over time reflect performance on these indices and the extent to which progress has been made in translating its growth into a better quality of life. The HDI score for India was 0.0530 in 1996 and 0.605 in 2006. The score for 2006 was highest for Chandigarh at 0.784 and lowest for Bihar at 0.507. The GDI score for India was 0.514 in 1996 and 0.509 in 2006.

The score was highest for 2006 for Chandigarh at 0.763 and lowest for Bihar at 0.479. The GDI and HDI are calculated on the basis of health, literacy and standard of life. (The Hindu)

Globalisation blinds us to aam aadmi plight: SC

In unusual self-criticism, the Supreme Court said today that courts, including the “last court in the largest democracy of the world”, have lost sympathy for the common man in pursuit of the “attractive mantras” of globalisation and liberalisation. A Division Bench of Justice G S Singhvi and Justice A K Ganguly, in two separate orders, cautioned judges of the Supreme Court and Constitutional courts that there will be “precarious consequences” will visit the nation if they dilute constitutional imperatives to promote the “so-called trends of globalisation”. Both judges passed their orders on January 5 in an appeal filed by Harjinder Singh, a retrenched worker with the Punjab State Warehousing Corporation, who had challenged the Punjab and Haryana High Court decision to pay him Rs 87,582 as compensation instead of re-instating him with 50 per cent back wages. The judges set aside the High Court order and called for his re-instatement with 50 per cent back wages and cost of Rs 25,000. Justice Ganguly quoted Rabindranath Tagore in his order when he described the “eventualities which may visit us in our mad rush to ape western ways of life”. His brother judge on the Bench, Justice Singhvi, observed how he had noticed a “visible shift” generally in the courts’ approach in dealing with cases involving the interpretation of social welfare legislation like the Industrial Disputes Act. “The attractive mantras of globalisation and liberalisation are fast becoming the *raison d’être* of the judicial process and an impression has been created that the constitutional courts are no longer sympathetic towards the plight of industrial and unorganized workers,” Justice Singhvi said in his order. Justice Singhvi said a large number of cases end up with the workmen being denied any relief from judges, who readily accept the justification employers give about such “illegal retrenchments.” “Judges of this Court are not mere phonographic recorders but empirical scientists and interpreters of the social context in which they work,” said Justice Ganguly. “I am in entire agreement with the view of my Lord Brother Justice Singhvi about a disturbing contrary trend which is discernible in recent times and which is sought to be justified in the name of globalisation and liberalization of economy,” said Justice Ganguly. “Our Constitution is primarily shaped and moulded for the common man. It takes no account of the ‘portly presence of the potentates, goodly in girth’. It is a Constitution not meant for the ruler, but the ranker, the tramp on the road, the slave, the man with too weighty a burden, too weary a load,” said Justice Ganguly, quoting eminent jurist N A Palkhivala. Justice Ganguly said the “ditches” created in the society by the advance of globalisation can only be overcome if “this Court makes an effort to protect the rights of the weaker sections of the society as per the Constitutional mandate”. “Judges and specifically the judges of the highest court have a vital role to ensure that the promise (to secure all citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity) is fulfilled. If judges fail to discharge their duty, they fail to uphold and abide by the Constitution which is their oath and office... Judges of the last court in the largest democracy of the world have a duty to articulate the Constitutional goal,” the Bench said. (The Indian Express)

Foreign Relations:

India expresses dismay at continuing attacks

India has expressed dismay over the continuing attacks on its nationals in Australia and their spread to cities such as Brisbane, where two such incidents were reported on Thursday night. Despite receiving assurances from the highest levels in Canberra of the safety and security of Indians, especially the student community, New Delhi said it was a matter of concern that the attacks continued. Most of the attacks took place in Melbourne followed by a few in Sydney, but despite the government's assurances, two Indians have been attacked in Brisbane, government sources noted. The Indian High Commission in Australia and the consulates were in constant touch with the authorities there and were providing all possible assistance to the victims, they said. The sources pointed out that External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna had asked the Australian government to act tough and show India the results of investigations into the past incidents. If the incidents continued, bilateral ties in some areas, particularly education and tourism outflows to Australia, might be affected, Mr. Krishna warned. (The Hindu)

A special R-Day, says Obama

United States President Barack Obama has conveyed his warmest wishes on behalf of the American people to Indians across the world on the occasion of Republic Day. The U.S. and India have a strong shared belief in the values of liberty, pluralism, and religious tolerance, he said in a message. He said this Republic Day was particularly special because in the 60 years since the Indian Constitution was adopted, both India and the U.S. had built a strong and vibrant partnership. (The Hindu)

Punish the pervert: Russia

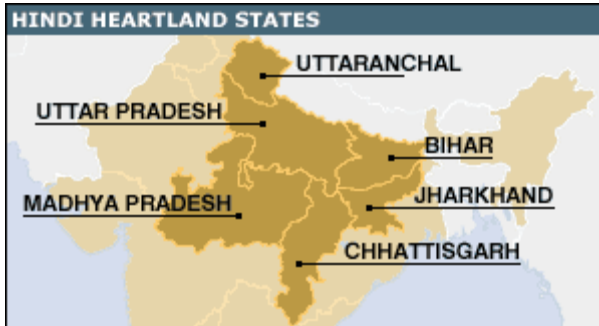
Pointing out that Russians never thought that "such a terrible thing" would happen to them in India, Ambassador Alexander Kadakin said his government demanded urgent action against the criminals involved in Tuesday's rape of a nine-year-old child in Goa. "This perverted criminal must be caught and punished severely. Can you imagine a crime like that on a nine-year-old? Unfortunately this is not the first case of this nature and we expect the Indian side to catch the culprits involved in the abhorrent crime." Mr. Kadakin pointed out though Russia was unhappy also with how the Goa police investigated an earlier rape of a Russian in December last, it would desist from issuing a travel advisory because it expected the Indian government to take swift and deterrent action. If the investigations were not conducted properly, "we will draw our own conclusions." On the forthcoming visit of Russian National Security Adviser (NSA) Nikolai Patrushev, a few days after the London meet on Afghanistan, the Ambassador said it was part of the regular contacts at the highest levels between the two governments. But this would be the first meeting between the new National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon and an NSA of another country. "We have known Mr. Menon as a good friend of our country. He has done a lot to promote our friendship and it will be good to interact with him as part of our regular consultations on security measures," said Mr. Kadakin. (The Hindu)

India offers 100 fellowships to Afghan farm students

External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna on Thursday announced two Indian initiatives to help assist the rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan. Mr. Krishna was in Afghanistan to attend a conference. Mr. Krishna said in a statement that since agriculture was key to Afghanistan's development, India had decided to offer 100 fellowships every year over the next five years for its agricultural students to do Masters and Ph.D. programmes in Indian universities. He said India strongly supported the proposed Afghan National Institution Building Project agreed upon at the conference. Without naming any country but in an apparent reference to Pakistan, he said: "For Afghanistan's stabilization it is essential for the neighbouring and regional countries to ensure that support, sustenance and sanctuaries for terrorist organisations is ended forthwith." (The Hindu)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

Bandh hits traffic in Bihar; Lalu, Rabri, Paswan arrested

Traffic was disrupted in several places in Bihar as workers of the Rashtriya Janata Dal blocked highways, rail track and bridges on Thursday, when their president Lalu Prasad called a dawn-to-dusk bandh to protest price rise. National Highways in Gopalganj, Mr. Prasad's constituency Chapra, Sitamarhi and Begusarai bore the brunt of the shutdown as traffic was noticeably thin. The police said Mr. Prasad, his wife Rabri Devi, Lok Jan Shakti Party chief Ram Vilas Paswan, the former Union Minister, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, State RJD chief Abdul Bari Siddiqui and the former MP, Ram Kripal Yadav, were among those arrested. Additional Director-General of Police (Headquarters) U.S. Dutt said 1,959 people had been arrested while first information reports were lodged against those who damaged public property. While Mr. Prasad claimed that the protest was a success and thanked the people, Mr. Dutt said the bandh was peaceful, thanks to elaborate security arrangements made at the State and zilla levels. The bandh call was supported by the LJP, the Communist Party of India, the CPI(M) and the CPI (ML) Liberation. RJD workers blocked the Mahatma Gandhi Setu, connecting south Bihar, throwing traffic out of gear. The agitators blocked the track on the Delhi-Howrah line, and also targeted trains at Jehanabad, Gaya and Hajipur. Most of the schools remained closed. The RJD student wing damaged a library on the Patna University campus. An examination in Bhagalpur University was postponed. Police sources said some shops in Araria were looted, while in East Champaran district, the police had to fire in air as a lathi charge failed to disperse RJD workers blocking the road at Dhangarha. Mr. Prasad criticised Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for failing to curb price rise. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Economic Front:

The North



Politics:

Social front:

Chandigarh greener than before: Survey

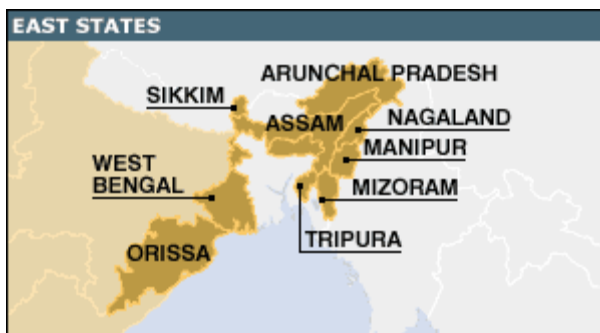
Planned and built by famous French architect Le Corbusier, the beauty of City Beautiful – Chandigarh – has increased over the last few years. Courtesy, the greener look imparted to the city by the increasing forest cover. The Forest Survey of India, through satellite pictures, claims an increase of two square kilometer area of the forest and tree cover in the city. Chief Conservator of Forest Iswar Singh gave credit for the increase in greenery to the joint efforts of residents, schoolchildren and employees of horticulture wings of the Municipal Corporation and Chandigarh Administration. He said in 2007, the forest and tree cover in the city were 41 sq km and nine sq km respectively. These went up to 43 sq km and 11 sq km respectively in 2009, showing a total increase in greenery by nearly four per cent, Singh added. The survey also indicated a qualitative increase in the density of greenery at the Sukhna lake, lake resorts, Sukhna choe and Patiala-ki-Rao choe. The green belt area of Chandigarh, which does not have shadow trees, was excluded from the survey because only the lush green trees are visible in the pictures taken through satellite. In the pictures taken though satellite, black spots showed thick forests followed by yellow spots for bushes with trees and red spots for bushes. With the increase in the forest area, the number of animals has also gone up during the last five years, as water is easily made available by constructing more water bodies in the forest area, claimed Forest officials involved in monitoring the Kansal and Napli forests located across the Sukhna lake bordering Haryana. While technical know how, along with the Green Action Plan, was provided by the Chandigarh Administration with the support of the Forest department, plantation and upkeep of saplings till their growth into trees were the joint efforts of social organisations, residents welfare associations, eco-club, horticulture wing, school authorities and school-going children, Singh said. He claimed Chandigarh has a green cover area of 38 per cent whereas Delhi has 21 per cent green cover area. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

Deputy CM aims to make Punjab ‘skill capital of the world’

Punjab Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal termed the population of the country as its biggest asset while inaugurating a conference titled ‘Making Punjab the skill capital of the world’, organised by the International Punjabi Chamber for Service Industries (IPCSI) in collaboration with the Institute of Technology and Future Management Trends (ITFT) on Saturday. Badal said that with Punjab emerging as the main centre to train and export skilled human resource to the world, the time has come for NRIs to exploit this opportunity by investing in the state. “Punjab is investing heavily in developing human resource according to changing needs of the industry,” he said, adding that institutes like Indian Institute of Technology, Indian School of Business and central universities are being set up in the state. Asking NRIs to invest in renewable energy ventures, the Deputy CM added that Punjab was committed to providing power for the industry, single window clearance of all ventures besides ensuring world-class road and air connectivity. Addressing the gathering, Principal Secretary D S Bains said the Central government proposes to create a resource base of 500 million skilled workers by 2022 and 15 million people would be trained annually. “Punjab has identified nine sectors including drivers for heavy machinery, hospitality industry, dairy entrepreneurs, training for poultry, horse breeding, security personnel, construction workers and health care workers in which training would be provided,” he said. Presiding over the conference, Minister for NRI Affairs Sewa Singh Sekhwan asked Punjabi NRIs to return to the country and use their entrepreneurial qualities and dedication to help the state. Dr Gulshan Sharma, secretary general of IPCSI, NRI Affairs, Punjab Advocate General H S Mattewal, Canadian MP Gurbax Singh Malhi and Chief Secretary S C Aggarwal also spoke on the occasion. (The Indian Express)

The East



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

West Bengal to create one lakh jobs by March

The West Bengal government is planning to create one lakh jobs by March 2010. State Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta said this was decided at the cabinet meeting held on Friday. The meeting also decided to set up police outposts in the State's coastal area. He said most of these recruitments would take place in government-run schools. State government offices would also recruit new hands. While some of the job-creation would be through filling up of posts lying vacant for sometime, in some cases jobs would be created by converting temporary posts into permanent ones, he told journalists. The Minister also announced the creation of three police outposts in the coastal areas, as part of the Centre's plan to step up security along the coast in the wake of 26/11 attacks. These three outposts would be set up in South 24 Parganas on the southern precincts of the State. They would be located on three islands Kalash, Sitarampur and Bonney Camp. About 30 sergeants would be manning these outposts. The cabinet meet also decided to set up a 100-seater medical college in Kalyani in Nadia district. A National Institute of Genomics is also proposed to be set up with assistance from the Centre. Mr. Dasgupta said the State has already set up a committee to take forward the Unique Identification (UID) project of the Centre. The issue regarding setting up a museum at the residence of Jyoti Basu was however not considered at this meeting. It was learnt that one of the Ministers mooted the proposal. (The Hindu)

The South



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Constitution is my commander, says Sankaranarayanan

Kateekal Sankaranarayanan, outgoing Governor of Jharkhand and former Kerala Finance Minister, was sworn in as Governor of Maharashtra on Friday. J.N. Patel, acting Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court, administered the oath of office at a Raj Bhavan ceremony. After the swearing-in, Mr. Sankaranarayanan was given a ceremonial guard of honour by the Navy. It was attended by the outgoing Governor S.C. Jamir, Chief Minister Ashok Chavan and Deputy Chief Minister Chhagan Bhujbal. “My commander is the Constitution. I will work within the framework of the Constitution. I will go with the developmental goals of Maharashtra and support the good ventures of the government,” Mr. Sankaranarayanan told. As Governor of Jharkhand, Mr. Sankaranarayanan oversaw the elections in the State, which was under President’s Rule. Earlier, between February 3, 2007 and July 25, 2009, he was Governor of Nagaland. He also held additional charge as Governor of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam for brief periods. He was Cabinet Minister for Finance and Excise in the A.K. Antony Ministry in Kerala during 2001-2004. (The Hindu)

Sena wrests Bhiwandi from SP

In a gift of sorts to party chief Bal Thackeray on his birthday, the Shiv Sena on Saturday wrested the Bhiwandi (East) Assembly seat from the Samajwadi Party (SP), defeating SP leader Abu Azmi’s son Farhan in a closely-contested by-election. The Sena tally in the 288-member Assembly went up to 45 with this victory, just one less than ally BJP. Sena candidate Rupesh Mhatre won the triangular fight with a margin of 1,676 votes. Mhatre secured 35,376 votes while Farhan got 33,700 votes. Congress candidate Muzaffar Hussein came third with 24,418 votes. Mhatre was the only local candidate among the three top contestants. The other factors that contributed to the Sena victory included the presence of a Muslim candidate (of Congress) in fray who divided the Muslim votes of the SP, the absence of an MNS nominee and the outbursts of Abu Azmi against Thackeray that united the Sena cadre. Azmi blamed the Congress and the Sena for the defeat. He accused the Congress of playing dirty politics and the Sena of bogus voting. The bypoll result has come as a setback to the SP in Bhiwandi, where it had lost control

over the Bhiwandi-Nizampur Municipal Corporation a month ago. The SP was in power in the corporation with support of the Congress. However, in the mid-December mayoral election, SP nominee Tarabai Chaudhary was defeated by Independent Yashshree Kadu who was supported by the Congress, the NCP and the Shiv Sena. “We campaigned on the issue of development, while Azmi campaigned on communal lines,” said Congress state vice-president Hussein Dalwai. “The Sena got the advantage...They had made the attack on Azmi in the Assembly a poll plank. Why will people vote for an MLA who does not know Marathi?” He claimed that though the Congress did not win the seat, the votes secured by its candidate have doubled from 12,881 a year ago to 24,599. In the 2009 Assembly elections, Abu Azmi was elected from Bhiwandi (East) and Mankhurd-Shivaji Nagar. He had defeated Sena’s Yogesh Patil and Congress’ Gurunath Tawre in Bhiwandi (East). He had got the advantage of being the sole Muslim candidate. (The Indian Express)

Social front:

‘Untouchability still prevalent in rural Gujarat’

Despite tall talk of progress and development, the practice of untouchability is still prevalent in rural areas of Gujarat. This was found in a survey by the Navsarjan Trust and the Robert F. Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights. It was carried out over three years in randomly selected 1,589 villages in the State. The compiled report of the findings was released here on Wednesday by University Grants Commission Chairman S.K. Thorat. The report said that not only was untouchability practiced against Dalits by caste Hindus, it was practiced by the relatively ‘upper’ sub-caste Dalits against the ‘lower’ sub-caste Dalits. It said that while 98 forms of untouchability was practiced by caste Hindus against the Dalits, 99 forms of caste discrimination was found within the Dalit sub-castes. Giving examples, the report said a Dalit woman was “assaulted” for trying to take part in a village “garba” dance organised by caste Hindus. Even the sarpanch, if he happened to be a Dalit, was expected to sit on the ground while caste Hindu panchayat members sat on a pedestal. The Dalit passengers were required to vacate the seats in government-owned State transport buses for non-Dalit passengers. It said inter-caste marriage was strictly prohibited in 98.4 per cent of the villages and such marriages within the Dalit sub-castes was found banned in 99.1 per cent of the villages. Any violation of the “rule” would invariably attract a violent reprimand against the defying couple, who were often forced to leave the village. Even in tea kiosks, cups and saucers were kept separately for the Dalits and such customers were required to clean their own utensils before putting the same back in the rack meant for the Dalits. In schools, separate sitting arrangements were made for caste Hindus and Dalits for mid-day meal schemes. Dalit students were not served water in schools. They were expected to go home or carry their own water with them. “The report shows that the existing legal system has failed to address the problem of untouchability and it is time for human rights activists to act strongly,” Navsarjan Trust executive director Manjula Pradeep said. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

Rs. 50,000-crore infrastructure projects in Mumbai

The total worth of infrastructure projects in Mumbai is Rs. 50,000 crore, comprising the Bandra-Worli sea-link, the ongoing work on the metro rail, monorail, skywalks and flyovers. These are all part of “ambitious schemes” aimed at bringing about the transformation of Mumbai into a world class city, Maharashtra Governor K. Sankaranarayanan said in his Republic Day address at Shivaji Park on Tuesday. In his first ceremonial speech after taking charge, Mr. Sankaranarayanan put his finger on the State’s industrial and economic pulse. “Maharashtra continues to be the most favoured investment destination in the country. The State succeeded in attracting 53 per cent of foreign direct investment in the last financial year. In spite of the economic slowdown, 38 new mega projects have committed investment worth Rs. 28,000 crore, in the first nine months of the current financial year itself. [Maharashtra has] 146 Special Economic Zones [SEZs] spread across the State, the highest in the country, approved by the Central government. These SEZs, with an aggregate investment of Rs.1,88,738 crore, are expected to generate 65 lakh employment opportunities.” By 2012, the State would achieve self-sufficiency in power. To tackle the acute lack of affordable housing in the city, Mr. Sankaranarayanan said the State government had launched “a programme to build 10 lakh houses for the poor and middle-income groups in the next two years.” (The Hindu)