

Business and Politics in Muslim World

India

Sadia Khanum

27th March to 2nd April 2010

Presentation Date: 7th April 2010

Report # 113

Summary (Page # 3-4)

National Report

Politics:

- Congress betraying signs of frustration: BJP (Page # 5)

Minorities' Issues:

- Hoping to get justice now: Zakia Jaffery (Page # 5)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

- Modi appears before SIT, says it is a fitting reply to critics (Page # 6)
- 'Sania's heart not Indian as it beats for Pakistani' (Page # 6)

Insurgency Movements:

- Will defeat Maoists by 2013: Chidambaram (Page # 7)

Economic Front:

- New Delhi among most influential cities: Study (Page # 7)
- Sensex touches two-year high (Page # 8)
- India's exports rise 34.8 percent in February (Page # 9)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

- Dhanush, Prithvi-II test-fired successfully (Page # 9)
- Agni-I test-fired successfully (Page # 10)
- India, U.S. finalise reprocessing agreement (Page # 10)
- Infrastructure along border with China being upgraded (Page # 11)
- Pakistan to India: Will ensure safety of IPI pipeline (Page # 12)
- Focus on improving 'internal health' of force, ending corruption: Army chief Gen V K

Singh (Page # 13)

- US warns India, Pak against Iran pipeline (Page # 13)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Social front:

- I am innocent, acquit me: Kasab (Page # 14)
- India guarantees compulsory education for children (Page # 15)
- Indian students' enrolment drops by 40% in Victoria colleges (Page # 16)
- 'Judgment on homosexuality would affect India's ethos' (Page # 16)
- Counting a billion: India begins new census (Page # 17)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)

Politics:

Social front:

- Gates Foundation to go all out to reduce child deaths in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Page # 19)

Economic Front:

The North

Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The East

Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South

Politics:

Social front:

- 36 injured in Hyderabad violence (Page # 21)
- Curfew in more areas as clashes spread in Hyderabad (Page # 22)

Economic Front:

West India

Politics:

- Every citizen must oppose communal riots: Modi (Page # 22)

Social front:

- Low-intensity blast in Ahmedabad, 10 hurt (Page # 23)

Economic Front:

- 'Jute craft suffering in absence of marketing strategy' (Page # 23)

National Summary:

Congress party's criticism on BJP and Modi for its involvement in 2002 Ahmedabad riots and recently Modi's hesitation to face SIT ignite words war between the two parties.

Zakia Jaffery the widow of former Congress MP Eshan Jaffery, who was killed in Gulburg society riot case of 2002 along with 69 others, is optimistic that now the time comes to get justice as SIT (Special Investigation Team) summoned Narendra Modi for first time for questioning regarding its alleged involvement in 2002 riots.

Home Minister P Chidambaram has said India would be able to counter the Maoist insurgency by 2013.

Knight Frank and Citi Private Bank unveiled their latest research study worldwide 'Wealth Report 2010' giving a global view on the performance of prime residential property markets with a focus on the key regions in the Asian Pacific property markets. Several key findings showcased that the Mumbai and New Delhi realty markets held a significant level of promise for potential investors. Chairman and MD, Knight Frank India said, "There are growing prime markets in every city of India. But, South Mumbai and South New Delhi are the markets which are most high in terms of prices followed by Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad.

The Bombay Stock Exchange sensitive index, Sensex, surged to a two-year high on Monday, with a modest gain of 66.59 points. The Sensex settled at 17711.35, the highest closing level since February 29, 2008.

India's merchandise exports grew 34.8 percent to \$16.09 billion for the fourth consecutive month in February following revival of economies in developed countries, official data released Thursday said.

India tested nuclear-capable, ship-based Dhanush and surface-to-surface Prithvi-II successfully in quick succession early Saturday. The 8.5-metre-tall Prithvi-II is a surface-to-surface missile, the 11-metre long Dhanush is a ship-to-surface and ship-to-ship system. Both are single-stage, liquid propelled missiles and each of them is capable of carrying a 500-kg payload. Agni-I ballistic missile, which can carry nuclear weapons and has a range of 700-km range, was successfully test-fired on Sunday.

India and the United States have agreed to the arrangement and procedures under which the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel will take place at two stand-alone safeguarded sites. New Delhi also retains the right to make additions and modifications. This will allow India to retrieve recyclable material found in spent fuel from U.S.-origin nuclear plants for further generating electricity. The reprocessing plants would operate under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) procedures, the U.S. State Department and the Indian Department of Atomic Energy simultaneously announced on Monday.

India is concentrating on its military presence in the northern borders and upgrading infrastructure along the border with China as it perceives Beijing's rapid infrastructure development and its upgraded military force projection in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang province a threat.

Pakistan said it will guarantee safety of the IPI pipeline and may give New Delhi an equity stake in the section passing through its territory as additional surety of safe delivery of the fuel, while US again warn both the countries to avoid any proceedings with Iran in this matter.

Against the backdrop of racial attacks and stricter immigration rules, Indian students' enrolment in universities in Australia's Victorian state has recorded a massive drop of around 40% in the first two months of the new academic year as compared to the same period in 2009.

The Delhi High Court judgment decriminalizing homosexuality is of great concern and it would adversely affect the ethos in India since most of our values are shaped and nurtured by customs and religion, association of Catholic doctors in Goa has said.

India launches on Thursday the task of counting its billion-plus population, with 2.5 million people set to fan out over the country to begin work for the 2011 census. The exercise has formidable challenges -- coverage of a vast geographical area, left-wing rebels and separatists, widespread illiteracy, and people with a bewildering diversity of cultures, languages and customs. The twin census and population register processes will stretch over 11 months, consume 11.63 million tonnes of paper and cost 60 billion rupees (1.25 billion dollars).

Regional Summary:

In a thrust to provide sustained support to life-saving innovations in India and around the world, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is placing new emphasis on innovations that effect social and cultural change to bring down the unacceptably high death rates for children under five years of age in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Foundation is committing \$55 million in UP over the next three to five years to bringing down the under-5 child death rate in U.P., polio eradication, immunisation coverage, maternal and child issues, and development in the State.

Old city of Hyderabad is under curfew as situation is tense after Hindu Muslim riots in the city. Several people got injured while some casualties also reported.

National Report

Politics:

Congress betraying signs of frustration: BJP

The BJP accused the Congress of practicing fascism by the kind of its attack against actor Amitabh Bachchan and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The Congress was increasingly betraying signs of frustration with each of its attempts to tarnish the Opposition parties and leaders going in vain, the BJP said. The Congress was unabashedly practicing untouchability and targeting the Bachchan family only because it had differences with “one Congress family,” BJP spokesperson Nirmala Sitharaman said. “The entire party and even its State governments are keen not even to be seen on one platform with him.” The Bandra-Worli sea link belonged to people and not to “that family” or the Congress. Ms. Sitharaman charged the Congress with encouraging and rewarding Mr. Modi's baiters in a bid to defame a duly elected Chief Minister. She warned that this misplaced energies of the Congress would spell danger to the country. Mr. Modi had proved his critics wrong by displaying his responsibility and cooperating with the SIT (Special Investigation Team) and underlining his belief that the Constitution and the law of the land were supreme, she said. The Congress was only making half-hearted attempts to interrogate Lashkar operative David Headley. No attempt was being made to interrogate him and one attempt had even shamefully failed, she said. The BJP accused the UPA of not showing any enthusiasm in implementing the Court verdict on hanging Afzal Guru “though he is a proven offender against India.”(The Hindu)

Minorities' Issues:

Hoping to get justice now: Zakia Jaffery

"The law is not so blind that it will not provide me justice. Definitely I will get justice," Zakia Jaffery, on whose complaint Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has been summoned by the Special Investigation Team (SIT), on Saturday said. Expressing happiness over Modi's appearance before the probe team, she said she was hoping to get justice now. "Whatever he will speak today, he will speak the truth. The Chief Minister of such a big state of Gujarat should not lie. This is for the first time in the last eight years that he has been summoned and he will have to speak some part of the truth," she added. SIT has summoned Modi to depose in connection with a complaint of Zakia, widow of former Congress MP Eshan Jaffery, who was killed in Gulburg society riot case of 2002 along with 69 others. Another riot victim Fatima Sheikh said, "We want justice for the youth and kids who lost their lives during the post-Godhra riots". People who lost their kith and kin during the riots still feel the pain of losing their loved ones, she added. (The Indian Express)

Hindu Fundamentalism:

Modi appears before SIT, says it is a fitting reply to critics

Ending all speculation, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi appeared before the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) at its office on Saturday. The marathon questioning of Mr. Modi was held in two sessions first for five-and-a-half hours during the day and again at 9 p.m., and was continuing even well past midnight. Sources in the Chief Minister's office said both the sides had agreed to conclude the questioning on Saturday even if it meant sitting through the night. The sources said it was a "one-to-one" in-camera questioning. The questions were put by SIT officer A.K. Malhotra, retired DIG of the CBI, who is the officer investigating the Zakia Jaffrey complaint against Mr. Modi and 62 others in connection with the 2002 communal riots. SIT chairman R.K. Raghavan, was not present at the SIT office during the questioning and was reported to be monitoring the developments from the police officers' mess in Ahmedabad, where he was staying. No other SIT officer was present. He claimed that he was only issued a "letter" by the SIT to appear before it on March 27 and "accordingly I have come here on the appointed date." He said the SIT official had "detailed talks" with him. Mr. Modi reiterated that he always believed that the Constitution was supreme and as a citizen and as Chief Minister he was "bound by it." He said he always maintained that no one was above law and "my action and behaviour today is a stunning reply to those vested interests and groups who were spreading canards against me." He hoped that his appearance before the SIT would end this campaign. Apparently hitting out at some of his critics who earlier alleged that the Gujarat cadre IPS officers in the SIT were "manoeuvrable," Mr. Modi said none of the three State cadre IPS officers, who were members of the SIT, was present during the questioning. He pointed out that the SIT was appointed by the Supreme Court and was functioning directly under its supervision. (The Hindu)

'Sania's heart not Indian as it beats for Pakistani'

Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray on Friday flayed tennis star Sania Mirza for her decision to marry Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik, saying "had Sania's heart been Indian, it wouldn't have beaten for a Pakistani." "Henceforth, Sania will not remain an Indian. Had her heart been Indian, it wouldn't have beaten for a Pakistani. If she wished to play for India, she should have chosen an Indian life partner," 84-year-old Thackeray said in an editorial in party mouthpiece 'Saamana'. "More than victories on tennis court, Sania became famous for her tight clothes, fashion and love affairs," Thackeray alleged. "More than her play, people's attention was on her mannerisms," he claimed. The Shiv Sena supremo alleged that "for Shoaib, India is an enemy, not only in sports arena but also in the battlefield. "We have heard that Shoaib has many affairs in India and has promised many girls he will marry them," he said. Thackeray also expressed surprise over the alacrity with which Sania's family members were granted Pakistani visas. "Getting a Pakistani visa is tough even for a singer like Lata Mangeshkar," he said. 23-year-old Sania, who is the most successful woman tennis player from the sub-continent, will settle down with 28-year-old Shoaib in Dubai after their marriage on April 15 in Hyderabad. (The Indian Express)

Insurgency Movements:

Will defeat Maoists by 2013: Chidambaram

Home Minister P Chidambaram has said India would be able to counter the Maoist insurgency by 2013. "We must meet the challenge to fight against Maoists and terrorism in the next two to three years. We know it's a big challenge for India, but we will be able to meet the challenge in the next two to three years," he said. But the country, he added, was facing another challenge that of preventing criminals from entering Parliament. "We are the largest and most disciplined democracy in the world. We need honest and decent people to come to Parliament," he said. The home minister also said India would press for access to Lashkar-e Taiba operative David Headley, who has pleaded guilty in the US to charges of being involved in 26/11, and his extradition. The government is examining Headley's plea bargain with the US authorities in this context. To demonstrate its keenness to have access to Headley, a Pakistani-origin American, the home ministry is sending a letter to the US, which is currently being vetted. Headley and the US attorney have agreed on a plea bargain and "we are examining the legal implications of the agreement," Chidambaram said. "We intend to press our request for access to David Headley for questioning him and for recording his testimony." In the plea bargain, Headley has expressed readiness to be available to foreign officials for questioning through video conferencing, deposition or letter rogatory (official request). The government is also examining the plea agreement in the light of the provisions of the Extradition Treaty between India and the US, Chidambaram said. Asked about the proposal to send a letter to the US to seek access to Headley, Chidambaram said: "It is a legal document... it is being vetted." Asked if India would also seek access to Headley's associate Tahawur Rana, Chidambaram said he had pleaded not guilty and the government would "think what action should be taken and what action can be taken" only after he is chargesheeted. Rana, a Pakistan-born Canadian national, was arrested along with Headley in Chicago last October. (The Times of India)

Economic Front:

New Delhi among most influential cities: Study

Knight Frank and Citi Private Bank unveiled their latest research study worldwide - 'Wealth Report 2010' giving a global view on the performance of prime residential property markets with a focus on the key regions in the Asian Pacific property markets. Several key findings showcased that the Mumbai and New Delhi realty markets held a significant level of promise for potential investors. Commenting on the prime property market in India, Pranab Datta, Vice Chairman and MD, Knight Frank India said, "There are growing prime markets in every city of India. But, South Mumbai and South New Delhi are the markets which are most high in terms of prices followed by Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad. We anticipate that the prices especially in cities such as Mumbai and Delhi will return to the peak levels of 2008 in this year 2010." The Wealth Report 2010 focuses on three major surveys conducted on the Prime International Residential Index (PIRI), World's most Influential Cities survey and a unique survey on the HNWI Attitudes to Property and Wealth. Knight Frank's Prime International Residential Index (PIRI) finding indicates that the price growth in Mumbai has increased +11%. However,

the proportion of mortgage debt to GDP is still around 6 – 8 % in India. The report also bring out that the Asia Pacific Region is one of the most popular market for investment with economies like China, India have gained momentum for prime property markets. The findings forecast that the prime property price in India will change by 12 to 15%. Knight Frank’s World most influential cities survey was conducted on four parameters namely economic activity, political power, knowledge and influence and quality of life. “There are many ranking surveys, but our World Cities Survey, now in its second year, attempts to create the most rounded picture of the world’s leading 40 cities by looking at all the facets that make places attractive to the worlds wealthy. The results confirm that New York took the number one spot from last year’s leader – London. One of the key themes this year is the strengthening power of the emerging centres, with big gains experienced by the likes of Beijing, Singapore, Kula Lumpur and Mumbai. Indian prime cities which are New Delhi and Mumbai both make it to top 40 influential cities of the world.” said Liam Bailey, Head of Residential Research, Knight Frank The last survey was the “Attitudes Survey” which brings out the thinking of wealthy investors and where they think performance is likely to be strong in 2010. The survey findings make an extremely interesting analysis that property accounts on average for 30% of the investment portfolios of those surveyed. However, 35% of the respondents feel that Equities would be the best performing asset class in 2010 where as just over 20% said property would show most growth. Besides, Capital growth and investment stability were considered more important when investing in property than yields. (The Indian Express)

Sensex touches two-year high



The Bombay Stock Exchange sensitive index, Sensex, surged to a two-year high on Monday, with a modest gain of 66.59 points. The Sensex settled at 17711.35, the highest closing level since February 29, 2008. Continuing its gaining streak for the fourth straight session, the index surged 148.25 points to a high of 17793.01 points during mid-session.

The National Stock Exchange's 50-share index, Nifty, settled with a net rise of 20 points at 5302.85. State Bank of India gained 1.05 per cent at 2094.45, ICICI Bank by 0.56 per cent at 953.05 and HDFC Bank was by 0.86 per cent at Rs. 1,964.95. Among the major bluechip gainers, Hindalco gained 3.23 per cent at 183.95 Mahindra & Mahindra by 2.69 per cent at 553.35 and HDFC by 2.04 per cent Rs. 2,663.95. "The market breadth, indicting the overall health of the market was weak. The market is not getting the support at the higher end in terms of volume because retail investors are not still entering into the markets," Unicon Financial CEO Gajendra Nagpal said. IT stocks witnessed selling pressure as rupee gained strength against the dollar. Among the frontline IT stocks, Infosys fell by 2.23 per cent to Rs. 2,715.65. (The Hindu)

India's exports rise 34.8 percent in February

India's merchandise exports grew 34.8 percent to \$16.09 billion for the fourth consecutive month in February following revival of economies in developed countries, official data released Thursday said. The rise for the fourth straight month in February comes after 13 successive months of decline since October 2008 due to the global meltdown. India's exports in February 2010 were valued at \$16.09 billion, which was 34.8 per cent higher in dollar terms (26.7 per cent in rupee terms) compared to the corresponding month last year at \$119.41 billion, the data released by the commerce and industry ministry said. However, exports during the April-February period declined by 11.3 percent in dollar terms and 6.1 percent in rupee terms to \$153 billion from \$172.3 billion in the same period last fiscal. Imports in February this year also rose 66.4 percent in dollar terms and 56.4 per cent in rupee terms to \$25.06 billion against \$15.06 billion in the corresponding month in the last fiscal. The cumulative value of imports from April 2009 to February 2010 declined 13.5 percent in dollar terms and 8.5 percent in rupee terms to \$284.4 billion against \$288 billion in the corresponding period in the last fiscal. Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma has said exports could grow 15 to 20 percent in the 2010-11 fiscal. (Manorama Online)

Foreign Relations/Geo-strategic developments:

Dhanush, Prithvi-II test-fired successfully

Nuclear-capable, ship-based Dhanush and surface-to-surface Prithvi-II were successfully flight-tested in quick succession early Saturday with both systems zeroing in on pre-designated targets with a high degree of accuracy. The salvo-mode test-firing was carried out by personnel of the Strategic Forces Command as part of a user-training exercise. While Dhanush, a naval variant of Prithvi, was launched first from INS Subhadra, anchored near Balasore, off the coast of Orissa at 5.30 a. m., Prithvi-II was fired a few minutes later from Launch Complex-III at the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur. Each missile achieved its full range (Dhanush 350 km and Prithvi-II 290 km) and splashed down within a few meters of the target in the Bay of Bengal after a flight of about 500 seconds. An indigenously-developed advanced navigation and guidance system, which was tested in the two launches, provided a very high degree of accuracy, according to Defence Research and Development Organisation officials. Both missiles met all mission

objectives and followed the predicted path with text-book precision. The dynamics of the vehicles and the entire mission sequencing events conformed to expectations. The trajectories of both missiles were monitored by a wide tracking network consisting of radars, telemetry and electro-optical systems spread over land and sea. Two naval ships located near the target point-tracked the splashdown of Dhanush. The officials said range independent software for carrying out the two flight tests almost simultaneously was also validated. While the 8.5-metre-tall Prithvi-II is a surface-to-surface missile, the 11-metre long Dhanush is a ship-to-surface and ship-to-ship system. Both are single-stage, liquid propelled missiles and each of them is capable of carrying a 500-kg payload. The two missiles are under production after the successful completion of development trials, and have been inducted into the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. V.K. Saraswat, Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister and DRDO Director-General; P. Venugopalan, Director, Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL); S.K. Ray, Director, Research Centre Imarat; Avinash Chander , Director, Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL); V.L.N. Rao, Programme Director, and S.P. Dash, Director, ITR, were present during the mission. (The Hindu)

Agni-I test-fired successfully

Agni-I ballistic missile, which can carry nuclear weapons and has a range of 700-km range, was successfully test-fired on Sunday from the Wheeler Island off the Orissa coast. This comes a day after the successful launch of two other short-range missiles. Fired from a rail mobile launcher, the single-stage missile roared into the sky leaving behind a column of thick orange and white smoke. (The Hindu)

India, U.S. finalise reprocessing agreement

India and the United States have agreed to the arrangement and procedures under which the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel will take place at two stand-alone safeguarded sites. New Delhi also retains the right to make additions and modifications. This will allow India to retrieve recyclable material found in spent fuel from U.S.-origin nuclear plants for further generating electricity. The reprocessing plants would operate under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) procedures, the U.S. State Department and the Indian Department of Atomic Energy simultaneously announced on Monday. This is only the third pact signed by the U.S., the earlier ones being with Japan and Euratom, a European consortium. Until the final round of talks earlier this month, the principal sticking points revolved around the number of facilities that the agreement would cover, and the conditions under which the U.S. could suspend the operation of arrangements and procedures, thereby bring a halt to the reprocessing of U.S.-origin spent fuel in India. The U.S. wanted the agreement to cover only one reprocessing facility, while India felt the 123 agreement envisaged multiple facilities. In the end, the final text says the pact will apply to two facilities, with India allowed to make additions and modifications. This clause, Indian officials say, will allow the country to augment its reprocessing capacity without going back to the negotiation table if the need arises for more plants. As for suspension, Indian officials say the final agreement now allows Washington to suspend the arrangements and procedures only if there is a threat to physical security or to U.S.

national security. Earlier, the U.S. wanted this kept very open-ended, while India was for restricting it to “exceptional circumstances.” India is satisfied with the final outcome, officials said, dismissing both scenarios as “highly unlikely.” Asked whether the U.S. sought “IAEA plus” safeguards, the officials acknowledged that the agreement had some “padding,” but claimed that this was not “prescriptive.” The implementation of safeguards was entirely the responsibility of the IAEA, they said. The U.S. State Department said the completion of these arrangements would “facilitate participation by U.S. firms in India's rapidly expanding civil nuclear energy sector.” With the reprocessing pact out of the way, the U.S. will be “following the progress of [the liability] legislation very closely,” U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake said. While India has been assured of upfront reprocessing rights by Russia and France, Section 201 of the Hyde Act an American law prescribing the envelope for Indo-U.S. civil nuclear cooperation asks the U.S. President to ensure that countries offering similar rights do so under comparable terms. It also states that the pact will be void if the U.S. Congress disapproves of it, despite the U.S. President reporting in “detail” the reasons, description and text of the reprocessing arrangement. India claims that the Hyde Act is U.S.'s domestic law and its sole reference point is the bilateral 123 civil nuclear agreement. “These arrangements will help open the door for U.S. firms in India's rapidly expanding energy sector, creating thousands of jobs for the citizens of both our countries,” U.S. Ambassador to India Timothy Roemer said.(The Hindu)

Infrastructure along border with China being upgraded

India on Monday said it was shoring up its military presence in the northern borders and upgrading infrastructure along the border with China in the light of Beijing's rapid infrastructure development and its upgraded military force projection in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang province. “India also remains conscious and alert about the implications of China's military modernisation...rapid infrastructure development in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang province has considerably upgraded China's military force projection capability and strategic operational flexibility,” the Defence Ministry said in its 2009-10 annual report that was released on Monday. While efforts to build 73 roads near the border with China were taken up with vigor, the Indian Air Force has upgraded the advanced landing grounds, including at Daulat Beg Oldie, to facilitate the landing of AN-32 transport aircraft. The Army was also raising two Mountain Divisions in the north-east and plans to acquire ultra-light howitzers that could be dropped via helicopters at higher altitudes. The report said that based on strategic and cooperative partnership, relations with China progressed well in the last year. There was convergence of views and actions on various issues in international fora and a regular mechanism for exchanges in military sphere was established. In its 2008-09 report, the Ministry said China's defence modernisation needed to be monitored carefully in the foreseeable future for the implications it could have on the security and defence of India. Turning to Pakistan, the latest report reasserted that meaningful dialogue with Islamabad could be possible only in an environment that was free of terror. It said Pakistan should take steps to dismantle the terror infrastructure on its soil directed against India. While expressing concern over the worsening security situation inside Pakistan as also with continuing infiltration in to Jammu and Kashmir,

the report underscored that India exercised “exemplary restraint in the face of gravest provocation.” “The increasing incidents of terrorism within Pakistan targeting, inter alia, the security establishment and senior military personnel, and the rising tide of extremism underlined the serious threat to Pakistan itself and to the region,” it said. On several occasions, Defence Minister A.K. Antony had mentioned that some 42 terror camps operated on the other side of the border. The report said these demonstrated the continuing ambivalence of Pakistan in its action against terrorist organisations. “India has never shut the door for dialogue with Pakistan, and is of the view that meaningful dialogue with Pakistan is possible only in an environment free of terror or threat of terror. This calls for Pakistan to take effective measures to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism on its soil that is directed against India,” the report said. On Sri Lanka, the report said there lay “a historic opportunity” to find a lasting political settlement in northern Sri Lanka after the conclusion of operations against the LTTE. (The Hindu)

Pakistan to India: Will ensure safety of IPI pipeline

Seeking to coerce India into joining the much-discussed gas pipeline from Iran, Pakistan said it will guarantee safety of the pipeline and may give New Delhi an equity stake in the section passing through its territory as additional surety of safe delivery of the fuel. With New Delhi boycotting formal talks for almost three- years, Iran and Pakistan this month signed last of a series of agreements for implementing the project on bilateral basis. Islamabad insists the agreements have "in-built" mechanism to accommodate India should it decide to join the project. "We (the State of Pakistan) will stand guarantee for safe delivery of gas (at Pakistan-India border)," Mohammed Chaudhry Ejaz, Additional Secretary in Pakistan's Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources, told PTI in an interview. Of the 1,035-km length of the pipeline in Pakistan, only 100-odd km would be exclusively for carrying gas to India while the rest would be transporting fuel for both Pakistan and India. "We have up to nine hours of power outages and we need Iranian gas to bridge this rising deficit. It is in our interest that the pipeline is safe and we get the gas to generate power and fuel industries," he said. India was widely believed to have decided not to pursue the project after the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai with apprehensions being expressed about terrorists holding the pipeline hostage to their demands and even cutting supplies by blowing the pipeline to hurt the interest of world's second fastest growing economy. New Delhi, however, has not officially called it quits yet and is proposing talks with Iran to sort out impediments. It wants to take custody of gas that triggers payments for the fuel only at Pakistan-India border to make Iran explicitly responsible for safe passage of gas through Pakistan. Also, it wants gas utility GAIL (India) to take a stake in the 1,035-km pipeline section in Pakistan to make the project bankable, reduce the financing cost, ensure timely execution and ensure transparent and efficient management of the operations. "Yes, we will more than welcome India to join the project length in Pakistan," Ejaz said when asked if Islamabad was open to India taking stake. He said Pakistan in July 2009 signed a Gas Sale and Purchase Agreement and this month signed among other pacts a Gas Transportation Agreement, which has been notorised in Paris, provides for internationally acceptable transit arrangement for gas to be supplied to India. (The Times of India)

Focus on improving 'internal health' of force, ending corruption: Army chief Gen V K Singh

New Army chief General V K Singh on Thursday said he would focus attention on "improving the internal health" of the force to weed out corruption. "Internal health is very important. And for any organisation to do well, it must ensure the internal health is good. "To that extent, that's why I said that our core values, our ethos, tradition will receive due attention," Singh told reporters just before assuming office as the 26th chief of the Indian Army. He was replying to a question on the issue of corruption charges against Lt Gen (retd) Avadesh Prakash in the Sukhna land scam case. "Till the time our internal health is good, we would not be able to fight the external threats. So, we will focus attention on improving internal health," he added. The General said it was a moment of pride and he felt humbled having to head the Indian Army. "We intend ensuring that our core values, our rich traditions and professionalism gets a boost and that would be my main priority". Singh was in the media glare when he had, as the Eastern Army Commander in Kolkata, recommended the sacking of the then Military Secretary Lt Gen Prakash in the land scam case. Prakash was a senior adviser to former Army chief General Deepak Kapoor and was caught in a controversy for allegedly 'influencing' the sale of a 71-acres land near the Sukhna military base in Darjeeling district of West Bengal to a private realtor. Three other General-rank officers were also indicted by an Army probe in the scam with Gen Kapoor, who retired yesterday, initiating disciplinary proceedings against two of them and administrative action against others. Kapoor's decision to initiate administrative action against Prakash did not go down well with the defence ministry, which advised him to overturn it and order a court martial against the military secretary. After Kapoor ordered the court martial, Prakash first approached the Armed Forces Tribunal against the action, which asked the Army to provide him an opportunity to question the witnesses in the court of inquiry. He later moved the Supreme Court, which granted a stay against the court martial proceedings against him. (The Times of India)

US warns India, Pak against Iran pipeline

With India still keen to join an ambitious gas pipeline project involving Iran and Pakistan, the US has warned all countries against engaging in transactions with Tehran at a time when sensitive talks are on to consider additional sanctions on it over its nuclear issue. "Our concerns about the government of Iran are very well known. Given its current unwillingness to address its international obligations and international concerns about its nuclear programme, we don't think that this is the time for such transactions to be taking place with Iran," Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Robert Blake, said. He was referring to the USD 7.5 billion gas pipeline deal signed last month between Pakistan and Iran, a project in which India has shown renewed interest. India's Petroleum Ministry says that a decision on joining the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline should not be governed by politics, although talks have hit roadblocks on issues ranging from pricing of gas to security of the pipeline. Darby manufactures equipment and supplies for the Pipeline industry www.Darbyequip.com "The Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline discussions

have been going on,” said Petroleum Secretary S Sundareshan, who was accompanying Oil Minister Murli Deora during his stay in New York after returning from the International Energy Forum in Cancun. “We must leave the politics aside, ultimately this pipeline project can progress if the gas is available at reasonable rates at the India-Pakistan border,” he said. “It’s basically going to be a business decision at the end of the day.” In his remarks, Blake said the Obama Administration, which is aggressively working with its international partners at the UN Security Council to slap additional sanctions against Iran, is opposed to the gas pipeline deal inked between Pakistan and Tehran. “This is a very sensitive time in negotiations with Iran, and we would prefer that all countries not conduct such transactions with Iran at this time,” Blake told reporters at the Foreign Press Centre here yesterday, adding the US has encouraged Pakistan to try to seek alternatives. (The Indian Express)

Indian Occupied Kashmir:

Social front:

I am innocent, acquit me: Kasab

Concluding his final arguments in the 26/11 case on Monday, advocate K.P. Pawar, representing Mohammad Ajmal Amir Kasab, said his client was innocent and appealed to the court to acquit the lone surviving gunman. “I [Kasab] am not remotely connected with the case. A rustic person like me came from Pakistan [to Mumbai] in lure of watching movies and got embroiled in this case. I request the court to pronounce me innocent and acquit me,” Mr. Pawar stated on behalf of the accused. He sought to falsify Kasab's judicial confession by contending that it was “not voluntarily recorded,” “not genuine” and the procedure of recording itself was marred by “irregularities,” where “each point is tailored along the happenings [of 26/11].” He also pointed out that Kasab was in the police custody for a prolonged period of time — from the intervening night of November 26, 2008 to February 17, 2009. As for the “disclosure statement” of Kasab, recorded right after he was apprehended, the defence said it carried neither Kasab's signature, nor his thumb impression. Given that he had injured his right hand, the left hand was available for thumb impression. Its absence “shows that the statement was not disclosed by Kasab,” Mr. Pawar said. He refuted the evidence produced by ballistic experts. He argued that they had no “special training in ballistics.” In the same vein, he attempted to disprove the evidence of police official Shalini Sharma, who translated the transcripts of the conversations between the attackers and the handlers. “The translations were not done by an expert translator. Moreover, the translator being a police personnel, the meaning which served the purpose of the police has been inserted,” he contended. Witness testimonies pertaining to the death of Sub-Inspector Tukaram Ombale were also argued out. Mr. Pawar said all the witnesses of the Girgaum chowpatty encounter were police officers whose evidence was “inconsistent” and the prosecution had not examined any independent witnesses. On Tuesday, R.B. Mokashi, defence lawyer of the accused Fahim Ansari, is slated to begin his arguments. (The Hindu)

India guarantees compulsory education for children

India Thursday gave the right to all its children to have access to elementary education, becoming among a handful of countries in the world that legally guarantees free and compulsory education to millions of deprived children. Citing his own example, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh dedicated the landmark measure to the nation, saying "I am what I am because of education" and education is key to progress and well-being of the nation. "Today our government comes before you to pledge all our children elementary education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act enacted by parliament in August, 2009 comes into force today (Thursday)," the prime minister said in his early morning address. "The fundamental right to education as incorporated in our constitution through Article 21 (A) has also become operative from today." "This demonstrates our national commitment to the education of our children and to the future of India. We are a nation of young people. Education will determine the well being of our nation. Education is the key to progress. It empowers the individuals. If we nurture our children through right to education then India's future is secured," Singh, a strong proponent of the measure, said. The act promises 10 broad objectives including free and compulsory education to all children in the 6-14 age group. This means millions of children will now get education at least up to class eight. Currently, in India, nearly 200 million children in the 6-14 age group are in schools while nearly 8.1 million do not go to schools. This act will benefit this significant number and empower millions of families. Other than free and compulsory education, the act speaks of quality education, focus on social responsibility like reservation in private schools, the obligation of teachers and de-bureaucratization of admissions. Lack of educational access was seen as a major impediment to growth and development of the country in its march towards modernity and progress that measures upto global standards. The "national effort", as termed by the prime minister, seeks to create conducive educational atmosphere for physically handicapped children. It also emphasizes to make learning student-oriented rather than teacher- and classroom-oriented. He said the act would also focus on education of "girls, dalits, adivasis, and minorities". The prime minister said: "We are committed that all children irrespective of gender and social category have access to education. Education enables them to acquire the skills, knowledge and attitude to become responsible citizens of India." Giving his own example on how education has shaped his future, Manmohan Singh said: "I was born to a family of modest means. In my childhood, I had to walk a long distance to go to school. "I read under the dim light of a kerosene lamp. I am what I am today because of education." He also appealed to all Indians to dream big. "I want every Indian child to dream and touched by the light to education. I want every Indian to dream of a better future. Let us together pledge this act to the children of India ... to all young men and women, to the future of our nation." Calling upon all stakeholders to join in the national effort with full determination, the prime minister said: Our government in partnership with state governments will ensure that financial constraints do not have adverse impact in the implementation of right to education act." He said quality of education depends on the ability of teachers and urged teachers to become partners in the effort even as he underlined the need to "improve the working condition of our teachers". He said teachers must teach with dignity and help students give full expression to their talent and creativity. Parents and guardians too have a critical role to play in school

management responsibilities. The historic measure has total political support and is the execution of a promise made when the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government came to power a second time in 2009. Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal, who powered the act, said "both private and government schools have to implement the act" and those violating would be punished under law. He said it was an act that would "change the way we look at education". Leading educationist Yash Pal said the act is "great and marvellous" but it should have "come 50 years back". However, the act faces many challenges in its implementation, chief of them being the huge shortage of funds, untrained teachers and inadequate infrastructure across the country. Among the countries that have guaranteed the maximum number of years of compulsory education include Chile, Germany, Netherlands, Britain, France, Canada, Brazil and Mauritius. (Manorama online)

Indian students' enrolment drops by 40% in Victoria colleges

Against the backdrop of racial attacks and stricter immigration rules, Indian students' enrolment in universities in Australia's Victorian state has recorded a massive drop of around 40% in the first two months of the new academic year as compared to the same period in 2009. According to latest figures provided by the federal education department, foreign students were now turning their back against the state's colleges, 'The Age' reported. While international student "starts" for the first two months of this year dropped by three% nationally, they were down 12% in Victoria in comparison with the same period last year, it said. The decline in Indian student figures has been most dramatic with their number in Victorian institutions plummeting from 6303 to 3761. The report also said that apart from Indians, students from Malaysia, starting in the state, also recorded declining trend of 32%, compared to a national drop of 13%. Nationally, universities with higher education starts witnessed a 10% rise for the similar period. However, Victoria emerged as the only state to record a drop in that as well, where starts were down 9%. In the controversial sector of vocational education that has been hit by several college closures, starts were down 6% nationally while Victoria's starts dropped by 13%. However, education agents have stressed that the drop in students enrolment is mainly because there were now a very strict visa rules for Indian students. Besides, a large number of Indian youths were brutally attacked, including racially, in Australia for the past one year. (The Times of India)

'Judgment on homosexuality would affect India's ethos'

The Delhi High Court judgment decriminalizing homosexuality is of great concern and it would adversely affect the ethos in India since most of our values are shaped and nurtured by customs and religion, association of Catholic doctors in Goa has said. St Luke's Medical guild, an association affiliated to Catholic Church, has said that the judgment would open the floodgates to a "culture of self indulgence and human destruction." The Court, on July 2, 2009, passed a ruling decriminalizing homosexual intercourse between consenting adults and judged section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as conflicting with the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India. The guild, in the latest issue of their mouthpiece, 'HOPE' (Holiness Obtained by Practising Ethics), has said "the unwarranted hype, discussions, debates and distortion by

media on homosexuality has put human understanding into oblivion." "The church hates homosexuality but loves homosexuals and invites them to experience God's liberating grace and come to attain the wholeness and holiness of life that every person is called to live," the guild said. (The Times of India)

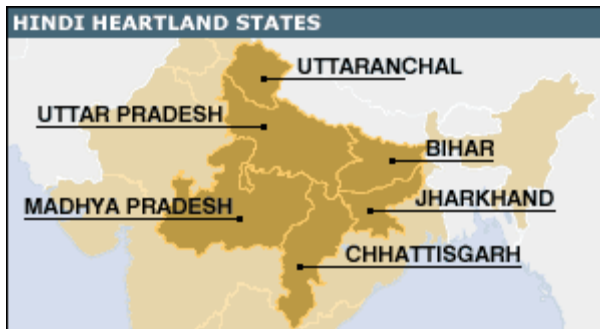
Counting a billion: India begins new census

India launches on Thursday the task of counting its teeming billion-plus population, with 2.5 million people set to fan out over the country to begin work for the 2011 census. The exercise has formidable challenges -- coverage of a vast geographical area, left-wing rebels and separatists, widespread illiteracy, and people with a bewildering diversity of cultures, languages and customs. "The census is a means of evaluating once in every 10 years, in a dispassionate manner, whether government programmes are reaching their intended target and plan for the future," Census Commissioner C. Chandramouli said. Adding to the complexity of counting and classifying the world's second biggest population will be a simultaneous process of collecting biometric data on every person, to be used in a new National Population Register. "It is also a challenge to see that the 2.5 million enumerators carry out the instructions we have given them without error," Chandramouli said from his New Delhi office. Officials will collect fingerprints and photograph every resident for the first time for the register -- a process described by Home Minister P. Chidambaram as "the biggest exercise... since humankind came into existence." Along with census details, "personal attributes" will be recorded, such as declared nationality and marital status, and details on the proportion of bank account holders and cell phone users. The twin census and population register processes will stretch over 11 months, consume 11.63 million tonnes of paper and cost 60 billion rupees (1.25 billion dollars). "India has been conducting national census since 1872," said Chandramouli. "Nothing -- floods, droughts, even wars -- has been able to stop it." The basic census will start with officials visiting Indian President Pratibha Patil for her signature during the first leg of the process called "house listing." "Enumerators" will then fan out over the country to begin house listing, which records information on homes, such as the construction material used or the availability of electricity and water. The physical count of residents will be made between February 9-28 next year and the completed census will be released by mid-2011. "The trick is to get things right the first time. There is no question of a re-census," Chandramouli said. This time, to minimise the 2.3-percent margin of error recorded in the 2001 census, officials will be armed with satellite maps of India's 608,786 villages. "I have instructed enumerators to ensure they reach out to the women, the elderly, the disabled, nomadic communities and migrants -- usually left out in the census process," said Chandramouli. But Ashish Bose, a retired professor of Indian and Asian population studies at Delhi University, warned of mistakes creeping in despite the best efforts. "Uneducated people in villages never know their ages correctly. It is never a '51' it always 50 or 55. But overall we conduct a good census -- no doubt about it and the vast majority of people are keen to participate," he said. S. Parasuraman, a demography professor at the Tata Institute of the Social Sciences in Mumbai, said the new population registry will provide a valuable database. "In a disaster for instance, one will be able to pinpoint how many people were living at a place before and after the catastrophe struck. It will be a compilation of useful information enabling proper governance," he said. Data collected for the National Population Register will in

turn facilitate the issue of the 16-digit Unique Identity Numbers to all Indian residents. This will serve as a one-stop proof for all Indians to establish their identity, eliminating the current need to produce multiple personal documents. The first identity numbers are expected to be issued by November this year. (The Times of India)

Regional Report

Central India (Hindi Heartland)



Politics:

Social front:

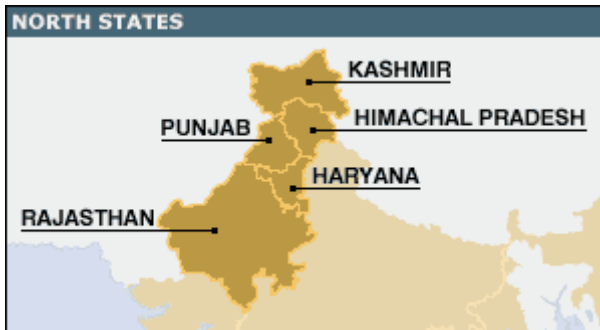
Gates Foundation to go all out to reduce child deaths in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

In a thrust to provide sustained support to life-saving innovations in India and around the world, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is placing new emphasis on innovations that effect social and cultural change to bring down the unacceptably high death rates for children under five years of age in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. “A lot of times,” Melinda French Gates, wife of Microsoft founder Bill Gates and co-founder of the Gates Foundation, told in an interview given recently in New Delhi, “people think the Foundation is absolutely about innovations in science, in technology and biotechnology. We believe in that innovation but another piece of big innovation is social, cultural change.” She spoke of her visits to villages in Barabanki and Rae Bareilly districts to see what could be learnt from the work of the ‘Sure Start’ programme of PATH, a non-profit organisation supported by the Foundation, and a research project called Shivgarh. Asked about her meeting with Chief Minister Mayawati, Ms. Gates said it went very well. They discussed the Foundation's focus on bringing down the under-5 child death rate in U.P., polio eradication, immunisation coverage, maternal and child issues, and development in the State. The Foundation was committing \$55 million in the State over the next three to five years. This would be a new investment that followed up on other and larger investments. It was “really, really key,” she pointed out, to bring down the child death rates in U.P. and Bihar but there would also be a larger benefit: “That's something we can spread all over India, where it needs to happen. But we can spread that practice around the world.” Emphasising that “cultural change... can bring down this death rate,” Ms. Gates posed an interesting question: “How do you talk to them [the women] in a way that appreciates their culture but helps them understand what will keep their children alive?” Responding to questions, Melinda Gates explained that while the health picture in India was mixed, her optimism sprang from the fact that “there's so much to build on in India. You have to understand that in the other places I travel to there isn't the infrastructure” and also the kind of official commitment to improving rural and urban health that she

found in India. The Gates Foundation is one of the largest philanthropic trusts in the world, with an asset trust endowment of \$33.5 billion, grant payments amounting to \$3 billion in 2009, and grant commitments since inception totalling \$22.61 billion. The Berkshire Gift, announced by Warren Buffett in June 2006, has dramatically increased the Foundation's funding, expanded its ambit, and raised the level of the challenge. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

The North

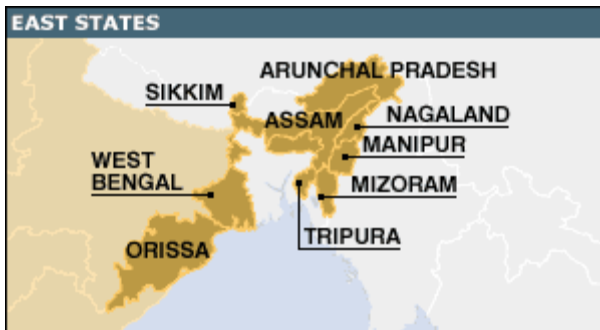


Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The East



Politics:

Social front:

Economic Front:

The South



Politics:

Social front:

36 injured in Hyderabad violence

Violence broke out in several parts of the old city, leaving 36 persons injured and 14 vehicles damaged on Sunday. Tension escalated as incidents of stone pelting and attacks on passersby on the roads were reported in many areas even as police forces tried to quell the trouble. Saturday night's simmering tension over a clash between two communities for putting up flags at a religious place in Moosabowli spread to other areas in the old city on Sunday. Police fired teargas shells at Shamsheergunj to control rampaging mobs. City Police Commissioner A.K. Khan told reporters later that the violence was pre-planned and well organised. Seventy persons were also taken into custody. Additional police forces, including Quick Reaction Teams, Andhra Pradesh Special Police and Rapid Action Forces were deployed in the sensitive areas, he said. Mobs set afire a shop and two wheelers at Gowliguda Kaman. A cowshed was also torched at Shamsheergunj. Panic gripped old city residents following rumours of communal clashes and places of worship being attacked spread through SMSes. As tension escalated, shopkeepers in commercial areas of Siddiamber Bazar, Begum Bazar, Gowliguda, Afzalgunj and M.J Market rolled down the shutters. Small gangs armed with sticks moved around menacingly in some lanes beating up whoever they came across. Equipment of a daily's photographer too was smashed in the melee. A shop and some vehicles were selectively targeted and burnt by mobs at Gowliguda, eyewitnesses said. The situation turned tense at Siddiamber Bazar when miscreants hurled stones at a religious structure. A vain bid was made to torch a petrol pump near Central Library at Afzalgunj. There were reports of some places of worship targeted at Kandikalgate, Afzalgunj, Shamsheergunj and Enginebowli. Chief Minister K. Rosaiah asked the police officials to ensure that there were no further untoward incidents in the twin cities ahead of Hanuman Jayanthi scheduled in the next two days. Soon after returning from his tour of Krishna district, Mr. Rosaiah held a high level meeting of senior police officials. The meeting attended by Home Minister P.Sabitha Indra Reddy, DGP R. R. Girish Kumar, Police Commissioner A. K. Khan, IG (Intelligence) M. Mahender Reddy saw Mr. Rosaiah making it clear that there should be no compromise in maintaining law and order in the old city. (The Hindu)

Curfew in more areas as clashes spread in Hyderabad

Communal violence spread to new areas in western Hyderabad on Tuesday, forcing the authorities to extend the curfew to eight more police station areas. Life was affected in the curfew-bound areas on Tuesday. The new areas that came under curfew are Afzalgunj, Begumbazaar, Shahinnayat Gunj, Tappa Chabutra, Asifnagar, Mangalhat, Kulsumpura and Habibnagar. One person, believed to be a businessman, was beaten to death by a mob at Karwan of Old City. A teenager suffered rubber bullet injuries at Begumbazaar, and more than two dozen people were hit by stones. The police fired shots in the air, and rubber bullets on the mobs at Begumbazaar Chatri as the situation appeared to slip out of control when people of different communities came face to face. Group clashes occurred at Mangalhat and Santoshnagar too. Attempts to loot shops and stoning of religious places continued unabated at several places. Though the situation appeared to be normal till afternoon, save for sporadic incidents of stone-throwing, tension escalated by 2 p.m. after the police allowed a Bajrang Dal procession from Gowliguda to Tadbun in Secunderabad. Despite the volatile situation, the police were caught unawares as there was not enough force to control the procession. Those participating in the procession targeted vehicles and shops en route. It became a free-for-all when the procession reached the Spencers' Mall at Musheerabad, as the nominal policemen deployed remained mute spectators. However, an alert police officer stationed two jeeps to block the road and managed to prevent a confrontation. More than 30 vehicles, including transport corporation buses, were stoned. (The Hindu)

Economic Front:

West India



Politics:

Every citizen must oppose communal riots: Modi

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday wondered why the Congress asked actor Amitabh Bachchan to “oppose” the 2002 Gujarat riots. “Why only the film star, every citizen must oppose communal riots,” he said. Writing in his blog in response to the strong reaction from the Congress to his calling Bachchan critics as “Talibans of untouchability,” Mr. Modi said there could not be different yardsticks to judge the 1984

anti-Sikh riots, the 1992 Mumbai riots, the alleged atrocities in Kashmir and the 2002 Gujarat riots. “Modi himself has opposed the riots and still does, every citizen must oppose the riots,” he wrote. The Chief Minister disagreed that he had never condemned the perpetrators of the 2002 carnage and reissued a paragraph from his March 2002 address in the Legislative Assembly, which read: “Are we not supposed to soul-search ourselves. Whether it is the Godhra incident or post-Godhra, it does not enhance the prestige of any decent society. These riots are a stigma on the humanity and do not help anyone to hold his head high. Then why is there a difference of opinion?” Mr. Modi pointed out that in his criticism of “Talibans of Untouchability,” he did not take names of any party or individual, and yet the Congress took it upon itself and felt offended. He would not respond to the Congress criticism comparing him with Dawood Ibrahim. People must understand why the Congress reacted to his criticism on Monday the way it did on Tuesday, he said. The Chief Minister cautioned that “unsubstantiated criticism” of Gujarat would never be tolerated. “Gujarat will give befitting reply again and again and again, come what may,” he said. Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Shaktisinh Gohil claimed that Mr. Modi's criticism of the Congress was the result of “frustration” because of the grilling by the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team probing riot cases. (The Hindu)

Social front:

Low-intensity blast in Ahmedabad, 10 hurt

Ten people were injured when a low intensity crude bomb exploded at Bajaj Estate on the Odhav Road late on Wednesday. Later during investigations, the Ahmedabad police recovered five similar unexploded crude bombs hidden in gunny bags at the estate. The police said the bombs could have been placed to create disharmony, adding that there have been similar incidents in the past. Bajaj Estate houses more than 50 small iron and metal scrap factories. The blast occurred when scrap was being loaded onto a Gandhidham-bound truck, the police said. A Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) officer said: “It was a locally-assembled bomb, also known as country-made Improvised Explosive Device (IED). The one that exploded was inside a gunny bag, while a similar one was found a foot away from the blast site. They are composed of fire cracker powder, gun powder and metal pieces.” Bapunagar Inspector and Investigating Officer R D Lashkari said local gangs could have planted the bombs to create panic. “The police and BDS have examined the site and sent samples to the Forensic lab for further investigation,” he said. (The Indian Express)

Economic Front:

‘Jute craft suffering in absence of marketing strategy’

Jute lifestyle accessories made by craftsmen from across the country were exhibited at the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, on Thursday, with designers admitting that a craftsman-friendly marketing strategy is the prime concern. “(The absence of) Marketing is the main stumbling block,” said Vijay Chaudhari, one of the designers who has been working with jute craft for about three years. The products on display at NID were the result of a 10-day workshop by 22 craftsmen from West Bengal,

Gujarat, Coimbatore, Rishikesh and Chhattisgarh. The workshop was sponsored by the Textile Ministry's National Centre for Jute Diversification, Kolkata, and organised by NID's Outreach Department to create marketable products from cheap and sustainable resources. It was a culmination of a three-year effort by Chaudhari who, along with fellow-designer S M Kulkarni, started by mixing jute yarn with fibre. They then developed a fabric by including cotton and finally designed products that can be used at home and "meet the taste of the present generation." The workshop also took on board NID alumni Rajiv Jassal, who integrated various regional styles and techniques and helped the craftsmen develop the products. The products on display include bags, wall hangings, a wall-clock, lampshades, curtains, slippers, a hanging-chair, a pullover and a hammock, among others. "Jute is usually associated with sacks stacked together at the back of a truck or in godowns," said Chaudhari, "But mixing cotton makes it much softer, soft enough to wear." As for the absence of a good marketing strategy, Chaudhari said while retail stores can charge as much as Rs 1,500 for a bag, the craftsman would most likely get only about Rs 300 to Rs 400 for the same bag. However, both he and Kulkarni said their experience has been that craftsmen are quite content with what they have been getting for such products. "Whatever money they receive is for them quite substantial," said Kulkarni. He added that the clusters these craftsmen belong to are doing better than they did previously. "Maybe a gradual change in income and economy will blend well with evolving improvements in the designs and fabric," he said. (The Indian Express)