

LTTE will not surrender, Lanka PM says no truce

Asian Age, 6 March 2009

As Sri Lankan forces steps up attacks to take control of a key Tamil Tiger's stronghold, the government has ruled out any ceasefire and asked the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to lay down arms and surrender. Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake informed the Parliament on Wednesday that the government has no intention to go for a ceasefire with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. "Every time when the LTTE faced a severe set back, they spoke about a ceasefire. But the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam cannot mislead this government through such traps," he said. "Our armed forces have been able to reveal to the country how the LTTE terrorists were strengthened during the ceasefire period. If that trend continued, the entire country would have been in danger," Mr Wickramanaye told the House.

Pakistan rules out Indian hand

Hindu, 6 March 2009

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan said on Thursday the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore could have been the work of the Al Qaeda and dismissed suggestions that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or India was behind it. Rehman Malik, head of the Interior Ministry, told journalists here that there was no evidence to suggest that the LTTE carried out the attack. He also ruled out media suggestions of Indian involvement, saying there was no evidence to back such theories. He said the preliminary probe was being finalised. Severely embarrassed by the attack and the failure of the police to react swiftly to it, Pakistani officials are desperate for a breakthrough, but it is proving elusive.

PM-Obama meet April 2

Asian Age, 10 March 2009

March 9: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is likely to meet US President Barack Obama on the sidelines of the Group of Twenty (G-20) summit in London on April 2. Dr Singh's meeting with the new US President will be his first since Mr Obama's inauguration on January 20. Foreign secretary Shiv-shankar Me-non began talks in Washington on Monday to lay the ground for a meeting between the two principals. While the focus of the summit will be on growth, jobs, financial stability and regulation, Dr Singh and Mr Obama are expected to discuss a host of bilateral, regional and global issues connected to security and terrorism. The situation in India's extended neighbourhood, including but not limited to Pakistan and Afghanistan, the investigation of the November 26, 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai and the threat posed by terrorism emanating out of Pakistan are likely to find resonance with them. The G-20 Summit will be held on April 2.

Nepal Maoists fear royalist plot in Delhi

Asian Age, 10 March 2009

March 9: With former Prime Minister and Opposition leader Girija Prasad Koirala scheduled to leave for India on Wednesday, Nepal's ruling Maoist party on Monday said a conspiracy was hatching in New Delhi to reinstate monarchy in the new Himalayan republic. "A new pact is being signed in New Delhi against the Maoist government," said the Janadisha daily, regarded as the mouthpiece of the former rebel party. "The new agreement among regressive forces is meant

to combat the elected Maoist government and democratic forces." In 2006, when King Gyanendra was ruling Nepal with the support of the Army, stoking further instability and violence in the insurgency-hit kingdom, New Delhi brokered an agreement between the sidelined political parties of Nepal and the underground Maoists which resulted in the ouster of the royal regime.

Menon begins dialogue with Obama team

Hindu, 10 March 2009

Washington: Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon on Monday plunged into three days of hectic diplomacy focusing on taking the India-U.S. strategic relationship forward as the two nations began their first high-level interaction since Barack Obama became President in January. Mr. Menon, who arrived here on Sunday, is set to meet Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the afternoon after a series of meetings with Deputy Secretary James B. Steinberg, and his counterpart Under-Secretary for Political Affairs William Burns. Besides bilateral issues, Mr. Menon is also expected to provide Indian perceptions on how to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan when he meets Ms. Clinton and U.S. special representative on Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke.

Hillary, Menon discuss 26/11

Hindu, 11 March 2009

Washington: Meeting for the first time, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon agreed on the need to prevent another Mumbai-type attack. During the meeting on Monday at the State Department's Foggy Bottom headquarters, the first high-level contact for India with the Obama administration, Ms. Clinton also said the two countries needed to improve cooperation in bilateral and global issues. The State Department acting spokesman Robert Wood told journalists on Tuesday that the Mumbai terror attack figured during the meeting.

U.S. assures India it will proceed with nuclear deal

Hindu, 12 March 2009

Washington: The new Obama administration on Wednesday assured India that it will proceed with the landmark India-U.S. nuclear deal, signed during George W. Bush's tenure, and said the two countries needed to ramp up cooperation in counter-terrorism and global issues such as climate change. Senior State Department officials gave the assurance to Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, who is on a four-day official visit. Mr. Menon on Monday met Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and discussed the nuclear deal, counter-terrorism cooperation, bilateral issues, Sri Lankan conflict and bringing the situation under control in war-torn Afghanistan. During his talks with Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Nicolas Burns on Wednesday, Mr. Menon discussed the landmark civil nuclear deal and other bilateral issues.

No military solution to Tamil issue: Mukherjee

Hindu, 14 March 2009

New Delhi (PTI): External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Saturday said that India was deeply concerned at the sad plight of the Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka who have been the victims of crossfire but insisted that there was no military solution. "We are deeply concerned at the sad plight of the Tamil civilians who have been caught in the crossfire between the Sri Lankan

government and the LTTE...," Mr. Mukherjee told reporters at the AICC here. The minister, however, said that "military solution was not the solution" and the issue has to be addressed politically.

India's 26/11 response packed with primary documents

Hindu, 14 March 2009

NEW DELHI: India's response to a Pakistani questionnaire on November's attacks in Mumbai runs to over 400 pages — almost six times as long as an dossier of evidence released in January. Prepared in response to 30 investigation-related queries prepared by Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency, India's textual response runs to just a few pages — and follows the contours of details published earlier this week in The Hindu. However, the document contains voluminous appendices, which include five compact discs and over 400 pages of primary documentation.

IT cos fret over likely L1 Visa curbs

Economic Times, 14 March 2009

KOLKATA: The amendments proposed in the H1-B visa norms may just be the beginning. Key players in India's software industry circles are apprehensive that the current wave of protectionism being seen in the US could also lead to a tightening of the L1 visa provisions. An L1 visa is a temporary visa which allows companies the flexibility to transfer certain class of employees to work at their US operations for up to seven years. Although Nasscom has thus far been stressing more on the changes in the H1-B visa process and its potential impact on outsourcing, the software industry body is also keeping its ears to the ground on the L1 issue.

Sino-Indian border tranquil: Menon

Hindu, 20 March 2009

NEW DELHI: The Sino-Indian border is tranquil and both sides are maintaining the status quo, Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon said here on Thursday. Pointing out that both sides had their own perceptions about the boundary, Mr. Menon said each side treated the other's crossing over as an incursion. But the important thing was whether there had been a change in the pattern of incursions and whether it was taking place in new places. The answer to both was in the negative, he said, while taking questions at the release of the book "India-China relations – The border issue and beyond" co-authored by Mohan Guruswamy and Zorawar Daulet Singh. "Both sides maintain the status quo. We don't see changes in the pattern by either side," Mr. Menon added.

CIA chief meets Chidambaram

Hindu, 20 March 2009

NEW DELHI: Terrorism, post-26/11 Mumbai terror strike, the security scenario in South Asia, the situation in Pakistan and Bangladesh and cooperation in operational areas of security were some of the topics that came up for discussions which the visiting United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief, Leon Panetta, had on Thursday with Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram and top officials in India's security and intelligence establishment. Mr. Panetta, who is the third high-ranking U.S. official to visit India after the 26/11 attack, first met Mr. Chidambaram for nearly half an hour at North Block. Though it was described as a "familiarisation trip" of the CIA chief to India, his first visit outside the U.S. after assuming

office, sources said he discussed ways of further strengthening cooperation with India in the fight against terrorism.

The roles we play

Indian Express, 21 March 2009

That Washington forces New Delhi to do things it does not like in order to please Islamabad is an important part of Indian foreign policy mythology. This particular myth gained some fresh wind this week amidst reports that the Obama administration has asked India to reduce its troops on the border with Pakistan so that Islamabad could focus on the war against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. According to media leaks, the US special representative on Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, conveyed this to the Indian foreign secretary, Shiv Shankar Menon, in Washington a few days ago. The reports add that India rejected the suggestion outright. Before parsing the merits of the proposed troop reduction, we must return to the larger myth.

Sixteen Indians on hijacked vessel off Somalian coast

Hindu, 21 March 2009

Mumbai (PTI): Sixteen Indians are onboard a ship, which was hijacked off the Somalian coast on Saturday, the Directorate General of Shipping said. The ship was hijacked on March 21 at 10.30 hours, the DG Shipping said in a release. The ship was travelling between Dubai and Mogadishu carrying rice, refined oil, wheat and general cargo. The coalition forces and the Indian navy vessel operating in the Gulf of Aden have been informed of the incident and have been asked to provide assistance.

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Editorial: All steps back

Indian Express, 23 March 2009

The Mumbai attacks of November 26 appear to have claimed, among their many victims, a probable resolution of the Sir Creek maritime boundary dispute between India and Pakistan. Not only is the five-year-long composite dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad in a freeze but the two states now look set to miss the May 13 deadline for submitting their mutually agreeable claims on continental shelves to the UN Convention on the Law of Seas. Sir Creek, a 96-km-long estuary in the Rann of Kutch, has been a matter of disagreement between India and Pakistan since the late '60s, with Pakistan claiming the whole of the creek and India asking for a maritime boundary midway through it, according to international maritime law applicable to all navigable waterways. Pakistan, till recently, had refuted India's claims of navigability; but negotiations last year, as part of the composite dialogue process initiated in January 2004, had brought Pakistan round to India's perspective.

US asks India to support Pakistan on extremists

Daily Times, 24 March 2009

WASHINGTON: The US has called on India to support Pakistan in rooting out extremism. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg also said on Monday that the US backed a 'global role for India. Steinberg delivered the first substantive remarks on India by President Barack Obama's administration which is expected this week to unveil a new strategy on fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. "I think it will be important for India to make clear that as Pakistan takes steps to deal with extremists on its own territory that India will be supportive of that," said Steinberg.

Editorial: Reminding the world

Indian Express, 24 March 2009

Does India have a coherent worldview, which it pushes in forums like the G-20? Whatever, else, in the years of the non-aligned movement and of the G-77 the country did at least have an agenda: global anti-colonialism, building coalitions for international development. India participated fully in global debates and developed ideas and strategies. Here are some: Indira Gandhi saying "poverty is the biggest pollutant" at the first Environment Conference in Stockholm; projecting 25 per cent of world industry in the third world at the third UNIDO at Lima in 1975; population and development at Bucharest and so on. But by the end of the '80s development and security paradigms were changing and so India's perception of its role was reinvented: Rajiv Gandhi's vision, in the 1989 Eighth Plan introduction, was that India would pursue its global goals in a policy of "concentric circles of influence." But world perception takes a while to catch up. Not till 2003, and the well-known CIA study (and Goldman Sachs' BRIC report) did India's growth story really get noticed. The G-8, and John Kirton, had discovered that earlier, but didn't really get credit for it; a fascinating illustration of perceptions and not reality determining global beliefs.

India & Israel in deal for missiles

Asian Age, 26 March 2009

March 25: India is learnt to have struck a Rs 10,000-crore deal with an Israeli company for the supply and joint development of medium-range surface-to-air missiles. The defence ministry is yet to officially confirm that the deal has been signed, but sources in DRDO indicated that it was on. The joint development of the 70-km MR-SAM project will be done by India's DRDO and the Israeli Aircraft Industries. This company, incidentally, is also the manufacturer of the Barak missile systems. The DRDO is hoping that collaboration with the IAI will help it develop these missiles within four to five years. The indigenous Akash surface-to-air missile developed by DRDO has a range of 30 km

India, Iran in Obama AfPak plan

Asian Age, 28 March 2009

March 27: US President Barack Obama said on Friday that he plans to further bolster American forces in Afghanistan, increase aid to Pakistan, and for the first time set benchmarks for progress in fighting Al Qaeda and the Taliban in both chaotic countries. In strikingly ominous tones, Mr Obama warned — just as President George W. Bush did repeatedly over the years — of intelligence estimates that Al Qaeda "is actively planning attacks on the US homeland from its safe haven in Pakistan". Among other things, officials said he planned to recast the Afghan war as

a regional issue involving not only Pakistan but also India, Russia, China, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and the Central Asian states. His plan envisions persuading Pakistan to stop focusing military resources on India so it can concentrate more on battling insurgents in its lawless tribal regions.

Editorial: War on terror?

Indian Express, 30 March 2009

As US President Barack Obama promotes his restructured “Af-Pak” strategy on the international stage this week, India has reasons to be pleased and concerned. The good news from the much touted review, announced by Obama last Friday, comes from his diagnosis of the problem. He has taken on board much of India’s own analysis of the challenges confronting the world in the badlands between the Indus and the Hindu Kush. He agrees with India that Pakistan is the source of Afghanistan’s insecurity and the world must act together to cure Islamabad of its political malaise. In recognising that the borderlands between Pakistan and Afghanistan constitute the single most important threat to global peace and security, arguing that Islamabad is part of the problem rather than the solution, and asking India to join an international concert in managing the Af-Pak region, he has made welcome departures from the American policy towards South Asia since September 11, 2001.