

The Hindu, 1 August 2004

Manmohan for optimum use of energy resources (K.Venugopal)

BANGKOK, JULY 31. Leaders of the seven-nation BIMST-EC regional grouping who met here today reminded themselves about their vast natural and human resources, and how they must use them to raise their economic standards. "We must accept that the aggregate economic performance of BIMST-EC has not been among the top ranks of the world," the host and Thailand Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, said at the summit meeting, the first time the heads of government and state have met in the seven-year history of the organisation. "The danger is that after so long, we run the risk of getting used to life at the bottom," he said. "We must not. We must look up to the top to find the track to reach there." He, however, warmly noted India's economic growth and the projection by Jeffrey Sachs in Fortune magazine that it would draw equal with the U.S. economy by 2050. "The signs are there for all to see," he said. "Not only are big multinational companies relocating their manufacturing facilities to Asia, they have also been outsourcing their services offshore to Asia. The beneficiaries have not been just Asia, but consumers the world over."

The Hindu, 1 August 2004

India's concerns addressed: Kamal Nath (PTI)

NEW DELHI, JULY 31. After four days of hectic negotiations, the World Trade Organisation today reached a deal, which India said "more than adequately" addressed its concerns. Emerging from a meeting, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Kamal Nath, who flew back from Bangkok to attend the trade talks which almost broke down yesterday, told PTI over phone from Geneva that "we have closed the deal. It more than adequately addresses our concerns." "Developed countries cannot by way of artificial price mechanism gain access to Indian markets and will now have to take firm steps to reduce domestic support." "Developed countries have

recognised that agricultural trade with heavy subsidy component is not free trade," he said. Talks nearly broke down on Friday when India, along with some other countries, said that the new revised draft was not acceptable as it had failed to address developing countries' concerns especially with regard to agriculture. India and other developing countries have been seeking apart from less than full reciprocity for developing countries for reduction in tariff, substantial cuts in domestic support and elimination of all forms of trade distorting subsidies. India was also pressing for adequate safeguard to its sensitive products and a provision for special products.

The Hindu, 2 August 2004

India's wish list accepted at WTO

NEW DELHI, AUG. 1. India today said that most of its concerns had been addressed in the revised framework for further discussions adopted at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting that ended in Geneva on Saturday. "India has secured significant gains and succeeding in fully protecting her interests in agriculture and other key areas in the revised framework for negotiations," said an official news release here today. The revised framework was the subject of intense negotiations in Geneva, with developing countries holding out till issues crucial to them, such as the livelihood of farmers with marginal land holdings, were addressed through deferential treatment and a real cut in subsidies to farmers in developed countries. Sensing that the developing countries' concerns might be addressed in the revised framework, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, had directed the Commerce Minister, Kamal Nath, to rush back to Geneva as soon as he had arrived in Bangkok. These include assurances to discuss special and differential treatment, such as giving developing countries the flexibility to adopt a special safeguard mechanism (SSM) and designate several farm produce as special products (SP). The framework also drops the three Singapore issues relating to investment, competition and Government procurements

from the Doha agenda, whose deadline has been pushed to December 2005 from January 2005.

The Hindu, 2 August 2004

Series of bilateral meetings with Pakistan
(B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 1. Beginning August 3, India and Pakistan will hold separate meetings on five different subjects under the composite dialogue process. The first round of talks under the composite dialogue, held in New Delhi on June 27-28 with talks at the Foreign Secretaries level on security-related confidence-building measures and Kashmir, will culminate in a conference on September 5 and 6. In the next 10 days, the two sides will meet separately in New Delhi and Islamabad to discuss Siachen, Sir Creek, promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields, terrorism and drug trafficking and improvement in economic and trade ties.

The Hindu, 4 August 2004

'India managed to ensure acceptance of food security concept at WTO'

NEW DELHI, AUG. 3. India has managed to ensure that the concepts of food security, livelihood security and rural development are "enshrined" in the framework agreement on agriculture concluded at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva. Disclosing this here today, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Kamal Nath, said the agreement also ensures for the first time that developed countries reduce export subsidies by as much as 20 per cent within the first year of the agreement. He clarified that the framework agreement laid down the criteria and principles for the final draft agreement on agriculture that will come into effect after 2005. As for the next WTO ministerial conference, he said it would be held in Hong Kong next year. Commerce Ministry officials, however, said that no more mini-ministerial meetings are likely to be held till December this year, given the fact that elections are under way in several countries, including the United States. Addressing a press conference, Mr. Kamal Nath said the next step would be to ensure that developed

countries cut their huge farm subsidies within a five-year rather than a ten-year time frame.

The Hindu, 4 August 2004

Pakistan poll chief invited to India (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 3. The Chief Election Commissioner has invited his Pakistani counterpart to visit India to exchange experiences as part of proposals exchanged by the two countries today under the rubric of "promotion of friendly exchanges". Delegations led by the Indian and Pakistani Culture Secretaries, Neena Ranjan and Ali Abbas Jalali, met here this morning to exchange proposals in art and culture, education, science and technology, youth affairs and sports, media, tourism, prisoner exchanges, visa regimes and visits to places of religious importance. From the Indian side, officials from the External Affairs, Home, Culture, Education and Information & Broadcasting Ministries were present at the discussions. The Director-General (External Publicity), the Joint Secretary (Interior Ministry), the Joint Secretary (Religious Affairs) and a senior Foreign Ministry official were part of the Pakistani delegation. A Pakistani source told this correspondent that Islamabad wanted an increase in the number of pilgrims coming to places of religious importance and proposed measures to increase the "comfort level" of prisoners in the custody of the two countries. Separately, sources in the External Affairs Ministry said India proposed the increased exchange of a large variety of artists from different fields. The exchange of exhibitions and publications was also proposed.

Indian Express, 4 August 2004

Power-packed punch to Indo-Bhutan ties (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3: This is one power project that is well on course to becoming one of the biggest symbols of Indo-Bhutan cooperation. The Tala Hydroelectric Project in Bhutan involves the construction of one the longest tunnels in

Asia and this difficult task has recently been accomplished giving good reason for both sides to believe that power production should begin within a year. Under construction on River Wangchu in south-central Bhutan, this 1020 MW power project more than half of which is being funded by India is expected to transform the country's economic health. Estimates suggest that Bhutan's annual per capita income would increase from about \$700 to about \$1200. And this shows the significant revenue accruing from this sector to Bhutan's economy. The Chukha project, built on the same river and the first example of Indo-Bhutan cooperation in this sector, is today responsible for 35-40 per cent of Bhutan's revenues. One reason for this is that the country is already surplus in power and so has enough to sell to India its prime buyer. It is expected that a large proportion of the 1020 MW to be generated from Tala will be purchased by India.

Indian Express, 5 August 2004

India, Pak officials talk fishermen release, visa

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 4: India and Pakistan today agreed on working out mechanisms to address issues related to the release of civilian prisoners and fishermen in each other's custody. They also exchanged views on easing the visa regime and facilitating travel of more pilgrims to shrines on both sides. A joint press statement was issued at the end of the two-day official-level talks on promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields. It stated that the two sides discussed ways to broaden the scope of the 1974 bilateral protocol on visits to religious places by increasing the number of pilgrims and shrines to be visited on both sides. The discussions were held in a very cordial and constructive atmosphere, the MEA spokesperson said. Both sides exchanged several proposals for promoting friendly exchanges and cooperation in the field of art, culture, archaeology, education, science and technology, youth affairs and sports, media and tourism. According to the statement, the implementation of the

programmes would be undertaken through mutual coordination. The Indian delegation for the talks was led by Culture Secretary Neena Ranjan, while the Pakistani side was headed by Syed Jalil Abbas, Secretary, Minorities, Tourism, Culture and Youth Affairs.

The Hindu, 6 August 2004

Talks on Siachen begin (Sandeep Dikshit)
NEW DELHI, AUG 5. India and Pakistan today held exploratory discussions on demilitarising the Siachen Glacier and deliberated on the contours of a joint statement that is likely to be released tomorrow. Senior officials termed the meetings today a "mind and body language study mission" by Pakistan following the change in the Government here and felt that "nothing substantial" was likely to emerge from the talks. They said the officials from both sides made it a point to refer to the ceasefire since November 25 last year. The two sides, assisted by naval officials, are scheduled to hold talks over the weekend on the Sir Creek demarcation dispute in the Rann of Kutch. The interaction opened with a meeting between the two Defence Secretaries, Ajay Vikram Singh and Hamid Nawaz Khan. The Pakistani team called on the National Security Adviser, J. N. Dixit, and along with the Indian delegation met the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, to formally apprise him of the discussions.

The Hindu, 6 August 2004

Musharraf denies seeking timeframe (B.Muralidhar Reddy)
ISLAMABAD, AUG. 5. The Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, has denied that at his recent meeting with the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, he had sought a timeframe for finding a final solution to Kashmir issue. In an interview with Dawn, Gen. Musharraf said: "I have not asked them to give any timeframe, but only called for a fast pace." On the reported statement of Mr. Singh that there was no hurry (on Kashmir), the General said "it is a comparative term." The Pakistan Foreign Office had, in a statement, after the meeting

between the two here last month, said the President emphasised the need for a "reasonable timeframe" for resolution of the Kashmir issue. It is not clear if Gen. Musharraf is suggesting that the Foreign Office got it wrong.

Indian Express, 6 August 2004

Indonesia executes Indian drug smuggler (AP,PTI)

JAKARTA, AUGUST 5: A police firing squad today executed an Indian national who had been found guilty of smuggling heroin into Indonesia, authorities said. The execution of Ayodhya Prasad Chaubey in Medan City on Sumatra was the first death sentence carried out in Indonesia since 2001. It came despite pleas for clemency by the Indian Embassy and London-based rights group Amnesty International, who had complained his trial fell short of international standards of fairness. A senior police officer said the execution was carried out at 0200 am local time today. He was given an Islamic burial in the city shortly after the execution, the report said. Ayodhya was arrested along with two Thai nationals in 1994 after airport officials confiscated 12 kg heroin. All three were sentenced to death in 1996. The two Thai nationals remain on death row.

The Hindu, 7 August 2004

India, Pakistan agree to continue talks on Siachen (Sandeep Dikshit)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 6. Talks between India and Pakistan on demilitarising the Siachen Glacier ended here today with military experts of the two sides discussing modalities for disengagement and redeployment of troops and resolving to hold further discussions on the issue. The two Defence Secretaries agreed to "continue their discussions with a view to resolving the Siachen issue in a peaceful manner," said a joint statement following the meeting, the first in six years on ending the 20-year-old conflict. With the talks on resolving the Siachen conflict concluding in the afternoon, the two sides took up the issue of demarcating the boundary in Sir Creek

which divides India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch area. These talks will continue tomorrow, official sources said. Senior officials said, 'it was a good meeting after a long time;' redeployment and disengagement remained the goals of both India and Pakistan. The military experts discussed their present positions and methodology of disengagement. 'We are headed in the right direction.'

The Hindu, 7 August 2004

BDR, BSF agree to defuse border tension
(Haroon Habib)

DHAKA, AUG. 6. Bangladesh and India have agreed to take effective measures to defuse border tension and stop all kinds of cross-border crimes. The consensus came from a four-day annual border conference between the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the Border Security Force (BSF) that ended at the BDR sector headquarters in Comilla on Thursday. BDR sources, as quoted by the media, said other issues such as killing of unarmed Bangladeshis by the BSF, intrusion of Indian citizens into Bangladesh, control over arms and drug smuggling and security issues were discussed at the conference. Building of houses, roads, bridges and erection of barbed wire fences within 150 yards of the border and obstruction by the BSF in transportation of bamboo and other forest resources on common river routes were also discussed. The Deputy Director-General of BDR, Brigadier General Muhammad Ibrahim Khalil, led Bangladesh side, while the BSF Inspector-General, Alexander Daniel, led the 12-member BSF delegation, according to a BDR press release. The next border meet between the two sides is likely to be held in India after three months, sources said.

The Hindu, 7 August 2004

11 Indian stowaways found in Finnish freighter are from Punjab, Haryana
(Hasan Suroor)

LONDON, AUG. 6. Nearly all the 11 illegal Indian immigrants found hidden in a Finnish freighter 10 days ago are from Punjab, Haryana and the neighbouring areas, and

they are reported to have paid hundreds of dollars to travel agents specialising in smuggling people into Europe on forged documents. The names of the 11 stowaways, still being questioned by Finnish authorities, are: Davindra Singh, Harminder Singh, Yashwinder Singh, Kuldip Singh, Pratap Singh, Surjeet Singh, Baljit Singh, Balwant Singh, Ajay Kumar, Raju Kumar and Sarathi Kumar. Erkki Makela, police commissioner, who disclosed the names to The Hindu over phone, was not able to give more details because he said he did not understand English. 'Sorry, not know English.' More than 10 days after the incident, the Indian embassy in Helsinki has no information and appears to have made no attempt to find out. 'These are people arrested for illegal activities... why should we get involved till the Finnish Government informs us? We are waiting for information from them,' an Indian embassy official said.

The Hindu, 8 August 2004

Sir Creek dispute: India, Pakistan for early resolution (Sandeep Dikshit)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 7. India and Pakistan today ended their first talks in six years on the Sir Creek border demarcation dispute with a joint statement that reiterated the need for an early resolution of the issue. The two sides agreed to continue the discussions at a future date. The talks on Sir Creek began on Friday soon after a joint statement on Siachen demilitarisation talks was finalised. The threads were picked up today with both sides presenting their viewpoints. The Surveyor General of India, Prithvish Nag, led the Indian delegation while the Additional Secretary in the Pakistan Ministry of Defence, Ahsan ul Haq Chaudhry, led the other side. Pakistan said the entire Sir Creek, with its eastern bank defined by a 'green line' and represented on a 1914 map belongs to it. However, India says the green line is an indicative line and felt the boundary should be defined by the 'mid-channel' of the Creek as shown on a map dated 1925. Senior sources in the Defence Ministry said reports that this was the last chance for both sides to resolve the

dispute on a bilateral basis were "misplaced."

The Pioneer, 8 August 2004

BSF, BDR to jointly fight militancy

Shillong. The border Security Force has proposed joint-operations with its Bangladeshi counterpart, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) to dismantle militant camps across the international border. The idea was mooted at the bi-annual meeting between the top BSF and BDR officials that concluded on Thursday at Comilla, Bangladesh, after both sides produced a list of militant camps in the neighbourhood and pressed for action. The BSF handed over a list of 195 camps of the Indian rebel groups in Bangladesh to the BDR delegation. The latter flatly denied their presence, and claimed that there were at least 29 camps in India, used by the Bangladeshi anti-national groups.

The Hindu, 9 August 2004

Italy refuses to extradite Quattrocchi (UNI)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 8. Italy has refused to extradite businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi to face trial in India in the Rs. 64 crore Bofors scam, CBI sources said here today. The sources said the Italian Government denied to honour the red corner notice served by the CBI through the Interpol. It is presumed that Quattrocchi after fleeing from Kuala Lumpur was hiding in Italy. The day he won the extradition suit in a lower court in Kuala Lumpur, the accused fled to Europe. An appeal of the Indian Government against the order of the lower court is still pending in the Supreme Court of Malaysia. The accused contested the order of the British Government to freeze his two London bank accounts containing Rs. 21 crore which he allegedly received as commission for the Bofors deal in 1986.

The Hindu, 9 August 2004

India for action against Nepalese cable network (PTI)

KATHMANDU, AUG. 8. India has asked Nepal to take action against a private cable

network here for its suspected links with underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, saying it has "credible information" that the international criminal invested heavily in the company. The Government of India has "credible information" that Dawood, who is accused of masterminding the 1993 bombings in Mumbai, had invested heavily in the Space Time Network, a private cable network and publishing house in Kathmandu, the Indian embassy said in a letter to the Nepalese Foreign Ministry. A Nepalese Foreign Ministry official said the kingdom was investigating the matter.

The Hindu, 11 August 2004

Trade ties: breakthrough unlikely in talks with Pakistan (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 10. There is no hope of any major breakthrough at the two-day talks between India and Pakistan beginning tomorrow for enhancement of economic cooperation. The Union Commerce Secretary, Deepak Chatterjee, is leading the Indian delegation for the talks that would mark the conclusion of the first round of talks on all the eight subjects identified in the composite dialogue format. The interaction could at best help identify the innumerable opportunities for economic cooperation, as Pakistan is not in favour of better economic ties without resolution of Kashmir issue. The proposed gas pipeline from Iran to India running through Pakistan is the only new area Islamabad is interested in now. The project has been hanging fire for several years as India has reservations about the safety of the pipeline. In the bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the SAARC summit in January India had said that it was ready to consider the pipeline if Pakistan reciprocated with the gesture of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) economic status. For political reasons, Pakistan has been reluctant to reciprocate the status unilaterally conferred on it by India in the 90s.

The Pioneer, 11 August 2004

Pervez 'confused' by India's remarks (PTI)

Islamabad. Suggesting that India was giving contradictory signals on resolving the Kashmir issue, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said this had left him "confused". "On one side, I am hopeful, while on the other, Indians are giving negative signals. I am confused," he said in a wide-ranging interview to English daily The News. In talks, he said Indians looked serious in solving the Kashmir problem but in public "they do not speak with the same mind." The President said he told about it to External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh when he called on him recently. Musharraf went on to add: "Then I have my doubts they are playing tricks. I think they are moulding their public opinion gradually. There is a new government in India, and one should give it a chance." Describing Kashmir as a "flashpoint", he said the public in India was for peace and once the issue was resolved "rest will fall in line." He also said that he would be meeting Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in September. "There are some fillers from there (India) and I would meet him, certainly," he said. Both the leaders are expected to be in New York to attend the UN General Assembly.

The Pioneer, 11 August 2004

Indo-Pak talks on terror begin (PTI)

Islamabad. Top Interior Ministry officials of India and Pakistan on Tuesday have begun two-day talks on terrorism and drug trafficking here. A host of issues, including alleged infrastructure of terrorist camps in Pakistan, extradition of hijackers of Indian airlines plane in 1999 and the accused wanted in connection with Bombay blasts will be discussed. An eight-member Indian delegation at the talks is led by Home Secretary Dharendra Singh while the Pakistan team is led by Tariq Mahmood. Singh is accompanied by a delegation of officials from Home and External Affairs Ministry and Narcotics Department. Ahead of the talks, Singh, on his arrival here last night, said that the parleys being held after a gap of six years would focus on measures to be taken to deal with terrorism and trafficking in drugs. He said the dialogue

was for creating goodwill, promoting peace and mutual trust between the two countries. Singh said he had come with an open mind and hoped his visit to Islamabad would lead to progress in efforts to improve relations between India and Pakistan. "We shall take up all the concerned issues when we sit together at the negotiating table," Singh said ahead of the talks. Indian officials have stated that issues like extradition of hijackers of Indian Airlines plane in 1999 as well as the accused in the Bombay blasts and assistance being provided to terrorist groups operating from Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) would figure in the talks.

The Pioneer, 12 August 2004

Pak to free 449 Indian prisoners (PTI)

Islamabad. As a goodwill gesture, Pakistan on Wednesday announced that it would soon release 449 Indian prisoners, a majority of them fishermen who were detained for allegedly entering the country's territorial waters. Pakistan Government as a goodwill gesture would release 41 Indian prisoners languishing in Pakistani jails for visa violations, an announcement over the state-run PTV said. Also 408 fishermen held in Karachi on the charges of illegally entering Pakistani waters for fishing would be released after the completion of the formalities, it said. This meant that Pakistan would be releasing all the Indian fishermen currently in its custody. The announcement came as Indian and Pakistan officials completed the two-day talks on terrorism and drug trafficking. Home secretary Dharendra Singh, who led the Indian delegation at the talks, earlier called on Pakistan Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat.

The Hindu, 12 August 2004

India, Pakistan resolve to combat terrorism (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 11. At the end of the two-day official level talks on terrorism and drug trafficking, India and Pakistan today reaffirmed their determination to combat terrorism and emphasised the need to completely eliminate 'this menace'. A joint

press statement, adopted at the conclusion of parleys on the difficult and sensitive subject as part of the composite dialogue, signalled that both sides are committed to stay on dialogue track. Difficulties on the subject could be gauged from the fact both sides have serious differences on definition of terrorism. The commitment to combat terrorism certainly does not square up with the latest statement of the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, that Kashmir-centric 'jehadi outfits' in Pakistan would have to 'pack up' if Islamabad arrives at a settlement with New Delhi on Kashmir. Behind the closed doors the Indian delegation led by Home Secretary, Dhirendra Singh, conveyed concern over the failure of Pakistan Government to move significantly towards dismantling of terrorist infrastructure as well as infiltration across the Line of Control (LoC), which has seen a spurt in the months of June/July.

The Telegraph, 12 August 2004

Maoists target Indian firm (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, Aug. 11: Maoists have threatened to indefinitely close down nearly two dozen big companies in Nepal, including an Indian one, for allegedly exploiting workers and for promoting the interests of King Gyanendra. Of about 85 Indian joint ventures, only one tobacco manufacturing company "Surya Nepal" is on the hit list. The Nepal king has substantial stakes in this company. The shutdown threat from next Tuesday came recently from a trade union affiliated to the Maoists and appears to be directed more against the king than India. Hotel Soaltee Crown Plaza, Bottlers Nepal, Pashupati Spinning Mills and Sangai Plastic are among the targets. India has urged Nepal to provide security to its companies. Officials said though only one was on the hit list now, several others could be threatened in coming days. Agency reports from Kathmandu quoted Sanjay Verma, first secretary at the Indian embassy, as saying India has sought the help of the Nepalese foreign ministry to protect its companies. "We have taken very

serious note of the Maoist threats to Indian joint venture companies, including Surya Nepal, a tobacco manufacturing company, agencies quoted an Indian embassy official as saying. Sources said India has asked for cover to all its joint ventures to ensure Surya Nepal was not singled out and the impression created that it was trying to protect the king's interests.

The Hindu, 13 August 2004

Talks to boost trade ties with Pakistan end on a tame note (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 12. The two-day talks between India and Pakistan for enhancing economic and commercial cooperation ended on a tame note today with both sides promising to consider the innumerable proposals exchanged during the deliberations. All eyes would now be on the scheduled meeting between the two Foreign Ministers in New Delhi on September 5 and 6. The operative paragraph in the brief joint press statement issued after the dialogue said it all: "Wide ranging proposals were made on various aspects of economic and commercial cooperation. These would be considered further." The Pakistan Commerce Minister, Humayun Akhtar, defined the outcome of the talks when he told the Commerce Secretary, Deepak Chatterjee, that his country could consider reciprocating the Indian gesture of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status only if sustained political dialogue commenced for the resolution of all issues.

The Hindu, 13 August 2004

India, Japan to support each other for U.N. seat (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 12. India and Japan have agreed to support each other's candidature for permanent membership of the United Nations' Security Council, the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, and the visiting Japanese Foreign Minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, said at a joint interaction with the press this evening. With this, as many as three serious contenders for a permanent seat on the Council Brazil, Germany and Japan have agreed to support

India's bid to enter the highest decision-making body of the U.N., in return for reciprocal support from New Delhi. "Japan and India share the understanding that it is of great importance to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of the Security Council, particularly through expanding the membership of the Security Council..." "Japan and India, based on the firmly-shared recognition that both countries are legitimate candidates for the permanent membership of the Security Council in the light of the current realities of the international community, will support each other's candidature, and make utmost efforts and closely work together towards realising the reform of the Security Council," the two Ministers said. An official-level dialogue on U.N. reforms has also been agreed upon, with B.S. Prakash, Joint Secretary (United Nations) in the External Affairs Ministry, travelling to Tokyo for the first meeting on August 23.

The Hindu, 14 August 2004

24 Tamil Nadu fishermen released by Sri Lanka

CHENNAI, AUG. 13. A total of 24 Tamil Nadu fishermen released by the Sri Lankan Navy reached Rameswaram at 5.30 p.m. today. They were apprehended by the island's Navy on August 4. Three of the fishermen belong to Akkaraipettai in Nagapattinam district. An official release issued here tonight said the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, in a letter to the Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, had informed her that 24 fishermen were being repatriated through mid-sea transfer. Ms. Jayalalithaa had written to the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and Mr. Singh on August 10 regarding an incident in which the Sri Lankan Navy opened fire at Indian fishermen belonging to Rameswaram on August 9 resulting in the death of one of them, Ramu, the release said adding that she had also requested the Centre to take immediate action to repatriate 29 fishermen belonging to the State along with their boats. Replying to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam president, M. Karunanidhi's letter

of August 9 regarding the arrest of 25 fishermen, Mr. Singh said the Indian High Commission had taken up the matter with the Sri Lankan Government immediately.

The Hindu, 14 August 2004

India, Japan to identify projects for cooperation

NEW DELHI, AUG. 13. The Japanese Foreign Minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, called on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today and held "warm and cordial" discussions with him. An official release said both sides agreed that there was vast, untapped potential for close bilateral relations. "They agreed to identify major projects on which both sides can cooperate so as to exemplify in a visible manner this vast potential. They underlined the need for stronger Japanese business presence in India." Ms. Kawaguchi also informed the Prime Minister that the two sides had agreed they would extend mutual support to each other for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council. A Japanese statement on Ms. Kawaguchi's visit said separately that India and Japan had agreed to "exchange views and cooperate in the field of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery," which posed an imminent danger to the international community.

The Telegraph, 15 August 2004

Maldives Opposition seeks India intervention (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, Aug. 14: Members of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) seek India's intervention in restoring democracy in the republic where President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom declared a state of emergency late last night. The MDP leaders, who are planning to come to New Delhi to seek India's intervention, said Gayoom should immediately stop the "repression against his people. Diplomatic circles here believe that the decision to impose emergency in the Maldives is a desperate attempt by Gayoom to establish control in the face of rising demands by his opponents to restore democracy. Gayoom has been the

President of Maldives a country with more than 1190 islands since 1978. In the past few days, rising cries for democracy and street demonstrations led Qayoom to declare a state of emergency. During the mid-1980s when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister, India had sent its troops to help Gayoom restore his authority after a coup by sections of the Maldivian army. It is, however, keeping a close watch on the situation in the Maldives. "We have learnt about it. We are naturally concerned. We are watching the developments, the foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna's remarked, giving a clear indication of India's stand.

The Pioneer, 16 August 2004

Putin lauds India's economic, social achievements (PTI)

Moscow. Lauding the "significant success" achieved by the post-independence India in economic, social and cultural spheres, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday. Expressed commitment to further strengthen strategic partnership with New Delhi. "In Russia, we are earnestly happy at the significant success achieved by your country in economic and social spheres, at achievements in culture and science," Putin wrote in his message to President APJ Abdul Kalam on the occasion of the Independence Day. Expressing satisfaction at the relentless expansion of fruitful Indo-Russian cooperation in various fields, Putin underscored that his forthcoming talks with the Indian leaders in New Delhi in December would further strengthen bilateral strategic partnership, Kremlin press office said. In his message to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Putin noted that the sustained character of the bilateral strategic partnership was fruitfully working for the benefit of the people of the two nations. "For ages Russia and India are tied with the bonds of friendship, shared approaches in resolving key international problems and mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields."

The Hindu, 16 August 2004

Peace reigns along International Border (Luv Puri)

SUCHETGARH, AUG. 15. Peace prevailed along the once volatile India-Pakistan International Border today as jawans and civilians celebrated Independence Day without the shadow of fear. There was a mood of festivity throughout the day. For several years, the roar of guns dominated life on the border and the people would mostly remain indoors on Independence Day. But thanks to the November 26, 2003 ceasefire, the exchange of fire has completely stopped, encouraging the people to participate in the celebrations enthusiastically. National flags were seen fluttering in many places and patriotic songs resonated from all over the area.

The Hindu, 16 August 2004

A historic display of bonhomie (Sushanta Talukdar)

BUMLA (INDIA-CHINA BORDER), AUG. 15. As the nation celebrated the 58th Independence Day today, this strategic border post in Arunachal Pradesh, at an altitude of 15,500 feet, in the eastern-most part witnessed a historic event. A delegation of officers and soldiers of the Chinese Army - the People's Liberation Army (PLA) -- accompanied by their family members, crossed over the border to take part in the celebrations. The 46-member delegation, led by Col. Ding Jiang, arrived on the other side of the border around 9.20 a.m. They were received and escorted by a team of Indian Army officers, from the actual border post as the Pipe Band of the 5 Gorkha Regiment played welcome tunes. Then the delegation reached the Bumla Hut 100 yards away, where the flag-hoisting ceremony and other programmes were arranged. As part of the reception arranged by the Indian Army, 21 children waved the Tricolour and the Chinese flag as the delegation walked past them. After they were received by Brig. P.S. Paul, the Chinese and Indian Army officials lined up for the hoisting of the Tricolour with a Chinese flag fluttering nearby.

The Hindu, 16 August 2004

Nepal invites more Indian investments
(UNI)

KATHMANDU, AUG. 15. Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has invited India to invest in his country and help the Himalayan Kingdom in harnessing its natural resources. In a message on India's 58th Independence Day, Mr. Deuba said, "we eagerly look for Indian investment in Nepal in harnessing our natural resources, developing basic infrastructure and strengthening and widening the industrial base." The vast scope for expansion and consolidation of economic and commercial ties between the two countries needs to be fully realised to the mutual benefit, he said. The impressive progress of India in various fields particularly in human resources development, science and technology has been well recognised beyond the region and "We in Nepal highly acclaim these exemplary achievements and wish India to continue with the trend of progress and prosperity," he added.

The Hindu, 17 August 2004

Penetrating the Latin American markets
CHENNAI, AUG. 16. A "new mindset" among the businesses and people of Latin America, brought about by political and economic changes, provides an opportunity for Indian entrepreneurs and exporters to expand their presence there region, according to R. Viswanathan, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. The factors that have prepared the Latin American markets, including prominent ones like Brazil and Argentina, for penetration by India include the democratisation process which has led to a focus on fulfilling the consumption needs of the lower middle class and the poor, in contrast to decades of dictatorship that saw the privileged rich being pampered, he said. Making a presentation at a seminar on business opportunities in Latin American countries (LAC) and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, organised here on Thursday by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Mr. Viswanathan said the profile and competitive pricing of goods

from countries like India would have a greater prospect in the Latin American countries now. The success of Indian pharmaceuticals in the Latin American countries despite resistance by multinationals, exports of Indian automobiles and contracts won by RITES (Rail India Technical Services) had created a positive image about India.

The Hindu, 17 August 2004

India, China discuss police-level cooperation (P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, AUG. 16. India and China today explored the possibilities of bilateral cooperation at the level of the policing agencies in respect of internal security duties. The talks were held in Beijing between top officials of the Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP) and a five-member Indian delegation led by the Joint Secretary (Police), Ministry of Home Affairs, A. K. Jain. The delegation called on the PAP commander, Gen. Wu Shuang Zhan, and also held detailed discussions with the PAP deputy commander, Lt. Gen. Liang Hong, who had visited India earlier this year. The Sino-Indian talks on police-related functions were initiated during Lt. Gen. Liang's visit. Interactions in this sphere have been envisioned under the overall framework of the joint statement on wide-ranging cooperation, which was agreed upon in June 2003, when the then Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, visited Beijing. The present Indian delegation, which arrived in Beijing on Sunday on a weeklong visit, is scheduled to travel to some other parts of China as well. Some of the specific areas of mutual interest are understood to be the security of installations, including those in special economic zones, the security of very important persons, police training as also equipment, besides certain basic aspects of internal security.

The Hindu, 17 August 2004

CBMs linked to progress in talks:
Musharraf (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 16. The Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, has said that

the confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan are linked to "progress" in talks. Participating in the "Aap kay rubaru" programme on the State-run Pakistan Television tonight, Gen. Musharraf gave enough indications that Islamabad was not keen on improvement of relations in various fields without movement on Kashmir. Gen. Musharraf's remarks assume importance, as Foreign Ministers of both the countries are to meet in New Delhi on September 5 and 6 to take stock of the progress made on eight different subjects under the composite dialogue process. In the third/fourth week of September, Gen. Musharraf is expected to meet the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

Indian Express, 17 August 2004

Bangladesh, India border guards issue high alert (PTI)

DHAKA, AUGUST 16: Border guards of Bangladesh and India today issued high alert by hoisting red flags at a point in northwestern part of the country over barbed wire fencing, the official BSS news agency said. The high alert was issued in Birampur border in Dinajpur district after two flag-meetings failed to reduce tension sparked by Border Security Force (BSF) attempts to erect barbed fencing. BSF intensified strength at the frontier prompting Bangladesh officials to caution villagers against violence, BSS said quoting witnesses and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources. BDR officials alleged BSF troops started to erect the fencing in 500 yards area overnight on the zero line near the international pillar number 295 by mobilising equipment and several hundred labourers. This forced the Bangladesh Rifles to register an immediate protest.

The Telegraph, 18 August 2004

Israeli knowhow for Assam

Guwahati, Aug. 17: Assam is planning to procure sophisticated sensors from Israel to detect improvised explosive devices (IEDs), one of which claimed 13 lives in Dhemaji on

Independence Day. A senior official said the proposal to buy the state-of-the-art sensors from Israel was not a new one, but admitted that the blast in Dhemaji had forced the government to give it serious thought. The state police department has no metal detector capable of tracing explosives buried beyond six to eight inches below the soil surface. The IED that caused the explosion at the venue of the official Independence Day function in Dhemaji could not be detected because it had been planted two-and-a-half feet under the ground. Assam has mostly plain, open terrain, which is not suitable for ambushes. Militant groups active in the state, therefore, use blasts more than ambushes to spread terror. Moreover, IEDs create more impact in terms of casualties with less risks for the outfit, a senior police official said. The official said a sophisticated sensor was required to detect explosives concealed in special plastic wrappers. Militant groups are constantly upgrading their arsenal and the police require high-tech gadgets to keep pace with such adversaries. The governor, Lt Gen. (retd) Ajai Singh, supported the proposal to procure sensors from Israel to detect IEDs. The former general-officer-commanding of the army's Tezpur-based 4 Corps said surveillance devices manufactured in Israel were among the best available worldwide.

The Hindu, 18 August 2004

China giving 'most useful' data

NEW DELHI, AUG. 17. India said today that China had been providing "most useful" data to deal with the artificial lake created in Tibet. In an apparent response to reports in a section of the press, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said the Indian Embassy in Beijing had been receiving inputs from the Chinese side on a regular basis. "It may also be noted that the Chinese authorities have stationed a technical team in the close vicinity of the area where the landslides have occurred leading to the formation of the artificial dam and lake. We have been given to understand by the Chinese side that while their personnel have not been able to reach the exact location of

the dam/lake due to continuing landslides and unstable conditions, they are keeping the situation under observation from a distance of about 500 metres and sharing information with us on that basis. We appreciate the cooperation extended by the Chinese Government in this regard," the spokesman added.

The Hindu, 18 August 2004

Pakistan PM may come in October (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 17. The Pakistani Prime Minister in all likelihood Shaukat Aziz is likely to visit India toward the end of October or early November as part of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process. Mr. Aziz, whose election takes place on Wednesday, is expected to be sworn in Prime Minister on August 22. He will replace the Interim Prime Minister, Shujaat Hussain. Mr. Aziz is expected to visit New Delhi and other State capitals to personally hand over invitations to the heads of government for the January 2005 SAARC summit in Dhaka. Though there is a lull in the intense period of contact between the Islamabad and New Delhi, with round one of the "two plus six" dialogue having just been completed, the Foreign Secretaries, Shyam Saran of India and Pakistan's Riaz Khokhar, will meet here on September 4. They are to prepare for the September 5-6 discussions of the External Affairs Ministers, Natwar Singh and Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri.

The Hindu, 19 August 2004

58 Indians arrested in Singapore (P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, AUG. 18. As many as 58 men, all identified as Indian nationals, have been arrested at a work yard here by the city state's Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA). The ICA said in a news release that its officers caught the Indians during an operation that was carried out along the Admiralty Road West at around 2.55 a.m. on Tuesday. The Indians were found staying in some containers. The youngest of those caught was 20-years-old,

while the age of the oldest was put at 49 years. While the city state has a reputation of being a foreigner-friendly destination for job seekers, the ICA, it has been said, "takes a serious view of attempts by foreigners to overstay or enter Singapore illegally." This is not the first time that Indian nationals have been arrested for immigration offences in Singapore, and India's High Commission here is seeking details of the latest case too. Of particular interest to the Indian authorities are the verifiable citizenship of each of those nabbed now and the circumstances in which they might have entered Singapore without valid visas or work permits or might have actually overstayed here, if that be the case.

The Hindu, 19 August 2004

India proposes reciprocal opening of banks to Pakistan (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, AUG. 18. Can India and Pakistan agree to "bank" on each other? It is a million dollar question that does not have easy answers. During the August 11-12 talks between the Commerce Secretaries in Islamabad, India proposed to Pakistan that banks be set up on a reciprocal basis in the two countries. The establishment of direct banking relations, the Indian side believes, could lead to an improvement in the trade relations between the two countries. Pakistan received the banking proposal, along with a series of other measures proposed by India to strengthen trade relations, and said it would respond in due course to the suggestions made by India. When asked if Pakistan had made any proposals on the trade and commerce front during the recent talks, South Block sources replied in the negative. During the discussions, India proposed to Pakistan that trade should be opened through the Wagah-Attari route; it offered the sale of diesel and other petroleum products through a dedicated pipeline and suggested that the two countries form joint ventures as well.

The Hindu, 20 August 2004

India supports Palestine cause (PTI)

DURBAN, AUG. 19. Voicing its full support to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, India today urged the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to look at meaningful ways to mobilise further the international community to lend its support to peace efforts. Addressing the NAM Ministerial Committee on Palestine here, the Minister of State for External Affairs, Rao Inderjit Singh, noted that the Indian support to the Palestinian cause had been a consistent tenet of its foreign policy. At a reception hosted in his honour by India's High Commissioner to South Africa, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, attended by local dignitaries and prominent members of the Indian origin community, Mr. Singh said the city of Durban was a special link in the strong ties that bound the people of the two countries. He recalled that it was here that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi set out on his momentous journey towards becoming the Mahatma.

The Hindu, 21 August 2004

Dhaka likely to request Delhi to ratify 1974 treaty (Haroon Habib)

DHAKA, AUG. 20. Bangladesh is likely to request India to ratify the India-Bangladesh Land Agreement of 1974 for establishing a "legal basis" for a quick resolution to demarcate a 6.5 km stretch of the border. The undemarcated stretch of the 4,096 km-long border with India runs along disputed Muhurirchar in Bangladesh's Feni and India's Tripura. The Foreign Secretary, Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, was quoted by The Daily Star as telling journalists after an inter-ministerial meeting: "The agreement should be ratified and Bangladesh has done it. If it is not ratified there is no legal basis to solve outstanding land disputes." The Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, chaired the meeting on Wednesday which was also attended by the State Minister for Home, Lutfozzaman Babar, the Home Secretary, Omar Farooq, and the BDR Director General, Jahangir Alam Chowdhury. It was part of Dhaka's effort to push through a number of proposals to settle pending border issues with India,

Mr. Khan said. He explained that both sides differed on the interpretation of the treaty, but the process to ratify the agreement could be expedited through dialogue that would help both countries reach middle ground on the issue.

The Hindu, 21 August 2004

India, Nepal launch joint operations (Marcus Dam)

KOLKATA, AUG. 20. Even as the blockade of Kathmandu by Maoist rebels entered the third day today, joint operations by the Nepalese security forces and India's Special Security Bureau [SSB] have begun along Nepal's border with Uttar Pradesh in view of reports of covert links between the Maoists and banned militant outfits in this country. The law and order situation was reviewed at a special meeting of the Cabinet of the Nepal Government, Nepalese diplomatic sources told The Hindu here today. Apart from naxalites, the rebels are also suspected to have links with militant groups such as the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation and the United Liberation Front of Asom, the sources said. The Nepalese Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, is scheduled to visit India on September 8 and underscore the need for more effective intelligence sharing between the two countries during talks with the Indian Government. Taking advantage of the open India-Nepal border, the Maoists are suspected to be acquiring arms from militants in India. There is definite information with the Nepal Government that the rebels have "hide-outs in the bordering Indian States," the sources added. The joint operation by the Nepalese forces and the SSB could soon extend to other parts of the border.

The Pioneer, 22 August 2004

Pak PM plays down rise in infiltration charges by India

Islamabad. Pakistan Prime Minister Shujaat Hussain Saturday rebuffed Indian claims that infiltration along the Line of Control has increased and asked New Delhi to avoid such statements as it was against the spirit of the January 6 joint declaration between the

two countries. "Such statements should be avoided to carry forward the process of negotiations between the two countries," Hussain said, adding Pakistan sincerely wants to establish peace between the two countries. He said such statements was not in the spirit of the January 6 joint declaration between President Pervez Musharraf and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit in Islamabad. Army Chief General N C Vij on Wednesday had said infiltration across the Line of Control has increased sharply, almost double the figures of last year. The outgoing Prime Minister claimed Musharraf has initiated a process of negotiations with India and hoped it would continue with mutual respect and trust between the leaders of the two countries. The leaders of both the countries should avoid giving controversial statements so that the negotiation process could not be disturbed, he said.

The Hindu, 23 August 2004

India has not offered any help to Nepal yet

NEW DELHI, AUG. 22. India feels that it is too early to offer any kind of assistance to the Nepalese Government following the blockade imposed on Kathmandu by Maoist militants in the Himalayan kingdom. "It is not for the first time that the Maoists have imposed a blockade," sources in the Ministry of External Affairs told this correspondent this evening. Information available with New Delhi suggests that the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) is providing security to convoys of vehicles coming into Kathmandu. "Some traffic has started coming into Kathmandu." Supplies are coming into the Nepalese capital and oil supplies are in the hands of a Government-owned company, the sources pointed out. They said that as of now no assistance had been offered by the Government of India to Kathmandu to deal with the situation. As of now, there was no shortage of supplies, the sources pointed out, adding that a close watch was being maintained on the situation. "We have no immediate plans to

offer help to the Nepalese," the sources stated.

The Hindu, 24 August 2004

Hostage crisis: talks gather new momentum (Atul Aneja)

MANAMA, AUG. 23. Talks between the Kuwaiti transport company, whose seven employees have been kidnapped, and a new Iraqi mediator have gathered momentum, raising hopes that the crisis may not prolong indefinitely. "We had very good talks with our Iraqi friends about the hostage issue today and we are very much pleased about its outcome," Rana Abu Zaineh, the spokesperson of the Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL) told The Hindu over telephone. She, however, cautioned that it would be inappropriate to make a definite prediction about the outcome of the talks, as hopes raised about the release of the hostages in the past had been belied. Diplomatic sources confirmed that talks with the new negotiator had acquired prominence since Sunday and were "moving in the right direction." The sources also confirmed that the former Iraqi negotiator, Sheikh Hisham al-Dulaimi, was not leading talks with the KGL. "It would be incorrect to name the new negotiator as the Iraqi mediator had requested that his name be kept anonymous." The hostages were safe and new evidence had been provided to show that they were in good health.

The Hindu, 24 August 2004

India, Japan discuss reform of United Nations (P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, AUG. 23. Official-level talks between India and Japan were held in Tokyo today on the question of reforms in the United Nations. An agreement was reached in New Delhi on August 12 by the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, and the Japanese Foreign Minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi. India and Japan agreed to support each other for permanent membership of the Security Council and work together to bring about reforms in the U.N. system. At the Tokyo meeting, B.S. Prakash, Joint Secretary (United Nations) in

the Ministry of External Affairs, and Tsuneo Nishida, Japan's Deputy Vice-Minister for Foreign Policy, discussed issues on the international agenda, in the specific context of the next annual session of the U.N. General Assembly, besides exchanging ideas on how best the two countries could cooperate on the reform issues.

The Hindu, 24 August 2004

Nepal to seek help of Indian States

KOLKATA, AUG. 23. The Nepal Government, through its diplomatic missions in India, intends to seek greater coordination with the Governments of the bordering Indian States to prevent Maoist rebels from launching attacks from Indian territory. The initiative comes in the wake of the latest threat by the rebels to attack government installations from September 8 in Ilam and Pachathar districts in east Nepal adjoining the India-Nepal border. Incidentally, the Nepalese Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuwa, is scheduled to visit India that day. Speaking to The Hindu here today, Nepalese diplomatic sources said that Ilam district was adjacent to West Bengal's Darjeeling district "and the Nepalese Government would not like to see a recurrence of attacks like the one by Maoist rebels on the thana in the border town of Pashupatinagar from the Indian side of the border in April.

The Hindu, 25 August 2004

Preparations on for Manmohan, Musharraf meet

NEW DELHI, AUG. 24. The Indian and Pakistani Foreign Ministers, who will review the progress in the composite dialogue in New Delhi on September 5-6, will also prepare the ground for the first-ever meeting between the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York next month. Information available here suggests that Dr. Singh will address the U.N. General Assembly on September 23 and Gen. Musharraf on September 21. A source in the

External Affairs Ministry said today that the Foreign Secretaries would meet ahead of the Foreign Ministers for a day on September 4. They would sift some of the ideas that came up during the recently-concluded resumed bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan. All this would then be put to the Foreign Ministers, who would then decide how to take forward the dialogue process.

The Hindu, 25 August 2004

India, U.K. offer help to Bangladesh (Haroon Habib)

DHAKA, AUG. 24. India and the United Kingdom have offered to help Bangladesh in the investigation of the grenade attacks on an Opposition public meeting here on Saturday. With the death of prominent political leader Ivy Rahman, the toll has gone up to 20. Ms. Rahman, wife of the former Minister, Zillur Rahman, was the women's affairs secretary of the Awami League. After a meeting with the Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, on Monday, the Indian High Commissioner, Veena Sikri, told journalists, "We have offered to help in the investigation. We want to work with Bangladesh on this." Mr. Khan also held talks with the U.S. Ambassador, Harry K. Thomas, the British High Commissioner, Anwar Choudhury, and the Pakistani High Commissioner, Manzar Shafiq. Though Mr. Khan did not refuse any offer, he said Dhaka took the attack seriously and would ask for assistance in the investigation, if needed.

The Hindu, 26 August 2004

Kuwait promises efforts to save hostages

NEW DELHI, AUG. 25. Kuwait today assured India that it would make all efforts for the safe return of the three Indian truck drivers being held hostage in Iraq since July 21. "We will not leave any stone unturned for the safe return of Indians held captive in Iraq," the visiting Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Mohammed al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabbah, said here. Speaking after the signing of a landmark agreement between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council, of which Kuwait is now the chairman, he said his Government was working closely with its

friends in Kenya, India and Iraq for the safe return of the hostages. He described as "completely baseless" the allegations that Indian workers coming to Kuwait were forced to work in areas that they did not want to go to. Later, the External Affairs Ministry spokesperson, Navtej Sarna, said the hostage issue came up during talks between the Kuwaiti Minister and the External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh. "Kuwait has assured us that no stone would be left unturned to bring this matter to a positive resolution and to ensure the safe return of not only the Indian hostages but also the other hostages."

The Hindu, 26 August 2004

Centre approves agreement on Asian Highways

NEW DELHI, AUG. 25. The Union Cabinet today gave its ex-post facto approval for acceptance of inter-governmental agreement on Asian Highways, and for becoming a party to the 1,40,000-km network. The agreement on the network was signed at Shanghai, China, in April this year. It would formalise the coordinated development of the Asian Highways to a minimum acceptable standard. This will help the movement of traffic, improvement of trade and tourism among Asian countries. The network extends to 32 countries and is intended to provide connectivity between capitals of member-countries, main industrial and agricultural centres, major sea and river ports, major container terminals and depots and places of major tourist attraction. The Cabinet also gave its approval for an agreement with Nepal for institutionalising the arrangement of vehicular passenger traffic between the two countries. It would help in finalisation of protocol and state-wise schedule by designated bus operators of Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal and Delhi with their Nepalese counterpart operators.

Indian Express, 26 August 2004

India chooses to wait and watch Gayoom's moves (Jyoti Malhotra)

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 25: India will wait and watch how soon Maldivian President Abdul Gayoom pursues a truly democratic reform agenda in his country, the first test of which would be a special session of Parliament or Majlis under secret ballot. Maldivian Health minister Ahmed Abdullah, who is in Delhi as Gayoom's "special envoy" after the imposition of emergency in the island, met External Affairs minister K. Natwar Singh and handed over a letter from Gayoom to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. By all accounts, New Delhi treated Abdullah gently but firmly, pressing him to see that besides the reforms agenda, those arrested after the imposition of emergency, including former SAARC secretary-general Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, should be given "fair and humane treatment" in detention. Gayoom, clearly, seems to have won some sort of reprieve from New Delhi, at least for the now, and goes on to Pakistan from here. New Delhi underplayed its own reaction, its tongue firmly in cheek. "As a nation with strong deep-rooted democratic traditions and values, India is keenly observing the initiatives taken by the Maldives to usher in democratic and constitutional reforms. We support the democratization process and hope that it would be taken to its rightful conclusion," a MEA spokesperson said.

The Hindu, 27 August 2004

Ex-Pondy CM made envoy to Saudi Arabia

NEW DELHI, AUG. 26. Senior Congress leader and former Chief Minister of Pondicherry, M.O.H. Farook, was named as the new Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Mr. Farook will replace Kamaluddin Ahmed, a former Planning Commission member and one-time Congress Minister who switched loyalties to the BJP after losing his seat in 1999 and was sent to Riyadh by the erstwhile Vajpayee Government in May 2003. Mr. Farook was an MP from the Union Territory in the last Lok Sabha but had to give up his seat to the PMK, following the Congress party's decision to go in for an alliance with the DMK-led front in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

The Hindu, 27 August 2004

India takes up 'turban ban' with France
NEW DELHI, AUG. 26. With the French school year due to start in September, India has urged France to reconsider its ban on the display of "religious symbols" by students — including the turban that Sikh pupils in that country, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, wear. According to the Prime Minister's Office, the question of the ban was raised by the National Security Adviser, J.N. Dixit, "at the highest levels of the French Government" during his visit to Paris on August 23-24. According to the PMO, "an assurance was conveyed (to Mr. Dixit) that the matter would be sorted out in a manner responsive to the sensitivities of the Sikh community." In February this year, Dominique de Villepin, the then Foreign Minister of France, gave a similar assurance to the Vajpayee Government during his visit here. However, French officials say it will be difficult to relax the rule mandated by the country's tough "Secularity law" for Sikh students without inviting similar demands from Muslim and Jewish pupils who will be prohibited from wearing the 'hijab' and 'yarmulke' from September onwards.

Indian Express, 28 August 2004

Delhi to take up ULFA with Dhaka
(Bhavna Vij-Aurora)
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 27: With the ULFA raising its pitch of violence in Assam, India is likely to raise the topic of the banned outfit's strong presence in Bangladesh during the Home Secretary-level talks in Dhaka on September 16. Sources said that Home Secretary Dharendra Singh will ask his Bangladeshi counterpart to take action against ULFA leaders, like commander-in-chief Paresh Barua, who are believed to be active in that country. The timer device used in the Dhemaji blast, which claimed 13 lives on Independence Day, has only added to India's worries. Sources said they hope there would be some movement on the issues of infiltration and ULFA presence in Bangladesh during the two-day meeting. Last time, the talks —

scheduled for March 30 — had been postponed as Dhaka was not ready to accommodate New Delhi's requests on the two issues. Singh's Bangladesh trip was finalised today after ULFA engineered a number of blasts in Assam on Thursday, killing six people, including three BSF personnel. A formal agenda would be prepared during a high-level meeting on September 2, and sent to Dhaka, sources said. The Additional Director-General of BSF would accompany the Home Secretary for the trip. Other contentious issues like illegal immigration, gun-running, joint patrolling and border-fencing would also be taken up with Bangladesh, sources said.

The Hindu, 29 August 2004

'India for strengthening ties with all nations'

BANGALORE, AUG. 28. The Minister for External Affairs, K. Natwar Singh, has said that all vital issues concerning India and Pakistan will be discussed on August 5 and 6 in Delhi during the visit of the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Khurshid Mohammed Kasuri. Mr. Singh was speaking at a function organised to name the 4th Main Road at Chamarajpet here after the philanthropist, Bellur R. Shankaranarayan, on Saturday. The Government was committed to strengthening relations with all countries, he said. India's ties with China had been cordial despite differences on the border. The Government was keen on improving and building its bilateral relationship while initiating measures to settle the differences with all countries. In this direction, it was desired to reopen the respective consulates of India and Pakistan in Karachi and Mumbai, he said.

The Hindu, 29 August 2004

India to be sounded on Malacca Straits security (P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, AUG. 28. India is likely to be consulted on security issues concerning the safe passage of ships along the busy Straits of Malacca. This has been indicated by the Singapore Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Security and

Defence, Tony Tan, at a recent press conference here. Responding to a question from The Hindu whether the proposal of the U.S. for a Regional Maritime Security Initiative, in regard to the Straits of Malacca, had at all taken off, Dr. Tan cited India among the countries that Malaysia and Singapore recently agreed upon to cooperate to keep the straits safe for international navigation. He did not specify how New Delhi could cooperate. Malaysia's High Commissioner to Singapore, N. Parameswaran, who responded to a question on the same subject at a separate meeting with the Foreign Correspondents Association here, said his country was "uncomfortable" with the idea of any "foreign presence" for the purpose of security along the Straits of Malacca. He indicated, however, that intelligence-sharing could be a mode of international cooperation in this regard. The strategically located Straits of Malacca and the Singapore Straits are among the economically crucial waterways for international trade and other communications. For several months, nearly two years ago, India had provided naval escort for the passage of "high value American cargo" through the Straits of Malacca, under a specific arrangement that was agreed upon between Washington and New Delhi.

Indian Express, 29 August 2004

EC to help out new democracies

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 28: The EC has got a pat on its back from none other than the United Nations for holding "free and fair" elections. So much so, that the UN has entered into an agreement with the Commission, asking it to help conduct elections in fledgling democracies. The EC would not only provide its expertise but also personnel to these countries. Already, senior EC consultants are working in Afghanistan for their upcoming polls, while former Chief Election Commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh has put in place a blueprint for Bhutan's future Election Commission. Speaking on this "historic and unique" MoU with the United Nations, Chief Election Commissioner T.S.

Krishnamurthy informed that it was signed between Deputy EC Noor Mohammad and the Director, Electoral Assistance Division in the UN, Carina Perelli. "I see it as a beginning of a very important relationship. In the years to come, it will be necessary to conduct elections in a number of countries, as many of them are young democracies," Krishnamurthy said. The arrangement would provide an opportunity to serve several countries through the UN and uphold the cause of democracy, he added. Under the agreement, both the EC and the UN have agreed to promote cooperation on mutually-agreed terms and conditions in priority areas, including promotion of initiatives to strengthen electoral systems and democratic institutions, and providing assistance to electoral authorities in member states and conduct of electoral process on demand. The world body would provide nomination of EC personnel for inclusion into the UN electoral experts' roster and provision of personnel, logistical and technical assistance to the UN electoral observation and monitoring activities.

The Pioneer, 30 August 2004

Chinese, Indian troops hold mountain exercise (Reuters)

Beijing.Chinese and Indian border troops have held their first-ever joint mountaineering exercise as part of a programme to improve understanding along their border. A dozen troops from each country held the exercise in the Tibet region on Saturday at an altitude of nearly 13,600 feet, hiking 3 km in an hour, China's official Xinhua news agency said."The drill was carried out in line with the consensus reached between senior military leaders of the two armies to conduct friendly exchanges for maintaining peace and tranquillity along the border regions," Xinhua quoted an unidentified defence ministry official as saying.The Indian troops returned to Indian territory on Saturday, Xinhua said. It gave no other details.China and India had agreed in March to strengthen ties and exchanges between their armed

forces, which fought a brief border war in 1962.

The Hindu, 31 August 2004

India, Thailand move towards free trade area

NEW DELHI, AUG. 30. India today took the first step towards a free trade area (FTA) with Thailand by concluding a protocol to implement one of the facets of the framework agreement on FTA. The protocol is meant to implement the Early Harvest Scheme (EHS) which provides for fast track elimination of tariffs on common items of export interest for both the countries. The protocol signed here today by the Commerce and Industry Minister, Kamal Nath, and the Thai Commerce Minister, Watana Muangsook, will come into effect from September 1. The early harvest schemes provides for elimination of tariffs in 82 items in three phases over two years. Tariffs would be brought down to 50 per cent on September 1, and by 75 per cent in the subsequent year. By 2006, there will be a duty-free trade regime on 82 items. Later the second phase of FTA implementation will begin with the aim of having a free trade area between India and Thailand by 2010. Under the timetable laid down in the framework agreement, negotiations for FTA in goods have to be concluded by March 2005 and for services and investment by January 2006. The 82 items on which tariffs are to be reduced include gear boxes, television picture tubes, wrist watches, refrigerators, textile spindles, spinning rings, machinery for moulding, pipes, boiler shells, ball bearings, pulleys, signalling equipment and printed circuits. Signing of the protocol marked a historic landmark in bilateral relations between India and Thailand and was also a major step in the country's 'Look East Policy'. He said Thailand became the second country after Sri Lanka with which India would be implementing an FTA in a phased manner.

The Hindu, 31 August 2004

Kasuri expresses concern over Indian statements (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, AUG. 30. Pakistan's former Foreign Minister and Ambassador - at-large Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri has expressed concern over what he calls an "emerging pattern of accusatory statements from high officials" in India against his country prior to the crucial round of talks at the level of Foreign Ministers between the two countries scheduled in New Delhi for September 5 and 6. Talking to The Hindu, Mr. Kasuri, who is expected to be re-inducted as Foreign Minister by the new Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz, on September 1, said that finger-pointing did not augur well for the composite dialogue and reiterated his call for a "rhetoric-restraint regime." Mr. Kasuri was responding to questions on the statement made by the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, on Indian concerns over the rise in cross-border infiltration and Islamabad's approach to the talks scheduled in New Delhi. "Of course I would persist in promoting a healthy and result-oriented dialogue with India on all issues including Jammu and Kashmir. I am going to New Delhi with total confidence. Since the people of India, Pakistan and Kashmir have expressed an overwhelming desire for peace, hopefully the leaders of the two countries would rise to the occasion," Mr. Kasuri said.