

The Telegraph, 1 December 2004

### **Russia arms ties crack**

New Delhi/Moscow, Nov.30. A chill threatens to set in between India and its largest supplier of military hardware, Russia, even as Russian defence minister Sergei Ivanov and Indian defence minister Pranab Mukherjee begin talks that will last through tomorrow. Shortly before leaving Moscow, Ivanov said Delhi's reluctance to sign an agreement on intellectual property rights was making it difficult for Russia to continue with its large military supplies to India. "In our military-technical cooperation, we have come to a stage when, without signing of the agreement on the protection of intellectual property rights, we cannot look ahead," Ivanov said. The minister is in Delhi three days ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit. Talks between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Putin are scheduled for December 3. Indian defence sources said the talks at the official level were on projects that India had either contracted or was negotiating but refused to comment on the Russian insistence on signing an intellectual property rights agreement.

Deccan Chronicle, 1 December 2004

### **PM for a new forum for Asian nations**

On board Prime Minister's Special Plane, Nov. 30: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday favoured exploration of the possibility of setting up of Asian Economic Community for faster progress of the countries in the region. Singh told reporters accompanying him on his return home from a three-day visit to Vientiane where he attended the Asean summit that the establishment of the AEC was one of the proposals he had made there at the summit as well as during his bilateral parleys with his Asean counterparts and other leaders. Any such endeavour on the floating of the community should involve India, Japan, China, Korea and Asean countries, he said. "I have made a proposal to explore the possibility of setting up of an Asian economic community," he said. "AEC will not be a group we want to build on regional and sub-regional edifice," he said.

The Pioneer, 1 December 2004

### **India, Asean sign partnership pact**

Vientiane. Heralding a new era in their relations, India and 10 ASEAN countries on Tuesday signed a historic partnership pact for peace, progress and shared prosperity and pledged to cooperate in fighting international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The 'ASEAN-India partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity' agreement inked by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and leaders of ASEAN countries during their 3rd annual summit here outlines a multi-pronged action plan for boosting trade, investment, tourism, culture, sports and people to people contacts. The leaders agreed to intensify efforts to combat international terrorism and other transnational crimes like drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, particularly of women and children, sea piracy and money laundering. India along with China and other key countries are the dialogue partners of the grouping.

Indian Express, 2 December 2004

### **Delhi yes in principle to IPR pact with Moscow**

New Delhi, Dec.1. New Delhi has agreed in principle to Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov's suggestion that both countries should conclude an intellectual property rights agreement on weapon systems. This will be a step forward in expanding military to military co-operation. On reaching New Delhi today, Ivanov said that an early conclusion of such an agreement would lay the foundation for development of many more hi-tech weapons systems jointly by the two countries. Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, top bureaucrats and the three service chiefs also sought assurances of lifetime support on Defence equipment from the Russians. Mukherjee met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh this evening to brief him ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit on December 3.

Indian Express, 3 December 2004

### **Moscow looks at old ties, new chemistry** (Dadan Upadhyay)

Moscow, Dec.2. When Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sit down for the first-ever regular summit level talks on a range of regional and international issues in New Delhi tomorrow, much attention will be focused on their "personal chemistry". Though the Russian President will face a new PM distinct in mindset, the atmospherics of long-standing traditional friendship will hardly be different as there is a national consensus over the time-tested and strategic relationship between India and Russia. "The new Indian government, in its very first declaration related to foreign policy, reiterated its commitment to further develop cooperation with Russia," said Alexander Yakovenko, spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Hindustan Times, 3 December 2004

### **After Arafat, Israel sees 'balanced' role for India**

New Delhi, Dec.2. With the passing away of its "friend" and Palestinian president Yasser Arafat, Israel sees a "balanced" role for India in resolving the Middle East conflict. "Now that Arafat is no more, there is a constructive and balanced role for India...like other supporters of the Palestine cause...to encourage the new (Palestine) leadership to stick to the roadmap for peace," say Israeli diplomatic sources. Olmert's four-day visit to India from December 6 will be devoted to boosting bilateral trade, which crossed \$1.6 billion in September 2004 and is expected to cross \$2 billion by end of December. India is Israel's second largest Asian trading partner, after China and South Korea.

The Tribune, 3 December 2004

### **India, Israel share concern over terrorism**

New Delhi, Dec.2. The Indo-Israeli Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter Terrorism meeting, which concluded here today,

discussed measures to curb terror financing and denying terrorists the capability to use anti-aircraft missiles. The two countries also held their first round of consultations on disarmament issues parallel to the fourth meeting of the JWG. India was led by Additional Secretary (UN) in the External Affairs Ministry Meera Shankar, while Israel was headed by Deputy Director General for Strategic Affairs in their Foreign Ministry Jeremy Issacharoff, a Ministry of External Affairs press note said. The two sides were of the view that recent resolutions of the UN Security Council, particularly 1373, 1540 and 1566, provided a valuable framework for strengthening cooperation against terrorism in the international arena, the press note said.

The Pioneer, 3 December 2004

#### **No veto, no deal: Natwar**

Making India's stand clear on this crucial issue, External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday that certain reports about a UN study on "high-level panel on threats, challenges and change" in the Security Council were speculative as the official document was yet to be released. Replying to questions on the status of India's efforts to secure a seat in the Security Council, the External Affairs Minister said four countries including India, Japan, Germany and Brazil were making a joint bid. He also said India wanted an African representation in this body. He, however, did not agree with the suggestion of Dr Bimal Jalan (Nominated) that India should accept a seat in the Council without veto and then garner support and said the country would not accept this at all.

Hindustan Times, 4 December 2004

#### **Putin punctures India's UN hopes**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday punctured Indian hopes of Moscow's support to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto powers, reflecting how the five permanent members of the Council zealously guard their exclusive club. "Speaking about the role of veto and other tools present in the UN, we should say that we believe it would be absolutely unacceptable to erode such tools of the UN," he said in response to a question at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh following their annual summit talks. He was asked about the recommendation of the special panel on UN reforms, favouring a two-tier permanent membership of the Security Council - one with veto powers and the other without. Ironically, Putin's response came shortly after Manmohan Singh, in his opening remarks, had appreciated Russia's support for India's claim for a permanent seat in the Security Council.

Deccan Chronicle, 4 December 2004

#### **Russia pushes for India, China triangle**

New Delhi, Dec.3. India, Russia and China are inching towards a "strategic triangle" with a meeting of premiers of the three countries being worked out for next year at Lake Baikal in Russia. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has had detailed discussions in this one week with both Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao who will be visiting India in March next year, and Russian President Vladimir Putin who is here on a three-day visit. Putin had mooted the idea of a strategic triangle that was responded to cautiously by India, and virtually rejected by China at the onset. A second meeting of foreign ministers of the three Asian countries was held at Almaty recently and is now likely to be followed by a meeting at Lake Baikal in the first half of 2005.

Hindustan Times, 4 December 2004

#### **Portugal court paves way for Monica's extradition**

New Delhi, Dec.3. Paving the way for her trial in India, the Supreme Court of Portugal has rejected a petition by underworld don Abu Salem's girlfriend Monica Bedi opposing her extradition to India. The little-known Bollywood actress had filed an appeal before the Portugal Supreme Court after the High Court of that country ordered her extradition to India to face trial in a case of securing a fake passport. CBI sources said her appeal was rejected by the Supreme Court after the Portuguese Prosecutor General, representing the Indian investigating agency, apprised the court that she had completed her sentence in Portugal for illegal entry and that New Delhi had given an assurance that she would not be awarded capital punishment. The Supreme Court of Portugal had earlier dismissed her petition seeking her release after completion of her jail sentence of two years in September this year.

Indian Express, 5 December 2004

#### **Putin clears air, backs India for UNSC veto**

New Delhi, Dec.4. Peeved at what he called a deliberate attempt to dilute the success of his visit, Russian President Vladimir Putin today backed India for full veto power in the enlarged UN Security Council, and found no reason why New Delhi should be relegated to second rung in the international body. Putin explained the considered Russian position in his meetings with Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani and Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee before leaving for Bangalore today. It is learnt that Putin will seek an opportunity to publicly clear the air before he leaves for Moscow on Sunday afternoon as the Russian President felt his remarks had been "misinterpreted". Sources said Putin told his interlocutors that denying India veto powers in the Council would amount to questioning similar powers exercised by the P-5 countries.

The Tribune, 5 December 2004

#### **Putin for biotech, IT pacts with India (Sridhar K. Chari)**

Bangalore, Dec.4. Russian President Vladimir Putin today called for the setting up of joint ventures between Indian and Russian companies and "bolder objectives" in cooperation in electronics, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and IT. Speaking at a dinner meeting organised by the CII and FICCI, he also stressed the continued cooperation in science, space and atomic

energy, and oil and gas. "The tremendous potential that exists has not been tapped in full measure."The Indian industry should also look at Russian expertise in information security, which, he said, had attained "world renown." Science and technology cooperation should progress with the aim of "jointly marketing hi-tech products," he added.

The Tribune, 5 December 2004

**Air-India trial: verdict on Mar 16**

Vancouver, Dec.4.Final arguments in the Air-India bombing trial have concluded with the verdict set to be delivered on March 16 next year, ending one of the most exhaustive and expensive trials in the Canadian history. Ripudaman Singh Malik (57) and Ajaib Singh Bagri (55) are charged with planting bombs that exploded on June 23, 1985, aboard an Air-India plane, which was on its way from Toronto to India via London, killing 329 persons.Both accused deny the charges. British Columbia Supreme Court Justice Ian Josephson announced yesterday that he would deliver the judgement on March 16, 2005.

The Pioneer, 6 December 2004

**CBI team to bring Monica from Portugal**

New Delhi. Following the Supreme Court of Portugal turning down Monica Bedi's plea against extradition, the Central Bureau of Investigation will send a team to complete the formalities to bring her to the country. Underworld don Abu Salem's moll had appealed against the high court verdict calling for her to face trial in India in a case of fake passport against which she had appealed.The CBI will now have to send a team to complete the formalities to clear the procedural hurdles. Bedi is currently in preventive detention after having completed her sentence in Portugal prison for illegally entering the country.

Deccan Chronicle, 6 December 2004

**India, Russia are natural allies, says Putin**

Bangalore, Dec.5. Describing India and Russia as "natural allies" who had enormous potential to grow, President Vladimir Putin wound up his three-day visit to the country after watching an awesome display of home-grown supersonic fighter Tejas and a visit to software major Infosys here. On a business-centric visit to this it hub, Putin spent about an hour at Infosys on the outskirts of Bangalore, telling employees about the need to take Indo-Russian bilateral relations to greater heights and calling for working together on innovative new technologies."We are natural allies and it has potential to grow," the Russian leader, accompanied by a high-powered business team, said, while asserting that India's economic progress would make the world a better place to live in.

The Hindu, 6 December 2004

**India, China may face financial meltdown: Swamy**

Beijing, Dec.5. Asian economic giants, India and China, are likely to face a "financial meltdown" due to fiscal and banking failure respectively, arising out of "political compulsions," the Chairman, Centre for National Renaissance, Subramanian Swamy, said today. "The consequences of the political constraint in India and China, in implementing further necessary economic reforms are serious. Unattended, it may even become catastrophic," Dr. Swamy said at an international conference hosted by Tsinghua University here. "Both India and China are heading toward a possible financial crisis arising out of a fiscal and a banking failure respectively, that although can be rectified by new reforms, will require a major political commitment to adopt," he told the meeting.

Deccan Chronicle, 7 December 2004

**India to aid Iraq poll with cash**

New Delhi, Dec.6. India has decided to contribute funds for the elections in Iraq on Ja-nuary 30. It will also train 30 Iraqi electoral officers here for the polls and has agreed to receive a delegation from the Election Commission of Iraq to acquaint it with the functions, procedures and other modalities of holding elections in the country. The government is of the view that a "hands-off policy" cannot be the basis of Indian policy on Iraq, and that some level of intervention is necessary as the radicalisation of West Asia through Iraq will impact India as well. The parameters of the Parliament resolution, however, are being kept in mind while defining Indian policy for the election in Iraq, which has become a sensitive spot in Congress and Left Front relations.

The Tribune, 7 December 2004

**Indo-German defence ties discussed**

New Delhi, Dec.6.Visiting German State Secretary for Defence Peter Eickenboom and Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee today discussed bilateral defence and security-related issues in talks that are expected to give a much-needed fillip to Indo-German defence cooperation. The two ministers in a one-on-one meeting discussed issues pertaining to regional security, defence and industrial cooperation, and military training with the German defence forces. Dr Eickenboom, who happens to be a highly important official of the German Defence Ministry with the Directorate-General of Armaments under his direct control. Indo-German defence relations had been under a cloud since the late 80s when India purchased HDW submarines from Germany at a cost of nearly € 9 million (present exchange rate).

The Hindu, 8 December 2004

**Israel proposes IT partnership**

Bangalore, Dec.7. The Vice Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, who is in India on a five-day visit, proposed here today a broad collaboration with Karnataka in information technology (IT) and biotechnology. This will boost collaboration between Indian technology companies based in Bangalore and those in Israel. Indian IT services companies, for instance, already do

business with strong product firms in Israel. Mr. Olmert, who is accompanied by Eli Opper, head of Israel's Office of Chief Scientist, said: "We should create a broad framework of agreement for business cooperation between Karnataka and Israel." The Office of the Chief Scientist is an important government policymaking and funding body in the fields of scientific research and technology, with a strong focus on commercialisation of new technologies.

The Hindu, 9 December 2004

**Poll panel can train Iraqis in India: Natwar**

New Delhi, Dec.8. The External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, today categorically stated that the Government had no intention to send anybody from the Election Commission to help in the conduct of polls there. Mr. Singh told the Lok Sabha that New Delhi was prepared to train Iraqi personnel in India. "The Iraqis can send their people for training; we will not send anybody to Iraq," he said.

The Times of India, 10 December 2004

**Dawood aide deported from Dubai**

Mumbai. Yet another Dawood aide was deported from Dubai on Wednesday night. The accused, Omar Bukhari, was involved in a series of offences in Gujarat and has been handed over to the Porbander police. Bukhari was detained in Dubai last week following a red-corner notice issued against him by Interpol. A high-level home ministry team brought him to Mumbai late Wednesday night after which he was taken to Gujarat. Sources said Bukhari faces charges for gun-running, landing of explosives and attack on policemen in Gujarat. A Porbander court had issued a non-bailable warrant against him in 2002 and subsequently, the Interpol issued a red-corner alert notice for him.

The Hindu, 10 December 2004

**Final talks on for economic cooperation pact with Singapore** (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Dec.9. India and Singapore "are now in the final negotiations" for a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA), and the Prime Ministers of the two countries "are looking forward to signing the CECA early next year." Giving this bilateral update, the Singapore Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Security and Defence, Tony Tan, told a distinguished gathering at the 80th anniversary dinner of the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) here on Wednesday that "the potential for win-win cooperation between Singapore and India is very bright."

Hindustan Times, 11 December 2004

**Qaeda, Taliban threat still real: India's UN envoy**

New York, Dec.10. Describing the process of peace and stability in Afghanistan as still being quite fragile, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Nirupam Sen, said that the Taliban and Al Qaeda may have been ousted, but were by no means vanquished. Participating in the annual debate on Afghanistan in the 191-member United Nations General Assembly, Sen said that the upsurge in militant violence in the run-up to the polls and in the period since has revealed that terrorism perpetrated by the Taliban, Al Qaeda and Hizb-e-Islami elements continues to constitute the primary source of insecurity in Afghanistan.

The Hindu, 12 December 2004

**'India-Britain trade will touch \$10 billion this financial year'**

New Delhi, Dec.11. The trade between India and the United Kingdom is expected to grow by 20 per cent this fiscal, thus reaching the \$10-billion mark, Britain's High Commissioner to India, Michael Arthur, said today. Mr. Arthur, who was speaking at a seminar on 'The Changing Pattern of Indo-British Links', organised by the Institute of Marketing and Management, said the coming years were expected to see the trade grow by 20-25 per cent a year. Mr. Arthur said Britain was the second largest foreign investor in India and the third largest source of new foreign direct investment in the country this year. "In the next three to four years FDI from the U.K. to India will grow significantly as we are seeing greater interest in Britain about India."

The Tribune, 12 December 2004

**Bay of Bengal countries tie up to counter terrorism** (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, Dec.11. BIMSTEC member States yesterday decided to enhance information and intelligence sharing regarding terrorism and transnational crime and to take effective steps to deny sanctuary and transit facilities for terrorists. This was decided at the two-day first meeting of the BIMSTEC Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG-CTTC), which concluded here yesterday. BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) member States have witnessed a disturbing growth in terrorist and transnational criminal activities in recent years. The grouping noted that terrorist groups gather strength from networking, taking advantage of porous borders to operate across the countries of the region and hence it was all the more necessary for them to enhance cooperation to combat terrorism and transnational crime.

Hindustan Times, 13 December 2004

**Indian envoy had narrow escape in Colombo blast**

Colombo, Dec.12. Dignitaries, including Indian High Commissioner Nirupama Rao, had a narrow escape in the grenade attack on a concert in Colombo that killed two people and injured 19. "Police cordoned off and combed the Race Course grounds, the venue of the concert, early on Sunday. They found the grenade pin in the stands closest to the stage where Colombo's elite, including Rao, and other VIPs had sat at the sell-out show.

The Tribune, 14 December 2004

**India, Slovak pacts on economy, culture** (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, Dec.13. India and Republic of Slovak today reiterated their commitment to continue to mount a "comprehensive and sustained effort" to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and signed three bilateral agreements to deepen their engagement. The agreements pertaining to economic cooperation, cultural exchange programme and cooperation in small scale industries, were signed by ministers and senior officials of the two sides in the presence of the visiting Slovak President Ivan Gasparovic and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. President Gasparovic and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also had talks and later this evening Dr Gasparovic held talks with President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam.

The Tribune, 15 December 2004

**Natwar to attend Indo-S Korean Joint panel meet today**

Seoul. External Affairs minister K Natwar Singh arrived here on Tuesday to participate in the India-South Korea Joint Commission meeting that is expected to focus on enhancing bilateral economic and trade ties, besides reviewing the international situation, including the North Korean nuclear issue. The third joint commission meeting will also focus on the implementation of follow-up measures to the cooperation projects in various areas such as politics, economy and culture between the two countries, sources here said. The ties between the two countries have strengthened immensely in recent times and South Korea today is the fifth largest investor in India.

The Tribune, 16 December 2004

**PM to make statement in Parliament on foreign policy** (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, Dec.15. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh intends to make a comprehensive statement in Parliament by next week on foreign policy, well placed sources told The Tribune today. The PM's statement is likely to be made on December 22 or 23, the last day of the Winter Session. The Opposition, particularly the NDA, has been pressing the government for clarifications on a host of foreign policy-related issues.

The Hindu, 16 December 2004

**Iran upbeat**

New Delhi, Dec.15. Iran today appeared optimistic on the Iran-India gas pipeline project, given the increasing goodwill between India and Pakistan. According to Iran's Deputy Foreign Economic Affairs Minister Ali Majedi, the pipeline looked closer than ever in view of the better relations between the New Delhi and Islamabad. He, however, conceded that the security concerning the pipeline remained a key issue. Even so, he felt India would lose an opportunity if it maintained that all bilateral issues with Pakistan need to be sorted out before the project is cleared.

The Pioneer, 17 December 2004

**Seoul backs India on economic bloc**

Seoul. South Korea's President Roh Moo-hyun on Thursday welcomed India's idea of forming an economic bloc that comprises East Asian nations and India. He praised the proposal when he met External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh, who is visiting South Korea to promote trade, investment and bilateral ties."President Roh said that he welcomed the basic idea although further discussions are necessary on its system and procedural matters," said deputy presidential spokesman Kim Man-soo. During a trip to New Delhi by Roh in October, the two countries agreed to build two-way trade to \$10 billion by 2008. South Korea is the fifth largest investor in India, pumping in more than \$657 million in 1991-2004.

Times of India, 18 December 2004

**India losing sight of UNSC seat bid** (Chidanand Rajghatta)

Washington, India's quest for a UN Security Council seat with a veto is losing steam amid signs that the permanent five are closing ranks on the veto question. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Thursday joined the list of influential voices who agree the Council should be expanded, but are not inclined to give veto powers to new members. "I don't think anyone disagrees with the need for better representation in the Council. So the question is which option are they are going to adopt at the end of the day," Annan said. Annan was referring to the two options proposed by a blue-ribbon UN panel, both of which speak for a UNSC expansion with a new second-tier of permanent or semi-permanent members, but without the veto that the five original permanent members have.

The Tribune, 19 December 2004

**Natwar meets PM, clarifies stand on N-policy**

New Delhi, Dec.18. External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh today took no chance to clarify his reported remarks on the 1998 Pokhran nuclear tests to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, when he drove straight to the Prime Minister's Race Course Residence, for a 30 minute long meeting. The meeting, however, was officially described as a briefing on the five-days visit of the Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi starting Sunday. Mr Natwar Singh, who returned from South Korea after a three-day visit this morning, had told a South Korean newspaper 'Korea Times' that two Koreas should not be emulating India's example of becoming a nuclear power. Reportedly, Mr Natwar Singh had also sought to blame the previous NDA government for the 1998 nuclear tests and the subsequent problems with Pakistan.

The Tribune, 19 December 2004

**India may accept UNSC seat without veto power**

New Delhi, Dec.18. The government is looking at the possibility of India accepting permanent membership of an enlarged UN

Security Council without veto powers and push for such rights after getting in. New Delhi, which has been pressing its claim for a permanent seat, is not in favour of becoming a semi-permanent member of the Security Council, government sources said today. Though UK, France and Russia, three of the five permanent members of the Security Council, support India's candidature, New Delhi is well aware that getting veto rights may not be an easy task.

The Telegraph, 20 December 2004

**No change in stand on UN Council seat**

New Delhi, Dec.19. India today indicated that there was no change in its stand that it must get the veto power in an expanded United Nations Security Council. "Our stand is very clear. There is no change in it. The External Affairs Minister, Mr Natwar Singh, has already stated India's position on the issue in Parliament," Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran told a television news channel. The Foreign Minister had recently made it clear in Parliament that India would not accept a seat on the Security Council without the veto power. Asked to comment on reports which quoted informed government sources as saying that India would accept a berth in the Security Council without the veto power, Mr Saran wondered where these reports had originated from.

Deccan Chronicle, 20 December 2004

**Malaysia PM on State visit**

New Delhi, Dec.19. Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi arrived here on Sunday on a five-day State visit that is expected to give a big boost to bilateral economic cooperation in diversified areas. He will hold wide-ranging discussions with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday on a host of important bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual concern. Threats posed by terrorism, UN reforms and situation in Iraq are among issues that are expected to figure during the parleys.

Indian Express, 21 December 2004

**BJP elders take Natwar to task on foreign policy**

New Delhi, Dec.20. It was a day of trading charges and scoring points in the Rajya Sabha today as the foreign policy came up for discussion. While it was widely appreciated that the topic made an appearance after years, former Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha led the BJP onslaught against External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh on India's stand on accepting a permanent seat in the UN Security Council without veto power. The BJP also raised the following issues: the fate of the gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan; its policy towards the US, whether India had diluted its stance on cross-border terrorism; and whether it follows a cohesive foreign policy as different ministries were speaking in different voices.

Hindustan Times, 21 December 2004

**Malaysia proposes free trade pact with India**

New Delhi, Dec.20. Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Monday underlined the need for strengthening the Indo-Malaysian trade ties through a free trade agreement (FTA) and asked Indian businessmen to suggest a framework to maximise the gains from such an agreement. Addressing a gathering of Indian and Malaysian businessmen at a meeting organised by FICCI and CII in New Delhi, Badawi said he was keen to know the expectations of the two sides so that mutual aspirations could be reflected in the FTA to make it viable. He assured the Indian business community that all roadblocks in the way of efficient functioning of free trade would be removed.

The Tribune, 21 December 2004

**Turban issue taken up with France**

New Delhi, Dec.20. The government has taken up with France the issue of ban on Sikh turbans in French schools as part of that country's new law. Responding to a special mention by Mr S.S. Ahluwalia and the feelings of the members, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad told the Rajya Sabha today that External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh had taken up the issue with his French counterpart.

Indian Express, 22 December 2004

**No ambiguity in stand on veto rights, says PM**

New Delhi, Dec.21. The Prime Minister today made it clear there was "no ambiguity" in India's stand on a seat in the UN Council with veto rights. Clarifying the issue in Rajya Sabha today, Manmohan Singh said: "There is no ambiguity in our stand. There is no confusion...We do not believe there should be any discrimination in the Security Council (on veto rights)". "At this point, all members have veto power. We are a candidate. This issue may arise in respect of any new permanent member who may be admitted. Our fundamental position remains clear," he said. According to Singh, there could not be two layers of permanent members in the UNSC - one group with the veto right and others without. Pointing out that there was still "no clarity" on the shape of the UNSC reforms, he said it was "premature" for the Government to "pre-judge" the issue at this stage.

The Hindu, 22 December 2004

**India eligible for U.N. Council seat: Badawi (Amit Baruah)**

New Delhi, Dec.21. The Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, described India as a "strategic partner" and a "very eligible candidate" to enter the United Nations Security Council tonight, but stopped short of open support for India's bid for a permanent seat. On the Security Council issue, Mr. Badawi said he had discussed it with the Indian leadership. The Prime Minister said he did not know what would happen with the U.N. Security Council reforms. "We don't know what type of

expansion there will be." At the same time, he stressed that India was a very eligible candidate to join the Security Council, adding that India was "well placed" to be a member. According to Mr. Badawi, a situation of uncertainty persisted as far as Council reforms were concerned.

The Hindu, 22 December 2004

**Lee backs India's inclusion in 'East Asian Community'** (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Dec.21. The former Singapore Prime Minister and elder statesman, Lee Kuan Yew, has suggested that a place be kept for India in the proposed "East Asian Community." Mr. Lee said, "India has something to contribute not only in economics but also in the political and diplomatic fields and even in the security fields." Mr. Lee's support for India acquires importance in the context of the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh's initiative for the creation of an "Asian Economic Community." Dr. Singh had discussed this idea with the leaders of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) at a summit in Vientiane on November 30.

Hindustan Times, 24 December 2004

**Indian delegation makes secret visit to Israel: Report**

Jerusalem, Dec.24. A high-level Indian delegation on Friday completed a secret visit to Israel focused on arms sales and the fight against terror, Haaretz newspaper reported in its online edition. The delegation met Israel's Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz and the director general of his ministry, Amos Yaron, the paper said. Last August, top Israeli military research official UK Atre said that India and Israel were planning to produce together a strategic ballistic missile. After decades of cold relations, India and Israel have established strong military ties, illustrated by New Delhi's purchase of Israel's Phalcon advanced air warning system.

The Hindu, 24 December 2004

**Putin hails successful BrahMos test by India** (Vladimir Radyuhin)

Moscow, Dec.23. Russia sets great value on its warm and trust-based relations with India and will work to upgrade strategic partnership between the two countries, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, said. "We value the traditionally warm and trustworthy relations with India. The political, economic and cultural ties between the two countries are steadily developing," Mr. Putin said after accepting the credentials of the Indian Ambassador, Kanwal Sibal, in the Kremlin on Wednesday. Mr. Sibal, who arrived in Russia in September, is India's 18th envoy to Russia since the two countries opened diplomatic relations in April 1947. Mr. Putin specially stressed the strategic character of Indo-Russian partnership that gained new strength following his visit to India earlier this month.

Indian Express, 25 December 2004

**JWG meets, Israel to try out F-16s against Su-30s** (Shiv Aroor)

New Delhi, Dec.24. India-Israel defence ties are likely to receive a boost with the third joint working group meeting held today in Tel Aviv. Defence Secretary Ajai Vikram Singh led the eight-member Indian side. Israel is understood to be keen on pitting its F-16 fighters against the IAF's Su-30s in a joint exercise next year. Its other proposals include a marketing tie-up for Hindustan Aeronautics-made MiG-21UM trainer jets, the sale of new generation Heron UAVs and joint development of the Barak-II ship defence missile.

The Tribune, 25 December 2004

**Natwar's first bilateral visit to Arab world**

New Delhi, Dec.24. External Affairs Minister embarks on his first bilateral visit to the Arab world tomorrow. During his six-day-long tour (December 25-30), Mr Natwar Singh will be visiting Sultanate of Oman, United Arab Emirates and Kingdom of Bahrain at the invitation of these countries, the Ministry of External Affairs announced today. In Oman, Mr Natwar Singh will hold discussions with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Industry, Oil and Gas and Defence and would also sign extradition treaty and an MoU on audit cooperation. He will lay the foundation stone for Indian Embassy's building in the diplomatic area in Muscat and meet Indian community.

The Hindu, 26 December 2004

**Natwar Singh discusses economy, security in Oman** (Atul Aneja)

Manama, Dec.25. India is set to give a fresh direction to its relationship with key Persian Gulf states, with the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh beginning a six-day visit to Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain today. Mr. Natwar Singh arrived in Muscat last night and held talks today with his counterpart, Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, covering economic, energy and security issues. He also called on Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and delivered a message from the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. During his stay, Mr. Natwar Singh is expected to sign an extradition treaty and hold discussions with the Ministers of Defence, Oil and Gas and Trade and Industry.

Indian Express, 27 December 2004

**Post-car rally, Thailand eyes N-E export mart** (Samudra Gupta Kashyap)

Guwahati, Dec.26. One month after the India-ASEAN Car Rally took ties between India and ASEAN nations one step further, Thailand has become the first country to show keen interest in the North-East, eyeing the export-import potential there. Tharabol Thougruang, a senior official in the Royal Thai Embassy at New Delhi, said here today that the North-East could be a new area for Thai exporters to explore. "While India and Thailand have already signed a long-term free trade agreement that immediately cuts down customs duty by 50 per cent, the North-East can become a favourite destination for

over one million Thais who travel out every year," Thougruang said.

Hindustan Times, 27 December 2004

**Oman supports India's UNSC bid**

Dubai, Dec.26. Oman on Saturday extended support for India's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Oman made its stand clear during visiting Indian External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh's talks with Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the Omani Foreign Minister on Saturday in Muscat, a release from the Indian Embassy in Muscat said. Singh also delivered a message from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Sultan Qaboos. The hour-and-a-half long meeting with the Sultan touched a wide range of bilateral issues, regional and international developments, it said.

Hindustan Times, 29 December 2004

**India will not accept permanent seat without veto power**

Dubai, Dec.28. India will not accept permanent seat in the UN Security Council without the veto power, the External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh said on Tuesday. "Our Prime Minister has already made it clear that any discrimination in the enlarged group of permanent members in the Security Council will not be acceptable," Singh said that India's stand was clear in that regard. The minister said India has had backing from Oman, UAE and Bahrain from the Arab world, adding he will be visiting more countries in the region seeking their support for India's bid for a permanent seat.

The Hindu, 29 December 2004

**UAE backs India's bid for Security Council sea (Atul Aneja)**

Manama, Dec.28. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become the second Gulf nation after Oman to express support for India's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council during the visit to the region by the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh. In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of Mr. Singh's meeting with UAE's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the two Ministers agreed that it was necessary to enlarge the Security Council. UAE's official news agency Wam, quoting from the statement said, "the UAE expressed its support for India in its objective of obtaining permanent membership of such an enlarged Security Council."

The Tribune, 31 December 2004

**UN should balance its priorities: Saran**

New Delhi, Dec.30. Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran today said that the international system was imbalanced and stressed that the UN needs to bring more balance in its priorities in tune with the requirements of the developing countries. At present, the international order is perceived as having become imbalanced and somewhat distorted, Mr Saran pointed in his keynote address on the "Report of the UN Secretary General's high level panel on threats, challenges and change". India, the Foreign Secretary said, felt that the UN was moving more towards playing a regulatory role and on taking punitive action mostly directed against developing countries, which form the largest chunk of members of the world body.

The Pioneer, 31 December 2004

**India to form coordination group with US, Australia, Japan**

New Delhi. India has accepted a proposal to form a coordinating group with Australia, Japan and the United States to effect relief for disasters in different regions in the wake of the tsunami disaster. A tele-conference was held on Thursday morning between foreign secretary Shyam Saran and the US Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman, Australian Permanent Secretary Douglas Chester, Director General of Japanese Economic Cooperation Bureau, SATO. India conveyed that it is willing to join the humanitarian effort. The group of four countries has agreed to work closely with the UN and examine where the relief efforts can best be channelised through the UN.