

The Indian Express, 1 February 2006

Russia, China too want Iran reported, UPA tells Left we need to go with all

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 31: With Russia and China last night joining the other permanent members of the UN Security Council-the United States, Britain and France-to report Iran to the Security Council over its nuclear programme, the UPA government today told the Left parties that India would have to go along with this majority view when the IAEA board meets in Vienna on Thursday. The major powers agreed that the IAEA Board "should report to the Security Council its decision on the steps required of Iran". There is a quiet satisfaction in South Block that an international consensus is finally at hand. The Government is also pleased that its decision last September to vote against Iran has been vindicated by the developments since then.

The Hindu, 1 February 2006

IAF chief meets Rajapakse (V.S. Sambandan)

COLOMBO: Air Chief Marshal S.P. Tyagi on Tuesday met Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse and senior defence officials as part of his three-day official visit to the island-nation. He also met the Chief of the Defence Staff, Daya Sandagiri, and Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse. The Air Chief is scheduled to travel to Anuradhapura and Kandy on Wednesday after which he will leave for New Delhi on February 3. Officials said Air Chief Marshal Tyagi was on a "goodwill visit" to Sri Lanka. Separately, India and Sri Lanka on Tuesday held discussions to further enhance cooperation in fisheries. Among the issues discussed were the humane treatment of straying fishermen and technical cooperation and investment in fisheries.

The Indian Express, 1 February 2006

Kalam in Singapore with science in mind (Vipin Pubby)

SINGAPORE, JANUARY 31 : President and scientist, APJ Abdul Kalam, clearly had science at the top of his agenda as he landed here this evening as part of the three-nation tour of Singapore, the Philippines and South Korea. Addressing mediapersons aboard the special Air India flight, the President made it clear that he would look for technology convergence, ways to develop stem cell research, as well as how to take forward his idea of a world youth satellite and a world knowledge platform. He said he would like to see how these countries were seeking to bridge the digital divide, so as to replicate some of the lessons learned in India. In Singapore, President Kalam will be given a ceremonial reception on Wednesday at the Istana (the Presidential Palace) and will be greeted by Singapore President S R Nathan. He is due to deliver the 27th Singapore lecture at the Department of Raffles Convention Centre and will address students at the National University of Singapore.

The Hindu, 2 February 2006

Kalam to visit Myanmar (Amit Baruah)

SINGAPORE: President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam is all set to visit Myanmar in the second week of March. This will be the highest-level visit from India to Myanmar since Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi travelled to Yangon in December 1987. Interestingly, Mr. Kalam will be making his first visit to a neighbouring country since taking office in July 2002. Clearly, the Government of India has shed its earlier hesitation in the Head of State travelling to Myanmar. Officials had told this correspondent previously that the invitation for the President had been received; but no action had been taken on it.

The Indian Express, 2 February 2006

NSA heads for key Munich conference, Iran on the table (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 1: On the day the IAEA's board of governors takes a call on reporting the Iran nuclear issue to the UN Security Council, National Security Advisor M K Narayanan, India's points person on the Iran issue, will be in Munich where top leaders and officials from all major powers will discuss the latest developments in the matter. The occasion is the annual Munich international security conference (February 3-5) where, reports indicate, an Iranian delegation including Deputy Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Javad Vaeidi is expected to attend. US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and its Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier besides defence ministers from Britain, France and Germany will all be present at Munich.

The Times of India, 2 February 2006

India, Israel discuss Middle East peace, Iran

NEW DELHI: India and Israel on Wednesday discussed the situation in the Middle East following Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections as well as the Iranian nuclear issue. These issues figured in the wide-ranging discussions between Israel's visiting National Security Adviser Maj. Gen. (retired) Giora Eiland and his Indian counterpart M.K. Narayanan. Eiland, who is on a three-day visit to India, also met Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and discussed bilateral issues. Eiland, who is here for a strategic dialogue, will on Thursday call on India's special envoy for the Middle East Chinmaya Gharekhan.

The Indian Express, 2 February 2006

General: India should take brave steps on Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 1: Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has asked India to take "brave decisions" on his self-governance and demilitarisation proposals to resolve the Kashmir issue. In a meeting with British historian Alistair Lamb on Tuesday, he said the two proposals were "bold and well-considered" in the context of a finding a solution to the Kashmir issue which would be acceptable to Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir. Musharraf said India would have to take brave decisions in this regard. Lamb, here on an official invitation, said he had been "enormously encouraged" by the President's ideas, which had rekindled international interest in seeking a settlement of the dispute.

The Hindu, 3 February 2006

Wound caused by 1962 conflict with China has healed: Kalam (Amit Baruah)

SINGAPORE: President Abdul Kalam said here on Thursday that the wound caused by the 1962 conflict between China and India had healed and the two countries were now working together in trade and business. "Our national aim is the coming together of the two Asian powers," the President stressed during a discussion with a group of intellectuals at the Shangri La Hotel. Pointing out that there was a "spiritual connectivity" between India, China and the South-East Asian countries, Mr. Kalam said the challenge was to "trigger" this connectivity. While China had the vision of becoming a "powerful nation," India had a vision of becoming a "developed nation."

The Hindu, 3 February 2006

Saudi King avoids Kashmir issue in Pakistan (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz did not make any reference to Kashmir at a banquet here on Wednesday and confined his comments to the India-Pakistan peace process. Pakistan had been uneasy over the King's statements in a television interview that Islamabad should possibly consider sponsoring the name of New Delhi for an observer status in the Organisation for Islamic Conference (OIC).

The Hindu, 3 February 2006

Asian virtual university grid (P. S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: Dr. Kalam has suggested that India and Singapore "consider" taking the initiative to create an "Asian virtual university grid." Addressing the students of National University of Singapore (NUS) in an interactive session, Dr. Kalam said the universities in India, Singapore and other Asian countries "can have networked research-and-development cooperation based on their core competencies."

The Hindu, 4 February 2006

Versailles court scuppers bid to block asbestos probe (Vaiju Naravane)

PARIS: The French Government's case concerning the decommissioned aircraft carrier, Clemenceau, appears fast unraveling. A Versailles court threw out an urgent petition by the French State seeking to block an independent enquiry into the amount of asbestos on board the ship, now on way to India for dismantling in Gujarat. The Defence Ministry said it would not appeal the court's decision. The court reconfirmed its January 11 decision to set up an independent experts panel, which would "allow an evaluation of the quantity of asbestos remaining on the Clemenceau." It also asked the experts to "determine the amount of asbestos that could have been removed without damaging the ship's navigability." In yet another setback to the Government, the European Commission announced it was enquiring into the legality of sending the Clemenceau to India.

The Hindu, 4 February 2006

India considering Russian anti-missile shield offer (Sandeep Dikshit)

NEW DELHI: Russia is in "advanced" negotiations with India on weapons and equipment worth \$10 billions, head of a high-level Russian delegation Vyatcheslav Dzirkaln said here on Thursday. The proposals being considered by the Indian side include an anti-missile defence shield for the entire country, technology transfer for indigenous production of 1,000 tanks, development and production of medium transport aircraft and conceptual work on a fifth generation fighter aircraft. Russia also proposes to sell submarines and help India develop an aero-engine. The costliest project would be the missile defence shield that entails setting up an air defence system. The equipment offered includes the S-300 missile in different modifications. The stumbling block at the moment was legal questions.

The Hindu, 4 February 2006

Kalam for self-reliance in critical technologies (Amit Baruah)

MANILA: No nation should control what India is doing, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam said as he began a three-day Philippines visit on Friday. Referring to the sanctions imposed after the May 1998 nuclear tests, he said the country must be self-reliant in critical technologies. On Saturday Mr. Kalam will receive a ceremonial welcome and will hold talks with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo on Saturday. He is also scheduled to visit the International Rice Research Institute and address a dinner meeting hosted by the Asia Society.

The Hindu, 5 February 2006

India backs resolution (Siddharth Varadarajan)

NEW DELHI: India was among the 27 members of the 35-strong IAEA Board of Governors which voted in favour of reporting Iran to the U.N. Security Council on Saturday. The five steps the resolution says are required of Iran are: re-establishing the full and sustained suspension of all uranium enrichment activity, including research; reconsidering the construction of a heavy water moderated research reactor; ratifying and implementing the Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement; in the interim, continuing to act in accordance with that protocol; and implementing "transparency measures ... which extend beyond the formal requirements of the Safeguards Agreement and Additional Protocol and would include such access to individuals, documentation, dual-use items, certain military-owned workshops, and research and development as the Agency may request in support of its ongoing investigations." However, official sources told The Hindu that India had worked together with the Non-Aligned Movement group in Vienna to "soften" the resolution by emphasising the continuation of the IAEA oversight despite the referral.

The Hindu, 5 February 2006

India, Philippines to exchange military training expertise

MANILA: New Delhi and Manila signed four agreements on military exchanges, agricultural cooperation, tourism and pharmaceuticals, even as President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam held talks with his Philippines counterpart Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo here on Saturday. With the two countries pursuing a pro-American approach in the region, the defence accord is significant. "India has been supportive of the Philippines Government's pro-poor initiatives to make commonly bought medicines available at reduced prices," said a note on the agreement.

The Indian Express, 6 February 2006

US shifting goalpost on n-deal: Atomic Energy chief (Pallava Bagla)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 5: Placing the Fast Breeder programme in the civilian list, Kakodkar said, "will not be in our strategic interest" both for long-term energy security and for maintaining nuclear-weapons capabilities. For, it would push India "into another import trap," constantly dependent on supplies of imported enriched uranium. The Department of Atomic Energy, he said, was visualizing that "in the long run, the energy that will come out from the nuclear fuel resources available in India (from domestic uranium and thorium mines) should always form the larger share of the nuclear energy programme as compared to the energy that will be generated from imported nuclear fuel."

The Indian Express, 6 February 2006

As India twiddles thumbs, US, Russia unveil nuclear deal (C Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 5: As it continues to dither on a plan to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities, India is in the danger of losing out on a new partnership being launched by the US and Russia to promote an expansive global nuclear industry. The plan aims to provide reliable supply of nuclear fuel to all interested countries as part of a plan to intensify the use of atomic energy around the world. US and Russia plan to take back the spent fuel from the reactors in other countries and reprocess it to produce plutonium which will be put to further use in advanced nuclear power generation reactors such as fast breeders. Until the pact is implemented and the current international rules are modified, India will remain ineligible for any international cooperation, let alone participate in the new joint plan being floated by Russia and US.

The Hindu, 6 February 2006

'Vote will not affect ties with Iran'

LONDON: India's vote in favour of an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution to report Iran's nuclear programme to the United Nation's Security Council will not affect its relations with Teheran, India's Ambassador to the U.N. nuclear watchdog has said. "India's active role in getting the resolution tabled will help in recognising Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy," he told BBC Hindi service on Saturday. Mr. Sharma said India had always felt that the route of confrontation should not be adopted and in the coming six weeks the draft would be seen by the IAEA board and diplomacy would continue.

The Indian Express, 6 February 2006

PM has to take a political call (C Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 5: As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh addresses the concerns of the Department of Atomic Energy on the separation of India's civil and military programmes, it is becoming clear that the final decision will have to be a political rather than a technical one. Clearly, whatever India has to offer on its civilian list has to stand the scrutiny of the US Congress and the international community represented in the Nuclear Suppliers Group which must endorse the changes necessary for international nuclear cooperation with India. Without the nuclear pact being implemented, India would be in no position to import either enriched uranium badly needed by the Tarapur reactors or natural uranium for the indigenously developed reactors.

The Indian Express, 7 February 2006

India, Israel tie up on next-gen Barak missiles (Shiv Aroor)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 6: In an indisputable sign that Indo-Israeli defence ties have matured, the governments of both countries have signed their first-ever joint weapons development contract to design and produce the Barak-II next-generation air defence missiles for warships. After 17 months of complex inter-government negotiations, the deal was concluded on January 27 but kept under wraps for "political reasons", sources said. The Barak-II will be jointly developed by the Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI), the Barak programme's secondary integrator Rafael and by the Hyderabad-based Defence Research & Development Laboratories (DRDL), with the two countries splitting the approximately \$330 million kick-start investment.

The Indian Express, 7 February 2006

Support for AEC on keeping FBT out of nuclear civil list

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 6: Former diplomats, including former Foreign Secretary A P Venkateswaran, feared that the price India would be asked to pay to ensure the US Congressional ratification would be too high, not only in the specific area of its future nuclear programme but also on broader issues of nuclear proliferation and other foreign policy aspects. S K Jain, chairman and managing director of Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Ltd (Bhavini), a new company of the Department of Atomic Energy formed to handle fast breeder reactors, said that by putting the country's completely indigenous fast breeder programme under safeguards amounts to dampening Indian nuclear power programme.

The Indian Express, 7 February 2006

After red flag, DAE chief told: let the PM speak (Shishir Gupta & Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 6: A day after Atomic Energy Commission chairman Anil Kakodkar told The Indian Express that Washington's request for placing specific Indian nuclear facilities in the civilian programme list amounted to changing "the goalpost", the Government communicated to him that it would have been more appropriate had he waited for the Prime Minister to make a statement in Parliament on the Indo-US nuclear deal. This is the first time Kakodkar has raised such concerns. In fact in July, 2002 when the then US Secretary of State Colin Powell was visiting India, Brajesh Mishra, as National Security Advisor, had offered to place at least two indigenous operating nuclear reactors under IAEA safeguards along with power-generating reactors and all reactors that New Delhi purchased from abroad. Kakodkar was AEC chairman then, and in the loop.

The Hindu, 7 February 2006

Let people know about nuclear deal with U.S.: former Ambassadors

NEW DELHI: Eight former Bangalore-based Ambassadors have expressed disquiet over the secrecy surrounding the negotiations with the United States on separation of civilian and military nuclear facilities. They have urged the Government to share with the people "all that they are legitimately entitled to know." The signatories are C.B. Muthamma, who was in Hungary and the Netherlands; N. Krishnan, who was stationed as the former Permanent Representative of India at the United Nations; A.P. Venkateswaran, former Foreign Secretary; A. Madhavan, who was posted in Japan and Germany; Peter Lynn Sinai, who had worked in Austria and was the Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency; C.V. Ranganathan, who represented India in China and France; A.M. Khaleeli, who was based in Iran and Italy, and P.A. Nazareth, who served in Egypt and Mexico.

The Indian Express, 8 February 2006

N-energy: Garman, Saran talks today on what may lie ahead (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7: While India works on its separation plan in an attempt to seal the nuclear deal during US President George W Bush's visit next month, Washington will emphasise the advantages of the deal by rolling out plans for a Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) at the Indo-US energy talks here tomorrow. US Under Secretary for Energy David Garman will make a presentation on this programme when he meets Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran. Also present will be Department of Atomic Energy officials. The key theme of GNEP is to develop fuel recycling facilities in a consortium of countries with advanced nuclear technology. Besides this, Garman will discuss India's possible participation in 'FutureGen', a \$1 billion project to make the world's first zero emission fossil fuel plant.

The Hindu, 8 February 2006

New Delhi, Seoul to conclude economic agreement by 2007 (Amit Baruah)

SEOUL: A joint Ministerial statement committing the two countries to reach what will be India's first-ever CEPA with a member of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was signed in the presence of Presidents A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Roh Moon-hyun on Tuesday. Currently, the India-South Korea trade stands at about \$7 billion, but there is growing interest here in improving the economic relationship. Seven Ministers and 40 delegations from India have visited South Korea in the last four months.

The Indian Express, 8 February 2006

India may lag in civilian nuclear energy race (C Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7: As a new era in international nuclear energy cooperation unfolds, the Department of Atomic Energy might lose valuable opportunities for growth in a globalising civilian nuclear industry. Japanese giant Toshiba has bought one of the world's leading nuclear-reactor maker, Westinghouse, an American company owned by the British BNFL. This purchase would make Toshiba the leading nuclear reactor producer in the world. Having acquired 100 per cent ownership of Westinghouse, Toshiba is already in talks to sell minority stakes to other interested nuclear companies. If India were to be part of the club house, the DAE's entities might well be in a position to acquire such "nuclear equities" around the world. In other developments, Canberra is close to giving permission to Chinese companies to buy uranium mines in Australia and an Australian company is in final talks on a contract for waste management of a nuclear power plant in Taiwan.

The Indian Express, 8 February 2006

Commandos for Indian workers in Afghanistan

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7: A protection force of 100 paramilitary commandos from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) will shortly be deployed in Afghanistan to beef up security for Indians working in the country. The decision to increase the security apparatus in Afghanistan was taken after the murder of Border Roads Organisation (BRO) driver M R Kutty by suspected Taliban guerrillas in November last year while on duty on the Delaram-Zaranj roadway project. The BRO had made a fresh threat assessment in conjunction with the Foreign Ministry and made it clear that more security was an immediate need for the highway to be completed on schedule.

The Hindu, 9 February 2006

France offers to take back toxic waste (Manas Dasgupta)

BHAVNAGAR: France will take back all the toxic material that came out of its decommissioned warship Clemenceau if the Government of India or Supreme Court wanted, French Ambassador Dominique Gerard said here on Wednesday. Mr. Gerard, who visited the yard along with a delegation of the French embassy, said an inventory of the material aboard the ship would be submitted to the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee in New Delhi on Thursday. Mr. Gerard said he had seen the facilities at the yard and was satisfied that a vessel of the size of Clemenceau could be handled and hazardous material disposed of. He also offered to get French labour for the dismantling work.

The Indian Express, 9 February 2006

China: Sino-India relations has witnessed 'remarkable progress' in recent years (Anil K Joseph)

BEIJING, FEBRUARY 8: Observing that Sino-India relations witnessed "remarkable progress" in recent years, China on Wednesday has said it hoped to further enhance the strategic cooperative partnership between the neighbouring Asian giants. "In recent years, under the joint efforts of both sides, Sino-India relations have made remarkable progress," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan said when asked to comment on President A P J Abdul Kalam's recent remarks in Singapore that the "wound" of the 1962 conflict with China had "healed" and India's "national aim" was the coming together of the two Asian powers. Quan also noted that in 2005, during the visit to India by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, the two countries had established a strategic cooperative partnership.

The Indian Express, 10 February 2006

Buddha calls Bush names, US protests (Ananda Majumdar)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9: Ambassador David Mulford has written a protest letter to West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, objecting to his description of Bush as a leader of the "most organised pack of killers". Bhattacharjee, who made the remark a month ago at an election rally in Kolkata's Brigade Parade grounds, wrote a strong letter to the Prime Minister, saying just as no state government could write directly to an envoy, neither could an envoy write directly to a state government. A Democrat-led Congressional delegation last month also mentioned, at one of its official meetings, that such views about a US President would not be acceptable even to the Democrats. The Left even wanted the Government to summon Mulford for writing to the CM. But South Block resisted this, saying that if such a remark had been made against an Indian leader, then New Delhi too would have lost no time in reacting strongly.

The Indian Express, 10 February 2006

India, US slam Nepal municipal poll as 'hollow exercise'

NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 9: While the US slammed the elections in Nepal as a hollow attempt on the part of the King to legitimise power, the pro-government candidates in Nepal continue to sweep the polls. In initial returns for 15 of the 36 cities and towns where polls were held, the pro-government Rastriya Prajatantra Party won 10 mayoralities, the pro-government Nepal Sadbhawana won two and independent candidates won three, the Election Commission said. India today also raised questions over the credibility of the Nepal poll. With no mainstream political party participating, New Delhi felt such an exercise fails to contribute to restoration of

democracy.

The Indian Express, 10 February 2006

India, US sign hydrocarbon agreement

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9: India and the US signed a Memorandum of Arrangement (MoA) for exchange of information and analysis techniques in the hydrocarbon sector here today. The MoA was signed between India's Petroleum and Natural Gas Secretary M S Srinivasan and US Under Secretary of the Department of Petroleum David K Garman. The agreement establishes a mechanism to exchange information in the sector, which will complement the sector's statistics and other information.

The Indian Express, 10 February 2006

Bush gets ready for India, calls meeting of key heads (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9: According to official sources, this is a key meeting as the principals would involve US Vice-President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, US Trade Representative Rob Portman and senior representatives from Defence and Intelligence. The meeting will review ties with India and decide on the broad approach and direction that needs to be followed on important bilateral issues ahead of Bush's visit. Crucial in this context will be the view the principals take on the nuclear deal, going by the progress made so far in talks between Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns.

The Indian Express, 11 February 2006

'Bush is certainly not welcome in India'

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 11: Seven political parties, including CPI, CPI(M) And Samajwadi Party, on Friday decided to oppose the forthcoming visit of US President George W Bush to the country. "He is certainly not welcome in India," a joint statement of CPI, CPI(M), RSP, AIFB, CPI(ML) Liberation, JD(S) and SP said after a decision in this regard was taken at a meeting on Thursday. "We have constituted a broad-based committee against Bush's visit and decided to organise under its banner a massive peoples march and rally to protest against his visit," it said, calling the American leader an "enemy of sovereign nations". The protest would begin on March two from Ramlila Maidan, the statement said.

The Indian Express, 11 February 2006

Hiccups in civilian nuclear pact with the French too (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 10: The prospects of a formal India-France civilian nuclear cooperation agreement have hit a roadblock after New Delhi declined to make any references to the International Atomic Energy Agency or the Nuclear Suppliers Group in the document. Instead, the two countries may sign a document of intent that will not be legally binding. With just over a week to go for French President Jacques Chirac's visit to India, hopes now lie on last-minute reversals as efforts were still underway to somehow finalise a formal agreement. Paris, sources said, is keen to sign a proper agreement that would not only be legally binding, but will also send a clear signal on the terms and conditions under which India is prepared do business in this field. The sense was that such an agreement would help strengthen India's case in the NSG.

The Indian Express, 11 February 2006

India, China step up engagements as Manmohan, Hu Jintao plan visits

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 10: Keeping up the pace after Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to India last year, both countries are looking at another round of high-level visits soon with Chinese President Hu Jintao keen on coming here within the next few months. But before that, Special Representatives on the boundary question are slated to hold their next round of talks in March. It's learnt that Beijing and New Delhi are working on firming up dates for Hu's visit, which could be as early as May. This may be followed up by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visiting China later this year. March will be a busy month for India and China with Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee expected to travel to Beijing for talks on intensifying bilateral exchanges in the military field. India has also proposed to open border trade at Nathu La some time in June.

The Hindu, 12 February 2006

India voices 'deep concern' over snowballing cartoon controversy

NEW DELHI: A statement said India expressed its outrage in October last itself to the Danish government and suggested that apologies be sought and assurances obtained from the newspaper that it will not publish such cartoons in future. The Shahi Imam of Delhi Jama Masjid Maulana Syed Ahmed Bukhari alleged on Friday that the Centre and the Congress had remained silent on the sensitive issue. There have widespread protests on the issue in the past few days in several cities of the country.

The Hindu, 12 February 2006

Burns may visit India ahead of Bush

WASHINGTON: As India and the U.S. race against time to implement the civil nuclear deal, officials indicated here on Saturday that the two countries could hold one more round of talks before President George W. Bush visits New Delhi. Mr. Burns' trip could be in the context of preparations for Mr. Bush's visit, but there are indications that the two sides could discuss the nuclear issue as well. The talks have apparently become difficult because of India's reluctance to accept the U.S. demand that New Delhi put fast breeder reactors in the civilian side.

The Times of India, 13 February 2006

Chirac visit: India rules out N-pact with France

NEW DELHI: France is more than willing to offer India its expertise in nuclear energy, but a formal civil nuclear cooperation pact may not be signed between the two countries when President Jacques Chirac comes here this month. Paris has also clarified that even if the two sides sign a formal pact on civil nuclear cooperation, its implementation will have to wait for the US and the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) to alter their rules for transacting nuclear business in favour of India. "Unlike the US, there is no parliamentary process involved. And in France, people have no problem with nuclear energy. India is very popular and enjoys a good image," he said. Civil nuclear cooperation is clearly high on the agenda and is evident from the composition of Chirac's delegation, which includes French Atomic Energy Commission chairman Alain Bugat and Anne Lauvergeon, CEO of Avera, a leading French manufacturer of nuclear reactors.

The Hindu, 13 February 2006

Warm welcome for Indian cricket fans in Lahore

LAHORE: Pakistanis on Sunday gave a warm welcome to hundreds of Indian fans who had come through the Wagah border to watch Monday's third one-day cricket international to be held at the Gaddafi Stadium here. The visiting Indians, mainly from Punjab, Delhi and Gujarat, trickled in from the morning and had to wait for close to three hours to complete the formalities. On this side of the border, a lot of placard-holding Pakistanis were seen standing to receive the visitors.

The Indian Express, 14 February 2006

India accelerating towards deal with CERN (Reshma Patil)

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 13: India's nuclear scientists are on the verge of entering into a new, intensive collaboration-estimated at five million Swiss francs-with the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), the world's largest particle physics centre near Geneva. It will create a Novel Accelerator Technology Fund-NAT Fund-to give DAE scientists access to CERN and start a specialised course in particle physics technologies for Indian university students, with international faculty and CERN help.

The Times of India, 14 February 2006

Hostility to Mittal may cost Luxembourg pact

NEW DELHI: Steel king L N Mittal's boardroom battle for Arcelor may turn into a fight between India and Luxembourg. Indian government plans to review signing the proposed double taxation avoidance agreement (DTAA) that is currently being negotiated with the Duchy of Luxembourg, in an apparent tit-for-tat response to the latter's hostility towards Mittal's bid for Arcelor. Top sources in the government said the decision to use the proposed agreement as a bargaining lever has been mooted by the commerce and industry ministry, which will soon take up the matter with the finance ministry.

The Indian Express, 16 February 2006

Before India voyage, Chirac orders asbestos ship home

President Jacques Chirac today ordered a decommissioned aircraft carrier laden with toxic materials to return to France after the country's top administrative court suspended its transfer to India for disposal. Chirac's decision was a victory for environmentalists who had assailed the order to send the asbestos-carrying Clemenceau to India, where it was to be broken up in Alang, Gujarat. The fate of the Clemenceau, once a symbol of French naval prowess, has embarrassed the government before Chirac leaves tomorrow on a five-day trip to Thailand and India.

The Hindu, 16 February 2006

India extends visa offer to 250 Pakistani journalists (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

As a special gesture to mark the 18 February inaugural run of the Thar Express, connecting Sindh in Pakistan to Rajasthan, India has decided to extend the facility of visa on arrival to around 250 Pakistani journalists and scores of officials. It is for the first time since Independence that the facility is being provided to any one from Pakistan. The train service, being revived after a gap of 41 years, has evoked overwhelming response from the people of Sindh province. The provincial Government has already forwarded a list of 150 journalists from the province to the Indian High Commission here. The final list is expected to exceed 200 despite the stipulation that only one

journalist per Organisation can board the train.

The Indian Express, 17 February 2006

Delhi values ties with Tehran, but Iran must comply with international obligations

A pragmatic Indian diplomacy that was the message of the Prime Minister, when he talked elaborately in the Lok Sabha about India's decision to vote against Iran at IAEA board meeting at Vienna. However he said, not to annoy the Left, India's plans to have a gas pipeline with Iran is very much on the agenda of the government. In order to clear the air over India's stand on Iran's nuclear programme in Parliament, Prime Minister made a suo motu statement on Friday.

The Hindustan Times, 17 February 2006

'Civil nuclear deal, economic ties with India most important' (Sridhar Krishnaswami)

Observing that US has embarked on a strategic partnership with "rising global power" India, Richard Boucher, the Assistant Secretary of State designate for South Asia on Thursday said a civilian nuclear partnership and opening up of economic cooperation are among the most important areas in Indo-US ties. "We have embarked upon building a global strategic partnership with India. President (George W Bush) will be travelling to India in the coming weeks to continue a strong, forward looking relationship with this rising global power," Boucher said in prepared remarks to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at his confirmation hearing as Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia.

The Hindustan Times, 17 February 2006

President Kalam to visit Myanmar in March

President APJ Abdul Kalam will pay a three-day state visit to Myanmar next month to enhance bilateral ties and economic cooperation. The March 8-10 visit comes on the invitation of Senior General Than Shwe, chairman of the ruling State Peace and Development Council, and will be the first by an Indian president, the external affairs ministry said in a release. Shwe had visited India in October 2004. Kalam's visit signals India's interest in developing a long-term economic partnership with Myanmar as well as commitment to cooperate in infrastructure projects, scientific and technological support and human resource development.

The Indian Express, 18 February 2006

Thar Express reaches Munabao from Jodhpur

The Thar Express train, linking India and Pakistan through Rajasthan, reached Munnabao on Saturday after an overnight journey from Jodhpur. The express train carried over 200 passengers. The train, having seven bogies, reached Munabao Station on Saturday morning after covering a distance of 329 kms without a halt, official sources said. The passengers of the Thar Express, who would board the other train from Pakistan in the afternoon for the second leg of their journey, were being subjected to immigration and customs checks.

The Hindustan Times, 18 February 2006

French toast: IIM-A ties up with Parisian school (Chetan Chauhan)

When French President Jacques Chirac comes to India, IIM-Ahmedabad will be happy to say 'oui'. IIM-A is set to sign an agreement with Paris-based ESSEC Business School for a wide range of collaborations - joint research, exchange of faculty and a double-degree programme. Gainers will be the select IIM-A students who will be selected for the twin-degree programme. "We can pick five students from the IIM for the course. At the end of it, they will have a diploma from IIM-A and a full-time MBA from ESSEC, one of Europe's leading management institutes," an IIM official said.

18 February 2006

PM confident of Iran-India gas pipeline

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is confident a \$7 billion pipeline to carry Iranian gas to India across Pakistan will be built, Oil Minister Murli Deora said on Friday. The project to deliver gas to energy-deficient South Asia has been discussed for more than a decade but progress has been slow because of hostility between India and Pakistan, as well as concerns over Iran's nuclear programme. "The PM said the pipeline is very important for the economic progress of India, Iran and Pakistan and he is confident that the pipeline will come through," Deora told reporters after meeting the prime minister along with his Pakistani counterpart.

The Indian Express, 19 February 2006

Burns back next week to touch up N-deal (Shishir Gupta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 18: Government sources confirmed that Burns will be on a two-day visit to New Delhi from February 23, leaving for Washington on February 25. He will meet National Security Advisor M K Narayanan and hold discussions with Saran's team, which includes Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Anil Kakodkar and

his strategic planner R B Grover. Burns will be preceded by his advisors, who arrive early next week. Official sources confirmed that the future of the contentious fast breeder test reactor (FBTR) will be on the agenda of the talks after Kakodkar went on record to The Indian Express to say that he wanted the experimental reactor to be placed on the military list.

The Hindu, 19 February 2006

Thar Express brings India, Pakistan closer (Mohammed Iqbal)

MUNABAO (RAJASTHAN): Forty-one years after the disruption of the rail link between India and Pakistan on the western border, the much-awaited Thar Express from Pakistan steamed across the desert sands to arrive here on Saturday to a tumultuous welcome by people of India. The revival of the rail link is set to reunite a great many divided families across the borders, besides giving a fillip to the friendly relations emerging between the two countries as part of confidence building measures. An estimated 200 passengers, including 62 members of a delegation of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy and a few journalists, came on the goodwill train's inaugural run.

The Indian Express, 19 February 2006

India will be a major polluter without N-power, says Chirac

BANGKOK: India will become a major polluter unless it can generate electricity using nuclear power, French President Jacques Chirac said on Saturday. "If we don't help India produce electricity using nuclear power we would let develop in India a chimney for greenhouse gases," he said in Bangkok, a day before leaving for a two-day visit to New Delhi. France and India are expected to sign a declaration of intent on the development of nuclear energy for civilian use during Chirac's visit.

The Indian Express, 20 February 2006

Chirac tour begins, will be meeting PM today

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 19: French President Jacques Chirac arrived here today on a three-day visit during which the two countries will sign a declaration on nuclear cooperation, a Defence agreement and some other pacts. On his second visit to India as President, Chirac, who came via Thailand, is accompanied by a high-powered delegation, including Foreign minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, Defence minister Michele Alliot, Finance and Industry minister Thierry Breton and CEOs of 30 companies. Chirac, who will be holding discussions with the Prime Minister tomorrow, said in Bangkok that India needed a helping hand in producing electricity from nuclear power failing which it could become a "chimney for greenhouse gases".

The Indian Express, 20 February 2006

Bush threatening NPT by exempting India, says NYT

WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 19: A day after President George W Bush defended an Indo-US civil nuclear deal and promised to discuss development of a civilian nuclear power industry during his visit in March, a leading daily today said that in trying to give New Delhi a "special exemption", he was threatening the non-proliferation treaty. The New York Times also alleged in the editorial "India, oil and nuclear weapons" that New Delhi had "bowed to American pressure" and voted against Iran at the recent IAEA meeting in Vienna with an eye on the nuclear deal.

The Indian Express, 21 February 2006

India, France ink N-declaration (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20: India and France today stopped short of a formal agreement on civilian nuclear energy cooperation, with the outcome of the Indo-US nuclear deal holding the key to realising this agreement at a later date. The two countries signed a declaration instead, announcing their intent to reach such an agreement in the future. This, however, is on the condition that it will be in line with their respective "international commitments". India will also be looking for support from France in convincing the NSG when the time comes. Paris was keen that an agreement be signed during the visit, underlining Indian commitments and making a better NSG case. Both sides signed nine agreements, including a framework agreement on defence cooperation, including the formation of an armaments procurement group. Meanwhile, Airbus Industrie and Indian Airlines also signed an agreement for purchase of 43 aircraft at a cost of \$2 billion.

The Hindu, 21 February 2006

Walkout over Mulford issue; Congress isolated

NEW DELHI: The Congress found itself isolated in Parliament on Monday as its allies and supporting parties joined hands with the Opposition to demand the recall of American ambassador to India David Mulford for his statements on the Iran vote and letter to West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. However, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance - which echoed the sentiments aired by the Left parties - did not join the walkout. Conceding it was not proper for an Ambassador to write directly to a Chief Minister and that it "violated established procedures", Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Suresh Pachauri assured the Rajya Sabha that the sense of the House would be conveyed to the Prime Minister.

The Indian Express, 21 February 2006

N-deal 90 pc through: Burns

WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 20: Just days ahead of US President George W Bush's visit to India, a senior US administration official has said the US was "90 per cent of the way there" on formally working out a Indo-US civilian nuclear pact. Burns, the pointsman for US administration on the civilian nuclear arrangement signed between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Bush on July 18 last year, is heading to India this week for a round of critical negotiations. Burns also rejected any linkage between the civilian nuclear agreement and India's stand on Iran nuclear enrichment issue.

The Hindu, 22 February 2006

India's ties with Iran as strong as ever: Ahamed

TEHERAN: In the first high-level contact between the two countries since the February 4 International Atomic Energy Agency's vote, Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed met Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad on Tuesday and said bilateral relations could not be "spoiled by anybody." The meeting came two days ahead of a debate in Parliament on India's stand over the Iran nuclear programme. Mr. Ahamed, who was warmly received at the presidential palace in Teheran, told the Iranian leader that India was also looking forward to the implementation of the gas pipeline project involving Iran, India and Pakistan, a view shared by the Iranian President.

The Indian Express, 22 February 2006

N-deal will not affect FBR: Envoy Sen (Lalit K Jha)

WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 21: Setting the stage for the February 24 meeting of the Indo-US joint working group on implementing the nuclear deal, Indian Ambassador to US, Ronen Sen, today made it clear that the fast breeder programme would not be affected by the nuclear agreement with US. Addressing a press conference at the National Press Club on the visit of US President George W Bush to India from March 1, Sen said the thinking that the Indo-US nuclear agreement would end up bolstering India's strategic programme was flawed as enough research was underway in India to keep the programme alive. Sen, who left for India today, said there would be no change in the three-stage nuclear programme of India as was envisaged by Dr Homi Bhabha.

The Indian Express, 22 February 2006

Indo-US naval exercise off Sri Lanka coast (Shiv Aroor)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21: What was planned as a simple passage exercise between aircraft carrier INS Viraat and the American USS Ronald Reagan supercarrier three days ago off Sri Lanka spontaneously became a full-fledged, joint-maritime war game. A detailed operational report on this "surprising level of Indo-US interoperability between the two Navies at short notice" will shortly be given to the Defence Ministry. In the confidential report that will be submitted to the Ministry, the Navy has said, "This bears testimony to growing levels of interoperability between the two Navies and augers well for future exercises." The complexity of the exercise is principally unusual because of the short-notice at which it was organised.

The Indian Express, 23 February 2006

Before his journey, Bush rolls out new India map (C Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 22: Addressing the 50th year of the Asia Society in Washington a week before he arrives in India, Bush underlined five areas of shared interests between India and the United States: These include the war against terrorism, supporting democratic institutions in other countries, promoting economic prosperity through free trade, addressing global challenges of health and environment and developing clean-energy technologies, especially new techniques of nuclear power generation. America's relationship with India and Pakistan, he said, is important "for our economic security..and for our national security." He then went on to define this relationship against the backdrop of India's growth story, its secular, pluralistic democracy, its growing affluence and its young talent. Bush sang a paean to Indian democracy and demanded that Pakistan ensure "open", "free and fair" polls in the general elections slated for 2007, as he emphasised his conviction that democracy is the best antidote to terrorism. Reminding American people that India had a Muslim President and a Sikh Prime Minister, Bush said, "India is a good example of how freedom can help different people live together in peace. And this commitment to secular government and religious pluralism makes India a natural partner for the United States."

The Indian Express, 23 February 2006

After the IAEA vote, first Iran emissary heading for Delhi (Amitav Ranjan)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 22: Last week, Tehran informed External Affairs Ministry that it was sending its Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia & Pacific Affairs Mehdi Safari on February 23 for diplomatic and energy talks. "The LNG deal that is awaiting ratification from the Iranian side is likely to come up as also other issues related to energy sector cooperation," said the meeting notice. After signing a Sale Purchase Agreement last June to export LNG to

India at a price linked to \$31 per barrel crude, the National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC) sent back an Indian team mid-January saying that the price agreed to in that pact was no longer valid.

The Indian Express, 23 February 2006

Biologist Kesavan returns from US consulate without visa (Pallava Bagla)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 22: Yet another Indian scientist has been turned away from the doors of the US Consulate in Chennai without a visa. The latest case is that of top ranking biologist Professor P C Kesavan, working at the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai. Kesavan went for a visa interview yesterday to the Chennai consulate as he had been invited to participate in a conference by the Foundation for Future. Kesavan dubbed it as the "most demeaning and humiliating experience". Swaminathan said that if the US government had framed a new policy of not giving visas to eminent scientists then it should be widely publicized so that "it does not cause embarrassment to the individuals who would then not apply for the same".

The Hindu, 23 February 2006

No recall of Mulford (Vinay Kumar)

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday ruled out recall of the U.S. Ambassador David Mulford for writing a letter to West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Dr. Singh, however, described the envoy's action as "unwarranted" and at variance with diplomatic practice. The Government had taken note of the issue and the action taken so far would suffice, he said. The Prime Minister said the Ministry of External Affairs had conveyed its displeasure and asked the envoy to desist from making such moves.

The Hindu, 24 February 2006

Bush plan demotes India (Siddharth Varadarajan)

NEW DELHI: On the eve of his visit to South Asia, United States President George W. Bush has demoted India from the ranks of "leading countries with advanced nuclear technology" - the phrase used in the July 18, 2005 India-U.S. agreement - to those who merely have a "developing nuclear energy programme." This unilateral reclassification is not a minor issue. For, only countries that have "advanced civilian nuclear energy programmes" will have the right to reprocess spent nuclear fuel under Mr. Bush's proposed 'Global Nuclear Energy Partnership,' of which the India-U.S. deal is "an integral part."

The Indian Express, 24 February 2006

LNG in pipeline, despite vote against Iran

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23: While some tough negotiations were underway in South Block to seal the civilian nuclear energy cooperation agreement with the US, New Delhi was at the same time giving a message to Tehran today that it was committed to the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline. "Both sides", the MEA spokesperson said, "reaffirmed their commitment to the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline" and also hoped for an "early ratification of the LNG deal" that had already been signed. This comes right after US President George W Bush told Pakistani journalists, in response to a query on the pipeline, that he would like to see a unified message go out from India, US and Pakistan to Iran that it must comply to non-proliferation commitments.

The Hindustan Times, 24 February 2006

Indian scientists' visa denial sparks outrage in US

WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 23: Embarrassed over denial of visa to a top Indian scientist to travel to the US, the American scientific community has thrown its weight behind the applicant. It said this leaves a terrible impression about the country, just ahead of President George W Bush's India visit. The denial of visa to Goverdhan Mehta, former head of Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore, has set off a major diplomatic flap in the US, a media report said on Thursday. Besides Mehta, P Rodrigues, former chief of Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Institute, and leading agro-scientist PC Kesavan of MS Swaminathan Research Institute in Chennai have also been denied a visa.

The Hindu, 24 February 2006

Differences remain on nuclear deal implementation: Burns (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: Visiting U.S. Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns on Thursday said that differences with India on implementing the July 18, 2005 civil nuclear deal remained to be sorted out. He described his exchanges with the Foreign Secretary as "good." The fast-breeder programme, the bedrock of India's strategic weapons programme, is the bone of contention between the two sides. On its part, the External Affairs Ministry only said there had been an informal exchange of views on the civil nuclear deal. Separately, M.K. Rasgotra, Convenor of the National Security Council Advisory Board, said the problem in implementing the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal was that Washington was shifting the goalposts.

The Indian Express, 25 February 2006

Sleepless on Friday night, India and US try closing n-deal (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 24: India and the US today significantly narrowed down their differences over the nuclear deal, including the one the number of nuclear reactors to be put on the civilian list. So close have the two sides reached on clinching the issue that Washington's chief negotiator, Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, is not ruling out postponing his departure tomorrow if the need arises. However, he added: "I think President Bush and Prime Minister Singh have really given a clear signal. They both want this agreement done. So, it is the job of people like myself and Ambassador Mulford to get that job done from the American side."

The Indian Express, 25 February 2006

Finally, top scientist Goverdhan gets US visa (Pallava Bagla)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 24: Professor Goverdhan Mehta, former director of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore has finally been granted an entry visa to the US. Speaking to The Indian Express today, Mehta said: "Thank you, but no thank you. I have already cancelled my tickets and have no intention of going to the US. I am not allergic to the US and would be willing to go at a later date if there is a plan that comes up." Mehta said that he graciously accepted the apology extended to him by Ambassador David C. Mulford, and urged him to ensure that "the visa issuance system gets reformed so that it does not offend the applicants". Another scientist, Placid Rodriguez, former director of the Indira Gandhi Center of Atomic Research (IGCAR), Kalpakkam, who was also recently turned away without a visa, was issued an entry visa today.

The Indian Express, 25 February 2006

Nepal shelves plan to recall India envoy (Yubaraj Ghimire)

KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 24: Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs move to recall its ambassador in New Delhi was dropped for fear that India may refuse to accept the new envoy. Karnadhoj Adhikary was appointed Nepal's ambassador to India nearly two and a half years ago under King Gyanendra's instruction. But sources said that the Ministry of late blamed Adhikary for the government's souring relationship with Delhi.

The Indian Express, 26 February 2006

N-deal: Now it's over to Singh, Bush (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25: In a carefully crafted diplomatic effort, US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns successfully bridged much of the gap in implementing the July 18 Indo-US nuclear deal leaving the last blank for President George W Bush to fill. India has made it clear that it was difficult for it to match Washington's expectations given the nature of its nuclear programme. The US, which started from a position that India should put all reactors producing energy on the civilian list, first brought it down to 90 per cent and at the last round of talks made a further reduction. India, for its part, is said to have pegged its final offer at 70-75 per cent of its total production capacity. The PM, who will be making a statement in Parliament on Monday, is expected to spell out the broad parameters of India's separation plan.

The Hindu, 26 February 2006

Bush: working on Kashmir (B Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: U.S. President George W. Bush has said that he had begun to "play a role" in the resolution of the Kashmir issue with his speech to the Asia Society two days ago. He said he would use his trip to the subcontinent to urge the leadership of India and Pakistan to resolve it. Mr. Bush also said without elaborating that sometimes there was a temptation for countries to try to jump in the middle of a dialogue. He maintained that a lasting solution to Kashmir could be found. He saw the progress that had been made in the relationship from the time he first became President.

The Indian Express, 27 February 2006

Mission moon: Indo-US deal to land with Bush (Pallava Bagla)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 26: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has confirmed that the US will be cooperating with India in its maiden mission to the moon, the Chandrayaan I to be launched in 2008. India had offered to fly free of cost a few kilograms of scientific instruments from international collaborators. The US MiniSar was one of those selected and later another US payload, the moon mineralogy mapper, was included as part of the mission. Both countries, however, are still working hard on an acceptable text for the highly complex umbrella agreements called Technology Safeguards Agreement (TSA) and the Technology Assistance Agreement (TAA) that would allow India to commercially fly US satellites using Indian rockets.

The Hindu, 27 February 2006

India, U.S. to seal many deals (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: India and the United States will sign more than a dozen agreements during the March 1-4 State visit of U.S. President George W. Bush to New Delhi, senior officials handling the trip told The Hindu on Sunday. Mr. Bush, who arrives in the capital on March 1, will hold talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on March 2 at the Hyderabad House. The President has a public address slotted at the Purana Qila the same evening. He will travel to Hyderabad on March 3 for a visit to the Indian School of Business and an agricultural university.

Interestingly, while American officials have had no hesitation in briefing the press about the Bush visit, the External Affairs Ministry has maintained total silence on what has been billed as a "historic" trip.

The Indian Express, 27 February 2006

India embarks on naval exercises with Singapore

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 26: It's a busy time for military diplomacy in the Indian Ocean. After a short-notice exercise with the United States Navy on February 16, the Navy has begun its thirteenth maritime bilateral exercise with the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN). The ten-day Simbex 2006 exercise is being held for the first time on the eastern seaboard-all previous exercises have been held off Kochi, except the last in the South China Sea in March last. The sea phase of the exercise will include surface firings, anti-air engagements, anti-submarine warfare and maritime patrol aircraft operations.

The Indian Express, 28 February 2006

'Safeguards for 65% n-power, talks on' (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27: Underscoring the fact that the India-US nuclear deal would help meet its energy needs to power a 10% growth rate, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today told Parliament that India would put "roughly 65 per cent of its total installed thermal nuclear power capacity under safeguards." Making it clear that flexibility in the strategic programme would be retained, Singh said that the Fast Breeder would be kept out of safeguards. This is the first time that Singh has put a figure to the separation plan as envisaged in the July 18 understanding. And although this doesn't close the gap for the deal to go through, Singh clearly left room for ongoing negotiations by not spelling out the fate of future indigenous reactors under construction. Hours after his statement, sources said, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke to the Prime Minister.

The Indian Express, 28 February 2006

After 17 yrs, US set to let Indian mangoes enter supermarkets (Sonu Jain)

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27: The separation of nuclear reactors may take its time but after 17 years of sheer perseverance from India, Washington has decided to open its markets to Indian mangoes. If all goes well, Indian mangoes will land in US markets in the next 18 months. Preventing Indian mangoes from entering US supermarkets was the strict Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) conditions imposed by the US. Pests like pulp weevil and fruit fly are alien to US conditions. Doors opened just a crack when a mechanism was set up following the PM's US visit-the US-India Trade Policy Forum, a group headed by India's Commerce Minister and US Trade Representative Rob Portman. Several meetings later, the clincher was irradiation, the method to be now adopted to make mangoes pest-free.

The Hindu, 28 February 2006

Campaign against Bush visit gains momentum

NEW DELHI: "We emphatically oppose the forthcoming visit... President Bush is the topmost official of U.S. imperialism, leading enemy of the sovereignty of nations and the peoples of the world today. He is the leader of the imperialist quest at neo-colonial world domination. He is certainly not welcome in India..." the Committee consisting of the Left, the Samajwadi Party, the Janata Dal (Secular) and the Indian Justice Party said in a joint statement. The campaign also gained ground with five other organisations, including the SUCI and the CPI (ML) and the CPI (ML-New Proletarian), announcing a separate protest rally to coincide with the visit. The Committee decided to organise a massive people's march and a rally to protest Mr. Bush's visit on March 2 from Ramlila Maidan, the leaders announced at a press conference here.