

The Pioneer, 2 January 2005

India mulls invite to special ASEAN summit on tragedy

New Delhi. India is actively considering the invitation to attend the special summit of the ASEAN to be held on January 6 in Jakarta to discuss the tsunami disaster. The invitation was extended to the External Affairs Minister by Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Hassan Wirjuda when he called him on Friday. External Affairs Ministry spokesman, Navtej Sarna, told reporters that the invitation for the summit was for the Prime minister and was under active consideration of the Government.

Times of India, 2 January 2005

Navy launches Operation Gambhir in Indonesia

As part of the "Operation Gambhir", two Indian Navy ships that began sailing on Saturday will reach the Indonesian shores on Tuesday, according to Vice-Admiral Raman Puri, who is heading the unified defence relief operations. Admiral Puri said the quantum of assistance would depend upon the requirement conveyed to the joint control room of ministries of defence and home. Giving details of other overseas relief operations, Admiral Puri said "Operation Rainbow" is being carried on in Sri Lanka where Indian armed forces' five MI-8 and one MI-17 helicopters have gone operational. "Operation Castor" was also underway in the Maldives where India has despatched two Avros besides conducting several sorties as the need may be, Puri said.

The Hindu, 2 January 2005

Efforts on to set up another Antarctica station (Anil Sastry)

Vasco Da Gama (Goa), Jan.1. The Department of Ocean Development and the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR), Goa, plans to establish the third state-of-the-art habitat in the Antarctica. The 23rd Indian Scientific Expedition (2003-04) has identified a suitable location for it. Dr. Rajan said the team identified a tentative location on an as-yet unnamed promontory in the Larsemann Hills, about 600 km from Maitri.

Hindustan Times, 3 January 2005

In tsunami's wake, India makes diplomatic advance

New Delhi, Jan.2. Within hours of the tsunami, India geared up for its biggest-ever relief operation, but not just with its own devastated coasts in its sights. As New Delhi launched a relief effort along the eastern coast, ten warships - backed by helicopters and transport aircraft and loaded with relief supplies - also headed for Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Maldives, three neighbours badly hit in one of world's worst natural disasters. A country campaigning for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, India refused to portray itself as a helpless victim. "India has been trying to convey the image that it is a regional power, and a credible power in terms of having the ability to step in when required," said Uday Bhaskar of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis.

The Hindu, 4 January 2004

Natwar leaving for Jakarta today

New Delhi, Jan.3. The External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, will leave for Jakarta tomorrow evening to attend the January 6 summit meeting convened by the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to discuss the post-tsunami scenario. Mr. Singh, who was previously scheduled to visit Sri Lanka after the summit, will now meet the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, in Jakarta itself. Several other leaders from key countries are expected to attend the summit meeting. Mr. Singh is also expected to meet a representative from the Maldives, which also was hit by the tsunami.

The Tribune, 5 January 2005

200 Indians being deported from Iran

Dubai, Jan.4. About 200 illegal immigrants from India, allegedly pushed into Iran by Turkish security personnel, were being sent back to India in batches after getting temporary shelter in a Tehran gurdwara. "There are some 70 more persons staying at the gurdwara and they are being sent back in batches of 10," Indian Ambassador to Tehran, K. C. Singh, said. He said potential job seekers to Greece, mostly from Punjab, came to Jordan and Lebanon as it was easy to get visit visa to those countries. They tried to go to Greece through Turkey where they were caught and allegedly subjected to maltreatment by security personnel, before being pushed into Iran, he added.

The Hindu, 6 January 2005

India to offer expertise to tsunami-hit countries (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Jakarta, Jan.5. India is likely to offer the tsunami-affected countries help based on the skills that have been acquired on the "frontline" of managing natural disasters. The External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, indicated on the eve of the conference that the gesture would be made at the one-day extraordinary multilateral summit to be held here tomorrow to address the tsunami crisis in the Indian Ocean region. Mr. Singh will represent India at the meeting which will be attended by the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, leaders from the United States and others in the "core group," besides China, Japan, and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which took the initiative for the conference.

The Telegraph, 7 January 2005

India role in London's Marshall plan (Amit Roy)

London, Jan. 6. Barely has President George W. Bush practically buried his that Gordon Brown, Britain's powerful chancellor of the exchequer (finance minister), is creating another core group in all but name - this time to help with long-term reconstruction of the tsunami-affected countries. Since India has rejected offers of aid from the West, it is not clear whether it will benefit from

Brown's resolve to reschedule debt servicing. The chancellor is unfolding a grand vision - today, in a major speech, he laid out his vision for a new Marshall plan for South Asia along the lines of the scheme under which America helped with the rebuilding of a war-ravaged Europe. It seems that if such a core group takes concrete shape, both India and China, increasingly seen as big boys, will be included.

The Telegraph, 7 January 2005

India willing, Japan happy to help

New Delhi, Jan.6. Japan has offered to transfer technology for establishing a tsunami early warning centre and to share with Delhi its experience of dealing with such disasters. It has also expressed willingness to step up concessional loan assistance to India if the Centre makes such a request. Japanese ambassador Yasukuni Enoki said he has had preliminary discussions with the Prime Minister's Office and that India has expressed interest in the proposal. More discussions are needed with officials in the home ministry and other departments before the proposal can be put in motion, he added.

Deccan Chronicle, 7 January 2005

Israeli arms firm gets \$11.6m deal

Jerusalem, Jan.6. Israel Military Industries has signed a deal with India for joint manufacture of advanced 125-mm tank shells. The deal, worth approximately \$11.6 million, is part of an agreement signed between IMI and Indian defence industries and a follow-up order is likely later this year, a company release said. The deal was signed during a recent visit of a delegation from the Indian ordnance factories to Israel, defence sources said. "The IMI management regards India as a strategic partner and therefore has a permanent representation there," it said. The Israeli company will be setting up five chemical plants to develop explosives in Bihar.

The Hindu, 8 January 2005

India offers financial aid to Indonesia (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Jakarta, Jan.7. India today proposed extending "concessional lines of credit" to Indonesia for the "reconstruction of roads, buildings and harbours" in Aceh province, which was ravaged by the tsunami 12 days ago. The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, extended the offer to the Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, during their meeting here on Friday. Should Indonesia accept this offer, New Delhi's assistance to this country will go beyond the emergency help now being rendered by two naval ships. Indonesia has registered the highest toll of nearly 1,00,000 in the natural disaster and the number of internally displaced persons has been placed at 6,00,000.

Times of India, 8 January 2005

India open to overseas aid: FM

Mumbai. Jan.7. The Centre on Friday said it was open to overseas financial assistance for rehabilitation programmes in tsunami-affected areas in the country. "Primarily India has refused overseas financial assistance for relief operations in tsunami-affected areas," Finance Minister P Chidambaram said addressing delegates at Third Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas function in Mumbai. "It is not true that India has taken an isolated stand on receiving foreign aid," he added. India in the long term would be open to overseas financial assistance for rehabilitation programme which would include designing lost structures, rebuilding infrastructure and cleaning coastal areas, Chidambaram said. The country was capable of meeting the challenge of immediate relief operations without overseas financial assistance.

Indian Express, 8 January 2005

Oil diplomacy pays off, India signs mega LNG import deal with Iran

New Delhi, Jan.7. In a major breakthrough in the hydrocarbons sector, India today entered into an agreement with Iran to import 7.5 million tonnes per annum of liquefied natural gas (LNG), starting 2009, over a period of 25 years. In turn, Iran will give Indian firms developmental rights in two producing oil fields -Yadavaran and Jufeyr. The two countries broke the year-long deadlock on the issue of LNG pricing a day after the roundtable talks of principle Asian buyers and sellers, termed as 'mini-OPEC'. Iran had wanted to peg the LNG price to the Brent crude price, while India sought a fixed price contract. Finally, it was agreed that while Iran will sell the LNG to India at a price linked to Brent crude, there will be a ceiling.

Times of India, 9 January 2005

Malaysian NRIs to invest upto \$600 mn

Mumbai, Jan.9. Looking at successful Malaysian investment in Indian highway projects, Kuala Lumpur-based Non-Resident Indians have shown interest to invest upto \$600 million in another area of infrastructure power sector in the country. The effective working of joint ventures in highways projects in India has created interest among NRIs to invest in two billion Ringgit (about \$600 million) power sector for small and medium size projects with controlling stake, K N Nijar, chairman Cisco group of companies and Member of Parliament (Malaysia), said on the sidelines of Third Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas function here. The Malaysia-based investors would be interested in holding controlling stake with 30 per cent equity holding, Nijar said adding, this arrangement was to guarantee sources of funds for the project and raises debt backhome.

The Pioneer, 10 January 2005

Sudanese accord hailed

New Delhi. India has welcomed the peace accord signed between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Nairobi, saying the accord is a successful demonstration of peace negotiations arrived at by mutual accord within the state without resort to force. "This accord will bring greater stability to the region and enable Sudan to play its rightful role,"

a Ministry of External Affairs spokesman said in a statement on Sunday. The signing of the peace accord was attended by Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed in the Kenyan capital Nairobi. He said, "I am pleased to be present here on behalf of the Government of India at Nairobi on this historic occasion," and described the signing as symbolic of the enduring unity of the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic peoples of the Sudan.

Hindustan Times, 11 January 2005

India, Italy to step up bilateral trade

New Delhi, Jan.10. India and Italy on Monday agreed to step up trade flows and explore enhanced cooperation in textile clusters and design. Commerce Minister Kamal Nath and Italy's Minister for Production Activities Antonio Marzano took a decision in this regard at the 16th session of India-Italy Joint Commission for economic cooperation, an official release said. Although the two-way trade between India and Italy has increased to 2.77 billion dollar during 2003-04, both sides noted that it did not reflect the true potential. Nath said the bilateral trade between the two countries could be doubled to five billion dollar within the next two-three years.

Times of India, 11 January 2005

Legislation being drafted with inputs from Japan, US

New Delhi, Jan.10. Having tackled the immediate rescue and relief task and beginning with rehabilitation of thousands in the wake of the tsunami disaster, the government on Monday began planning for the future with a legislation that would seek to deal with all dimensions of disaster - from natural to nuclear. A committee was constituted with Z S Negi, an additional secretary in the law ministry, to draft a legislation. Three existing laws of Japan, the US and Queensland in Australia - the last one being for a state legislation - have been studied. The basic idea is that the proposed authority would step in when the local administration fails to cope up. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), announced by PM Manmohan Singh, may come into being sooner than expected.

Indian Express, 12 January 2005

India may send more troops for UN force

New Delhi, Jan.11. United Nations under secretary for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guehenno, today said the UN was recommending its members, including India, that they set up a 1,300-strong strategic reserve force for short notice deployments into conflict zones around the world. The issue also came up during discussions that Guehenno held over the last few days with officials from the Home Ministry. "India has committed to peacekeeping operations in Congo and may also contribute in Sudan. With this, India's contribution to UN peacekeeping operations will go up to 7,000-8,000 troops," Guehenno said today after delivering a speech at the United Services Institute here.

Hindustan Times, 12 January 2005

Annan not disallowed from visiting tsunami-hit TN: Govt

New Delhi, Jan.11. The Government on Tuesday denied that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was disallowed permission to visit tsunami-hit Tamil Nadu but noted that India has advised that foreign dignitaries should avoid travel to such affected areas as it may hamper relief work. "There is no question of refusing permission to the UN Secretary General to visit the tsunami-hit areas," Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed said, denying a media report in this regard. During pre-occupation of local authorities with relief work, it would be "difficult to extend protocol and normal facilities that are extended to any foreign guest", Ahamed said.

The Hindu, 12 January 2005

India to acquire stake in Myanmar's energy sector (Siddharth Varadarajan)

Yangon, Jan.11. Taking a strategic view of the fast developing energy sector in Myanmar, India has decided to play an active role in the exploitation of off-shore and deep-sea gas and petroleum blocks being offered by the Government here. Though Indian energy companies such as GAIL and ONGC Videsh Ltd. are reportedly unsure about the quality of the data underpinning several blocks, the Manmohan Singh Government appears to be taking the view that it is in India's strategic interest to acquire a stake in what is being offered. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister of Myanmar, Lt. Gen. Soe Win, met the visiting Indian Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Mani Shankar Aiyar, and urged India to get involved in the development of his country's energy resources.

The Telegraph, 13 January 2005

Warning system in 18 months

Port Louis, Mauritius, Jan.12. A UN agency will lead efforts to set up a provisional tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean within 18 months, at a cost of more than \$30 million, the Unesco director-general said today. The provisional tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean will precede work on the global early warning system, which is expected to be ready by the end of 2007. World leaders have called for a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean to make sure there is never a repeat of the December 26 disaster that killed more than 150,000 people. A final decision on what kind of system the world will have will be made in June, after experts have met to discuss it, said Koichiro Matsuura, head of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The Tribune, 13 January 2005

India, NATO hold first-ever strategic talks (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, Jan.12. A delegation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) initiated first of its kind strategic dialogue

with India today, reflecting the fast emergence of India on the global economic and strategic radar. The high-powered NATO delegation, drawn from several countries, held talks with Ms Meera Shankar, Additional Secretary (Disarmament) in the Ministry of External Affairs, at South Block here. It is understood that the NATO, of late, has become interested in exploring the possibility of expanding cooperation with India strategically and economically to provide long-term security and stability in the region. The development acquires more significance in view of the fact that NATO has come into the region in a big way.

The Pioneer, 13 January 2005

EU threat to India's nascent BPO industry

Brussels. Never mind the threat from China. Do the eight East European and two Mediterranean countries that joined the European Union (EU) last May threaten India's lead in offshore outsourcing? At least one firm of consultants - Gartner - has predicted that these countries will become popular for "near shore" outsourcing, although not on a scale to threaten India. The prediction is contained in a report issued recently by a tripartite body which the EU set up to help it draft future policy on social and work-related matters. The report questions the assumption that outsourcing is driven exclusively by the search for lower costs. It claims that non-cost related factors are among the driving forces for ICT (information and communications technology) outsourcing.

The Pioneer, 14 January 2005

EU's 'destination India' plan runs into legal tangles

Brussels. The European Commission is insisting on more transparent regulation and simplified legal procedures in India to increase investments by European companies in India. Many European companies including the air transport companies are keen expanding their operations in India but the legal procedures appear too baffling for them and they are seeking its simplification. EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson, who began on Wednesday his visit to India from Kolkata, has expressed his desire to rectify the situation after talking to the Indian Government and trade bodies. He is discussing with India's communist-dominated Left Front Government in West Bengal.

The Pioneer, 15 January 2005

EU asks India to improve services offer

New Delhi. Terming as "disappointing" the New Delhi's offer on services, European Union on Friday warned that the WTO trade talks may get derailed if India and other developing countries do not improve their offers before the May deadline. "WTO negotiations is a two-way street. For services negotiations to move forward, better offers would have to be made by countries like India before the next deadline in May, EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson said here. "The negotiations on services are now at a critical stage and could flounder if more ambitious offers are not made by the deadline," he said, adding that India has much to gain from liberalising trade in services and it should not feel defensive. After his detailed talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, he said both EU and India agreed that member countries will have to take a balanced approach to carry the Doha round forward to make it a win-win situation for all.

The Tribune, 16 January 2005

India, China to outshine USA by 2020: report

Washington, Jan. 15. India and China are likely to emerge as new major global players by 2020 and outshine the USA in some fields, transforming the geopolitical landscape of the world, according to a recent CIA report. The 114-page report, titled "Mapping the Global Future", said the likely emergence of India, along with China, as new major global players - similar to the advent of a united Germany in the 19th century and a powerful USA in the early 20th century - will transform the geopolitical landscape, with impacts potentially as dramatic as those in the previous two centuries. "In the same way that commentators refer to the 1900s as the American Century, the 21st century may be seen as the time when Asia, led by India and China, comes into its own". "A combination of sustained high economic growth, expanding military capabilities and large population will be at the root of the expected rapid rise in economic and political power for both countries," the report said.

Hindustan Times, 16 January 2005

14 Indian Army Gurkhas abducted by Maoists: report

Kathmandu, Jan. 15. Fourteen Nepalese Gurkhas working in the Indian Army are reported to have been abducted by Maoist insurgents. The soldiers belonging to the Indian Gorkha Regiment and posted in Jammu and Kashmir were abducted from Nepal, while returning home on leave, the Kathmandu Post daily reported on Saturday. The incident occurred in Chuha in remote Kailali district near the Indian border - a hotbed of insurgent activities that has been in the news of late for clashes between Communist guerrillas and security forces, the Post said. The men were reportedly going home to districts where the outlaws have a strong presence like Dang, Syangja, Kaski and Nuwakot. The paper did not specify when the abductions took place.

The Hindu, 16 January 2005

Canadian Prime Minister coming

New Delhi, Jan. 15. The Canadian Prime Minister, Paul Martin, arrives here on Monday on a two-day visit to India for talks with his counterpart, Manmohan Singh, and other leaders. He will explore with Dr. Singh the ways in which India and Canada can collaborate on tsunami-warning procedures for the Indian Ocean region, according to a Canadian press release. The Canadian Health Minister, Ujjal Dosanjh, the National Security Adviser, Arthur Carty, and several Canadian Members of Parliament will accompany Mr. Martin. Mr. Martin is also visiting Thailand, Sri Lanka, Japan and China during his January 15 to 23 foreign tour.

The Telegraph, 17 January 2005

Bypass-Bangla options in pipeline (S.P.S.Pannu)

New Delhi, Jan. 16: The hydrocarbon establishment has come up with a bouquet of proposals to bypass Bangladesh if it insists on driving a hard bargain to let India import gas from Myanmar. At least three options on the table allow India to ferry gas without using Bangladeshi territory, Gail chairman Prashanto Bannerjee said today. According to one of the proposals, the pipeline can run directly from Myanmar to India through Tripura and Mizoram, circumventing Bangladesh. The other two stand-by plans involve importing the gas through two offshore routes, which will also skirt Bangladesh. Bangladesh has set three conditions. First, it wants the right to access hydro-electricity from Nepal and Bhutan through Indian territory and a trade corridor to these countries. Second, India should import more goods from Bangladesh to help Dhaka bridge the huge trade deficit. Third, Dhaka is keen to reserve the right to access the gas pipeline.

Hindustan Times, 17 January 2005

Nepal Maoists release abducted Indian soldiers

Kathmandu, Jan.16. Nepal's Maoist guerrillas on Sunday freed unharmed 14 Gorkha soldiers of the Indian Army they had abducted two days ago mistaking them to be from the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA).The 14 men of the Gorkha Regiment were coming home on leave when they were taken off their bus in Chuha village in Kailali district where the rebels have in recent times clashed repeatedly with security forces.

Indian Express, 18 January 2005

India's bio-diversity Act pushed as model (Nirmala Ganapathy)

New Delhi, Jan.17. India is taking a lead in negotiating a position among 16 Like-Minded Mega-diverse Countries (LMCC) that ensures they enjoy the benefits of sharing their genetic resources and traditional knowledge with others. India, which heads the group till 2006, will take the negotiated position to an international meet of 188 countries on Access and Benefit Sharing (of genetic resources) in Bangkok next month. While there has been mounting criticism of the Bio-diversity Act within India, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has pushing it as a model for China, Brazil, Kenya, Indonesia and 11 other countries. This group accounts for nearly 60-70 per cent of the world's bio-resources, with India's share said to be around 6-7 per cent.

The Hindu, 18 January 2005

India, Malaysia set up group on economic pact (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Jan.17. India and Malaysia today set up a Joint Study Group (JSG) with a political mandate and detailed terms of reference to fashion a bilateral economic pact. The decisions on these lines were taken during talks in Kuala Lumpur between the visiting Commerce Minister, Kamal Nath, and the Malaysian Minister for International Trade, Rafidah Aziz. Today's move is a sequel to the broad agreement that was reached during the Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's talks with the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, in New Delhi last month. According to official sources in Kuala Lumpur, the JSG had been tasked to submit its recommendations within six months from date of its first meeting, scheduled to take place in New Delhi towards February-end.

Deccan Chronicle, 19 January 2005

Centre beefs up forces at Indo-Nepal border

Guwahati, Jan.18. An alert has been sounded along the Indo-Nepal border in view of increasing activities of Maoist insurgents in neighbouring Nepal. Union Minister of State for Home Sri Prakash Jaiswal on Tuesday informed reporters that States like West Bengal, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal and Bihar, which have borders with Nepal, have been alerted. "The situation in the Nepal border was a cause for worry in view of the Maoists activities and insurgency in Nepal," Jaiswal said. The deployment of the SSB and the BSF guarding the frontiers there would also be doubled in view of Maoists abducting Indian soldiers, the Minister said. He toured all the States along the boundary and instructed them to remain alert to the situation.

Indian Express, 19 January 2005

Canada offers help to set up tsunami centre

New Delhi, Jan.18. India and Canada today agreed on upgrading scientific cooperation in the wake of the tidal disaster, with Canada offering technical aid in setting up a tsunami warning centre. Both sides also agreed to step up overall cooperation in environment and health sectors. In a joint statement issued after talks between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and visiting Canadian Premier Paul Martin, the two sides stated that they recognised the need for a multilateral initiative for a regional warning system as a measure to be prepared for such disasters.

The Hindu, 19 January 2005

India, Singapore sign MoU for army exercise (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Jan.18. India and Singapore have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for organising their first-ever "joint army exercise". The MoU, designed to enhance bilateral engagement on military matters, is in tune with the existing Singapore-India Defence Cooperation Agreement. While the two countries have held joint naval exercises for over a decade, the inaugural bilateral air exercise was held last October. The army exercise, to be held in India from February 11 to April 5, will involve armour and artillery units from the two countries.

Hindustan Times, 20 January 2005

Chilean President's maiden visit to India on Jan 20

New Delhi, Jan.19.Chilean President Ricardo Lagos Escobar, who arrives in New Delhi on Thursday, will pitch for a role in the

development of India's infrastructure while seeking closer trade and economic links with New Delhi. Escobar, the first Chilean head of state to visit India, had played a major role in bringing about transformation in his country, both in his present capacity as well as the public works minister before that. The Chilean President, on a five-day visit to India, arrives in New Delhi after visiting Mumbai. He will also visit Bangalore and Agra before his departure on Saturday. Escobar will hold talks with President APJ Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on enhancing bilateral cooperation, particularly in trade, agriculture and defence.

The Tribune, 20 January 2005

India, Israel to further military ties: report

London, Jan.19. India and Israel have agreed to fulfil a number of bilateral equipment deals and conduct a joint air manoeuvres later this year as a mark of their burgeoning defence ties, a leading defence weekly has claimed. The third joint working group at its meeting in Tel Aviv last December discussed New Delhi purchasing Israel Aircraft Industries' Heron II medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles and jointly extending the range of the Barak point defence system for the Indian Navy, the Jane's Defence Weekly, in its latest issue, said. The two sides also agreed to hold joint exercises in which Israeli F-16 multi-role fighters would be pitted against India's Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30Mk1 multi-role fighters. The venue and schedule of the manoeuvres is yet to be disclosed.

The Pioneer, 20 January 2005

Australia may outsource as many as 50,000 jobs to India

Sydney. Banks in Australia have reportedly activated an aggressive process which could eventually see them outsourcing about 50,000 jobs to India. According to a report in The Australian, ANZ Bank, which has already boosted developer numbers at its Bangalore software facility in India by over 30 percent since last year. Two other large banks - National Australia Bank and Westpac - also confirmed last week that they had engaged Tata Consultancy Services to perform project work in India. In the past year, ANZ has boosted employee numbers from 400 to over 530, a growth of 32 percent. When ANZ sold its India-based Grindlay's Bank subsidiary to the Standard Chartered Bank in 2000, it retained ownership of Grindlay's information technology operation.

The Tribune, 21 January 2005

Indian diplomacy reaching out to Latin America

New Delhi, Jan.20. New Delhi began to forge close ties with Brazil two years ago, it is the turn of Chile now, signalling the Indian diplomacy's deepening interest in Latin America. The visiting President of Chile, Dr Ricardo Lagos, today held wide-ranging talks with President A P J Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh. India thanked Chile for its support to India for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Chile is also interested to purchase advance light helicopters from India and when Chile's Defence Minister visits India in April this year, the ALH deal will be high on his agenda. If the ALH deal materialises it would enable Indian armament export industry a toehold in Latin America.

The Pioneer, 21 January 2005

India, Israel may hold joint Special Forces' exercise (Rahul Datta)

New Delhi. In a major step forward in Indo-Israel defence tie, both sides are soon expected to explore the possibility of holding the first ever joint military exercise of commandoes of the Special Forces. The matter will come up for discussion when a top Israeli general comes to Delhi in early February. Brigadier General A Mizrahi, Chief of Staff and Head of Operations of the Israeli ground forces command, would arrive here in the first week of February for extensive discussions with the Indian Army top brass. Both the delegations are likely to discuss the possibility of having joint exercises of the elite Special Forces in India besides reviewing their growing military-to-military relations, sources said here on Thursday.

Hindustan Times, 22 January 2005

560 Army troops leave for Congo

New Delhi, Jan.21. Some 560 Indian Army troops left for the Democratic Republic of Congo to join a contingent already there for peacekeeping operations, an Army spokesman said on Friday. This takes the total strength of Indian forces deployed in the central African country to 2,850, the spokesman said. Several thousand UN peacekeeping troops are deployed across the Democratic Republic of Congo, working closely with the nation's troops in a campaign to disarm local militias and stabilise the region.

Times of India, 22 January 2005

G-7 invites India, China for Feb roundtable

New Delhi, Jan.21. The high table beckons. India has been invited to attend a meeting of the G-7 finance ministers on February 4. Finance minister P Chidambaram said, "India has been invited, China has been invited and I have accepted the invitation." The invitation came from the British chancellor of the exchequer Gordon Brown. UK holds the present chair of the G-7, which comprise the world's leading industrial nations - US, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Canada, and the recently-added Russia. Apart from India, finance ministers from Brazil and South Africa have also been invited. The meeting is scheduled to start on February 4 and continue with talks the following day. India's presence is an acknowledgement of its growing economic clout as well as a greater international role.

The Hindu, 23 January 2005

Japan ready to give aid for reconstruction (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Jan.22. Japan has expressed its desire to reinforce ties with India, among several other "major countries", and offered to "discuss" the possibility of extending aid to New Delhi for post-tsunami reconstruction efforts. The Japanese Foreign Minister, Nobutaka Machimura, said in his policy speech to the Diet (Parliament) on Friday that, "it is essential to strengthen relations with neighbouring countries such as India and Australia". The Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hatsuhisa Takashima, said Tokyo would like to provide India with Official Development Assistance (ODA) for post-tsunami reconstruction work.

Hindustan Times, 24 January 2005

UN impressed by India's training to peacekeepers

United Nations, Jan.23. Impressed by the training given by India to peacekeepers prior to their UN assignments, the world body has said it is encouraging that New Delhi has agreed to increase the number of its police officers for the mission, besides including a "sizeable" number of women among them. UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guehenno, who recently visited India and held discussions with top military officials, said in United Nations that he was highly impressed by the training that India gives to peacekeepers prior to their taking the assignment with the world body.

Deccan Chronicle, 24 January 2005

US freebie wins over Israelis, India out

Bangalore, Jan.23. Israel has put on hold its plan to buy India's pilotless target aircraft Lakshya, instead going for an American system, which, officials say, has been offered by Washington for free. Tel Aviv had expressed interest two years ago to buy nearly 20 Lakshyas developed indigenously by the Bangalore-based Aeronautical Development Establishment, a DRDO unit focused on unmanned aerial vehicles. "Israel has been silent since they expressed interest to buy Lakshyas two years ago. We have raised this issue with them but have evoked no response," ADE sources said. Israel, a leader in UAVs technology, had paid India for conducting trials of the Lakshya, but remained silent after it expressed interest to buy or lease the home-grown reusable PTA system.

The Tribune, 25 January 2005

Bhutan King arrives

New Delhi, Jan.24. Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, who will be the Chief Guest for the Republic Day celebrations, arrived here today on a four-day state visit. External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh called on the King of Bhutan this afternoon and welcomed him on the visit and on being the Chief Guest. He expressed great satisfaction with the bilateral cooperation which had brought immense benefits to the two countries. He thanked Bhutan for the exemplary action to flush out Indian insurgent groups that had established camps in southern and eastern Bhutan. It was agreed that cooperation on security issues would be further strengthened.

Hindustan Times, 27 January 2005

Bhutan to sign three MoUs with India: King

New Delhi, Jan.26. Visiting Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, on a four-day official visit to India, was accorded a ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Wangchuk, who arrived in New Delhi on Monday, is the chief guest at this year's Republic Day celebrations. Wangchuk told mediapersons on Tuesday that Bhutan would sign three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with India. The three agreements include establishment of power projects, railway links between the two countries and cooperation in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry.

Hindustan Times, 28 January 2005

India trade bureau to be set up in UK

London, Jan.27. Council and business leaders in Leicester, a city with a large Asian population of Gujarati origin, are setting up an India Trade Bureau to boost relations. It is being set up on the lines of the successful Leicestershire-Sichuan Trade Bureau launched in May 2004, which provided a further boost to Britain's trade relations with China. The Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP) has granted money to fund a manager's post, while the city council is likely to second another member of staff. LSEP chief executive Kishor Tailor wants the India bureau up and running by April. He said: "We recognise that as the Indian economy grows, there are a lot of opportunities for companies in Leicestershire and those in India to work together."

The Hindu, 28 January 2005

New aviation tie-ups with Singapore, China 'possible' (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Jan.27. A "new bilateral air services agreement" between India and Singapore will be "negotiated", and technical-level talks are under way to explore the scope for enhancing air links between India and China. The Civil Aviation Secretary, Ajay Prasad, said on Tuesday that talks would be held for an India-Hong Kong air services agreement as well. Mr. Prasad, who was here for discussions with Singapore officials and to deliver a keynote address at an Asia Pacific conference, said a "comprehensive policy" for the Indian civil aviation sector was now "in the final stages of preparation".

Deccan Chronicle, 29 January 2005

India advises UN : Return to its original brief

United Nations, Jan.28. Expressing serious concern over diminishing development activities and increasing regulatory and punitive aspects in the United Nations, India has asked the world body to play a central role in setting the global economic agenda, a role which it played till mid-1970s. "We firmly believe that development is required not for the sake of security but for

itself," India's UN Ambassador Nirupam Sen told a meeting of the General Assembly here on Thursday. He also suggested general and complete disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, to prevent proliferation of atomic arms and their falling into the hands of terrorists and stressed on the responsibility of nuclear weapons states to ensure that such weapons are eliminated.

The Hindu, 29 January 2005

Engage India, Goh tells ASEAN (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Jan.28. Exhorting the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to engage India, among other "major powers", Singapore's senior Minister and former Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, on Thursday launched the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) here. Mr. Goh said: "It would be short-sighted and self-defeating for [the] ASEAN to choose a direction that cuts itself off from a dynamic India." Noting that the "ASEAN's future is best secured by a policy of encouraging deeper engagement of all major powers," he said "India is now a vital link in global production chains". Tracing New Delhi's own interactions with this regional association as its "full dialogue partner", Mr. Goh said: "India has proposed an FTA [Free Trade Agreement] with [the] ASEAN. In time, India's military and strategic links with Southeast Asian countries must grow further."

The Pioneer, 30 January 2005

India says inclusion of developing countries in UNSC must

United Nations. Rejecting the contention that expansion of the Security Council be limited to non-permanent members, India has said the inclusion of major developing countries from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the developed world as permanent members is necessary to make the UNSC more "representative" and "legitimate." "We will work with Brazil, Germany, Japan and Africa in our quest to make the Security Council more representative, democratic, legitimate and effective," its UN Ambassador Nirupam Sen vowed while addressing an informal meeting the General Assembly. Effectiveness is not an "arithmetical concept" but "one of responsible and rational decisions that would have wide acceptability," he emphasized intervening in the debate on the report of the high level panel on the reforms of the United Nations.

The Tribune, 30 January 2005

UN to coordinate tsunami warning centres

Phuket (Thailand), Jan.29.The United Nations emerged today as a coordinator for a regional tsunami warning centre after officials from 43 nations, including India, Indonesia and Thailand failed to agree who should run it. The compromise dealt a blow to Thailand, host of the two-day tsunami ministerial meeting on the resort island of Phuket, which was itself hit by the December 26 killer waves that devastated Indian Ocean coastal regions. It had wanted to run the centre itself. Bangkok's proposal to set up a regional tsunami trust fund, to which it pledged an initial 10 million dollar contribution, was not welcome at the conference, where Cabinet Ministers of only six countries took part.

Indian Express, 31 January 2005

It means much more for India (C.Raja Mohan)

New Delhi, Jan.30. With Iraq's first general elections in over half a century set to create a constituent Assembly and a transitional government, India might have to consider a more active policy towards Baghdad. India knows that elections, even in the most troubled circumstances, have a way of changing the political dynamics on the ground. A day before the polls, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reiterated India's stakes in Iraq as well as the desire to renew the engagement with its leaders. Singh's offer to assist in the normalisation and reconstruction of Iraq is hinged on the hope that stability will return to the nation. With change looming large, Singh should consider reaching out directly to the Iraqi leadership. As Shias become the dominant force in Iraq for the first time, Delhi would also want to leverage the connections that exist between Lucknow and Najaf.

The Hindu, 31 January 2005

"Economic cooperation agreement will bring India, Singapore closer" (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, Jan.30. The "Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)", which Singapore is currently "negotiating" with India, "will bring our economies closer together", said Lee Hsien Loong, the City-State's Prime Minister, on Saturday. Responding to felicitations from the Singapore-Indian community over his recent assumption of office as Prime Minister, Mr. Lee said: "Singapore seeks to prosper by riding on the emergence of China and India, both of which present us with many opportunities. With India opening up, our bilateral trade is booming, tourism is growing, and investments are expanding in both directions."