

The Hindu, 1 January 2006

Rail linking Sindh, Rajasthan by mid-January (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: The Munabao-Khokrapar rail route linking Sindh to Rajasthan would open by the middle of January. Pakistan Railways Minister Mian Shamim Haider told the upper house of Parliament on Saturday that preparations were in full swing to make the second rail link between Pakistan and India operational. Mr. Haider said the new train would reduce travel time for passengers who want to travel to or from southern Pakistan, as compared to the present arrangements through the Wagah border. In the aftermath of the revived dialogue process since January 2004, India and Pakistan agreed to re-open the rail link that was shut down after the 1965 war.

The Hindu, 1 January 2006

SAFTA in place from today

NEW DELHI: The agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) comes into effect from January 1, ushering in an era of free trade in goods among the seven SAARC member-countries. It paves the way for a full-fledged South Asia economic union in the future. As per the agreement terms, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have to scale down their customs duties to the level of 0.5 per cent by 2013. On the other hand, the four 'least developed' members in the SAARC group - Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan - are expected to follow suit by 2018. India, being the larger economy among the seven member-countries, has to provide certain concessions to the four least developed countries (LDCs). This would include a compensation mechanism for the revenue loss that they may incur owing to the cut in their import duties. As per the agreement provisions, the trade liberalisation programme would not be applicable to the tariff lines included in the 'sensitive' list of items.

The Hindu, 1 January 2006

Hurriyat team leaves on Pakistan visit

SRINAGAR : A three-member delegation of the moderate faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, led by its chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, left for New Delhi on Saturday en route to Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) to express solidarity with the victims of the October 8 earthquake and study the progress of the peace talks. Terming the visit politically significant, the former chairman of the amalgam, Abdul Gani Bhat, said that it was a "healthy" development at this stage. "All the political forces in Kashmir, with different ideologies, are talking about the resolution of the Kashmir dispute... All political forces active in Kashmir, whether pro-India, pro-Pakistan or pro-Independence, are talking about resolution of the issue and this in my view is a very healthy development." Though we will be going there to express our sympathy to the quake victims, our visit has a political significance too, as we belong to a political forum called the All Parties Hurriyat Conference. We'll talk to the Pakistan government and leaders vis-à-vis Kashmir," he said shortly before embarking on the fortnight-long visit. Bilal Gani Lone, son of the slain Hurriyat leader, Abdul Gani Lone, is part of the delegation.

The Hindu, 2 January, 2006

India for adding greater substance to ties with China (P.S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: The "fast developing relationship" between India and China "transcends the bilateral dimension and is an important determinant for the peace and stability, as well as development and prosperity, of Asia and the world." Prime Minister Manmohan Singh emphasised this new political dynamic, while sending warm felicitations and cordial greetings to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao on Sunday and heralding the beginning of the India-China Friendship Year. Dr. Singh said: "it is important that we continue adding greater substance to our bilateral exchanges and international cooperation." In a parallel message to Chinese President Hu Jintao, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam traced the "unique dimension" of the present bilateral relations to the historical context.

The Hindu, 2 January, 2006

India, Pakistan exchange lists of nuclear facilities (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: India and Pakistan on Sunday exchanged lists of their respective nuclear facilities on the first day of the New Year as per an accord in place since 1988. An official statement issued by Pakistan Foreign Office said here that the swap took place under an agreement signed in 1988 on the prohibition of attacks on each other's nuclear installations in the event of war. The agreement came into force in 1991 and the first such exchange of information was on January 1, 1992. Both the countries have since then continued with the practice, even at the height of tensions in 2002 and 2003. Under the agreement both Pakistan and India are to refrain from attacking each other's nuclear facilities in the event of a war. India went nuclear in May 1998 and within few days Pakistan followed suit. Today's exchange of list on nuclear facilities came two weeks before the scheduled third round of composite dialogue slated in New Delhi.

The Times of India, 2 January, 2006

Hurriyat to discuss Kashmir with Musharraf

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 1: Ahead of its Pakistan visit from Monday, separatist outfit Hurriyat Conference on

Sunday said it would discuss the Kashmir issue with President Pervez Musharraf and other Pakistan leaders. During its politically significant visit, mainly aimed at expressing solidarity with survivors of the October 8 earthquake that had rocked India and Pakistan, the three-member delegation, led by Hurriyat's founder Chairman Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, will meet Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and discuss with him the Kashmir issue. "We have nothing in specific but we will be generally talking about every scenario vis-à-vis Kashmir", senior Hurriyat leader Abdul Ghani Bhat, who is also part of the delegation, said. The Hurriyat visit to Pakistan is likely to last a week. He said the resolution to the Kashmir issue will be focus of their talks with the leadership in Pakistan.

The Indian Express, 2 January, 2006

Gas pipeline agreement to be signed next month, says Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 1: Pakistan, India and Iran will finalise a tripartite framework agreement and the project structure of the proposed Rs. 7 billion gas pipeline next month, said an official here. "The IPI gas pipeline project is progressing satisfactorily and petroleum secretaries of the three countries will meet in Tehran in February," said Pakistan's Petroleum Secretary Ahmad Waqar. Waqar said Iran has proposed that each country construct the pipeline in its respective territory, whereas another proposal was to lay the whole pipeline as an integrated project from the gas field in Iran to distribution points in Pakistan and India.

The Indian Express, 3 January 2006

Japan minister visit could prove key to India's N-aims

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 2: In its diplomatic manoeuvres towards securing international cooperation for its civilian nuclear energy, India will take an important step forward when it launches its first ever nuclear dialogue with Japan during Japanese foreign minister Taro Aso's visit, which starts on Tuesday. Aso's visit is crucial for India as it comes at a time when New Delhi is working hard with the US to implement the July 18 nuclear deal. One of the key commitments for Washington is to help build India's case in the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG), of which Japan is an important member, so as to remove restrictions that currently prevent Indian access to nuclear technology. Japan has not lost the opportunity to underline its opposition to India's nuclear programme at various multilateral fora, including at the meeting of the NSG a couple of months ago, where it raised several doubts when India's case was brought up for discussion. Despite India's being currently without an external affairs minister, Japan was still keen to press ahead with Aso's visit to ensure that New Delhi was his first stop in Asia as foreign minister.

The Times of India, 3 January 2006

PM likely to visit Japan in summer

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is expected to visit Japan in summer this year, Japanese Embassy said on Monday.

The Hindu, 3 January 2006

India, Pakistan miss deadlines

NEW DELHI: India and Pakistan have missed deadlines for reopening the Karachi and Mumbai consulates by the end of 2005 and restoring the Munabao-Khokhrapar rail link between Rajasthan and Sindh by January 1, 2006. These deadlines were set in the April 18, 2005 joint statement issued by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Pervez Musharraf in New Delhi. With railway officials of the two countries expected to meet later this week to set a date for commencing the rail service, it appears that the Munabao-Khokhrapar link will be delayed only a little past the deadline of January 1. However, the situation looks quite different as far as the reopening of the consulates is concerned. "We paid the advance on the property in November. But now we are being told that there might be 'security issues' around us [in] running our consulate," a Pakistan High Commission source told this correspondent on Monday. "It's strange that the objection has come now," he said. The source was clear that in the unlikely event of all the problems being resolved on Tuesday it would take "at least two months" for the consulate to begin functioning.

The Hindustan Times, 3 January 2006

Nepal on edge, India worried (Nilova Roy Chaudhury)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 2: India was "seriously concerned" as the spiral of violence once again threatened to engulf Nepal after the Maoist insurgents withdrew their cease-fire on Monday and said that they would "go on the offensive" against the Royal Nepal Army. While Nepal seems to be on the verge of a bloody year, India, which has high stakes in maintaining peace in the Himalayan kingdom, finds itself in an awkward situation. It cannot assist the RNA with "lethal" weapons because of King Gyanendra's decision to assume absolute power in February 2005, nor can it allow the Maoists to take control. "Having placed all its eggs in the democracy basket, there is no Plan B for India," said an analyst. India has called the withdrawal of cease-fire by the Maoists as "unfortunate", and urged the insurgents to shun violence and work for a political settlement, but it is unlikely the Maoists will heed the request.

The Indian Express, 3 January 2006

Pak says 'bully' India must keep out of Balochistan

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 2: Reacting strongly to India's remarks on the spiralling violence in Balochistan, Pakistan today said it "betrayed the psyche of a bully" and tended to vitiate the atmosphere created by the two sides for sustaining the composite dialogue process. "Anyone who says that there is nothing extraordinary about a statement that tantamount to interference in the internal affairs of other countries betrays the psyche of a bully, a bully who sees a red rag everywhere. Our advise to the Indian officials would be to mind their own business," said Foreign Office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam. Meanwhile four people have been killed in a bomb blast in Balochistan as fighting erupted in the restive province where para-military troops conducted operations against rebels opposed to the construction of Army cantonments.

The Indian Express, 3 January 2006

Jobless Indian doctors line up for food in UK temple

LONDON, JANUARY 2: A large number of overseas doctors, mostly from India, who had flocked to Britain in response to the UK National Health Services's global appeal for more staff, are facing unemployment, poverty and discrimination, a report said today. More than 6,000 doctors who passed the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) test face months of hardship, and many may never obtain jobs and may have to return home penniless, UK daily The Independent reported. Many doctors who are living on the fringe, the daily added, flock the Sri Mahalakshmi Temple in East London every evening to get free food. The British International Doctors' Association has accused the government of exploiting the situation by charging doctors hefty fees each time they renew their visa. NHS trusts also charge doctors hundreds of pounds to take them on for a few weeks of work experience so that they can improve their chances of getting a paying job.

The Times of India, 4 January 2006

Pakistan to buy 6 nuclear reactors from China

LONDON: Pakistan is negotiating to buy at least six nuclear power reactors from China during the next decade in its most ambitious nuclear facility expansion, according to media reports here. A newspaper report said Pakistan's nuclear shopping could cost as much as \$10 billion. Islamabad's talks with Beijing involve a minimum of six and a maximum of eight reactors, a newspaper said. It quoted an unnamed, senior Pakistani official to say that the nuclear plants being negotiated were expected to be completed by 2025, with construction starting by 2015. News of negotiations with China comes just days after the formal start of a Chinese-supplied nuclear plant at Chashma in the Pakistani province of Punjab. Commentators agreed that the news would underline western concerns about nuclear proliferation as Pakistan increasingly and boldly makes clear its reliance on China as the main supplier of its nuclear reactors.

The Hindu, 4 January 2006

Assam sector of India-Bangladesh border will be sealed: Patil (Sushanta Talukdar)

GUWAHATI: The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Tuesday said the Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil had assured it that a vast portion of the Assam sector of the India-Bangladesh border would be sealed by December 2006. "Through our continued agitation we have been impressing upon the Centre and the State Government that the Assam-Bangladesh border is porous and illegal migration from Bangladesh has been taking place. On Monday, the Union Home Minister and the Assam Chief Minister could see for themselves that a vast area of the border is still open and even the old barbed wire fence in many areas like Sonahat needed to be replaced," said Mr. Bhattacharyya. He said the AASU had asked the Centre that if the India-Pakistan border could be sealed in just two years why the India-Bangladesh border could not be sealed even 20 years after signing the Assam Accord.

The Times of India, 4 January 2006

Govt takes its foreign policy to the borders (Indrani Bagchi)

NEW DELHI: If you are a traveler to Kailash-Mansarovar, you really wish the bus could carry you all the way till the Lipulekh Pass at the China border. Instead, the last point where the bus drops you off, to begin an arduous uphill trek, is at Mangti, Uttaranchal. To be fair, the government was trying to build that road. But the issue is stuck - where else - in court where it has somehow become linked to an elephant corridor in nearby Raiwala, which means any road will have to make arrangements for elephants to go on their way without human interference. Things are changing, though the winds of change blow softly in the Indian government. The first signs came when foreign secretary Shyam Saran undertook a couple of quiet trips to the border areas in Arunachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal in the past few months. Those trips have yielded a new policy in the foreign office. The MEA is now taking a renewed interest in border, or frontier management, which used to be part of its beat several decades ago. There is a strong security imperative here. The Chinese are developing their frontier regions in Tibet at a fascinating pace. Consequently, India too is taking a deeper look at the development in its eastern flanks, particularly since the infrastructure on the Chinese side is incomparably superior to India's. There is a bigger strategy involved here - the assessment in the foreign office is that at some point development issues in the

border areas converge with security threats.

The Hindustan Times, 4 January 2006

India, Pakistan to be linked via cable

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 3: Pakistan will be linked to India with a cable laid through the Wagah border as part of an international system, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has said. "All work in this regard has been completed at our end. We are waiting for the Indian government to grant permission to its telecom carriers, which we hope will be soon," Aziz said at the inaugural ceremony of the South-East Asia-Middle East-Western Europe 4 (SEA-ME-WE 4) cable on Tuesday. Pakistan will have five international links by the middle of next year and this includes, besides SEA-ME-WE 3 and 4, two new undersea cable links and a terrestrial fibre optic link with India, he was quoted as saying. SEA-ME-WE 4 is a consortium of 16 international telecommunication companies for a new cable system linking Asia with Europe via the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.

The Hindustan Times, 4 January 2006

UN to withdraw India-led mission in Ethiopia (Dharam Shourie)

The Indian-led peace mission monitoring the five-year-old ceasefire between Ethiopia and Eritrea is in danger of being withdrawn following increased confrontation between the two countries with Eritrea making its functioning almost impossible. With the mission almost immobilised, Annan asked the Council to put a deadline on the two nations to meet its demands, apparently hinting that the mission could be asked to fold up after that or its nature could be changed. The Indian mission to the United Nations had no comment on the options given by Annan but India's Ambassador Nirupam Sen had told a meeting of the Council, convened by New Delhi in October, that the mission would collapse unless it took a decisive decision. Currently, the mission has the strength of 3293 troops, including 214 military observers and is headed by Major Gen Rajender Singh. India is the main contributor with about 1500 troops followed by Jordan which had 1000 military personnel.

The Hindustan Times, 4 January 2006

Japan to sign FTA with India, Australia, China

TOKYO, JANUARY 3: Japan plans to begin talks on a free trade agreement (FTA) with India and Australia in 2007 and with China in 2009 in a bid to play a leading role in bringing about a proposed East Asian economic grouping, a report said on Tuesday. Japan supports the inclusion of Australia and India in the East Asian Community, which was proposed at the inaugural East Asian Summit in December in Kuala Lumpur. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao insisted that 13 countries-the 10-nation ASEAN bloc plus China, Japan and South Korea-would guide the future of Asian integration. Australia, India and New Zealand were apparently included as a counterweight to Beijing's influence in the forum, where the United States was not represented.

The Hindu, 4 January 2006

Mistrust between India and Pakistan high, says analyst

CHENNAI: "Fifty eight years of not knowing each other" is the "main problem" between India and Pakistan, said Pakistani scholar and defence analyst Ayesha Siddiq. Hence, "peace is going to come very slowly" since "mistrust [between the two countries] is very high and it is not going to go away."

Part of the problem with the bilateral talks was that people had high expectations that were difficult to meet. In the past 58 years since Independence "a lot has happened to each other." "Pakistan, like India, has acquired its own identity. People in Pakistan have become comfortable with the idea of Pakistan," Dr. Siddiq said, at a lecture on 'Security perspectives from Pakistan'. A 'weak-Pakistan-trying-to-survive' was an image that she had found in the corridors of New Delhi, Washington DC and elsewhere. This was not true.

The Indian Express, 5 January 2006

India, Japan to start talks to bridge nuclear divide

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5: India and Japan agreed on Wednesday to launch talks on nuclear issues in a bid to resolve differences as New Delhi pushes its ambition to become the world's sixth atomic power and boost energy production. The agreement came during discussions between India's junior foreign minister, E. Ahamed and visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso, officials said.

The Hindu, 5 January 2006

Indo-Pak. talks on inaugural run of train service today

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5: Railway Officials of India and Pakistan would be meeting here today to finalise the modalities as well as the dates for the inaugural run of the Khokhrapar-Munabao train service between the two countries. India and Pakistan had agreed to re-establish the rail link in 2004 as part of confidence building measure. The two sides had agreed that the train services would be resumed from first January, 2006, which was not done because of delay in holding further delegation levels talks to finalise the modalities. Both countries have already concluded the trial run of the train on their respective sides.

The Hindu, 5 January 2006

French firm chief ready to testify before panel (Vaiju Naravane)

PARIS: Jean-Claude Giannino, president of Technopure that carried out the first phase of asbestos removal from the French aircraft carrier, George Clemenceau, says he is willing to testify before the Indian Supreme Court's Monitoring Committee on Hazardous Waste. The panel is meeting in Mumbai on Friday. "I have a valid passport, a visa and I, with my colleague Mr. Eric Baudon, who speaks excellent English, am ready to leave for India tonight carrying all the necessary documents," he told The Hindu on Wednesday. Mr. Giannino said that contrary to the claims made by French authorities and by the SDIC, the private company that contracted to acquire the ship, there was over 200 tonnes of asbestos, and not just 45 tonnes, on board.

The Tribune, 5 January 2006

Pak panel for intelligence on Indian, Afghan water plans

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 4: Pakistan Commission for Indus Waters (PCIW) has recommended to the government to take steps for getting "accurate and timely" intelligence about India and Afghanistan's water storage plans to avoid complications and prepare counter strategies. The Nation today quoted PCIW Chairman Syed Jamaat Ali Shah as saying that more information and intelligence gathering was needed on Indian role/plans in Afghanistan and additional information for validating current information on data about water availability to Pakistan on Western and Eastern Indus rivers. Pakistan has already a weak case as far as India's Baglihar and Kishanganga projects are concerned and that is mainly because of delayed intelligence information conveyed to the authorities concerned to take action like moving neutral expert under the Indus Waters Treaty, 1960.

The Indian Express, 5 January 2006

We can manage our conflicts: Pak to India

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 4: Asserting that it would not 'entertain outsiders' views' on military operation in Balochistan, Pakistan has asked India not to worry about the provincial situation and instead 'settle its own conflicts'. It made it clear that the action against tribals and nationalists who are agitating for autonomy in the province would continue till the 'writ' of the government is established there. Speaking on the same issue, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said in an interview to ARY TV network that Pakistan taking steps for its security is its right and on this 'we would not entertain outsiders' views'. He said India is itself entangled in its internal problems and its statements are tantamount to interference in internal affairs of other countries. The Indian statement had 'pained us', he said, adding 'they should not have done so, as such utterances could mar the atmosphere'.

The Indian Express, 5 January 2006

'India, Pak should pull back troops from LoC'

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 4: "Our suggestion is that both countries should pull back their troops and the security could still be maintained in the area through police and other organisations," Pakistan PM Shaukat Aziz said yesterday. Referring to his and President Musharraf's meeting with PM Manmohan Singh last year, Aziz said various ideas were being discussed through back channel diplomacy which included proposals like self-governance and demilitarisation.

The Hindu, 6 January 2006

Nuclear plan presented to Washington (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: A plan to separate the country's civil and military nuclear facilities was presented by Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran during talks with his American counterpart Nicholas Burns in Washington last month. A top External Affairs Ministry official told The Hindu that the United States' response was expected when Under-Secretary of State Nicholas Burns came to New Delhi later this month. The official said India's nuclear fast-breeder reactor programme was not included in the list of civilian facilities presented to the U.S. According to the official, India will have no problem if the U.S. side shares the separation plans with the U.S. Congress since it is a "transparent" exercise. However, details of the facilities to be classified as "civilian" are still to be made public in India. On the issue of safeguards in perpetuity, Mr. Saran stressed on December 21: "Let me put it this way. As long as there is a guarantee of lifetime supply of fuel, I don't think India would have a problem with lifetime safeguards on such fuel." In a veiled reference to Iran, the Foreign Secretary, addressing the concerns of those Americans opposed to the nuclear deal, said India did not want any more nuclear states, especially in its neighbourhood.

The India Express, 6 January 2006

Learning Hindi is a critical need: US

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 6: The US administration has identified Hindi as one of the 'critical need' foreign languages that Americans should learn to further strengthen national security and prosperity in the 21st century. While launching the National Security Language Initiative programme (NSLI), US President George W Bush is expected to request USD 114 million in funding for 2007. "The NSLI will dramatically increase the number of Americans learning critical need foreign languages such as Hindi, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Farsi and others

through new and expanded programmes from kindergarten through university and into the workforce," the US state department said in a fact sheet. The US administration noted that an important component of national security in the post 9/11 period is the ability to engage foreign governments and peoples, especially in critical regions, to encourage reform, promote understanding and convey respect for other cultures.

The Tribune, 6 January 2006

Mirwaiz for global guarantee on Kashmir

MUZAFFARABAD (POK), JANUARY 5: All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) Chairman Mirwaiz Umer Farooq has said that "international mediation" and "guarantee" are imperative for achieving a solution of the Kashmir issue. He was talking to reporters at the residence of Sahibzada Ishaque Zafar, MLA, yesterday. Senior Hurriyat leaders Professor Abdul Ghani Bhat and Bilal Ghani Lone were also present on the occasion. Supporting the India-Pakistan talks and peace process, he said dialogue was imperative, but there should be the world community's involvement at a certain level to reach a solution acceptable to all concerned parties. He said "intra-Kashmiri" talks were important and it would only be possible by frequent visits of leaders.

The India Express, 6 January 2006

'India having N-energy is important'

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 6: US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said the prospect of India having civilian nuclear energy could be an "enormously important step" forward as it is welcomed not only by the US but also by members in the Nuclear Suppliers Group and IAEA chief Mohammad ElBaradei. "In fact, ElBaradei himself has said publicly he thinks it is a good thing we move in this direction with India. So this could be an enormously important step forward," Rice said at an interactive session at the US State Department Correspondents Meeting on Thursday. Though she refused to divulge details of the ongoing negotiations with the Indian government, Rice stressed that Washington had made clear the need for a "separation plan."

The India Express, 6 January 2006

US 'absolutely opposes' Iran-India gas line

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 5: The US said it was "absolutely opposed" to a natural gas pipeline project linking Iran with Pakistan and India, even though it was seen as feasible by an Asian Development Bank (ADB) expert. "The US government supports multiple pipelines from the Caspian region but remains absolutely opposed to pipelines involving Iran," senior State Department official Steven Mann told a forum in Washington on Wednesday night. Mann, the special negotiator for Eurasian conflicts in the State Department's Bureau of European Affairs, spoke after ADB expert Dan Millison told the forum that the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline and another planned pipeline project linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan were both feasible. Millison said although the 1,680-km trans-Afghan gas pipeline was shorter and less costly, as of last month India and Pakistan were "moving forward" with the project with Iran.

The Times of India, 6 January 2006

On visit eve, India high on Bush priority

According to Rice, the region of Central Asia through Afghanistan which was once described as an "arc of crisis" by National Security Advisor to former President Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, is now turning out to be an "arc of opportunity". She noted that Afghanistan would have to be seen in a regional context and hence the rationale of moving some countries from Central Asia from the US State Department's European bureau to a South Asia bureau so as to have an integrated approach.

The India Express, 6 January 2006

Indo-Nepal transit treaty extended by three months

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 5: India has extended by three months the transit treaty with Nepal after two rounds of negotiations. The decision had taken Nepal by surprise, which expected an automatic renewal. While the treaty does provide for renewal, South Block officials said it also permitted negotiations before a renewal is effected. India wanted to discuss technical issues like rationalisation of transit points, passage of Indian goods through Nepal to bordering states like Bihar, and also insert new rail links developed after the treaty was signed.

The Indian Express, 7 January 2006

After 40 yrs, Thar Express to cross border (Bhavna Vij-Aurora)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 6: The trans-border Thar Express, linking Rajasthan and Sindh, is to commence operations from February 1, Indian and Pakistani railway representatives said in the capital today. This Munabao-Khokrapar link will be the second passenger between India and Pakistan after the Samjhauta Express, which runs between Amritsar and Lahore. Initially to run on a weekly basis initially, the train will cross the border on fenced tracks, amid tight security. Passengers wanting to travel on the Thar Express will have to board the link train at Jodhpur and disembark at Munabao for customs and immigration checks. There they will board the actual Thar Express which will take them over the three kilometres across the border to Zero Point station in Pakistan. Here

they will undergo another series of checks before they proceed over the final eight km to Khokhrapar.

The Hindu, 7 January 2006

G-4's resolution tabled again (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: Japan did not join Germany, Brazil and India in "re-tabling" the G-4 resolution of July 6, 2005, seeking expansion of the United Nations' Security Council in New York on Thursday. According to the sources, the resolution had to be tabled again because the U.N. General Assembly had begun a new session. Also, the African Union had brought forward its own draft and the General Assembly could not vote on two similar resolutions. They pointed out that even though the G-4 resolution was tabled at short notice, the draft had 25 co-sponsors. France was one of the co-sponsors of the draft, which calls for increasing the number of Security Council seats from 15 to 25 by adding six permanent and four non-permanent members.

The Indian Express, 7 January 2006

Musharraf pushes Kashmir plan before Indo-Pak talks

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 6: President Pervez Musharraf told Kashmiri separatist leaders that he hoped India would respond positively to Pakistan's proposal to demilitarise the disputed Himalayan region and grant it self-governance. His reported remarks were made during a meeting late on Thursday with leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference visiting from Kashmir. Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said proposals for self-governance in Kashmir should be addressed. "These proposals should be discussed and taken forward formally, beginning with the next round of Pakistan-India dialogue at foreign secretaries' level," he said.

The Hindu, 8 January 2006

New Delhi rejects Musharraf proposal (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: India viewed Islamabad's implementation of its January 2004 commitment to end cross-border terrorism as "unconditional" and not linked to the proposal put forward by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf that the towns of Srinagar, Kupwara and Baramulla be demilitarised. The External Affairs Ministry spokesman also rejected concepts like joint control or management of Jammu & Kashmir, an "integral part" of India, by Islamabad and New Delhi, as a basis of settling the Kashmir issue. According to the spokesman, he seemed to suggest that if India withdrew its troops from the three Kashmiri towns, he would ensure there was no "militancy" there. "What we are talking about here is 'terrorism' and no mere militancy."

The Indian Express, 8 January 2006

India to quietly raise terror with chief guest Saudi King

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7: Against the backdrop of hardline Tehreek-e-Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani's scheduled meeting with United Jihad Council chief Syed Salahuddin on the sidelines of the Haj in Mecca this week, New Delhi has decided to seek help from visiting Saudi monarch King Abdullah to fight against the spread of extremism in the sub-continent. Government sources said that India will "quietly" raise the issue of extremism with King Abdullah-who arrives on a four-day visit to New Delhi on January 24-without going into specifics about Saudi funding to religious institutions in the sub-continent.

The Indian Express, 8 January 2006

Aiyar takes Panchsheel flavour to China (Amitav Ranjan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7: Dogged by the Chinese drubbing of India's state-run firms in the hunt for oil and gas assets worldwide, diplomat-turned-minister Mani Shankar Aiyar is serving up Panchsheel-the five principles of peaceful co-existence-as the new basis for hydrocarbon partnership with China. With the two governments having declared 2006 the Year of Friendship, Aiyar's ministry plans to sign as many as 12 memoranda of understanding with Beijing, aimed at collaboration in the hunt for oil and gas in third countries.

The Hindu, 8 January 2006

Musharraf: withdraw troops from three places in Kashmir for militancy to end (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said that if India agreed to withdraw troops from Srinagar, Kupwara and Baramulla to the "outskirts," there would be no militancy in the Kashmir valley. Gen. Musharraf reiterated his "formula" of dividing Jammu and Kashmir into seven regions. The formulation envisages the identification of trouble-torn regions in both Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and their administration with joint control by India and Pakistan.

The Indian Express, 8 January 2006

Studies begin on Indo-Myanmar train

GUWAHATI: The Indian Railways has started preliminary studies on speeding up the realisation of a Trans-Asia railway line. Railway Board chairman J.P. Batra today said a team of senior officials, including a member (Planning) and a member (Mechanical), had already visited Myanmar and were carrying out feasibility studies for advancing the existing railway network eastwards from Jiribam on the Assam-Manipur border to Moreh at the

Indo-Myanmar border. "Though a basic agreement on the issue of the rail link will take place between the governments of the two countries, the major portion of the workload will be on the Indian side," Batra said.

The Hindu, 9 January 2006

Saran to hold talks in China

NEW DELHI: Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran will hold talks with Chinese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Wu Dawei in Beijing on January 9 and 10. It is for the second time that India and China are holding such a strategic dialogue; the first one was held here in January 2005. The sources said the two sides were also working on a possible visit by Chinese President Hu Jintao to India some time this year.

The Hindu, 9 January 2006

Manmohan has no plans to see matches in Pakistan: External Affairs Ministry (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has no plans to visit Pakistan to see any of the cricket matches to be played between January 13 and February 19, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said on Sunday night. Official sources also told this correspondent that no "formal invitation" to the Prime Minister had been received from Islamabad. The "television invitation," of course, had been noted by New Delhi. They also said there was no basis to a report filed by a Western news agency that Dr. Singh had already accepted an invitation to travel to Pakistan to watch a cricket game. The sources, however, pointed out that Gen. Musharraf had invited Dr. Singh to pay a visit to Pakistan last year and the Prime Minister had accepted the invitation in principle. No dates for the visit had been set so far.

The Times of India, 9 January 2006

Census shows migration from China rising (Mahendra Ved)

NEW DELHI: It's an 'invasion' which is taking place on the quiet. Virtually unknown to the public and politicians, more and more Chinese are migrating to India although their number in absolute terms totals but a few thousand. The just-published Migration Data of Census of India 2001 reveals that the Chinese inflow is driven mainly by work/employment, business and education. Apparently because of the improving bilateral ties, a total of 11,029 Chinese-6,702 men and 1,983 women-came during 1991-2001. After 30,84,826 migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan comes next (9,97,106), followed by Nepal (5,96,696), Sri Lanka (1,49,300), Myanmar (49,086), China (23,721), Afghanistan (9,194) and Bhutan (8,337).

The Times of India, 9 January 2006

SAFMA moots "peace park" on Indo-Pak border

CHANDIGARH: The Pakistani chapter of South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) on Sunday mooted the idea of setting up a "peace Park" between India and Pakistan on the Wagah-Attari international border to facilitate more people-to-people contact, cultural and business exchanges. "We don't need any monetary help from the Governments to construct this Park. It will be a people's venture, but the authorities on both sides should first give their nod," Alam said, adding SAFMA was in the favour of a very liberal visa regime, which would facilitate free movement of people on both sides of the border.

The Indian Express, 9 January 2006

Kerala may host next round of India-China border talks

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JANUARY 8: On the eve of the second round of the India-China strategic dialogue in Beijing, Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Yuxi told a news conference here on Sunday that the next round of border talks may be held in February at a venue in Kerala, most likely Alappuzha. Although Indian Foreign Ministry officials have expressed readiness to hold the talks by the end of January, they are likely to be held only in February because of the annual Spring Festival in China. "Frankly speaking, settlement of the boundary dispute will take some time," Sun said. 2006 has been declared the India-China Friendship Year.

The Hindu, 9 January 2006

Nothing to do with cricket, says Pakistan (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Sunday maintained that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had accepted an invitation to visit the country and that the dates of travel were to be "worked out." Foreign Office spokesperson Tasneem Aslam said Dr. Singh accepted the invitation long ago, and it had nothing to do with the ongoing India-Pakistan cricket series. She denied a report attributed to her by an international news agency that Pakistan had extended a new and specific invitation to Dr. Singh to watch an ODI. The news agency quoted her as saying that Dr. Singh had accepted the fresh invitation.

The Indian Express, 10 January 2006

Nepal's red rag: China, Pak on India's border (C Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 9: As King Gyanendra toys with a plan to let China and Pakistan open consulates on the sensitive Indo-Nepal border, the Government has communicated its strong displeasure to Kathmandu. China is

apparently ready to open a consulate at Biratnagar at the border between eastern Nepal and Bihar. Pakistan, not to be left behind, is keen to open shop at Birganj in central Nepal region that also borders Bihar. While King Gyanendra might hope that his threat to draw in China and Pakistan would force New Delhi to soften its policies, the indications are that the move could further undermine the limited support the monarchy enjoys in New Delhi.

The Tribune, 10 January 2006

SAFMA Secy-Gen apologises for Partition carnage

CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 9: The Secretary-General of the South Asian Free Media Association, Mr Imtiaz Alam, today gave a new meaning to the fast-changing India-Pakistan relationship. He chose to say: "We are sorry for the carnage during Partition." "I had to take this burden of history off my back", he went on to add amidst thunderous applause. He was speaking at a special session, "Punjab-Punjab consultation: exploring complementarities" organised by SAFMA and the Chandigarh Press Club here.

The Tribune, 10 January 2006

CM agrees to set up peace park

CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 9: The Punjab Chief Minister, Capt Amarinder Singh, today announced the setting up of a peace park (friendship park) in the Wagah-Attari area on both sides of the border. He said he would take up the matter with the Government of India and also suggested to a visiting delegation from Pakistan to impress upon Mr Pervaiz Elahi, Chief Minister of Pakistani Punjab, to discuss this matter with the Pakistan Prime Minister. The Chief Minister was delivering his presidential address at a session, "Punjab-Punjab consultation: exploring complementarities," jointly organised by the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) and the Chandigarh Press Club here today. Earlier, the Pakistani chapter of SAFMA mooted the idea of setting up a "peace park" between India and Pakistan on the Wagah-Attari international border in "no man's land" to facilitate more people-to-people contact and cultural and business exchanges.

The Tribune, 10 January 2006

6 nations to meet in Sydney today (Vibha Sharma)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 9: Six leading economies of the world - USA, Japan, China, India, Australia and South Korea will meet in Sydney tomorrow to promote clean energy technology in an effort to tackle the warming of global climate changes, without sacrificing economic growth. The Indian side will be represented by Environment and Forest Minister A. Raja in what will be the first ministerial meeting of the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate.

The Hindu, 10 January 2006

Border sealed

MOREH (MANIPUR): The India-Myanmar border in and around Moreh was sealed for the second day on Monday after twin blasts on Sunday.

The Hindu, 11 January 2006

India, China complete second round of strategic dialogue (P. S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: India and China completed the second round of their strategic dialogue in Beijing on Tuesday on a note of "satisfaction at the positive trends" that emerged on the bilateral front "in the recent past." The two sides explored the "content" of their evolving strategic partnership. Significantly, in this diplomatic ambience, India "asked [for] cooperation from China," a key member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), in the context of Washington's latest agreement with New Delhi on "civilian nuclear energy" issues. Indicating, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, who led the Indian delegation, said at a media briefing in Beijing that his Chinese interlocutors did not convey to him any unhappiness over the Washington-New Delhi accord. On a different plane, he did not ask the Chinese side about its reported supply of nuclear reactors to Pakistan at this stage. "As far as I know, this [report] has not been confirmed," he pointed out.

The Indian Express, 11 January 2006

Myanmar sends ship to show it's opening up

PORT BLAIR: Ending decades of self-imposed maritime isolation, Myanmar has sent a warship out of its territorial waters for the first time in 40 years. In a clear signal that it is willing to open up, the military dispensation in Yangon has dispatched UMS Anawyahta to Port Blair at the Navy's invitation for the Milan 2006 exercises. An indigenously-built missile corvette never before seen by most maritime forces, the Anawyahta has made a big impression at the Navy formation here as has its crew led by Commander Ko Ko Kyaw. Myanmar's presence here is significant considering the rapidly evolving assessment of Coco Island, a Myanmarese territory just 20 nautical miles from Landfall, India's northernmost point in the islands.

The Hindu, 11 January 2006

Andrabi released, criticises Musharraf (Shujaat Bukhari)

SRINAGAR: Asiya Andrabi, chief of right wing women's organisation Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DeM), on Monday denounced Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's "complete U-turn" on his Government's official stand vis-a-vis Kashmir and said "nothing short of right to self-determination" was acceptable to the Kashmiris. Ms. Andrabi who was released on Sunday after a three-month detention, said the Pakistan Government in consultation with some Kashmiri leaders and with the "blessings" of the United States was "preparing for a sell-out over Kashmir," which "will not be allowed at all." Stating that this was a "critical juncture in the freedom movement of Kashmir," she said, "only Syed Ali Geelani [the hard-line Hurriyat leader] represents the wishes of the Kashmiri people."

The Times of India, 11 January 2006

Myanmar deals a blow to Aiyar's oil diplomacy

NEW DELHI: Myanmar has inked a deal with China to sell gas from fields jointly owned by Indian companies, puncturing Mani Shankar Aiyar's oil diplomacy balloon a day before the oil minister was to leave for Beijing in search of a political stamp on hydrocarbons co-operation. ONGC Videsh (OVL), the overseas investment arm of ONGC, owns 20% and Gail holds 10% in the field. South Korea's Daewoo controls operations. To add insult to injury, Yangon did not inform New Delhi about the deal with PetroChina, which has beaten OVL in global bids on several occasions recently. The issue came to light when a senior oil ministry official went to Yangon for talks on options for transporting to India OVL-GAIL's share and additional gas from the field. Yangon's move has raised the stakes for Aiyar's Beijing visit, first by an Indian minister in a year which New Delhi has designated as the 'Year of Friendship' with its neighbour.

The Indian Express, 11 January 2006

China backs India's bid for UNSC seat: Saran

BEIJING, JANUARY 10: China has assured India that it has not gone back on its support for New Delhi's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said on Tuesday. Though China had initially backed India's bid, Beijing later became ambiguous about its support citing Japan with which Beijing's relationship has soured in recent times. India had joined hands with Brazil, Japan and Germany and formed the G4 to muster support for the UNSC bid. China, one of the five veto-wielding permanent members of the UNSC, had described the G4 draft resolution as an 'immature' plan. China had further said that it would vote against any Security Council expansion formula which could split the UN membership if such a proposal was put to a vote in the General Assembly.

The Times of India , 12 January 2006

India gets John Kerry's backing for Indo-US nuclear deal

NEW DELHI: Implementation of the Indo-US deal on civilian nuclear cooperation will mean grant of nuclear power status to India, influential American Senator and former Democrat Presidential candidate John Kerry said here on Thursday as he voiced support for the agreement. Kerry told a press conference here that the deal, with "enormous benefits" bilaterally, cannot be seen only in the context of Indo-US relations but had implications at the global level. Kerry, a member of the US Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had told him during their meeting here yesterday that India would sign the Fissile Material Control Treaty (FMCT). Kerry, whose opposition Democratic Party will have a crucial role with regard to ratification of the deal in the US Congress, said he backed the agreement signed on July 18 last year by the two countries during the Prime Minister's visit to Washington.

The Hindu, 12 January 2006

Balochistan leader slams Musharraf (Praveen Swami)

NEW DELHI: Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, the powerful tribal chieftain whose followers have been engaged for several weeks in full-blown warfare with Pakistani troops in the province of Balochistan, on Wednesday slammed President Pervez Musharraf's claims that India was providing support to the rebellion. "His objective is to defame the legitimate demands of the people of Balochistan." "What is the need for us to take anything from anyone," he asked. "The weapons we are now using flowed into this region when the United States financed the jihad in Afghanistan. It was the Inter-Services Intelligence which distributed them to Afghanistan, Iran, Jammu and Kashmir - and to us in Balochistan." Pointing to the easy availability of small arms in northern and western Pakistan, he said the cost of acquiring weapons was minimal.

The Indian Express, 12 January 2006

Indo-US nuke deal on track, assures US

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 12: Ahead of US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns' visit to India next week, Washington has said it is continuing to work with New Delhi on the civilian nuclear deal and that the Indian government is currently formulating a plan which will see the separation of civilian and military nuclear programmes. "...In terms of the US-India agreement we are in discussions with the Indian government on this. They are currently formulating a plan, which would separate the civilian and military nuclear programs. We're going to be in contact with them because that's an important component of this deal, so it's an issue that we're

continuing to work with them on," state department spokesman Sean McCormack said yesterday.

The Indian Express, 12 January 2006

US wake up, India, China rising: Report

HOUSTON, JANUARY 12: The dramatic rise of China and India is a wake-up call that should prompt people in the United States and around the world to take seriously the need for strong commitments to build sustainable economies, according to a report by a US-based research organisation. This change presents one of the "gravest threats and greatest opportunities" facing the world today, says the Worldwatch Institute in its 'State of the World 2006' report. And, viewing this colossal shift in global geopolitics as an opportunity rather than a challenge holds the greatest prospect for ensuring a stable and peaceful twenty-first century, the report by the global environmental and social policy research body, said. The report calls for broader cooperation between China, India, Europe, and the United States to develop new energy and agricultural systems, maximise resource efficiency, and continue recent progress towards participatory decision-making in China and India. Educational and professional exchanges should also be stepped up, it recommends.

The Hindustan Times, 13 January 2006

6 Indians among 345 killed in Haj stampede

MENA (SAUDI ARABIA), JANUARY 12: Six Indians are suspected to be among those killed in a stampede during the symbolic stoning ritual at the Haj in Mecca in which at least 345 pilgrims have died, Indian Consulate in Saudi Arabia said. The Indians included four women and two men, Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed said.

The Indian Express, 13 January 2006

Meanwhile, Mulford meets Narayanan on Tehran stance (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 12: Against the backdrop of a fast emerging consensus to take Iran to the UN Security Council over its nuclear programme, US Ambassador to India David Mulford today held a meeting with National Security Advisor M K Narayanan. Mulford is said to have explained the US position, the ongoing diplomatic efforts, while also discussing the course it seeks to adopt after Iran removed IAEA seals on equipment which could be used for uranium enrichment. India has been quiet over the past couple of days when the crisis has been unfolding in various important capitals across the globe. Despite having voted against Iran at the IAEA in September, New Delhi has been favouring a negotiated settlement of the problem. It was Narayanan who had made an unpublicised visit last November to London, ahead of the IAEA board of governors' meeting and discussed the issue with officials from the EU-3, US and Russia.

The Indian Express, 13 January 2006

Fleet expansion in mind, Myanmar looks to India for expertise (Shiv Aroor)

PORT BLAIR, JANUARY 12: Myanmar is steeped in its largest ever defence project, developing indigenous stealth frigates to give the country's small navy an expeditionary warfare fleet. While it is only to be expected that China will be a principle contractor for the technology, the Than Shwe government has expressed its keenness to deepen the Indian involvement for its shipbuilding know-how and maritime expertise. Arms supply for the Myanmar project will be one of the subjects of discussion when Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash visits Yangon next week. Apart from selling Yangon the Navy's remaindered BN-2 Islander aircraft, Admiral Prakash will also discuss the supply of deck-based air defence guns and other weapons for the new Myanmar frigates when he meets the country's second-in-command General Maung Aye.

The Hindu, 13 January 2006

India, China engagement positive, says Shyam Saran (P.S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: India and China are engaged in a positive way to expand their commonalities. It is an outdated perception that the two might be seeking the containment of each other, according to Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran. In an address to the Shanghai Institute of International Studies on Wednesday, Mr. Saran said New Delhi believed there was enough space and opportunity in Asia and beyond for the two countries to grow. The simultaneous emergence of India and China as Asian and global powers, in fact, made it imperative for them to be sensitive to each other's interests and aspirations. In the larger regional situation, he said India "would be happy to work closely with China towards the progressive realisation of an East Asian Community and, eventually, a larger Asian Economic Community." In this wider framework of cooperative engagement, he said India would expect Beijing to respond positively to New Delhi's quest for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

The Hindu, 13 January 2006

India, China primed for energy cooperation (Siddharth Varadarajan)

BEIJING: India and China took a key step towards enhanced energy cooperation by creating a framework under which their state-owned oil and gas companies can evolve and submit joint bids for acquisition of assets in third countries. If implemented successfully, the framework will not end all competition between Indian and Chinese

energy companies overseas. But Indian officials are hopeful that the countries will be able to put behind them the bruising battles for acquisition of oilfields in Kazakhstan, Angola and Nigeria, which benefited only the sellers there. Under the umbrella of an overall memorandum of understanding signed here on Thursday by Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Mani Shankar Aiyar and China's National Development and Reforms Commission Chairman Ma Kai, five company-specific MoUs were also signed to begin the process of operationalising cooperation. Speaking to reporters, Mr. Aiyar stressed that joint bidding in third countries was only one aspect of what was being envisaged.

The Indian Express, 14 January 2006

N-deal with India: US can't afford to fail, says ex-envoy (Lalit K Jha)

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 13: The Former United States Ambassador to India, Robert D Blackwill, has said the US and its Congress "can't afford" an unsuccessful nuclear deal with India, as this would harm vital American strategic interests for many years. "The failure would be very damaging for US prospects," Blackwill said, before a select gathering at the US Chamber of Commerce building facing White House. Making a strong case for the passage of the appropriate legislation by the Congress that would approve what he said as the historic Indo-US nuclear deal, Blackwill said India was an emerging global power- saw in this agreement a "litmus test" for the US foreign relationship towards India.

The Indian Express, 14 January 2006

31 Indians in stampede toll

MECCA, DUBAI, JANUARY 13: Thirty-one Indians, including 15 women, were among 364 pilgrims killed in the Haj stampede in Mina near Mecca yesterday. Of the 15 Indians injured, eight have been released from hospitals, Indian Consul General Ausaf Sayeed said over phone from Mina. Among the dead, 14 were from Uttar Pradesh, four from Andhra Pradesh, three each from Maharashtra and Kerala, two each from MP and Rajasthan and one from West Bengal, he said. Saudi Arabia blamed unruly pilgrims for the crush but many Muslims said better security could have averted the worst disaster to befall the rite in 16 years.

The Indian Express, 14 January 2006

Aiyar chalks out safe route for gasline (Amitav Ranjan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13: With the international community turning the heat on Iran, Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar is proposing that the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline be individually built by each of the three nations in their own territory. This option would not only help New Delhi avoid a face-off with the United States but also protect the project from international sanctions. This model would also enable American consultants and contractors to participate in the project segments being executed in Pakistan and India, it said.

The Hindu, 14 January 2006

Aiyar: India fully committed to pipeline project (Siddharth Varadarajan)

BEIJING: Firmly denying media reports that New Delhi had decided to withdraw from the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, Petroleum and Natural Gas minister Mani Shankar Aiyar on Friday said the country was "fully committed" to the venture. Describing the factual position, the Minister said the three parallel tracks of bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan, India and Iran and Pakistan and Iran led to a situation where the three countries were now contemplating trilateral discussions. India was still reviewing the project structure and various options would be taken to the Cabinet for approval. Officials said that as the three countries moved to give concrete shape to the pipeline proposal, the level of opposition from the United States administration had perceptibly increased.

The Times of India, 15 January 2006

Indian toll at Haj 44; 39 identified

DUBAI: Thirty nine of the 44 Indians killed in the stampede during the symbolic stoning ritual on the final day of the Haj on Thursday in Mina, have been identified. Bodies of 39 Indian victims have been identified, Indian consul general in Saudi Arabia Ausaf Sayeed said on Saturday. He said that the identification process was still on and feared that there could be more casualties among Indians, who were not pilgrims but working with various Saudi agencies.

The Times of India, 15 January 2006

IIM: India missed the bus, says Tong

AHMEDABAD: A senior minister of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong, on Sunday said the Indian Government's recent decision to not allow IIM-B to set up campus in Singapore was India's "loss". Tong, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, who is visiting the Indian Institute of Management-Ahmedabad (IIMA) along with a delegation of about four ministers, told mediapersons, "We are happy to welcome IIM-B in Singapore. But it is for the Indian Government to decide on the matter". "It is their (India's) loss. They could have made some money as well", he added.

The Times of India, 15 January 2006

New ideas, terror to figure in Indo-Pak talks

NEW DELHI: India and Pakistan will discuss "new ideas" on promoting bilateral ties when Foreign Secretaries of the two countries meet in New Delhi on Tuesday to kick off the third round of Composite Dialogue amid New Delhi's serious concerns over continued cross-border terrorism. The Indian side is expected to make some fresh proposals with regard to enhancement of people-to-people contacts, like launch of transportation links and tourism exchanges. Taking place in the backdrop of terror attacks in Delhi and Bangalore in which Pak-based Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT) have been found involved, the meeting will discuss terrorism which is of much importance to India, the sources said.

The Times of India, 15 January 2006

20 killed in Myanmar action against Naga rebels

DIMAPUR: Heavy fighting in Naga-inhabited areas of Myanmar in the past week has resulted in the death of over 20 people, including 15 Myanmar soldiers. NSCN-Khaplang faction claims its fighters killed 15 Myanmar army men in a gunbattle in the jungles of northern Myanmar. NSCN-K leader Kughalu Mulatonu said the gunfight began last Saturday between NSCN-K cadres and Myanmar soldiers in Myanmar's northern Sagaing Division. But there is no independent confirmation of the clashes from either the Myanmar or Indian authorities.

The Hindu, 16 January 2006

Egypt approves transit for French warship through Suez Canal (Vaiju Naravane)

PARIS: Egypt finally gave its approval for the Clemenceau, the asbestos-laden decommissioned French warship, to transit through the Suez Canal on its way to India for dismantling. The Egyptian authorities had previously claimed that the Basel convention applied to the ship, causing a standoff that briefly threatened to strain relations. Under immense pressure from France Egypt appears to have accepted the French claim that the Clemenceau was a warship and so was not governed by the regulations of the Basel Convention of 1989 which bars trans-boundary movement of toxic waste.

The Indian Express, 16 January 2006

India concerned about Iran gas pipeline

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 15: With unrest prevailing in Balochistan, concerns are growing in India over the proposed 4.16 billion US dollar Iran-India gas pipeline which has to pass through the region of Pakistan. India's worries stem from the fact that it would have huge stakes in the nearly 3000 km long pipeline project, about 800 km of which has to pass through Balochistan. New Delhi apprehends that the pipeline could be caught in the cross-fire if violence continues to increase in Balochistan, they said, citing the past incidents when pipelines of water and gas have been targeted in the region. These concerns are believed to have been one of the provocations for External Affairs Ministry to issue a statement recently on situation in Balochistan.

The Times of India, 16 January 2006

Pak N-deal like India's, but changes first: Kerry

ISLAMABAD: US Senator and leading Democrat John Kerry on Saturday said Pakistan ought eventually to have the same access as rival India to civilian nuclear technology, but indicated changes were needed first. After talks with Pakistani prime minister Shaukat Aziz in Islamabad, he said he had discussed steps Pakistan needed to think about as it moved toward equal treatment with India.

The Hindu, 16 January 2006

India, China to enhance ties

NEW DELHI: India and China on Sunday agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation on issues relating to trafficking of narcotic drugs and set up a mechanism to enable exchange of information.

The Times of India, 17 January 2006

India signals turn, rebukes Iran on N-issue (Indrani Bagchi)

NEW DELHI: India delivered an official rebuke to Iran on Monday, in the process signalling that New Delhi will not oppose Iran's referral to the UN Security Council at the next IAEA meeting in February. MEA strongly refuted a statement by the Iranian nuclear chief, Ali Larijani, that appeared to cast aspersions on India's nuclear programme. As long as Iran was hitting out at the west and Israel, India preferred to keep its counsel. But when the chief Iranian nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani impugned India's nuclear programme, the MEA decided to react.

The Times of India, 17 January 2006

Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus to start by February-end

NEW DELHI: The first-ever bus service between Amritsar and Nankana Sahib, linking the city of Golden Temple

with the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev - the founder of the Sikh faith - will start next month-end. Timing of the service was decided here on Monday in consultation with the authorities in Pakistan. A formal announcement is expected shortly in both the capitals of India and Pakistan.

The Hindu, 17 January 2006

India, E.U. should sign free trade deal: U.K.

NEW DELHI: The United Kingdom has proposed that India and the European Union enter into a Free Trade Agreement. The suggestion was made by the visiting U.K. Trade Minister, Ian Pearson, to Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath, who said India would be "open" to the idea.

The Times of India, 17 January 2006

'India should be transparent on N-deal'

NEW DELHI: US Senator Max Baucus on Sunday said Indian government should ensure clear separation between civilian and military facilities before US Congress decides to ratify the Indo-US deal on civilian nuclear cooperation. "Most Congressmen do not know much about the deal as it is not yet a signed agreement," Baucus, who serves as Ranking Member of the influential US Senate Finance Committee, told reporters. Senator is leading a delegation from Montana, US on a five-day visit to India. Sunday was the last day of that visit.

The Indian Express, 18 January 2006

Let strike forces not be eyeball to eyeball: Pak to India (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 17: In a suggestion that has set South Block thinking, Pakistan today proposed that military strike formations on either side should not be "permanently relocated" to forward locations. According to Pakistan, the proposal, presented on Day 1 of the Foreign Secretary-level talks today, will improve trust levels on both sides and not fuel suspicion over intent each time a strike formation is moved. However, New Delhi is still looking at whether this could end up undermining post-Parakram efforts of the Indian military to reduce time taken for deployment of forces in the border. India, for its part, formally presented a non-paper proposing to Pakistan not to set up new posts on the Line of Control or carry out any fresh defence works. As India engages in discussions with the US on the ballistic missile defence, the Pakistani side has proposed to declare South Asia as an "ABM (Anti-ballistic Missile) free zone." In the backdrop of the recent agreement on pre-notification of ballistic missile tests, Islamabad proposed to also include Cruise missiles in the agreement.

The Hindu, 18 January 2006

Bertie Ahern pitches for joint IT initiatives with India

BANGALORE: Launching the Global e-School and Communities Initiative (GeSCI) in India, Ireland Prime Minister Bertie Ahern on Tuesday said India would be the focus of initiatives in education and technology combined. An initiative of the United Nations ICT Task Force, the GeSCI would draw lessons from Indian applications. Ireland acknowledged the strengths of India. It could be a key R&D destination. Presiding, Chief Minister N. Dharam Singh said his Government would extend support to education initiatives in Karnataka, which was a pioneer in privatisation of higher education.

The Hindu, 18 January 2006

Clemenceau: Egypt didn't consult India (Vaiju Naravane)

PARIS: Egypt did not make any effort to obtain fresh certificates from India that would have highlighted the present situation, especially the Supreme Court order restraining the ship from entering India's territorial waters until February 13, 2006, and the negative opinion expressed by the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee on Hazardous Waste on January 6. While the letters from the French authorities were all dated January this year, the no-objection certificates from the Gujarat Pollution Control Board and the Gujarat Maritime Board dated back to 2003, 2004 and 2005. Highly informed sources in Cairo told The Hindu that the Egyptian authorities had not contacted the Indian embassy in Cairo about the Clemenceau's locus standi vis-a-vis the Government of India.

The Times of India, 18 January 2006

London HC will seek reasons to reopen case (Rashmee Roshan Lall)

LONDON: Crown Prosecution Service sources said the London HC would "query any application for a further restraining order given the application to discharge the original order. The court is likely to ask for evidence as to how and why there has been a change in circumstances." While there is speculation that the Bofors fugitive may well have cleaned out the accounts, the information provided by CPS acquires significance even if the money has indeed been withdrawn. Significantly, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee, according to news agencies, said in New Delhi on Tuesday that the government did not have any "jurisdiction" over other countries. "We have no jurisdiction... We can at best make a request to them (UK authorities)".

The Indian Express, 19 January 2006

General reminds him of invite to talk J&K, PM in no hurry, underlines terror (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 18: Reminding Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of his earlier invite, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has conveyed through his Foreign Secretary that the time had come for the two leaders to meet and discuss the Kashmir issue. While accepting the invite, Singh told Pakistan Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammed Khan that he would first like to ensure that the visit is a substantive one. The PM also raised the issue of terror with Khan and drew his attention to the attacks in Delhi and Bangalore. He reminded the Pakistan Foreign Secretary that it was important to ensure that Pakistan abides by its commitment not to allow its territory to be used for terrorism directed against India.

The Indian Express, 19 January 2006

US team landing for Bush visit groundwork (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 18: India and the US may not have officially announced the dates for the visit of US President George W Bush, but White House has already begun preparations and is sending a delegation over the weekend to hold preliminary discussions. As of now, Bush is expected to be here on March 1 after India pointed out that February 28 would be Budget day here. Currently, the plan is for a three-day visit and the team will be holding discussions at Hyderabad House on Saturday on arrangements connected to the trip. Usually, Washington does start preparations at least a couple of months ahead of a Presidential visit due to security concerns. And many such teams will follow as the visit draws closer.

The Indian Express, 19 January 2006

US makes changes in visa procedures

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 18: In moves that may benefit Indians applying for business visas to visit America, the US State Department and Department of Homeland have announced a number of steps to expedite the processing time for visas. It has also established a business visa centre to lessen the waiting time for visa appointments for visitors and all American embassies and consulates have established procedures to expedite the processing of business visas. Under the new scheme, student visas will be issued up to 120 days ahead and holders will be allowed entry 45 days in advance of studies.

The Indian Express, 19 January 2006

'India a partial bright spot for human rights in South Asia'

WASHINGTON, JAN 18: Human Rights Watch (HRW) sees India as a bright spot in its generally bleak assessment of the human rights situation in South Asia. The group's report for 2005 praised India for playing a "constructive role in opposing" King Gyanendra's seizure of absolute power last February in neighbouring Nepal. The report, issued today, praised the Indian government for setting up a committee to review the armed forces special powers act, which gives the Army and paramilitary sweeping powers to battle militants, including the right to shoot people suspected of being rebels. HRW criticised India for creating legislation that the rights groups alleged shields security forces from accountability and for allowing police to torture suspects. It also faulted India for allegedly failing to protect its citizens from discrimination based on caste and religion.

The Hindu, 19 January 2006

SAFTA decision deferred (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has deferred a decision on ratification of the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which was scheduled to come into force from January 1. The Tuesday decision came at a Cabinet meeting presided by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz amid speculation in the media over differences within the Government on formal seal of approval. Information and Broadcasting Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said the decision was taken due to "paucity" of time as Mr. Aziz was scheduled to leave on a week-long tour of the U.S. beginning on Wednesday. The reports imply that in the context of India, operationalisation of the SAFTA would mean conferment of most favoured nation (MFN) plus to India. According to these reports, the Commerce Ministry has recommended to the Cabinet conditional ratification of the treaty to ensure that India does not get optimum benefit.

The Indian Express, 20 January 2006

Between the lines of n-deal fineprint: a new Indo-US pact? (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 19: Finding their way through maze of issues surrounding the Indo-US nuclear deal, both sides today focussed on details of a possible civil nuclear energy cooperation agreement during the upcoming visit of US President George W Bush. However, another round of talks may have to be conducted next month before the visit. Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns today held discussions through the day, picking up the thread from where they had left it in Washington last month. While India had indicated to the US the options it was exploring to put in place a credible separation plan, sources said, Burns had returned to this round of talks with more details in mind.

The Indian Express, 20 January 2006

Nuclear issue: EU-3 looks for India's support to restrain Iran

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 19: In a bid to consolidate support for referring the Iran nuclear issue to the UN Security Council, EU-3 representative and senior German foreign office official Michael Schaefer today met Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and conveyed the EU-3 decision to get the UNSC to give a call to Iran for cooperation on behalf of the international community. Ahead of his meeting with Saran, Schaefer - who is a political director in the German foreign office - made it clear that it was not the intention of EU-3 to move for sanctions and in fact, described the talk of military action as an "unrealistic option" at this stage. He said India can play an "important role" to help find a way forward to resolve this issue.

The Indian Express, 20 January 2006

Nepal crackdown cause for grave concern, says India

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 19: King Gyanendra's latest attempt to restrict political activity in Nepal has drawn a strong reaction from India, which today expressed "grave concern" and felt this was a setback to all efforts to get the monarchy to work together with other constitutional forces. Indian Ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shankar Mukherjee is currently in Delhi and has held discussions with Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and senior Army officials besides meeting Home Minister Shivraj Patil on Wednesday. While India keeps a watch on the developments, the matter will be discussed with US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns who is here for talks on implementing the July 18 joint statement.

The Indian Express, 20 January 2006

India's 'N-violation?' US puts past behind to push for N-deal (Carol Giacomo)

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 19: In documents released by a Senate panel, the US State Department said it could not determine whether the project in question-a 40 megawatt nuclear reactor called Cirus-had violated a 1956 US-India contract. Some experts say the project violated past Indian assurances that US nuclear material will be used only for peaceful uses, not weapons and this called into question India's trustworthiness as a future nuclear partner. Rather than spend time on Cirus, "the administration believes the most productive approach is to focus on India's new commitments under (the July 18, 2005) joint statement," he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Canada had cut off nuclear co-operation with India in 1974 after plutonium from Cirus was used in the first nuclear test at Pokharan. The US is affected because it supplied Cirus with "heavy water" which is used to moderate nuclear fission.

The Hindu, 20 January 2006

15 Indians in Saudi jails

DUBAI: At least 15 Indians, mostly from Kerala, are languishing in Saudi prisons, unable to pay 'blood money' for their release. Diplomatic sources in Riyadh said all of them were involved in accidents resulting in deaths of people, for which compensation would have to be paid. These persons hope that the Indian Government will plead for their release during the visit of King Abdullah to New Delhi as chief guest on Republic Day.

The Indian Express, 20 January 2006

Amritsar-Lahore bus service launch today

ISLAMABAD, JANUARY 19: The Amritsar-Lahore bus service will be launched tomorrow, taking the people-to-people contact between India and Pakistan another step forward. As per the agreement between the two countries, the bus from Pakistan would leave from Lahore for Amritsar and return the next day. The first bus from the Indian side would arrive in Pakistan on January 24 and return the next day. The bus from Pakistan would leave Lahore on Fridays and return on Saturdays while the Indian bus would arrive in Lahore on Tuesdays and return the next day. Officials of the two countries consider it a historic step in furthering the peace process as this would be the first time a bus service would be directly linking the Punjab provinces of both sides.

The Hindu, 20 January 2006

India, Ireland sign three agreements

NEW DELHI: India and Ireland signed three agreements on cultural, scientific and technological cooperation on Thursday. One of the two agreements signed on Science and Technology was a memorandum of understanding between the Indian National Science Academy and the Science Foundation of Ireland. The visiting Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern held talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He called on President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. The delegation was briefed about the progress of the Metro project by Managing Director of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation E. Sreedharan. Since Ireland is also considering the possibility of having a Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) for Dublin, which is quite densely populated, Mr. Sreedharan explained to the visiting dignitaries the construction techniques of the elevated Metro and the cost involved.

The Indian Express, 20 January 2006

Indian scientist named 'Inventor of the Year'

SILICON VALLEY, JANUARY 19: An Indian-American scientist has been named 'Inventor of the Year' for his pioneering work in developing a new system which utilises data to improve patient care and clinical decisions. R

Bharat Rao, senior director of Engineering Research Development, Computer-aided Diagnosis and Therapy Group at Siemens Medical Solutions, is one of 12 Siemens inventors to receive the award. Rao of Malvern, Pennsylvania was chosen from Siemens' 57,000 research and development employees worldwide for his pioneering work in developing an automated data collection and analysis tool, REMIND (Reliable Extraction and Meaningful Inference from Nonstructured Data).

The Hindu, 20 January 2006

India-born Tellis is Adviser to Burns

WASHINGTON: Ahead of US President George W. Bush's visit to India in March, eminent South Asia expert Ashley J. Tellis has been appointed Senior Adviser to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns in support of various State Department activities relating to India-U.S. relations. He had served previously on the National Security Council staff as Senior Director for Strategic Planning and Southwest Asia, and as Senior Adviser to the then U.S. Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.

The Hindu, 21 January 2006

U.S. lifts barrier to high-tech trade

WASHINGTON: In a bid to strengthen strategic partnership, the U.S. has removed a major non-tariff hurdle for hi-tech trade by exempting India from import certification requirements. The announcement made by the U.S. Department of Commerce exempted six other east European nations as well from this requirement - Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The removal of the requirement for India was on account of the actions taken by New Delhi under the Next Steps in the Strategic Partnership (NSSP) with the U.S.

The Indian Express, 21 January 2006

Friendship unites two Punjabs (Dharmendra Rataul)

WAGAH, DECEMBER 20: Divided long ago by the partition, the two Punjabs came together today with Dosti - the first bus from Lahore to Amritsar which glided into Wagah - with warm hugs and bhangra beats. The police band played Ghar aya pardesi, refreshing memories of undivided Punjab. But today's bus carrying 26 passengers was largely an official affair, with only Reshma-the Pakistani folk singer-and her family representing the masses. There were also four Indians, on their way home after watching the Lahore cricket Test. It took the bus exactly 1 hour 20 minutes to cover the 65 kilometres between Lahore and Wagah.

The Hindu, 21 January 2006

Deal unlikely during Bush visit, says Nicholas Burns (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: An agreement to implement the July 18, 2005 civilian nuclear deal between India and the United States may not be clinched by the time President George W. Bush arrives here in March, a senior American official said on Friday. Addressing a joint press conference, U.S. Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns said that for any agreement to be credible with the American Congress and the Nuclear Suppliers' Group, it would have to be detailed and substantial. Pointing out that the two sides had their work cut out for the next several weeks, Mr. Burns stressed, "We have to see if we can be successful. I hope we can."

The Hindu, 21 January 2006

Safeguards for breeder reactors a key obstacle (Siddharth Varadarajan)

NEW DELHI: According to sources familiar with the ideas exchanged by both delegations, the U.S. team, headed by Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, is unwilling to accept India's position that the fast breeder, as an R&D programme, will not be put on the list of civilian facilities that are offered up for safeguards and inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). They argued that if Japan could agree to subject its Joyo experimental breeder reactor and Monju prototype reactor to IAEA safeguards, there was no reason why India could not. Thursday's meeting here was apparently the first time the Indian side formally got to learn of America's insistence on safeguarding the 20-year old Fast Breeder Test Reactor (FBTR) and Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, near Chennai.

The Hindu, 21 January 2006

"IAEA inspections will compromise breeder research" (Siddharth Varadarajan)

NEW DELHI: "Moving fuel from one section to another would then require informing the IAEA in advance, waiting for their inspector to arrive and approve, and then executing the task concerned," said one former DAE scientist. At the heart of the U.S. insistence on safeguarding the fast breeders is its reluctance to accept India as a nuclear weapons state, scientists familiar with the programme's potential weapons application say. Though India wants breeders for civilian purposes, a breeder reactor can also be used as a "laundry" to breed weapon-grade Pu-239 from reactor grade plutonium (Pu-240) generated by pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs).

The Hindu, 21 January 2006

Couple of Indian origin burnt to death in South Africa

DURBAN: A young couple of Indian origin was burnt to death in a fire in their shop at Eshow, a town in KwaZulu-Natal province. KwaZulu-Natal province has been witnessing violence that mostly targeted ethnic Indians. The incident is the latest in a series of incidents in which people of Indian origin have been targeted in and around Durban, which has the largest concentration of Indians in South Africa. Last year, Keegan Naidu, a clerk working in Isipingo Rail, south of Durban, was shot dead after being abducted along with his friend by gunmen.

The Indian Express, 22 January 2006

On George Bush's New Delhi agenda: plan for inter-faith meet in Akshardham (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 21: Top on the list of cultural places for US President George W Bush to visit during his stay in Delhi is the Akshardham Temple where an inter-faith congregation is on the cards once White House gives its final nod. A "pre-advance" team led by White House Deputy Chief of Staff Joseph Hagin visited the newly constructed temple complex on the banks of Yamuna today. While a confirmation to this proposal will come only after this team submits its report, what is clear is that Taj Mahal is not yet on Bush's list. Indications are that Bush's staff wants to keep his itinerary different from that of former US President Bill Clinton who even visited a Rajasthan village during his trip six years ago.

The Hindu, 22 January 2006

France yet to provide full inventory (Vaiju Naravane)

PARIS: France has still not provided an inventory of the exact amount of asbestos or its location on the former aircraft carrier Clemenceau. Sources close to India's Supreme Court Monitoring Committee said the French government's presentation of its case to the SCMC which met on Friday was "inadequate." Neither the French ambassador to India, Dominique Girard, nor Mr Briac Beilvert of SDIC, the Panama-registered private company that acquired the ship, was able to give adequate answers to several questions raised by the committee. The Supreme Court's final decision on whether the ship should be allowed into India to be broken up is to be announced on February 13, a particularly awkward moment for the governments of the two countries, since President Chirac is to begin a 36-hour official visit to India on February 20.

The Hindu, 22 January 2006

Let us go beyond CBMs: Aziz (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has said India and Pakistan must move beyond simple confidence-building measures to "substantive dispute resolution" of the Kashmir issue to achieve "sustainable peace" in South Asia. Mr. Aziz, on a weeklong visit to the United States, spoke to the press after "comprehensive" talks with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Replying to queries, he said Kashmir was the "core" issue, which must be resolved to allow India and Pakistan to move forward on other fronts, according to the official news agency, Associated Press of Pakistan.

The Hindu, 22 January 2006

Terror threat to Apollo Hospital in Bangladesh

NEW DELHI: India has conveyed its concern to Bangladesh over a terror threat to Chief Executive Officer Richard Larison and nine Indian doctors of the Dhaka-based Apollo Hospital. The External Affairs Ministry called Bangladesh High Commissioner Liaquat Ali Choudhary here on Friday to convey its concern in the wake of the threat received through e-mail a few days ago, sources said. The email was signed by Abu Sayeed M.M. Rehman, joint secretary of the Joint Action Committee of the terror outfits, Jamait-ul Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Jehad-e-Islami and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh. It asked them to leave the country or pay 20-lakh taka.

The Hindu, 22 January 2006

Nuclear deal with U.S.: change of mood seen

NEW DELHI: There's a shift in the mood as far as the civil nuclear deal between India and the United States is concerned. This is evident from on-the-record remarks made after the second meeting of the India-U.S. joint working group on civil nuclear cooperation in Washington last month and the just-concluded third meeting in New Delhi. The key message from the remarks made by Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns on Friday was simple: that more work needs to be done before the July 18, 2005 nuclear deal can be implemented.

The Indian Express, 23 January 2006

Observer status for India at OIC: King Abdulla

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 22: Saudi Arabia favours India getting an observer status in the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) but wants Pakistan to endorse India's application for the same. King Abdullah's statement assumes significance as Pakistan has been consistently trying to block India's entry to OIC. Admitting the Pakistan factor had clouded Indo-Saudi relations in the past, King Abdullah said the two countries' relationship now needed to be de-hyphenated.

The Indian Express, 23 January 2006

Fearing war, Lanka Tamils flee to India (Jaya Menon)

DHANUSHKODI, JANUARY 22: Around 2.30 am on Friday, Suryakumar landed on the Arichalmunai shores near the ghost village of Dhanushkodi. Fearing a fresh outbreak of conflict between the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE, he had fled his native village, Thondamannar in Jaffna district, with his wife, five daughters and five siblings. But his flight to safety came at a price. He had to shell out Rs 42,000 to the boat-owner who brought him illegally to Rameshwaram from Talaimannar in the dead of night, when both Sri Lankan and Indian naval patrols were napping. Since January 12, eight batches of Lankan Tamils have reached the Indian shores undetected.

The Indian Express, 23 January 2006

'India needs to refocus attention on Pak-occupied Gilgit and Baltistan'

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 22: In view of the urgent need to have alternate routes for energy supplies, India requires to refocus attention on Gilgit and Baltistan, which is now facing popular unrest against Pakistani authorities due to large-scale anti-Shia violence that has taken a toll of over 100 lives so far, a top security analyst has said. He said this would imply some negotiations with China on boundary and trade issues. "The practice of anti-Shia pogrom started in the 1980s, and one of the persons who led a brutal campaign against Shias in Gilgit in 1988 was Brig (now General) Pervez Musharraf, who was then based in Khapalu," Sood said.

The Indian Express, 23 January 2006

On PM-Saudi King agenda: terrorism, defence, energy (C Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 22: All the pomp surrounding the first visit by a Saudi King to India in half a century - plane loads of royalty accompanying the monarch and the pageantry of the Republic's birthday bash - will not hide the strategic significance of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's talks with King Abdullah on Wednesday. The PM and the King are apparently determined to act on the broad principle the two establishments have recognised long ago - the security of the sub-continent and the Arabian Peninsula are inextricably intertwined. For the King, the India visit is part of a new "Look East" policy that seeks to connect the Saudi Kingdom to Asia's economic dynamism and engage China and India, whose rise is transforming the world. King Abdullah arrives here from China after a three day trip to the Middle Kingdom. Unlike China, India's historic links and cultural affinities with the Arabian Peninsula are deep. For India, the King's visit will create the basis for deepening the "Look West" policy, that the Prime Minister has often talked about. He is keen to promote a free trade area with the Gulf Cooperation Council, that covers the six nations of the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi Kingdom is the economic and political heart of the GCC. Manmohan Singh is keen to move India beyond its past mercantilism that focused only on oil purchases and labour exports.

The Indian Express, 23 January 2006

Why Israel's top gun has India on his mind (Sudipta Datta)

PUNE, JANUARY 22: As former head of security of Israel's official airliner EL AL, widely considered to be the most secure airliner in the world, Offer Einav is used to being the first and last word on security. And that's what's bringing him to India. He has tied up with Pune-based security firm Force 10, which was set up by ex-Army Lt Col (retd) Shashi Anand, Lt Gen (retd) D B Shekatkar, Maj Gen (retd) S C N Jatar among others four years ago. "By becoming the leading locomotive of the world economy, India, ironically is also becoming vulnerable to attacks," says Einav. After the brazen attack on Bangalore's premier science institute, "it's clear we will see a change in the way attacks happen. I am talking about defence, military, tourist targets. Remember Egypt and Bali? One terrorist strike and the tourism industry has gone into a tailspin."

The Indian Express, 24 January 2006

DAE drags feet on separation, Space docks with NASA (C Raja Mohan & Johnson TA)

NEW DELHI, BANGALORE, JANUARY 23: While the Department of Atomic Energy remains tentative on separating its civilian and military facilities and faces the prospect of continuing international isolation, the Department of Space is reaping gains from the engagement with the Bush Administration. The Saran-Burns talks have tied up an understanding on letting Indian rockets launch satellites with American components. The move is expected to boost India's commercial rocket launch programme. ISRO sources told The Indian Express that they were on the verge of finalising an agreement with NASA to launch US instruments on future Indian space missions.

The Indian Express, 24 January 2006

On gas sale, Myanmar sees India chance (Amitav Ranjan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 23: Myanmar is reconsidering sale of natural gas to India, a step that would rekindle the prospects of a Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline project. Last Tuesday, Indian Ambassador in Yangon R K Bhatia persuaded Myanmar Energy Minister Lun Thi to come back to the negotiating table for sale of gas from Block A-1 to India instead of China. The rider is that New Delhi must provide a clear indication to Yangon about its plan to evacuate this gas to India in a "time-bound manner". Myanmar said it signed the MoU with PetroChina

because no progress had been achieved in the tripartite agreement between Myanmar, Bangladesh and India for the proposed pipeline project, whereas the Chinese had assured that they would lay their pipeline on time. Last month, Myanmar had sent a feeler to New Delhi asking Aiyar to visit Yangon in the first week of January. Instead, Aiyar left for China to pursue strategic partnership among state-run companies of both nations.

The Hindu, 24 January 2006

Saudi court pardons Noushad

NEW DELHI: A Saudi Arabian court has pardoned Abdul Lateef Noushad, an Indian national, whose eye was to be gouged out under the tit-for-tat laws of the country, Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed said here on Monday. The pardon comes a day before Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud's arrival in India. Not only had the victim pardoned Noushad but the court also authenticated this gesture, Mr. Ahamed said.

The Times of India, 24 January 2006

World Economic Forum honours Shabana Azmi

NEW DELHI: Noted actress Shabana Azmi has been selected for the prestigious 'CRYSTAL' award by the World Economic Forum for her "outstanding excellence" in the field of art. Azmi, known for her versatile acting in movies like 'Arth', 'Mandi' and 'Sardari Begum', shares the honour with Hollywood superstar Michael Douglas. The award is given to artists who have achieved outstanding excellence in the field of culture and have used their art to reach out to other countries. The award would be presented in Davos, Switzerland on January.

The Hindu, 24 January 2006

Saudi King's visit raises expectations (Atul Aneja)

DUBAI: The visit of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz to India has raised high expectations among the intelligentsia of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, who see it as a path-breaking event that would set the course of a new round of engagement between the oil rich region and New Delhi. From a Saudi Arabian perspective, India could become a gateway for fostering a deeper relationship between Riyadh, South Asia and South-east Asia. India could also support Saudi Arabia's membership to the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. Based on its close ties with Iran, India is well placed to mediate between the GCC countries and Teheran to ease tensions. Besides, Saudi Arabia could take advantages of Indian intellectual resources, as the successes in the Information Technology sector were likely to be replicated in biotechnology, biogenetics and pharmaceuticals.

The Times of India, 24 January 2006

Bhel to set up 500 MW power plant in Sudan

NEW DELHI: India on Monday okayed a loan of \$392 million in two Lines of Credit through Export-Import Bank (EXIM) for setting up a 500 MW power plant and a transmission line project in Sudan. This would make India's second largest investment in Sudan after ONGC Videsh Ltd's (OVL) \$1 billion plans in Sudan. The total project cost of about \$500 million is being shared by the two countries, with the Exim Bank of India giving credit lines of \$392 million. This would open up more opportunities for Bhel, Sudan government officials said, adding they were keen that Indian companies set up manufacturing base there to tap the African and Middle-east market.

The Hindu, 25 January 2006

PM receives King Abdullah

NEW DELHI: Setting aside protocol, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh personally received Saudi Arabian King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud at Palam airport here on Tuesday evening. It is the first visit by a Saudi King to India in 51 years. The Saudi King, who will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations, arrived here from China. He is scheduled to meet President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and the Prime Minister on Wednesday.

The Indian Express, 25 January 2006

Israeli, Indian NSAs to talk Iran next week (Shishir Gupta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 24: On February 2, when the US wants the IAEA board to meet for possible referral of Iran to the UN Security Council, Israel's National Security Advisor will be briefing his counterpart in Delhi about the threat Tehran poses to Tel Aviv. Official sources today confirmed that Israeli NSA Giora Eiland will be on a two-day India visit from February 1 to revive the strategic dialogue after a gap of four years. Eiland, who was in Moscow last week to try and convince Russia about the urgency to take Iran to UNSC, will seek Delhi's support against Tehran's nuclear activities. Confirmation of Eiland's visit to India comes on the day President George W Bush made clear that US would defend Israel against any Iranian threat.

The Indian Express, 25 January 2006

Navy deal with Myanmar hits UK hurdle (Shiv Aroor)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 24: The UK has been critical of India's recent overtures to Myanmar's military dispensation, but now it has warned New Delhi against the proposed sale by the Navy of a British-made BN-2

Islander aircraft to Yangon. Ahead of Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash's Myanmar visit from January 19-22, the British High Commission wrote a letter to the External Affairs Ministry, which was then forwarded to the Defence Ministry and the Navy. The Navy is now worried that the UK's protest could upset ongoing deals with that country, including the supply of helicopter spares and the cleared sale of 10 second-hand Royal Navy Sea Harriers to replenish the Goa-based fleet. The Navy finds this bizarre since there was no resale clause in the contract signed with British aviation firm Britten-Norman two decades ago.

The Indian Express, 25 January 2006

Iran, Iraq to figure in PM-Saudi King talks (C. Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 24: As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and King Abdullah meet tomorrow to review regional security, Iran's nuclear proliferation and Iraq's political stability are also expected to figure prominently in their talks. With the United States and Europe readying for a new confrontation with Tehran at the International Atomic Energy Agency early next month, the views of prominent Arab nations like Saudi Arabia and Egypt could hold the key to the eventual political decision on taking the Iran dossier to the UN Security Council. In the last few months, the historic rapprochement, built by King Abdullah and former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami between Shia, Persian Iran and Sunni Arab Saudi Arabia, is now under severe political stress.

The Indian Express, 26 January 2006

Indo-Saudi anti-crime pact inked

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 25: India and Saudi Arabia today took the first step towards combatting terrorism together through an agreement that opens the door for intelligence-sharing for the first time between both countries. While the agreement signed today in the presence of Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is one on combatting crime, it does cover terrorism. This is extremely important from an Indian standpoint as it will help in gathering information and conducting investigations into terror networks and their financial support.

The Indian Express, 26 January 2006

N-deal dies if India doesn't vote against Iran: Mulford (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 25: US Ambassador to India David Mulford today played spoiler to New Delhi's delicate dealing on the Iran nuclear issue as he sought to link the fate of the Indo-US nuclear deal to the way India votes at the International Atomic Energy Agency meeting on February 2. In an interview to PTI, Mulford said that if India did not vote to send Iran to the UN Security Council, the effect on the deal would be "devastating", for the US Congress would "simply stop considering the matter" and the "initiative will die". Later on, in damage-control mode within hours of the interview, Mulford expressed "regret" at his comments and said they were "taken out of context". He pointed out that he had also said that Iran was a matter where India would vote "on the basis of its own national interest". The remarks prompted a sharp reaction from India.

The Indian Express, 27 January 2006

Mulford undermines Bush visit: Envoy Sen will tell Burns (Shishir Gupta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 26: Bristling over Ambassador David Mulford's remarks that if India didn't vote to refer Iran to the Security Council, the nuclear initiative "would die," New Delhi has decided to convey to key interlocutors in Washington that such "insensitive views" would undermine the visit of President George Bush to India later in March. Official sources said that Indian Ambassador to US Ranendra "Ronen" Sen is meeting US Under-Secretary of State Nicholas Burns later today. He is expected to convey to him in "no uncertain terms" that Ambassador Mulford's comments were uncalled for and had the potential to create hurdles in closing the Indo-US nuclear deal before Bush arrives in March.

The Hindu, 27 January 2006

5 Indians held in Kachchativu (V.S. Sambandan)

COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan Navy apprehended five Indian nationals in the Kachchativu islet in the early hours of Thursday with a huge consignment of electric detonators, the island's navy said. "An Indian boat was seen approaching LTTE-held northern Sri Lanka on Wednesday night. When we chased the boat, it beached in Kachchativu. In the morning, following investigations, five Indians were found on board with 38 boxes of electric detonators with Indian markings, totalling 61,056," a naval spokesperson told The Hindu. Those held would be handed over to the local police, he said.

The Hindu, 28 January 2006

U.S. tells India to back off Syria oil deal (Siddharth Varadarajan)

NEW DELHI: Taking strong exception to India's recent decision to buy a Syrian oilfield in partnership with China, the United States has asked the Manmohan Singh Government to "reconsider" its proposed investment. A demarche to this effect was made earlier this month and an aide memoire outlining Washington's objections

handed over to the Ministry of External Affairs by senior diplomats here. In December last, ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) teamed up to purchase a 37 per cent stake in the al-Furat oil and gas fields from Petro-Canada for \$573 million. It is not known whether the U.S. embassy in Beijing presented a similar note to the Chinese Government. Indian officials say the U.S. has been told that the Syrian investment will proceed as planned. Coming on the heels of the Bush administration's opposition to gas imports from Iran, the demand is likely to intensify fears that Washington is leveraging its offer of civil nuclear cooperation to curb India's attempts to diversify its sources of energy.

The Hindu, 28 January 2006

King signs accord, a first for him (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: It was a first for the monarch. Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al Saud admitted on Friday that it was the first time he had actually "signed" an agreement with any country. According to Dr. Baru, the custodian of the two holy mosques told Vice-President B.S. Shekhawat that other countries might feel jealous that he had "signed" this declaration, but India was "very special" to Saudi Arabia. According to the "Delhi Declaration," the king's visit heralded a new era in India-Saudi Arabia relations and a landmark in the development of increased understanding and cooperation between the two countries and creation of a mutually beneficial partnership. They agreed to develop a "strategic energy partnership" based on complementarity and interdependence. The elements of this partnership would include reliable, stable and increased volume of crude oil supplies through "evergreen" long-term contracts.

The Hindu, 28 January 2006

Iran: India backs Russian initiative (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: Two days after the United States publicly advised India to vote against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), New Delhi welcomed "all initiatives," including from Russia, which could "enable a consensus" on the Iranian nuclear question and urged "further intensive efforts" in that direction. Moscow, it may be recalled, had proposed to Teheran that it enrich its uranium in Russia and top Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani recently discussed the suggestion with his Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov. While Russia, China and other leading members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) had abstained from voting with the United States at the IAEA governing board meeting on September 24, 2005, India had voted against Iran, in line with the U.S. position.

The Hindu, 29 January 2006

India, South Korea may consider economic pact (P.S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: India and South Korea are likely to explore the possibility of launching negotiations for a "Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement" (CEPA). Sources in Seoul said on Saturday that South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun might discuss the prospects of CEPA with President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam during their planned summit there on February 7. South Korea has suggested CEPA as a free-trade-plus agreement. And, efforts are now under way to set the CEPA initiative on course during Mr. Kalam's visit to Seoul, so that negotiations on the economic pact can begin thereafter. Two specific bilateral agreements, one on science and technology and the other relating to customs cooperation, will be signed during the Indian leader's visit.

The Hindu, 29 January 2006

France willing to repatriate toxic wastes (Vaiju Naravane)

PARIS: For the first time since the controversy erupted over the amount of asbestos on board the decommissioned French aircraft carrier Clemenceau, France has declared it is willing to repatriate the toxic wastes that will be removed when the ship is dismantled in India. This is a definite change in the French position, which has so far been that the wastes would be buried in secure landfill sites in Gujarat. Defence ministry spokesman Jean-Francois Bureau told journalists in Paris. "This question doesn't seem to be resolved, so we have made this proposition to avoid any ambiguity and of course for the return we will obviously apply the Basle Convention on the transport of dangerous waste," he said. Curious as that might seem, it is the same asbestos from the Clemenceau that will, if the Supreme Court allows the ship into India, make the return trip to France. Only this time around the waste will be subject to Basel regulations.

The Hindu, 29 January 2006

We will not interfere with Indian vote, says Burns

WASHINGTON: The United States says it expects India to vote on Iran based on its self-interest at the February 2 International Atomic Energy Agency meeting and it has "no desire" to interfere in this process. "I think the record is clear that the United States considers India to be a great country and great countries make their own decisions based on their interests. We have the highest respect for that process. We would never want to interfere in it," Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns told Indian media persons at a reception at the residence of Indian Ambassador Ronen Sen here on Republic Day. Defending his top envoy in New Delhi as an "outstanding" Ambassador, Mr. Burns said the U.S. had the highest respect for the sovereignty of India.

The Indian Express, 29 January 2006

16 N-reactors, how many to declare? (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 28: New Delhi has said no to Washington's proposal that all its power-generating nuclear reactors be put on the civilian list. The Department of Atomic Energy has been asked to soon revert with the "final bottom line" of how many reactors it can put on the civilian list. The urgency is significant, given that New Delhi hopes to get back to Washington by early February with its final position. At the meeting between Burns and Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, the US felt that matters could proceed if India simply put all its power-generating reactors on the civil list. This was the method adopted in other nuclear-weapon states. That's easier said than done. For, in India, all these reactors are dual-use in nature, for power production as well as for the strategic programme. Barring one of the 13 reactors, all have a modest capacity of 220 MW. India's total capacity is 3200 MW, far less than any of the other nuclear weapon states. India has been trying to explain to the US that it cannot shift its strategic requirement to two or three reactors because there are capacity constraints.

The Hindu, 30 January 2006

India, China in limelight at Davos

DAVOS (Switzerland): The economic race between India and China dominated the meeting of the world's business and political leaders here who clearly see a shift to an Asian century. Two years ago, the annual discussion focused on four challengers to U.S. economic power - China, India, Russia and Brazil. Last year, China took centre stage. But this year, the spotlight was on India and China, the most populous countries with booming economies and huge domestic markets that are attracting major foreign investment. Mr Martin Sorrell, group chief executive of the British-based communications company WPP Plc. and a co-chair of the annual meeting, said India's strong presentation at the forum and reports on the strength of the Chinese economy, putting it in third place globally by some measures, had sharpened the discussions.

The Indian Express, 30 January 2006

Musharraf put off by Indian 'farce'

NEW YORK, JANUARY 30: Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has said India uses pretext of cross border terrorism and Pakistan-backed groups indulging in violence, for not moving forward in improving its relations with his country. "These are independent groups acting without any guidance or support from anyone, following their own agendas. Let's demilitarise and give self-governance to the people of Kashmir. These (Indian soldiers) are there and kill so many civilians on the slightest of pretexts," he told Newsweek in an interview being published in its upcoming issue.

The Indian Express, 30 January 2006

'Separation must before N-ties' (C Raja Mohan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 29: Three weeks before President Jacques Chirac arrives here, France is signalling its eagerness to launch civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India. Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, special representative of President Jacques Chirac had an intensive round of consultations with the National Security Adviser M K Narayanan on Friday. This is the fifteenth round of strategic dialogue between the two governments, launched by Chirac and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1998, and was focused on preparing for the French President's visit slated for February 19-20. Washington and New Delhi have been banking on French support at the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group that must agree to change the nuclear rules before any major nation agrees to sell nuclear fuel or reactors to India.

The Indian Express, 31 January 2006

India plans to abstain over Iran vote

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30: India plans to abstain from a vote on Iran's nuclear programme at a meeting of the UN's atomic watchdog this week, top Indian officials said on Monday. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board is due to hold an emergency session in Vienna on Thursday to consider sending Iran to the UN Security Council for sanctions over its disputed nuclear programme. The US Ambassador to India, David Mulford, said last week that if India did not oppose Tehran at the IAEA, a landmark India-US nuclear cooperation pact could be in trouble. "We are still hoping the crisis won't go to a vote and Iran will get some more time to resolve it through talks," said the official. "But if it does, then Ambassador Mulford has made it easy for us."

The Indian Express, 31 January 2006

Analysis: 'Iran gas pipeline is now dead' (Palash Kumar)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30: India has moved to secure the fate of a rickety nuclear deal with Washington by replacing its pro-Iranian oil minister with a reformist seen as having close US contacts, analysts say. Political analyst Mahesh Rangarajan said India was faced with a difficult choice between siding with an old friend in Iran and a new, powerful handshake with the world's only superpower. "The timing of his removal is significant, coming days before the IAEA vote," he said. "Aiyar's pet theme was an Asian oil and gas grid with China and Iran."

His removal will completely alter the balance of power in the region," said foreign policy expert Prem Shankar Jha. "The Iran gas pipeline is now dead."

The Indian Express, 31 January 2006

Iran to India: LNG price we signed on is no longer valid (Amitav Ranjan)

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30: Last October, Tehran linked its energy dialogue to India's nuclear diplomacy asking New Delhi to "compensate (its) past default (voting against Iran) by supporting Iran in the next meeting of the IAEA board of governors in November." That November meeting saw no vote and now Iran is back to flexing its energy muscle ahead of the crucial IAEA meeting this week. After having signed a Sale Purchase Agreement (SPA) last June to export 5 million tonnes per annum of LNG to India at a price linked to \$31-per barrel crude, the National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC) has now told India that the price agreed to in that pact is no longer valid. This despite the fact that Tehran never raised the issue of a price hike even when international crude had touched \$68 a barrel last August.