

The Hindu, 1 July 2004

'India, China seriously engaged on border issue' (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, JUNE 30. The former President, K.R. Narayanan, believes that India and China have seriously engaged each other in a bid to resolve their border dispute after the appointment last year of Special Representatives to address the issue. Talking to The Hindu today, Mr. Narayanan, who paid a visit earlier this month to Beijing in connection with the 50th anniversary celebrations of Panchsheel, said that growing contacts between India and China as well as the expansion of the trade relationship would have a positive bearing on this process. "All this will act as a fillip to this process." "The approach is such that something concrete and beneficial will come out of it," he said about the talks going on between the Special Representatives. "It will be a long haul, it [a possible settlement] will not be sudden." Mr. Narayanan was convinced that the "five principles" of Panchsheel were still relevant in today's world. In his June 14 Beijing address, he argued that respect for the sovereignty and integrity of nations, non-interference in internal affairs and non-aggression and equality were the pillars on which a "just and peaceful" world order could be erected.

The Hindu, 1 July 2004

Natwar Singh arrives in Jakarta (P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, JUNE 30. The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, arrived in Jakarta today to participate in the annual meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations' Regional Forum (ARF), scheduled for July 2. Pakistan's possible admission to the ARF, recently recommended by the senior officials of the participant-countries including India, is expected to be a new factor in the diplomatic dynamics of the forum on this occasion. As a grouping for security-related consultations, the ARF brings together a host of important international players such as the U.S., Russia, China, India, Japan, the European Union and others besides the ASEAN

members. The ARF meeting will be preceded by consultations among defence officials and the ASEAN's interaction with its key dialogue partners. Ahead of these meetings, Mr. Singh today held talks with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Dy Nien. Bilateral relations were also reviewed against the backdrop of the traditionally close interactions and the 50th anniversary, this year, of the first meeting between Jawaharlal Nehru and Ho Chi Minh.

The Pioneer, 1 July 2004

Asean-India ties intensifying: Megawati (PTI)

Jakarta. Observing that Asean's relations with India were intensifying, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri on Wednesday urged the 10-member regional grouping to be in the forefront in the fight against international terrorism and cross-border crimes such as people-smuggling and maritime piracy. "Our dialogue relations with India are intensifying as India pursues a 'look east' policy," Megawati said opening the two-day Asean Foreign Ministers meeting preceding the 23-member Asean Regional Forum (ARF), which is being attended among others by External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh. Megawati also urged the Asean members to "be at the forefront in the fight against the most inhuman of multinational crimes, international terrorism." Mr Singh, who arrived here on Wednesday morning, is expected to hold several bilateral meetings with his counterparts from the Asean and ARF member countries.

The Pioneer, 2 July 2004

India reiterates demand to expand UN Security Council (Rana Ajit)

New Delhi. With the United Nations failing to restrain United States from resorting to its unilateral act of global policing in a unipolar world, India, in a significant step, harshly questioned its efficacy and reiterated its long-pending demand to expand the Security Council. While questioning the UN's ability to solve international issues, India bitterly

lamented that the Security Council no longer "reflects the true character or the current realities of the contemporary world." "In the peace and security architecture of the UN, the composition of Security Council has remained static over the decades. Its composition no longer reflects the true character of the current realities of the world today," said Home Minister Shivraj Patil, while addressing an international conference on "United Nations and The New Threats : Rethinking Security", jointly organised by the United Nations Foundations and Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.

The Hindu, 2 July 2004

India for strong ties with ASEAN

(P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, JULY 1. The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, today assured the Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, of India's "commitment to further strengthen relations with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)." Indonesia currently holds the ASEAN Chair. Mr. Singh conveyed this message to Ms. Megawati in "a warm and friendly conversation" in Jakarta today, ahead of tomorrow's 11th annual meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), according to the External Affairs Ministry spokesman, Navtej Sarna. Mr. Singh, who called on Ms. Megawati, along with the Foreign Ministers of the other dialogue-partners of the ASEAN, assured her of India's commitment to strong ties with Indonesia as well. Mr. Singh held a hectic round of consultations with the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Canada, New Zealand, Mongolia and top European Union officials. The discussions centred, by and large, on bilateral aspects as also current regional and international issues.

The Hindu, 2 July 2004

Dixit meets Ivanov (Vladimir Radyuhin)

MOSCOW, JULY 1. India and Russia expressed satisfaction with the progress in bilateral cooperation in all fields during the talks between the visiting National Security Adviser, J. N. Dixit, and the Russian

Security Council chief, Igor Ivanov. The talks focussed on global security and stability, besides exchange of views on Afghanistan, Iraq and West Asia. The two countries, sharing "identical or very close positions on these and most other international issues", vowed to strengthen their cooperation. Mr. Dixit also met Russia's atomic energy chief, Alexander Rumyantsev. The Russian side said they discussed cooperation in the field and the progress in the construction of the Kudankulam nuclear station. Mr. Dixit's visit comes a week after the Foreign Secretary, Shashank's visit here for a meeting of the Indo-Russian Joint Group on Global Challenges.

The Hindu, 2 July 2004

Maran suggests Asia-Pacific research fund in IT sector (P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, JULY 1. The Union Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Dayanidhi Maran, today suggested that "it would indeed be useful if a common Research-and-Development Fund is created for the Asia Pacific region" in the IT sector. This could be "utilised by identified centres of excellence in different countries" that were already sharing their research findings across "the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) platform," he told an international conference in Bangkok. Addressing the APT ministerial conference on broadband and ICT development, Mr. Maran said governments and industry, besides the U.N. and multilateral financial agencies, "can perhaps fund" IT-related research, with particular reference to the Millennium Development Goals of the global organisation.

The Hindu, 3 July 2004

Manmohan to attend India-European Union summit

NEW DELHI, JULY 2. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, will travel to the Netherlands to attend the annual India-European Union summit on October 14. It will be preceded by an India-E.U. business summit on October 13, an announcement

from the Netherlands Embassy said today. The Dutch, who took over the Presidency of the E.U. from Ireland on July 1, said that Asia would be one of the priorities in the Union's external policy. "The E.U. is also in the process of redefining its policy towards India on the basis of a communication of the European Commission on an E.U.-India strategic partnership, which will be discussed and has to be approved by the E.U. Council and the E.U. Parliament. We look forward to the Indian reply to this policy document and to discussing with the Indian Government the way forward in India-E.U. relations," a press release said. "With 10 new member-states, a newly-elected European Parliament, agreement on a new constitution and — in just a few months — a new European Commission, the Netherlands' ambition is to ensure that the plans and policies already made are carried out with energy."

The Telegraph, 3 July 2004

Gas line via Pak on Iran agenda (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, July 2: The Indo-Iranian gas pipeline through Pakistan is likely to come up for talks when Kamal Kharazmi lands in 10 days. The Iranian foreign minister is scheduled to be in Delhi on July 11 and 12. He will hold discussions with foreign minister K. Natwar Singh and other key leaders, which might include the Prime Minister. This will be the first face-to-face interaction between Teh-ran and the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance regime. The Iranian leadership had spoken to Manmohan Singh and Natwar soon after the election victory in May. Apart from the gas pipeline, Iraq developments and the September meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency on whether Iran violated rules to make a nuclear bomb are likely to figure in the talks. Natwar had recently said that the Centre was willing to consider the pipeline provided Islamabad gave the required "international guarantees". This is a major shift from the stand of the earlier National Democratic Alliance

government, which had avoided involving Pakistan. Iran is one of the world's largest suppliers of natural gas and India one of its main buyers. The proposed pipeline is part of an agreement the two countries have for gas supply.

The Telegraph, 3 July 2004

China spadework meet (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, July 2: The first major interaction between China and India since Manmohan Singh took over will take place later this month here when national security adviser J. N. Dixit and China's seniormost vice-foreign minister Dai Bing Guo — the designated special representatives of their governments — meet to discuss the boundary dispute. Foreign minister K. Natwar Singh met his Chinese counterpart Li Zhaoxing on the sidelines of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue at Qingdao a few days ago, but it was seen as an engagement where the two leaders exchanged pleasantries. The tenor and success of the Dai-Dixit meeting, scheduled for July 26 and 27, will lay the groundwork for the official visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Indications are that if it is a success, Wen would visit India this year. Otherwise, he might postpone the trip. So far, Dai has had two meetings with Brajesh Mishra, Vajpayee's special representative for the boundary talks. The upcoming meeting will allow the United Progressive Alliance government to reaffirm Delhi's commitment to strong and friendly ties with Beijing. It would also give the new dispensation the opportunity to present its views on some of the queries the Chinese have on the contentious boundary issue.

The Pioneer, 4 July 2004

Manmohan greets new Pak PM

Islamabad. Felicitating Pakistan premier Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain on his assumption of office, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has said that he looked forward to working with him to consolidate the present positive trends in bilateral ties. "I look forward to working with you to consolidate the present positive trends in our

bilateral relationship and taking our dialogue process forward," Singh said in a message. Hussain's counterparts from Bangladesh and Nepal also extended warm greetings to him. Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said her country attached great importance to its relations with Pakistan and "the extent and depth of our ties call for continuous engagement at all levels between our two countries". She also hoped to work closely to further deepen bilateral cooperation and promote peace and stability and economic development in the region through the SAARC process. In his felicitation message, Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said "I am confident that the friendly relations that have been existing between our two countries will be further strengthened during the term of your office."

The Pioneer, 5 July 2004

Indo-China boundary talks this month (PTI)

Beijing. The third round of India-China special representatives-level boundary talks are likely to be held in New Delhi this month with Beijing hoping to discuss the "guiding principles" to settle the territorial issue. "We believe that during the third meeting, efforts should be made in finding the guiding principles for the solution (of the border issue)," a senior Chinese Foreign Ministry official said here. "With respect to the boundary question, the Chinese side is ready to seek a fair and reasonable solution acceptable to both sides through negotiations on an equal footing," he said. He said Beijing is ready to continue discussing with New Delhi the framework of a settlement of the boundary issue through the mechanism of special representatives. Sources said the foreign ministries of the two countries were currently discussing the convenient dates for the two special representatives to meet. "We are looking at a date during the last ten days of July," an official source said. The meeting would be the first between India's new National Security Advisor J N Dixit, who was appointed as India's special representative to negotiate with his Chinese counterpart,

Daibingguo, who is also executive Chinese vice-foreign minister.

Indian Express, 5 July 2004

Haider set to become UN chief's Iraq envoy

NEW DELHI, JULY 4: Former Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haider is set to become special envoy to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in Iraq. Haider will be based in Baghdad. The UN mission is currently operating from Amman, capital of Jordan. The UN pulled out of Iraq last August after a bomb blast killed 22 people, including UN envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello, a Brazilian diplomat. Haider, a former envoy to China and Britain, was among the five people whose names were considered for the post. Some of those who were contacted initially said "yes," but backtracked later due to pressure from their families. The UN Secretary-General was apparently keen on the appointment of a Muslim. Haider was, therefore, suitable; besides, he had opposed the deployment of Indian troops in Iraq. The 66-year-old diplomat had recently met Annan in Doha and had later travelled to New York for consultations with senior UN officials.

The Hindu, 6 July 2004

Scouts' visit to Kashmir evokes protests in Pakistan (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 5. A section of Pakistan political parties are up in arms against the Government for permitting a group of boy scouts to visit Kashmir on Pakistani passports and Indian visas. The Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman, Masood Khan, confirmed that a group of scouts have been allowed to visit Kashmir as part of SAARC exchanges. However, he was not sure if it amounted to any change of Government policy. Pakistan's position is that Kashmir is a "disputed territory" and has been saying that to allow Kashmiri citizens on either side of the divide be allowed to travel without documents as and when the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus link is agreed upon. It appears Qazi Suburul Hasan, National Secretary of the Pakistan Scouts is

leading the Pakistani team comprising scouts from all the four provinces and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). The special permission of the Indian Government is required for Pakistani citizens to visit Jammu and Kashmir.

The Hindu, 7 July 2004

Natwar rules out sending troops to Iraq

NEW DELHI, JULY 6. The External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, today emphasised in the Lok Sabha that the question of sending Indian troops to Iraq did not arise and that the United Progressive Alliance Government was being guided by the unanimous resolution adopted by Parliament last year. "We took into account a number of relevant factors such as ground realities, development of political process, role of the United Nations, public perception in Iraq and of Iraq's neighbours, national sentiment in India and capacity to spare our troops for Iraq. Accordingly, we have decided not to consider any troop deployment in Iraq. This will continue. I must clarify that India has not been approached recently for dispatch of troops," Mr. Singh said replying to a discussion in the House on the situation in Iraq, initiated by P.K. Vasudevan Nair of the Communist Party of India. In an emotional submission, Mr. Singh said any compromise was "inconceivable" and he was distressed to note the reaction back home.

The Hindu, 8 July 2004

Troops to Iraq: Manmohan clarifies Natwar's remark

NEW DELHI, JULY 7. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today denied that there had been any change in the Government's position on sending troops to Iraq. He made it clear that his Government was committed to the parliamentary resolution against sending troops and if ever there was a need to review that position the "Government will hold the maximum possible discussions with all shades of opinion in Parliament". The Prime Minister's assertion came in the form of his intervention during question hour, after MPs of the Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janata Party charged the External

Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, of misleading the House. The Opposition said Mr. Singh had in the presence of the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, told the media that India would review its stand on sending troops but had changed his position on his return to the country. The Prime Minister made it clear that all political parties were bound by the resolution passed by Parliament and there was no question of his Government deviating from it. But the Opposition continued to press for an apology from the External Affairs Minister and later walked out in protest.

The Hindu, 8 July 2004

India's concern over violation of norms in Iraq

NEW DELHI, JULY 7. The Congress-led Government has expressed concern at the violation of international conventions and norms by some members of the United States security forces in "dealing with Iraqi people." The Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed, informed the Lok Sabha today that the Government had also taken note of the "punitive and preventive" measures taken by the U.S. Government in this regard. "The Government has also noted with concern the violation of the sanctity of holy places in Iraq and has emphasised the imperative need to respect the sanctity of the places of religious worship by all concerned in Iraq," he said in a written response.

The Hindu, 9 July 2004

NRIs hail budget (PTI)

LONDON, JULY 8. The Chairman of the London-based Caparo group, Lord Swraj Paul, today joined NRIs from various parts of the world in hailing the Indian budget as 'positive' and 'growth-oriented' that would help reduce poverty because of its thrust on agricultural development. "Agriculture has a big potential for exports because sooner or later the West will have to cut agriculture subsidy and then India can be a supplier of food and agriculture products to the whole world," Lord Paul, Co-Chairman of the Indo-U.K. Round Table, said. He said "agriculture is now a high-tech business and

not a low-tech business.' "I would have liked to see more focus on health because it is health which is going to reduce costs and improve productivity. Secondly we must make literacy a fundamental right. We also improve the quality of education because that is the way progress is going to come.

The Hindu, 10 July 2004

Nehru Award conferred on Goh (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, JULY 9. The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, conferred the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding on the Singapore Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan this evening. The Award carries a trophy, citation and a purse of Rs. 25 lakhs. Mr. Goh, who arrived in the capital on Thursday night, had a full schedule of meetings today. He called on the President and the Vice-President, B.S. Shekhawat, and held talks with the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. He also met the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and the Leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani. In his address at the Award function, Mr. Kalam said that Mr. Goh, with his leadership and vision, had come to occupy a leading place among the statesmen of Asia. "At the same time, we remember and pay our respects to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India..." The President said Mr. Goh had guided the destiny of Singapore and its people for a decade and a half. "Under your illustrious leadership, Singapore has scripted a new way of doing things designed for creating an enterprising and innovative society. The results are there for all to see in the form of the Singapore dream." In his acceptance speech, Mr. Goh said that Nehru was a cosmopolitan, a nationalist and an intellectual giant. "Most of all, he was an inspiration to the generation that had fought to free themselves from colonial rule."

The Hindu, 10 July 2004

India-Thailand free trade accord from September 1

CHENNAI, JULY 9. The India - Thailand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will come into force from September 1, 2004, the Thai Minister for Science and Technology, Korn Thapparansi, said here today at a meeting organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). Eightytwo of the 84 items identified in the "early harvest scheme" of the FTA, signed in October last, will be covered by the agreement. Two chemical items have been removed from the list, according to Thai officials. "India has been quite flexible in the matter of value addition or local content," said the Thailand Vice-Minister of Commerce, Panpree Bahiddha Nukara. The identified items would enjoy a 50 per cent concessional tariff over normal one in both countries from this September 1, to September 1, 2005, 75 per cent concessional tariff till September 2006 and to nil duty thereafter, Mr. Nukara said.

The Hindu, 10 July 2004

Troops for Ethiopia

NEW DELHI, JULY 9. The Deputy Chief of the Army Staff, J.B.S. Yadava, today bid farewell to men of the 13 Kumaon Battalion who will join the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Ethiopia-Eritrea (UNMEE). The first batch of 200 men will leave on July 16 and relieve the 15 Sikh Light Infantry Group. India, a major contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations, has sent an infantry battalion to Lebanon and a 'composite group' to Congo.

The Telegraph, 11 July 2004

Army on Afghan rebuild mission

Calcutta, July 10: The army will shortly take up development work, particularly construction of roads, in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Lieutenant General Mathew Mammen, the army's engineer-in-chief, said "reconnaissance work" is already underway in Afghanistan and the final project report should take shape soon, paving the way for army personnel to fly to the country. "In about six months, the Indian Army will help Afghanistan rebuild its roads. The project has been cleared by the governments of both

sides," Mammen said today. A similar project will simultaneously get underway in Kyrgyzstan, announced the officer, who is on a short visit to the Eastern Command headquarters here. The Afghanistan project will not be under the UN banner, as is the norm, but will be exclusive work undertaken by the army. The force had in the past undertaken similar projects in Sierra Leone, Lebanon and Somalia, Mammen said.

The Hindu, 12 July 2004

Manmohan urged to take up dam breach with Bhutan (Sushanta Talukdar)

GUWAHATI, JULY 11. The Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, has urged the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, to take up with the Bhutan Government the matter of adequate measures to safeguard the dam on the Tsatichu artificial lake. In a letter yesterday, Mr. Gogoi also asked Dr. Singh to send a team to assess the flood situation in the State, which has turned critical. The Bhutan authorities had alerted the Central Water Commission that the dam on the Tsatichu lake, above the Kurichu hydel project, had breached around 5.20 p.m. yesterday and that water was likely to merge with the Manas river basin. The State Government has sounded a red alert in the districts bordering Bhutan. Mr. Gogoi said that the National Highway 31 was likely to be submerged by six to seven feet of water due to the heavy flow from the Himalayan Kingdom. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries have breached their embankments at 24 points, causing massive damage to bridges, roads, electrical installations, panchayat and school buildings and irrigation canals. An estimated 20 lakh people have been affected and 10,678 houses washed away.

The Pioneer, 12 July 2004

Pak persuading India to give nod to gas pipeline project (PTI)

Islamabad. With top commerce officials of India and Pakistan meeting next month after a gap of five years, to discuss steps to normalise trade ties, Islamabad has stepped up efforts to persuade New Delhi to give its

nod to the Iran-India and Turkmenistan-India gas pipeline projects proposed to be laid through Pakistani soil to meet growing energy needs of the South Asian region. Pakistan's initiative comes as Commerce Secretaries of India and Pakistan are to meet here on August 10 and 11 to discuss steps to boost economic and commercial cooperation between the two countries. The top commerce officials' meeting, which will be held here under the composite dialogue process to discuss Kashmir and other contentious issues between the two countries, will be their first after 1998. The two officials will discuss a number of steps to step up trade ties. Ahead of these trade talks, Pakistan is lobbying hard for India to give its nod to the two important gas-pipeline projects with promise to give international security guarantees. Pakistan wants India to push the Iran-India gas pipeline project on top of its agenda at the trade talks next month, officials here said, adding former Pakistan Minister for Energy Usman Aminuddin is currently in New Delhi holding talks with top Indian officials on the issue.

The Telegraph, 12 July 2004

Indian troops on Africa mission

New Delhi, July 11: An Indian army battalion leaves this week for Ethiopia and Eritrea for the fourth time as an Indian major general is set to assume charge of the UN force that is keeping the warring armies of the two African nations at bay. Troops of the 13 Kumaon Infantry Battalion Group will begin leaving from Friday to replace colleagues of the 15 Sikh Light Infantry Group. The Indian battalion (Indbatt) under the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) is in charge of one of three sectors monitored by the UN force. Major General Rajender Singh is also set to assume command of the force from a British officer, Major General Gordon, from July 23. An Indian battalion is in charge of the central sector on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, an area spanning 120 km by 230 km, since it took over from a Dutch and Canadian group in June 2001. The two other sectors are in

the charge of a Jordanian and a Kenyan battalion but 42 countries contribute military personnel to UNMEE that has some 4,200 troops. The Indian battalions rotate after a year's tour of duty.

The Pioneer, 13 July 2004

Siachen may figure in Indo-Pak talks (PTI)

Islamabad. India and Pakistan could discuss the option of demilitarisation of the world's highest battle field, the Siachen glacier, during Defence Secretary level talks to be held in New Delhi next month. While no breakthrough is expected in the first round of talks due to opposing stands on the ground positions held by armies of the two countries, demilitarisation is one option the officials of the two countries could discuss at the talks, Pakistani officials said here. During the talks both the countries would try to reach a mutually acceptable arrangement to withdraw troops to previous positions, failing which the two could consider the proposal to demilitarise the region, the officials were quoted as saying by local daily The Nation. Pakistan had rejected the demilitarisation proposal in 1989. Pakistan officials have expressed hope that the two countries will sort out differences on Siachen through talks under the composite dialogue process. With the two countries resuming the composite dialogue process with Foreign Secretaries level talks in New Delhi, the Defence Secretaries of the two countries are set to meet again to discuss Siachen.

Indian Express, 14 July 2004

India, Pak chalk up timetable till August for talks

NEW DELHI, JULY 13: Stepping up the momentum of the peace process, India and Pakistan today agreed on specific dates for holding official-level talks. The meetings will start on July 28 and will end before a possible meeting between the two Foreign Ministers meet on August 25. According to a Pakistan Foreign Office announcement, External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh is slated to meet his Pakistani counterpart,

Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, for talks in New Delhi. This will be a day after the two foreign secretaries meet to prepare an agenda of issues to be taken up by the two leaders. New Delhi and Islamabad have drawn up a packed timetable for the discussion on six issues of the composite dialogue — starting with talks on the Tulbul Navigation Project on July 28-29 and culminating with talks on economic and commercial cooperation on August 11-12. The composite dialogue was to address eight issues, of which six remain to be discussed. Foreign Secretaries Shashank and Riaz Khokkar recently held the first round of talks on peace and security, in Delhi. This immediately followed the talks on nuclear confidence building measures.

The Pioneer, 14 July 2004

Putin for expanding ties with India (PTI)
Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin has called for expanding Russia's ties with India and other nations of the growing Asia-Pacific region for the development of Siberia and far eastern parts of the country. "We should tie our policy of broadening relations with Asian and Pacific countries to the solution of our domestic problems and the development of the potential of Russia's Siberia and far eastern regions. "Relations with India and China hold much promise in this," Putin said in a keynote address at a conference of Russia's Ambassadors to 130 countries here on Monday. Putin said on Tuesday Asia and the Pacific region are evolving into the most dynamic centre of the world economic development and underscored that Russia's foreign policy should be aimed at satisfying the everyday needs of common man.

The Hindu, 15 July 2004

India, Germany agree U.N. needs reforms
NEW DELHI, JULY 14. "We welcome the fact that the United Kingdom and the United States have abandoned the unilateral road [on Iraq] and taken the multilateral road," the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, said at a joint press conference with his visiting German counterpart, Joschka

Fischer, today. The multilateral route, Mr. Singh felt, was the right way to address the situation. "I say this with great respect to both countries. We have very good relations with both the U.S. and the U.K." Pointing out that the Government had welcomed United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546 on Iraq, he said India had already committed \$20 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq. "We'll be interested in the reconstruction process." Mr. Fischer, who called on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, earlier in the day, said that the Resolution 1546 was a big step forward. India and Germany also said that they considered each other to be "natural candidates" for a permanent seat in an enlarged Security Council and would support each other in this endeavour. The nations believed in a strong and effective multilateral system. "Both are committed to the effective functioning of the U.N.," they said. "We also agree that the U.N. needs to be reformed if it is to successfully tackle the tasks ahead... It can only play its role effectively if it becomes more representative of the world in the beginning of the 21st century."

Indian Express, 16 July 2004

Indian workers abused in Saudi Arabia, says report (Reuters)

LONDON, JULY 15: Many foreign labourers in Saudi Arabia suffer from exploitation and work under conditions that resemble slavery, an international human rights watchdog said on Thursday. Saudi Arabia said the report exaggerated the experiences of a few of the more than six million foreigners working there, and noted that millions of families around the world were dependent on remittances from such workers. The Human Rights Watch, in its first report on foreign labourers in the country, slammed the authorities, the legal system and private employers for a range of abuses leading to death. Around six million foreigners, mostly from India, sweep the streets, build homes or run offices. The report said mistreatment of women was among the most disturbing findings. "Some

women workers were traumatised from rape and sexual abuse at the hands of Saudi male employers,' the report said.

The Hindu, 17 July 2004

Portugal to extradite Monica

NEW DELHI, JULY 16. The High Court of Lisbon has granted extradition of Monica Bedi, friend of the underworld don Abu Salem. The Central Bureau of Investigation received intimation today that the Court had granted extradition of Ms. Bedi on July 14, while complying with the directions of the Supreme Court of Portugal. The High Court also ordered the continued detention of Ms. Bedi when her term of imprisonment of two years in the case instituted by the Judicial Police of Portugal expires on September 18, this year. Ms. Bedi was arrested for travelling on forged documents. The earlier High Court order which granted the extradition was challenged by Ms. Bedi in the Supreme Court which sent it back to the High Court with the direction that it give reasons for its order as to why she should be extradited to India. CBI officials today expressed the hope that Ms. Bedi could be extradited sometime in October. The officials pointed out that the order of continued detention meant that even after the end of her two-year prison term, Ms. Bedi would be kept in preventive detention in the extradition case.

The Hindu, 17 July 2004

SAARC Foreign Ministers to review progress on SAFTA

NEW DELHI, JULY 16. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Foreign Ministers' meeting in Islamabad on July 20-21 will review the progress in implementing the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) framework agreement signed in January this year. Sources in the External Affairs Ministry said today that SAFTA would be operationalised from January 1, 2006, with Least Developed Countries (LDCs) having been given more time to adhere to the accord. The mid-year meeting of Foreign Ministers will take stock of the implementation of the framework

agreement — especially the finalisation of sensitive lists and agreement on the rules of origin. The Committee of Experts on these issues has met thrice since the January SAARC summit. A fourth meeting of the panel will take place in Thimpu during August 2-4, where "indicative" sensitive lists are expected to be exchanged. Further discussion on the rules of origin will also take place in Thimpu, the sources said. An informal meeting of Foreign Ministers is likely to take place on July 19 evening or July 20 morning — prior to the formal Council of Ministers meeting — that will be attended by the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh.

The Hindu, 17 July 2004

Sri Lankan Prime Minister coming today
(V.S.Sambandan)

COLOMBO, JULY 16. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapakse, is scheduled to arrive in New Delhi tomorrow on a two-day official visit to India, during which he will meet the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. On the eve of his first official overseas visit after the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, appointed him as the Prime Minister on April 6, Mr. Rajapakse told journalists that his visit would focus on issues relating to rural development and infrastructure. According to Prime Ministerial aides, village roads and rural telephony are likely to figure prominently in the discussions. Mr. Rajapakse is also scheduled to meet the Union Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Dayanidhi Maran, the Leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani, and other political leaders, his aides said.

The Hindu, 18 July 2004

Sikkim hopes for reopening of Nathu La trade route
(Vinay Kumar)

GANGTOK, JULY 17. The optimism that has been building up among traders in Sikkim after India and China agreed to reopen the trade route through Nathu La pass in the State last year, is giving way to an air of uncertainty. The excitement that was visible here among various sections in

the wake of the then Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's Beijing visit last June and the deal with China to reopen the trade route appears to have subsided with the two countries yet to do their groundwork and finalise details on items of trade, trade posts and security-related matters. "China's negative approach over Sikkim is long over. The international acceptance of Sikkim's merger with India in 1975 is complete," the Sikkim Chief Minister, Pawan Kumar Chamling, told The Hindu in a conversation here. He termed as "positive action" the recent Chinese steps showing Sikkim as part of India in their official website and maps. "Since our party Sikkim Democratic Front came to power in 1994, we have been consistently demanding the resumption of trade between India and Tibet through the former Nathu La route to Lhasa," he said. The Chief Minister said the decision would not only help in improving India's relations with China but also boost the State's development.

The Hindu, 18 July 2004

Population programme hit by fund cut (Gargi Parsai)

NEW DELHI, JULY 17. As if the nearly Rs. 160 crore cut in the Union budget on the population programme was not bad enough, has come the news that the Bush administration has decided to block \$ 34 million in the Congressionally approved aid to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) because of the alleged connection of the fund with coercive abortions in China. The move is likely to hit the population programmes the world over including India. The UNFPA, which is the world's largest source of population assistance, has denied the charge. The agency advocates target-free, non-coercive approach to reproductive and child health. The U.S. will withhold funds for the third year in a row to UNFPA. According to UNFPA, the \$ 34 million could have helped prevent 2 million unwanted pregnancies and nearly 800,000 abortions; 4,700 maternal deaths and over 77,000 infant and child deaths in many countries. The funds could also have been

used to scale up promising maternal health and HIV-prevention efforts. India is one of the largest beneficiaries of the UNFPA funding for reproductive health. It is assigned \$ 75 million over five years from 2003 to 2007 for its population programmes.

The Pioneer, 18 July 2004

India, Russia to jointly work in cutting edge defence projects

Moscow. In tune with growing collaborations among western nations in defence sector, India and Russia are on the path to jointly work in cutting edge defence projects, Indian Ambassador to Moscow, Krishnan Raghunath, said. "The principle has been established and we have a future," Raghunath said in an interview published by 'Indian Defence Review' (IDR) quarterly in its latest issue. "Certain areas in the defence sector for further R and D are being discussed with India," he affirmed. Raghunath also dispelled notions that discussions on jointly developing the fifth generation fighter were taking inordinately long. He gave the example of the first Indo-Russian collaboration in cutting edge technology, the supersonic Brahmos missile. Work on developing the missile started in 1995 and the first test took place only after six years. "Building a futuristic fighter aircraft is not only complex but costly as well. These things take time," he observed. Ambassador Raghunath, who is completing his three-year stint in Moscow next month, pointed out that Indo-Russian defence partnership was in tune with the growing trend of collaborations among western countries on major defence projects. He gave the example of eight western nations jointly developing the fifth generation Joint Strike Fighter.

The Hindu, 19 July 2004

Pakistan for inclusion of bilateral issues (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 18 . The two-day SAARC Foreign Secretaries meet here began on a contentious note with Pakistan raking up the issue of the need for expansion of the Council's charter to include bilateral

disputes and peace and security in the region. Though Pakistan had raised the subject in the past, other member-states were at a loss to understand the reasons behind Islamabad's decision to speak about it in the SAARC Standing Committee forum. The main objective of the Standing Committee meeting, which is attended by Foreign Secretaries of the seven-member countries is to finalise the programme for the Council of Ministers meeting beginning on July 20. As per the agreed agenda, the Foreign Ministers are to review the progress on the implementation of the decisions made at the January SAARC Summit here.

The Hindu, 19 July 2004

Rajapakse explores new areas of ties

NEW DELHI, JULY 18. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapakse, explored new areas of cooperation with India during separate meetings with three members of the Union Council of Ministers here today. On his first overseas visit after assuming office in April this year, Mr. Rajapakse met the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, the Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, and the Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation, Oscar Fernandes. Mr. Rajapakse, who arrived in the Capital last night on an official visit, began his day with a meeting with Mr. Chidambaram. Though the LTTE issue figured in their talks — with Mr. Chidambaram saying that an early resolution of the strife in the island nation was in India's interest — matters of economic cooperation preoccupied their attention. While exploring new areas for enhancing economic cooperation with Sri Lanka, Mr. Chidambaram informed the Sri Lankan Prime Minister that India was willing to review the Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty with Colombo.

The Telegraph, 19 July 2004

Thai date for Singh, Khaleda

New Delhi, July 18: Manmohan Singh's official visit to Dhaka may still take a while, but the Prime Minister will meet Bangladesh counterpart Begum Khaleda Zia on the

sidelines of the Bimstec Summit in Thailand later this month. The heads of governments of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand are meeting in Bangkok on July 30-31 to strengthen economic cooperation. The meeting between Singh and Khaleda could take place on either of the two days. The meeting is likely to give a much-needed push to bilateral relations, which have gone through more downs than ups recently. An earlier proposal that Singh make Dhaka the venue of his first foreign trip as Prime Minister was shot down by South Block. But when Bangladesh mooted the idea of a meeting between the two leaders in Thailand, it was accepted without much reluctance. The foreign ministry said Delhi should neither go out of its way to woo Bangladesh nor should it do anything to suggest that India does not value its friendship. This could strain bilateral ties further and allow forces inimical to Indian interest to exploit the situation. No agenda appears to have been fixed for the Thailand meeting. Indications are that both Prime Ministers will re-affirm their commitment to strengthen bilateral relations. This will be the highest political contact between the countries since the May installation of the United Progressive Alliance government.

The Pioneer, 19 July 2004

Third round of India-China boundary talks likely on July 26 (PTI)

Beijing. The third round of India-China special representatives-level boundary talks are likely to be held in New Delhi on July 26-27, sources said here. While an official announcement to this effect has not yet been made, it is understood that Beijing is likely to endorse the July 26-27 dates proposed by New Delhi, sources said. The upcoming meeting would be the first between India's new National Security Advisor J N Dixit, who was appointed as special representative to negotiate the boundary issue with his Chinese counterpart Dai Bingguo, who is also Executive Vice Foreign Minister. Former National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra and Dai had held two rounds of border negotiations since the special

representative mechanism was established by India and China last year to settle the border issue during former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China.

The Hindu, 20 July 2004

India offers \$150m credit to Sri Lanka

NEW DELHI, JULY 19 . India today offered \$150 million credit to Sri Lanka for petroleum imports and also conveyed an 'in principle' decision to extend a \$100 million line of credit for upgradation of rural infrastructure, the specifics of which would be decided later. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, conveyed the Indian offer of assistance during his meeting with the visiting Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse. The two leaders also discussed bilateral and other issues of mutual interest and expressed satisfaction over the progress of bilateral relations. Developments in the Sri Lankan peace process were reviewed and Dr. Singh highlighted India's support for a solution which protected the rights of all Sri Lankan citizens while maintaining the territorial integrity of that country. Mr. Rajapakse sought technical and economic assistance for the development of rural infrastructure, particularly rural roads in his country. During his three-day visit, the first by him after becoming Prime Minister, Mr. Rajapakse held talks with the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, the Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, and the Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation, Oscar Fernandes.

The Hindu, 20 July 2004

India, Pakistan share 'ideas'
(B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 19. Agreeing to carry forward the composite dialogue process, India and Pakistan today exchanged some "ideas" on confidence building measures (CBMs) on peace and security and Jammu and Kashmir. Both sides reiterated their desire to push the dialogue process at a meeting of the two Foreign Secretaries on

the sidelines of the SAARC Standing Committee conference here this morning. The Foreign Secretary, Shashank, and his Pakistani counterpart, Riaz Khokhar, were upbeat about the progress made. But neither was willing to spell out details of the proposals on the ground that it was for the Foreign Ministers to decide on them when they meet in the next couple of days on the sidelines of the two-day SAARC ministerial meeting beginning tomorrow. The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, who arrived here from New Delhi to take part in the SAARC conference in a statement said he would do his best to use the opportunity to contribute further to creating a better climate for taking forward the composite dialogue process. Indian and Pakistani Foreign Secretaries said the proposals discussed at their bilateral breakfast meeting centred on CBMs related to peace and security and Jammu and Kashmir exchanged at their last meeting in New Delhi in the last week of June.

The Hindu, 20 July 2004

SAARC Ministers to meet on combating terrorism (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 19. Foreign Secretaries from SAARC countries tonight recommended a ministerial meeting on combating terrorism and trans-national crimes, including drug trafficking and decided to seek 'observer' status at the United Nations. The Standing Committee of the Foreign Secretaries suggested that the ministerial meeting, which would also discuss the problem of human trafficking, be convened at an early date. Bangladesh has decided to host the meeting. It finalised several proposals on energy cooperation, poverty alleviation besides follow-up action of free trade agreement in the regional grouping. However the 'idea' floated by Pakistan for expansion of the Council charter to include peace and security issues overshadowed the long list of agenda deliberated by the SAARC Standing Committee. At the end of the two-day deliberations, the SAARC Standing Committee agreed that Permanent

Representatives of the seven member states at the U.N. in New York be directed to "take action for obtaining observer status" at the world body, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary and Chairman of the Committee, Riaz Khokhar, told a news conference here. He said Pakistan's Permanent Representative, as SAARC Chairman, has been mandated to coordinate efforts in this regard.

The Pioneer, 20 July 2004

Portugal ends CBI's long Salem chase
(Subodh Ghildiyal)

New Delhi. In a major shot in the arm for the CBI, the Lisbon High Court (Portugal) has ordered the extradition of underworld don Abu Salem to India. An ally of global terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, Salem is a key accused in the 1993 Mumbai blasts case, apart from 40 other cases of murder and extortion. The order comes inside a week of a similar Lisbon High Court judgement in favour of extradition of his companion, Monica Bedi, who was arrested along with him in September 2002. But the extradition order may not be the final word on the issue. Salem retains the right to move the Supreme Court in appeal against the High Court order. An official said, "Salem had approached the Supreme Court earlier but the apex court did not go into the merits of the case and the option for appeal against the High Court order is open to Salem." Additional Director CBI Vijay Shankar is overseeing the extradition case. Hoping that it does not have to wait for two more years to get Salem, CBI is examining if there exist laws in Portugal which provide for "holding a convict's prison sentence in abeyance" while he is handed over to second country seeking his custody. He may face the trial in the second country and be deported later to serve the remainder of prison sentence in the first country.

The Hindu, 21 July 2004

We should not compromise on terrorism:
Natwar Singh (B.Muralidhar Reddy)
ISLAMABAD, JULY 20. Much to the consternation of other member-states in the

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), India-Pakistan disputes indirectly took the centre stage of the two-day Ministerial council meeting of the forum, which began here today. The Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, advocated the need for a mechanism within the SAARC forum for the resolution of political conflicts among the member-states even as the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, talked about the dangers posed by the scourge of terrorism in the region. In his opening remarks at the SAARC Council of Ministers session, Mr. Natwar Singh acknowledged that SAARC was perhaps the "weakest" among various regional cooperation organisations, but refused to join issue with Pakistan on the need to expand the SAARC charter to include bilateral issues related to peace and security. Mr. Singh, in a pointed reference to terrorism, said that "globally, the scourge of terrorism is plaguing many a nation. South Asia itself is a tragic example of this. We need to resolve not to compromise with terrorism if we wish to realise the dream of South Asia as a region where boundaries cease to be barriers separating our peoples."

The Hindu, 21 July 2004

"We will definitely not send troops to Iraq": Fischer (N.Ram and Kesava Menon)
CHENNAI, JULY 20. "We will not commit our troops to Iraq," the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, said in an interview to The Hindu in Chennai on Monday. He made it clear that the decision not to "send troops" was a definite one, consistent with Germany's opposition to the war. The decision would not change even if a request came from the 'Prime Minister' of the interim government, Iyad Allawi. However, Germany was "willing to move forward after the war" and provide help to the transfer of sovereignty and democratisation processes in Iraq in other ways. Mr. Fischer was responding to a series of questions on Iraq, relations with the United States and other major powers, the future of Europe, and the prospects of enhancing the Indo-German bilateral

relationship. Asked about the prospects of taking the Indo-German bilateral relationship to a new level, Mr. Fischer began with fervent praise for India's culture, which he said was "an important pillar of our relations" and has been "admired not only today but in the past by so many Germans." He foresaw a many-sided development and enhancement of bilateral relations, with economic as well as political cooperation having a leading role.

The Hindu, 21 July 2004

Offer on reopening Lhasa consulate (Amit Baruah)

BEIJING, JULY. 20. China today indicated that it was not averse to the idea of reopening India's consulate in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, if it was allowed to have another consulate in an Indian city. "I think we will consider such a scenario of opening or setting up a consulate in one of the cities in India and vice versa," the Assistant Foreign Minister, Shen Guofang, told visiting Indian presspersons when asked if India and China could have new consulates in Lhasa and, possibly, Kolkata. Mr. Shen was hopeful that a consensus would emerge on the issue after discussions between the two Governments. At present, India has a consulate in Shanghai and China has one in Mumbai. At present only Nepal has a consulate in Lhasa.

The Hindu, 21 July 2004

China resents meeting with Dalai Lama (PTI)

BEIJING, JULY 20. A reported meeting between the Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, has been resented by China, which today urged New Delhi to refrain from doing things that would hurt the "good momentum" witnessed in bilateral ties recently. "We hope the Indian side will abide by the political commitment, refrain from interfering in China's internal affairs and not affect the good momentum of Sino-Indian relations," the Chinese Foreign Ministry

spokeswoman, Zhang Qiyue said, reacting to the report in an Indian daily. She said China hoped that India would adhere to the "political commitment" it made last year. "The Dalai Lama is not a religious figure but a political exile," Mr. Zhang said while stressing that the Chinese Government is opposed to any meetings with the Dalai Lama by "officials of any country in any name or any form." China had protested similarly when the U.S. President George W. Bush as well as Prince Charles met the 69-year-old Nobel Peace Prize Laureate in recent months.

The Hindu, 22 July 2004

India, Pakistan agree on 'sustained dialogue' (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 21. The Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan will meet in New Delhi on September 5 and 6, at the end of the first round of the talks on the eight subjects identified under the resumed composite dialogue process. The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, and his Pakistan counterpart, Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, agreed this morning on the new dates for their bilateral meeting during an interaction over breakfast on the sidelines of the SAARC Council of Ministers conference here. Originally, they were scheduled to meet on August 25 but it has been postponed due to scheduling problems. The meeting in Delhi will be preceded by a one-day conference between the Foreign Secretaries on September 4. According to official sources, there was a clear understanding on both sides that the dialogue would have to be a "sustained process" and that there could be no quick fix to the complicated problems between India and Pakistan that have evaded answers for over five decades. Implied in it was the suggestion that it would be unrealistic to set any deadlines on the concerns of each other. At the end of the interaction they had no new agreements to offer. Perhaps, both sides are looking at each other's package and there is a possibility of some announcements after the Delhi round of talks.

The Hindu, 22 July 2004

Devananda's gesture (V.S.Sambandan)

COLOMBO, JULY 21. The Sri Lankan Minister for Hindu Affairs and secretary-general of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), Douglas Devananda, today announced a contribution of Rs. 2 lakhs (Sri Lankan) to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Relief Fund to be given to the families of the victims of the Kumbakonam fire tragedy. Expressing anguish over the "heart-wrenching tragedy" in which "budding flowers perished in flames," causing "indescribable distress to all across the world," Mr. Devananda said: "In a tragedy of such magnitude, it is necessary that all hands join together to lend support to the government handling relief and rehabilitation." The contribution would be handed over to the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo. The EPDP complimented Chief Minister Jayalalitha for her "excellent handling of the post-tragedy relief and also her foresight in initiating measures to prevent the recurrence of such mishaps in schools," Mr. Devananda said in a statement.

The Hindu, 22 July 2004

Natwar Singh, Kadirgamar review ties (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 21. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Laxman Kadirgamar, today apprised the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, about the "peace process" in his country. The two Ministers, who met here on the sidelines of the SAARC Council of Ministers conference, reviewed bilateral ties and discussed matters of mutual interest. The interaction coincided with the high-level contact between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam after weeks of tension. Official sources said that Mr. Singh endorsed the suggestion made by Mr. Kadirgamar for consultations at the level of Foreign Office and Ministers at mutually convenient dates. The two discussed issues related to the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement and the coming comprehensive economic partnership talks and expressed the hope that

all problems would be resolved. Mr. Singh recalled the recent visits of Mr. Kadirgamar and the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Rajapakse, to India and New Delhi's decision to extend \$150 million credit to Colombo for purchase of infrastructure for humanitarian assistance and development projects.

The Hindu, 23 July 2004

Over 5,000 Indians employed in Iraq

NEW DELHI, JULY 22. More than 5,000 Indians are employed, a majority of them illegally, in Iraq despite a Government ban on going there due to the prevailing situation. Only 350 Indians have been granted permission to work on a project there. The rest have gone without the mandatory clearance from the Protector-General of Emigrants or have moved to Iraq from neighbouring countries. According to Labour Ministry officials, most of the emigrants to Iraq and its neighbouring countries have gone through private recruitment agencies. The Government has suspended clearance to Indians going to Iraq from April 15 and to Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates from May 17 this year. The Indian missions in Jordan and Kuwait have also contacted local companies who have deployed Indians at their work sites in Iraq. Besides, officials in the Indian embassy at Baghdad have visited some camps having Indian workers. Earlier, taking note of the "illegal recruitment of ex-servicemen by private agencies for providing security to various installations in Iraq," the External Affairs Ministry directed the Protector-General of Emigrants to ban such recruitments and take strict action against the erring employment agencies. The Government has also placed under suspension the provision of Emigration Clearance Not Required (ECNR) certificates for Indians travelling to Iraq.

The Hindu, 23 July 2004

Natwar Singh, Shaukat Aziz review ties (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 22. Taking forward the spirit of the understanding arrived at on

Wednesday to stay engaged with each other on a sustained basis, India and Pakistan today agreed on the need for both sides to 'get together' for the good of the people of both countries and the region. This was the crux of the informal interaction the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, had with Pakistan's Prime Minister in-waiting and Finance Minister, Shaukat Aziz. The meeting provided an opportunity to them to review the current state of India-Pakistan relations. Mr. Singh spent some time with Mr. Aziz who is expected to take over from the transitional Prime Minister, Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain. A trusted lieutenant of the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, Mr. Aziz' elevation to the highest post has been delayed, as he is not a member of the Pakistan National Assembly. Mr. Aziz is contesting the by-elections scheduled on August 18 from two of the National Assembly constituencies to make himself eligible to occupy the chair of Prime Minister. In the course of his interaction with the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Aziz was all appreciation for the verdict of the people of India in the recent general elections and characterised the outcome as a 'tribute to Indian democracy.' It is likely that Mr. Aziz could be in Delhi some time in September and October in his capacity as the Chairman of SAARC.

The Hindu, 23 July 2004

India to consider SAFMA plea
(B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 22. The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, has assured a delegation of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) that India would consider grant of multiple one-year visas to the National Executive Body members of SAFMA. He also promised to take up the issue of liberalisation of the visa regime in the composite dialogue process between India and Pakistan. Talking to a SAFMA delegation, Mr. Singh appreciated the initiative taken by the association and assured the delegation of his Government's moral support to SAFMA's conferences and activities promoting better understanding

among the nations of South Asia. The delegation had sought facilitation of visas and allowing SAFMA to hold its conference on interstate conflicts and second parliamentary conference in New Delhi. It asked for help in exchange of delegations between the two Punjabs and exchange of journalists across Kashmir. On SAFMA's demands to adopt its protocols on free movement of mediapersons and media products across the South Asian region and on freedom of information, besides granting it a status of an Apex Regional Body of SAARC, the External Affairs Minister said he would do his best to accommodate these proposals.

The Hindu, 24 July 2004

Middlemen behind woes of Indian workers (Atul Aneja)

MANAMA, JULY 23. The kidnapping of three Indian truck drivers in Iraq who face the threat of execution has raised questions about the conditions and circumstances under which a large number of Indians find themselves caught up in the crossfire between Iraqi resistance and the American occupation forces. According to some estimates about 5,000 Indians are at present located in Iraq. The New York Times in a recent report, quoted "government officials" as saying that "there are hundreds, if not thousands, of Indians already there [in Iraq]." Reports say that a chain of middlemen, including recruiting agents in India, "sponsors" employees in some Persian Gulf countries and foreign "security contractors" may have tricked many Indians to work in Iraq. Many of the Indian workers have reportedly been taken to U.S. military camps, located in hazardous areas, to work as cooks, barbers, butchers and, quite frequently, in inhuman conditions. Kuwait and Jordan have been the staging posts for smuggling many of them into Iraq.

The Pioneer, 24 July 2004

India turns to Islamic scholars to save hostages

New Delhi. As time ticks away for the three Indians seeking freedom from their captors

in Iraq, India has approached Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait seeking their intervention for the release of the captives. Informed sources said the religious scholars have been approached for making appeals to the group, calling itself as 'The Holders of the Black Banners', to free the abducted Indians. The scholars were also requested to get in touch with the religious ulemas and maulvis who would help in impressing upon the group to release their prisoners, they added. Meanwhile, Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh on Friday termed the situation "serious". "I don't want to give any false hopes. It is a serious situation and has to be dealt with in a sensitive manner," Singh said on arrival from Islamabad, where he was attending the Saarc Foreign Ministers' meet. Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahmed assured Parliament that the Kuwait-based employers were "willing to do everything necessary to ensure the safety and release of the hostages." He heads the crisis management group set up by the Government to tackle the situation. The company, in the meanwhile, has issued an appeal to the kidnappers to release the hostages at the earliest so that they can return safely to their families. Ahmed said: "The company has assured the Indian Embassy in Kuwait that they are willing to do everything necessary to ensure the safety and release of the hostages."

The Pioneer, 24 July 2004

West's bid to discredit Indian AIDS programme irks Health Ministry (Yoga Rangatia)

New Delhi. The Union Health Ministry is aggrieved that despite major strides in curtailing the spread of HIV infection in India, there is a major effort by a section of opinion-makers in the West to play up the pandemic. The US-based National Intelligence Council (NIC) projected that by 2,010, as many as 20-25 million Indians are likely to be HIV infected. The figure is roughly a quarter of India's population. World Bank vice-president Praful Patel is reported to have said that Indian leadership

is going through a denial phase of the pandemic. A series of such statements has the Health Ministry worried. "We have asked for a clarification on how they have arrived at such numbers. Are they collecting blood samples and testing them? What formula are they using to come up with these numbers? After all, this is epidemiology, not astrology," Union Health Secretary JVR Prasada Rao said. Mr Rao said none of the agencies have agreed to discuss the issue with the Government. The ministry also told Parliament on Friday that it does not agree with the numbers floating around. The ministry feels that answering such "doomsday predictions diverts our attention from the real work. Multinational companies based in the West were also engaged in concentrated efforts to discredit drugs manufactured in India." "We countered the contentions. Indian drugs are as good as manufactured anywhere in the world. Even the World Health Organisation has certified Indian drugs. The advertisement campaign is misleading," Mr Rao said.

The Pioneer, 25 July 2004

Pervez's latest 'disappointing'

New Delhi. India on Saturday voiced its displeasure over President General Pervez Musharraf's reported comment that all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir should be solved within a time frame. Voicing its disappointment over these comments made by Pakistan after the talks between External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh and General Musharraf in Islamabad on Friday, an External Affairs Ministry spokesman said here that these comments did not reflect the comprehensiveness of the discussions. The comments were released by the Pakistan Foreign office after the parleys between Mr Singh and General Musharraf. "We are disappointed at the tone and substance of some of the comments made in the Press release issued by the Pakistan foreign office," he said. The spokesman made this observation when asked about the Pakistani statement in which it quoted General Musharraf as having told Mr Singh that there should be simultaneous

progress on all bilateral issues including Kashmir within a reasonable timeframe. General Musharraf, according to the statement, told the Indian Minister that "it is important to address this issue with sincerity with a view to reaching a final settlement that accorded fully with the legitimate aspirations of the Kashmiris within a reasonable timeframe." Mr Singh, after returning home on Friday after a five-day visit, said he found the attitude of the Pakistani leadership very positive and constructive.

The Pioneer, 25 July 2004

Iraqi abductors want ransom: Natwar (Reuters)

New Delhi. Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh said on Saturday he was optimistic three Indian drivers threatened with beheading by kidnappers in Iraq would be freed, saying their captors simply wanted money. Everything was being done to secure the release of the three men, Singh told reporters after meeting the family of one of them. "There will be a solution." "The group is not a political one... these are only some irresponsible men who kidnap people to make money." A group calling itself the "Black Banners" seized the Indians and four other drivers - three Kenyans and an Egyptian - this week and threatened to start beheading them unless the Kuwait transport company employing them pulled out of Iraq. But on Friday, they issued a new 48-hour deadline. They also want India, Kenya and Egypt to withdraw their citizens from Iraq. The three countries are not part of the US-led coalition in Iraq. India already discourages its citizens from working in Iraq. But hundreds are employed there as cooks, drivers and other labour, generally by Gulf-based contractors.

The Hindu, 25 July 2004

Sri Lankan MP sent back
CHENNAI, JULY 24. M.K. Eelavendan, a Sri Lankan MP, who arrived here from Colombo this afternoon, was sent back to the island. Official sources said that the MP, representing the Tamil National Alliance,

arrived here, on his way to Bangalore to attend the World Tamil Confederation's conference tomorrow; but he was denied entry as per a Ministry of Home Affairs warning circular issued in January 2001. Mr. Eelavendan was deported on December 14, 2000 on the ground that "his continued presence on Indian soil was undesirable due to his pro-LTTE activities".

The Hindu, 25 July 2004

Racketeers exploit the vulnerable (Atul Aneja)

MANAMA, JULY 24 . As instances of coercion that brought a large number of Indians into Iraq come to light, spotlight has turned on a trans-national "industry" that benefits from their vulnerability in foreign land. It is now becoming clear that the three truck drivers kidnapped were not recruited for employment in Iraq. Amir Muscatwalla, the head of Oman Agencies, a Mumbai-based firm, said that the company sent the three drivers, Sukhdev Singh, Tilak Raj and Antaryami to Kuwait. It is common knowledge that Indian employees, soon after landing, have to deposit their passports with their employers. "In 99 per cent of the cases the workers cannot retain their passport," says Rajesh Kumar [not his real name], a migrant worker from Uttar Pradesh who works in a grocery store here. Once the passport is in the hands of the employer, the worker effectively loses his freedom of movement. "We are immediately brought under the thumb of our employer who can, if he wishes, manipulate us in any way he wants," Mr. Kumar adds. Many workers who wished to travel home to attend emergencies have experienced difficulties in doing so because access to their passports was denied. Most workers are either too poor or diffident to take recourse to local legal channels, approach the Indian Embassy or access some of the "helplines" which a few better-off expatriate volunteers in some of the Gulf countries have established.

The Hindu, 26 July 2004

FTA to figure in Sino-Indian talks (PTI)
BEIJING, JULY 25. India and China will

discuss the possibility of signing a Free Trade Agreement and ways to step up bilateral trade and investment when officials and experts from the two sides meet tomorrow in New Delhi. At its first meeting here on March 22, the Sino-Indian Joint Study Group (JSG) on Trade and Economic Cooperation initiated measures to discuss the possibility of signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. At tomorrow's meeting, both sides are expected to carry forward the discussions and explore the possibility of encouraging cooperation between the business communities of both sides, official sources said here.

The Hindu, 26 July 2004

India, Japan engage in defence dialogue
(P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, JULY 25. India and Japan "are getting to know each other, in a macro sense", through an intensive dialogue in the defence sector. The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal S. Krishnaswamy, told The Hindu in Singapore today that the ongoing process, undertaken to "break the ice" in interactions in the sensitive air-defence field, was related entirely to "professional issues". Responding to questions, during a transit visit here on his way back home from Japan, where he held talks with senior defence officers, he said his interlocutors evinced "very keen interest to understand our posture, the way we do things". Characterising this as "a great professional interest" on the part of Tokyo, Air Chief Marshal Krishnaswamy, the first IAF chief to pay a "formal visit" to Japan, said there was no specific objective behind this dialogue, such as the current Iraq situation or any other issue.

The Hindu, 27 July 2004

All foreign troops should leave Iraq:
Kharazi (Harish Khare)

NEW DELHI, JULY 26. "All foreign troops will have to leave Iraq before peace and stability can return to that country," asserts Kamal Kharazi, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who is here on a

two-day visit to "renew and deepen" relations with India. A veteran diplomat, Dr. Kharazi believes Iraq will experience a semblance of order only when the "foreign troops" — meaning the American and allied forces — leave that country and Iraq is able to raise its own national army and police force to keep order. Talking to The Hindu, the suave and articulate Minister disclosed that Teheran would be hosting a meeting of the Interior Ministers from the neighbouring countries to see what kind of help — training and equipment — could be provided to Iraq to set up an effective police and army. "This is the age of multilateralism; we have to strengthen it," he says. Pointing out that Iran was always against the American invasion of Iraq, Dr. Kharazi notes that the United States' unilateralism has only brought turmoil and problems to that country and instability to the region. Just as it did in Afghanistan, Iran was keen on playing a role in stabilising the situation in Iraq.

The Hindu, 27 July 2004

India-China talks begin, statement likely today

NEW DELHI, JULY 26. The third round of talks on solving the India-China boundary dispute began here today. There was no official word about the talks and the External Affairs (MEA) Ministry spokesperson said a statement is likely tomorrow, concluding day of the talks. The National Security Adviser and India's special representative, J.N. Dixit, and his Chinese counterpart and Executive Vice-Foreign Minister, Dai Bingguo, held the talks. Mr. Dixit received the Chinese Minister at his South Bloc office and the two reportedly went over the ground that has already been covered. The Indian side comprises the Ambassador in Beijing, Nalin Surie, the Additional Secretary in the MEA, Nirupama Rao, and other senior officials. The previous National Democratic Alliance Government had taken the decision to upgrade the talks and the then National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, led the first two rounds of talks. It is understood that both sides have managed to narrow

down the differences in perception on the approach to the problem. They also acquainted each other with some technical irritants such as the marking of contours on the maps. India had earlier insisted on a sector-by-sector approach to solving the problem while China wanted a package deal. The two sides have now agreed to discuss the problem on a sector-by-sector basis but announce the agreement once the differences on all the sectors are sorted out.

The Pioneer, 27 July 2004

IAF contingent leaves for Congo on UN mission

New Delhi. Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal S Krishnaswamy on Monday urged his men to live up to the reputation of handling sensitive situations during the UN peace-keeping operations and fulfill the role of dedicated air warriors. Flagging off a 243-men-strong IAF contingent to Congo from here, as part of a UN peace-keeping mission, the Air Chief urged the team to face the serious challenges in the war-ravaged African nation with professional competence. The contingent, which would replace another IAF team there posted last year, was sent following a UN request for continued deployment and its acknowledgement of the exemplary role played by the Indian peace-keepers in the Congo mission, the Chief of Air Staff said. The jungle terrain and the violence-ridden history of Congo makes it one of the most volatile nations with warring rebel factions fighting each other to gain control over mine-rich areas. The IAF contingent was flagged off on Monday by Group Captain D S Ahluwalia and entrusted with the task of carrying out helicopter missions and quell unrest, especially in the eastern Congo with the help of five MI-17 and four MI-25 helicopters besides communication equipment.

The Pioneer, 27 July 2004

Portugal urged to charge Salem with major offences

New Delhi. The Central Bureau of Investigation has written to the Portuguese

government to approach the Supreme Court with an appeal for extradition of underworld don Abu Salem on major offences like the Mumbai Bomb Blasts case. It is learnt the extradition ordered by the Lisbon High Court earlier last week was on minor offences. Sources said the CBI wants the Portuguese government to seek Salem's extradition for grave offences. A list of nine charges like four with Delhi Police, two with Mumbai Police and three with CBI has been attached for the fresh appeal to be filed in Supreme Court. Sources said the detailed order of the last week's High Court had left the authorities baffled as it cleared his extradition only for minor offences. An accused can be tried only for offences for which he has been extradited, an official said. Senior officials said the agency was also trying to get Salem extradited even while he was serving a four and half years sentence in Portugal over minor charge of passport forgery. The CBI is examining ways of how his present sentence in Portugal can be held in abeyance and he be extradited to India.

The Pioneer, 27 July 2004

Rlys unsure about Indo-Nepal project (Satarupa Bhattacharjya)

New Delhi. As the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Monday cleared the direct Indo-Nepal rail link for freight trains, officials of the Indian Railways felt there would be considerable roadblocks in developing Nepal's rail infrastructure. With the Cabinet approval, the IR will have to introduce freight trains from Raxual in Bihar to Birgunj in Nepal to move export-import items between the two nations. In the backdrop, there appears to be a degree of apprehension on both sides. IR officials point out that progress in projects between India and Nepal have been held back by the Chinese. Representatives of the Nepalese Government in India, however, deny this and blame Maoists insurgents for the delay. "Since Nepal does not have rail infrastructure, the Indian Railways would like to develop a set-up for that country," senior Railway Ministry sources said. They

point out that while for Nepal, the gains would be through easier transit of commercial goods across the border, for India, future project development in Nepal will be meaningful. A project that the Indian Railways is eyeing in Nepal is the Birjanga-Kathmandu broad gauge link for which the Nepalese Government wants participation of foreign private firms.

The Hindu, 28 July 2004

Toward better economic ties with neighbours (K.Venugopal)

NEW DELHI, JULY 27 . In what will be his first visit overseas as Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh leaves New Delhi on Thursday for Bangkok to attend a summit that seeks to promote better economic cooperation among seven countries on the Bay of Bengal rim. It was a trip that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee might have made as the summit was first scheduled for February this year. But the announcement of elections to the Lok Sabha that turned his into a caretaker role caused the summit to be postponed. Without a credible Indian participation, the summit would have had little meaning. India's gross domestic product is larger than those of the other six nations put together. Known now by the rather inelegant acronym BIMST-EC, the regional grouping had started out seven years ago as BIST-EC at Thailand's initiative to foster better trade among three other contiguous countries around the Bay: Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Myanmar, admitted to this grouping in 1997, provided the extra letter to the acronym. Nepal and Bhutan joined the membership early this year, but spared the acronym of further upheaval. The involvement of the top leaders is expected to provide the impetus to regional trade that was missing till now.

The Hindu, 28 July 2004

'China-India border talks constructive'

NEW DELHI, JULY 27. The third round of China-India talks on solving the boundary dispute ended here today. The talks between the National Security Adviser and India's Special Representative, J.N. Dixit, and his

Chinese counterpart and Executive Vice-Foreign Minister, Dai Bingguo, were held in a "friendly, constructive and cooperative atmosphere," according to an External Affairs Ministry news release. The talks involved reviewing the guiding principles for the talks that had been formulated in the previous two meetings. The two sides agreed to hold the next meeting in Beijing at a "mutually convenient date." Mr. Dai Bingguo called on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and handed over a letter from the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. He also called on the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh. The boundary settlement talks were upgraded to the level of Special Representatives (SRs) and since then two rounds of talks were held between the then National Security Adviser and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Brajesh Mishra, and Mr. Dai Bingguo.

The Hindu, 28 July 2004

MoU signed for development of Myanmar Railways

NEW DELHI, JULY 27 . India and Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding for the development of Myanmar Railways here today in the presence of the Minister of State for Railways, R. Velu, and the Myanmar's Minister for Rail Transportation and the leader of the nine-member visiting delegation, Aung Min. The MoU, inked by the Joint Secretary, Southeast Asia, Ministry of External Affairs, and Myanmar's Ambassador, provides that India will make available a line of credit of \$ 56.358 million to Myanmar for augmenting the Myanmar Railways. The line of credit will be operationalised through a separate agreement between the EXIM Bank of India and the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank. It has been agreed that the Rail India Technical and Economic Services Ltd. (RITES) will execute the project for the supply of rolling stock, components, equipment, machinery & plant to Myanmar. RITES, which is the sole authorised export agency of Indian Railways having access to its technical expertise, will supply a package

of ten 1350 HP locomotives, 48 passenger coaches of various types and capital spares of the total value of \$ 28 million. The MoU aims at improving passenger services on the Yangon-Mandalay trunk line and upgrading of tracks, signalling and communication systems and maintenance on the Myanmar Railways, which has 4,525 route km of lines.

The Telegraph, 28 July 2004

Hopes pinned on Pak to clear Jhelum pact (Sujan Dutta)

New Delhi, July 27: An Indian team flies into Islamabad tomorrow expecting to clinch an agreement with Pakistan on the sharing of river Jhelum's waters that has been in dispute for 20 years. Islamabad objected to the Tulbul Navigation Project in 1985 aimed at making the Jhelum, which flows through the Kashmir Valley in India and into Pakistan, navigable through the year. We have discussed it and I believe our friends in Pakistan will accept that there are benefits to both sides from the project, Union water resources secretary V.K. Duggal said. Duggal leads the 10-member team that includes technical experts and officials of the external affairs ministry, water resources ministry and the Jammu and Kashmir government. There have been eight rounds of talks on the Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project between October 1988 and August 1992 since Pakistan filed its objection with the Indus Waters Commission. At least twice in the past, draft agreements were prepared and New Delhi and Islamabad came close to resolving the dispute.

The Hindu, 29 July 2004

BIMST-EC: scope for boosting regional trade

NEW DELHI, JULY 28. There is considerable potential to expand trade among the members of BIMST-EC, a Ministry of External Affairs spokesman said at a media briefing today, ahead of Friday's summit meeting in Bangkok. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is leading the Indian delegation to the summit, where he will

confer with heads of the six other countries that make up this economic community around the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan. To push for an increase in the interaction, a ministerial meeting in February agreed to work towards a free trade agreement, which would see countries lower tariffs on imports from fellow members in a phased programme. In the case of an initial set of goods, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand would offer concessional tariffs to imports from the other four countries starting April 2006, and to one another starting in April 2007. The agreement was not limited to goods but would cover services and investment as well. He said the region had enormous hydropower and hydrocarbon resources that could be exploited for the common benefit. Myanmar and Bangladesh were both rich in natural gas. On providing better connectivity, he said that discussions were under way on a trilateral highway project that would connect Thailand and India through Myanmar. He declined to indicate a time-frame for its implementation.

The Hindu, 29 July 2004

Talks with kidnappers: Kuwaiti firm optimistic (Atul Aneja)

MANAMA, JULY 28. Al Dulaymi, whom the kidnappers of seven truck drivers of the Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL) had appointed as their representative, was "taking the negotiations towards a wrapping-up period," Rana Abu-Zaineh, spokesperson of the firm said today. "There has been no interruption in the talks and they were proceeding satisfactorily," she added. The spokesperson, however, denied earlier reports attributed to her that "some kind of an agreement" with the kidnappers (Holders of the Black Banners) for the release of the hostages had been reached. "That is simply not true," she said, adding that her company was "very optimistic" that the hostages would be released soon. "The extension of the deadline by the kidnappers was the best thing that could have happened," she said.

Indian Express, 29 July 2004

Buy water from India: Pak MPs (PTI)

ISLAMABAD, JULY 28: Pakistan's ruling coalition's MPs from Punjab province have asked the government to buy water from India to tide over the acute crisis in their region and wanted the 1960 Indus Water Treaty to be renegotiated with New Delhi to get water from the Sutlej. Ruling coalition members, R.H. Pirzada, S.F.A. Khan Leghari and S.S.J. Mazari moved a motion in the National Assembly yesterday on the issue saying that parts of Punjab province faced severe water shortage due to a drought-like situation there. Pirzada said besides discussing Kashmir and other political issues, the government should negotiate the purchase of water to save 50 million people in southern Punjab. He said former ruler Ayub Khan sold Ravi, Beas and Sutlej rivers under the Indus Water Treaty in 1960, which formed the primary water source of the Seraiki belt. The treaty negotiated by the World Bank was signed by Ayub Khan and Jawaharlal Nehru under which Ravi, Sutlej and Beas were awarded to India, while Pakistan was given the rights on Indus, Chenab and Jhelum. Meanwhile, officials from India and Pakistan would hold discussions on resolving differences over the Wullar Barrage, during their two-day talks here from tomorrow.

The Hindu, 30 July 2004

India to take re-look at Free Trade Agreement with Thailand (K.Venugopal)

BANGKOK, JULY 29 . India will take a re-look at the Free Trade Agreement with Thailand that the Vajpayee Government had worked out last year, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said today. He was speaking to presspersons on board his special aircraft that took him to Bangkok for the first summit of BIMST-EC, the group of seven countries located around the Bay of Bengal. Dr. Singh pointed to the fact that his Government was just two-months-old, and therefore needed time to take a hard look at the provisions of the Free Trade Agreement. It was not clear whether the new approach

represented the political twist upon the change of government or was a response to pleas from the domestic industry. It could be both. Over the past few days, Dr. Singh has been telling his staff that the Government must promise less and deliver more. The political inference from that is that the previous Government had promised tall and could not deliver on that. There has been enough noise from industry as well. Thailand has a fairly large automobile base with investments from Japanese majors such as Toyota and Honda, and bids to be the Detroit of the east. India's auto majors and auto component makers have expressed apprehensions that imports from Thailand could swamp them.

The Hindu, 30 July 2004

26-nation meet on disaster management begins

NEW DELHI, JULY 29 . Tempest Express, a 26-nation workshop to help prepare the Asia-Pacific region develop capability to conduct immediate planning in the event of a crisis conflicts, man-made or natural disasters began here today. Co-hosted by the United States and Indian militaries, the Multinational Planning Augmentation Team event is being held for the first time in India. The MPAT began in 1999 to improve the response to crises in the region. In his welcoming remarks, the U.S. Charge d'Affaires, Robert O. Blake, said that increasing global inter-dependence required greater cooperation between nations on trans-national matters and all nations must learn from each other's experiences on humanitarian and disaster-related issues.

The Telegraph, 30 July 2004

Delhi offers help to Dhaka

New Delhi, July 29: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has written to his Bangladesh counterpart Begum Khaleda Zia, offering India's help and co-operation in dealing with the devastating floods in the country. The letter sets the tone for the "good neighbourly" relations Delhi wants to have with Dhaka on the eve of a meeting between the two leaders on the

sidelines of the Bimstec (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation) summit in Thailand. India is one of the first countries to respond to Khaleda's appeal for help to deal with the floods that have claimed several lives and damaged property worth millions of takas. Tomorrow's meeting between Singh and Khaleda will be their first since the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government came to power in May. Singh will try to convince Khaleda that his government does not have any favourites in Dhaka and whichever party comes to power, Delhi is willing to play ball. He will also take the opportunity to tell the Bangladeshi Prime Minister that a change of government in Delhi must not be seen in Dhaka as a shift in some of India's fundamental concerns. Chief among them is the presence of northeastern insurgents in Bangladesh.

The Hindu, 31 July 2004

'Notable poverty reduction'
NEW DELHI, JULY 30. A World Bank study has found that South Asia had made progress in poverty reduction in the 1990s, based on strong growth performances. The study has also found that the growth impetus and poverty impact was most notable in India. The Bank has, however, said that notwithstanding this progress, the region faces tremendous challenges moving forward in the 21st century. An estimated 40 per cent of the world's poor are located in the region and social indicators are weak. Hence, strong performance in South Asia would be critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the global level. The study has identified two critical areas where policy and institutional reforms were necessary throughout the region - improvement in delivery of basic services and acceleration of the growth rate from five to six per cent rate at present to eight per cent and above to achieve even faster poverty reduction. The Bank has expressed the view that the growth agenda needs to be pursued in the context of a global environment that is getting more integrated. South Asia was behind in taking

advantage of the opportunities presented by global integration, reflected, for example, in a very low share in world trade. Raising this share entails sustained efforts at reducing the cost of doing business, raising productivity and increasing private investment.

The Hindu, 31 July 2004

Go-ahead on FTA (K.Venugopal)
BANGKOK, JULY 30. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh does not cease to surprise. Less than 24 hours after startling observers by expressing the Government's intention to take another look at the Free Trade Agreement with Thailand, his Commerce Minister Kamal Nath announced today that all apprehensions had been addressed, and that the first phase of the agreement would go ahead as scheduled on September 1. It was clear that some, if not all, the reservations of the Prime Minister had been addressed at his meeting this morning with Thailand Prime Minister ahead of the seven-nation BIMST-EC summit meeting on Saturday. The primary source of worry for India had been that Thailand should not become the staging point for exports from third countries. It had sprung from the fact that Thailand already has free trade agreements with China and Australia, which might have enabled producers in either country to run their products through to India at a concessional duty. Thailand has assured India that would not happen as it would enforce the rules of origin, which means that only those goods which see a 40 per cent value addition in Thailand are eligible to use this route.

The Hindu, 31 July 2004

Kamal Nath rushes back to Geneva (UNI)
BANGKOK, JULY 30. Cutting short his stay with the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, for the BIMST-EC meeting here, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Kamal Nath, is rushing back to Geneva tonight as last-ditch efforts are being mounted to resolve the deadlock in the World Trade Organisation negotiations on the framework agreement. Mr. Kamal Nath, who joined the Prime Minister's entourage from Geneva to

attend the BIMST-EC meet, said there was still no agreement on the draft proposal .

The Hindu, 31 July 2004

India, Pakistan talks on Wullar barrage inconclusive (B.Muralidhar Reddy)
ISLAMABAD, JULY 30. India and Pakistan have not been able to resolve their differences over New Delhi's long-pending proposal for the construction of a barrage on Jhelum River to facilitate navigation between Baramullah and Wullar in Jammu and Kashmir. However, at the end of the two-day official level talks here, there was agreement that talks on the issue should continue as and when the next round of composite dialogue takes places. It was agreed that the discussions would continue at the next round of the dialogue process with a view to finding a solution to the issue consistent with the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty between the two countries, a brief joint statement issued at the end of the two-day official-level talks here said. The project has been hanging fire since 1987, as Pakistan believes that the barrage would be in violation of the Treaty. Despite several assurances from India that the barrage would not in any way affect water flows into Pakistan, Islamabad is not convinced. Wullar barrage is one of the eight subjects that figure in the composite dialogue that was revived after an agreement between the two Foreign Secretaries here in February this year.