

The Hindu, 1 June 2005

India, Iceland sign two pacts (K.V. Prasad)

REYKJAVIK: India and Iceland on Tuesday signed bilateral agreements, one envisaging regular air services and a memorandum of understanding on foreign office consultations. The agreements were signed in the presence of President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Iceland Prime Minister Halldor Asgrimsson here. Though the details were not made public, the one on air services is expected to provide 14 flights a week connecting two cities in each country, official sources said. The agreement on air services elaborates on aspects such as route schedule, self-handling and allowing the aeronautical authorities of both countries to cooperate. The Indian Ambassador, Mahesh Sachdev, signed the documents on behalf of New Delhi, while Olafur Egilsson, Ambassador of Iceland, signed it on behalf of Reykjavik.

The Indian Express, 1 June 2005

New Delhi's new French connection is Prime Minister Villepin (Prarthna Gahilote)

NEW DELHI, MAY 31: French celebrations over the election of Dominique de Villepin as the new French Prime Minister today came with a dash of Indian spice. Villepin's two stints in India, first as the second councillor at the French Embassy in 1989-90 and then as the first councillor in 1990-92, gave Indians enough reason today to join the French celebrations. As conservationist and art historian, Aman Nath put it, "I am extremely happy that a man like Villepin has become the prime minister. He loves India which is a good thing for our country." Nath remembers him as a man who was a complete India-wallah. Calling him a "contemporary man with an extremely positive outlook," he added, "I am pleased that Villepin now holds the top job." Nath recalled the Villepin couple's inimitable hospitality.

The Hindu, 2 June 2005

Thailand Premier coming (P.S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will pay a two-day 'working visit' to India from June 3 for talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. While bilateral issues, especially commercial and trade relations, will be a key subject, larger international questions such as anti-terror campaign may also figure, according to sources. Thailand is understood to be keen to engage India intensively on some aspects of the bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) as also air links. A Framework FTA was signed in 2003, and it was followed by an understanding on "early-harvest" schemes. The present objective seems to be to put the entire process on a firmer course.

The Hindu, 2 June 2005

New Delhi can play a leading role in world politics: Iceland (K.V. Prasad)

REYKJAVIK: Iceland president Olafur Grimsson, who takes pride in his long association with India, says New Delhi can play a leading role in world politics provided it does not remain engrossed in domestic affairs. "India has the opportunity to play a leading role on the world stage and not be solely occupied with problems at home. It has an economic advantage, a vibrant democracy and has established peace in a reasonable way with its neighbours and relations with Europe and the United States," Mr. Grimsson told correspondents who are accompanying President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on his four-nation tour. Indian economy had turned around and, having a democracy that stood the test of time, the country could have its voice heard on the world stage. Long association Mr. Grimsson said both India and Iceland got independence around the same time. Recalling his association with Indian leaders since Indira Gandhi, he talked glowingly of his special relationship with Rajiv Gandhi.

The Hindu, 2 June 2005

'Russia, India, China share common interest' (Vladimir Radyuhin)

VLADIVOSTOK: Russia, India and China share a common interest in promoting growth and stability in the Asian region, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said here. The choice of venue for the trilateral meeting "reflects a shared desire to cooperate in stabilising the economic development and strengthening security in the region," Mr. Lavrov said as he met with China's Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing here on Wednesday. External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh arrived here on Wednesday evening. Apart from a trilateral meeting on Thursday he is also scheduled to have bilateral meetings with the Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministers. Experts said energy issues were likely to dominate the agenda of trilateral talks. India and China are both keen to get access to Russian energy. "It is in Russia's interests to avoid rivalry over oil reserves between its two strategic allies in the region - China and India - and harmonise their quest for Russian hydrocarbons," an informed Russian source at the talks told The Hindu .

The Hindu, 2 June 2005

Kalam holds talks with his Ukrainian counterpart

Kiev, June. 2: President A P J Abdul Kalam, today held talks on a wide range of bilateral issues with his Ukrainian counterpart Victor Yushchenko. The two leaders were assisted by senior officials in the talks. Later, the two countries signed agreements on cooperation in space and on standardisation in the presence of the two Presidents. The Framework Agreement on Cooperation for the Peaceful Use of Outer Space was signed by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman Madhavan Nair, and Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister Borys Tarasiuk. Indian Ambassador to Ukraine Shekholen Kipgen, and Mr Nagrich Nikhola Michailovich, Head of Ukraine's Committee for Technical Regulation and Consumer Affairs, signed the Memorandum of Understanding in the field of Standardisation, Metrology Conformity, Assessment and Quality. ISRO delegations had earlier visited Ukraine in 2002 and 2003 with the aim of increasing cooperation with its National Space Agency, officials said.

The Pioneer, 4 June 2005

'Dhaka's action against rebels an eyewash' (Subodh Ghildiyal)

Security forces believe that Bangladesh's claimed action against Tripura rebels is an eyewash aimed at softening India before the SAARC summit. Senior officers of the Border Security Force see no evidence of Bangladeshi sincerity in flushing out militants operating in the Indian North-East and safely ensconced in its territory. Bangladesh has neither put on record the operation said to have been mounted in Maulvi Bazar last Friday nor has it confirmed that those killed or arrested were Indians. While the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sounded the BSF headquarters about a possible action against "criminals", it did not bother to get back with the outcome. Speaking to The Pioneer, Director General, BSF, RS Moosahary said, "Bangla-desh refused to act against Indian terrorists despite repeated demands. If it is sincere, it should continue with the action."

The Hindu, 4 June 2005

A day at rocket design centre (K.V. Prasad)

For a person who gained fame as the missile man, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on Friday paid a visit to the Yuzhnoye design office here that played a role in the development of a missile based on new technologies and use of a self-contained guidance and control system. Considered a repository of rocket and satellite technology, Mr. Kalam was given a presentation by its general director Stanislav Konyukhov on the achievements of the firm and its association with India since the launch its first satellite, Aryabhata, in 1975. The President, accompanied by senior scientists, flew in from Kyiv to the city, 500 km south of the Ukrainian capital on the penultimate day of his four-day visit here. The design office which was earlier known as the special design bureau was established in 1954 and with the attainment of Independence and denuclearised status of the country, a new programme of missile development began taking into account the missile technology control regime and Wassenaar agreement that includes deployment of anti-aircraft missile defence systems.

The Hindu, 4 June 2005

Colombo's eco concerns to be factored into Sethu project (Siddharth Varadarajan)

NEW DELHI: In an attempt to allay Colombo's fears about the proposed Sethusamudram ship canal project, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is understood to have given his "personal commitment" that India will modify the design and other parameters of the controversial project if Sri Lanka's environmental concerns warrant it. Though the joint statement issued on Friday only commits India to continuing the exchange of views between Indian and Sri Lankan technical experts on "environmental concerns and prospects of closer economic cooperation between the two countries in the Palk Bay area," senior officials told The Hindu that Dr. Singh assured Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga that her country's worries would be accommodated. The project, which received Cabinet clearance last month, will create a 20-km long, 300-metre wide channel between India and Sri Lanka. Once completed, experts estimate it will knock 36 hours off the time ships take to travel between the east and west coasts of India. The Rs. 2,427 crores project requires major dredging operations in and around Palk Bay, the Palk Straits and Adam's Bridge.

The Hindu, 4 June 2005

India backs Colombo plan (Siddharth Varadarajan)

NEW DELHI: Ending all speculation to the contrary, India has come out in support of a controversial Sri Lankan Government proposal to involve the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a joint domestic mechanism for administering post-tsunami operations in that country. The India-Sri Lanka joint statement issued here on Friday during the ongoing working visit of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga notes that she apprised Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of her efforts to establish a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) and that the "Prime Minister expressed understanding of and support for these ongoing efforts". New Delhi's endorsement of P-TOMS assumes significance in the light of the strong opposition by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and other Sinhala political forces to the involvement of the LTTE in any administrative

mechanism.

The Hindu, 6 June 2005

Dhaka denies ULFA-run hotels, accounts (Haroon Habib)

DHAKA: Dhaka has rejected as "unfounded and baseless" the allegation that Indian separatist outfits run commercial operations in Bangladesh. It denied a report that the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) ran hotels and operated bank accounts in the country. A spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Saturday that their attention had been drawn to a PTI report quoting S.C. Srivastava, Inspector-General of the Border Security Force of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Nagaland frontier, that ULFA ran seven hotels and operated three accounts in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong. "It is unfortunate that the allegations are being made when Bangladesh is taking positive action on the frontier." The position of Bangladesh on the issue was well known, he said and added that Bangladesh did not allow insurgent or extremist groups to conduct operations against any other countries.

The Hindu, 6 June 2005

Sri Lankan fears on Sethusamudram addressed

TUTICORIN: The Sethusamudram project, which will connect the Gulf of Mannar with Palk Bay, will not have any adverse impact on the environment. On the contrary, the project, to be undertaken at a cost of Rs. 2,233 crores, would have a dissipating effect if any tsunami strikes the east coast, Union Minister for Shipping, Ports and Highways T.R. Baalu said on Sunday. Talking to newsmen here after inspecting sites for holding a formal function to signal the commencement of the project, Mr. Baalu said the Cooum in Chennai did not have any adverse impact on the University of Madras buildings when the tsunami struck in December last. Post-tsunami studies in the Gulf of Mannar had revealed that instead of having an adverse effect, the Sethusamudram channel would have a dissipating impact. "Sethusamudram channel will control tsunami."

The Hindu, 8 June 2005

Australia to back India's bid for seat

CHENNAI: Australia will back India's bid for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, according to Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs. In a brief interaction with presspersons, after addressing a meeting organised by the Indo-Australian Chamber of Commerce here on Tuesday, Mr. Downer said: "India should have a permanent seat in the Security Council ... we will support the case." Australia, he said in reply to another question, wants India to be more involved in the East Asian region from the perspective of ensuring peace. The two nations should take forward the process of strengthening economic relations. Earlier addressing the meeting, Mr. Downer said India's importance to Australia went beyond the traditional links of the nations being members of the Commonwealth where English is widely spoken and cricket is popular.

The Hindu, 9 June 2005

India may extend \$500 million credit line to Sudan

NEW DELHI: India is likely to extend a \$500-million credit line to Sudan in view of the emerging opportunities for domestic businessmen, according to Sudan's Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail. He said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave an indication to this effect during a meeting with him on Tuesday. Addressing members of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry before concluding his two-day visit, Dr. Ismail said Sudan's Finance Minister would soon visit India to concretise the deal. Dr. Ismail called upon Indian businessmen to liberally invest in Sudan in sectors such as roads, ports, communication, oil and gas and financial services. Any country, including India, wanting to invest in Sudan could bring in its own managerial and skilled labour.

The Hindu, 9 June 2005

India backs steps to restore democracy in Nepal

NEW DELHI: External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh met Nepali Congress chief Girija Prasad Koirala at South Block on Wednesday and held talks on the situation in Nepal and its implications for both countries. An External Affairs Ministry spokesman said that Mr. Singh conveyed India's "strong support" for all efforts aimed at restoring multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy. Mr. Singh said that as a first step, a process of national reconciliation and dialogue should begin. "[The] External Affairs Minister reiterated our conviction that the multi-dimensional and complex challenges facing Nepal can only be addressed by forging a broad national consensus on an eventual political settlement," the spokesman said. The spokesman said that Mr. Koirala told Mr. Singh about the common agenda and roadmap prepared by seven political parties. "[The] External Affairs Minister welcomed this initiative which, he said, provides a good basis for a dialogue."

The Hindu, 9 June 2005

Sri Lankan Chief of Defence Staff visits Line of Control (Luv Puri)

JAMMU: Chief of Defence Staff of Sri Lanka, Vice-Admiral D.W.K. Sandagiri, and his wife, Peari Sandagir, visited the forward locations along the Line of Control (LoC) and the Northern Command headquarters at Udhampur on Tuesday. Vice-Admiral D.W.K. Sandagiri met Lt. Gen. Hari Prasad, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Northern Command. The meeting was followed by a briefing on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. He also met other senior Army officers. Defence spokesman R.K. Chibber said: "India and Sri Lanka have long history of close military cooperation. Sri Lankan military personnel regularly undergo training in the military establishments in India." The Vice-Admiral also flew along the Line of Control in Rajouri sector and landed at a forward locality. He was briefed by the local commander there. Later they left for New Delhi after a banquet.

The Hindu, 10 June 2005

India committed to Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity

NEW DELHI: External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh, who left for Sri Lanka on Thursday on a three-day visit, will co-chair the sixth meeting of the joint commission between the two countries, an official statement said. It is his first visit to Colombo after assuming office in May 2004. Referring to the just-concluded visit of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga to New Delhi, the statement reiterated India's understanding of and support for her efforts to establish a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS). "India supports the process of seeking a comprehensive, negotiated settlement acceptable to all communities reflecting the pluralistic nature of the Sri Lankan society, within the framework of a united and democratic Sri Lanka.

The Hindu, 10 June 2005

India plans to use Israeli pipeline for crude imports, says Aiyar

BAKU: India on Friday proposed to diversify its sources of crude supplies by using an Israeli pipeline to access crude oil from the Central Asia and Caspian Sea region to feed its fuel needs. Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, addressing the 12th International Caspian Oil and Gas Conference here, said the 254-km-long Eilat-Ashqelon pipeline could be used for transporting east Mediterranean crude to the Red Sea, from where it can be shipped to India. Oil, according to Mr. Aiyar, could be pumped from the Caspian region into the just-commissioned 1,764-km Baku (Azerbaijan)-Tbilisi (Georgia)-Ceyhan (Turkey) pipeline to reach the Mediterranean Sea, from where it could be pumped into the Israeli pipeline for Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCCs) to pick up at the Red Sea for transporting it to India. "There is immense possibility of us becoming consumers of Caspian oil. We are ready to pick up whatever Caspian oil is available in the Mediterranean Sea at competitive rates," Mr. Aiyar said.

The Hindu, 11 June 2005

France to co-sponsor G-4 draft on U.N. Council expansion (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: France has become the first permanent member of the United Nations Security Council to agree in principle to co-sponsor the G-4 draft resolution on its expansion. The draft was circulated to all 191 U.N. members in New York on Wednesday. Another P-5 member and solid supporter of India's candidature for the Council, Britain, is considering whether it can also co-sponsor the resolution, which seeks the expansion of the 15-member body by six in the permanent category and four in the non-permanent category. "We are still considering the issue. And, we will make up our minds soon," a British High Commission source told this correspondent here on Friday. Britain felt that the amended draft was a "good document".

The Hindu, 12 June 2005

Talks for opening Kargil, Skardu road: Manmohan (Shujaat Bukhari)

SRINAGAR: The opening of the Kargil-Skardu road is under consideration and talks are on with Pakistan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Saturday. The issue of re-opening of the trade route as also the Kailash-Mansarovar road would be taken up with China. Complimenting the people on the courage they exhibited during external aggression, Dr. Singh said at a function in Kargil: "Everybody from every part of the country has eulogised the spirit and determination you have shown while fighting the enemy and restoring normalcy. Our endeavour is to protect you from such dangers in future." The peace process with Pakistan was initiated to end the conflicts once and for all and provide a conducive atmosphere to the people to live peacefully.

The Hindu, 12 June 2005

Not yet time for a stand on India's bid at U.N., says China (P.S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: China has said "it is not the time yet to make a stance on the relevant countries' bids for permanent members" of the United Nations Security Council. The "relevant countries" in focus are India and Brazil. This categorical position was outlined by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao at a press conference in Beijing this week. At an earlier press conference, also in Beijing, Mr. Liu had said that the Group of Four,

consisting of not only India and Brazil but also Germany and Japan, acted "hastily" in framing a draft resolution for consideration by the U.N. General Assembly in regard to their efforts to become permanent members of the Security Council and other aspects of reform of the global organisation.

The Pioneer, 13 June 2005

No redrawing of boundaries, says PM (Khursheed Wani)

Prime Minister Mr Manmohan Singh on Sunday visited Siachen, the highest battle-field in the world. During his visit he reiterated India's stance against proposals to alter the existing borders. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shakes hands with soldiers, as Indian Army Chief Gen JJ Singh looks on, at the Indian Army's Siachen Glacier camp on Sunday.A.P. Mr Singh said that India was not ready to change the boundaries of the country in pursuit of the peace process. "These (boundaries) are not only important for the security (of the country), but also related to our prestige," he stated. Striking an emotional chord with the troops the Prime Minister said that the purpose of his visit was to assess the reality about the arduous conditions in which the soldiers lived. "The time has now come to make efforts to convert this battlefield into a peace mountain. In this direction, the talks are going on with Pakistan," he added.

The Hindu, 14 June 2005

Natwar speaks to G-4 colleagues

NEW DELHI: External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh has spoken to his Brazilian, Japanese and German counterparts on the G-4 draft resolution on expanding the United Nations Security Council. The External Affairs Ministry spokesman said that Mr. Singh had also spoken to British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in the last few days in this regard. India has requested Britain to co-sponsor the resolution that aims to increase the number of permanent members in the Council by six. According to official sources, Mr. Singh discussed with his G-4 counterparts the timing of tabling the draft resolution in the Security Council. Mr.Singh, who is accompanying the United Progressive Alliance Chairperson Sonia Gandhi to Russia, is also scheduled to visit Norway, Italy and Hungary from June 16.

The Hindu, 14 June 2005

Sonia arrives in Moscow to a grand reception (Vladimir Radyuhin)

MOSCOW: United Progressive Alliance Chairperson Sonia Gandhi arrived here on Monday on a four-day visit as Russian President Vladimir Putin's personal guest. Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov and Deputy Railway Minister Vladimir Yakunin gave her a red-carpet reception at the VVIP Vnukovo-2 airport. External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh is accompanying her. Ms. Gandhi will meet Mr. Putin in St. Petersburg on Wednesday. In Moscow, she will interact with Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov and address a function at the elite ``Centre of National Glory of Russia. India's Ambassador to Russia Kanwal Sibal described the visit as ``an exceptional gesture of friendship on the part of President Putin that reflects the high importance both sides attach to their relations." The level of reception is the highest Ms. Gandhi has been given abroad. On Monday Ms. Gandhi paid a visit to a place in Vladimir Region east of Moscow where her father had been kept as PoW during World War II.

The Hindu, 15 June 2005

"Working to enhance role of U.N." (Vladimir Radyuhin)

MOSCOW: United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday said that India and Russia should work shoulder-to-shoulder to defeat terrorism, promote multilateralism and enhance the role of the United Nations. She stressed on the "unusual resilience, stability and continuity" of a "very special relationship" linking the two countries despite great changes in the international and domestic environment. "We agree that terrorism must be fought collectively, resolutely and consistently without any double standards," Ms. Gandhi said here. "We speak in one voice on the need to strengthen the forces of multilateralism in the conduct of world affairs. We are working together to make the United Nations truly representative so as to enhance its political credibility and moral authority."

The Hindu, 25 June 2005

Singapore backs India's bid (P. S. Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has expressed support for India's bid to become a new permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Outlining the parameters of Singapore's support, Mr. Lee said, in response to a question from The Hindu , that "it is unwise to extend the right of veto to new permanent members." Backing New Delhi for a new role at the U.N. on the ground that "India is a major country which makes significant international contributions," he noted, however, that "increasing the number of vetoes will complicate decision-making and undermine UNSC's credibility and effectiveness." In a separate but related development, Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo said on Friday that his country would not co-

sponsor the latest resolution that the Group of Four hopes to pilot at the U.N. General Assembly.

The Hindu, 29 June 2005

India, US ink pact for comprehensive defence co-operation

Washington, June 29: Upgrading their defence ties, India and the United States have signed a ten-year agreement that envisages stepped up military cooperation in various fields, including joint weapons production, technology transfer and collaboration on missile defence. Three weeks before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the US, the "new framework for the US-India defence relationship" was signed by visiting Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and his American counterpart Donald Rumsfeld. In recognition of the growing US-India strategic defence relationship, the two countries also established a Defence Procurement and Production Group and agreed to institute a Joint Working Group for mid-year review of the functioning of the already-existing Defence Policy Group that guides the Indo-US defence ties.

The Hindu, 30 June 2005

Manmohan for pact with ASEAN

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has described the recently concluded Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with Singapore as a step towards a similar agreement with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). He has asked the high-level Trade and Economic Relations Committee (TERC) to come forward with proposals to enable forward movement on negotiations for an India-ASEAN CECA. At a recent meeting of the TERC, he said that over the past decade successive governments have reiterated their commitment to bring India's tariffs in line with ASEAN rates. While this would benefit India's trade partners, he said it was necessary to place trade and investment liberalisation with respect to India's neighbours and ASEAN countries on a "faster track."

The Hindu, 30 June 2005

India, Singapore sign economic pact

NEW DELHI: India and Singapore on Wednesday took a giant step forward in expanding trade relations by signing a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). Signing the accord, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Singapore counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong, said it would boost ties between the nations. A spokesman for the Prime Minister said the two leaders discussed bilateral and regional issues at Hyderabad House here. The Prime Minister thanked Mr. Lee for Singapore's support for India's participation in the East Asia summit at year-end. Dr. Singh, however, stressed that the summit should not be confined to economic issues and should be extended to all areas of concern to Asian nations. Approved by the Cabinet on June 20, the CECA is an integrated package comprising trade in goods and services, agreement on investments, mutual recognition agreement in services and cooperation agreements in customs, science and technology, education, e-commerce, intellectual property and the media.