

The Hindu, 1 March 2005

'Staged encounter killings' in India, says U.S. rights report (Sridhar Krishnaswami)

Washington, Feb.28. The U.S. State Department has maintained that although the Government of India "generally respected" the human rights of its citizens, "numerous serious problems remained" pointing, among other things, that police and security forces "were sometimes responsible for extra-judicial killings, including staged encounter killings and custodial deaths." In its annual 2004 Report on Human Rights, the State Department has also said that Government officials in India "often used special anti-terrorism legislation to justify the excessive use of force while combating active insurgencies in Jammu and Kashmir and several north-eastern States." Washington has taken the position that security officials who committed human rights abuses "generally enjoyed de facto legal impunity" although there have been numerous reports of investigations into individual abuses and punishment to those responsible.

Hindustan Times, 2 March 2005

ONGC Videsh bags exploration block in Egypt

New Delhi, March.1. India's exploration major ONGC Videsh (OVL) has bagged a highly prospective exploration block in Egypt along with consortium partner IPR Energy Red Sea Inc (IPR), a subsidiary of US energy major Texas Independent. "The Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC) has announced the award of the North Ramadan Block No 6, which was the most contested block in EGPC's international bid round number one," OVL said in a statement on Tuesday. OVL is proposing a total investment of \$20 million in the block, which "has a potential in-place oil of more than 600 million barrels". OVL is the overseas investment arm of exploration major Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), which has so far acquired stakes in over a dozen properties in 10 countries including Russia, Iran, Sudan, Vietnam and Myanmar.

The Hindu, 2 March 2005

17,000 Indians return from Malaysia during amnesty period

Kuala Lumpur, March.1. At least 17,000 Indians are among the 4,00,000 alleged illegal workers who have left Malaysia for home taking advantage of the four-month-old amnesty that ended today. As the amnesty came to an end, the Malaysian police began a crackdown on illegal workers, mostly from Indonesia, arresting more than 110 people. At least 17,000 Indians illegally working in Malaysia had returned to India during the amnesty period, an Indian embassy official told PTI. "At least 4,000 nationals were issued fresh passports to return to India," the official said. Many whose passports expired could also have left the country. Malaysia depends heavily on foreign labour to help in plantations, construction industry, factories and domestic work. A majority of the workers are from Indonesia, while the rest are from India, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

The Tribune, 3 March 2005

India, Indonesia to share intelligence on terrorism (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, March.2. India and Indonesia yesterday decided to strengthen bilateral cooperation in combating terrorism and flagmarked important tools like exchange of information and intelligence to achieve the objective. The two also agreed to have mutual legal cooperation and explore deeper and more meaningful interaction on the issue of maritime security in the region. The idea of India and Indonesia carrying out joint patrols in sea lanes in the region also came up for discussion when the Indo-Indonesia Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter-Terrorism held its first meeting here yesterday. The Indian delegation was led by External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh, and the Indonesian delegation was led by Foreign Minister N. Hassan Wirajuda.

The Hindu, 3 March 2005

Chavez arrives on four-day visit to India

New Delhi, March.2. The Venezuela President, Hugo Chavez, arrives here on Friday on a four-day visit to India. His visit, the first-ever by a Venezuelan President to India, will take him to Kolkata and Bangalore as well. A statement from the External Affairs Ministry said today that Mr. Chavez would be accompanied by Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Light Industry & Commerce, Science & Technology, Environment & Natural Resources, Energy, Health and Information and Communications. An agreement for cooperation in the hydrocarbons sector and Memoranda of Understanding for cooperation in biotechnology, establishment of a joint commission and MoUs in the rail and petroleum sector will be signed during Mr. Chavez's visit.

The Tribune, 4 March 2005

Talks on UNSC expansion later this month (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, March.3. Crucial discussions on the expansion of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) are slated to begin later this month in New York after UN Secretary General Kofi Annan submits his report on the issue. The idea of expanding the UNSC will gather full steam after Mr Annan's report and the subsequent discussions will have an important bearing on India as New Delhi has been lobbying hard for its representation on the expanded UNSC with veto powers. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has already gone on record saying in Parliament that India will not accept a permanent seat in the expanded UNSC without veto powers. According to diplomatic sources here, Mr Annan's report will take cognisance of the expert panel's report which last year in its report suggested two options for expanding the UNSC, both without veto powers.

Hindustan Times, 4 March 2005

India willing to mediate in West Asia: Envoy

New Delhi, March.3. India is willing take up a mediatory role in the Middle East peace process if both Palestine and Israel want it, Chinmaya Gharekhan, recently appointed as Special Envoy for West Asia, said on Thursday. "If they want a mediatory role for us, certainly we will be happy to do so," Gharekhan, who has returned after meeting top leaders in Palestine, Israel, Jordan

and Egypt, told reporters in New Delhi. "We will see what kind of help they want. If both parties want India to be of help in some sort of mediation or use our good offices, we will be happy to do it," he said. Gharekhan, who met Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, new President of Palestinian Authority Mahmud Abbas and Israeli leaders, said they welcomed India's decision to renew its interest in the region.

Hindustan Times, 5 March 2005

India, Venezuela to sign five accords

New Delhi, March.4. Marking a new dimension in bilateral ties, India and Venezuela will sign five accords on Saturday for stepping up cooperation in hydrocarbons, railways, biotechnology, petroleum and other areas. The documents will be inked in the presence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and visiting Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez Frias after the two leaders holding extensive parleys on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual concern. The two sides will sign an agreement for cooperation in the hydrocarbons sector and MoUs on biotechnology, establishment of a joint commission, railways and in the petroleum sector. Venezuela is keen to have cooperation with India in IT, space technology, healthcare, agriculture, poverty alleviation, low-cost housing and appropriate technologies.

The Telegraph, 6 March 2005

Exciting India to get G8 invite: Blair (Amit Roy)

London, March.5. Tony Blair called modern India "an immensely exciting place" and indicated that the country will be invited to attend the meeting of the G8 advanced nations in Gleneagles, Scotland, in July. In a speech in London, the British Prime Minister said he was looking forward to the European Union-India summit due to be held in India later this year because "that will be an important part of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Union". "But I also hope for the G8 at Gleneagles later this year, we find a way of bringing India into the dialogue and issues such as climate change in Africa, which is going to be the focal point of the meeting," Blair said. In a sweeping and long speech covering all aspects of India's deepening political and economic relationship with Britain, Blair also spoke of the positive contribution of the million strong Indian community in the UK.

The Pioneer, 6 March 2005

Natwar to attend India-Brazil-South Africa meeting in Cape Town

Durban. External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh will attend a two-day meeting of the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Ministerial Commission in Cape Town from Thursday during which an agreement on establishment of a Council made up of business chambers from the three countries is expected to be reached. Stating this, India's Deputy High Commissioner to South Africa Banashri Bose-Harrison added that prior to the Ministerial meeting, senior officials and diplomats from the three countries would hold talks from Monday to Wednesday. Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs Suryakanthi Tripathi would lead a delegation of high-ranking officials and diplomats at the three-day meeting, Bose-Harrison told here.

The Hindu, 6 March 2005

Venezuela backs India for U.N. Council seat (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, March.5. India's efforts to enter the United Nations' Security Council as a permanent member got a shot in the arm from Latin America, with the visiting President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, strongly backing New Delhi's candidature. Mr. Chavez, who held talks with the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, told presspersons that India's entry into the Council meant that the interests of weak countries, Third World countries, would be defended. "India's entry into the Security Council is a way to strengthen and democratise the United Nations," he maintained, stating in unambiguous terms Venezuela's support for New Delhi's entry into the Council. A joint statement issued after the talks stated that the two sides agreed on the urgent need for reforms of the U.N. and the Security Council to reflect the new realities of the international situation.

Times of India, 7 March 2005

India asks Bangladesh to deport Anup Chetia

New Delhi, India has sent a diplomatic missive to Bangladesh demanding the deportation of ULFA leader Anup Chetia after he finished his prison term there. Chetia was released on February 25. Bangladesh's response is not likely to make India feel any better. Dhaka said they would look into India's request after hearing Chetia's petitions asking for political asylum in its country. Chetia's release also comes soon after the Bangladeshi government moved to ban two Islamist terrorist groups which have been operating openly in Bangladesh for some time. On February 23, Khaleda Zia's government banned Jagroto Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jamatul Mujahedin.

Indian Express, 8 March 2005

India, China work on a new set of guiding principles to settle boundary (C.Raja Mohan)

New Delhi, March.7. As part of preparations for the visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to India next month, officials from the two sides are drafting a set of principles that could form the basis for the final resolution of the vexed boundary dispute. If they could complete the exercise in the next few weeks, the agreement on the guiding principles for the boundary settlement could be announced during Wen Jiabao's visit to India in the second week of April. Such an agreement would be a major political breakthrough in bilateral relations and would make Wen's visit to India a memorable one. The work on drafting these principles began as a follow-up to then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to China in June 2003. The two sides had then agreed to elevate the negotiations on the boundary dispute to the political level and resolve the question on the basis of "give and take".

The Tribune, 8 March 2005

India says 'no' to military aid to Nepal (Rajeev sharma)

New Delhi, March.7. India today conveyed to Nepal that there was no question of revoking its decision of suspension of Indian military aid to Kathmandu until King Gyanendra restored multi-party democracy in the Himalayan Kingdom, diplomatic sources told The Tribune. Nepalese Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey pitched for resumption of Indian military aid to Nepal during his working lunch with External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh, but Mr Natwar Singh told him it would be possible only when Kathmandu met three major concerns expressed by India and four other international players - the USA, the UK, the European Union and the United Nations. The three concerns are: (i) multi-party democracy should be restored, (ii) the political prisoners should be freed, and (iii) press censorship should be lifted. The argument of the Nepalese Foreign Minister was that by suspending its military aid to Nepal, only the hands of the Maoist insurgents were being strengthened. India rejected the argument, the sources said.

The Hindu, 9 March 2005

New Zealand for flexibility in U.N. reforms (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, March.8. The New Zealand Foreign Minister, Phil Goff, believes that countries have to be "flexible" on the issue of United Nations reforms, including that of the Security Council. He feels that member nations have to agree on a compromise mechanism to expand the Council. "We believe that reform of the Security Council is important and the basic principle we work on is that its permanent membership ought to reflect the world as it is in 2005 and not as it was in 1945. And, our basic principle is equally that there are large areas of the world that are under-represented - Asia, Africa and Latin America being the key regions that are under-represented," he said. While stating that New Zealand favoured a "stronger position" for India within the Security Council and had every right to be represented on the body.

The Hindu, 10 March 2005

Australia backs India's bid for permanent seat (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, March.9. Australia has reaffirmed that it will support India's efforts to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, diplomatic sources have said. The two countries also made a commitment to "update and accelerate" mutual cooperation in counter-terror measures and defence-related engagement. These and related issues were discussed in the two-day third annual meeting by India and Australia, which ended in Canberra on Tuesday. It was attended by officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Home and Defence. The Australian delegation was led by Michael L'Estrange, Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, while the Indian team included Rajiv Sikri, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and High Commissioner to Australia, P. P. Shukla.

Indian Express, 11 March 2005

Attempt to undermine pipeline project: Iran

New Delhi, March.10. Reacting to The Indian Express report that Washington had conveyed to New Delhi its deep concerns over Tehran's nuclear programme after Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar got the Cabinet go-ahead for talks on a gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan, the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi today said it was "surprised" at "those who wish to undermine the implementation of the project." "If they cannot help in increase of regional cooperation and stability, they should at least avoid creating difficulties in the way of such projects," the Iranian Embassy statement said. "The views of the authorities of these countries which has repeatedly been announced is that major regional projects, like the pipeline, would lead to increase in regional cooperation and economic development and would also make the region immune from danger of crises," stated the Embassy.

Deccan Chronicle, 11 March 2005

India may get Shanghai group's invite

New Delhi, March.10. India, China and Russia are well on the way to establishing a formal bloc that will bring new emphasis on multipolarity. This is expected to take shape by the end of this year, with External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh likely to visit Moscow in September, on his way to the United Nations General Assembly, for a meeting with the foreign ministers of China and Russia. In a major move, Russia and China are expected to open the doors for India to the exclusive Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. For the first time, Indian business representatives are likely to be invited as observers and special invitees for a meeting of the organisation later this year. At present, its members are China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Russia has taken the lead in persuading the members to allow Indian representatives at the meeting, which could eventually lead to full membership of the fairly prestigious body at a later stage.

Indian Express, 12 March 2005

India, Russia to strengthen ties: Lavrov (Dadan Upadhyay)

Moscow, March.11. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has told visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran that the strategic partnership between Moscow and New Delhi will be further strengthened during the coming visits of top leaders of the two countries. Lavrov said Saran's visit was a continuation of the intensive political consultation process between the countries. Saran stressed the importance New Delhi places on its relationship with Moscow and said External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh was looking forward to renewing his associations at Vladivostok during the trilateral meetings between the foreign ministers of Russia, India and China.

The Pioneer, 12 March 2005

Indian exporters lose out in European Parliament

Brussels. India and Pakistan clashed in the European Parliament (EP) earlier this week through intermediaries. India lost,

although the final decision rests with the 25 European Union (EU) Governments. MEPs were discussing a proposal granting developing countries easier access to the 25-nation European Union (EU), when a dispute erupted over an amendment which favoured Pakistani exporters. Defending India's interests was the EU's trade supremo, Peter Mandelson, who spoke on the "Pakistan Karim" amendment before MEPs voted on it. The dispute centred over amendments by the Liberal Democrats to the EU's revised generalised system of preferences (GSP), which gives developing countries access to the EU market at either zero duty or at reduced rates.

The Tribune, 12 March 2005

Indo-UK joint exercise for UN missions begins

New Delhi, March.11. India and the UK today started their first ever planning and implementing humanitarian assistance exercise under the United Nations mandate at Secunderabad, which, however, does not have any troop involvement. The nine-day exercise has been undertaken to improve the joint capabilities and effectiveness in dealing with contemporary situations requiring international peacekeeping effort. The imaginary scenario for the exercise depicts providing such assistance to a civil war-torn country jointly by India and the UK. The exercise is only for the planners and does not involve any troops. The participants for the exercise have been drawn from the defence forces, civilian government officials and some NGO's. The overall responsibility to schedule the exercise is being jointly shared by the Integrated Defence Staff (India) and the Chief of Joint Operations (UK).

Deccan Chronicle, 12 March 2005

India gets ready for WTO talk

New Delhi, March.11. Noting that developing countries needed an equitable trading system, India, Brazil and South Africa vowed to strengthen their trade and investment links and work together to have greater impact on world affairs." Developing countries need an equitable and transparent international trading system," External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh told the trilateral ministerial meeting of the India-Brazil-South Africa Commission in Cape Town on Thursday. "We are happy that our three countries have played a leading role in shaping the WTO negotiations." "The more we speak together the more impact we will have on world affairs," said Brazil's Foreign Minister Celso Amorim. South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said the three countries, with "unique geopolitical positions", would remain united ahead of WTO negotiations in Hong Kong in December.

The Telegraph, 12 March 2005

Friction over Bangla fence

New Delhi, March 11: Fencing along the Indo-Bangla border is fast turning into a contentious issue, with the Bangladesh Rifles and the Border Security Force having exchanged fire in Bengal's Cooch Behar and south Tripura over the past few days. There are no casualties or injuries, but there are fears that relations between the two countries may be strained further if the situation is allowed to drift. India says Bangladesh started the "unprovoked" firing and has protested to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia through a "note verbale" both in Delhi and in Dhaka. The deputy directors-general of the BSF and the Bangladesh Rifles have decided to hold a meeting in Agartala next week to defuse the situation. A more detailed discussion between them is planned for April.

The Pioneer, 13 March 2005

Foreign Ministers of India, China, Russia to meet in June

Moscow. Foreign Ministers of India, Russia and China will hold their first "stand-alone" trilateral meeting in this country's Pacific port of Vladivostok in June, to be preceded by a business meet of the three countries in New Delhi next month, Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said. "This would be for the first time a stand-alone trilateral meeting and this adds certain significance to it. Earlier three such meetings were held on the sidelines of UN General Assembly and CICA in Almaty," Saran told reporters yesterday at the end of his Moscow leg of 3-day Russia visit. Saran said that none of the three wanted to forge an alliance, but they have a convergence of views on a large number of issues of present day life, including multi-polar world order and multi-laterality in resolving key international problems. The Vladivostok ministerial meet would be preceded by trilateral India, China, Russia business meeting in New Delhi in April at India's suggestion to add new dimension to the interaction among the three countries.

The Pioneer, 14 March 2005

Russia refuses to lease out nuclear submarines to India (Rahul Datta)

New Delhi. India's efforts to have nuclear powered submarines and strategic long range maritime planes are likely to be delayed as Russia has declined to give two such Akula submarines and TU-22 aircraft to India on lease and instead wants the Navy to purchase them thereby leaving operational gaps in underwater preparedness and warfare. India had planned to get two nuclear powered submarines on a five-year lease worth over one billion dollars from Russia and talks were on for the last three years in this regard. However, Russia's recent hesitation to lease these vessels has now caused some concern amongst the naval strategy planners, sources here said. Russia reportedly expressed its inability to India recently on the grounds that it did not have an independent agency, experience and expertise to procure these submarines from manufacturers and then lease out to India. Sources said, it would have been possible in the erstwhile Soviet Union when some regions, which are now independent countries, used to enter into such agreements with friendly countries.

Deccan Chronicle, 15 March 2005

Chinese PM to talk out border on India trip

Beijing, March.14. Chinese premier Wen Jiabao on Monday announced that he will visit India soon with a three-point agenda,

including enhancing bilateral ties to strategic levels and to seek a "fair" resolution to the vexed boundary issue on the basis of "mutual accommodation and accommodation of reality". Speaking at his annual customary press conference at the end of the 10-day session of the Chinese parliament, the National People's Congress, Wen stressed that China and India were not rivals but friends. As the two most populous nations in the world, China and India are not rivals but friends, and that both countries shall work together to tap the potential of bilateral cooperation and find a "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable plan" to solve the border disputes, Wen said ahead of the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and China on April 1.

The Telegraph, 16 March 2005

Saran holds talks with U.K. official (Hasan Suroor)

London, March.15. The Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, had talks on a wide range of issues with the British Permanent Under-Secretary, Michael Jay, ahead of the summit of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialised countries to which the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, is an invitee. The summit, to be held at Gleneagles, Scotland, will be hosted by the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. A statement, issued by the Indian High Commission here, said Mr. Saran and his delegation had a "constructive and substantive" exchange of views on bilateral, regional and international issues. "Among other issues, they had a detailed exchange of views on energy requirements of growing economies, climate change and sustainable development. They agreed that India and the U.K. must strengthen their cooperation in science and technology."

The Pioneer, 17 March 2005

EU to put Indian, Pakistani exporters on an equal footing

Brussels. Indian and Pakistani exporters to the 25-nation European Union (EU) market will be treated alike from April 1. That is the date on which the EU is expected to introduce its revised generalised system of preferences (GSP) scheme, under which the exports of developing countries enter the EU market either duty free or at reduced rates of duty. The revised scheme offers a new deal for vulnerable developing countries, whose economies are poorly diversified. Known as GSP-Plus, it provides for duty-free entry to the EU market for some 7,200 products. Neither India nor Pakistan reportedly appears on the list of developing countries entitled to GSP-Plus, which the EU Foreign Ministers are expected to adopt Wednesday.

The Hindu, 18 March 2005

India aspires for greater strategic autonomy: Saran (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, March.17. India aspires to achieve a greater strategic autonomy for itself after emerging as a major economic player, the Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, said today. "The current assumption is that India's ambitions will mesh in with U.S. objectives," he said at a dialogue on India-U.S. relations. Arguing that India wanted to occupy a larger strategic space in the world, Mr. Saran said that India favoured a more balanced world order among the major players. Referring to Wednesday's talks with the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, he said that it was no accident that she had talked of India's growing energy requirements. Without referring to the controversy created by Dr. Rice around the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline deal, Mr. Saran said India's differences with the international community on nuclear energy matters were known.

Deccan Chronicle, 18 March 2005

Kanishka victims for public inquiry

Vancouver, March.17. Families of the victims of the 1985 Air India bombings angrily demanded a public inquiry after a judge acquitted two Sikh activists of the crime. But Canada's Chief Justice official said that little would be gained from a probe of the investigation and prosecution of the case that has cost more than C\$100 million (\$83 million) and was one of the most complicated in Canadian history. The court ruled that key prosecution witnesses against the two accused, Ripudaman Singh Malik and Ajaib Singh Bagri, were not credible, but agreed with the prosecution claim that the bombing plot appeared to have been based in Vancouver. The Air India investigation has been controversial from its early stages, starting with whether Ottawa took warnings of a potential bombing plot seriously enough after the Indian army's 1984 storming of the Golden Temple.

The Telegraph, 18 March 2005

India too big for UK aid boots (Amit Roy)

London, March 17: The British government should take a fresh look at how it gives aid to India because although the country still has millions of poor people, it is not as poor as it once was, a group of MPs said today. These days, the focus of the British government's attention, thanks to Gordon Brown, the chancellor of the exchequer (finance minister) and a possible future Prime Minister, is Africa. As such, India "will become a much lower priority for the Department for International Development (DFID)", the MPs'79-page report says. India receives £200 million of bilateral British aid, which is expected to rise in the medium term to £300 million. This is more than what any other country receives but the sum "is marginal for the Government of India and brings DFID little influence over the Indian government's development policies", the MPs argue.

Indian Express, 18 March 2005

BSF agrees not to fence disputed areas

New Delhi, March.17. The BSF on Thursday agreed to stop erecting barbed wire fencing at disputed places along the border with Bangladesh. The decision came on the final day of the three-day meeting with Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). BSF IG S.K. Dutta, who led the Indian delegation, said: "The Indian agencies would carry out fencing along the Indo-Bangla border but we would halt the fencing at a couple of places where the BDR is adamant...The decision to halt fencing at some places was taken to de-escalate tension in some areas." More than 254 villages with a population of over 62,000 fall along the zero line.

Late last month, when India started fencing the border along these villages, the BDR retaliated with heavy firing. Senior Home Ministry and BSF officials told Express that the fencing programme has been put on hold.

The Tribune, 19 March 2005

Indo-Chinese pact on Parechu (Anil.K.Joseph)

Beijing, March.18. Ahead of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's first visit to India, the two countries have finalised key agreements on water resources, including sharing of flood data on the Sutlej as well as on the Parechu issue, official sources said here today. "We have finalised a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the provision of hydrological information on the Sutlej in the flood season by China to India," they said. Describing it as a major bilateral agreement, the source said the two-day talks held here between Secretary, Water Resources, Mr V.K. Duggal and Chinese Vice Minister of Water Resources, Mr Zhai Houhai, were held in a "friendly" atmosphere and "fruitful". The two sides also discussed the Parechu issue and reached consensus on how to tackle the artificial lake formed in Tibet, the sources said. "The outcome of the discussions on the Parechu issue was positive," the source said, adding that details of the MoU and other issues would be released during Wen's visit.

Indian Express, 20 March 2005

US, India tell Pak, China not to go to King's aid (Shishir Gupta)

New Delhi, March.19. United States and India have decided to call King Gyanendra's bluff of seeking military aid from China and Pakistan by asking both Beijing and Islamabad not to fish in troubled waters and explaining to them the reasons behind suspension of military hardware to Kathmandu. Official sources told The Sunday Express that James Moriarty, US envoy to Nepal, told his Indian counterpart Shiv Shanker Mukherjee that Washington had asked both Pakistan and China not to provide any military assistance to Kathmandu which was stopped by the international community after the February 1 royal coup. India, on its part, took up the issue through diplomatic channels with both countries. It's learnt that New Delhi sought cooperation from Beijing and Islamabad after explaining to them the background to the suspension of military aid to Kathmandu.

The Pioneer, 21 March 2005

India-Iran pipeline fine, says UK

Islamabad. Britain does not share the objections raised by the United States over the Iran-India gas pipeline through Pakistan as it believes that the project would bolster ties between New Delhi and Islamabad. United Kingdom does not share US objections over the gas pipeline project, Britain's Deputy High Commissioner to Pakistan Simon Butt said. "I am not sure that we will have the same kind of objections that (US Secretary of State Condoleezza) Rice expressed for understandable reasons," he was quoted as saying by The News daily. Butt said besides viewing it as commercial project, Britain also considered it as project to bolster India-Pakistan ties. The operations of British Petroleum in Iran was another factor why UK may not be objecting to the project, he said. Pakistan Prime Minister Aziz said in Lahore that Rice had expressed her reservations over the project during her visit here this week.

The Tribune, 21 March 2005

MEA's renewed focus on Africa (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, March.20. The Ministry of External Affairs is going to lay a special focus on Africa from tomorrow when 24 Heads of Mission from the dark continent will assemble here for a two-day conference to finetune India's Africa policy and flagmark new areas of expanding Indo-African relations. A major project is to be executed by India in Africa in the coming months to provide fibre-optic and electronic connectivity among all its states. It is envisaged that implementation of this project will impart a further impetus to Africa in its march towards progress and prosperity. The March 21-22 conference is being held at a time when India and Africa are poised to enter a new era of expanding cooperation and interaction in such diverse fields as IT, SSI, agriculture and communications where Indian experience and technology would prove of special benefit to Africa.

The Telegraph, 22 March 2005

World favours India in council seat: Poll (Amit Roy)

London, March 21: World opinion is strongly in favour of India being made a permanent member of the UN Security Council, according to a poll conducted by the BBC. The poll, in which 23,518 people in 23 countries, including India, were questioned, was conducted on behalf of BBC World Service radio. The findings, released today, show that the a majority of people across the world now want Germany, India, Japan and Brazil to become permanent members of the Security Council alongside the existing five - China, France, Russia, Britain and the US. Although figures vary from country to country, across the 23 countries, 69 per cent of those questioned want the Security Council to be expanded, while 17 per cent are against. Not surprisingly, the figure is highest in India - 87 per cent for and six per cent against. "This is a very strong number in support of India," Doug Miller, president of GlobeScan Inc, the international polling organisation which did the research, told The Telegraph. GlobeScan was assisted by the Programme on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland.

Indian Express, 23 March 2005

Just before Natwar visit, Myanmar backs out on oil deal (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

New Delhi, March.22. A recent turnaround by Yangon on its earlier commitment to allow Indian oil and gas companies to carry out on-shore exploration in Myanmar will be high on External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh's agenda during his four-day visit to the country starting Thursday. It's learnt that Myanmar has retracted from its earlier position to allow a consortium of Oil India Ltd, Gas Authority of India Ltd and Indian Oil Corporation to place bids for exploration activity in blocks RSF 5, RSF 6

and RSF 9. This was conveyed as late as March 7 while the bids were to be placed by mid-March. But two days later, sources said, they were stumped by this fax from Yangon stating that it had decided to reserve on-shore exploration for MOGE and expressed apologies for the inconvenience. Sources said the reasons for Yangon's turnaround is still unclear though there are doubts over MOGE's financial links with other East Asian countries including China.

The Pioneer, 23 March 2005

Canada Opposition demands inquiry in Kanishka acquittal

Vancouver. Opposition leaders in Canada pressed for a full-scale public inquiry into the 1985 Air India bombings, following the acquittal of two accused last week. Raising the issue in the House of Commons, Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper said on Tuesday, "I want the government to commit unequivocally, without hesitation, that if there's no successful prosecution, there will be a full public inquiry." He was referring to the appeals being mulled by prosecutors. In her response, Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan cautioned that an inquiry might not produce any new information. "It's not clear, 20 years later, how much can be learned from an inquiry," McLellan was quoted as saying in media reports.

The Telegraph, 24 March 2005

India-China joint working group to meet after 3 years (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

New Delhi, March.23. After a gap of three years, India and China will convene a meeting of the joint working group on the crucial boundary question next week in Beijing. This sets the ball rolling for both sides to address this issue at various levels before Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao begins his visit to India. Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran will head the Indian side for the talks slated for March 30 in which Chinese Vice-Minister Wu Dawei will be his counterpart. Both officials had recently met in New Delhi to initiate the first ever strategic dialogue between the two countries. Sources said talks were also underway to schedule a meeting of the Special Representatives on the boundary question before Wen visits India. This will come up during Saran's discussions as both countries are trying to firm up an agreement on a set of guiding principles to explore a resolution of the boundary dispute.

The Hindu, 24 March 2005

No official meeting in Britain for Modi

New Delhi, March.23. The Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, can visit the United Kingdom, but can expect nothing more from British officialdom, which has been following a policy of "non-contact" with him since the February 2002 killings. There had been no high-level contact with Mr. Modi since the Gujarat carnage, sources in the British High Commission said today. Even when Mr. Modi visited the United Kingdom in 2003, he had no official meetings. The sources said the British Government, like other European nations, had taken a clear stand that it would have nothing to do with Mr. Modi after the Gujarat killings. The British High Commissioner to India, who has travelled around the country, visiting State capitals and meeting the Chief Ministers as part of his diplomatic duties, has not gone to Gujarat since February 2002. The message to Mr. Modi is loud and clear - he is not being denied permission to enter the U.K.; but the expression of displeasure is evident because no official meeting is being planned with him.

Deccan Chronicle, 25 March 2005

A handshake the world will watch

New Delhi, March 24: India and China are getting ready to take bilateral relations, strategic, economic and political, to new heights when Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao arrives here on April 9 on a four-day State visit. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Premier Wen will sign a Delhi Declaration that will commit both governments to a long term relationship as "friends and not competitors." Wen, aware of the potential of the two Asian giants, had told Singh at Vientiane: "The handshake between you and me will catch the attention of the entire world." Both countries have the recognised potential to control 65 per cent of world trade by 2020, with efforts now being directed at raising bilateral trade from the present \$12 billion annually to \$100 billion.

The Hindu, 26 March 2005

India, Myanmar to strengthen ties (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, March.25. India and Myanmar today agreed to sustain dialogue and "further strengthen" various aspects of "concrete cooperation to counter terrorist activities in the border region". The specific understanding on this sensitive subject was reached during the delegation-level talks chaired by the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, and the Myanmar Foreign Minister, U. Nyan Win, in Yangon. While there was no official update regarding the proposed gas pipeline project involving Myanmar, India and Bangladesh, Mr. Singh and the Myanmar leaders reviewed relations within the overarching framework of the results of the recent "landmark visit" to India by Senior General Than Shwe. The Myanmar Prime Minister, Lt. Gen. Soe Win, conveyed to Mr. Singh Yangon's commitment to strengthen ties in this new context. Mr. Nyan Win emphasised how the traditional relationship with India had "developed markedly in recent years".

The Hindu, 27 March 2005

Myanmar's resolve to sustain ties hailed (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, March.26. India and Myanmar today identified "a stable security environment" in their border area as "a shared goal" and "a subject of mutual interest." The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, who called on the Chairman of Myanmar's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Senior General Than Shwe, in Yangon today, welcomed the "resolve" of the Myanmar leadership to sustain active cooperation with India on border stability and security. Sr. Gen. Than Shwe recalled with "pleasure" his State visit to India last October and noted with satisfaction that follow-up action had been

taken by both countries to sustain the momentum in bilateral engagement, according to the Indian side. Mr. Singh reaffirmed that India valued its ties with Myanmar within the bilateral framework and also in the regional and sub-regional context. The SPDC Chairman, for his part, reiterated Yangon's "interest in deepening cooperation with India."

The Tribune, 28 March 2005

India to sign free trade agreement with Mauritius

New Delhi, March.27.India will sign a free trade agreement (FTA) with Mauritius during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's four-day visit, starting from March 30 to this island country. The agreement is aimed at strengthening the existing economic cooperation between the two countries. It will liberalise trade in goods and services and even facilitate joint ventures, besides encompassing the existing double taxation avoidance agreement between the two countries. This will be the first bilateral visit of the Prime Minister after assuming charge in May last year. With a bilateral investment promotion treaty and a double taxation agreement already in place, the island has been a large source of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow to India - a total of Rs 38,024 crore during the past 13 years. Analysts said with the FTA, India's bigger message would be that it wished to bind the region in a bond of free trade agreements that will encompass Sri Lanka, Mauritius and, then, Singapore, leading to an economic win-win situation in these countries.

The Hindu, 28 March 2005

"Natwar's visit a boost to India, Myanmar ties" (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, March.27. India and Myanmar have reached a "closer political understanding that would be reflected in diverse sectors of the bilateral relationship." The significant political understanding was reached during the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh's four-day visit to Myanmar that concluded today. India's Ambassador to Myanmar, R.K. Bhatia, told The Hindu over the telephone from Yangon that Mr. Singh's visit was "highly successful" on several counts. Mr. Bhatia said: "The visit led to concrete results in terms of a closer political understanding and a very wide-ranging dialogue." The "crafting of a clear plan for bilateral interactions in the coming year" was also facilitated. According to other diplomatic sources, Mr. Singh's visit, which coincided with the celebration of the Armed Forces Day in Myanmar, acquired considerable political importance on account of the presence of the top military leaders during his meeting with the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Sr. Gen. Than Shwe, in Yangon.

The Tribune, 29 March 2005

Maldives President holds talks with PM

New Delhi, March. 28.Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom today held talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and briefed him about the recent developments in Maldives, including the initiatives for reforms undertaken by him. External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh, National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan and Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran were also present during the Prime Minister's talks with Mr Gayoom.President Gayoom also thanked the Prime Minister for the large scale, timely and effective assistance that India extended in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster.On the economic issues, it was felt that the joint commission between India and Maldives, which has not been held since the year 2000, should be held soon and it should be used to reprioritise the economic agenda between the two countries, foreign office spokesman said.

The Hindu, 29 March 2005

No 'soft power' projection by India: Arjun (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, March.28.The Union Human Resource Development Minister, Arjun Singh, today disputed the perception that India was seeking to project its "soft power" abroad through knowledge-based diplomacy. The concept of "soft power," made popular by diplomatic experts such as Joseph Nye with reference to the United States, applies to exercising influence over other countries through non-military means such as scientific and other skills and also values such as democracy. Mr. Singh was talking to mediapersons after declaring open the Mahatma Gandhi Centre of Values and Thoughts at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan here. In his speech, he said that India would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the City-State for the launch of academic activities here by the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, in association with the National University of Singapore. On India's alleged efforts to project externally its "soft power" of knowledge-related skills, Mr. Singh said that he would "not use the word power." He said that "soft power" denoted "connotations far removed from the ethos of education."

The Tribune, 30 March 2005

PM leaves for Mauritius today (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, March.29.Prime Minister Manmohan Singh leaves for his first bilateral visit to Mauritius tomorrow during which the two countries would be signing four agreements, including one for setting up a Joint Working Group on combating international terrorism. The JWG on terrorism with Mauritius is rather inexplicable as Mauritius has so far not emerged on the radar screen of international terrorism. Moreover, Mauritius is also not a key transit country for terrorists and terror arsenal. Ms Shashi Tripathi, Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs, when quizzed about this aspect justified the JWG on terrorism with Mauritius saying that: "These days terrorism has lost that concept of boundaries. You cannot any more say that this place is safe and this is not. These days there are pan-terrorist organisations which are spreading all over and there are branches which may function under separate names but they are present. So, suffice it to say that no place is safe from the scourge of terrorism any more."

The Hindu, 30 March 2005

India offers \$2 million aid to Indonesia (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Singapore, March.29. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today sent a message of "sympathy"to the President of

Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, over the death and destruction caused by the latest earthquake. Mr. Singh also extended "support" to Indonesia to face the aftermath of the new natural calamity. Relief aid of the order of \$ 2 million was announced by India. Indian nationals in Medan and other places across Sumatra, which lies close to the epicentre of the quake, were reported safe. There was also no damage to the Indian consulate in Medan, H. K. Singh, India's Ambassador to Indonesia, told The Hindu over telephone from Jakarta. India's new offer of relief aid to Indonesia is a sequel to the role that New Delhi played in helping Jakarta in the wake of the tsunami disaster that struck Aceh and some other pockets in Sumatra last December.

The Pioneer, 31 March 2005

India, China secys meet to frame border row rules

Beijing. India and China commenced a crucial round of negotiations here on Wednesday to find a mutually acceptable solution and formulate the guiding principles to solve the vexed border dispute. The 15th meeting of the joint working group (JWG) on the India-China boundary question, which was meeting after a gap of over two years, is attended by foreign secretary Shyam Saran and Chinese vice foreign minister Wu Dawei. The two-day meeting will discuss the formulation of the guiding principles to resolve the vexed territorial dispute that has bedevilled bilateral ties, official sources said. The meeting is taking place ahead of Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's maiden visit to India from April 9-12. Commenting on the talks, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said the meeting of the 15th round of the JWG was the continuation of dialogue and consultations between the two countries on the boundary question.