

The Indian Express, 1 March 2006

**25 killed, 60 kidnapped: Naxals strike terror** (Vivek Deshpande)

NAGPUR, FEBRUARY 28: The state-sponsored Salva Judum campaign against Naxalites in Chhattisgarh took a direct hit today when Left wing extremists used a landmine to blast a convoy of trucks carrying Judum activists, killing at least 25 people and leaving another 40 injured. Officials expect the toll to rise. The site of the attack is 145 km from the district headquarters of Dantewada in South Bastar. This is the first time that the Salva Judum campaign, reported at length by The Indian Express, was being taken to the deep south of Chhattisgarh. So far, their activities had remained confined to the Gidam-Bijapur belt in the south-west of the state.

The Hindu, 1 March 2006

**Outlays up for social sector programmes** (Ashok Dasgupta)

NEW DELHI: Mr. Chidambaram ensured that adequate revenue was generated during the coming fiscal to fund the various social objectives even as he chose not to further burden either the "aam aadmi" or India Inc. To make life easier for the salaried class, he proposed to include fixed deposits in scheduled commercial banks for five years for calculating the Rs. 1 lakh exemption for income tax. He also abolished the one-by-six criteria for filing IT returns. Presenting the budget for 2006-07 in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Chidambaram did not propose any change in the corporate and personal IT rates; neither did he impose any fresh tax. Instead, he widened the service tax net to include 15 more services such as credit cards, luxury class air travel and ATM operations to mop up Rs. 34,500 crore during the new fiscal. On the indirect tax front, the peak customs duty has been reduced to 12.5 from 15 per cent to bring it down to the ASEAN levels gradually. For the future, he proposed a road map to introduce a Goods and Services Tax to replace the present excise and service tax from April 1, 2010.

The Indian Express, 1 March 2006

**Mulayam gets past HC order failing his 40 MLAs**

LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 28: Moving swiftly to get past the Allahabad HC order setting aside the Speaker's 2003 decision to recognise 40 BSP rebel MLAs who later joined the SP, Uttar Pradesh CM Mulayam Singh Yadav today sought a trust vote on the floor of the House and won 207 votes to nil after the entire Opposition walked out. In a 2-1 verdict, the HC's Lucknow bench nullified the split in the BSP during the formation of the Mulayam government in 2003 and the subsequent merger of the splinter group with the SP.

The Indian Express, 2 March 2006

**Hectic talks over nuclear deal** (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: India and the United States remained engaged in intensive negotiations to try and clinch a civilian nuclear deal even as U.S. President George W. Bush landed in the capital on Wednesday evening on a state visit. This is the fifth visit by an American President to India. Just before receiving Mr. Bush at the airport, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh briefed the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) on the latest developments relating to a possible civilian nuclear accord. During a stopover in Kabul, Mr. Bush said officials had been talking to the Indians from his special aircraft and these discussions would continue in New Delhi. Reiterating that it was a difficult issue for both governments, the President said the two sides would continue to have a dialogue and work ... "and hopefully we can reach an agreement. If not, we'll continue to work on it until we do."

The Hindu, 2 March 2006

**Sensex crosses 10,500-mark**

MUMBAI: Infrastructure and power equipment sectors on Wednesday carried the Bombay Stock Exchange indices to dizzy heights, even as the benchmark Sensex crossed the 10,500-level following hectic purchases by foreign and local funds. The 30-share index (Sensex) recorded a huge rise of 195.23 points, the second highest post-budget gains since 1997, when it had spurted by 205.58 points on March 1. Crediting the upswing to buying spree by institutional investors, brokers said the main trigger for the dramatic rally in cement, construction, power equipment and steel shares was the large 54 per cent increase in the allocation for Bharat Nirman Programme, considered good for macro level. The Sensex rallied sharply after opening steady at 10,368.75 and scaled a new intra-trade peak of 10,573.29 before closing the day at an all-time peak of 10,565.47 against Tuesday's close of 10,370.24, up by 1.88 per cent.

The Indian Express, 2 March 2006

**Abu Salem alleges arms delivery to Sanjay Dutt**

MUMBAI: In his confessional statement in the 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blasts case, the extradited gangster Abu Salem has narrated how arms were collected and delivered to actor Sanjay Dutt here. The statement, contained in a sealed envelope, was read out in the designated TADA court here on Wednesday. The prosecution filed a supplementary charge sheet for offences allegedly committed by Abu Salem and another accused, Riaz Siddique. In the statement, Salem said that in January 1993, after the communal riots in Mumbai, he went with one Aziz to collect silver.

The Hindu, 2 March 2006

**Assembly polls from April 3 to May 8** (Siddharth Narrain)

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission on Wednesday announced the schedule for elections to the West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Pondicherry Assemblies. While all 234 constituencies in Tamil Nadu will go to the polls on May 8, elections in West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Pondicherry will be spread over the period from April 3 to May 8. Counting of votes in all these States will be done on May 11. Chief Election Commissioner B.B. Tandon said it would be a five-phased exercise in West Bengal: 45 segments would go to the polls on April 17; 66 on April 22; 77 on April 27; 57 on May 3 and 49 on May 8. Asked why the elections were staggered, he said the Commission had taken into account the "ground realities" and availability of paramilitary forces.

The Hindu, 3 March 2006

#### **India, U.S. clinch deal on nuclear separation** (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI: India and the United States on Thursday hammered out an understanding on the separation of New Delhi's civilian and military nuclear facilities, which Washington will have to push through the U.S. Congress and the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG). Hailing the "successful completion" of their discussions, a joint statement here said the two sides "looked forward" to the "full implementation" of their July 18, 2005 commitments on civilian nuclear cooperation. "This historic accomplishment will permit our countries to move forward towards our common objective of full civil nuclear energy cooperation between India and the United States and between India and the international community as a whole," the statement said.

The Hindu, 3 March 2006

#### **Minority Education Institutions Bill passed**

NEW DELHI: The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed by voice vote a Bill to amend the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004 for giving more teeth to the Commission set up under the Act. The Bhartiya Janata Party opposed the Bill saying it was against the secular character of the country, and piloted with an eye on the "minority vote bank." Seeking more clarity on the definition of minorities other than linguistic minorities, BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi urged the government to withdraw the Bill and come back to the House with comprehensive legislation. The House rejected by voice vote a resolution moved by Dr. Joshi disapproving the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (Amendment) Ordinance, 2006 (No 1 of 2006) promulgated by the President on January 23 this year. The party felt the government had shown "unholy haste" in taking the ordinance route for promulgating the Amendment Bill.

The Hindu, 3 March 2006

#### **Decks cleared for export of mangoes to America** (Gargi Parsai)

NEW DELHI: Americans may be able to savour irradiated Indian mangoes next summer under a Framework Equivalence Plan signed as part of the Indo-U.S. Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture Education, Research, Services and Commercial Linkages. In a reference on Thursday, U.S. President George Bush said at his joint press conference with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh: "I look forward to eating Indian mangoes with the opening up of markets and [the] liberalisation of trade." The U.S. authorities have agreed to consider lifting sanitary and phyto-sanitary ban on its import. The framework outlines the fundamental requirements to allow bilateral trade of commodities treated by irradiation as phyto-sanitary measure. "With this, the regulatory process for export of irradiated mangoes from India to the U.S. may be initiated and hopefully completed in about a year," said a fact sheet. A joint Board of Knowledge Initiative has been formed to identify priority areas under an agreed work plan and to oversee the implementation. The plan is, however, silent on Intellectual Property Rights on collaborative research and the germplasm accessed from the public research domain.

The Indian Express, 4 March 2006

#### **N-deal: Left calm, BJP wants PM's statement**

NEW DELHI, MARCH 3: In a mute response to the nuclear deal between India and the US, the Left today said assurances were required from the Prime Minister that the Indian side had ensured the independence of the nuclear programme. The opposition BJP went a step further and demanded that the PM make a detailed statement in Parliament on Monday. The Left said there was a need to know who represented the "new nuclear order" as mentioned by the PM and if the conditions spelt out in the deal were on the lines of the NPT, which India has held as discriminatory. They however praised the PM's decision not to discuss details of the deal unless he had informed Parliament about it. Pointing out that there were question marks over the credibility of the IAEA itself, CPM leaders Nilotpal Basu and Basudeb Acharia said that on the issue of IAEA inspection of nuclear facilities, the government would have to make sure it was a sovereign programme. "There can be no compromise on the question of reciprocity. That is because the US has a history of going back on its commitments," Basu said.

The Hindu, 4 March 2006

#### **MDMK decides to cross over to AIADMK camp**

Chennai, March 4. (PTI): The DMK-led Democratic Progressive Alliance in Tamil Nadu received a major jolt today with a prominent constituent of the grouping MDMK deciding to cross over to the AIADMK camp ahead of the coming Assembly polls in the State. MDMK chief Vaiko is to meet party supremo Jayalalitha at 11.45 AM to ink the poll accord between the two parties, party sources said. Right from day one of the seat-sharing talks between

the constituents of DPA, MDMK had been adopting a dilly-dallying attitude. Only yesterday, DMK chief M Karunanidhi had served an ultimatum to MDMK to take the offer of 22 seats or leave the alliance. MDMK had been demanding parity with the PMK on the plea that its strength was much more than the PMK and was the "number three" party in the state. MDMK cadre had been opposing the tie-up with the DMK and were seeking an alliance with AIADMK which had offered the party more seats. Vaiko's decision is a boon for ruling AIADMK, which had been more or less isolated in the state's political scenario.

The Indian Express, 4 March 2006

**Jharkhand: Three cops killed in Naxal attacks** (Manoj Prasad)

RANCHI, MARCH 3: Three policemen were killed this evening in two separate incidents of Naxalite violence in Bokaro district of Jharkhand. Armed Naxals, belonging to the CPI(M-L), opened fire at a police outpost along the Bokaro-Bermo highway, killing two constables, Bokaro SP M S Bhatia told The Indian Express. "Playing drums and other musical instruments, the Naxals arrived in two vehicles. Before they opened fire, our men thought that it was a wedding party," Bhatia said. Of the three men on duty at the outpost, two died on the spot. The third has been admitted to a hospital with bullet injuries that are said to be serious. The Maoists later triggered a land mine blast at a barrack of the Central Industrial Security Force, killing one of its constables.

The Indian Express, 4 March 2006

**Lalu panel calls Godhra an accident, what about flaming rags, ask victims**

NEW DELHI, AHMEDABAD, MARCH 3: In line with its interim findings, the UPA-appointed Justice U C Banerjee panel has claimed that the fire in the Sabarmati Express on February 27, 2002, in Godhra which killed 59 passengers and sparked off riots across Gujarat was an accident. Survivors and relatives of those killed in the train attack have reacted with outrage at the conclusion saying this flies in the face of evidence that they were not allowed to leave the coach and burning rags were thrown inside by a mob that had gathered at the station. The Banerjee report, submitted to Railway Board chairman J P Batra, comes at a time when according to an interim order of the Gujarat High Court, the Banerjee commission cannot make its findings public until the court issues a final order on a petition filed by a survivor of the fire. The next hearing in the case is on Monday (March 6).

The Times of India, 6 March, 2006

**Kerala unit to decide on Karunakaran: Sonia**

KOCHI, March 5: Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Sunday asked the party unit in Kerala to decide on the future of its former leader K. Karunakaran. "The party high command will fully endorse and accept the views of the state party, and I have asked the state leaders to decide on what needs to be done," said Gandhi, interacting with senior editors here. With the party president putting the ball in the court of state leaders, a final decision is expected on Monday at the deliberations at the ongoing party plenary. Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy and state Congress president Ramesh Chennithala are among those strongly opposed to accommodating Karunakaran and his Democratic Indira Congress (Karunakaran) in the Congress or even as an ally of the Congress-led United Democratic Front.

The Indian Express, 6 March, 2006

**Iran picks on 'objectionable' Indo-US deal**

NEW DELHI, March 5: Ahead of the IAEA board meeting in Vienna tomorrow on the Iran nuclear issue, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin late last night over the phone to check the status of Russian efforts to resolve the matter. Advertisement Singh's call comes within days of his meeting with US President George W Bush where the issue came up during discussions on global security affairs. India had voted last month in favour of reporting the matter to the UN Security Council, but the resolution also gave IAEA chief Mohammed El Baradei time until the next board meeting to submit his report. Meanwhile, Tehran pointed fingers at the US, attacking Washington's nuclear deal with New Delhi. "The United States' approach is a form of double standards. It signed a contract with a country that was not a member of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. That is objectionable. On the other hand, it approaches Iran in such a (bad) way," said Iran Foreign Office spokesperson Hamid Reza Asefi.

The Times of India, 7 March, 2006

**Jaya Bachchan disqualified from RS**

NEW DELHI, March 6: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav alleged a "conspiracy" behind the Election Commission's recommendation on Monday to disqualify actor Jaya Bachchan's Rajya Sabha membership. "(The recommendation for) Jaya Bachchan's disqualification is a consequence of the Congress party's design to damage the Samajwadi Party," Yadav told reporters. "The basis on which Bachchan has been sought to disqualify is unprecedented in the history of this country," the chief minister said. The Election Commission has sent to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam the recommendation to disqualify Bachchan for simultaneously holding an office of profit. Bachchan, who is the chair of the Uttar Pradesh Film Development Corporation, has claimed that she does not receive a salary and thus could not be said to be holding an office of profit.

The Hindu, 7 March, 2006

### **Six killed as Maoists raid village, blow up bus**

BHADRACHALAM, March 6: Naxalites of the CPI (Maoist) raided Basaguda village in Bijapura district of Chhattisgarh targeting the activists of Salva Judum and killed four of them in the early hours of Monday. Some 30 persons supporting the anti-Maoist campaign were injured in the attack. The raid was looked upon as continuation of the terror campaign unleashed by the left wing extremist group in the tribal villages of South Bastar (bordering Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh) by killing 27 activists of the Salva Judum while returning from a peace rally last week near Erraboru village in Kunta sub-division. Sources said that at least 700 tribals, mostly the Sangham members from the Maoist strongholds, accompanied the armed squads that spearheaded this operation. Tension gripped the forest pocket following the raid. While retreating from the village, the naxalites blasted a private bus, which was on its way from Jagadapur to Basaguda, near Timmapur (5 km away from Basaguda) around 11 a.m. Two persons aboard the bus were killed while seven others injured seriously. Maoists blasted a rail engine at the Bhansi railway station near Dantewada district headquarters on Sunday. The railway station building was partially damaged under the impact of the explosion. The Maoists stepped up a counter-campaign asking for disbanding the State-sponsored Salva Judum campaign.

The Hindu, 8 March, 2006

### **Rs. 5,900 cr. likely for irrigation projects**

RAICHUR, March 7: The Government has proposed to provide Rs. 5,900 crores in the budget for major and minor irrigation projects in the Krishna and Cauvery river basins. Minister for Water Resources K.S. Eshwarappa told a press conference here on Tuesday that the Janata Dal (Secular)-BJP Government is committed to completing all pending and ongoing irrigation projects in the two river basins in a time-bound manner. He said he has sought a budgetary allocation of Rs. 5,900 crores for irrigation projects. Last year, it was Rs. 3,700 crores. He has discussed the matter with Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy and Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister B.S. Yediyurappa. They have agreed to his proposal, he said. He said the completion of ongoing major irrigation projects in the two river basins will get priority. His department has identified 16 such projects, including nine in north Karnataka, and these will be completed this year. There is a need for Rs. 700 crores and it will be provided in the budget. These projects will be completed in a time-bound manner to utilise the State's share of the Krishna and the Cauvery waters, he said.

The Times of India, 8 March, 2006

### **Blasts kill 16 in Varanasi, red alert sounded across India**

ARANASI/LUCKNOW, March 7: In an outrageous serial terrorist strike on the holy city of Varanasi, the ancient Sankat Mochan temple packed with Tuesday worshippers of Lord Hanuman was rocked by a huge blast and two bombs exploded soon after at a nearby train station, leaving a total of 16 people dead. Although no group was blamed officially, sources said the attacks bore hallmarks of Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. With the DM and the SSP on leave, there was no one to give the exact figures of the dead and injured. The assault on Varanasi, regarded by many as the most sacred seat of Hinduism, began with a huge explosion at the Sankat Mochan temple — the city's second biggest temple — around 6.20 pm, the peak aarti hour on Tuesday. At least 10 people were killed inside the temple as traumatised worshippers rushed to organise relief and get ambulances into the narrow alley lined with shops. Within 20 minutes two bombs had gone off at the Varanasi Cantt station — one outside the waiting room on platform one and the other near the inquiry office. Six people were killed at the station and a total of more than 30 injured from all the blasts. The blast caused a two-foot-deep crater on the platform. Its impact threw body parts up to the almost 25-foot-high ceiling. The toll is likely to go up. A GRP constable, VN Singh, who was on duty said he saw four bodies outside the waiting room. Another railway official said that he had rushed 25 seriously injured to hospital. The injured included the tourist reception officer Uma Shankar and tourist constable O P Singh.

The Times of India, 8 March, 2006

### **Two Lashker terrorists gunned down in capital**

NEW DELHI, March 7: Delhi Police on Wednesday gunned down two alleged terrorists of the Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT) and recovered a large cache of arms and explosives from them. The shooting took place in the Bawana area of west Delhi. Police said both of them were wanted in several attacks in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. According to police, one of the slain terrorists, Ghulam Yazdani, was the mastermind of explosions in Gujarat and Hyderabad and had also attacked police teams. The identity of the second terrorist is not yet known, police said. "They had come to Delhi to carry out explosions and attacks at public places, we are investigating their motive," said Karnail Singh, joint commissioner, Special Cell, Delhi Police. He said they had recovered explosives, an AK 56 gun and several rounds of live cartridges from the terrorists.

The Hindustan Times, 8 March, 2006

### **Nation on high alert, PM appeals for calm**

NEW DELHI, March 7: Spelling out the separation plan under the Indo-US nuclear deal, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday said there would be no capping of the country's strategic programme. He also said

that Washington has assured uninterrupted supply of fuel to Indian reactors under international safeguards."India has decided to place under safeguards all future civilian thermal power reactors and civilian breeder reactors, and the Government of India retains the sole right to determine such reactors as civilian," Singh told Parliament."This means that India will not be constrained in any way in building future nuclear facilities, whether civilian or military, as per our national requirements," he said.The Prime Minister's announcement comes within days of India and the US reaching a landmark pact for implementing the July 18, 2005 agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation during the visit of President George W Bush to India.Dispelling apprehensions of members that the nuclear deal would hamper country's weapons programme, Singh said "there will be no capping of our strategic programme, and the separation plan ensures adequacy of fissile material and other inputs to meet current and future requirements of our strategic programme, based on our assessment of threat scenarios."In his five-page statement, Singh made it clear that no constraint has been placed on India's right to construct new facilities for strategic purposes."The integrity of our Nuclear Doctrine and our ability to sustain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent is adequately protected," he said.

Hindustan Times, 9 March, 2006

#### **Four villagers killed by Naxalites in Chhattisgarh**

RAIPUR, March 8: Four villagers were axed to death and many others injured in attacks by Maoists in the wee hours on Wednesday in Dewarpali village of Dantewada district, police said.The armed Naxalites cordoned off the village and assaulted the people who had opposed them and participated in Salwa Judum or peace campaign against the ultras, State Intelligence chief SK Paswan said.Some of the villagers were later attacked with axe, in which four villagers were killed, he said.Recently, the Naxalites have killed CRPF, CISF and Naga jawans and also the villagers in Dantewada district who were involved in anti-Naxal movement.

The Indian Express, 9 March, 2006

#### **SC gets Zaheera to pay for her flip-flops: a year in jail and a fine**

NEW DELHI, March 8: In a judgment that could radically alter the way criminal justice is administered in the country, the Supreme Court today slapped a year's prison term and a fine on Zaheera Habibullah Sheikh, the now famous witness in the infamous Best Bakery case, for committing contempt of court.What the court found contemptuous was statements made by Zaheera to the press disowning whatever she had told in proceedings before it and the NHRC even as the retrial in the case was going on in Mumbai and when appeals filed by her were pending before the apex court.What makes today's order significant is its message: that you cannot get away by saying one thing in court and then just the opposite.It's also a reminder to courts that they cannot be mere spectators to the distortion of justice, but will have to play a more pro-active role to arrive at the truth.The ruling couldn't have come at a more appropriate time when widespread public debate over the Jessica Lall acquittal has also highlighted this particular problem."Zaheera's role in the whole case is an eye-opener for all concerned with the administration of criminal justice. Criminal justice system is likely to be affected if persons like (her) are to be left unpunished," the bench of Justice Arijit Pasayat and Justice H K Sema which pronounced the judgement said.Besides the imprisonment, she will have to cough up Rs 50,000 as costs. Her bank account will also remain attached for three months. The court also directed IT authorities to take steps to get her to explain the source of assets acquired and expenses incurred since January 1, 2002.

The Times of India, 9 March, 2006

#### **The day after: Probe zeroes in on LeT module in UP**

VARANASI, March 8: As the holy city bravely put Tuesday's terror behind it and went about its business normally, Special Task Force investigators gathered leads that indicated that the blasts may have been carried out by an LeT module under Mohammed Saleem, alias Doctor, who was shot dead in Lucknow on Wednesday. A day after the gruesome terrorist strike in Varanasi, a joint team of UP and J&K police shot dead Mohammed Saleem Salar alias Doctor (45), one of the most wanted Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants in the country. Saleem, suspected to be the mastermind of the Varanasi blasts, was shot in an encounter at Gosaingarj in Lucknow early Wednesday.Also known as Abu Sharara, Saleem was wanted in Delhi, UP, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and J&K. Saleem was also one of the main conspirators in the abduction of nine foreign nationals from the Valley in 1995. One of these, a Norwegian, was later killed.In another encounter around the same time, the Delhi Police special cell shot dead two Bangladeshi militants. One of them, Ghulam Yazdani, was apparently the LeT chief in Bangladesh. Their involvement in the Varanasi blasts has, however, been ruled out. In the Lucknow encounter, four detonators, 2.5 kg RDX and a Chinese pistol were seized from Saleem.

The Hindu, 10 March, 2006

#### **DMK seals seat-sharing agreements with Congress, CPI(M), IUML**

CHENNAI, March 9: The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam on Thursday signed seat-sharing agreements for the Assembly elections with the Congress, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Indian Union Muslim League.The Congress will contest 48 seats, the CPI(M) 13 and the IUML 3. All the three candidates of the IUML will contest on the DMK symbol.The DMK had earlier inked an agreement with the Communist Party of India, allotting it 10 seats.The only major party in the alliance that is yet to clinch an agreement is the Pattali Makkal

Katchi. "The PMK will come tomorrow for talks," DMK president M. Karunanidhi said, after clinching the deals with the three parties. PMK leader S. Ramadoss had said that his party would conclude an agreement latest by Friday. With the exit of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) from the Democratic Progressive Alliance, the Congress and the Left parties have managed to secure more seats. Of the total of 234 seats, the DMK has allocated 74 to its allies, excluding the PMK. Now 160 seats remain to be shared between the two parties.

The Hindu, 10 March, 2006

#### **Delhi budget has much to cheer the housewife, girl child and the disabled**

NEW DELHI, March 9: In a budget that should bring cheer to the Capital's housewives, Delhi Finance Minister A. K. Walia on Thursday proposed a reduction in Value Added Tax (VAT) on Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), Piped Natural Gas (PNG), power inverters, desi ghee, industrial cables, coffee, coco and jewellery. This is likely to bring down the cost of the LPG cooking gas cylinder by about Rs. 20. Those paying a monthly bill of around Rs. 1,250 for the other cooking gas, PNG, would end up saving about Rs. 210. With summer fast approaching, the much-in-demand power inverters would also cost less with the duty down from 12.5 per cent to 4 per cent. Also, electrical goods would be brought under the 4 per cent tax rate. In the case of LPG and PNG, the duty has been cut from 12.5 per cent to 4 per cent leading to the reduction in their final cost to consumers. The morning cup of coffee is also going to cost less with the incidence of VAT on coco and coffee being brought down from 12.5 per cent to 4 per cent.

The Hindu, 10 March, 2006

#### **Five naxalites killed in two encounters**

KARIMNAGAR, March 9: Three naxalites belonging to the CPI-ML Praja Prathighatana group were killed in an exchange of fire with the police in the dense forests of Singaram village outskirts in Adavi Mutharam mandal on Thursday morning. According to Godavarikhani ASP Ch Srikanth, on credible information, special police parties launched combing operations in the forests. Seven Praja Prathighatana group naxalites, who were holding a meeting in the forests, noticed the police and took to their heels by opening fire. However, the police parties retaliated the fire killing three. Other naxalites escaped. The police recovered a .303 weapon and six kit bags from the scene of offence. The police suspect that two of the dead naxalites were group dalam commander Ranjit and his wife and the third person was yet to be identified. Additional police forces were reinforced and combing operations were intensified.

The Indian Express, 10 March, 2006

#### **CCS told: Lashkar prime suspect, may have used Bangla operatives for blasts**

NEW DELHI, March 9: The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) was told tonight that the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba militant outfit was the prime suspect in the Varanasi blasts and had most probably used operatives from Bangladesh and local elements to carry out the bombings. The status report presented to the CCS pointed out that the evidence collected so far indicated that LeT was the mastermind behind the blasts though LeT men were not on the ground to personally set off the bombs. For that, the LeT is believed to have used Bangladeshis living illegally in Uttar Pradesh. The LeT modus operandi in Varanasi was similar to the Delhi blasts in October last year. In both cases, pressure cookers with timer devices were used to store the IEDs which were triggered off at evening when people throng market places and religious shrines. The bombs at both places were not very sophisticated. Nor were remote control instruments used to set off the blasts, the official said.

The Times of India, 10 March, 2006

#### **Jaish floats red herring to derail probe**

NEW DELHI/VARANASI, March 9: With the probe into Varanasi blasts gathering momentum after investigators picked up key clues, Jaish-e-Mohammad attempted to throw sleuths off the trail by arranging for a fictitious group, Lashkar-e-Qahar, to own up to the outrage. As part of a diversionary ploy, deputy chief of Jaish-e-Mohammad in J&K, Pakistan national Abdul Jabbar, posed as "Abu Firoz of Lashkar-e-Qahar" to call offices of a news agency and a TV channel and claim responsibility for Tuesday's serial bombing. But the tactic failed with intelligence agencies, top IB and Delhi Police sources revealing that the call had been traced to a BSNL number used by Jabbar. Jabbar is high in Jaish's pecking order, next only to Abu Badar, who looks after operations in the Valley. It took a joint team of IB and Delhi Police, who are monitoring phones of terrorists, painstaking work to isolate one of the numbers he uses. The red herring flung by Jaish coincided with the success of UP's Special Task Force in intercepting telephonic conversations among members of terror modules.

The Times of India, 10 March, 2006

#### **Pak SC rejects Sarabjit's REVIEW plea**

AMRITSAR, March 9: Sarabjit Singh's fate now lies in the hands of Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf. In what has come as shocking news to Singh's family in Amritsar, the Pakistan supreme court on Thursday rejected his review petition. Sarabjit, who has been languishing in Kot Lakhpat jail for 16 agonising years, has two days to mercy petition. Musharraf. He was condemned to death in Pakistan for allegedly carrying out four bomb blasts that

killed 14 people in the country. His family, however, has consistently maintained that Sarabjit crossed over by mistake in 1990, and he was not a spy. Sarabjit's lawyer Rana Abdul Hameed said that the petition to the supreme court there had been "filed too late". Another review petition — in connection with three more blasts in 1990 for which also Sarabjit had received the death sentence — is pending. "We are expecting the court to deliver the order on the second petition in a week, but we have no hope," said Rana. "We will now petition president Musharraf." Adding that permission to appeal has already been sought, Hameed said, "The petition would be submitted to the president after the supreme court delivers its judgment on the second petition," he said.

The Times of India, 10 March, 2006

#### **Finally, NRIs can cast their vote**

NEW DELHI, March 9: The government has introduced a bill to extend voting rights to Indian citizens who are residing overseas on account of employment or education, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday. The voting rights, however, will be extended only to Indian nationals and not to persons of Indian origin who are citizens of other nations, Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi said in a written reply. The decision to table the landmark bill and give non-resident Indians (NRIs) a sense of belonging, was taken by a meeting of the cabinet presided over by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last month. The new provision will amplify the definition of Indians ordinarily resident in the country in the Representation of the People Act, and allow them to enrol themselves to exercise their voting rights, official sources said. They can cast their votes in parliamentary and assembly elections when they are in their constituencies and also participate in the democratic process of nation building as citizens of India, the officials added.

The Hindu, 11 March, 2006

#### **Centre puts on hold decision on Narmada dam**

NEW DELHI, March 10: Union Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz on Friday put on hold the Narmada Control Authority decision on Wednesday to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada from 110.64 metres to 121.92 metres. "I have taken this seriously. I am not at all satisfied with the resettlement and rehabilitation of the project-affected families. Neither Gujarat nor Madhya Pradesh has given me a credible commitment that the Action Taken Reports would be verified by gram sabhas/gram panchayats so that the displaced people are not deprived of their legitimate rights. Consequently, the clearance given by the resettlement and rehabilitation sub-group of the Narmada Control Authority to raise the dam height was premature," Mr. Soz told The Hindu. The NCA review committee, which Mr. Soz chairs, would take another look at the decision. The Chief Ministers of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan are members of the committee. Mr. Soz said he would visit the Narmada Valley to assess the rehabilitation and resettlement claims made by the States. He has written to Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan to express his dissatisfaction with the rehabilitation process. According to official estimates, 177 villages are affected in Madhya Pradesh alone between the dam height of 110.64 metres and 121.92 metres. Several thousand families are yet to be even identified in the riparian States.

The Times of India, 11 March, 2006

#### **BJP to Raise Sarabjit issue in the parliament**

NEW DELHI, March 10: The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will raise in parliament on Saturday the issue of Sarabjeet Singh, who has been sentenced to death in Pakistan for allegedly masterminding bomb blasts that killed several people in that country. "We have given a notice to the (Lok Sabha) speaker. We want the government to take up the matter with (Pakistan) President (Pervez) Musharraf and secure Sarabjeet's release," V.K. Malhotra, BJP's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, said at a briefing. BJP's ally Akali Dal has sought Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's intervention to secure Sarabjeet's release. "The prime minister should immediately take diplomatic initiatives to save Sarabjeet and secure his release," former minister and Akali Dal general secretary Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa said. Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed Sarabjeet's review petition on technical grounds, saying it had been filed too late. Three more petitions are pending with the court.

The Times of India, 11 March, 2006

#### **Varanasi charity under scanner for jihad links**

NEW DELHI, March 10: A 'hardline' religious organisation in terror-scarred Varanasi has come under the security agencies' scanner for possible links with jihadi masterminds across the border. The group, Ahle Hadis Jamaat al-Salahiya, has been receiving funds from a Saudi charity which has also been generous to Markaz-ul Dawa al-Irshad, Lashkar-e-Taiba's parent body. Markaz is headquartered in Muridke, Pakistan. Saudi charities, the chief source of terror money, came under global watch after 9/11. US pressure forced the authorities in Pakistan and elsewhere to clamp down on the more notorious ones, like Al Rashid Trust. But suspicion persists that they have crafted their way around global vigilance to help fundamentalists promote their agenda. Intelligence sources suspect they are also fundraisers for Hurriyat Conference leaders. Suspicions about Markaz's ability to avoid scrutiny from Pakistani authorities is heightened by the ease with which its chief, 'Prof' Hafeez Saeed, continues to operate despite being under house arrest. Intelligence agencies have shortlisted a few other radical organisations as well, but Hadis has come in for special attention. The sect believes in a particularly austere, and

exclusivist, form of Islam — like the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia.

The Times of India, 11 March, 2006

#### **Kashmiri jurist asks India, Pak to end proxy war**

ISLAMABAD, March 10: A leading Kashmiri jurist called on India and Pakistan on Friday to end their proxy war over Kashmir and restore fundamental democratic freedoms. "Let the people of Kashmir negotiate for themselves and not be negotiated by India and Pakistan," Syed Nazir Gilani, the head of the London-based Jammu and Kashmir Council for Human Rights told reporters in Islamabad. Gilani welcomed the confidence-building measures now under way between India and Pakistan, but said the process cannot be successful by excluding the Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control, the de-facto border that divides Kashmir between the two countries. "We have a role in regards to our life, property and dignity due to us today and towards our many tomorrows," he stated. After two wars and years of acrimony and mutual allegations, India and Pakistan began a peace process in 2004. They have been engaged in a series of confidence-building measures but have failed to make any tangible headway on the solution to Kashmir.

The Times of India, 11 March, 2006

#### **'Discussing J-K may lead to national security problem' Add to Clippings**

JAMMU, March 10: Strongly assailing the discussing of the internal matters pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir outside the country, the former union minister and a senior leader of the BJP, Chaman Lal Gupta warned that this would lead to more problems on the national security front than sorting out any issue. "We warn that discussing international matters pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir outside country would lead to more problems on national security front," Gupta said on Friday. Commenting upon the meets being held in Pakistan under the guidance of some foreign based organisation, Gupta alleged that the Congress led UPA government at the centre is encouraging such gymnastic on the issues which have already been settled and cannot be changed and also the matters which purely pertain to the people of this state and New Delhi. He elaborated that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India and this cannot be altered. As far as the internal issues are concerned the state is already enjoying more powers but at the cost of the rights of the people, both that of the state as also that of rest of the country.

The Times of India, 11 March, 2006

#### **Gilgit-Baltistan part of Jammu and Kashmir: India**

NEW DELHI, March 10: Taking note of Pakistani media reports about a new map being circulated on Jammu and Kashmir depicting so-called Northern Areas as a separate entity, India on Friday asserted that the region of Gilgit-Baltistan is a part of the state and thus an integral part of the country. In response to questions, External Affairs Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said Government has seen reports in Pakistani media that some Pakistani missions are circulating such a map showing only the rest of the State as J and K. He said the Pakistan Foreign Office has denied that it has circulated any new map. "We would like to reaffirm that the region of Gilgit-Baltistan is a part of the state of J and K, which on the basis of its accession in 1947 is an integral part of India," he stressed.

The Times of India, 13 March, 2006

#### **Eye-witnesses fail to identify suspects of blasts**

VARANASI, March 12: The eye-witnesses have failed to identify the two suspects, detained by Uttar Pradesh Police in connection with the twin blasts, official sources said on Sunday. Sadiq Ali and Ansar, whose faces resembled the sketches released by police, were paraded a number of times before the two witnesses at a hotel in the temple town on Saturday, the sources said. After the identification parade, the two eye-witnesses said they were not the same persons who had allegedly kept a bag containing the bomb at Godaulia market on March 7. The two along with six others were picked up from a marketplace in Hardoi on Friday evening.

The Times of India, 13 March, 2006

#### **LeT denies hand in Varanasi blasts**

SRINAGAR, March 12: Pakistan-based militant outfit Lashker-e-Tayyaba (LeT) on Sunday denied its involvement in last week's Varanasi blasts and said it had no connection with those arrested in Uttar Pradesh and Goa. "The blasts at Varanasi were aimed at defaming 'jehad' in Kashmir," LeT spokesman Abu Huzaifa told Kashmir News Service (KNS), a local news agency. He claimed that the blasts at public places in the country, including Jammu and Kashmir, were being engineered by "Indian secret agencies". "We have no hand in such acts," the spokesman said.

The Times of India, 13 March, 2006

#### **Dismiss Mulayam govt, demands BJP**

LUCKNOW, March 12: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national president Rajnath Singh urged the Union government to immediately dismiss Mulayam Singh Yadav's government as the state had been witnessing virtual collapse of law and order machinery. Addressing a party's workers meet here on Sunday, Singh said, "the Centre

will have BJP's support if the government here in the state is dismissed."He said that the state government was hand-in-glove with the criminal elements. "This is the sole reason why the anti-social elements were ruling the roost and crime graph was spiralling," he said. Equally critical of the Union government, he said: "Certain wrong policies being pursued by the Centre coupled with minority appeasement, has created a situation where the nation is on the verge of another split on the religious lines." In support of his contention, Singh said that the Centre lacked will to stop infiltration from Bangladesh border which over a period of time would pose a grave threat to the integrity and security of the nation. Raising the Volcker Committee report issue, he said that not only the Congress but also the Samajwadi Party and the Left had been benefited by such deals.

The Times of India, 14 March, 2006

#### **Red alarm: Comrades to join 'like-minded' parties**

NEW DELHI, March 13: CPM has expressed its strong displeasure with the direction India's foreign policy is taking. With the Iran issue having moved to the UN Security Council, CPM, along with other Left and like-minded parties, could contemplate seeking a vote in Parliament. Expressing overall dissatisfaction with the way UPA government is disregarding the Common Minimum Programme and Left parties on various issues, party general secretary Prakash Karat said on Monday that CPM's central committee would make an overall assessment of the political situation after the assembly elections. He also hinted that the Left would join hands with other "like-minded" parties to protest the UPA's 'violation' of various policy issues. On seeking a vote on India's foreign policy in Parliament, Karat said nothing has been decided yet. "It is not about the Iran issue alone." "We are concerned with the way CMP's commitment on foreign policy is being disregarded by the government. In the case of Iran, things are moving very fast. It has already been referred to the Security Council. India has definitely helped the US." During his interaction with reporters, Karat spoke of how various arms of the US government and CIA are operating in India in the name of spreading democracy. "Now India will partner George Bush in spreading democracy worldwide. Where are we going? Why was there no reaction when Bush talked of regime change in Cuba, Iran, Zimbabwe and elsewhere?" he said, citing Nicholas Burns' statement of Indian help to US on Iran.

The Times of India, 14 March, 2006

#### **Naxals release captive train in Jharkhand**

RANCHI, March 13: Naxalites on Tuesday morning released the train which they had held captive since Monday evening near Heyagarha railway station in Jharkhand's Latehar district and all passengers in it are safe, a top police officer said. "Around four hundred security personnel have reached the spot and all passengers, the driver and the guard are safe," Inspector General of Police (Special Branch) BC Verma said. The engine of the train has been partially damaged, he said adding that the train will resume journey after carrying out the necessary repair work. CPI (Maoist) rebels had stopped the train on its way from Barkakhana in Jharkhand to Mughalsarai in Uttar Pradesh close to a thick jungle between Heyagarha and Kumundi stations at around 7.30 pm. Police said the naxalite action was in protest against the death of one of their self-styled commanders Jagannath Koiri in a police encounter in Palamu district on March 3. The incident took place in the midst of a 24-hour bandh called by the Naxalites in Palamu division which covers Latehar district to protest against the incident. According to the passengers, about 45 naxalites who had laid seize to the train left the spot without harming them as the day broke. Stating that police were the target of the CPI(Maoist) activists and not the passengers, DIG (Palamu Range) Ram Lakshman Prasad said the forces comprising CRPF and state police had taken all precautions while reaching the spot. "The police were their enemies and not the passengers," he said adding Latehar Superintendent of Police Subodh Prasad and a CRPF Commandant led the security personnel to the spot.

The Indian Express, 16 March, 2006

#### **844 Pakistanis given Indian citizenship in 2005**

NEW DELHI, March 15: India granted citizenship to 844 Pakistani nationals in 2005. Besides Pakistani nationals, the citizenship was also granted to 185 Afghanistans, 63 Sri Lankans and 41 Bangladeshis in the same year, Minister of State for Home S P Jaiswal said in a written reply in Lok Sabha here today. As per the information available, 18 Chinese nationals were granted citizenship in the last three years, Jaiswal said.

The Times of India, 16 March, 2006

#### **Five Karnataka cops suspended**

BANGALORE, March 15: Karnataka Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy Wednesday ordered the suspension of five police officials for corruption. The five were arrested earlier Wednesday and remanded in judicial custody for 15 days on graft charges after the state Lokayukta (anti-corruption cell) raided their homes and offices Tuesday and unearthed cash, jewellery and properties worth Rs.600 million. "I have ordered their immediate suspension and an inquiry to ascertain how they amassed so much wealth," Kumaraswamy, who also holds the home portfolio, told reporters. "I want to send a strong message to government servants that stringent action will be taken against corrupt elements among them without fear or favour. We will empower the Lokayukta with more legal powers to continue its crackdown on all officials indulging in corrupt activities." The arrested police personnel are deputy superintendent of police (Bangalore rural) N. Krishnappa, Crime Branch inspector Shami-ur-Rahman,

VVIP security inspector N. Narayanaswamy, Koramangala (south Bangalore) inspector Mir Arif Ali and Yeshwantpur (north Bangalore) inspector Shivanna.

The Times of India, 16 March, 2006

### **World Bank gives \$216 million loan for Karnataka project**

NEW DELHI, March 15: The World Bank has approved a \$216 million loan to finance Karnataka's municipal reform project aimed at improving the urban infrastructure. Designed to support an evolving process of urban reforms in Karnataka, the project will focus on large-scale restructuring of urban governance and management, said the World Bank in a statement Wednesday. "The project will significantly enhance the state's urban services from water supply and sewerage system to urban roads and slum upgradation," said Michael Carter, World Bank Country Director for India. "It will also contribute to improved health conditions for the poor by improving access to sanitary services." This project is the World Bank's second engagement with Karnataka in the urban sector. The first was the Karnataka Urban Water Sector Improvement Project approved in April 2004. It complements and builds upon experiences of parallel initiatives by other donors working in the sector.

The Hindu, 16 March, 2006

### **Naxalites trigger blast**

RANCHI, March 15: Dangling the carrot of "major" civilian nuclear imports before the United States in the event of a change in the laws there, India on Wednesday countered Washington's objections to Russia's decision to supply light enriched uranium (LEU) for the Tarapur plant. "The U.S. is aware of the urgent need for fuel for Tarapur," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson said when asked for his response to Washington's reservations about the Russian decision. "There is no violation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines and Russia has approached the group under the safety exception clause," he said. Senior officials told The Hindu that the Russian offer "really has no connection to our nuclear deal with the United States." In all interactions over the past year, Russia assured India that it would continue to provide LEU for Tarapur as and when required, an official said. This point was reiterated when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh went to Moscow last December and the final technical details of the transfer were sorted out in January. However, Russia waited till India and the U.S. reached agreement on March 2 before notifying the NSG of its decision.

The Indian Express, 17 March, 2006

### **Over 200 Arms Act convictions: tiny drop in Bihar ocean sets off big ripples**

PATNA, March 16: The law and order system here is so fragile and moth-eaten that if I take drastic measures, things will crumble further. But there is no alternative. So I will do it carefully and in a phased manner. That was Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, speaking to The Indian Express, days after he took charge of Bihar riding a wave for change. Last week, as his government clocked its hundredth day, the first, "careful phase" of his campaign is becoming clear: go after those already in jail, secure convictions. So even as crime statistics haven't given him any respite, buried in the details of 141 kidnappings and 400 murders since he took charge—a figure matching that from his predecessor Lalu Yadav's term—there is a distinct glimmer of hope. In what is unprecedented in the state, 177 criminals have been convicted under the Arms Act. In fact, in March, in less than a fortnight, there have been 30 convictions and the target for this month: 150. This is just a drop given the ocean of illegal weapons in the state but this drop has sent ripples. For one, this conviction rate is more than twice what it was under the Lalu Yadav government. And, two, the message this has sent down the police lines. "This was unbelievable till the other day. We want to create fear of law among criminals which had disappeared in the state. Never in the past had they bothered about conviction," says Additional Director General (Administration) of Police, Abhyanand, the brain behind the drive.

Hindustan Times, 17 March, 2006

### **Best Bakery: Zaheera does a U-turn again**

MUMBAI, March 16: Zaheera Sheikh, prime witness in the Best Bakery case who was sentenced to one year jail term by the Supreme Court for her flip flops, on Thursday did a turnaround in a sessions court in Mumbai saying that she wanted to be in a Gujarat prison. Earlier, Zaheera had told the court that she did not want to serve the sentence in a Gujarat prison and would like to be in a Maharashtra jail. Zaheera was in the court for nearly 45 minutes and most of the time she was seen wiping her tears. The court directed Bhoiwada police not to be harsh with Zaheera and allow her better facilities like home food and permission to offer namaz. The police was also told to bear in mind that Zaheera should not be treated like an accused who has to undergo interrogation by cops.

The Hindu, 17 March, 2006

### **Couple shot dead by militants**

JAMMU, March 16: A couple was shot dead in their house on Thursday by militants in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, official sources said. A group of 3 or 4 militants entered the house of one Abdul Gani Malik in Thalela area of Thathri in Doda district, they said. They beat up Malik and his wife, Shameema, and later poured bullets, killing them on the spot, sources said adding that the reason behind the murder was not known. Later militants

escaped from the scene. Troops have launched a combing operation in the area to track down the militants.

The Indian Express, 18 March, 2006

### **Undeterred, SP says it will renominate Jaya**

NEW DELHI, March 17: The Samajwadi Party (SP) is undeterred by the disqualification of party nominee and cine star Jaya Bachchan by the President. It declared today that the party would re-nominate her in the bye-election for the vacant seat. Speaking to the media, SP general-secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Amar Singh said, "Our party will support Jaya Bachchan again and we will have the strength in the House yet again to bring her back to victory. We will give her name as and when the notification for the election is announced. It could take a few weeks." Singh almost upstaged Bachchan and her dramatic disqualification today from the Upper House, when he marched up to President A P J Kalam with his own resignation letter in his pocket. But counsel prevailed on Singh, he admitted, when his leader UP Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav asked him not to take any decision without consulting the party's parliamentary board.

The Indian Express, 18 March, 2006

### **Death of 4 Harkat men shows terror trail from J&K to Gujarat**

SRINAGAR, March 17: Hours after four militants were killed in a pre-dawn raid on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, the J&K Police say they have identified three of them from the pictures sent by the Gujarat Police. The Gujarat Police said in the morning that they were suspected to be Harkat-ul-Mujahideen militants and said their objective seemed to have been to "establish a terror network and target VVIPs, public and religious places". The militants had travelled to Ahmedabad from Shopian - a militant hotbed in Pulwama district of south Kashmir. One of them is a Pakistani militant commander, Azaan, who had been operating in south Kashmir as deputy chief of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen while two are local recruits of the outfit from Shopian. The fourth is yet to be identified. "The Pakistani militant Azaan was recognised as soon as we looked at the pictures sent by the Gujarat Police. He was on our wanted list and was operating in Shopian," Inspector General of Police, Kashmir range, K Rajindra said. "We knew that the Harkat militants had gone to Gujarat and Maharashtra. When we busted the main network of Harkat in Shopian some time ago that led to the killing of Shahzaad, Chacha and Saifullah, we got to know that Harkat was setting up modules in Gujarat and Maharashtra." Rajindra said that Harkat has a "larger game plan." "They are sending men to settle down in places that they look like locals," he said. "In fact, they had set their base by pretending to be Bihari labourers here as well." Rajindra said that the Harkat men killed in Ahmedabad were also responsible for a bank dacoity in Shopian in mid-2004. The J&K Police say that they have identified two Kashmiris too. One of them, Mudasir alias Hanzullah, belongs to Shopian and was actively involved with Harkat. "Both Azaan and Hanzullah had escaped our cordon several times in Shopian area but for some time they were missing," a police officer said. "They had suddenly disappeared and we thought they might have gone across (the LoC)."

The Hindu, 18 March, 2006

### **Centre urged to stop anti-naxal movement in Chhattisgarh**

NEW DELHI, March 17: The Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) has urged the Union Government to stop the anti-naxalite campaign, "Salwa Judum", in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh and ensure that civilians were not involved in conflicts with armed groups. The Union and the State Governments must ensure that no counter-insurgency or security measures were undertaken, ACHR director Suhas Chakma told reporters here on Friday. He urged Maoists to stop attacking civilians and end indiscriminate use of mines and children in hostilities. He also urged the Chhattisgarh Government to order immediately a judicial probe into recruitment of "child soldiers" as Special Police Officers. Releasing a report, "The Adivasis of Chhattisgarh: Victims of Naxalite Movement and Salwa Judum Campaign," brought out by a team of ACHR activists who visited Bastar and Bhadrachalam (Andhra Pradesh), Mr. Chakma said the aboriginal tribes had become pawns in the hands of naxalites and the State Governments. Members of a family were pitted against each other. Some of them were forced to become naxalites, while the others joined "Salwa Judum." The report says that the conflict in Chhattisgarh has claimed as many as 227 lives - 47 security personnel, 30 alleged Maoists, 138 civilians killed by Maoists and 12 civilians by security forces and "Salwa Judum" activists - between June 5 last year and March 6 this year. It points out that many adivasis in Chhattisgarh had joined "Salwa Judum" for recruitment by police. This spoke of the need for the tribals' economic uplift. The naxalite movement found support among adivasis because of systematic displacement, dispossession and violation of their rights, says the report.

The Indian Express, 20 March, 2006

### **Leftists all set for the show in WB**

KOLKATA, March 19: With opposition's dream of putting up a united front in total disarray, the ruling Left Front in West Bengal has already stolen a march over others in its preparations for next month's Assembly polls in a bid to emerge victorious for a record seventh time. The leftists, ruling the state since 1977, have already hit the campaign trail by giving themselves a headstart with the announcement of the list of candidates a month ago and projecting the newly acquired pro-development image of Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee to woo voters. On the other hand, the efforts by firebrand Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, to put up a one-

on-one fight to unseat the apparently invincible Left Front from power after 29 years seems doomed. The BJP has proved to be a thorn in the flesh of a grand opposition alliance against the leftists with the Congress setting the pre-condition that Mamata must come out of NDA for such an arrangement and the TC chief refusing to do so. State Congress President and Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee virtually shut the door on Mamata a few days ago by rejecting her gesture of not putting candidates for the seats won by Congress in the last polls when she announced the list of around 200 candidates for the 294 seat assembly. "It is not a question of TC leaving 30, 60 or 93 seats for us. We just cannot have an electoral understanding either with the BJP or a partner of the BJP-led NDA," Mukherjee said. In fact Congress has already shortlisted candidates for all the 294 Assembly seats that would be contested by the United Democratic Alliance, headed by the party. The state Congress President Pradip Bhattacharjee said that of the 294 seats the Congress would contest in 254 while leaving the remaining to its allies, mostly the smaller parties including expelled CPI(M) Leader Saifuddin Chowdhury led party for democratic socialism.

The Times of India, 20 March, 2006

#### **'Congress playing minority card for votes'**

NEW DELHI, March 19: Continuing his offensive against the Congress-led government for indulging in "politics of minorityism" for "vote-bank politics", leader of opposition L K Advani on Sunday set the stage for his proposed National Integration Yatra by saying that the entire Congress leadership, including the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was opposed to reservation for minorities after Independence. Speaking at a seminar on minority rights, the senior BJP leader launched a broadside against "minorityism" as practised by the Congress saying it is purely aimed at vote-bank politics. Referring to the discussions that had taken place immediately after Independence in the Constituent Assembly, Advani said special measures like reservation for minorities were opposed by Nehru. "The Constituent Assembly had a sub-committee which was headed by Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel and Pandit Nehru and Dr Ambedkar were its members. What the first draft discussed was reservation for religious minorities. Pandit Nehru opposed it saying it would lead to isolation," he said.

The Hindu, 21 March, 2006

#### **Banerjee report: Railways' plea rejected**

AHMEDABAD, March 20: A Division Bench of the Gujarat High Court on Monday rejected an application filed by the Railway Ministry, which sought to vacate the stay on the tabling of the Banerjee Commission report in Parliament. The Bench comprising Justices M. S. Shah and S. D. Dave rejected the Railways' appeal against the stay granted last week by a single-judge Bench of M. S. Shah and allowed the original petition filed by Neelkanth Bhatia, a survivor of the Godhra train carnage. Hearing in the case is scheduled to begin from April 3. Confirming the stay, the Bench ordered that the ban on tabling the report and any further action would continue till the original petition was disposed of.

The Hindu, 21 March, 2006

#### **Terminate Scorpene deal: NDA**

NEW DELHI, March 20: The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Monday demanded the termination of the multi billion-dollar deal to purchase submarines from a French company even as Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee dismissed allegations of violation of the contractual terms and promised action if there was any. Speaking to newsmen shortly after NDA leaders alleged a scam and the presence of middlemen in the deal for six Scorpene submarines, Mr. Mukherjee said here that he would make a comprehensive statement in Parliament. The Minister suggested that it was the NDA Government that processed the deal but was unable to complete it because of the announcement of the general elections. The United Progressive Alliance reviewed the deal and persuaded the submarine manufacturers to reduce the price by Rs. 300 crore. BJP leader L.K. Advani said the Scorpene deal was a bigger scam than Bofors. His party colleague Jaswant Singh maintained that the NDA Government decided not to finalise the deal after it was told that the World Bank had blacklisted the firm. Besides the scrapping of the deal, they demanded a probe into the linkages with the leak of classified documents from the Navy's war room. Mr. Mukherjee said the charges were "unsubstantiated" and pointed out that the deal between Mazagaon Docks and the French companies was governed by an "integrity pact," that made it mandatory for all companies bidding for contracts of over Rs. 300 crore to declare that they would not indulge in any underhand deals. Earlier, senior NDA leaders L.K. Advani and Jaswant Singh said they found it "strange and surprising" that the Government remained silent months after a "responsible magazine" had reproduced material allegedly about the underside of the deal. "In the second part of the budget session [in May], we will be raising issues of probity in public life," Mr. Advani said.

The Hindu, 21 March, 2006

#### **Govt. to announce Foreign trade policy on April 7**

NEW DELHI, March 20: The government will announce the annual supplement of Foreign Trade Policy on April 7 instead of March 30 decided earlier. The annual review for the FTP 2004-09 would be announced by Commerce Minister, Kamal Nath, official sources said. The review is likely to focus on employment generating sectors such as

textiles, toys, leather, gems and jewelery, sports goods, stationery and processed foods in line with the recommendations of the Board of Trade. At its meeting last week, the high-powered Board had suggested a slew of measures to boost exports, including neutralisation of all taxes and levies. Headed by industrialist Kumaramangalam Birla, the Board had also described the four per cent countervailing duty proposed in the Budget as a major disadvantage for exporters. Nath had earlier said the government was planning a new export incentive scheme which would focus on specific products and markets to accelerate export growth. The government was also examining ways of neutralising incidence of service tax on exporters, besides enlarging the scope of Vishesh Krishi Upaj Yojna. Both the issues are likely to be addressed in the policy review.

The Hindu, 21 March, 2006

### **Babbar Khalsa militants captured in Delhi**

NEW DELHI, March 20: Paramjeet Singh Bheora, alleged head of operations of Babbar Khalsa International in India, and two of his accomplices who were planning to set up base here in the Capital have been arrested by the Special Cell of the Delhi police. According to the police, a huge quantity of arms and ammunition has been recovered from them. Paramjeet was allegedly involved in the assassination of Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh in 1995. He was in touch with Harjeet Singh Gill, Babbar Khalsa chief in the U.S., who too is wanted in the same case. Paramjeet had taken over control of Babbar Khalsa in India after its previous chief Jagtar Singh Hawara was arrested by the Delhi police last year. At least three Babbar Khalsa militants, including Hawara, had made a sensational escape from Burail Jail in Chandigarh in 2004. They were arrested last year following twin blasts inside cinema halls in the Capital in May 2005. Joint Commissioner of Delhi Police (Special Cell) Karnal Singh told media persons here on Monday that a special team had been tracking the movements of Babbar Khalsa militants since Hawara's arrest. Acting on a tip-off, the team under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner of Police Ravi Shankar laid a trap on GT Karnal Road in Delhi around 6 a.m. on Monday. Paramjeet and his accomplices Jasbir Singh and Bhupinder Singh were arrested following an exchange of fire. "Four kg of RDX, three detonators, one remote control device along with a wireless set, one timer, three pistols, 39 live cartridges and three fired cartridges were recovered from them. The stolen Santro car in which they were travelling was also seized." Mr. Karnal Singh said Paramjeet and his accomplices had come to Delhi to meet a contact who was to provide them a hideout as well as a vehicle. Further, Paramjeet was to go to Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh to meet another link, while Jasbir and Bhupinder were to go to Rajasthan to collect a huge consignment of arms and ammunition sent by BKI chief Wadhawa Singh who is now based in Pakistan. The police said Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence was helping these militants. Harjeet, who was coordinating terrorist activities on directions from Wadhawa Singh, had been sending money to Paramjeet through hawala and subsequently through Western Union Money Transfer, said the Joint Commissioner.

The Indian Express, 21 March, 2006

### **Sants held for holding trishuls, VHP slams Modi**

KATHMANDU, March 20: The VHP today criticised Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi after some prominent sants of the organisation were arrested for holding trishuls (tridents) during a yatra in Bhavnagar city on the occasion of Ram Navmi. VHP in a statement issued here blamed Modi for trying to appease Muslims by targeting Hindu sants. The statement compared Modi with Advani who had given pro-Jinnah statements during his visit to Pakistan last year. "While Advani saluted Jinnah, Modi celebrated his birthday with Muslims in Chennai," said the statement protesting the arrests. "In Gujarat, Modi himself is free to hold bow and arrow, while Hindu sadhus are arrested for holding trishuls in Ram Navmi shobha yatra," the release said adding that Modi was going the Advani's way. Meanwhile, a report from Bhavnagar said one Akhilesh Maharaj, a local VHP sadhu, was arrested when he arrived in the city for idol installation ceremony. Police said the sadhu was arrested in a case registered against him related to the trishul diskha last year. The sadhu was later released, police added.

The Indian Express, 22 March, 2006

### **In Bihar, 191 say farewell to arms**

PATNA, March 21: As many as 191 criminals from Kosi region surrendered today before Chief Minister Nitish Kumar responding to the rehabilitation package for criminals announced by the state government recently. It was termed as the largest ever surrender by criminals in the state. Criminals laid down their arms at two different functions - at Triveniganj in Supaul district and Madhepura - attended by the Chief Minister and top police officers. They handed over 224 firearms of which 190 were country-made pistols, 31 rifles and large quantity of ammunitions. Though the government claimed that all of them were wanted in different cases of murder, loot and extortion, no big name of the area figured in the list. Police officers, however, said soon big gang leaders would also respond as the atmosphere was against crime and criminals. At Triveniganj, a total of 131 criminals surrendered today. Earlier, 100 criminals from here had applied to the government expressing the desire to surrender. After screening, however, only 80 names were cleared for the rehabilitation package. Different kinds of relaxation would be extended to the others. Around 60 criminals laid down arms at the function in Madhepura. Speaking at the function, Kumar said he was excited by the response. He said his government was committed towards good governance and the surrender package was a step towards achieving the same.

The Hindu, 22 March, 2006

### **We've brought down Scorpene price: Pranab**

ISLAMABAD, March 21: The Government on Tuesday said any company violating the terms of contract for defence purchases would have to pay a heavy price. Making statements in both Houses of Parliament in response to allegations made by the National Democratic Alliance of the presence of middlemen in the Scorpene submarine deal, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said the NDA Government completed negotiations for the deal in 2002 and the Finance Ministry approved it a year later. The United Progressive Alliance Government only reviewed the deal and reduced by Rs. 313 crore the price finalised by the NDA regime. The Defence Ministry had introduced the concept of integrity pacts for all deals worth over Rs. 300 crore. In case of any breach such as the presence of middlemen, the pact provided for cancellation of the contract, recovery of the advance with penal interest, imposition of liquidated damages and recovery of the money paid to the middleman or agent. The first two integrity pacts were signed with two French companies for the submarine deal. Mr. Mukherjee ruled out links between a leak of information in the Navy's war room and the Scorpene deal. His Ministry had referred the matter to the CBI for filing criminal proceedings. Mr. Mukherjee denied that the Government had kept quiet since the story broke early this year. Rejoinders were sent to a magazine, which published the article on February 14. The contract signed with the two French companies was for Rs. 7,197 crore and not for over Rs. 16,000 crore, as had been made out by the magazine and on Monday by NDA leaders L.K. Advani and Jaswant Singh. Another contract was signed with a public sector undertaking for Rs. 5,888 crore for indigenous construction of the submarines. In addition, Rs. 3,553 crore was earmarked for taxes and Rs. 2,160 crore for other items. The Minister denied that the Government paid Rs. 4,500 crore more than what was negotiated earlier. On the contrary, it re-examined the project even though all negotiations had been completed by the NDA Government and reduced the price.

The Hindu, 22 March, 2006

### **Four militants killed in J&K**

SRINAGAR, March 21: A top commander was among four militants killed by the security forces in Jammu and Kashmir overnight, official sources said. They said security forces and Special Operation Group (SOG) of police launched an operation at Bandipora in north Kashmir early on Tuesday. When the troops were about to storm a house, they came under heavy fire from militants. The security forces retaliated and in the clash a Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) commander, Ashfaq Ahmad alias Gujjar, was killed. Ashfaq, a listed militant active in the north Kashmir for the past seven years, was wanted in a number of killings and other militancy-related incidents. One pistol, two hand-grenades, one magazine and eight rounds of ammunition were recovered from him. However, a police press release issued on Tuesday evening said he was a Jaish-e-Mohammad commander.

The Indian Express, 23 March, 2006

### **Ultras' target was CM: Police**

AHMEDABAD, March 22: Five days after four terrorists were gunned down in an encounter in Ahmedabad, investigation has revealed that the terror web they spun may have stretched from J-K to Gujarat, and from Gujarat to Bangalore. Police also suspect that the militants may have moved to Vatva to target Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Manoj Sashidhar said: "They selected Vatva as their hideout as it is close to Maninagar, the CM's constituency, and they could study his movements." The four Harkat operatives were in Surat when Modi was there for a poll campaign last December. The police are also not ruling out the possibility of the four's involvement in the attack on Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, on December 28. After the terrorists set up base in Vatva, they went to Valsad, Surat, Gandhinagar, Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, Agra, Kota and Ajmer. Sashidhar said based on cellphone records, visiting cards, bills and train tickets recovered from the encounter site, the city Detection of Crime Branch (DCB) have got "important facts about the movement of the four in and outside Gujarat." Sashidhar said.

The Indian Express, 23 March, 2006

### **Hand over Varanasi blast probe to CBI: Khursheed**

VARANASI, March 22: Alleging lack of progress in investigations by the Special Task Force into the terror attacks in Varanasi two weeks ago, Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee President Salman Khursheed on Wednesday demanded a CBI probe into the temple city twin blasts. "The ongoing STF probe into the terror attacks on the Sankat Mochan temple and the Cantonment railway station in the city has made no progress thus far which reflected poorly on the state government's commitment to bring to justice the perpetrators of the twin blasts on March 7 last," Khursheed told reporters. Stating that CBI was the competent and appropriate agency to investigate the terror attacks, Khursheed expressed consternation at the state government's "reluctance" to seek a probe by the central agency. He also lauded the residents of the holy city for showing exemplary unity and brotherhood in the face of the attack and foiling designs of the perpetrators of the blasts who wanted to vitiate peace and communal harmony by trying to divide the people on communal lines. Referring to senior BJP leader LK Advani's proposed Rath Yatra to highlight the UPA government's alleged minority appeasement policies which the saffron party claim to be responsible for the spate of terror attacks across the country, Khursheed said the issues of

minority appeasement and terrorism should be seen independent of each other. People were capable of reading into political and electoral designs of the saffron party vis-a-vis the rath yatra, the Congress leader said.

The Times of India, 23 March, 2006

#### **Kashmir government to free 40 militants**

VARANASI, March 22: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Wednesday declared it would set free 40 militants from jails in the state in keeping with a promise made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. "All persons to be released are local residents of Jammu and Kashmir and they are not involved in any serious crime," an official spokesman said. The prisoners are expected to be set free on Thursday. A panel of officers of the state government and the central home ministry reviewed the cases of 403 prisoners and found 40 people met the criteria for release as they were not linked to serious charges. The spokesman said the detainees were being set free in keeping with Manmohan Singh's assurance at the first round table on Kashmir in Delhi last month. The prime minister had said all cases of detention would be scrutinized to see whether it was possible to release those against whom there were no serious cases and that the process would be completed before the end of March. Earlier, the state government had released 44 detainees in October 2005. With the order for the release of 40 more prisoners, the number of militants being held in jails across Kashmir has come down to 364. Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad has expressed the hope that such reviews and releases would help consolidate the peace process in the state.

The Hindu, 24 March, 2006

#### **LeT militant held, 9 kg of RDX recovered**

SRINAGAR, March 23: A Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) militant, allegedly involved in the recent explosion at Sopore that killed a paramilitary personnel, was arrested and a huge cache of arms and explosives, including 9 kg of RDX, was recovered in Jammu and Kashmir, a defence spokesman said on Thursday. On a tip-off, the Army arrested LeT militant Ashan-ul-Haq alias Tahir, a resident of Noorbagh village, from Sopore area of Baramulla district on Thursday, the spokesman said. He said the militant confessed to having hurled grenades on February 14 and 27 in Sopore, fired at the Rashtriya Rifles headquarters and attacked a BSF post on March 19 which left a BSF jawan dead and over 25 people injured.

The Times of India, 24 March, 2006

#### **Sonia's exit breathes new life into Congress**

NEW DELHI, March 23: For a party that on Wednesday evening looked as though it was reeling under an aggressive Opposition campaign, the Congress latched on to Sonia Gandhi's Renunciation-II to recover quickly. The mood metamorphosis was best reflected in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's assertion that the ordinance to save Sonia Gandhi and other "office of profit" MPs was never under consideration, when barely 24 hours back his parliamentary affairs minister P R Dasmunsi had struggled to avoid questions that the Parliament session had been rejigged to facilitate the lifesaving law. This seemed in keeping with the plan to regain the moral high ground after a high voltage Opposition campaign to project Sonia Gandhi as somebody who was not averse to bending the laws to save herself - a far cry from the leader who turned down the crown in May 2004 when it was hers for asking. Besides using the resignation to buffer impact of adjourning Parliament, the party also sought to put the BJP on defensive by suggesting that it was still gunning for a woman. At a meeting of party general secretaries and secretaries, the line was very clear - the leader has done her bit yet again to defuse the situation. Now it was up to the cadre not to lose the ball. Party general secretary Janardan Dwivedi read out instructions seeking to claim moral high ground by sticking to the script, painting the resignation as a renunciation and denying that the government had ever considered an ordinance. It was also decided that in case the denial did not pass muster, the party should take the position that even if the ordinance had indeed been in the works, it was only because some individuals in the government tried to save MPs cutting across party lines from being unseated on the grounds that they were holding office of profit.

The Hindu, 25 March, 2006

#### **Maoists storm jail in Orissa, free 40 prisoners**

SRINAGAR, March 24: A large number of armed Maoists stormed a sub-jail in R Udayagiri town of Gajapati district and freed 40 prisoners early on Friday. They also attacked the local police station and an armed police camp killing three policemen before fleeing with a large cache of arms. The naxals took hostage the Officer-in-Charge of the police station, Ranjan Mallick, and jailor Rabinarayan Sethi. District Collector Binod Bihari Mohanty, who was camping at the local inspection bungalow, escaped the attack. More than 200 extremists along with an equal number of supporters raided the town from all sides after snapping telephone lines and disrupting electricity supply. The raid that started around 5 a.m. continued till 7.30 a.m. The Maoists simultaneously attacked the State Armed Police camp, jail, police station, treasury, tehsil office and a telecom tower spreading terror in the town. In the exchange of fire between the two sides at the police camp, at least three naxalites, including a woman, were killed, but the bodies were taken away by the ultras, Director-General of Police Suchit Das said.

The Hindu, 25 March, 2006

### **Manmohan to raise Sarabjit issue again**

AMRITSAR, March 24: After having twice raised the issue of death row prisoner Sarabjit Singh with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Friday that his Government would leave nothing undone to obtain clemency for the Indian national. Dr. Singh gave this assurance to Sarabjit's sister and daughters at the Circuit House lawns here. "I have myself spoken to General Musharraf twice," he said in Punjabi. "We will take it [the Sarabjit issue] forward again. I want to assure you of this," he said even as presspersons listened in to the conversation. "We will exert all possible influence." Earlier, Swapandeeep, a B.A. student at Bhikhiwind, said her father, Sarabjit, was innocent, and that they wanted Dr. Singh to help secure his release.

The Times of India, 25 March, 2006

### **6 killed in Chhattisgarh landmine blast, four injured**

RAIPUR, March 24: Six persons were killed and four others injured on Saturday in Kanker district in Chhattisgarh in a landmine blast triggered off by Naxalites while five Maoists have been killed in Bastar district in an encounter, police said. "Mistaking a private jeep taxi to be a police vehicle, the naxalites triggered a landmine blast near Ghodagaon village under Pakhanjur police station area, about 250 km from the state capital," Kanker District Superintendent of Police Pradeep Gupta said. Six persons were killed and four others injured, the SP said, quoting primary reports. He added that a police party had already left for the spot and further details were awaited. Meanwhile, Bastar SP Gurjinder Pal Singh said a police party had killed five naxalites, including a 'deputy commander' in Dhanora jungle area, about 400 km from the state capital in a fierce encounter. All the naxalites were killed in an encounter on Friday and the dead body of the 'deputy commander' has been recovered while the Maoists have taken the rest of the bodies with them, Singh said. Search operations are continuing in the area, he added.

The Times of India, 27 March, 2006

### **No ordinance on office of profit; govt for talks**

NEW DELHI, March 26: As a prelude to the legislation defining an office of profit, the government has begun collating suggestions offered by political parties during their meetings with parliamentary affairs minister P R Dasmunsi. PM Manmohan Singh, according to official sources, is going to examine the broad trends of opinion regarding the approach to amend the Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Act, 1959, before the government's legal experts get down to the business of preparing a draft legislation. There are, however, differences among the parties about the contents of the Bill. While BJP wants Parliament to define what constitutes an office of profit, some of the smaller Left outfits favour expansion of the legislation's ambit to incorporate other issues. "The Constitution has defined the office of profit; it is being interpreted by the judiciary and the Election Commission. Now, Parliament should define it," BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley said. Congress wants the process to be concluded sooner than later. "What needs to be done is examination of the suggestions made to prepare a draft," said party spokesman Abhishek Singhvi. Interestingly, RSP leader Abani Roy suggested that the proposed Bill look into 'misuse' of power by 'professionals' entering Parliament in a big way and favoured disqualification of MPs in case of their involvement in 'criminal activity'.

The Times of India, 27 March, 2006

### **Tight security in Bihar for Kalam's visit**

PATNA, March 26: Tight security arrangements have been made in this Bihar capital for President A P J Abdul Kalam's visit on Tuesday. "There will be a thick security blanket for the president during his short stay here," an official said. The paramilitary security personnel as well as Bihar police will be deployed. President Kalam will address a joint session of the two houses of Bihar legislature and later a function of the Bihar Chamber of Commerce. He will return to New Delhi the same day.

The Hindu, 27 March, 2006

### **Jawan, militant killed in encounter**

SRINAGAR, March 26: A jawan was killed and eight others were injured when their convoy was ambushed by militants in the Kadlabal area of Pampore. A militant, said to be affiliated to the Lashkar-e-Taiba, was also killed in the encounter. "At around 9.15 a.m. when an Army convoy was on its way to Jammu from Srinagar, militants hiding in Pampore fired upon the road opening party and one soldier was killed," Defence spokesman Lt. Col. Vijay Batra told The Hindu. He said that in the encounter that followed one militant was killed while the others managed to escape. Col. Batra said that keeping in view of the heavy rush of people "the troops exercised utmost restraint...". Army reinforcements have launched a search operation. The injured soldiers were admitted to the Base Hospital in Srinagar and were said to be out of danger. The Lashkar-e-Taiba claimed responsibility for the attack in a telephone call to a local news agency.

Hindustan Times, 28 March, 2006

### **Terrorists shoot down unarmed Army jawan**

SRINAGAR, March 27: An Army jawan was shot dead by terrorists near his house in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir on Monday, official sources said. Sepoy Rafiq Khan of the Territorial Army was shot at from point-blank range while he was on his way to his Balhama residence near Roohama Chowk in Baramulla district, the sources said. Khan, who was unarmed as he was on leave, was rushed to hospital where he was declared brought dead, they said, adding that the deceased used to help troops in counter-insurgency operations before joining the Army. Police, assisted by security forces, have launched a massive hunt to nab those responsible for the killing, they added. No militant outfit has so far claimed responsibility for the incident.

The Hindu, 28 March, 2006

### **Centre unveils 14-point policy to tackle naxal menace**

NEW DELHI, March 27: Even as the naxalite menace continues to remain an area of serious concern, recent attacks by naxalites in Orissa and Chhattisgarh have once again exposed the Government's inability to come up with a concrete and effective counter-strategy to deal with the menace that has spread across a dozen States. In a status paper on the naxal problem, placed in Parliament by Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil on March 13, the Government has spelt out a policy to combat the challenge posed by the naxalite menace. The 14-point policy stresses upon the States to adopt a collective approach and pursue a coordinated response to counter it. It emphasises that there will be no peace dialogue by the affected States with the naxal groups unless the latter agree to give up violence and arms. It is at slight variation with the UPA Government's earlier policy of allowing the affected States to enter into peace talks with the naxal groups. The Congress Government in Andhra Pradesh had a ceasefire arrangement with the naxal groups but the peace process proved to be short-lived. Another component of the policy is that it asks political parties to strengthen their base in naxal-affected areas so that the youth could be weaned away from the path of naxal ideology.

Hindustan Times, 29 March, 2006

### **J'khand braved the oldest tsunami**

New Delhi, March 28: Scientists have found evidence that the oldest earthquake followed by tsunami, traceable in the earth's history, took place more than 1,600 million years ago in what is now Jharkhand. An international team of scientists from India, Japan and Poland has reported the discovery in a paper to appear in the forthcoming issue of the journal Sedimentary Geology. This occurred long before the massive southern land mass called Gondwana land split up and the piece that now forms peninsular India floated north and crashed in the Asian land mass. Scientists analysed sedimentary rocks deposited in 'Chaibasa Formation' in eastern India. "The layers show deformations that have never been described before," said Rajat Mazumder, lead author and currently a Humboldt Fellow at Munich University. Mazumder and co-workers show that earthquakes caused the deformations "while the sediments were still being deposited and before their consolidation". The layers containing these deformation structures are termed "seismites" and the scientists could trace the deformed horizons up to a kilometre depth.

The Hindu, 29 March, 2006

### **No link between IISc attack and Delhi blasts**

NEW DELHI, March 28: Bangalore Police Commissioner Ajai Kumar Singh said on Tuesday that there was no link between the October 2005 serial blasts in New Delhi and the attack on the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, in December last. Mr. Singh told reporters that initially there were reports of a link. One of the accused caught by the Delhi Police had connections with the blasts in the Hyderabad Special Task Force office in October 2005. "But we did not find any link with the IISc attack," he said. Bangalore police have arrested 12 persons in two cases related to the IISc attack.

The Times of India, 29 March, 2006

### **Zaheera to spend one year in Byculla jail**

NEW DELHI, March 28: A sessions court on Wednesday ordered prime witness in the Best Bakery case Zaheera Sheikh to undergo one year imprisonment in a Mumbai jail as per the Supreme Court order imposed on her for contempt of the court. Judge Abhay Thipsay ordered police to lodge Zaheera in the Byculla jail here to execute the Supreme Court order sentencing her to one year jail term and Rs 50,000 fine. The judge also ordered that Zaheera may be given a set off for the period she has already spent in prison after her surrender before the court recently. The judge adjourned till April 7 the matter concerning show cause notices issued to Zaheera and her family members for perjury (giving false evidence) in the Best Bakery retrial in the Mumbai court.

The Times of India, 29 March, 2006

### **3 injured in Maoist-police encounter in Jharkhand**

JAMSHEDPUR, March 28: Three security personnel, including a police officer, were injured in an encounter between the police and Maoists at Bakrakocha Pahar area in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand on Wednesday. The encounter took place when the police and CRPF personnel were on a patrol to flush out activists

of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), police said. The ultras started firing at the patrolling party when they saw them approaching. The security personnel immediately retaliated, forcing the Maoists to flee, police said. The officer-in-charge of Dumaria police station Jairam Prasad, who was part of the patrolling team, sustained splinter injuries along with two jawans.

The Indian Express, 29 March, 2006

### **Kalam's gift to Patna: from ruins, new Nalanda campus**

PATNA, March 28: To bring back to life the glory of ancient Nalanda, the Centre has proposed an international university in collaboration with select Asian countries. Disclosing this during his address to the joint session of the Bihar legislature today, President A P J Abdul Kalam said "it's a great opportunity for Bihar to house a major universal institute of learning that can be a beacon of light for the world." Listing "Renaissance: Nalanda International University" as one of the ten measures to put Bihar on the road to prosperity by 2015, Kalam said the new university will be known as Bodhgaya Nalanda Indo-Asian Institute of Learning. "To recapture the past glory in the modern context, in keeping with Buddha's teaching of seeking knowledge in a holistic way, it has been proposed to establish a Bodhgaya Nalanda Indo-Asian Institute of Learning in partnership with select Asian countries", Kalam said. The government will help set up the university but a group of professionals from Singapore and India will independently manage the institute. There will also be a provision to add other Asian countries, Kalam said.

The Indian Express, 29 March, 2006

### **PM launches Public Health Foundation**

NEW DELHI, March 28: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today launched the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), a public-private initiative that aims to strengthen the country's public health system. It will establish five world-class public health institutes, each of which will train more than 1,000 public health professionals annually. It will also be a think tank for research on critical health policy issues. Today's launch was attended by Indian and international public health academicians, multilateral agencies, civil society groups, private health foundations and Indian corporates. Singh in his remarks today regretted that the public sector's record in providing health care has been poor. Noting that the private sector was the "dominant" source of health care in the country, he said that "on the whole, the record of the public sector in health care provisioning in India has not been very good". "We are all familiar with reports of unethical practices, including commissions given in return for referral and diagnostic work. We must have appropriate measures to tackle this," he said. With Nobel laureate Amartya Sen by his side, Singh said that the foundation would present an opportunity to develop innovative models of such partnerships in social sector programmes. "Such partnerships can help blend the commitment of the government with the operational efficiency of not-for-profit private groups," he said, citing the examples of Dr Devi Shetty's hospitals and Dr V Shantha's Cancer Institute in Chennai.

The Times of India, 30 March, 2006

### **India tests rocket launcher at Orissa range**

Orissa, March 29: India on Wednesday tested the indigenously developed Pinaka rocket launcher twice from a defence range near here, officials said. The tests were carried out from the Proof and Experimental Establishment at Chandipur-on-sea, 15 km from here. The first test was conducted at 2:45 pm and the second at 3:29 pm. Two similar tests were carried out on Tuesday, both from the same range in the coastal district of Balasore. The Pinaka multi-barrel launcher can fire rockets with a range of 40 km. It can fire 12 rockets with 1.2 tonnes of high explosives within 40 seconds. Defence officials described the tests as routine.

The Hindu, 30 March, 2006

### **Tarapur now has fuel for many years**

CHENNAI, March 29: Low enriched uranium (LEU) from Russia to fuel the first two reactors at the Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS) in Maharashtra has reached the Nuclear Fuel Complex (NFC) at Hyderabad. According to highly placed sources in the atomic energy establishment, the nuclear fuel from Russia reached Hyderabad last week. The LEU, which was flown into the Andhra Pradesh capital in the form of pellets, was taken in trucks to the NFC. At the NFC, these pellets will be clad in zircaloy tubes and sent to TAPS 1 and 2, where they will be fed into the reactors. The precise amount of fuel that has arrived by chartered flights could not be ascertained immediately. However, informed sources say Russia has agreed to give a total of about 50 tonnes LEU to fuel TAPS 1 and 2. Since these two Tarapur reactors are under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, the particular NFC facility where the imported fuel is converted into fuel bundles is also under safeguards.

The Indian Express, 30 March, 2006

### **'Best news on AIDS: In South India, HIV down 35 per cent'**

NEW DELHI, March 29: In what experts call the "best news on AIDS for India," an Indo-Canadian team of scientists has come up with the first definitive evidence that the AIDS epidemic is slowing down in at least southern India, considered the the cradle of the disease in the country. This essentially means that the prevention

program seems to be making headway and gloom-and-doom scenarios of AIDS in India need to be put into perspective. The study, in the latest issue of the British medical journal The Lancet, reports a one-third decline in new HIV infections in the worst-hit regions of India: Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. While data from north India is still cause for worry, the Lancet study reports that prevalence of HIV -1 (the most common variant of the virus in India) prevalence fell in the southern states from 1.7% to 1.1%-a relative reduction of 35%. UNAIDS, World Health Organisation and the Government of India all agree on an estimated 5.1 million people infected with HIV, 75% of them in the southern states. The Lancet study's 10-member team of researchers studied a sample of over 2.9 lakh women and 58,000 men attending 132 sexually transmitted infection (STI) clinics in the north and south from 2000 to 2004. "This is the best news so far on AIDS in India," Nirmal Kumar Ganguly, director general of the Indian Council of Medical Research, told The Indian Express tonight, adding that intervention strategies based on increasing awareness and imparting adequate information especially among high-risk groups might have helped put a brake on the epidemic.

The Indian Express, 30 March, 2006

#### **SC: Laws prohibiting cow slaughter constitutional**

NEW DELHI, March 29: The Supreme Court today upheld the constitutional validity of laws prohibiting the slaughter of cattle, but said that they could not be interpreted to mean that permission to kill bovine cattle was by itself unconstitutional. A bench of Chief Justice Y K Sabharwal and Justice Tarun Chatterjee arrived at this view while dismissing appeals filed by a Hindu outfit and animal rights activists against a Karnataka High Court decision dismissing their plea seeking a direction to the state government to impose a total ban on the slaughter of bovine cattle. Interestingly, the judges drew the logic for the refusal from an October, 2005, judgment of its seven-member Constitution Bench, which had upheld the validity of a Gujarat law prohibiting cow-slaughter. At that time, the Supreme Court had based its decision on the command to the state in Article 48 of the Constitution. "The Constitution Bench of this court in that case held such a legislation to be unconstitutional in the light of the finding that the legislation was in furtherance of the directive in Article 48 and any enactment which furthers the cause in the Directive Principles of State Policy cannot be held to be unconstitutional," the bench ruled today. The Hindu Jagran Vedike and some activists had challenged the constitutional validity of the Mysore Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Cattle Preservation Act, 1964, which imposes a total ban on the slaughter of cows and the calves of she-buffaloes, but allows the killing of other bovine animals subject to clearance from competent authorities.

The Hindu, 31 March, 2006

#### **Office of profit issue for Parliament**

NEW DELHI, March 30: The Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs on Thursday decided to convene a session of Parliament from May 10 to 23 to discuss the office of profit issue for taking a final decision. The Leader of the Lok Sabha, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, would write to the leaders of parties seeking their views. Emphatically denying that there was any move to prepare a draft legislation on the issue, he said the Government would decide on the next step on the basis of suggestions from the parties. "No. No. No. We are not preparing any draft Bill. ... Whether there will be an amendment to the existing law or whether there will be a new law? What shape would it take? It will all depend on the suggestions received from the different parties." Mr. Dasmunsi ruled out any proposal to hold an all-party meeting for thrashing out the issue. Parliament would take up various Bills and business pending before it. "It would be a regular session." Mr. Dasmunsi said that when Parliament was adjourned sine die on March 22, the Government assured the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha Chairman that it would take up other business, slated for the second part of the session, later. As per the earlier plan also, the second part of the session was scheduled to be held between May 10 and 23.

The Hindu, 31 March, 2006

#### **Sonia Gandhi satisfied with Assam situation**

TINSUKIA, March 30: Expressing satisfaction over the law and order situation in Assam, Congress president Sonia Gandhi claimed on Thursday that it was her party's Government that was responsible for the "improved situation." Whatever progress had been achieved was during the Congress-led regime at the Centre and in the State, she said at an election rally here. The party had assumed power at a critical juncture, and it had taken a long time to improve the situation. "We have, however, consolidated the situation in Assam and have started the long journey of progress and development, which will continue and be further improved under the Congress," Ms. Gandhi, who was attired in a traditional Assamese sari, said. She said she had directed the Congress workers not to make tall promises. The United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre was aware of the problems faced by tea workers, and had chalked out a comprehensive package for the industry. "However, much more needs to be done for the labourers. The Government is aware of it and will take more measures for the workers." Referring to the recent Kakopathar incident, in which 10 persons were killed in police firing, Ms. Gandhi said, "I was very saddened at the event, and though there can be no replacement for the victims, the Congress Government has helped their next of kin adequately."

The Hindu, 31 March, 2006

### **Is the ISI cracking down on Islamist terror groups?**

JAMMU, March 30: A string of attacks on prominent leaders of Pakistan-based Islamist terror groups has sparked speculation that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence may be cracking down on organisations hostile to President Pervez Musharraf's pro-United States policies. On Tuesday, six men kidnapped Maulana Fazl ur-Rahman Khalil, former head of the proscribed Harkat ul-Mujahideen, from Tarnol, near Islamabad. Maulana Khalil and his driver, Abdul Rahman, were beaten with rifle butts. Both men were badly injured and became unconscious, Harkat spokesperson Sultan Zia told journalists in Islamabad on Wednesday. Maulana Khalil, a longstanding Taliban supporter who has been intensely critical of Gen. Musharraf's support to the U.S., had addressed a congregation shortly before the attacks. He was ambushed on his way home, near a railway crossing where he had stopped to offer the evening Maghrib prayers. Both men were tied and blindfolded before being beaten up. Earlier this month, another group of unidentified gunmen killed Amir Abu Hanif, a prominent leader of the Lashkar-e-Taiba's parent political organisation, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa. Hanif was shot dead when he attempted to resist a kidnap attempt near the Jamaat-ud-Dawa's headquarters at Muridke, near Lahore. Although police initiated investigations into the murder, no arrests have so far been made.

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### **Border problem makes them aliens in their own land**

RAMRAIKUTI (India-Bangladesh border), March 30: Samir Ali, a farmer and father of three, of this border village will be voting for the fourth time on April 10. So also will Azizur Rahman who lives with his family of five. Ali and Rahman along with thousands of voters along the India-Bangladesh border under the Golokganj Assembly constituency in Dhubri district posed questions to the parties and candidates seeking votes: "When are we going to till our land as free citizens?" Thousands of farmers living along this international boundary have their cultivable land in the no man's land beyond the barbed wire fence. They can till their lands during the time stipulated by the Border Security Force (BSF), which is from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The gate is thrown open at 8 a.m. when they can cross over with their cattle and agricultural implements after registering in the logbook maintained by the BSF. If they do not return by 4 p.m. they have to spend the night on the fields. Ali and Rahman's thatched houses are located less than 10 yards from the barbed wire fence. Vast tracts of cultivable land belonging to Indian farmers came under this zone when the fence was erected 150 yards from the actual India-Bangladesh boundary. "We have to watch helplessly if cattle from the Bangladesh side enter our fields after 4 p.m. and eat the paddy that we grow. We plead with the BSF to let us go to the fields, but in vain, said Samir Ali pointing towards the houses of Bangladesh citizens just on the international border.