

The Indian Express, 2 May 2006

PM may postpone proposed Pak trip

NEW DELHI, May 1: The widely-expected June trip of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Pakistan may not happen until later this year because he wants to see whether Islamabad keeps its word on checking infiltration, militant violence and dismantling of the terror infrastructure. The massacre of 22 Hindus in Doda by heavily armed militants, suspected to be from the Lashkar-e-Toiba, has returned the spotlight on infiltration and the presence of some 1400-1600 militants south of Pir Panjal. The incident underlines the vulnerability of the peace process and the concerted attempts by foreign militants opposed to the idea of the separatist Kashmiri leadership talking to New Delhi. Although cross-LoC infiltration figures are pegged around 60 till date this year, security agencies expect the figures to rise as there is pressure building up between the Uri-Gurez band in north Kashmir and Poonch-Mendhar arc south of Pir Panjal ranges. Further, as the snow melts in the high mountain passes, infiltration figures go up though the Army is yet to come across evidence suggesting cross-LoC movement is still being abetted by their Pakistani counterparts.

The Hindu, 2 May 2006

ASEAN to discuss relative functions of members

SINGAPORE, May 1: India and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) "are of the view that a forward-looking approach is required" if the "East Asia Summit process" is to steer clear of controversies. This has been indicated to The Hindu by diplomatic sources, after a meeting which ended in Laos on Friday between the ASEAN and Indian officials. The ASEAN was represented by its Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong and officials from each of the 10 member-states, while the Indian team was led by Rajiv Sikri, Secretary (East). The next stage will be discussed at an ad hoc meeting in Malaysia in a few weeks time. They are the ASEAN, its "Plus Three" partners China, Japan, and South Korea and the other three partners India, Australia, and New Zealand. The emerging issues centre on the relative roles of the Plus Three, on one side, and the other three. Mr. Ong noted, after the first EAS in Kuala Lumpur last December, that all the participants shared the vision of a pan-regional community. The move is aimed at harmonising the relative roles of the members to realising the vision. While the ASEAN officials insist that the association will remain in the driving seat to promote the cause of a pan-regional community, a senior ASEAN political leader told The Hindu that the partners of the 10-member organisation, especially the bigger players such as China, India and Japan might soon play greater roles. The subjects discussed in Laos included counter-terrorism, a field in which New Delhi offered to share its expertise with the association.

The Hindu, 4 May 2006

It's an outrage, says Russia

Moscow, May 3: Russia has condemned Sunday's killings in the Jammu region as a senseless bloody outrage aimed at disrupting India-Pakistan dialogue and wrecking planned talks between the Government and separatists. "The Russian side feels deep sympathy for the victims of the terror strikes and their relatives, and voices indignation at these senseless and bloody acts of violence which victimised peaceful people," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement...

The Hindustan Times, 4 May 2006

Pipeline pressures

New Delhi, May 3: With the recent Iran-US nuclear standoff, an early implementation of the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project now seems too far-fetched. Also, President Ahmadinejad's 'never-say-die attitude' towards Washington has only made matters worse for its other partners -- India and Pakistan. "The US does not want India and Pakistan to get involved with Iran on such a big project for it would blunt Washington's strategy of making Iran suffer for its nuclear ambitions," says the Daily Times. Western powers, including US, fear that Iran secretly wants to develop the ability to make a nuclear bomb. They are also concerned that Iran's nuclear ambitions could lead to instability in the region. "The problem with IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) is the US approach on Iran. As the option to use force becomes less and less attractive, applying an economic and diplomatic squeeze on Iran has become imperative for the US," the paper explains. Knowing India as a close Iran ally, the US already dangled a carrot in form of the Indo-US nuclear deal and thus ensured a vote against Tehran at the United Nation Security Council...

The Hindu, 7 May 2006

Water releases at Farakka in accordance with treaty

Dhaka, May 6: India and Bangladesh held two meetings this week to improve customs operations for increased bilateral trade and to assess water-sharing in accordance with the 1996 Ganga water accord. The two-day meeting

of the joint group of customs (JGC) ended on Friday with a decision to close land customs stations (LCSs) on Fridays, the weekly holiday in Bangladesh. It also decided to hold a joint assistant commissioner-level meeting every month, a joint commissioner-level meeting every six months and a joint group of customs meeting every year. Bangladesh Customs Commissioner of Benapole, Mohammed Nasiruddin, and Indian Joint Secretary (Customs) Kameshawary Subramanian headed the respective teams...

The Indian Express , 7 May 2006

The Asian way of development-N K Singh

The 39th Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has just concluded. The impressive convention centre in Hyderabad, perhaps the only one of its kind in India, enabled us to host this prestigious event after a long time. The Asian Development Outlook 2006 published on the eve of the conference presents a comprehensive economic report on the 43 developing member countries of the Bank. ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda expects continued growth buoyancy this year and the next year. However, "higher energy prices with full pass-through to end-users will ease growth rates to 7.2 per cent this year, and which may come down further to about 7 per cent in 2007 as cyclical support for growth rates". Within this broad projection, there will be significant sub-regional and country diversities. Broadly speaking, the projected growth rates are contingent on resolving several risk factors...

The Hindustan Times, 7 May 2006

Belgium PM lauds India's economic progress

Antwerp (New Delhi), May 6: Indians have the right economic instinct and India is ready to become a global economic power, according to Belgium's Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. Speaking at the launch dinner of India's ICICI Bank in Antwerp, Verhofstadt also hailed the success of Antwerp as the world's rough diamond capital and the achievements of the Indian business community in the port city. As the chief guest at the launch on Thursday, Verhofstadt lit the traditional "diya" along with the Indian ambassador to Belgium Dipak Chatterjee and top ICICI management officials, Sonjoy Chatterjee, Lalita Gupte and KV Kamath...

The Indian Express, 8 May 2006

Nepal recalls envoy to India, 11 others

Kathmandu, May 7: Nepal is recalling its ambassadors to 12 countries, including India and the United States, as political appointments made during King Gyanendra's autocratic rule are invalidated, a top official said today. The decision was made by the new Cabinet installed last week after the King yielded power on April 24 and restored democracy in the face of mass protests. Envoys to US, India, Japan, Britain and France will be among those brought home, said Home Minister Krishna Sitaula...

The Hindustan Times , 8 May 2006

Japan may back Indo-US nuclear deal in NSG

New Delhi, May 7: Ahead of the Nuclear Suppliers Group's meeting in Brazil next month, a key politician from Japan's ruling party has indicated that. Tokyo will consider supporting the Indo-US nuclear deal if there is "adequate trust" between New Delhi and the international community over its nuclear programme". As far as peaceful uses of nuclear energy are concerned, Japan is not opposed to it," Kisaburo Tokai, director general of the international bureau of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), told a news agency...

The Times of India, 9 May 2006

India to discuss labour issues with SA

Dubai, May 8: Labour issues involving Indian migrants and delay in repatriating bodies of expatriates would come up during talks Overseas Indian Affairs Minister Vayalar Ravi would have with the Saudi Labour Minister on Tuesday. The Indian minister, who arrived in Saudi Arabia after visiting Bahrain and the UAE where he looked into the problems of millions of Indians working in Gulf countries, said he was aware of the problems of his countrymen working abroad. Ravi is set to meet Saudi Minister of Labour Ghazi Al-Gosaibi on Tuesday. Some of the problems relate to labour contracts being not fulfilled and delays in repatriating the bodies of expatriates...

The Hindu, 10 May 2006

India elected to Human Rights Council

United Nations, May 9: In a vote that could give a boost to its case for a permanent seat in an expanded Security Council, India was on Tuesday elected to the newly established Human Rights Council. It got 173 out of 191 votes in the United Nations General Assembly. India got the maximum number of votes in the Asian group, showing the

vast support it enjoys among the member-States. Also elected from the Asian group were Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, South Korea and Indonesia. In terms of votes, Pakistan was way down at sixth position getting 149 votes. Interestingly, India got far more votes than both Japan and China whose tally was 158 and 146 respectively...

The Hindustan Times, 10 May 2006

Indian minister to leave for Dhaka on May 10

New Delhi, May 9: Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil will leave for Dhaka on Wednesday to attend a meeting of Interior/Home Ministers of SAARC countries on May 11. The meeting will discuss implementation of decisions taken by various SAARC summits to check terrorism, drug abuse, trafficking in women and children and money laundering. Technical cooperation in police matters, training of police personnel of SAARC countries and strengthening of the existing structures of SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) would also be deliberated at the meeting. Union Home Secretary VK Duggal is already in Dhaka to attend the first meeting of Interior/Home Secretaries of SAARC countries, to be held on Wednesday. A team of senior police officers from India is attending the Police meet, being held in Dhaka on Tuesday...

The Indian Express, 10 May 2006

The Battle for Africa-C Raja Mohan

While Minister for State for External Affairs Anand Sharma is bravely flying the flag in Africa, India is yet to match the relentless momentum behind the Chinese diplomatic onslaught in the continent. President Hu Jintao has just completed his second visit to Africa in two years. Trailing behind him is Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who was in Africa this week. Emerging as a hot diplomatic destination, Africa is beginning to break out of its old colonial connections to Europe and waking up to the new economic giants in Asia. India, however, is some distance away from catching the African wind. If you discount Mauritius for a moment and the non-aligned summit in Durban in 1998, it is almost a decade since an Indian Prime Minister went to Africa. Throughout his trip, which took him from Nigeria in the west to Morocco in the north to Kenya in the east, Hu projected a five-point programme that would lead to strategic partnership between China and Africa...

The Hindustan Times, 11 May 2006

Sri Lanka peace process: Japan invites India to join co-chairs

Colombo, May 10: Japan has invited India to join the co-chairs of the Tokyo Donors' Conference, the Japanese Special Peace Envoy for Sri Lanka, Yasushi Akashi, told newsmen in Colombo on Wednesday. On the response from India to the invitation, Akashi said that the "indications were positive." The Japanese peace envoy, who would be in New Delhi for talks with the Indian leaders on Thursday, said that at the meeting of the co-chairs to be held in Tokyo at the end of May, procedural changes would be made to render participation "comfortable" for India. Having banned the LTTE, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, India cannot sit with the LTTE at the same table. Akashi did not spell out how this problem could be circumvented, but said that Indian diplomatic representatives had attended two meetings of the co-chairs earlier. The international community, which is playing a key role in the Sri Lankan peace process since February 2002, is represented by the co-chairs of the Aid Lanka Conference held in Tokyo in June 2003. The co-chairs are US, EU, Japan and Norway. The mega donors' conference had pledged \$4.5 billion to Sri Lanka if the two warring parties, namely, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, showed progress in achieving peace in the island...

The Hindustan Times, 15 May 2006

Indo-Lanka ties on an upswing

New Delhi, May 14: When Mahatma Gandhi visited Sri Lanka in 1927, he referred to the then Ceylon as India's "daughter state." Even the Father of Nation was amazed to see the cultural, spiritual and religious affinities that the two nations shared. Over the years, the bilateral relations have seen many ups and downs. There had been instances that had the potential to transform the two neighbours into bete-noires, but fortunately that didn't happen. As the Mahatma himself said in 1939, "it is, at least it should be, impossible for India and Ceylon to quarrel." Despite the sour experience of 1980s, the relations never reached a saturation point. In fact post-1990, the relations have been on a continuous upswing. Beginning with a free trade agreement, which the two sides signed in December 1998, India and Sri Lanka are now thinking of an Open Skies Agreement as well as a defence pact. It may be recalled that India had offered Sri Lanka, a credit line of \$100 million to Sri Lanka in June 2002 and recently, Colombo agreed to offer an oil and gas exploration block to India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on a preferential

basis. The visits by Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera this year have further "cemented the bilateral ties"...

The Hindustan Times , 15 May 2006

Al Taj crew to be flown back to India

Dubai, May 14: The crew of Indian-owned United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)-registered ship, which was attacked by Somali pirates, will be flown back to India after questioning by the Customs officials here. MV Al Taj, that on Saturday arrived at the Hamriya Port here with 12 crewmembers on board, was attacked on April 27 by the pirates, which led to the death of a 32-year-old Indian crew Juma Othman. The Custom officials took the crew for investigation after their arrival. Ship owner Narandra Shial said the wooden boat was released only after a Somali businessman paid a ransom of 25,000 dollar...

The Hindustan Times, 16 May 2006

India on NSG agenda, but France wants it leak-proof

Paris, May 15: When the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) sits for its plenary meeting in Rio de Janeiro on May 29, top of the agenda will be the Indo-US civilian nuclear energy deal. On Monday, senior French nuclear policy officials said the NSG would discuss how to get India within the international non-proliferation regime, without its adherence to the NPT. Though Iran is likely to try and take advantage of any arrangement between India and the NSG and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a top official said: "Iran will not be an obstacle for India at the NSG." But India's safeguards' agreement should be able to assure the NSG members that it was "leak-proof". A plan separating the civilian from the strategic nuclear programme -- as presented to Parliament last week -- would "go a long way" in assuring that India will not use the nuclear supplies from abroad for its strategic programme, an official said. India has agreed to safeguards for its civilian reactors in perpetuity but it will not agree to full scope safeguards -- as applied to non-nuclear weapons countries...

The Indian Express, 16 May 2006

Despite Pak denial on Suryanarayan, Kabul tells Delhi: ISI did it

New Delhi, May 15: Despite Pakistan's denial that it had nothing to do with the killing of Indian engineer K Suryanarayan in Afghanistan last month, the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul has communicated to New Delhi that the Pakistani ISI was behind the engineer's murder by the Taliban. Official sources said that the Karzai administration, using institutionalised security channels, confirmed the ISI hand in the killing. New Delhi, sources said, is convinced that Islamabad is trying hard to force Indians out of Afghanistan's reconstruction effort. Suryanarayan, working for a Bahrain firm in Zabul, was abducted and beheaded by the Taliban in the troubled Zabul province...

The Indian Express, 17 May 2006

Reactor Race: France offers upgrades to India

Paris, 16 May: France may have lost out to Russia on scoring that important political point with India over supplies to Tarapur, but it is working hard to ensure that it's in a favourable position to start nuclear business with India as soon as the clearance comes from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). In the race to sell reactors to India, France has upgraded its indicative offer for six 1,000 MW reactors to 1,600 MW third generation European Pressurised Water Reactors. There are only two such reactors under construction, one in France and the other in Finland. French officials say this is better than the Russian technology, more suited to attain India's 2020 target. Areva, the leading French concern on nuclear reactors, has already started talks with Nuclear Power Corporation of India to build the six reactors Paris has offered to New Delhi...

The Indian Express, 17 May 2006

Border crossings: India cannot refrain from greater intervention in Sri Lanka and Nepal-C Rajamohan

As a peace process takes shape in Nepal after the popular movement last month against an autocratic monarchy, another is coming under intense strain in Sri Lanka. Both these South Asian security challenges demand India's deep involvement, including political and military steps, in assisting the former and preventing the collapse of the latter. As the international community defines the nature and scope of the United Nations' involvement in Nepal's complex political transition, India is being called upon to play a leading role in the maintenance of peace as well as in the negotiations between the new government and the Maoists. In Sri Lanka, last week saw the biggest and most blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement in place between Tamil separatists and the government in Colombo since 2002. As both sides embark on more frequent military actions and deaths in Sri Lanka mount, both Colombo

and the international community have been pressing New Delhi to take a more active part in averting a breakdown of the peace process...

The Times of India, 17 May 2006

India, Oman discuss military cooperation

New Delhi, May 16: India and Oman, on Tuesday, discussed greater interaction between their armed forces at the first meeting of their Joint Military Cooperation Committee here. "The two sides discussed various issues of defence cooperation of mutual interest," a defence ministry release said. Defence Secretary Shekhar Dutt led the Indian delegation. Oman's Under Secretary for Defence Mohammad Nasir Mohammad Al Raasbi headed his country's side at the talks. Raasbi had arrived here on Tuesday at the head of a seven-member delegation on a six-day visit to India. The visiting delegation also called on Minister of State for Defence M.M. Pallam Raju, Indian Air Force chief S.P. Tyagi and Indian Navy chief Admiral Arun Prakash. The Omani delegation is scheduled to visit Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Bharat Electronics Limited in Bangalore before returning home on May 21.

The Hindu, 19 May 2006

India to join U.S.-backed gas pipeline project to connect Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan

New Delhi, May 18: India on Thursday decided to join the U.S.-backed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. This comes in the backdrop of the difficulties over the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project. Not only has Iran been asking for a high price for the gas it would sell to India, the project also runs the risk of being blacklisted for participation by U.S. and European financiers and companies. The U.S., which has accused Iran of harbouring nuclear weapon ambitions, has urged Pakistan to abandon the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project and instead consider the alternative Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) project...

The Hindustan Times, 19 May 2006

India to sign ITER agreement in Brussels

Brussels, May 18: High level representatives of India and its six partners in the International Thermonuclear Energy Reactor (ITER) will be meeting on May 24 to finalise an agreement to establish the ITER fusion energy project. Besides India, the other ITER partners are the EU, Russia, China, Japan, South Korea and the US. The project, which is to be built in Cadarache, France, is an international collaborative research project by the seven countries that together represent more than half the world's population. On the Indian side, the ITER signature ceremony will be attended by Department of Atomic Energy secretary and Atomic Energy Commission chairman Anil Kakodkar, Institute for Plasma Research director PK Kaw, and RB Grover, director of the Strategic Planning Group in the Department of Atomic Energy...

The Hindustan Times, 20 May 2006

India proposes panel of 3 names for next UN Secy General

Washington, May 19: India has proposed that the UN Security Council provide a slate of three candidates for the General Assembly for the election of the world body's next Secretary-General, breaking a long-standing tradition under which the Council sends only one name, diplomatic sources said here today. The one name recommended is usually approved by the Assembly by acclamation. The sources said that at meeting at the Malaysian Mission on Wednesday, representatives several Non-Aligned countries discussed the elements of the proposal presented by India and decided to set up a working group to refine the language and prepare a draft resolution for the consideration of the 191-member Assembly...

The Indian Express, 20 May 2006

Bridging China and India-C Raja Mohan

The King and his armies Border crossings The Battle for Africa Hu's eight commandments A trade boom on Pak-Afghan border As democratic Nepal looks to a new economic future, two big interconnected ideas are at hand. One is about facilitating transit trade between India and China and the other is about building a modern internal road network. Nepal, one of the world's poorest countries, is sandwiched between the world's two fastest growing economies, China and India. Kathmandu now senses that by building transit corridors between China and India, Nepal could reap rich rewards. Leveraging Nepal's geo-economic location was an idea that was put forward by King Gyanendra at the South Asian summit in Dhaka last November. The King was reversing the metaphor that has long dominated the geopolitical thinking in Nepal. "A yam between two rocks" was how the founder of Nepal,

Prithvi Narayan Shah, described the Kingdom. Playing India and China against each other came naturally to the rulers of Nepal. But today, amid rapidly improving relations between India and China, Nepal could see itself as a bridge between the two large economies. Rather than be land-locked, Nepal could well be land-linked. Both India and China are keen to develop transit trade through Nepal. But the three countries are yet to sit down and work out triangular trade and transit arrangements...

The Indian Express, 22 May 2006

CBI closed case 2 years ago, now Australian probe says \$2.5m commission was paid for wheat to India in 1998

New Delhi, May 21: An Australian investigation into the Iraqi oil-for-food programme has come up with documentary evidence to show \$2.5 million (Rs 11.25 crore) was paid as commission in a 1998 India wheat deal. The import of wheat from Australia was the subject of a CBI inquiry which was formally closed two years ago for alleged lack of documentary support from the Australians. But documents which now form part of a probe by Commissioner Terence Cole into illegal payments made by the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) to Saddam Hussein's Iraq link AWB to corrupt deals in other markets, including India. Incidentally, AWB is at the centre of a new row over the UPA government's fresh wheat imports. Of the 500,000 tonnes ordered from Australia, 100,000 tonnes have already arrived in India. According to reports published in The Age (Melbourne) and The Sydney Morning Herald, Commissioner Cole has obtained documents which show that AWB paid \$2.5 million as commission to a bank account in the Cayman Islands as part of an order for export of two million tonnes of wheat to India's United Front government in February, 1998...

The Hindustan Times, 23 May 2006

India, Iran, Pak hold trilateral talks on pipeline

Islamabad, May 22: Top petroleum officials of India, Pakistan and Iran on Monday held talks on pricing, trilateral framework and appointment of consultants to carry out feasibility studies on the proposed 2,600 km long IPI gas pipeline. The deliberations came amidst reports that there were sharp differences between Iran and Pakistan in their bilateral talks held on Sunday during which the two countries clashed on the issue of pricing and modalities to supply gas to India. Petroleum Secretary MS Srinivasan, heading a 10-member Indian delegation, joined the two-day talks on the \$7 billion pipeline in Islamabad on Monday to discuss issues like pricing, trilateral framework and appointment of consultants to carry out feasibility studies. Sharp differences surfaced between Iran and Pakistan during talks Iranian Deputy Oil Minister MH Hosseinian held with Secretary Petroleum Ahmad Waqar. The two held a bilateral meeting on Sunday ahead of two-day trilateral meeting...

The Indian Express, 23 May 2006

Aussie board confirms India payoff probe is on; CBI waits for Govt word

New Delhi, May 22: The Australian Wheat Board confirmed to The Indian Express today that documents pointing to a payment of \$2.5 million (Rs 11.25 crore) into a Cayman Islands account as commissions for a 1998 wheat import contract to India were now part of an "internal inquiry." As first reported in The Indian Express today, revelations about commissions being paid into an unknown company bank account surfaced in Australia as part of the probe into illegal payments made by AWB as part of the oil-for-food programme in Iraq. AWB spokesperson Peter McBride told The Indian Express: "Our current board is looking at the India deal and will take appropriate action. What the action will be I cannot say. The import deal was signed several years ago when there was a different board and we are trying to look at it internally." Meanwhile, top officials of the CBI—the agency had probed the imports for three years and then filed a closure report in court—indicated that they were in a wait-and-watch mode and would either look for a Government request to re-open the case or wait for the Australian government to send them the latest information...

The Hindu, 24 May 2006

Gas price issue delays pipeline

Islamabad, May 23: Iran, Pakistan and India on Tuesday failed to make headway on the price quoted by Teheran for the gas Iran intends to supply for the proposed gas pipeline. The second trilateral joint working group (JWG) on the pipeline which concluded here was of the view that the gas pricing required "further study" and decided to meet in New Delhi in July for further discussions. At a joint press conference along with delegation heads of Iran and India, the Pakistani Petroleum Secretary, Ahmed Waqar hoped that the contentious issue of pricing would be clinched at the next meeting. The progress of talks on the proposed pipeline, which has been pending for years, would be watched with interest since the Bush Administration is opposed to the project on the plea that it would not

be prudent to pursue it in view of the Iranian nuclear programme...

The Hindu, 24 May 2006

TULF leader seeks Karunanidhi's help

Colombo, May 23: Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) president V. Anandasangaree has sought the intervention of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi to solve the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis and invited him to visit the island-nation at the earliest. "As a matter of right, I seek your participation in solving our problem," the TULF leader said in a letter (dated May 21) to Mr. Karunanidhi. Copies of the letter were sent to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi. The TULF leader said there was "very wide support" in Sri Lanka for a proposal "to adopt a constitution like the Indian model." Moreover, there was an "opportunity now to have powers devolved to various Sri Lankan provinces like those devolved in Tamil Nadu."...

The Hindu, 24 May 2006

India a major investor in Russia

Moscow, May 23: India has emerged as a major foreign investor in Russia, according to Rosstat State statistical committee. India accounted for \$1.5 billion, which is 17 per cent of the \$8.8 billion foreign investments and over 70 per cent of FDI in Russia in the first quarter of the current year, says the committee. The bulk of Indian investment, \$1.4 billion, was made in the energy sector, as ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) started paying for its share of development costs in the giant Sakhalin-1 oil and gas field on the Russian Pacific coast, where it holds a 20-per cent stake. OVL has pledged to invest a total of \$2.77 billion in the project, which makes it India's largest single foreign investment.

The Hindustan Times, 24 May 2006

China visit to expand areas of unity: Pranab

New Delhi, May 23: Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said on Wednesday that his May 28-June 1 visit to China would lead to expanded cooperation between the two countries. "The visit is with the object of keeping our relationship warm and also to expand our areas of cooperation," Mukherjee told reporters in New Delhi on the sidelines of a defence seminar. During the trip, the once bitter enemies are expected to institutionalise a framework for regular military-to-military exchanges. Mukherjee, who leaves New Delhi on May 25, will first visit Japan before heading for Beijing...

The Hindustan Times, 24 May 2006

India, 6 others sign pact on N-energy in Brussels

Brussels, May 23: India along with six other partners signed up for the ITER (International Thermonuclear Energy Reactor) research project in Brussels Wednesday. "This signifies the start of a major international effort towards developing an energy technology which provides virtually limitless energy," Anil Kakodkar, secretary in the Department of Atomic Energy and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, said after initialling the agreement on India's behalf. The other signatories are the European Union, Russia, China, Japan, South Korea and the US...

The Hindu, 25 May 2006

TNA welcomes Karunanidhi's election

Colombo, May 24: Sri Lanka's Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi, popularly known as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), on Wednesday welcomed the election of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi and expressed confidence that the "senior statesman" would take an interest in the resolution of the ethnic conflict. "The fact that a senior statesman of the calibre of Kalaignar Karunanidhi has assumed the position of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu is very welcome. He is a person with long experience and exposure to the plight of the people in Sri Lanka. We are confident that in due course, he would interest himself in the Sri Lankan situation," R. Sampanthan, the TNA's Parliamentary group leader told a press conference in Parliament on Wednesday...

The Hindustan Times, 25 May 2006

Africa indispensable for India's energy security: Aiyar

New Delhi, May 24: Africa is indispensable for India's energy security and the Non-Aligned Movement should be resurrected to strengthen Afro-Asian solidarity, says Minister of Panchayati Raj, Youth Affairs and Sports Mani Shankar Aiyar. "In the quest for India's energy security, Africa is an indispensable continent," Aiyar told African heads of missions, academics and Africa enthusiasts on Wednesday evening. Aiyar was delivering the fourth "Africa Day Lecture," organized by the Indian Council of World Affairs, at Sapru House. Making a strong pitch for

taking India-Africa relations to a new level, Aiyar also underlined the need for India to start Track II initiative and for sending a special envoy" to African countries to inject new life into an old relationship, bound by shared struggle against colonialism, imperialism and apartheid...

The Hindustan Times, 26 May 2006

No obstacle in IPI project: Mottaki

Islamabad, May 25: There is no obstacle to the India-Pakistan-Iran (IPI) gas pipeline, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said on Thursday. "The leaderships of both countries won't yield to any external pressure or accept interference in the project," he told journalists after meeting Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri. He said progress has been achieved on the IPI gas pipeline in terms of evaluation of the structure and fixing of the gas price and added there was no obstacle in the way of this mega project. He said: "Iran is a sovereign country and takes its own decisions. We won't accept any dictation." Kasuri on the occasion said Pakistan is against the use of force against Iran on the nuclear issue...

The Hindustan Times, 26 May 2006

Hindu groups block roads in southern Nepal

Kathmandu, May 25: Hindu groups opposed to the government's decision to declare Nepal a secular state on Thursday blocked roads and burnt copies of a state-run newspaper during a strike called by them in the southern industrial town of Birgunj. Transport services were disrupted in Birgunj, which lies on Nepal's border with India, after the Hindu groups blocked roads to protest against the government's decision, witnesses said. They also burnt copies of The Kathmandu Post because it carried an article that supported Nepal's renaming as a secular state instead of a Hindu Kingdom, the paper reported. It said they stopped a vehicle carrying 1,700 copies of the newspaper and burnt all of them...

The Hindustan Times, 26 May 2006

Pranab in Japan to improve bilateral ties

Tokyo, May 25: Defence minister arrived in Tokyo on Thursday on a start of a trip to Japan and China, which are both seeking to improve ties with New Delhi. Pranab Mukherjee was due to meet on Thursday with Japanese defence chief Fukushima Nukaga and to hold talks on Friday with Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, Indian and Japanese officials said. The Indian delegation will also visit companies in hopes that "Japanese defence industries will play a niche role in India's defence modernization," an Indian defence ministry statement said. Japan has been seeking to build warmer ties with India to balance out tension between Tokyo and Beijing, which accuses Japan of failing to atone for its wartime aggression...

The Hindu, 28 May 2006

Blair supports India's Security Council bid

Washington, May 27: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has come out strongly in favour of India's candidature for a permanent seat in an expanded United Nations Security Council but the United States appeared to be lukewarm to the idea "at this point." "A Security Council which has France as a permanent member, but not Germany; Britain, but not Japan; China, but not India — to say nothing of absence of proper representation from Latin America or Africa — cannot be legitimate in the modern world," Mr. Blair told students of Georgetown University here on Friday. Asked to comment on Mr. Blair's statement, U.S. State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack said while discussions were taking place on a number of aspects related to the U.N., there was no change in the current American policy — of pushing only for Japan at the present...

The Hindu, 28 May 2006

Pranab: no U.S. factor in defence ties with Japan

Singapore, May 27: India's new military-related cooperation with Japan is "independent" of New Delhi's "good relations" with the United States at this stage, according to Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee. In a phone-in interview from Tokyo, Mr. Mukherjee told The Hindu on Saturday that the two aspects of India's defence diplomacy were "not necessarily linked." Japan is a close ally of the U.S., and the Indian Navy had joined the navies of these two as well as Australia to form a professional "core group" to meet the tsunami crisis along the Indian Ocean rim in December 2004. Asked whether the four were now thinking of enhancing their linkages, he said there was "no military" plan of that kind. Asked about the strategic importance of the new India-Japan Joint Statement on defence cooperation, he cited maritime security along the Indian Ocean and Straits of Malacca as one of the primary objectives...

The Hindustan Times, 28 May 2006

Bhutan, India sign pact on electoral management

Thimphu, May 27: India and Bhutan on Saturday signed an agreement to promote cooperation, consultation and exchange in the field of electoral management and administration between the two countries. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to this effect was inked at Thimphu, Bhutan, by visiting Chief Election Commissioner BB Tandon and his Bhutanese counterpart Kunzan Wangdi. Tandon is leading a delegation to Bhutan. The MoU further envisages to promote cooperation in the field of electoral assistance between the two sides which included training of personnel and development of human resources, production and dissemination of materials pertaining to electoral systems, voting technology and voters education and awareness...

The Hindustan Times, 28 May 2006

Pranab reaches China on six-day tour

Beijing, May 27: Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee arrived on Monday for talks with senior Chinese leaders and military officials on Sino-India relations, especially on how to enhance mutual trust between the two militaries. This is Mukherjee's first trip to China since assuming the post of Defence Minister in 2004. Mukherjee is visiting China on a six-day trip as a guest of his Chinese counterpart, General Cao Gangchuan. He will hold official talks with Cao on Monday, official sources said. He will travel to northwestern China's Gansu Province and Shanghai municipality, the country's economic hub in east China.

The Hindustan Times, 28 May 2006

Shyam Saran to visit Moscow next week

Moscow, May 28: Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran is to visit Moscow next week for talks to prepare Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's agenda for the upcoming G-8 summit of the world's most industrialized democracies under the rotating presidency of Russia. Saran would be in Moscow from May 31-June 1. Leaders India, China and Brazil are among the select world dignitaries, who have been invited by President Vladimir Putin to attend G-8 St. Petersburg summit at which global energy security and combat against epidemics are to top the agenda. Besides dovetailing Prime Minister Singh's agenda at G-8 with Kremlin "sherpa" Igor Shuvalov, Saran will also hold talks on a wide range of issue of bilateral interest with his Russian counterpart First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov, diplomatic sources said...

The Hindu, 29 May 2006

India for strong ties with China: Pranab

Beijing, May 28: Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Sunday said he hoped to have a "very useful" meeting with the Chinese leadership to further consolidate India's strategic relationship with the Communist giant. "I am expecting a very useful meeting with the leadership of China in the context of our growing relations and strategic partnership for peace and stability," he told PTI on arrival here from Japan on the second leg of his three-nation tour. "I do hope that this visit will also help to achieve that objective," Mr. Mukherjee said. He was given a warm welcome at the Beijing International Airport by the Indian Ambassador to China, Nalin Surie and senior officials from the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

The Indian Express, 29 May 2006

A Security Council without India cannot be legitimate- Tony Blair

In this article, exclusive to The Indian Express, the British Prime Minister argues that growing interdependence in the 21st century, brought on by globalisation, necessitates a change in the international institutional architecture. There is universal agreement now that that the characteristic of the modern world is interdependence. But we haven't yet had time to think through its consequences or understood that the international rule book has been ripped up. Interdependence ? the fact of a crisis somewhere becoming a crisis everywhere makes a mockery of traditional views of national interest. Nations, even as large and powerful as the USA, are now affected profoundly and at breakneck speed by events beyond their borders. Why is immigration now the top domestic policy issue in much of Europe and in the US? Because globalisation is making mass migration a reality and only global development will make it a manageable reality. Why has energy policy, too, rocketed up national agendas? Because of the need for countries like China and India to fuel their rapid development and the threat of climate change. The solution lies in an internationally agreed framework through which the developing nations can grow, the wealthy countries maintain their standard of living and the environment be protected from disaster...

The Hindustan Times, 29 May 2006

India, China to sign accord to expand ties

Beijing, May 29: China and India are scheduled to sign an agreement to expand military cooperation during Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit this week, the Indian embassy said on Monday. Mukherjee, who arrived in Beijing on Sunday, will oversee the signing of the accord, which the Indian defence ministry had said would institutionalise training, exercises and other contacts between the two countries' armed forces. "During the visit, the two sides are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding on exchanges and cooperation in the field of defence," the Indian embassy said in a statement issued on Monday. The agreement will aim to develop "a strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity between India and China," and at enhancing trust between the two militaries, the Indian defence ministry said ahead of Mukherjee's visit...

The Hindu, 30 May 2006

India, China MoU on military ties

Beijing, May 29: Even as India and China are in the process of massive military modernisation, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and his Chinese counterpart, General Cao Gangchuan, on Monday signed the first-ever memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Defence Ministries of the two countries. The MoU calls for institutionalising the frequent exchanges between the officials of the Ministries and the armed forces, in addition to developing an annual calendar for joint exercises and training programmes. In recent years, the two countries had conducted joint naval manoeuvres but the interaction between the ground forces has been limited to border meetings and mountaineering expeditions. There has been no contact between the Air Forces. The MoU said: "The two sides reiterate that strengthening effective contacts in the field of defence is of vital importance to enhancing mutual trust and understanding between the armed forces and ensuring a peaceful environment in which they can pursue their respective national development objectives."...

The Hindu, 30 May 2006

Arjun Singh begins Gulf visit

Riyadh, May 29: Carrying a letter from Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for King Abdullah, Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh arrived here on Monday on a six-day visit aimed at diversifying Indo-Saudi relations in the fields of higher education and scientific research. A highlight of the visit is expected to be the signing of an agreement for an Educational Exchange Programme between Saudi Arabia and India, that will focus on attracting Saudi students to Indian educational institutions. Against 38 Saudi students in India in 2003, the number rose to 104 in 2004. India wants this number to increase further in the coming years, officials said. Singh will begin his formal talks with Saudi Minister of Higher Education Dr. Khaled Al-Angari today followed by a visit to the King Abdul Aziz University Library here. He is also scheduled to address a meeting at the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, besides holding talks with the Minister of Education. The Minister will also call on King Abdullah and witness the signing of an Memorandum of Understanding between Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi and Jeddah's King Abdul Aziz University...

The Hindustan Times, 30 May 2006

Nepal needs India's goodwill for peace

Kathmandu, May 29: Nepal has said it needs India's goodwill to make the ongoing peace process a success as the interim government prepares for the second round of talks with the Maoists to solve the decade-long insurgency plaguing the Himalayan Kingdom. "We need government of India's goodwill to make the peace process successful and assistance from India for the reconstruction works," Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Pradip Gyawali said. "Since the peaceful solution of the Maoists' problem will also be in the interest of India, it can help in the process in different ways," Gyawali, who is also a member of the government's talk team with the Maoists, said. The Minister also said that the government and the rebels have agreed to ask the United Nations to monitor the ceasefire...

The Hindustan Times, 30 May 2006

India denies sending message to LTTE

New Delhi, May 29: The Government on Monday clarified that it had not sent any message to Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas on the island's floundering peace process. External Affairs Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna was reacting to published reports that National Security Adviser MK Narayanan passed on a message to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) through Norwegian minister Erik Solheim when the two met on Saturday. "As you know, we have for several years been sharing our assessments with the Norwegians about the developments in Sri

Lanka and the peace process. This does not amount to sending any messages to LTTE or any other party," Sarna said. "We conveyed to Solheim our well known view that there must be a peaceful, negotiated settlement that is acceptable to all sections of the Sri Lankan society and which preserves the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka," he added...

The Hindu, 31 May 2006

Chinese media ignore Sino-Indian defence MoU

Beijing, May 30: The official media in China on Tuesday effected a blackout of the first-ever MoU signed between India and China on joint military exercises, which is seen as an effort by Beijing not to further stoke international concerns amid the furore over the "China threat". The Indian media covering Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's maiden visit to the Communist country were also prevented by the People's Liberation Army from entering the signing ceremony last evening, making it an in-camera event. The state-run Xinhua news agency, China Daily and People's Daily did not mention about the MoU signed between the visiting Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and his Chinese counterpart, General Cao Gangchuan yesterday. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Jianchao said the MoU was not targeted at any third party. An official with the Indian delegation, responding to complaints from the Indian media said, "the PLA said they cannot permit the media to take photos as the MoU is secret." However, the Indian side had made the MoU public. The MoU is to institutionalise military training and to hold joint military exercises and training programmes so as to add more content to the two countries' emerging strategic relations. It provides a formal basis for the first time for defence and military exchanges that have been taking place between the two countries in the last few years.

The Hindu , 31 May 2006

Extensive consensus on defence cooperation with China

Beijing, May 30: A day after signing the first-ever MoU between the Chinese and Indian Defence Ministries, Pranab Mukherjee, Defence Minister, held talks with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Beijing. "Your visit is a success and I would like to congratulate you," Mr. Wen told Mr. Mukherjee at the very outset of the meeting. "We have reached an extensive consensus regarding defence cooperation and exchanges," he continued. According to the Defence Minister the progress of the border negotiations was extensively discussed during his talks with the Premier. Mr. Wen said a broad agreement had already been reached on the political parameters and guiding principles for the talks on the border dispute. Mr. Mukherjee suggested that "strong political will should be applied to the problem with the aim of solving it as soon as possible." Later in the afternoon, Mr. Mukherjee met Gen. Guo Boxiong, Vice-Chairman of China's Central Military Commission, who gave the Minister an in-depth presentation of China's military modernisation efforts. Earlier in his career Gen. Guo had served as commander of the Lanzhou Military Area Command, an area that Mr. Mukherjee will be visiting on Wednesday and Thursday. The Lanzhou Military Command controls the largest physical area of China's seven military regions and includes the provinces of Gansu, Shanxi and Xinjiang. The region holding the nuclear research and missile testing facilities in the Chinese West comes under the command of this area...

The Hindustan Times, 31 May 2006

China, sweet and sour- Manoj Joshi

Across the political spectrum - from the crimson Left to the deep saffron - conventional wisdom is that the UPA government has sold out to the US. There is not an iota of truth in the allegation, yet, in a country where 40 per cent people can't read or write, bazaar buzz and ideological predilection pass off for analysis. Perhaps the clearest indication that the charge is missing its target comes from India's Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's productive visit to Beijing. Coming a year after the two countries pledged to build strategic relations, the visit has led to an agreement that will promote ties between the armed forces of the two countries through joint exercises and exchange of officers in training institutions. The bets are that the delay in the Agni test earlier this month was occasioned by Mukherjee's visit to Beijing, rather than any alleged US pressure. If so, this was a prudent and thoughtful step. The Chinese have, in the past, behaved otherwise, conducting punitive military operations and nuclear tests as a 'lesson' for India. But China's past, and some current bad behaviour should not be allowed to unsettle New Delhi's balanced stance in international relations, an approach that is clearly yielding greater dividends. Where China is being seen as a threat, India's rise is seen as a benign and stabilising development around the world. India's relations with China have had its share of ups and downs and in some ways, the ups were really a long time ago in the Fifties, and till the late Eighties they were stuck in a deep and long rift-valley... India needs to understand the nuances of the US-Chinese relationship if it is to steer between the emerging Scylla and the existing Charybdis of the international system. We also need to understand the nature of Chinese power, both as a friend and

potential foe. Underestimating a peril can be risky and overstating it needlessly expensive, but both probably pale before the hazard of mistaking an opportunity for a threat. To its credit, the UPA government is not making that mistake and is moving with due deliberation to build beneficial relations with a neighbour without in any way compromising the country's strategic autonomy...

The Times of India, 31 May 2006

Editorial: Wooing Beijing

Indian foreign policy has recently turned assertive and confident, and defence minister Pranab Mukherjee's declaration of a strategic partnership between New Delhi and Beijing is a sign of this. Non-alignment, in the old sense, was understood as the refusal to get into "entangling" military alliances (apart from the question of sourcing arms from Russia). New Delhi's entering into a strategic understanding with Washington, followed by Mukherjee's sojourn in Beijing where, for the first time, joint exercises by army and air force units are being contemplated, gives non-alignment a new, positive content — what we could call neo-non-alignment. It means that New Delhi attempts to arrive at a defence understanding with all important players in Asia — and Beijing, of course, is a very important player. The old sense of non-alignment meant that India ploughed a lonely furrow, as it found itself factored out of everybody's security equation. Neo-non-alignment, however, would mean New Delhi enters into security dialogue with everyone who has interests in South Asia. Strategic alignments don't have to be of the "either/or" variety envisioned by containment doctrines, or the "neither/nor" of old-style non-alignment; "both/and" delivers much more by way of collective security arrangements... A security dialogue and holding of joint military exercises will be an important ice-breaker between the two nations. New Delhi should build on the momentum created by this, as well as a possible visit this year by president Hu Jintao, to finally resolve the border dispute. If the border dispute with Beijing could be resolved, armed forces disengaged and direct trade routes opened across the border, that would make "Chindia", or China and India acting in concert on the world stage, more of a real possibility...